

Cabinet – 9 September 2021

Questions from the Public

1 Nicholas Taylor to Councillor Andrew Johnson (Leader of the Council):

The consultation period for Epping Forest District Council's (EFDC's) Local Development Plan Main Modifications is now under way and comments are invited to be received by 23rd September 2021. Harlow residents have not been consulted about this Plan although it proposes to allow the building of several thousand new homes on Harlow's borders with Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) on what is effectively Harlow's Green Belt. In fact, some existing Harlow residents' gardens are just 12 feet from the EFDC proposals.

My first question is: Although there was a good opportunity to do so in the latest edition of Harlow Times, why were Harlow residents not informed of this Local Development Plan to build several thousand new homes on Harlow's borders?

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

Harlow Council was not informed of Epping Forest District Council's publication of their Local Plan Main Modifications consultation in advance of this appearing on the Examination website on 15 July. The print deadline for the summer edition of Harlow Times was 9 July, and so it would not have been possible to have included an article on the Consultation.

2 Nicholas Taylor to Councillor Andrew Johnson (Leader of the Council):

My second question is: As one of the pledges stated by your Party in the pre-election leaflet published in March this year was to 'Stop Summers West to prevent over development in our community', would you please advise me of what action you and your Party are taking to fulfil this promise?

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

Harlow Conservatives have consistently spoken against, campaigned against and voted against development to the south and west of Harlow since the proposal started to be made in the early 2000's

This Conservative group moved the longstanding policy that Harlow Council was against growth to the South and West of the town.

Under the previous Council, the Labour party did not take that position however and shamefully reversed that policy instead choosing to actively promote growth in that

area and welcoming Epping Forest District Council plans to build widescale developments in Sumners West, Katherines West and Latton Priory.

My party clearly stood on a platform of opposing these developments at the local election and this was most welcomed by the residents of Staple Tye, Harlow Common and specifically Sumners & Kingsmoor and Great Parndon.

We stand ready to honour that commitment to residents and deliver on the pledge we made.

Mr Taylor may not be aware that the agenda for the full council next Thursday 16th September was published last night and I point him to that agenda, which includes a motion from my group on this issue; a motion that if passed will see the council formally object to the Epping Forest District Council Local Plan.

I can assure residents that Conservative councillors intend to pass the motion.

Supplementary question from Nicholas Taylor:

The Inspector has said that it is now too late for objections to the plan other than minor representations. If the motion is passed next week will you formally end the agreement you have to work with Epping Forest District Council on part of their local plan which forms part of the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town?

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

I'm aware of the comments that the Inspector has made, but my Administration still has a duty to object formally at this point. I'm not willing to end the agreement to work together on Harlow and Gilston Garden Town. We will have to work together with Epping Forest on sites to the East of Harlow. By working together we have a better chance of securing regeneration that Harlow needs and securing housing nomination rights to houses built outside of Harlow. If the Inspector approves the Epping Forest plan I want Harlow Council to have the maximum say possible

3 Alan Leverett to Councillor Dan Swords (Portfolio Holder for Regeneration):

The Cycle Network in Harlow has been well use during the pandemic and we would hope will continue to be used more when things return to some normality. I am aware that the areas of cycle tracks and footpaths in the ownership of Essex County Council have a maintenance programme in progress whereas the areas under the ownership of the Harlow Council are being left in an appalling state of repair.

Can the Councillor Swords inform me of how much the council will have in this year budget to maintain the footpaths and cycle tracks and when do they expect the maintenance work to be carried out?

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

I am delighted that Mr Leverett has raised what is one of the most exciting areas of my portfolio, namely our plan to rebuild Harlow's cycle track network to a truly world beating standard.

As Mr Leverett knows, because I nearly rode into him on a cycle path a few weeks ago, my passion for this area knows no bounds. I agree that, as with so many areas of the regeneration portfolio, the cycle track network of Harlow has faced decades of decline, with no one taking responsibility to right that wrong.

But that failure ends, and it ends now. I have an extremely ambitious plan to completely rebuild the entirety of Harlow's cycle track network and I am afraid Mr Leverett will have to wait just a short while longer for me to unveil that plan and the funding package to deliver it.

Specifically in response to his point about the adoption schedule, at present Harlow Council owns approximately 10 percent of the town's cycle track network with the remainder being adopted by Essex County Council.

I do not agree with his assessment that Essex County Council have done a fantastic job on their areas and Harlow Council has not. The whole network needs a complete rebuilding and that is what we will deliver.

Supplementary question from Alan Leverett:

Will you look to raise funds and how do you plan to extend the network up to new housing estates and the new hospital if built

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

I can give you a concrete guarantee that we will plan to do those things.