

# Full Council – 31 March 2022

## Questions from the Public

**1 Nicholas Taylor to Councillor Joel Charles (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Business and Community Resilience):**

Harlow Council's Community Engagement Strategy 2018-2021 ran to 13 pages, stating that 'Harlow Council takes its responsibility for consultation with local people and businesses seriously and aims wherever possible and practical, to take their views and opinions into consideration when making decisions about things that affect them'. It goes on to list many ways that it will carry out this engagement.

I would be interested to note how many responses the Council has received from residents to the following consultation exercises:

- a) Harlow Design Guide (concluded 1 October 2021);
- b) Community Resilience Strategy (concluded 20 December 2021);
- c) London Road North LDO Amendments (concluded 24 December 2021);
- d) Town Plan (concluded 16 January 2022);
- e) Interim review of Polling Stations (concluded 17 January 2022);
- f) Town Centre Masterplan SPD and Public Open Space Standards and Biodiversity SPD (concluded on 11 February);
- g) Planning Validation checklist (concluded 11 February 2022); and
- h) Statement of Community Engagement (concluded 11 February 2022).

**Reply from Councillor Joel Charles (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Business and Community Resilience):**

The 2018 to 2021 Community Engagement Strategy was developed by the previous administration – it was clear at the start of our administration that it was not fit for purpose. That is why I launched a new, far more inclusive strategy, at Cabinet on the 24<sup>th</sup> of March to reposition the Council to be more proactive in the way it engages residents in, for example, future-focused conversations about estate renewal, improving community safety and new ways to stimulate economic growth. Each of the engagement opportunities

identified, not an exhaustive list, will be backed up by an action plan of activities that aim to work towards increasing engagement levels.

The total number of responses received as a result of the consultation exercises you identified, commissioned using the previous administration's engagement strategy, was 185. It is also important to note that all planning consultations are advertised online, in the local media and on social channels digitally. Additionally, the Council holds a database of 210 organisations and individuals who have specifically requested that their details be retained for planning policy consultations and material is automatically sent to these. For the LDO consultation, a further 200 letters were also sent to neighbouring residents in Newhall immediately adjacent to the Enterprise Zone site. I think this Council should be doing better than that and that is why our administration's new strategy includes the introduction of a key performance indicator to measure and encourage better community engagement activity across all Council services.

The five outcomes and enabling objective contained in the new strategy aim to empower residents to have a greater say – giving them more of a direct route to have meaningful conversations with the Council. Our administration is going further than any other before it by committing to the use of more accessible forms of engagement tools to open up opportunities to interact with the Council through the use of braille, large print and easy read versions of publications.

There is also a recognition that more needs to be done to engage with residents who get frustrated at times when communicating with the Council – the new Community Engagement Strategy, covering the remainder of this year and will be up for renewal in 2025, aims to encourage more of a two-way conversation so that people feel their views are being listened to and action, not words, is a clear result of the consultation exercises they decide to participate in when looking to provide feedback in the future.

## **2 Alan Leverett to Councillor Dan Swords (Portfolio Holder for Regeneration):**

On the 8<sup>th</sup> September 2021 I asked a question of you, that is, when are the cycle tracks and footpaths that are in council ownership going to be maintained. I was informed to watch this space. Well I am still watching this space some 6 months later, in the meantime the winter weather has seen the condition of the cycle tracks and footpaths fall even further into dis-repair.

Can you inform me if funding has been found and when can residents expect work to repair the towns cycle tracks and footpaths to be carried out?

**Reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Portfolio Holder for Regeneration):**

As Mr Leverett will know, at present, 90% of the cycle track network is owned by Essex County Council and repairs on that 90% are the responsibility of Essex County Council.

The other 10% is owned by Harlow Council. The majority of Harlow Council sections are deemed to be of a satisfactory standard.

With regard to the 90% owned by Essex County Council, I have had a series of meetings with the Cabinet Member for Highways at Essex County Council and further, I understand that the ECC Local Highways Panel has invested more this year into repairing cycle tracks than compared with any year in the existence of the panel.

However, the Corporate Strategy we passed in December set out an ambition to deliver a “a fully independent and interconnected cycle track network”. This is a much bigger project than that to which he asks.

I am talking about the entire network and the rebuilding that is needed. To that end, an announcement will be made after the May election, and I am certain that he and everyone in the town will welcome that announcement.

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## **Questions from Councillors**

### **1 Councillor Chris Vince to Councillor Russell Perrin (Leader of the Council):**

Following the last Cabinet meeting could I ask the leader to reflect on his comments made to Councillor Eugenie Harvey over her genuine and well-articulated concerns about how we can empower more women wanting to become more engaged in local politics at cabinet last week.

Would he agree with me that more training is needed for Cllrs about how we ensure this chamber is more inclusive and will he seek guidance and training from the LGA on this important matter?

### **Reply from Councillor Russell Perrin (Leader of the Council):**

I do agree that there is an under representation of women who hold elected office at all levels of government and that this under representation can be seen across the full political spectrum. I am happy for this administration to seek guidance and advice from all reputable sources, including the LGA, in order to address this imbalance.

### **2 Councillor Tony Edwards to Councillor Nicky Purse (Portfolio Holder for Environment):**

Could you please explain to the residents of Bishopsfield and Charters Cross why it has taken so long to get alley way lighting fixed?

Lighting which is a District Council responsibility.

### **Reply from Councillor Nicky Purse (Portfolio Holder for Environment):**

The Council has been aware that lighting around Charters Cross and Bishopsfield, including to the cycle path that runs past Charters Cross north of Bishopsfield to Partridge Road has not been working consistently since autumn 2021.

The lighting is the Council's responsibility: the power supply to this lighting is however the responsibility of UK Power Networks [UKPN].

It did take a long time for UKPN to resolve a fault in the power supply to the lighting. This was repaired in January 2022. The lights were briefly restored.

Unfortunately shortly afterwards the lights stopped working again. To eliminate the possibility that there is a fault in the lights themselves the Council must access a garage to examine supply equipment. The Council has been going through the necessary formal process to gain access. A site visit has been arranged for tomorrow between HTS and the Council's Electrical Officer. This should establish whether there is a fault in the Council's equipment, in which case repairs will be arranged; or a further fault in the UKPN supply, in which case the Council will work with UKPN. In either case the Council will ensure that any issues identified are resolved so that the lights again work properly and reliably.

The Council has very recently been made aware that the light fixed above the door of one address in Charters Cross has failed. This has been traced to a fault in UKPN's supply. This has been reported to UKPN. The Council will work with them to ensure that it is resolved.

**3 Councillor David Carter to Councillor Dan Swords (Portfolio Holder for Regeneration):**

Many of Harlow's Estates are sadly run down and a bit tired now.

Apart from the welcome building of new homes, what are you going to do to regenerate Harlow's Estates?

**Reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Portfolio Holder for Regeneration):**

Our Corporate Strategy and the subsequent Budget, both of which were of course voted against by the Labour Party, set the direction of travel for the once-in-a-generation programme of estate renewal that we are going to roll out.

A full announcement on the programme will be made after the election, but it will include:

- Individual neighbourhood renewal plans;
- A New House Building Programme;
- Our new Estate Renewal Fund;
- A new tiered estate regeneration programme;
- A new strategy to restore pride across all non-residential areas

I believe that this truly will answer the long-forgotten plea of left behind areas of our town, restoring pride in every one of Sir Freddie Gibberd's neighbourhoods

**4 Councillor David Carter to Councillor Dan Swords (Portfolio Holder for Regeneration):**

Last week at Cabinet, a new town centre master plan was passed.

What is the next step for this? When will it happen, not more delay and promises but real action?

**Reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Portfolio Holder for Regeneration):**

The historic masterplan we passed last week represents the passing of step one of our three-step plan to regeneration. This is the first ever planning framework for Harlow town centre, meaning we have taken back control of our town.

The new three-step plan to regeneration sets out that:

Step 2 will be complete in Autumn this year. That means that our new town centre will be designed with new shops, bars, public realm, restaurants, cafes, live music and much more besides.

Step 3 will be complete in Spring next year. This means that we will have our development partner on board and construction work will be underway.

This is a one-way roadmap. Not another plan or promise, but a one-way roadmap upon which we will deliver the new town centre that for so long Harlow has needed.

**5 Councillor Matthew Siggers to Councillor Dan Swords (Portfolio Holder for Regeneration):**

I would like to ask in a new era of using sustainable transport why is it that the 2<sup>nd</sup> biggest retail area in Harlow in Mark Hall North this includes (Edinburgh way and Howards Way) has no direct route meaning many residents in Harlow who don't drive do not get a chance to use the area with many businesses losing out on key retail and social and forcing some to shop online.

Would it not make sense that we trial these services to review the level of traffic? After that, if it affordable, reliable, and well-advertised then the residents of Harlow will use it. This could lead to other businesses seeing that the town is now connected could think about moving into those already vacant units around that area and restore Harlow as a major retail and social hot spot while the wonderful regeneration work carries on in the main town centre over the coming years.

**Reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Portfolio Holder for Regeneration):**

This is a very important question, and I am pleased that Cllr Siggers shares my love for buses.

I agree with all he says and we will raise this with Essex County Council who are responsible for the provision of bus services.