

**MINUTES OF THE CABINET
HELD ON**

13 October 2022

7.30 - 8.59 pm

PRESENT

Committee Members

Councillor Russell Perrin, Leader of the Council

Councillor Dan Swords, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration

Councillor Simon Carter, Portfolio Holder for Housing

Councillor Joel Charles, Portfolio Holder for Business and Community Resilience

Councillor Alastair Gunn, Portfolio Holder for Governance

Councillor Michael Hardware, Portfolio Holder for Strategic Growth

Councillor Stephen LeMay, Portfolio Holder for HTS, Properties and Facilities – with special responsibility for the roads

Additional Attendees

Councillor Matthew Saggars

Other Councillors

Councillor David Carter

Councillor Tony Durcan

Councillor Tony Edwards

Councillor James Griggs

Councillor Stacy Seales

Councillor Lanie Shears

Councillor Chris Vince

Officers

Rob Tinlin, Interim Chief Executive

Andrew Bramidge, Director of Strategic Growth and Regeneration
Niel Churchill, Communications Manager

Simon Freeman, Deputy to the Chief Executive and Director of Finance

Jane Greer, Director of Communities and Environment

Simon Hill, Director of Governance and Corporate Support

Andrew Murray, Director of Housing

Adam Rees, Senior Governance Support Officer

53. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor James Leppard and Nicky Purse.

54. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

55. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2022 are agreed as a correct record and signed by the Leader.

56. **MATTERS ARISING**

None.

57. **WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**

The questions, together with the answers, are appended to the minutes.

58. **WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS**

The questions, together with the answers, are appended to the minutes.

59. **PETITIONS**

a) **Disability Charter**

The Rt. Hon. Robert Halfon MP presented his petition on the Disability Charter. The Leader spoke on behalf of the Administration and Councillor Griggs on behalf of the Opposition.

The Leader said he welcomed the petition and the comments from Councillor Griggs. He recommended the Cabinet endorsed the petition which would be considered as part of the budget setting process. Where matters were not within the direct control of the Council, it would consider who the relevant bodies could be influenced.

RESOLVED that the Disability Charter be endorsed, subject to the budget setting process.

60. **FORWARD PLAN**

RESOLVED that the Forward Plan is noted.

61. **RECENT RELEVANT DECISIONS TAKEN BY THE LEADER, DEPUTY OR PORTFOLIO HOLDER(S)**

RESOLVED that the following decision be noted.

a) **Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration - 23 September 2022**

62. **CONTRACT AWARD – FIRE SAFETY WORKS AT MORLEY GROVE**

Cabinet received a report to award a contract for fire safety works at 1-56 Morley Grove.

Proposed by Councillor Simon Carter (seconded by Councillor Dan Swords) it was:

RESOLVED that the most advantageous tender submitted by Contractor A, Borrás Construction Limited, is accepted in the revised sum of £634,439.17 for the delivery of updated fire compartmentation works subject to contract and leaseholder consultation.

63. **MARK HALL CONSERVATION AREA ADOPTION AND ARTICLE 4 DIRECTION**

Cabinet received a report to adopt a Conservation Area and Article 4 Direction in Mark Hall.

Proposed by Councillor Dan Swords (seconded by Councillor Michael Hardware) it was:

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

- A** Noted the finalised Mark Hall North Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Proposals document, attached as Appendix B to the report.
- B** Noted the responses received during the consultation on the document and the proposals (including the proposed Article 4 Direction), attached as Appendix A to the report.
- C** Adopted the revised Mark Hall North Conservation Area boundary, attached as Appendix C to the report.
- D** Approved the making of the Mark Hall North Article 4 Direction.
- E** Approved the related Management Plan and Guidance document for consultation, attached as Appendix D to the report.

64. **CONTRACT AWARD - HARLOW AND TOWN CENTRE (VARIOUS SITES) CONSTRUCTION AND PROFESSIONAL SERVICES**

Cabinet received a report to award a contract for the provision of construction and professional services for regeneration of sites across Harlow.

Proposed by Councillor Dan Swords (seconded by Councillor Steve LeMay) it was:

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

- A** Awarded a Contract for the provision of Construction and Professional Services in relation to the regeneration of various sites across Harlow and specifically Harlow Town Centre, up to a maximum value of £5,000,000 awarded to McBains Ltd.

B Delegated Authority to the Director of Strategic Growth and Regeneration, in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, to extend the Contract beyond its initial term if required, as set out in paragraph 18 of the report.

65. **CABINET APPOINTMENTS**

RESOLVED that Councillor Kay Morrison be appointed to the Highways Panel.

66. **COMMUNICATIONS FROM COMMITTEES/WORKING GROUPS/PARTIES AND PANELS**

None.

67. **MINUTES OF PANELS/WORKING GROUPS**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the following meetings are noted.

- a) Minutes of Meeting Tuesday 6 September 2022 of Harlow Local Highways Panel

68. **MATTERS OF URGENT BUSINESS**

None.

LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Cabinet – 13 October 2022

Questions from the Public

1 Janet Jackman to Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

Why have tin hats been put on at Five Acres just to do a survey? It is totally unnecessary and a very expensive cost. The roof of 45 to 49 is in perfect condition and just needs minor repairs. It still has 20 years of life, and the new roof is only guaranteed for 15 years.

Reply from Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

Thank you for your questions, Ms Jackman. As stated previously we welcome questions at any time in the process. Harlow Council require these works to be completed as part of the “investigatory works” as part of the statutory process. This provision is required whilst the investigatory works are in place to protect the properties from the elements and potential damage through bad and adverse weather. Once the roof surveys are completed copies will be sent to all Leaseholders.

2 Janet Jackman to Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

The cladding on 45 to 49 is in perfect condition and under 11 metres, so it doesn't require changing. They are saying they are charging the cladding for like for like which it isn't. Like for like would be changing it to UPVC from UPVC. Hardie board is an upgrade, as it is a totally different material, so we class that as an upgrade.

Please can you explain if it is like for like why are you changing it when it is in perfect good condition with many years life and why are we not being updated with the works?

It really is shocking how long they are taking to survey the job. The leaseholders are very concerned about the costs and how we going to pay. It has been going on for too long with not knowing what works need doing. It is affecting our health and wellbeing.

Reply from Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

It is acknowledged that the cladding is below the threshold of 11m, and it is noted that the cladding is not being replaced due to height. The cladding, however, is being replaced due to its age and updated fire regulation after inspections.

In the case of block 45-49, it hasn't been possible to provide an exact date when it was replaced as legislation states the records must only be kept for a maximum of 12 years. It is estimated the cladding to be over 20 years old. This type of cladding becomes brittle and prone to breakages as it ages. It is also unlikely to have sufficient insulation behind it, but we won't know that until the investigations have been carried out. The cladding will be replaced with current industry standards materials for the reasons stated above.

Supplementary question from Janet Jackman:

Why is the cladding at 45-49 Five Acres being changed when it is in good condition?

Reply from Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

The investigatory works need to be carried to understand whether substantive works need to be carried out.

3 Sally Jones to Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

At the last Cabinet meeting, I queried who made the final decision regarding 'appropriate and necessary' works. Councillor Swords kindly explained that the Director of Housing would consult with you, Councillor Carter, as the Portfolio Holder. The Rt Hon. Robert Halfon made Andrew Murray aware that the Leaseholders are not happy with the situation at Five Acres and we still believe that a blanket approach has been adopted to all the blocks despite our continual comments on how they differ.

What proof will you provide of your discussions and what guarantees can you give us to ensure the details will be reviewed thoroughly and fairly for each individual block?

Reply from Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

Thank you for your questions Ms Jones. All works are individually reviewed a on a block-by-block basis.

When the works are completed and signed off, the invoice will be raised and a full breakdown of the works carried out to individual blocks will be supplied to all leaseholders. All leaseholders then have a further opportunity to raise questions concerning the works carried out to individual blocks and individual flats.

4 Sally Jones to Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

Please can someone explain if all the individual blocks will have scaffolding all at the same time for the surveys to be conducted soon, or will the scaffolding be removed once works are complete and moved to another block?

We are already five weeks into the project and the surveys have not been conducted on the pitched roofs or cladding. We trust we will not be penalised for the extra time that appears necessary to do these works correctly.

Reply from Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

All works are split into sections, scaffolding works will overlap to keep to programme. The Council is working to schedule for the agreed scaffolding completion dates that fit within the overall works programme. Survey dates have been previously advised and are still within these timeframes.

Cabinet – 13 October 2022

Questions from Councillors

1 Councillor Chris Vince to Councillor Joel Charles (Portfolio Holder for Business and Community Resilience):

Monday was world mental health day. What steps will the Council take to support the mental health of our town who are facing not only the fallout from the pandemic but also the cost-of-living crisis?

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

This year's World Mental Health Day theme was focused on making mental health and wellbeing for all a global priority. It is the council's ambition as a community leader to look at new ways to raise awareness of maintaining good mental health and to break down barriers associated with talking about personal wellbeing.

The Council is currently working with local primary care leaders and Essex County Council to refresh the town's existing Health and Wellbeing Strategy with the clear intention that mental and physical health will be considered on an equal footing. One priority to structure the strategy is a focus on an evidenced-led approach to help determine the specific response to mental health needs in the town. The Strategy and Action Plan is currently subject to a consultation process with the Health and Wellbeing Partnership, which the Council leads. The document will come to the Scrutiny Committee in November and Cabinet on the 1 December.

Cllr Nick Churchill is the Member Champion for Mental Health and Wellbeing. In his role, Cllr Churchill continues to be a passionate advocate for parity in the way mental and physical health is treated.

During the course of this year, officers have undertaken activities to highlight help available, ranging from outreach support in the Civic Reception to the Care House creative outreach project delivered by Harlow Playhouse at the bandstand in the Town Park, which again offered the opportunity to recognise mental health issues and provide ways to connect with support services.

In recognition of the continuing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the current economic challenges this coming winter, the Council will continue to fund the Community Hub. Some of the core aims of the hub are to help people deal with financial and other worries, and to ensure they can be referred to help, including mental health support services.

Supplementary question from Councillor Chris Vince:

What actions are being taken by the Member Champion?

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

I am pleased that the Our Health Matters project is progressing. Councillor Churchill is focussing on ensuring that mental health issues have parity with physical issues within the workplace.

2 Councillor Chris Vince to Councillor Dan Swords (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration):

Please can you give us an update on the new Harlow Hospital and UK Health Security Agency developments?

Reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration):

Both developments will have significant positive benefits for Harlow and the surrounding areas. Not only will they transform healthcare, research, and innovation in our town, but they will help to create more jobs and growth. In recent months, I have met with both parties and been involved with meetings with Ministers about the progress of these projects.

The Hospital has submitted a fantastic business case for the new development and is awaiting approval of that from the Department of Health and the Treasury to proceed with the next stages of the development. It is believed that announcements on this are expected this autumn.

At the UKHSA site, significant progress has been made on the site with demolition works completed and the installation of all utilities supplies for the new development. Work has also commenced on the fit out of the main building to create new lab space. UKHSA is awaiting confirmation of budgets from the Treasury before being able to finalise plans for the completion of the development.

The Council remains in regular dialogue with both PAH and UKHSA and will continue to do everything possible to ensure these projects are delivered as quickly as possible.

Supplementary question from Councillor Chris Vince:

Can we push for a meeting with the ICS?

Supplementary reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration):

I will arrange for a written response to be sent to you.

3 Councillor Tony Edwards to Councillor Joel Charles (Portfolio Holder for Business and Community Resilience):

Given the “Cost of Living Crisis” please tell us what specific actions are being taken by the Council to increase community resilience over the forthcoming winter period?

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

One of the Council’s most important priorities is to work relentlessly to promote prosperity. Enabling people to access opportunities, through skills development and employment is crucial. The Council’s approach to addressing concerns about the cost-of-living will be focused on supporting people to enhance their life chances. To do this there must be a focus on local economic growth, that is why the Council’s Economic Development Strategy, to be published next year, will set out a plan to attract further inward investment in the town.

The Council is also setting up an internal working group to look at what practical action can be taken regarding the cost-of-living. One step already taken by the Council has been to further fund the Community Hub to ensure this outreach provision for residents will continue through the winter, connecting residents with sources of help and support. The Council continues to have a good working relationship with Citizens Advice Harlow and the town’s Foodbank, where some hub users are referred, alongside the offer of mental health support.

Further opportunities are being explored through the Council’s work with colleagues in primary care on the Harlow Health and Wellbeing Partnership, and the West Essex Health Partnership structures. The Council is also engaging with the local Poverty Alliance and listening to the issues raised to look at ways to assist. A separate meeting request has been sent to leading members of the Poverty Alliance to discuss what more the Council can do to help residents during the winter months.

The Council’s website has been updated to include support and advice about the cost-of-living, and this will continue to develop. Projects under current consideration are the development of a campaign throughout the winter to ensure that residents can get the right advice on a range of matters, including additional benefits information, fuel efficiency and insulation best practice, and debt and mental health support. These matters have already been highlighted in

the Harlow Times and further information will be posted on the Council's social media channels. As part of the Council's winter planning, the provision of warm spaces for vulnerable residents who may need support is being considered.

Supplementary question from Councillor Tony Edwards:

What more do you anticipate the Council will do?

Supplementary reply from Councillor Joel Charles (Portfolio Holder for Business and Community Resilience):

We will be working with community leaders, and are also considering using the Playhouse as a Warm Space. I want to work with you to develop the best solutions

4 Councillor Tony Edwards to Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

Given the current cost of living crisis and the recent concerns expressed by Five Acres leaseholders regarding the cost of refurbishment of their Housing Blocks (estimated at 30k per leaseholder), would the Council be willing to extend the interest free repayment period from 5 to 10 years?

Reply from Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

At present one of the repayment options available to Leaseholders who reside in their property is an interest free loan up to a maximum of 5 years. On receipt of the completed application form the Homeownership Officers will assess the affordability of the applicant(s) before agreeing the loan. Harlow Council are prepared as responsible Landlord on a case-by-case application to extend the repayment period to a maximum of 10 years for those Leaseholders who reside in the Leasehold property.

Supplementary question from Councillor Tony Edwards:

Will you go through the arbitration process with residents?

Supplementary reply from Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

Residents have been provided with information about the arbitration process. It is recommended they seek independent advice, as the Council may be seen as having a conflict of interest.