

Cabinet – 21 March 2024

Questions from the Public

1 Jake Shepherd to Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

Harlow Council is proudly a Living Wage Employer, with the acquisition of The Harvey Centre will the Council seek to persuade independent retailers and business owners to follow in its footsteps?

Reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

As you rightly point out, Harlow Council are a proud Living Wage Employer and fully support the invaluable part it can play in helping employees to meet their day-to-day living expenses across all of the organisations that have adopted it. I welcome the significant increase to the Living Wage that the Government has announced which will see a £1,800 pay rise for those receiving it in the new financial year.

Whilst we may not hold any form of enforcement powers, Harlow Council would always seek to promote the virtues of the Living Wage and its application to all businesses across the town, county, and country, and not just those operating within the Harvey Centre.

Supplementary question from Jake Shepherd:

What can the leader say his legacy is for helping with the cost of living crisis?

Supplementary reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

Fully funding the community hub and freezing council tax.

2 Colin Thorpe to Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

At the Cabinet Meeting held 1st December 2022 Councillor Charles stated “The Council is committed to actively working with the Potter Street Wellbeing Hub Trust to seek to find venues from which it can commence running some well being activities in the Potter Street area.”

In your letter dated 7th December 2022 to the Trustees in your capacity of Deputy Leader and Portfolio holder for Regeneration after it was decided that Osler House was uneconomical to repair you wrote “That is why we will seek to find an alternative venue in Potter Street for your project that does not require such levels of investment .I am confident that this can be done in short order.”

In an email dated 12th December 2022 in reply to my own Robert Halfon MP wrote “ Thank your for your email please be assured that I will work with the Council to do all we can to help find an alternative venue for the Hub.”

Fourteen months have now passed since these promises were made will the Leader of Council now honour these promises or will the residents of South East Harlow once again be let down?

Reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

With a view to assisting the Potter Street Wellbeing Hub locate a venue, Council Officers facilitated a meeting with the Potter Street Community Association who at the time had capacity to take on new bookings within the existing Community Centre. As far as I have reviewed, perfectly reasonable offers were made but not accepted. This would have seen the hub located in Potter Street.

Nevertheless, Harlow Council have also supported the Wellbeing Hub concerning the community garden/growing project at the Dudley Terrace Allotment. That is an active project, and the Council is in the process of regularising the occupation of the site via the grant of a new lease.

Furthermore, given the welcome news of the proposed sale of Osler House to Mind in West Essex, there may be opportunity to work with the charity regarding use of the community space within the property. In due course, Harlow Council would be happy to make introductions so that the parties can discuss what opportunities there may be.

3 Colin Thorpe to Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

Following on from my previous question on the Council's suggested commitment to supporting the “Hub”.

The Potter Street Health and Wellbeing Hub have only been able to progress one part of it's plans and this has been achieved by taking over a derelict allotment site in Potter Street and creating the Potter Street and Church Langley Community Garden .

Unfortunately, the Garden lacks its “Hub” which is a central part of the project not only as a administrative centre for the rental of allotments but also somewhere our volunteers can rest

Will the Council now use its powers as granted in the “Smallholdings and Allotments Act 1908” Part II section 26 which allows for improvements on allotments and The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted

Development) (England) Order Part 12 Class A which allows the erection of small ancillary buildings of less than 4 metres in height with a maximum of 200 cubic metres capacity and provide a small log cabin funded by some of funds which were allocated to Osler House and by so doing honour its promise to find a base for the “Hub” in Potter Street?

Reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

Thank you for your question. The council congratulates The Potter Street Health and Wellbeing Hub on its important work in creating a community garden. The provision of a small log cabin for the purposes of an administrative centre or rest area on statutory allotment land will be contrary to planning laws. However, the council will commit to working with your organisation with a view to providing an appropriate facility for ancillary use to a statutory allotment, subject to the building and use falling within permitted development.

Supplementary question from Colin Thorpe:

Does Planning have to work within the constraints of the planning order and not use words that are not within the planning order. Incidental is not used in the planning order, but ancillary is. Will the council use its powers to allow a small log cabin to be erected on the site?

Supplementary reply from Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):

Can't comment on specific application. However, we have had extensive planning dialogue. We will seek to support to you. However, you can submit an application contrary to advice and if you submit an application which is rejected, you can appeal the decision. However, I would encourage you to consider and go along with the advice the council has given you.