

# Full Council – 27 March 2025

## Questions from Councillors

### **1 Councillor Kay Morrison to Councillor Danielle Brown (Portfolio Holder for Community and Wellbeing):**

Cost of living challenges continue to affect lives in our country. Necessities are sometimes unaffordable: amongst those for many, shockingly, are female hygiene products. One in 4 women cannot afford them, sometimes resorting to toilet paper and other surprising solutions.

State-maintained schools and 16-19 education settings in England can access free period products funded by the Department of Education. Yet, a third of teenage girls miss school because of periods according to a recent survey; of those, more than 1 in 10 said they have no access to sanitary products and 11% said they can't afford them. They're not alone.

Morrison's will provide a couple of sanitary pads in an emergency. Harlow's Playhouse makes such products available and foodbanks supply them. Some local authorities offer free period products and, recognising that the very subject is still potentially embarrassing, meet the need discreetly, confidentially.

How does Harlow Council support women and girls struggling to buy essential sanitary products and what further measures will be introduced?

### **Reply from Councillor Danielle Brown (Portfolio Holder for Community and Wellbeing):**

The council does not provide sanitary products to women and girls. The council supports the Harlow Foodbank who provide sanitary products, and Harvey Centre who have been working to tackle period poverty since 2021.

### **2 Councillor James Griggs to Councillor Danielle Brown (Portfolio Holder for Community and Wellbeing):**

Way back last summer I spoke with officers and suggested the relocation of the canopies and table tennis tables from the market square.

At a meeting of the 'Friends of the Town Park' the group told me they were keen to have the table tennis tables relocated to the park and I'm pleased that this has now been done.

At the same time, I suggested to officers the use of the canopies to provide some shade at the splash parks and paddling pools. Can you give an update on the canopies and the plans for their use?

**Reply from Councillor Danielle Brown (Portfolio Holder for Community and Wellbeing):**

Work has already begun to get the paddling pools and splash parks ready for the 2025 season. This includes assessing health and safety, as well as the need for shade, so we can determine the most suitable locations for the canopies which will be installed before the season commences.

We're looking forward to welcoming both returning and new visitors to the paddling pools and splash parks this summer as we continue to invest in these much-loved facilities as part of our mission to deliver high-performing council services.

In line with our increased investment, we are looking at how we can improve the provision further, and we will have an exciting announcement soon. We aim to ensure everyone enjoys the pools whilst staying comfortable in the shade. Let's hope we have a beautifully long sunny summer!

**3 Councillor James Griggs to Councillor Nicky Purse (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability):**

Over a year ago ECCO announced that its tenure at Parndon Wood Nature Reserve would come to an end on 12th May 2024.

In a statement issued on 1st March last year the Portfolio holder for environment said:

"We are working to secure a new community partner to operate the service and that work will be stepped up in the coming weeks"

Why, over a year later, is the process of finding a new partner moving at such a glacial pace?

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

I fully appreciate your concerns regarding the pace of progress in securing a new community partner for Parndon Wood Nature Reserve. While this process has taken longer than initially anticipated, it is important that we get it right to ensure the site's long-term sustainability and value to the community.

Work to secure a new partner has been ongoing behind the scenes, and I'm pleased to say there is now light at the end of the tunnel. We have received six expressions of interest so far, and all interested parties have been given the opportunity to visit the site in preparation. Tender packs are due to be issued within the next two weeks, with applicants given three to four weeks to return their submissions. Once received, the tenders will be evaluated, with a view to appointing a successful applicant in time to benefit from the important summer season.

This is not simply a matter of handing over the keys — we are looking for a partner who can not only manage the site but also deliver environmental education, community engagement, and stewardship of this valued natural asset. That level of responsibility requires a careful, thorough approach.

In the meantime, I'd like to reassure residents that Parndon Wood has remained open during its normal hours, with the site being staffed by Council personnel to ensure continued public access and safety.

We remain committed to delivering a strong future for the Reserve and appreciate the community's continued patience as we complete the final stages of this process.

**4 Councillor Jake Shepherd to Councillor David Carter (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing):**

I've been supporting Bishopsfield residents in tackling ongoing repairs, estate maintenance and environmental health matters for several months. Matters are made more complex due to the mixed responsibility between Harlow Council's and/or L&Q's (Housing Association), in differing areas with several grey areas. Residents and I are concerned about a breakdown in communication between those responsible for managing the neighbourhood and find the longstanding delays in resolving issues frustrating.

Will the Portfolio Holder join me and my fellow Ward Councillors in walking around the Bishopsfield neighbourhood to see these issues firsthand and meet with residents affected?

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

Yes, I, along with Housing Officers, am happy to meet with ward councillors and this is currently being arranged.

**5 Councillor Jake Shepherd to Councillor Nicky Purse (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability):**

It's been a notable amount of time (09/12/24) since residents were last updated by the Council on plans for a new Community Orchard at Cannons Gate allotment. The Portfolio Holder stated in December that stakeholders were being engaged in the coming weeks.

How many stakeholders have been engaged about these proposals, and subsequently what was the level of interest from stakeholders to get involved with this scheme?

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

Since December, we have been actively engaging with a broad range of stakeholders to develop plans for the new Community Orchard at Cannons Gate allotment. This has included local allotment holders, schools, community groups, volunteers, and environmental organisations.

As part of the project, schools will be invited to take part in a competition to design a feature that reflects Harlow's heritage through art. The winning design will be brought to life and commissioned through local artists, adding a unique and creative focal point to the orchard.

We are now in the final stages of the orchard's design and are proud to confirm that it will be dedicated to the late Bill Weston, in recognition of his deep commitment to the local community and the environment.

Further updates on the launch and opportunities for wider community involvement will be shared in the coming weeks.