

Full Council – 28 October 2021

Questions from the Public

1 **Nicholas Taylor to Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):**

During the recent election campaign the Conservative Party pledged to build many Council homes in Harlow. The previous administration's record on this subject can best be described as abysmal, sites such as at Elm Hatch and the former Lister House site have lain derelict for years and residents living in homes which will need to be demolished have been left in limbo. A document giving a timeline for development was produced by the Council in 2019 and another appeared in the Local Plan of December 2020.

Will you please advise me what progress is being made to develop the following sites, all of which form the first five year supply of homes in the Local Plan?

- a) Former Lister House site with Staple Tye Mews and the Staple Tye Depot
- b) Riddings Lane
- c) Pollard Hatch
- d) Elm Hatch
- e) Fishers Hatch

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

Thank you for your question Mr Taylor.

The list to which you refer appearing in the Harlow Development Plan adopted in December 2020 is of sites identified for development over the plan period and are not specific to the Council. This information is available to developers and the Council actively promotes them,

For details of the Council's pipeline of potential new houses I refer you to the quarterly Capital Expenditure performance reports presented to Cabinet.

The performance of the previous administration in building new council homes has been dire since the Pathfinder programme some seven years ago. The quarterly performance reports prompted many questions and comments from us in Opposition. We regularly challenged the previous administration over the absence of activity and interest in pursuing one of their key priorities, building more council house.

We are undertaking a rigorous and comprehensive review of the sites in the pipeline to ensure we achieve the homes that are needed and are value for money. We are also working with our subsidiary HTS to build properties in the pipeline through their emerging Business Plan, something else the previous administration failed to do.

The action we are taking now will result in this new administration building many more new Council properties, we are aiming for hundreds, and I look forward to making more announcements on the details of these schemes in due course.

Supplementary question from Nicholas Taylor:

Is Councillor Carter aware that the sites at the Readings and Pollards Hatch are subject to Community Right to Bid.

Supplementary reply from Councillor Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

They may be subject to bids but they have not yet been completed.

2 Nicholas Taylor to Councillor Dan Swords (Portfolio Holder for Regeneration):

Over a quarter of a million pounds was spent on refurbishing Market Square just three years ago. Like me, many residents have been concerned to see that about a third of this surface in the square is being dug up and replaced with another surface. This work has been going on for about seven months during which time the whole area looks like a building site.

I understand that Essex County Council may be paying for this work, nevertheless, can you explain why this work is being done, what is the expected cost and when can residents expect the work to be finished?

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

Thank you Mr Taylor.

I was not the portfolio holder at the time that these works were agreed, nor when they commenced. Indeed, this was agreed by the previous administration following the awarding of £1 million of funding from the Government towards town centre regeneration.

I have been clear publicly that this is not what I would have spent £1 million of Government funding on to kick start town centre regeneration.

Nevertheless, I understand that the scheme is scheduled to finish in Winter this year. I hope that this improvement to public realm makes a difference to the area.

However, I would like to be very clear that this administration has extremely ambitious plans to deliver the biggest programme of regeneration since Harlow was built, including a total rebuilding of the town centre. Not a tinkering at the edges, not a repaving nor a repainting and plans for that rebuilding will be published in due course.

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

At the last Full Council meeting it was agreed that the Chief Executive would be asked to submit a formal objection to the Epping Forest DC Local Development Plan.

Can you advise me on what date that was sent, when will you make its contents known to residents and what if any response has been received?

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

An objection to the Epping Forest Local Plan was formally submitted by this authority on the 23 September 2021. No response to this has yet been received. The contents of this letter will be made public as part of the Main Modifications process of the Epping Forest Local Plan. It is understood that formal communications will be made publicly available at the point at which all comments on the Local Plan are published.

The Council looks forward to the publication of the formal objection as it directly aligns with the motion passed at Full Council on 16 September 2021.

Supplementary question from Alan Leverett:

Do you feel that the Council should be consulting the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities?

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

This administration will work with all partners to reinforce the motion it set out.

4 Alan Leverett to Councillor Michael Hardware (Portfolio Holder for Strategic Growth):

As a result of the ill feeling expressed by residents living in Bynghams to the warehouse development nearby, I understand that the Council undertook to review the procedures it uses when advertising Planning Applications.

Can you advise me if this review has taken place, if not when will it be completed and if it has, what changes the Council has or will be making to the procedures used?

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

Thank you for your question, and yes, we have been undertaking a review of our planning procedures and communications, and this is still ongoing. There is an item on the next Cabinet agenda reviewing the council's Statement of Community Involvement which sets out how we will consult residents on forward planning such as the local plan review, new Community Infrastructure Levy, supplementary planning documents and, as relating to your question, with development control, planning applications. This will set out some of the changes we propose for consultation.

There are three participants in the planning process: the applicants, the public and the council and council members. Our aim is to make the process as transparent and accessible as we can for all three participants.

We have already introduced measures to ensure council members are fully aware of all planning applications as they are validated – they now receive a weekly report.

We are reviewing the letters we send to residents advising them of planning applications to ensure people know what they are and not mistaken them for circulars and put them straight in the bin. The content of the letter is also being looked at, ensuring it is readable in plain English, says everything it needs to and directs people to where there is further information.

We are also considering the size of the area around a site where the letter is sent, looking to do more than the legal minimum.

Making the website more accessible so that residents can find the further information they are seeking. This could include a mapping application so they are more readily identifiable, and asking applicants to provide a summary of the application to make it easier for the public to understand the key points.

By law, a notice has to be posted near to the property and the application has to be advertised in a physical newspaper. As we are all aware, we only have the Harlow Guardian which only a few people read. We are looking at other media outlets in the town to ensure greater outreach to residents.

When an application comes before the Development Management Committee, we are considering increasing the number of speakers for larger, complex or controversial applications, allowing more residents to give their views.

And we are looking at the broadcasting and virtual involvement of people with the committee. We saw far greater involvement and engagement during lockdown when meetings were virtual which we would like to see carry on.

Once this review has concluded, the recommendations to be adopted will be announced.

Supplementary question from Alan Leverett:

Will the Council be paying any form of compensation to the residents of Bynghams most affected by this warehouse development?

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

The issues raised are still being investigated so I can't comment at the moment.

5 Hugh Hoad to Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

I have had at least 15 workmen from HTS call at my address to carry out work or obtain the key for the Greenhills common room with no ID at the first knock. What is the council doing about this?

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

Thank you for your question

All HTS employees and sub contractors are provided with ID badges. Employees are also trained on working with residents and this includes the importance of ensuring staff can identify themselves.

Residents are encouraged to always ask for ID from anyone proposing to enter their home. HTS employees and sub contractors are actively encouraged to show ID at first point of contact.

If no ID is presented when requested, residents should refuse access. It is important that residents report this to HTS. HTS will always take action if advised of such circumstances.

I will undertake to do everything possible to ensure that all HTS and sub contracted workers show their ID upon entry to a property.

Supplementary question from Hugh Hoad:

It was about time something was actually done about this?

Supplementary reply from Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

This is an issue that comes up on a regular basis. Where issues occur go back to your housing manager or HTS.

6 Hugh Hoad to Councillor Dan Swords (Portfolio Holder for Regeneration):

In the plan to regenerate the town centre tabled at Cabinet 14/10/21 there was plenty of green space in the scheme. Will this be watered throughout its life and not left to die like the red flower pots scheme?

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

Greening our town in line with the Gibberd principles is key driver for this administration. That new greenery will be maintained to the highest standards because the rebuilt town centre truly will be one of the best town centres in Britain.

Dying plants have no role in that plan and we will be building back more beautifully, building back bigger, building back brighter in order to build back better.

Supplementary question from Hugh Hoad:

Can you be sure that the trees will be watered?

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

Yes.