

# Public Document Pack



Chairman and Members of the Council

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Date: 4 March 2022

cc. All other recipients of the Council agenda

Dear Councillor

## **COUNCIL - 1 MARCH 2022**

Please find attached the responses to the Public and Members' Questions on the agenda for the above meeting:

### 6. Public Questions (Pages 3 - 8)

To receive any public questions.

### 7. Members' Questions (Pages 9 - 12)

To receive any Members' questions.

Yours faithfully

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Council – 1 March 2022

Responses to Public Questions

## **Question 1**

### **Shaun Balding to ask Cllr Geoff Williamson, the Executive Member for Financial Sustainability:**

In respect of the reasoning for such a substantial change to the parking permit costs can I ask the following.

The Total Costs RPZ 2021, which appear to have been used to calculate the 2022 values, were £214,818.18

1. In this figure what is the role of Business Support Engagement and a Customer Support Engagement - why are residents having to pay for a Business Support Role?
2. How has 15% of the contractors been measured to make sure its 15%?
3. Why have has the hard copies allowance been used for 2022 budget calculation. We no longer have paperless vouchers.
4. What is the "Income RPZ Related (Permit and Voucher Sales) value made up from?

### **Response from Councillor Geoff Williamson**

I would like to begin by thanking Mr Balding for his questions.

On the first question, the Business Support Officers process enquiries through emails, telephone calls, and also online when validating Resident Permit applications and undertaking database administration. The function includes a range of activities that allow the Resident Permit Zone schemes to operate, which in summary include:

- Providing technical assistance relating to Resident Permit applications and Penalty Charge Notice challenges.
- Issuing visitor vouchers, processing, renewals, vehicle dispensations, managing expired permits, taking payments and making refunds.

The Customer Service function duties involve helping customers walking in to the Council's offices. These customers are generally those that prefer not to use the online system. The team process the permit application end to end on behalf of the customer.

An assessment of overall costs took into account the percentage of officers' time in "Business Support" and "Customer Services" when engaged specifically in delivering this service to residents, and these needed to be included as part of the calculations to achieve full cost recovery.

On the second question, in order to effectively manage Resident Permit Zones, Civil Enforcement Officers patrol daily and record this time on their hand held computers. The data was analysed using the council's parking enforcement IT system and the report verified that 15% of the total patrol time in East Herts was undertaken within the Resident Permit Zone boundaries.

On the third questions, visitor vouchers continue to be available in hardcopy form to supplement the virtual type available online. Some residents prefer to purchase hardcopy versions and the vouchers can be purchased in the council's offices. Whilst the residents' Permits themselves are of the virtual type (hardcopies are no longer issued) the visitor vouchers continue to be offered as an option to residents.

Finally, the income relates to the sale of Residents' permits, Residents' visitor vouchers and Carers' permits.

There was no supplementary question.

## **Question 2**

### **Robert Beahan to ask Cllr Geoffrey Williamson, the Executive Member for Financial Sustainability**

I understand the need for Residents' Parking Zones to be funded by users to ensure a balanced overall budget for the council.

However, the lack of debate and scrutiny on this matter at both the Audit & Governance Committee and the Executive Committee has been very disappointing.

Having written to all members of both committees, I'm still waiting for anyone to respond to me, so my question remains:

Why has East Herts Council created this situation, whereby residents are facing more than a 70% increase in permit cost for 2022? Should a higher increase not have been administered in previous years rather than allowing this huge hole in the finances to develop?

### **Response from Councillor Geoff Williamson**

Previously the Council has subsidised the cost of RPZ permits and only uplifted the fees in line with the council's general fees & charges increases which are applied each year, which has generally been at 2.5%. Following the approval of the Council's new Fees and Charges Policy in December 2021 which includes the need to recover the full cost of services, the RPZ costs uplift is now proposed for implementation as the previous uplifts have not achieved full cost recovery. As a result arguably holders of RPZ permits have benefitted from this situation over the years, and even at the new levels, the

fees are still lower than can be seen elsewhere, for example North Herts where a 12-month permit costs £84.

There was no supplementary question.

### **Question 3**

#### **Gary Jones to ask Cllr Geoff Williamson, the Executive Member for Financial Sustainability**

“As a practising Christian I am very concerned about turning Sunday into a day like any other. For many, it is a day of rest and a family day. Today, the Council budget recommendation is to charge for all East Herts carparks on Sundays. My question is about whether that is a sensible course.

The Council papers describe a calculation based on a proportion of weekly revenue. The additional revenue in the next year is only £70,000. There is no reference to costs in that year. What would be the extra costs associated with Sunday parking charges across East Herts for:

- Additional enforcement officers on Sundays 7.30am to 8pm annually
- Changing all existing Monday to Saturday restrictions to include Sundays, so that 30 minute and 1 hour restrictions and other single yellow line restrictions can operate as on weekdays, and only those with RPZ permits can use RPZ designated spaces on Sunday?”

#### **Response from Councillor Geoff Williamson**

“Thank you Mr Jones. I will start by saying that we think it is important that we recognise that there are a range of faiths within East Herts, and also those who have no faith. By introducing Sunday

charges we don't believe that we are treating one religious group more or less favourably than any other.

To answer your specific points:

Firstly, there are actually no extra costs associated with Civil Enforcement Officers patrolling the car parks on Sundays, as they currently patrol on Sundays already, in line with the existing parking enforcement framework.

Regarding the potential for vehicle transfer from car parks to the public highway, it is not possible for us to calculate the costs involved in changing the on-street parking controls without knowing the number of roads that might be involved, but East Herts officers will work together with Hertfordshire County Council to keep the situation monitored."

### **Supplementary question from Gary Jones**

Does the Executive Member acknowledge the implications of Sunday charging on residents, churches, workers, businesses and town centres, for example the young family with a Residents Permit, the church volunteer, the weekend worker and the small independent business in the town centre?

### **Response from Councillor Geoff Williamson**

There is a broader point that this allows users of the car parks across the week to be treated equally across the week and those users of car parks on a Sunday have not been singled out specifically.

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Council – 1 March 2022

Responses to Members' Questions

## **Question 1**

**Councillor Ben Crystall to ask Councillor Graham McAndrew, Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability:**

Question deferred to the meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2022.

## **Question 2**

**Councillor Ben Crystall to ask Councillor Graham McAndrew, Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability:**

Question deferred to the meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2022.

## **Question 3**

**Councillor Alastair Ward-Booth to ask Councillor Jan Goodeve, Executive Member for Planning and Growth**

Does the Executive Member for Planning and Growth agree with me that it is important that developers on the Stortford Fields estate are held accountable for their failure to adhere to the conditions of their planning application, and what steps will the Council take ensure compliance with their planning conditions?

## **Response from Councillor Jan Goodeve**

Thank you Councillor Ward-Booth. You raise a very important question about situations where development is not being carried out in accordance with the conditions attached to the planning permission.

You specifically mention the development at Stortford Fields which is a key part of Bishop's Stortford North. The Bishop's Stortford North

area benefits from planning permission for up to 2,200 homes and associated infrastructure, and is currently being built out.

I agree that compliance with the conditions attached to the planning permission is important and understand that a number of concerns have been raised by local residents.

I can confirm that the matter of planning compliance and enforcement at Stortford Fields is being progressed as a matter of priority by the Council. Officers, including the Head of Planning and Building Control, have spoken directly to the consortium of housebuilders at Stortfields Fields about the need to ensure that plans and conditions are adhered to. The seriousness of this has also been raised in writing.

Alongside this, a planning enforcement officer has been identified to investigate all alleged breaches. An action plan has been developed in order to help track and resolve specific issues, with the enforcement officer working closely with the planning officer.

This is overseen by the Service Manager for Development Management and now a regular item on the agenda when officers meet with the Consortium.

Addressing breaches or non-compliance without formal action can often be the most appropriate and proportionate approach but in some instances formal action may be considered necessary, and officers will make a judgement based on the extent of the breach and whether it is expedient to take formal action.

Officers are in contact with local residents and will be reporting progress to the next Steering Group meeting which includes local councillors. In addition, local councillors will continue to be kept informed as progress is made, and matters are hopefully resolved.

There was no supplementary question.

## **Question 4**

### **Councillor Rosemary Bolton to ask Councillor Jan Goodeve, Executive Member for Planning and Growth:**

What is this Council doing to support local business owners and help them learn new skills to foster further economic growth in our District?

### **Response from Councillor Jan Goodeve:**

We continue to administer our highly successful new premises grant scheme for which we have had 42 applications so far. The scheme has had good coverage on local social media and also in the Mercury and Bishop's Stortford Independent. We have been pleased to support the creation and expansion of so many businesses in the district and it bodes well for our future economic wellbeing that so many people are willing to invest in East Herts. Our approach has been so successful we have been invited by North Herts Council to administer a similar scheme for them which we are now doing, taking a small fee to cover the costs of doing so of course.

The economic development team at East Herts is also leading a countywide programme of business support using funding from the Health Protection board to support Covid business recovery. This funding will last until June this year and on behalf of 9 districts in Herts we are running different business support activities around social media, mental wellbeing and entrepreneurship through a mixture of on-line and in person events.

Some good examples include a "Growth Through Sustainability" event held on the 11<sup>th</sup> February at the University of Hertfordshire and attended by over 100 people. Some of you may also have come across the Mama Hive group in Hertford and we are collaborating with them to run a series of workshops and networking sessions throughout March, focusing on women in business linked to International Women's Day.

We also have the Rebel Business School who will be running events on starting and growing your own business, particularly targeted at disadvantaged groups across the county. You may have also seen we also have Jay Blades (from the BBC's Repair Shop) providing a keynote speech and Q&A at an entrepreneurship online event on the 9<sup>th</sup> March. Once these are completed we will be organising events in April and May on supporting blogging and vlogging skills for business owners amongst other initiatives.

All these events can be found on LinkedIn and Eventbrite so do please have a look if you want more details.

As well as running events and networking sessions we are also helping in more direct ways. A good example is working with Street Food Heroes to get the market back to Hertford and we are using some of the Health Protection Board funding to cover costs of running these events on 31<sup>st</sup> March, 28<sup>th</sup> April, 26<sup>th</sup> May, 30<sup>th</sup> June, 28<sup>th</sup> July, 25<sup>th</sup> August, 29<sup>th</sup> September.

There was no supplementary question.