

Full Council – 11 July 2019

Questions from Councillors

1 Councillor Michael Hardware to Councillor Danny Purton (Portfolio Holder for Environment):

Has the Council produced an action plan, including a 20% increase in housing allocation, following the Council's failure in the Housing Delivery Test in February, as required by Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)?

The Council managed to deliver an average of just 84% of the housing need in Harlow over the last three years, which is below the national threshold required by MHCLG of all councils to deliver much needed housing for its residents.

Reply from Councillor Danny Purton (Portfolio Holder for Environment):

The Housing Delivery Test Action Plan is currently in preparation and is scheduled for publication by 19 August 2019. The Council has assumed a 20% buffer on the five year housing land requirement as required by Government Guidance for some years now. It is forecast, however, that as the Strategic sites build out (remainder of Newhall and the Garden Town Site East of Harlow), and the Local Plan is Adopted, the completion and delivery rate will increase, and that the buffer will not be required.

2 Councillor Michael Hardware to Councillor Mark Ingall (Leader of the Council):

Can the Leader, confirm that in May 2018 in an email to Councillor Kevin Bentley and subsequently at a meeting, he refused an offer from Essex County Council for matched funding to the Council for additional highways improvement works? Not maintenance, not potholes, not pathways, but general improvement works undertaken by the Local Highways Panel (LHP) which always has more projects than its budget can undertake.

I was at the LHP meeting only last week and I think all members of that committee, both Labour and Conservative, would agree that more funding would be very useful to deliver the schemes that residents want to see done, small schemes such as dropped curbs on pavements, new crossings, extra parking and so on.

Reply from Councillor Mark Ingall (Leader of the Council):

I have never refused extra funding from Essex County Council (ECC) for improvements to our highways.

The extra money Councillor Hardware is referring to was given to County Councils to spend on addressing the backlog of general improvement works. It was given to ECC without strings attached. The decision by ECC to disburse it only to those councils who could match fund it was made on a whim from Councillor Kevin Bentley. This offer was made without consultation and after annual budgets had been settled.

In the meeting of Essex leaders where this was first disclosed a number of council leaders, mostly Conservatives, expressed concern, some expressed outrage at the proposal. I later wrote to Councillor Bentley asking for him to allocate the money, but without the strings attached, I also asked him to do the right thing and allocate the money at another, unrelated, meeting. Councillor Bentley refused to release Harlow's share of the money.

I agree that more money for highway's improvements would be useful and would ask that Councillor Hardware works with me in order to secure the additional funding from ECC without strings attached.

Supplementary question from Councillor Hardware to Councillor Mark Ingall, Leader of the Council

Even though no extra money was allocated, the administration announced small scale parking schemes leading up to the local elections. Will the leader apologise for claiming that the Pottersfield parking scheme was the first delivery of that new scheme when in fact it was designed, implemented and project managed by Essex County Council and not Harlow Council?

Supplementary reply from Councillor Ingall, Leader of the Council

I fully accept that this parking scheme was delivered by the County Council, but I'll remind you that the County Council currently receives 85 per cent of all the Council Tax collected in Harlow but keeps asking the Council to pay again for services the County Council should be providing from the £33 million a year it receives from Harlow residents. Services that we already pay twice include street lighting and providing PCSOs. We are not about to start paying the County Council twice for maintaining our highways. Councillor Hardware, you're ambitious, the question you should be asking of your bosses in County Hall is this. Go back to Councillor Bentley and ask where did the £100,000 of extra money allocated for Harlow Council go and when you ask that question, perhaps you should remember that you have been elected to represent the people of Harlow in County Hall and not to represent County Hall here in Harlow.

3 Councillor Andrew Johnson to Councillor Danny Purton (Portfolio Holder for Environment):

Can you confirm that the target of a 60% 'modal change' in Harlow and Gilston Garden Town plans is, in fact, for the entire town: both the new developments and the existing town? If so, this will require 60% of all journeys to be made by sustainable means: cycle, walk and public transport, in order for the existing and expanded town to be able to cope with the additional journeys required for shopping, work and leisure.

Reply from Councillor Danny Purton (Portfolio Holder for Environment):

The draft Harlow and Gilson Garden Town Transport Strategy (reported to Cabinet on 28 February 2019) seeks to ensure 60% of all journeys within the new Garden Town Communities (i.e. the new neighbourhoods allocated in the new Local Plans prepared by East Hertfordshire and being prepared by Epping Forest and Harlow) are to be undertaken by sustainable modes of transport.

Across the remainder of Harlow, the draft Transport Strategy seeks to achieve a target of 50% of all journeys being undertaken by sustainable modes of transport.

Supplementary question from Councillor Andrew Johnson to Councillor Danny Purton, Portfolio for Environment

Thank you Councillor Purton for your response and I am sure you know my concern regarding the high level that this plan is asking for. Given that and given the changes that we have seen in electric vehicles, does he consider that cars would be considered sustainable under the lifetime of this plan if they were electric?

Supplementary reply from Councillor Purton, Portfolio Holder for Environment

That's a very interesting question and in fact it has been addressed in a report that has come forward only recently which has pointed out that even electric vehicles create pollution in terms of various features on it even though it may be electrically powered. The main problem is private vehicles, in the sense of their effect on the environment is the congestion that they cause and yes these are ambitious targets, but we believe they are not only achievable but are absolutely necessary. Although we recognise the advantages that the Garden Town development is going to bring to Harlow in terms of jobs, in terms of Housing, in terms of other economic opportunities for the town, we are not prepared to accept additional traffic coming into Harlow creating problems for our existing communities and that's why this figure has been

set.. In this very room some five weeks ago in a meeting of the Leaders of the Councils along the A414 Corridor considered how they will approach A414 Corridor. They took the very courageous decision to reject all Highway Improvement Schemes and to go to a mass rapid transit system that is going to be built between St Albans and Harlow. This will assist our existing communities and go through all the new housing schemes that are going to be built along the corridor. So as people arrive at this they will have sustainable transport for all their movement needs. Yes it is ambitious but we are determined to meet it.