

# Full Council – 27 February 2025

## Questions from the Public

### **1 Steve Barnes to Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):**

I note that on 8 January 2025 at an Extraordinary meeting of Uttlesford DC (UDC), councillors voted to accept a comprehensive report on the subject of devolution. I also note that on 21 January Councillors at Epping Forest DC (EFDC) attended an all party briefing session on the same subject.

Can you advise me if Councillors in Harlow have discussed this matter collectively and if the Council has a formal view on the proposal to scrap Harlow District Council (HDC), bearing in mind there has been no consultation with residents about these changes which are likely to occur as soon as 2027?

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

Harlow Council has been fully engaged with these considerations, but Mr Barnes questions are a little premature. There is, at present, no proposal to consult on in respect of Local Government Regorganisation – that is being worked on and will be debated by Harlow Council in March ahead of the required update to Government, before any Essex-wide submission in the autumn. My sole interest is about doing what is right for Harlow and its people.

### **2 Nicholas Taylor to Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):**

You will no doubt be aware that within the EFDC area there are four Town Councils and twenty Parish Councils and within the UDC there are two Town Councils and fifty-one Parish Councils all of which are statutory consultees in respect of planning applications. I note that at a recent meeting of the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town committee a commitment was made to consult Parish Councils in the EFDC area. It is interesting to note that EFDC unlike in Harlow, do not publish comments made in respect of planning applications by individuals.

Bearing the above in mind, with the proposal to create new Unitary Authorities, will the residents of Harlow be afforded the same rights as residents in other parts of the new District, by the creation of a Harlow Town Council and indeed follow up the proposals made by the Conservative Party locally in the 1990's to create Parish Councils across the town?

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

These are details which are simply far too premature to consider, but I can assure Mr Taylor that they will be. Ultimately, all such decisions are for the Government. My sole interest is about doing what is right for Harlow and its people.

### **3 Nicholas Taylor to Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):**

The developments to the south and west of Harlow will greatly affect residents in Harlow. Bearing in mind that we live in the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town and the total lack of consultation that has taken place to date by either EDC or HDC, will this council make any effort and if so how, to involve residents in the town and encourage them to comment on these developments. so that residents here will be afforded the same opportunity to comment as those living in Parishes within the EFDC District?

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

Officers and members from Epping and Harlow Councils collaborate to ensure effective engagement in delivering and developing the Garden Community sites. This involves determining methods of engagement, identifying the stakeholders, and setting guidelines for developer engagement.

There has been extensive consultation to date on Latton Priory located to the south of the district, this being the most advanced site out of the south and west Garden Communities. Consultations are noted as:

#### **Developer Led Masterplan**

- Autumn/Winter 2019 Public Consultation
- Winter 2023 public consultation

#### **EFDC Led Design Code**

- Autumn/Winter 2023 public consultation

#### **Planning Application**

- Autumn/Winter 2023 Public Consultation
- 5,697 letters sent to address points in Harlow, Four site notices put up by EFDC, Six site notices within Harlow (Radburn Close, Spruce Hill, Sibneys Green, Rundells, Outside BBQ Flames, Access at Fern Hill Lane)

The Council will keep residents and the public informed of any further consultation.

The Water Lane Garden Community is not as advanced, but to help shape the future development of this site, the developer is formulating a stakeholder engagement. The engagement plan ensures that ward members, resident groups and/or associations and businesses can inform the masterplanning process at its earliest conception. This will ensure there is effective and ongoing engagement with a series of events and milestones set out along the way. The Water Lane developers are to start engaging with the local community spring/ summer 2025.

#### **4 Jennifer Steadman to Councillor Dan Swords (Leader of the Council):**

Following on from Harlow Council receiving a truly appalling C3 rating by the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH), Dan Swords attended a meeting with the RSH on January 8th of this year.

The report quoted that a "C3" fire safety regulation rating for council properties indicates "serious failings" in meeting fire safety standards, requiring significant improvements from the council to address issues identified by the RSH; essentially meaning the council has not adequately addressed fire safety concerns within their properties and needs to take immediate action to rectify them.

It also states over 500 overdue high risk remedial actions and 1,500 overdue medium risk actions of which 1,000 have been overdue for longer than 12months.

Is it now safe to presume that as it is nigh on five months since the C3 report that Harlow council properties have now all been risk assessed for fire safety, or are undergoing assessments and you will be announcing shortly that Harlow is now in receipt of the highest RSH rating?

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

The Council continues to meet monthly with the Regulator for Social Housing and remains on track to have completed all Fire Risk Assessments by 31st March 2025. The Council's performance has improved significantly in recent months with 82% of stock now having been surveyed. A dedicated team of officers review performance against the completion of Fire Risk Assessments and tasks/actions weekly, this includes performance against overdue actions and reports monthly into the Regulator for Social Housing.

It is important to note that a number of overdue actions relate to major works and to support delivery of these works a substantial capital works programme is currently in progress, with further £9m programmed in and due to be

delivered in 25/26. In addition to the above and to support the work being undertaken by the Housing team, two new Housing Officer posts dedicated to Fire Safety Work were approved by Cabinet last week.

We are fully funding every commitment we have made to the Regulator and will take every action required to meet those commitments.

**5 Jennifer Steadman to Councillor David Carter (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing):**

One of Old Harlow's pensioners who resides in a purpose-built bungalow brought to my attention a rather worrying fire safety matter concerning escape route access.

The row of bungalows in question have no back door fire escape access so, if there were to be a fire at the front of their property, unless they are an Olympic hurdle jumper or trained mountain climber, they won't be able to escape to safety out of their kitchen or bedroom window which are both at the back of the property.

Identical bungalows in Old Harlow had retrofitted back door fire escapes in their bedroom just a couple of years ago.

So why haven't the residents of these bungalows been offered a retrofit fire escape door in their bedroom? Did the budget run out or are the lives of these pensioner residents not important enough to spend money on?

**Reply from Councillor David Carter (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing):**

The council has requested that a fire risk assessor carries out inspections of the bungalows in question. The council will review the recommendations.