

Full Council – 15 July 2021

Questions from Councillors

1 Councillor Mike Danvers to Councillor Alastair Gunn (Portfolio Holder for Environment):

Could you briefly outline the new administration's new green policies for Harlow Council to face up to the declared climate emergency?

Reply from Councillor Alastair Gunn (Portfolio Holder for Environment):

I would like to start by paying tribute to the late Councillor Danny Purton who led this work on behalf of the Council in recent years following Harlow Council's declaration of a climate emergency. I know he is dearly missed by many in this Chamber and recognise that in several regards I am continuing works begun under his tenure.

Addressing the challenges posed by climate change is a global concern, on which there is fundamental cross-party agreement. We should be united in working towards a zero carbon future for this town, our country and across the world. I am determined that Harlow Council more than plays our part in this.

The Council has already made great strides towards reducing its carbon footprint since Harlow's first Carbon Management Plan in 2011, launched by the last Conservative administration. This work has been accelerated since the 2019 Climate Emergency was unanimously agreed, through introducing significant energy saving measures in our buildings, and I commend the previous administration on this.

This Administration will continue and extend the Council's carbon reduction programme and set out ambitions for a wider climate change strategy and action plan for Harlow. This will be with a view to setting a target date for when Harlow Council will achieve Net Zero, following the leadership set by the Conservative Government nationally, when it set the UK's 2050 Net Zero target in law. I will be bringing a report to the September Cabinet to set out these plans.

We will take a rigorous approach to protecting and enhancing the town's environmental assets, particularly Sir Frederick Gibberd's legacy of green wedges and wider green infrastructure across the town. We will be continuing the tree planting programme begun under the previous administration, but also wish to take a more systematic approach to the maintenance of the town's trees. We are commissioning a tree survey to map every significant

tree in Harlow which will then result in a proactive approach to tree maintenance. This will help us to protect existing trees whilst also planting and protecting new ones.

Further and in conjunction with this work, we will be developing a biodiversity strategy for the Council, to ensure that we meet our responsibility on addressing biodiversity loss. I intend to bring a report to the additional November Cabinet setting out these plans.

Alongside supporting sustainable and active transport, this Administration is committed to delivering a significant expansion of the town's electric vehicle charging infrastructure. With the sale of new petrol and diesel cars to end by 2030, we have an obligation to Harlow's residents to ensure their town is ready for the transition to electric, which is already underway. I will be bringing a report to Cabinet in September to provide more detail on this.

2 Councillor Mike Danvers to Councillor Joel Charles (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Community Resilience):

Could you briefly outline the non-statutory services that are now at risk of cuts to their budgets and the ones that are threatened with closure?

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

Our administration wishes to explore opportunities to invest in the council's much-loved non-statutory services. As part of an ongoing review of council budgets, launched by the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance, it is not anticipated that there will be any changes to the council's community services budgets that will negatively impact frontline delivery. Our administration plans to set out more detail about the council's future spending priorities as part of the annual work to update the medium-term financial strategy in the autumn of this year and development of a budget, announcements will be made in the usual way early next year.

Supplementary Question from Councillor Mike Danvers:

Will you pledge that no services will be privatised?

Supplementary Reply from Councillor Joel Charles (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Community Resilience):

We will be investing in our non-statutory services.

3 Councillor Chris Vince to Councillor Joel Charles (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Community Resilience):

Does the portfolio holder share the previous administrations view that Sam's Place is a vital resource for parents of those children who use it, that it should be provided free of charge and will you challenge Essex County Council should they return to their proposals to charge for this service?

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

Sam's Place provides disabled children and young people a range of structured opportunities to gain new life skills – it is a highly regarded service in the local community. Our administration believes that families accessing Sam's Place should continue to be able to enjoy the existing range of services unchanged.

The current contract is in place until autumn 2022, and we are assured there will be continuity in the current provision.

At the present time, the council has not been made aware of what the terms of any new contract might be. Our administration is already planning to make provision as part of the annual work to update the medium-term financial strategy in the autumn of this year and in next year's budget, 2022 to 2023, for a continuity fund to ensure that families are not burdened with fees in the future should the current contracting arrangements at Sam's Place change and the council be successful in tendering for the new service.

4 Councillor Jodi Dunne to Councillor Dan Swords (Portfolio Holder for Regeneration):

We saw many promises made by the Harlow Conservatives over the local election campaign, and the ones that stick in my mind are to do with the arts in our town. I know in Harlow's vibrant musical community they are very excited about the prospect of a new music venue in the town, as prominently promised on those glossy videos and discussed by our local media. When will this happen, where will this happen and how? I fear that they have over promised and will under deliver by resorting to Tory type of knowing the price of everything but the value of nothing.

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

I am pleased that Cllr Dunne enjoyed our campaign video as much as the other 41,823 other residents who saw it and duly elected Conservative

Councillors in seats across the town that had never voted Conservative before.

The video summarised the failings of the previous Labour administration and offered a vision of hope for the future with our plan to make Harlow the best town in Britain to raise your family and to send your kids to school; the best place to start a business; the best place to live and to be.

It was a great shame that the previous Labour administration did not save the last live music venue our town had, nor did they open a new one, nor in fact did they do anything to increase the cultural and leisure offerings of our town.

We are ending their decade of decline and kick starting a decade of renewal with the biggest programme of regeneration since the new town was built.

As part of our once-in-a-generation programme we will deliver a new live music venue.

However, that will be just one small part of our programme. We will make Harlow one of the best towns for entertainment, culture and leisure and that will include a whole host of new venues, bars, restaurants and much more besides.

Plans will come forward in due course setting out the exact details of such offerings and the full and complete regeneration works.

On Cllr Dunne's final point, he defers to Oscar Wilde's Picture of Dorian Gray to express his thoughts, perhaps a more pertinent quotation would have been, 'A man who does not think for himself does not think at all.'

However, he talks of cost and value which quite well summed up the previous Labour Council: they cost you more and brought you less.

5 Councillor Jodi Dunne to Councillor Joel Charles (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Community Resilience):

Can the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Strategic Growth guarantee that the programme at the Playhouse will not be affected by the budget this year and in coming years as the Labour group carried out our own analysis of the proposals for an alternative budget last year which showed a hole in the finances after three years, and will we therefore all be able to enjoy our wonderful theatre at its very best or will he be, to paraphrase the words of David Bowie who played at the venue, the man who sold the world?

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

The Playhouse, alongside the theatre community nationally, has been impacted by the restrictions that have been put in place to keep people safe during the pandemic. The lockdowns have restricted the ability of the venue to deliver a full programme of events during the last 15 months. Although we are heading cautiously towards the ending of pandemic specific legal measures under stage four of the Government's roadmap, it cannot be ruled out at this time that further restrictions may again impact on the Playhouse artistic programme as they have across all theatres and other venues for the performing arts since March 2020.

In a previous reply this evening to a question from Councillor Danvers, I made it clear that our administration takes its responsibility for ensuring sound financial management seriously – a detailed budget review process is already being undertaken. My reply also made it clear that there are no non-statutory services at risk as a result of this review work, this commitment includes the Playhouse.

6 Councillor Tony Edwards to Councillor Andrew Johnson (Leader of the Council):

Given the reported level of public concern regarding the planned second Stort river crossing and the potential detrimental effect to the environment and amenity, can all members please be given a further detailed officer briefing prior to the matter being formally considered by the East Hertfordshire or Harlow Development Management Committees?

Reply from Councillor Andrew Johnson (Leader of the Council):

As a regular substitute of the Development Management Committee I appreciate how important it is for all members to be aware of and have the opportunity to ask questions on large planning applications. Cllr Hardware as the portfolio holder for strategic growth has already taken steps to ensure that members are better briefed on all applications that come to this council.

I have asked for and can confirm that there will be an all-Member briefing on the Stort River Crossing proposals before the applications are presented to the Development Management Committees of both Harlow Council and East Hertfordshire District Council. I have asked officers to ensure that the briefing is in good time before the Committee meetings take place, once all planning issues have been addressed, so that members are as informed as possible.

I would also like to take this opportunity to remind all members of and substitutes to the Development Management Committee the importance of the avoidance of, or the appearance of, predetermination of planning applications.

Supplementary Question from Councillor Tony Edwards:

Will the presentation included the alternative schemes which have been considered?

Supplementary Reply from Councillor Andrew Johnson (Leader of the Council):

The presentation will be comprehensive and I want Councillors to be fully informed before any decision is made.

7 Councillor Nancy Watson to Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

In a recent article in your Harlow, you said you had a plan to work with HTS to bring more new houses to Harlow. Can you confirm when this plan is set to be announced and clarify the numbers of housing planned and what percentage of these homes will be built for social housing?

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

The pipe line is undergoing a thorough review in terms of suitability, viability and value for money. The aim of the pipeline is that all properties will be social housing owned by the council. Of the six schemes listed in the 2020/21 Q4 Capital Programme reported to Cabinet earlier this week.

- Bushey Croft is well under way;
- Work has just started on The Hill;
- Lister House and The Yorkes are under active review;
- Stackfield has been removed as unsuitable and consultation is underway with local residents to turn into a knee high garden for people with disabilities;
- Brenthall Towers is also removed for consideration as additional parking particularly for Carters Mead.

Two other sites have just emerged as suitable for development. The pipeline contains a long list of potential sites which will be reviewed on an ongoing basis to provide groups of sites suitable for development by HTS (Housing and Regeneration) Ltd. Details of sites going forward for development will be reported in the usual way through the quarterly Capital Programme reports.