

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL

**County Council
12th July 2018**

REPORT AUTHOR: County Councillor James Evans, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Governance, Housing and Public Protection

SUBJECT: Question from County Councillor John Morris

You will be aware that the Brecon Beacons National Park have chosen to retain any commuted sums for affordable housing collected within the park boundary and decide where it is to be spent despite Powys being the housing authority in the park area. They have done this after seeking legal advice but will not release the legal advice to PCC or even to their own members.

I am informed that the amount of money either already held by them or pending payment from present and future developments runs to around £2million. As 80% of the National Park falls within Powys a large proportion of that money would be raised in the Powys part of the park.

To date despite the BBNPA holding on to money collected in Powys for over 2 years they have refused to release any of it for an affordable housing project in Powys. They also earn interest from this retained money and use it to fund the budget of the BBNPA and not add it to the affordable housing pot.

Do you support the stance taken by the BBNPA and if not, what measures have you taken since replacing the previous portfolio holder who went to press to condemn the refusal to release the money and promised action to resolve the situation?

Response

Councillor Morris will be aware that the Leader, Councillor Rosemarie Harris, is on record as having objected to the holding of these funds by the BBNPA at a formal Powys CC/BBNPA Liaison meeting on 2nd September 2017.

As Portfolio Holder I fully endorse that stance and will continue to argue for the funding to be controlled by the Strategic Housing Authority, i.e. Powys County Council. I believe that the process established by BBNPA to distribute the commuted sums raised in the National Park is bureaucratic and leads to duplication of effort for this and other local authorities and our housing association partners.

Last Autumn a bid was submitted to the value of £94,262, the amount at that time held by the BBNPA that had been raised in the Powys area of their planning jurisdiction. The figure of £2million mentioned by Councillor Morris is the sum that

may be expected to be raised should all schemes granted planning permission by the BBNPA be developed. It is therefore only a “potential amount”.

Information from the BBNPA on 20th June 2018 is that the figure for Powys remains the same. We are also informed that there is no longer a system of “windows” for bidding and bids can be entertained whenever opportunity arises.

The bid submitted was rejected on the grounds that the scheme provided no substantive gain in the number of affordable homes as the planning permission had been granted for 100% affordable provision by Melin Homes and we were purchasing 6 of the homes from them. In planning terms we therefore had no reasonable argument against this decision.

As soon as a suitable scheme is identified that complies with the BBNPA Local Development Plan and Supplementary Planning Guidance, a further bid will be submitted which will have my full support.

Councillor Morris will be pleased to note that I will be attending a meeting in the coming weeks, to which the Leader and he have also been invited, with representatives of the National Park to put forward the case for the commuted sums to be handed to the Strategic Housing Authority.