

Cabinet – 12 July 2021

Questions from the Public

1 Neil Warner-Baker to Councillor Michael Hardware (Portfolio Holder for Strategic Growth):

I am a resident and stakeholder of the land where the proposed Stort Crossing, Pye Corner to Edinburgh Way is going to take place. On 11/6/21 I showed you and my ward Cllr, Matthew Saggars some of the many concerns I have regarding the proposed river crossing. Among my concerns, I showed you the poor state of the existing surface water storm drain system where it enters the River Stort at Riverway and the associated stench. I recall that you took photographic evidence.

I also showed you the serious flood damage in the form of up rooted trees and the under boring to the historic Latton Mill, which has all occurred since the recent widening of Edinburgh Way and other building schemes to the east of the town. All of this poses a risk to the existing flood defences that were installed at great expense to Harlow Council circa 2002/3. This is when the nearby weir was compromised by flooding and caused a partial collapse of the footpath south of the River Stort backwater and a threat to Mead Park industrial estate.

Recently, you gave a statement on behalf of the leadership of the council to Yourharlow.com stating that you would raise my objections with the relevant authorities and stakeholders. However, many Cllrs, including those with relevant portfolios, as well as our MP have indicated that they will refer all my questions and concerns to you.

I am concerned that the relevant authorities such as the Highway Authority, might not have been contacted. It is essential to investigate whether these schemes have caused an increase of surface water discharging into the River Stort. This will seriously affect the planning decision of The Central and Eastern proposed River Stort Crossing.

Please could you show me that you have consulted in full with the council and update me on progress in relation to my concerns?

Reply from Councillor Michael Hardware (Portfolio Holder for Strategic Growth):

The Gilston development, and its associated transport infrastructure, has been the subject of significant debate and consultation over many years, and a project we have inherited from the previous Labour administration. The development is enshrined in the East Hertfordshire Local Plan, which was adopted in 2018 following public consultation and an independent examination which found the Plan to be sound. Equally, the principle of the river crossings to support the development at Gilston is also enshrined in the Harlow Local Development Plan which was also

consulted upon and was adopted in December 2020 by the previous administration also following independent examination by a planning inspector.

Harlow Council is supportive of the development of new housing to the north of Harlow at Gilston as being vital to meet the future needs of the town and the surrounding area. It is vital to ensure that appropriate levels of infrastructure are provided to support this development and traffic modelling has demonstrated that the Eastern Stort Crossing is required to enable this.

Equally, we have to balance the increasing need for new housing with impacts on the environment. Climate change and global warming is a major issue facing humanity and we need to minimise the impact upon it. Conversely, there has been a housing shortage in the UK for many years. It is one of the reasons why house prices are so high and why it is difficult for many, in particular the younger generations, to get on the housing ladder.

It is a very difficult balance to find.

In answer to Mr Warner-Baker's question I can confirm that the Highway Authorities and the Lead Local Flood Authorities have been engaged and provided comments on the application for the Eastern Stort Crossing.

The proposal includes a series of new drainage infrastructure which will deal with surface water arising from the new road.

Note that the bridge is elevated at the River Way location over existing features. Surface water runoff from the new highway will be stored beneath the highway surface and systems designed to accommodate flows that may arise from a one-in-30-year storm event.

Towards River Way, where the urban area is more constrained, the new roundabout surface water will be attenuated and treated via conveyance and a separator to remove fine pollutants, particles and oils before discharge into the River Stort.

All drainage infrastructure must meet the same level of surface water run off as a greenfield (undeveloped) site. The assessments indicate that there will be no impact on surface water flooding arising from the development.

In terms of preventing flood risk and integrating sustainable drainage through design, the Eastern Stort Crossing proposal meets the requirements of the Environment Agency and the lead local flood authorities. The Drainage Strategy has been agreed in principle at this stage and subsequent engineering design stages will refine details about the proposed attenuation features, which will be controlled by a series of conditions attached to any planning approval. The highways authority has also confirmed to me that approval of these final details will be required before the Section 278 road adoption process can be completed. I am therefore satisfied that

there is sufficient engagement from the relevant authorities in relation to this proposal.

Stakeholders for the River Stort Crossing, which have and will continue to be engaged as the Gilston development progresses include:

Natural England
The Environment Agency
The Highways Agency
Lead Local Flood Authorities
Highways Authorities
Ecology Departments
Archaeology Departments
Minerals and Waste Authorities (at both County Councils)
Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust
Essex Wildlife Trust
The Canal and River Trust
Network Rail
Greater Anglia
National Aerodrome Safeguarding Team at Stansted Airport

Connectivity via the Stort crossings is integral to our once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to attract the transformative investment and growth that Harlow needs in order to fulfil our significant potential.

Sir Frederick Gibberd described Harlow as “an organism which would go on changing and being rebuilt as the needs of the people altered” and the Garden Town and associated infrastructure is the beginning of that new chapter.

There is no evidence to link the river flooding with the expansion of Edinburgh Way. These may be nothing more than coincidence - there are a number of drainage channels and potential sources of increased flow into the River Stort over the last few years when there have also been, and probably the actual cause of, a number of very high rainfall incidences.

The river catchment for the Stort is huge, and most of the Stort navigation comprises hard reinforced bank edges as it functions as a navigable waterway.

There are few parts of the river where the banks are not reinforced and therefore vulnerable to erosion. The Latton Island section is one such location where banks are not reinforced in all locations as the river splits in two to provide a relief flow of water around the lock.

Harlow Council is aware of the erosion damage at the weir mentioned by Mr Warner-Baker. I can confirm that the Council’s Environment team is currently in discussion with

the Environment Agency and the Canal and Rivers Trust to agree a programme of repairs to this part of the river bank.

Supplementary question from Neil Warner-Baker:

The Canal and Rivers Trust still say that the issues they have raised have not been addressed. Have you reviewed the issues they have raised?

Supplementary reply from Councillor Michael Hardware:

I'm assured that they have been contacted.