

Cabinet – 21 March 2024

Questions from the Public

1 David Forman to Councillor Nicky Purse (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability):

Do you believe:

- a) It is an absolute liberty that estate agent Westwood Leber has screwed their "Let" sign to one of your lovely brand spanking new street signs in Parrington Road as reported to Contact Harlow on 9th February;
- b) What enforcement action and reparations will be sought against this liberty taking estate agent; and
- c) Harlow Council should place an article in Harlow Times asking residents to 'grass up' liberty taking estate agents and to have an estate agent name & shame section in future editions of the Times and on the Council's website?

Reply from Councillor Nicky Purse (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability):

Thank you for recognising the work we are doing to replace over 1,600 street name signs as part of our work to restore pride in Harlow.

The council were made aware of the estate agent sign in February 2024 where it was reported through our unauthorised advertising procedure and swiftly removed. The sign remains in good condition and is still in situ. The council takes all matters related to unauthorised advertising seriously and will take action, where appropriate.

2 David Forman to Councillor Nicky Purse (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability):

On the 25th May 2023, Harlow Council released a public news statement titled 'Proposals to help maintain green spaces in housing estates'. This statement featured the innovative idea of the then Leader of the Council, Councillor Russell Perrin, for citizens to maintain green spaces adjacent to their homes. In particular, Councillor Perrin concluded his statement by saying:

“There has been progress made on developing proposals for a scheme via a formal licence arrangement which the council will look to bring forward in the next year.”

Consequently, I would like to know what progress has been made in rolling out this "licence arrangement" and how Harlow's citizens may enrol to help out our overstretched HTS landscaping team, despite the fact that citizens already pay council tax to receive green spaces maintenance?

Reply from Councillor Nicky Purse (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability)

I thank Mr Forman for his question. The landscaping licence announced by the previous Leadership was looked at when we considered our Corporate Priorities for 2023/24. An initial investigation into the matter had found that the resources and finances required to implement such a scheme would be prohibitive to its intended success.

There were also issues in granting licences to individuals rather than property owners, again would be a further cost to the Council. Our administration, have as part of our priorities for the last year and going forward, concentrated on better landscape management of existing assets. I am sure that Mr Forman would agree that HTS and the Council have made great progress on these matters in the last year.

3 Jake Shepherd to Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

Harlow Council is proudly a Living Wage Employer, with the acquisition of The Harvey Centre will the Council seek to persuade independent retailers and business owners to follow in its footsteps?

Reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

As you rightly point out, Harlow Council are a proud Living Wage Employer and fully support the invaluable part it can play in helping employees to meet their day-to-day living expenses across all of the organisations that have adopted it. I welcome the significant increase to the Living Wage that the Government has announced which will see a £1,800 pay rise for those receiving it in the new financial year.

Whilst we may not hold any form of enforcement powers, Harlow Council would always seek to promote the virtues of the Living Wage and its application to all businesses across the town, county, and country, and not just those operating within the Harvey Centre.

4 Colin Thorpe to Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

At the Cabinet Meeting held 1st December 2022 Councillor Charles stated “The Council is committed to actively working with the Potter Street Wellbeing Hub Trust to seek to find venues from which it can commence running some well being activities in the Potter Street area.”

In your letter dated 7th December 2022 to the Trustees in your capacity of Deputy Leader and Portfolio holder for Regeneration after it was decided that Osler House was uneconomical to repair you wrote “That is why we will seek to find an alternative venue in Potter Street for your project that does not require such levels of investment .I am confident that this can be done in short order.”

In an email dated 12th December 2022 in reply to my own Robert Halfon MP wrote “ Thank your for your email please be assured that I will work with the Council to do all we can to help find an alternative venue for the Hub.”

Fourteen months have now passed since these promises were made will the Leader of Council now honour these promises or will the residents of South East Harlow once again be let down?

Reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

With a view to assisting the Potter Street Wellbeing Hub locate a venue, Council Officers facilitated a meeting with the Potter Street Community Association who at the time had capacity to take on new bookings within the existing Community Centre. As far as I have reviewed, perfectly reasonable offers were made but not accepted. This would have seen the hub located in Potter Street.

Nevertheless, Harlow Council have also supported the Wellbeing Hub concerning the community garden/growing project at the Dudley Terrace Allotment. That is an active project, and the Council is in the process of regularising the occupation of the site via the grant of a new lease.

Furthermore, given the welcome news of the proposed sale of Osler House to Mind in West Essex, there may be opportunity to work with the charity regarding use of the community space within the property. In due course, Harlow Council would be happy to make introductions so that the parties can discuss what opportunities there may be.

5 Colin Thorpe to Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

Following on from my previous question on the Council’s suggested commitment to supporting the “Hub”.

The Potter Street Health and Wellbeing Hub have only been able to progress one part of it's plans and this has been achieved by taking over a derelict allotment site in Potter Street and creating the Potter Street and Church Langley Community Garden .

Unfortunately, the Garden lacks its "Hub" which is a central part of the project not only as a administrative centre for the rental of allotments but also somewhere our volunteers can rest

Will the Council now use its powers as granted in the "Smallholdings and Allotments Act 1908" Part II section 26 which allows for improvements on allotments and The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order Part 12 Class A which allows the erection of small ancillary buildings of less than 4 metres in height with a maximum of 200 cubic metres capacity and provide a small log cabin funded by some of funds which were allocated to Osler House and by so doing honour its promise to find a base for the "Hub" in Potter Street?

Reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

Thank you for your question. The council congratulates The Potter Street Health and Wellbeing Hub on its important work in creating a community garden. The provision of a small log cabin for the purposes of an administrative centre or rest area on statutory allotment land will be contrary to planning laws. However, the council will commit to working with your organisation with a view to providing an appropriate facility for ancillary use to a statutory allotment, subject to the building and use falling within permitted development.

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Questions from Councillors

1 Councillor Chris Vince to Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

At the last cabinet meeting I asked the leader about the meeting he had with Arriva about the ongoing situation with cuts to services across Harlow, in particular the number 9.

I was promised at that meeting the minutes of the meeting he had in January, however, at time of writing I have yet to receive them, can I ask again publicly for those minutes and also the actions which came from that meeting?

Reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

I apologise for this slip. I will fully brief Cllr Vince on this matter and bring him up to speed with the ongoing work.

2 Councillor Chris Vince to Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

The taxi industry news website 'taxi point' recently wrote an article stating that Wolverhampton and Milton Keynes councils have entered into a shared enforcement plan.

Due to the issues raised previously about taxis from neighbouring council areas, and also the need of Harlow Council to close a rather large budget gap over the next 4 years, has a shared enforcement plan been looked at between Harlow council and neighbouring authorities?

Reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

We are committed to improving our enforcement and are looking at a number of ways to potentially introduce shared enforcement. We have carried out joint enforcement sessions with other authorities such as Wolverhampton and, in Essex, the matter of sharing enforcement with neighbouring authorities is being looked into collectively by a new formed Essex Working Group and will hopefully be moving forward with this in the next few months.