

Cabinet – 27 January 2022

Questions from the Public

1 Mick Patrick to Councillor Simon Carter (Portfolio Holder for Housing):

I researched on Harlow's Council website the Housing needs test on delivering Harlow's Housing need only shows up to 2018.

It showed over a 3 year period that to 2018 that 1008 homes were needed 846 were built, showing an 84% delivery on homes.

I researched the national government data and found that the 2020/21 statistics show Harlow had 3661 applicants on its housing need register.

It is clear that Harlow like any other council are not anywhere close to supplying its local housing need. How are these statistics remotely accurate?

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

The Government requires each Local Planning Authority to provide information known as the Housing Delivery Test to ensure that sufficient homes are built to meet the relevant Authority's housing need. The housing need that this is tested against is known as the "Standard Method". It is important to note that whilst a Standard Method comprises many elements including projected household growth and affordability it does not, however, measure an assessment against the Council's Housing Register.

For the years quoted (2015 to 2018) the Council did not meet the target set by the Government's Housing Delivery Test. As such, Harlow was required to produce a Housing Delivery Action Plan and ensure that in the following 5 years the number of homes delivered were 20% above those required by the Council.

In the years since 2018, the number of homes completed in Harlow has met the Government target set by the "Standard Method". Therefore a new Action Plan is not required. The Council has very recently received the results of the latest Housing Delivery Test which shows that Harlow provided 208% of its requirement, and consequently will not be sanctioned.

Turning to the future, the number of homes required by the Council has been set by the adoption of the Harlow Local Development Plan at 9,200 dwellings for the period 2011 - 2033. This target is above that based on the objectively assessed housing need which is 7,400 dwellings. The Council is therefore expecting to meet the required housing delivery over the next 5 years.

Supplementary question from Mick Patrick:

2012 Council rent settlement backlog of repairs. Harlow's debt was over £300m. There are calls to revisit this settlement. Can you tell me owing to a 1 percent cut in rental income over four years. Is Harlow's rent income less than predicted over the last 10 years?

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

This is a technical question and I will arrange for a response to be sent to you.

2 Nicholas Taylor to Councillor Nicky Purse (Portfolio Holder for Environment):

On 1 May 2019 the then Leader of the Council had asked residents for suggestions as to where more off street parking could be constructed within housing estates. He was asked at Full Council on 28 January 2021 about the progress being made to create these spaces, he responded by saying that six sites had been given priority, these being 12 spaces at Shawbridge, 15 spaces at Wharley Hook, 6 spaces at Pear Tree Mead, 15 Spaces at Spinning Wheel Mead, an unspecified number at Bishopsfield and subject to Planning Permission 8 spaces between Five Acres and Barn Mead. Other sites would be subject to a robust assessment and it was hoped to complete the sites being given priority in 2021/2022.

Can you tell me how many of the sites identified as long ago as 2019 have been completed and what progress has been made in carrying out the robust assessment of other sites?

Reply from Councillor Nicky Purse (Portfolio Holder for Environment):

The parking schemes that were identified in 2019 are progressing and are due to conclude by 31 March 2022.

We are committed to delivering long term parking solutions in as many estates as possible and we will be making announcements and consulting on those proposals in due course.

Supplementary question from Nicholas Taylor:

Will all the sites be built by 31 March 2022?

Supplementary reply from Councillor Nicky Purse (Portfolio Holder for Environment):

I will arrange for a written response to be sent to you.

3 Nicholas Taylor to Councillor Russell Perrin (Leader of the Council):

At the Cabinet meeting held on 27 February 2020 the then Leader of the Council was asked about the future of Occasio House. He responded by saying that the Council was in discussion with the building's owner but for commercial reasons was unable to say any more. Nearly two years have elapsed since then. Can you tell me what progress if any has been made to get this property back into use?

Reply from Councillor Russell Perrin (Leader of the Council):

I can confirm that Harlow Council is currently in discussions with the owners of Occasio House about the purchase of the site by the Council to enable its re-development. These discussions are ongoing and I am unable to say more at the moment but I do expect this to have been brought to a conclusion by the end of April.

4 Alan Leverett to Councillor Alastair Gunn (Portfolio Holder for Governance):

I was interested to see from the local newspaper recently that Epping Forest DC intend to build a multi storey car park on its car park just off the High Street in Epping, which not only will see a big increase in the number of parking spaces but will also include 50 electric car charging points. This work is being done to encourage more visitors to Epping. Harlow Councils present programme of getting a handful of electric charging points installed in places other than in the town centre will do nothing to attract more visitors to Harlow Town Centre.

What priority will the Council give within its three year Strategy to increase the number of charging points in the Town Centre and across the town and has the Council set a target for the number of spaces that will be provided during this period?

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

The Council recognises the importance of charging facilities for electric vehicles and while plug-in-hybrid, battery electric, range-extended electric, or fuel cell electric cars currently comprise some 3.3 % only of the fleet nationally, with pure electric vehicles being a smaller proportion, it is aware of the forthcoming prohibition of sales of internal combustion-engined cars in 2030 and expects the market to react to that and the proportion of electric vehicles in the fleet to rise quickly as a result.

This understanding will be reflected in the Council's forthcoming overarching Climate Change Strategy and is already reflected in a range of recently adopted planning

policies. Furthermore, the Council is seeking to establish a town wide EV charge point policy, which an officer working group will develop under the oversight of a cross-party member steering group.

Regarding provision for town centre users the Council's position may contrast with that of other authorities who may directly control town centre parking provision and have the opportunity to make provision during redevelopment.

At present, parking provision in Harlow's town centre is largely privately owned meaning that, historically, the Council has had limited means of directly influencing provision. However it has engaged with owners regarding their plans, and there has been positive reaction in some quarters. The Council looks forward to learning about more specific proposals in the near future. There will of course be very substantial development opportunities arising in the forthcoming regeneration of the town centre and naturally the Council will apply its policy to ensure that new developments have appropriate provision for electric vehicle parking.

The Council will also be contributing to shifting the emphasis away from personal motorised transport through its work with HGGT on Active Transport Corridors which will see a massive improvement in active transport infrastructure and of public transport. This includes plans to redevelop Harlow's unique cycle track network.

The Council owns a number of car parks that serve satellite shopping centres rather than the town centre, as well as the Green Flag awarded Town Park, and has approved plans to begin to install charging points in these areas. The Council will be keeping the position under review and recognises that there will be a growing need for electric vehicle charging points in the years ahead.

Supplementary question from Alan Leverett:

Is the Council going to free, or even reasonable fees, and will they include fast charging?

Supplementary reply from Councillor Alastair Gunn (Portfolio Holder for Environment):

The question is premature, but the provision of charging points was identified as part of the Corporate Strategy. A cross party member steering group is meeting next week.

5 John Wright to Councillor Nicky Purse (Portfolio Holder for Environment):

As a resident of Waterhouse Moor I have become increasingly aware of the problems arising from the dropping off and collection of pupils from St Marks and

William Martin Schools. The increase in parental car driving to and from school has meant that Waterhouse Moor, in common with other residential areas near to schools is now experiencing twice daily irresponsible parking issues (parking on pavements and across cycle paths).

The Parking Partnership proposals will no doubt solve the problems being experienced outside both schools but I am afraid it will only move the problem to other residential areas nearby. The re-opening of the car park opposite William Martin will help to reduce the problem there and shines as a good example of what could be done at St Marks.

I would ask why Harlow Council have not considered a more permanent solution, that is to allow the green wedge area of land opposite St Marks School to be used as a dropping off and collection point between 08.00-09.00 hrs and 15.00-16.00hrs? The provision of a lockable gate would enable the school to provide access to this safe area only at the prescribed times, to be kept locked at all other times to prevent illicit parking/use.

Reply from Councillor Nicky Purse (Portfolio Holder for Environment):

We fully understand the challenges with parking across the town and particularly around schools and the knock on impact on student safety around schools.

The land that Mr Wright has identified is a designated Green Wedge under Policy 5 of the 2020 Local Plan and therefore this land cannot be used for any such solution.

It is not the case that Harlow Council is deciding not to change the use of this land, it is Policy 5 of the legally binding 2020 Local Plan.

I understand this is not the response that Mr Wright will be looking for, but we are unable to change this policy and it would not allow for such a parking area.

Supplementary question from John Wright:

Can this site be looked at as part of the Local Plan review process?

Supplementary reply from Councillor Nicky Purse (Portfolio Holder for Environment):

Yes.