

Public Document Pack



Chairman and Members of the Council

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Date: 8 December 2023

cc. All other recipients of the Council agenda

Dear Councillor,

COUNCIL - 13 DECEMBER 2023

Please find attached the complete list of the following items for the above meeting:

6. Petitions (Page 3)

To receive any petitions.

(B) Prevent the Closure of Our Local Swimming Pool in Buntingford (Page 4)

7. Public Questions (Pages 5 - 9)

To receive any public questions.

8. Members' Questions (Pages 10 - 13)

To receive any Members' questions.

Petition - Protect Bengoe Field landscape and return it to Green Belt

We the undersigned petition the Council to protect Bengoe Field from further housing development and return this beautiful landscape to Green Belt. We request that any planning decisions are put on hold and the full consultation on reinstating the Green Belt takes place.

Bengoe Field spreads alongside Wadesmill Road and Sacombe Road just on the edge of Hertford and is much loved and utilised by local residents. There is very strong local objection to further development in Bengoe Field and we are asking EHDC Councillors and planners to take into account our concerns.

This land was designated as green belt. It was removed from green belt protection on the assumption that, after minerals had been extracted, the landscape quality would have deteriorated and this reduced quality would then make it acceptable for residential development.

The minerals plan enquiry, approved by the Secretary of State, determined that the landscape of Bengoe Field was of exceptionally high value and was the primary grounds for rejection of the minerals extraction application.

This was not fully taken into account in the Local Plan inspection when the green belt designation was changed without any specific public consultation. We request that any planning decisions are put on hold and the full consultation on reinstating the Green Belt takes place.

This ePetition ran from 16/09/2023 to 19/11/2023 and has now finished.

305 people signed this ePetition.

[ePetition - Protect Bengoe Field landscape and return it to Green Belt - East Herts District Council](#)

Agenda Item 6b

Prevent the Closure of Our Local Swimming Pool in Buntingford

My husband, like many others in our community, has greatly benefited from our local swimming pool. Following a knee replacement surgery, he found himself unable to participate in activities such as biking or running. However, swimming provided him with an accessible and effective form of exercise that has significantly improved his health and wellbeing.

Unfortunately, the council has decided to close this invaluable community resource. This decision will not only impact my husband but also countless other residents who rely on the pool for exercise, rehabilitation or simply leisure.

Swimming is a low-impact activity that can be enjoyed by people of all ages and abilities. According to Swim England's report "Value of Swimming", it helps reduce the risk of chronic illnesses and improves mental health while saving NHS over £357 million per year through prevented GP visits.

The closure of our local pool would deprive us all from these benefits. We urge the council to reconsider their decision based on its significant impact on public health and community cohesion in Buntingford.

Please sign this petition if you believe in preserving vital resources for our community's physical and mental wellbeing.

Petition submitted by Terry and Jeanne Watson and Philip Wylie.

Online petition has received 1,307 signatures and 503 physical signatures have been received (correct as of Friday 8 December 2023)

COUNCIL – 13 DECEMBER 2023

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

<p>Question 1</p>	<p>Colin Woodward to ask Cllr Ben Crystall, the Leader of the Council</p>
<p>In September 2022 EHDC formally recognised the Water Lane Hall to be an Asset of Community Value, yet the perception in Bishop’s Stortford is that the Council is still intent on proceeding with the proposal to dispose of the Hall along with its other assets on the Old River Lane site by transferring them to Cityheart for development of the site for a paltry sum or, possibly at nil cost in the case of the Hall, compared with the cost to the Council of their purchase. In the meantime there has twice been an extension of the lease of the hall to the URC church, demonstrating its ongoing utility and value to the community, though without any reasoned reply to alternative bids such as that of 17 March 2023 submitted by Community Initiative (BS) and Bishop's Stortford Civic Federation setting out several ownership and operating scenarios to preserve this asset.</p> <p>Given that the Water Lane Hall was designated by EHC an Asset of Community Value, what process is EHDC now following to allow the community the option to retain the building for community use, noting its (EHCs) own policies including CFLR8, before it takes an irrevocable decision to hand it over to Cityheart, potentially for demolition?</p>	
<p>Question 2</p>	<p>Jill Goldsmith to ask Cllr Carl Brittain, Executive Member for Financial Sustainability</p>
<p>It is now 4 months since my last question on EHDC’s accounts and hence the audited values of assets on the ORL site. As of 5/12/23</p>	

the Council website still is not disclosing the accounts from 2020-21 which were completed months ago and the inspection period has not commenced for the 2021-22 unaudited accounts. The 2022-23 accounts have also missed the statutory deadline.

It is my understanding that as yet, no contract exists with Cityheart, but that the terms of the potential contract (Development Management Agreement) could go back to values set when Cityheart was selected as preferred development partner. That is nearly 5 years ago now, so the values then may or may not reflect best value now. The answer to me in July 2023 was that *“The Council would not enter in an agreement with a developer whereby we are not getting best value”*. The FAQs on the Council's website say that *“An updated Section 123 report, with independent valuations, will be produced and agreed before the development agreement is signed”*.

This is such an important scheme for the town and for the Council's finances that residents need to be able to see how the Council is justifying the transfer of our assets before the Development Agreement is signed.

Has the Council now obtained independent valuations for the ORL site; and will it make this information and related 123 explanations transparent, before the Development Management Agreement is signed?

Question 3

Charlotte Lipscomb to ask Cllr Vicky Glover-Ward, the Executive Member for Planning and Growth

In the Council meeting held on the 18th October I asked the Executive Member responsible for licensing a question regarding the chaos created by the AMAFest Festival held in Bury Green on 2nd September. In her reply she confirmed that an investigation was

launched immediately after the event. The Executive Member also stated, and I quote "Please be assured, however, that East Herts Council is ready to take action against any event organiser that commits offences under the Licensing Act 2003 which may include not complying with the terms of a licence. Regarding AMA Fest, we have gathered information and data from various sources, all of which has now been reviewed".

It is now well over three months since the event and two months since she made that statement, and residents like me are still expecting answers. Can the Executive Member please confirm when the results of the investigation, and the action that may be taken against the event organisers, will be made public?

Question 4

Karen Burton to ask Cllr Tim Hoskin, the Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability

On October 18th, this council rejected a request from the Bishop's Stortford BID to allocate 100 spaces for town centre workers at a discounted rate in Northgate End car park to help with recruitment and retention issues and activate an unpopular car park with an average occupancy of 20%. During the meeting, Cllr Crystal expressed concerns about setting a "dangerous precedent" and emphasized that Bishop's Stortford should not receive special treatment. He stated, "it is far better to take a slower, more rational approach and make it the best it can be" and that car parking across East Herts needs to be dealt with as a whole".

Surprisingly, just eight weeks later, a new proposal is being presented to the council, targeting three Bishop's Stortford car parks for increased charges in long-stay tariffs and one car park is proposed to undergo a smaller percentage decrease in the 4, 5, and long-stay tariffs, with no other car parks across East Herts having the same treatment.

As a listening council where and how have you found the evidence in such a short space of time to support such a significant shift that could profoundly affect Bishop's Stortford town centre businesses' ability to recruit and retain staff, as well as impact residents and visitors. How can this be the slower, more rational approach be achieved in such a short time and is the council prepared to stop and think again and if not, why not?

Question 5

Philip Wylie to ask Cllr Sarah Hopewell, the Executive Member for Wellbeing

When and what were the serious Health & Safety issues raised by Everyone Active, which led to the decision to close the pool. Has a full and independent evaluation been undertaken of ways to address these serious Health & Safety issues?

Question 6

Ian Ballantyne to ask Cllr Carl Brittain, the Executive Member for Financial Sustainability

£1,100,000 (£1.1m) was list as being Approved by the Council for spending on Ward Freeman Joint Use Facilities, in the 2022/23 budget, out of a total capital expenditure budget of £25,561,000 (£25.56m) – see <https://democracy.eastherts.gov.uk/documents/s57368/Budget%202022-23%20and%20Medium%20Term%20Financial%20Plan%20-%20Appendix%20C.pdf?j=22>.

How, when, why and who decided to remove this from the budget or not include it for 2023/24?

Question 7

Christopher Davalle to ask Cllr Sarah Hopewell, the Executive Member for Wellbeing

Over each of the last 10 years, what have the net annual running been for the Ward Freman Pool and how much of this is routine

maintenance? Has any analysis been done on the impact of low expenditure on maintenance – the pool cover and air circulation systems are not working and boiler system is very old and inefficient.

Question 8

**Kirti Wylie to ask Cllr Sarah Hopewell,
the Executive Member for Wellbeing**

Are the Council Authorities prepared to continue funding the running costs of Ward Freman Pool if a solution to the "urgent" Health & Safety issues could be found?

Agenda Item 8

COUNCIL – 13 DECEMBER 2023

MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Question 1	Cllr Ian Devonshire to ask Cllr Vicky Glover-Ward, the Executive Member for Planning and Growth
<p>Please could you let us know why there have been so few Development Management Committees since the election in May of this year. Up to the end of November 2023, there has only been two DMC meetings in seven months.</p> <p>It was reported last year that this Authority was the ninth busiest planning authority in the country. Therefore, it is worrying that we are having so few DMC meetings.</p> <p>The Development Management Committee is, obviously, very important to demonstrate transparency in the planning process, so please could the Executive Member explain why applications are not coming to DMC.</p>	
Question 2	Cllr Eric Buckmaster to ask Cllr Vicky Glover-Ward, the Executive Member for Planning and Growth
<p>Following the disappointing news that this Council is closing Ward Freman Swimming Pool, concerns have been raised yet again by a number of residents about the current condition and future status of the two other joint-use pools in the District, including Leventhorpe Leisure Centre in Sawbridgeworth, which is in desperate need of refurbishment.</p> <p>In August, an unnamed spokesperson for this Council was quoted</p>	

in the Bishop's Stortford Independent stating that 50% of the allocated £122,760 of Section 106 money from the SAWB2 and SAWB3 housing developments - which was ring-fenced in the S106 agreement for 'Grange Paddocks and/or Leventhorpe Leisure Centre' - remains unassigned.

As Grange Paddocks is now complete, open and operational, could the Executive Member for Planning and Growth confirm that this unassigned £60,000 will be spent on refurbishing Leventhorpe Leisure Centre, which will help to attract additional users and therefore ensure its continued operation for the benefit of all residents in Sawbridgeworth?

Question 3

Cllr Joseph Dumont to ask Cllr Sarah Hopewell, the Executive Member for Wellbeing

Local Councils, including this one, have responsibility for licensing dog breeders and ensuring puppies are bred in safe and healthy conditions.

Illegal puppy farms – in which large numbers of litters are bred in poor conditions without proper monitoring – continue to be used throughout the UK. It is estimated that 400,000 farmed puppies are purchased each year.

Does the Executive Member have any intelligence on the scale of this issue in East Herts and what steps is the Council taking to make sure the public is aware of the importance of acquiring puppies from licensed breeders?

Question 4

Cllr John Wyllie to ask Cllr Tim Hoskin, the Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability

Some Bishop's Stortford high street businesses struggle with staff recruitment and retention due to the proximity of Stansted Airport,

where many employees get free parking. The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability published a scheme in July, which would allow some Bishop's Stortford Town Centre workers to benefit from reduced parking charges. This scheme was supported by the Bishop's Stortford BID, the Executive Member then promptly withdrew his own scheme.

At the Full Council meeting on the 18th October the Leader of the Council said that the scheme was withdrawn so that an alternative scheme could be introduced.

Can the Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability tell me what the proposed new scheme is and when it will be launched?

Question 5	Cllr Nahum Clements to ask Cllr Sarah Hopewell, the Executive Member for Wellbeing
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With the first phase of the Hertford Theatre opening next Spring, could the Executive Member for Wellbeing please provide an update on what the total expected cost of the Theatre is, and are any specific alterations being undertaken or any aspects that remain to be funded as a result of cost increases?

Question 6	Cllr Carolyn Redfern to ask Cllr Sarah Hopewell, the Executive Member for Wellbeing
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How many extra car journeys into the centre of Hertford are expected as a result of the theatre opening and what plans are in place to:-

- a. promote the use of public transport, and active travel
- b. ensure adequate parking is in place to support the remaining car journeys

Question 7	Cllr David Jacobs to ask Cllr Carl Brittain, the Executive Member for Financial Sustainability
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Can the Executive Member for Financial Sustainability confirm how much funding this council has received from the following central Government development funds (the figure in brackets being the total value of the funds across England and Wales)?

Future High Streets Fund (£1bn)

Towns Fund (£3.6bn)

Levelling Up Fund (£3.8bn)

Levelling Up Partnership (£400m)

Long Terms Plan Towns Fund (£1.1bn)