

# Full Council – 28 January 2021

## Questions from the Public

### 1 **Jake Shepherd to Councillor Chris Vince (Portfolio Holder for Community and Wellbeing):**

A current Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded project, led by Dr Holly Ryan of Queen Mary, University of London, seeks to “To reinvigorate policymakers’ interest in town twinning and assist policy officials by building an evidence base on ‘value’ that goes beyond ‘the economic offer’ of [town] twinning”. The last publicly recorded institutional link between Harlow District Council and our twin towns was the appointment of a Harlow District Councillor in 2013/14 to the Harlow Town Twinning Association. I further note the absence of Council representation for the current municipal year.

How resolved is Harlow District Council to sustaining its links to Havirov (Czechia) and Velizy-Villacoublay (France), when research suggests a pattern of municipalities forgetting their twin towns?

### **Reply from Councillor Chris Vince (Portfolio Holder for Community and Wellbeing):**

As you will be aware town twinning emerged after World War Two to help try and build relations between countries involved in the conflict. Within Harlow, the Harlow Town Twinning Association helped maintain the town’s relationship with Havirov and Velizy-Villacoublay until it was disbanded in 2014.

The Council does recognise that twinned towns do offer benefits beyond just economic and can provide an opportunity for cultural enrichment. However, at this time the Council does not have the resources to actively maintain it’s linked to both twinned towns, or to assume the role of the Twinning Association.

Today we are setting out the budget for the next financial year, this is something we can look into over that year and for following years if possible. Sadly with recent events it is not a priority.

**2 Jake Shepherd to Councillor Chris Vince (Portfolio Holder for Community and Wellbeing):**

Further to my first question, what resources can Harlow Council commit to supporting Harlow Town Twinning Association, or assuming its role if the Association no longer functions?

**Reply from Councillor Chris Vince (Portfolio Holder for Community and Wellbeing):**

Please see my previous answer.

**3 Roy Court to Councillor Mark Ingall (Leader of the Council):**

On 1 May 2019 you invited residents to suggest areas which could be used to provide additional parking spaces within housing estates.

Can you provide me with a list of:

- i) Areas where residents suggested land could be used for this purpose.
- ii) What has been done by the council to assess those areas.
- iii) A list of areas which have been completed and the number of new spaces created.

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

Following my invitation for residents to suggest potential areas for parking schemes, a press statement was released in September 2019 setting out schemes which would be progressed to provide 73 additional spaces. These included.

- a) A scheme in Hookfield which was completed later that year providing 9 spaces;
- b) A scheme in Longfield providing 8 spaces.
- c) Several sites suggested by Councillors and/or residents for the first phase which were as follows, providing 56 spaces:
  - i) Shawbridge - 12 spaces
  - ii) Wharley Hook - 15 spaces
  - iii) Pear Tree Mead - 6 spaces

- iv) Spinning Wheel Mead - 15 spaces
- v) Barnmead/Five Acres - 8 spaces (Planning refused currently on hold)
- vi) Bishopfield (number of spaces yet to be confirmed)

Therefore, minus the scheme at Barnmead/Five Acres there are 65 deliverable spaces.

- d) A number of other sites have been considered for later phases

The Council carried out a robust assessment of all sites that will be progressed to development, and looked at the practicalities and costs associated with creating spaces on these sites. Where sites have not yet been assessed this will be done prior to the sites progressing.

Unfortunately due to the need to obtain planning permission and then the challenges presented by Covid, no further schemes apart from that at Hookfield have been delivered.

However, I can assure you that providing additional parking is still a priority for this Council and there is a pipeline of schemes to deliver much needed parking spaces in the town. We are looking to complete these as soon as we can. Subject to Covid restrictions it is hoped these can be delivered in 2021/22.

#### **4 Mick Patrick to Councillor Danny Purton (Portfolio Holder for Environment):**

In documents related to future developments in Harlow and Gilston state that affordable rented accommodation will form part of these developments. Furthermore given the Council's Homes Rent Formula and Local Housing Allowance figures the Council must have data on local low Band wage earners. Therefore please could you state:

- i) What consultation the Council has had with Social Housing providers; and
- ii) Whether the Council has any authority on future Social Housing rents?

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

The majority of development within the Harlow & Gilston Garden Town will actually take place within East Hertfordshire and Epping Forest Districts. As such Harlow Council does not have any responsibility for liaising with social

housing providers or for setting rent levels in these areas. Of the forecast 16,100 new homes within the Garden Town area, only 2,700 are allocated within Harlow, within the site at the East of Harlow. This site is in private ownership and it will be for the developer of that site to come forward to the Council in due course with their proposals for the delivery of affordable housing in line with the Council's planning policy on affordable housing.

The Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) directs the setting of social rents as part of the rent standard. The RSH regulates rents charged by social housing stock owning authorities that governs/restricts rent increases on social rents. The latest rent standard runs for a period of at least five years from 2020. Registered providers need to comply in full with both its own provisions and the rent standards policy statement to ensure compliance.

## **5 Robert Bruce to Councillor Mark Ingall (Leader of the Council):**

I note that at the Full Council meeting on 29 October 2020 you were asked a supplementary question by Cllr Hardware concerning the amount of New Homes Bonus Harlow Council had received in respect of two former office buildings that have been converted to flats. You said that you would provide him with a written response. This response is not recorded anywhere. My question is twofold.

- i) Firstly, can you please provide me with details for each of the last 7 financial years the sum of money Harlow Council has received from Government in respect of all the new homes created from the conversion of offices into flats; and
- ii) Secondly what if any of this money has been spent directly or indeed exclusively to help the plight of those residents who occupy these homes, often having to live many miles away from family, friends and support network?

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

- i) The Council does not receive New Homes Bonus (NHB) in respect of each specific new home that is created. The payments have been based on the overall increase in house numbers year on year across the town. This makes it very difficult to assess exactly how much has been received for specific properties.

Due to pressures being experienced within the Revenues and Benefits Service at the current time it has not been possible to fully answer your question but I can provide a partial response in respect of one of the

properties referenced in Councillor Hardware's supplementary question as follows:

- a) The property in Question – Terminus House was entered on the Rating list from April 2018.
  - b) The building created 222 additional housing units. However, after taking in to account the impacts of Council Tax Discounts and the Local Council Tax Support Scheme, which in itself is a discount on council tax, the net taxable units for the purposes of the new homes Bonus calculations is just under 40 additional homes.
  - c) Further adjustment reflecting the actual banding of the new units and the Tier split between ECC and Harlow results in a calculated NHB payment of £34,800 for the entire property.
  - d) This payment will be received for 4 years giving a total accumulated NHB payment of £139,200 from 2018/19 to 2021/22.
- ii) As set out in reports being presented to Council this evening, the Council allocates all of its NHB payment to its Discretionary Services Fund which helps to support the provision of a number of services available to all residents of the town. These services include the Advice Contract with CAB to which any of the residents of the permitted developments have access. This will include benefits support, financial advice and many other support networks.

I would add that the conversion of the property to Residential removed over £200,000 of Business Rates income from Harlow, or £800,000 over the four year period of the NHB and that loss is ongoing well after the NHB ends.

**6 Alan Leverett to Councillor Tony Durcan (Portfolio Holder for Growth and Prosperity):**

In response to my question to you at Full Council on 10 December you informed me that the cost of the renovation of 15 flats at Prentice Place was £2.845 million. This equates to £190,000 per flat.

Does the Council consider this good value for money for the residents?

**Reply from Councillor Tony Durcan (Portfolio Holder for Growth and Prosperity):**

Yes.

**7 Alan Leverett to Councillor Tony Durcan (Portfolio Holder for Growth and Prosperity):**

At the same meeting you informed me that the procedures used leading to the occupation of these flats would take place in December.

Can you provide me with an update on the progress being made towards residents on the Council's Housing Register taking up occupation of these homes?

**Reply from Councillor Tony Durcan (Portfolio Holder for Growth and Prosperity):**

Prentice Place scheme provides for badly needed new Council homes that will be allocated to applicants on the Council's Housing Needs Register.

Further additional works were required for fire stopping and building control priorities, and electrical, aligning to latest government guidance, for new build properties. Four properties were advertised prior to Christmas and offers made and accompanied viewings had been booked with the successful applicants. However all services associated with the lettings process, adverts, offers and accompanied viewings were suspended when the third lockdown began.

**8 James Humphreys to Councillor Mike Danvers (Portfolio Holder for Resources):**

With sales of electric and hybrid vehicles set to soar in the next few years, due to the restrictions on new petrol and diesel only car sales in 2030, central Government announced last January that £10million in funding had been made available for the installation of charge points on residential streets and car parks in 2021. A recent Freedom of Information request found that 126 out of over 400 councils have no plans to fit any ahead of 2025. Harlow was not listed although Essex as a whole responded with 7 charging points. Local councils have been encouraged to use this £10m fund in order to improve infrastructure and support a greener future for towns and cities as more and more people make the move to either hybrid or fully electric vehicles in Harlow.

With a rapidly growing town and emphasis on greener transport use to support new housing developments, do the council have any plans to use this fund in order to improve the electric vehicle infrastructure of this town to support greener initiatives?

**Reply from Councillor Mike Danvers (Portfolio Holder for Resources):**

I agree very much with you about how important this matter is. It is vital that central government produce a national plan to enable local authorities to do this properly rather than in a piecemeal fashion.

The Transport Secretary announced in 2020 that government funding will be doubled to £10 million for the installation of charge points on residential streets for 2021. This could fund up to 3,600 charge points across the country and make charging at home and overnight easier for those without an off-street parking space.

Currently, requests from residents for the installation of on street charge points is very low. However, this is likely to increase in line with the forthcoming ban on petrol and diesel vehicles. Officers are currently exploring options to facilitate the delivery of on street residential charge points for public use in estates where there is sufficient demand. Officers are also working with Essex County Council who own the majority of roadways within Harlow regarding on-street charging installations; an Essex wide funding bid is currently being drafted as part of this work. In addition, the newly adopted Local Development Plan contains requirements for developers to consider installation of charge points as part of future development schemes.

Harlow Council declared a Climate Change Emergency in July 2019 and as part of that commitment it has agreed to install electric vehicle charging points in its public Pay and Display car parks over the next five years, where this is possible.

**9 James Humphreys to Councillor Mike Danvers (Portfolio Holder for Resources):**

Furthermore, again with a rapidly growing town in mind, do Harlow council have any targets on electric vehicle charging points for 2025 or even 2030 on streets and in its car parks to reduce the reliance on petrol and diesel cars in line with other green transport initiatives?

**Reply from Councillor Mike Danvers (Portfolio Holder for Resources):**

A Climate Change Emergency was declared by Harlow Council in July 2019 in which it committed to installing electric vehicle charging points in all of its public Pay and Display car parks over the next five years, where this is possible. This work has already commenced and is due to be carried out within the timeframe set. There are no existing targets for on street charging but Officers are actively working with Essex County Council, who are

responsible for the majority of roadways and associated infrastructure within Harlow.