

Full Council – 3 February 2022

Questions from Councillors

1 Councillor Jean Clark to Councillor Alastair Gunn (Portfolio Holder for Governance):

The Labour Council agreed to declare a climate emergency and to adopt a strategy of moving towards net zero emissions. It was agreed that the Council would aim to install electric charging points across its car parks within 5 years. I understand that the Council is looking to install fast charging points.

When will the charging points be installed and can the Council explore the installation of faster charging methods?

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

At the September 2021 Cabinet, Harlow Council committed to working with BP Pulse to install Electric Vehicle (EV) charge points in six of its pay and display car park, subject to contract.

The proposal is for multiple charge points rated at up to 7.4kW. These meet the classification of fast charging. They would cater for top-up charging whilst visiting a neighbourhood shopping centre, or an overnight charge for those who do not have access to private off-street parking, for example.

The installation of these charge points would fulfil the commitment set out in the amended Climate Emergency motion proposed by Cllr Perrin and seconded by the late Cllr Tony Hall at the July 2019 Cabinet, which was unanimously supported on a cross-party basis. Minutes from that meeting suggest that the motion made no reference to the speed of the charge points that should be installed.

This contract would be the first phase only of an approach to making public EV charging widely available in Harlow, which is estimated to require. The Council will continue to explore a range of options as part of its approach to supporting residents in making the switch to electric vehicles. These may include among others electric vehicle charging stations, home charging, and the viability of installing rapid EV chargepoint infrastructure.

Officers continue to progress an appropriate legal agreement with BP Pulse to underpin proposed chargepoint installations, and final designs for chargepoint bay locations and sizes, necessary to submit a formal funding bid to the Office for Zero Emission Vehicles (OZEV).

Supplementary question from Councillor Jean Clark to Councillor Alastair Gunn (Portfolio Holder for Governance):

Just a couple of points of relevance the proposal is for 7.4 kilo watts. In fact I've been told reliably by a taxi driver that that equates to three to four hours waiting as opposed to the minimum of the faster charges which are 45 minutes so we are talking about a difference of 3.3 to 4 hours per vehicle as opposed to 45 minutes. It is true that we are fulfilling the commitment of all members, I mean we were all in agreement of the resolution we were committed yes to the climate emergency motion but this is really in a narrow sense a discussion we were actually talking about. My question is being in mind the discussions which we have been having and the exploration that we have been having already and the urgency of the matter, can we be assured that we will adopt the fastest rate of charging even if it is more expensive?

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

Thank you for the follow up question. So there is a distinction between what are described as fast chargers and rapid chargers and what Councillor Clark is asking us to install is rapid chargers. Rapid chargers are considerably more expensive to install, they require huge electrical input and they won't be appropriate for all vehicles and they will be more costly to use for vehicle owners. So there are some good reasons why the current approach for the contract with BP Pulse is going for fast rather than rapid chargers and indeed that also relates to the condition of the funding which we are going to receive from OZEV. There will be a need for rapid charging points, there is I think £150 million off the top of my head being devoted by the Government nationally. Whether that would be appropriate within Harlow is something that will need to be thought through because there will be some big cost implications if we go down the route of rapid charging and it may not be appropriate for all vehicle uses and certainly not for vehicles that are happy to charge their car overnight or to top up and if you are going to the shops it might be that a half hour/45 minute top up charge could be useful and you wouldn't need a rapid charge to be able to do that. There is huge uncertainty here and a lot of it will depend on behaviour of how people go about charging their cars which is obviously a bit of a guessing game at the moment.

2 Councillor David Carter to Councillor Dan Swords (Portfolio Holder for Regeneration):

The council has not built council houses for Harlow families for many years now. I have seen in the Budget that the council has put aside £26 million pounds to build new homes.

I would like to ask if these will be proper council homes for Harlow families who are on our waiting list, and if these will be built on areas that need regeneration or on any of our precious green field sites?

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

Tonight we will vote on proposals to spend more money on council house building in Harlow than this council has spent in the last 30 years combined. And that £26 million figure is just the start.

In March, I will announce our full New Build programme which will deliver hundreds of new Harlow homes for Harlow families, of the highest standards and in the right places.

We will be delivering on people's priorities, on a message that we hear loud and clear to build, build, build.

Build to give Harlow families the home they deserve.

Build to restore pride to neglected parts of our town.

Build to deliver on the pledge we made to the people of Harlow.

My commitment to building new Council homes for social rent was displayed with the recent announcement that we have secured £640,000 from Homes England to ensure that the new homes being built at Bushey Croft will be let at the lowest possible social rent levels for Harlow families – as opposed to the previously so-called affordable rent levels that the Labour party had proposed for the site.

It begs the question as to why they never used the £640,000 to do the same thing for which they were eligible.

The New Build Programme will be historic and it will deliver new homes for Harlow families on our waiting lists because for too long this Council has failed to tackle that issue.

It would be beggars belief for the party of Attlee to vote against £26 million for council house building, alas we will see in just a few moments time.

And if they do not vote for this investment, they will only be confirming what the people of Harlow already know – that we are the party of house building.

3 Councillor David Carter to Councillor Dan Swords (Portfolio Holder for Regeneration):

The old Lister House site on which I understand the previous administration spent £750,000 on consultancy fees and plans for new buildings, is still just a building site. It has a fence around it which is now being vandalised, can you tell me when, if ever, work on this valuable piece of land will start?

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

The Lister House site is a disgrace. As Cllr Carter highlights, no building work has taken place on the site. It is a shameful failure.

We all have different political views on what value for money may be. But I'm sure we can all agree that spending money on something that never happens, is not value for money.

It is therefore with sadness that I say that Cllr Durcan, when in this role, did draw up a scheme for the site that was not delivered.

That scheme was described by specialists and I quote as "too expensive, too much and a management nightmare."

In fact, not only that, there was not one, but two water mains under the site meaning that the scheme could never have even been built. For reference, that's why the old Lister House building was situated to the North West of the site.

Sadly, the lack of development alone is not the issue, the failure is that £695,733.30 was spent on nothing. No development of that site. That figure alone equates to three years' worth of Council Tax increases.

In fact, it is not only the Perry Road site. The Yorkes, Brenthall Towers, Elm Hatch, Stackfield, the Readings, the list goes on. None of those sites saw any development but they cost the taxpayers of this town.

£1,130,668.78 does that figure sound familiar? It should do. The amount of money spent on projects that never happened.

Never so much as a spade in the ground, or even out of the van, or even a van turning up, or even the van being started, in fact there was no van at all.

£1,130,668.78 of Harlow taxpayers money wasted.

It begs the question as to whether Cllr Durcan is the most expensive Councillor Harlow has ever seen.

So yes, it will be delivered providing value for money, new homes and much needed regeneration.

The full details will be set out in the New Build Programme this March and work will start as soon as possible once the scheme is approved.

4 Councillor Matthew Sagers to Councillor Dan Swords (Portfolio Holder for Regeneration):

As I was elected for the beautiful ward of Mark Hall I promised the residents of my ward that I would 1) cut the cost of this Council's part of the tax which tonight has been achieved but next part of my promise is to regenerate and restore the ward of Mark Hall back to its glory days and to on and move it into the 21st century and make it a jewel in Harlow's crown which it once was.

Great areas like the stow shopping who under the previous administration has been abandon, under this administration had their first Christmas market in a decade and in the last 6 months have tried to shake the bad reputation it has got. its 70th anniversary this area of which the residents and shop owners would like to show what a great area it is with many more celebration days, it would be good to hear that this and may other areas in my ward like that in Edinburgh way will get the much needed TLC they missed in a generation and help to put them back on their true path.

I, like my residents wait to hear more on what is the plan, when will we hear it and hope it will be a great birthday present?

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

In March, we will celebrate Harlow's 75th birthday. 75 years of innovation, enterprise, aspiration and community.

Mark Hall has pioneered all of those things. I am reliably informed that it was in Mark Hall that the first fibre optic cable was manufactured which are now sprouting in every country around the globe.

It was Mark Hall in which the first estates of the glorious new town were constructed with the wonderful landscape and architecture.

And it is in Mark Hall that we will kick start our once-in-a-generation programme of estate renewal.

Our Budget this evening shows in no uncertain terms our commitment to regenerating our whole town and Mark Hall will certainly be part of that.

Indeed, I can confirm that the Mark Hall ward will benefit from both the Estate Renewal Fund we are to vote on this evening and further that it will have its very own Estate Renewal Programme to be announced later this year.

Supplementary question from Councillor Matthew Saggors to Councillor Dan Swords (Portfolio Holder for Regeneration):

Once this regeneration gets underway, does he have any plans to help the hospitality and shop owners of areas like Mark Hall and Tanys Dell in highlighting them being there and driving people towards it so it becomes a social hub and not abandoned like it is at the moment?

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

Thank you for that supplementary. Yes, is the short answer in where the Estate Renewal programme for Mark Hall we will set out later in this year will address all of those things. The most incredible thing about Harlow is the context in which the 20 minute neighbourhood was built and that is now being replicated across the world. It's very fashionable these days to have a 20 minute neighbourhood and, as I said, Harlow had that way back when and we are going to rejuvenate that in no uncertain terms we will come onto fantastic things so, yes, they will be very popular places indeed.