

# Public Document Pack



Chairman and Members of the Council

Your contact: Rebecca Dobson  
Tel: 01279 502082  
Date: 19 October 2020

cc. All other recipients of the Council agenda

Dear Councillor,

## **COUNCIL - 21 OCTOBER 2020**

Please find attached the following reports which were marked "to follow" on the agenda for the above meeting:

6. Public Questions (Pages 3 - 6)

*To receive any public questions.*

7. Members' questions (Pages 7 - 10)

*To receive any Members' questions.*

Please bring these papers with you to the meeting on Wednesday.

Yours faithfully,

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East Herts Council

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**MEETING** : COUNCIL  
**VENUE** : ONLINE MEETING - ZOOM  
**DATE** : WEDNESDAY 21 OCTOBER 2020  
**TIME** : 7.00 PM

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## **PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

### **Question 1**

#### **Mr Chris Ramsden to ask Cllr Geoffrey Williamson, Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Financial Sustainability:**

The council has been wise to re-examine the current business plans for the impact of Covid and Brexit. If I am not mistaken, the capital budget over the next 4 years is 120M which is a considerable amount of money, and if borrowed at existing interest rates would lead to an annual finance charge of just under 6M which is roughly 40% council tax income. If any of these figures are wrong, I am of course happy to be corrected. In the interests of prudent financial management and Council taxpayer buy in, all business plans should be independently, objectively and transparently reviewed by publishing as much information as possible so that interested Council tax payers are able to assess the position and that they are assured that the plans are robust to future changes, likely to achieve the benefits and planned returns, and that the risks of non-achievement are manageable. In my attempts to achieve this, my brief investigations have encountered a number of issues including entire documents being restricted and missing figures. In order for such a review to occur:

- All business plans currently being re-examined should be published. If there is a need to restrict any content, then they should be published in a way that minimises the restriction to sensitive data only.
- All published business plans should contain figures for Top line (total revenue), broken down into components, the various deductions, and the bottom line (council contribution surplus/subsidy). Various deductions includes figures for direct costs, indirect costs, staff costs, financing costs, and service costs as separate line items.

The council Tax payer (as end customer, ultimate funder and risk taker) requires from the review assurances that

- There is high confidence that the top and bottom line figures are achievable, and that any risks of non-achievement are manageable
- all assumptions are valid over a time period of at least the duration of the loans.
- The plans are robust with respect to any future long term Covid consequences and new trends including possible changes to car parking needs, cinema going use, retail shopping habits and EH residents working at home etc.

Please will the council

1. publish the business plans as openly and transparently as possible (along the lines above) in a report to Council
2. perform an independent open, and objective review that publishes as a report the answer to the question "What assurances can the council give that each business plans is viable and that, for example, an independent hard-nosed business person would invest in each project"?

## **Question 2**

**Yvonne Estop-Wood, representative of the Bishop's Stortford Climate Change Group, to ask Cllr Jan Goodeve, Executive Member for Planning and Growth:**

The Bishops Stortford Climate Change group is very concerned that the planning white paper seriously threatens your policy-making role as Local Planning Authority, and gives unconstrained freedoms to developers. Can you let us know what representations you have made to the government challenging the white paper?

### **Question 3**

#### **Mr Martin Adams to ask Cllr Linda Haysey, Leader:**

I consider that the published policies Map being presented today is inaccurate because a part of it was not a part of the normal Plan adoption process. I am referring to a change to the village boundary at Millers View, Much Hadham. My research indicates that it was not consulted upon, or presented to Council for adoption. I believe it was added entirely as a staff initiative.

As per my two letters to Mr Cassidy I consider this to be a significant change, and that it has not been handled in a Democratic fashion. I have repeatedly put forward questions about this change that have never been answered, as per my second letter to Mr Cassidy.

I would request that this Boundary change is withdrawn by staff because it was drafted after the Plan was adopted. Failing that I would like to see the matter opened up for proper consultation, so that my unanswered questions (as per my second letter) can be considered alongside comments from other interested parties.

Staff have always dealt with my queries politely and respectfully, but I believe their overall response has been to say 'We're sorry that it happened this way, but we won't consider changing it'.

I would ask Council to support the request that I make above. This would ensure fairness, consistency of decision making and ensure proper consultation about Planning Decisions.

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COUNCIL – 21 OCTOBER 2020

## **MEMBERS' QUESTIONS**

### **Question 1**

#### **Cllr Peter Ruffles to ask Cllr Eric Buckmaster, Executive Member for Wellbeing:**

I'm aware that a number other agencies worked with Highways at County trying to ensure that our High Streets and Shopping Centres were able to re-open safely. Could the Executive Member for Wellbeing please explain the role of our East Herts Environmental Health team, and describe any particular challenges they may have faced?

### **Question 2**

#### **Cllr Alastair Ward-Booth to ask Cllr Eric Buckmaster, Executive Member for Wellbeing:**

Could the Executive Member for Wellbeing give Council an update on our Social Prescribing programme. Prior to Covid the service had been referring many hundreds of residents to community activities. How and to what extent could the service operate during the months of lockdown and restricted movement?

### **Question 3**

#### **Cllr David Andrews to ask Cllr Linda Haysey, Leader:**

What steps is the Council taking to lobby central Government for additional funding for local authorities, such as East Herts, to help contribute towards the financial difficulties faced by the impact of the coronavirus pandemic?

#### **Question 4**

##### **Cllr Mione Goldspink to ask Cllr Geoffrey Williamson, Executive Member for Financial Sustainability:**

Will the Executive Member for Financial Sustainability commit to publicising the latest report on the financial viability of the Council's Capital Projects, and will he also publish the business cases for the projects and make them all easily available to members of the public?

#### **Question 5**

##### **Cllr Mione Goldspink to ask Cllr Linda Haysey/Cllr Jan Goodeve, the Leader/Executive Member for Planning and Growth:**

Why did the Leader/Executive Member for Planning and Growth decide to take a Non-Key Decision on this Council's response to the Consultation on the Government's White Paper on changes to the Planning System, rather than bringing it to Full Council for open, public discussion?

#### **Question 6**

##### **Cllr Louie Corpe to ask Cllr Graham McAndrew, Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability:**

On 11th February 2020, the Executive received the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group on Parking. Among its recommendations was a suggestion to change the threshold for eligibility for Restricted Parking Zones, which would alleviate many parking issues faced by residents in our wards. I can personally say that All Saints Ward would greatly benefit from such a change in position. The Executive asked officers to bring a further report setting out cost implications. I recall that Officers stated informally that such a report would take some 6-8 weeks to produce.



We are now 8 months down the line, and no update on this item has come forward. The pandemic of course has changed priorities, but also exacerbated parking challenges, so the changes in policy are needed now more than ever. Can the Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability please comment on when we might expect the council to adopt the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group, and change the policy on RPZ eligibility?

## **Question 7**

### **Cllr Chris Wilson to ask Cllr Jan Goodeve, Executive Member for Planning and Growth:**

Members may be aware of the campaign called ForgottenLtd. This campaign is highlighting the difficulties that many small businesses are experiencing in these Covid-ravaged times. Directors of small limited companies are not eligible for small business grants especially as they are often not based in commercial properties. These businesses are the lifeblood of much of our local economy, and while the council has performed admirably in quickly awarding grants to eligible businesses, directors of limited companies have not been put on an equal footing with other businesses through no fault of their own. I ask, on behalf of some of my residents who are affected by this problem, whether the Executive Member for Planning and Growth would agree to write to the treasury and ask for the discretionary grant scheme to be extended to these limited companies and for the total grant to be increased so that all covid-damaged businesses in East Herts can get the helping hand they need.

## Question 8

### **Cllr Carolyn Redfern to ask Cllr Eric Buckmaster, Executive Member for Wellbeing:**

The existing theatre is a valuable community resource for local amateur performances as well as professional theatre companies and film. It is the only resource for some of the amateur activities. Its purpose is not to compete with other services already provided locally or top class theatres in London. A major investment of 20M should only be considered if the existing theatre is really not financially viable or if it is seriously inadequate in some way. There really needs to be a compelling reason to invest 20M, especially considering the uncertainty and effects created by COVID and Brexit. Before embarking on the programme, the council no doubt produced a report which identified why the Theatre was not felt to be viable and which essential services are inadequately provided by the existing theatre. I presume this report addressed the following aspects:

- what the impediments are to increasing profitability with the current theatre
- mitigations which were considered, including remodelling prices
- types of performance which are possible/ impossible with the existing theatre

Did the original report address these aspects, and is it still the bedrock of the decision surrounding the Theatre or is it being revisited with a fresh eye? Will you present an updated report to the council and/or Scrutiny committee that demonstrates that the existing theatre is not viable without the investment?