

Public Document Pack



Chairman and Members of the Council

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Date: 3 March 2023

cc. All other recipients of the Council agenda

Dear Councillor

COUNCIL - 1 MARCH 2023

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

7. Public Questions (Pages 3 - 5)

To receive any public questions.

8. Members' Questions (Pages 6 - 11)

To receive any Members' questions.

Agenda Item 7

COUNCIL – 1 MARCH 2023

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

Question 1	Alastair Cook to ask Cllr Graham McAndrew, the Executive Member for Environmental Services
<p>Have the cumulative effects of the traffic and therefore pollution being generated by 4000 plus houses, a new Aldi on the Gates site and two proposed logistics centres (St James, Wren) been assessed with regards to impact on the already unacceptable pollution levels at the Hockerill junction?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>May I first thank Alastair Cook for his question.</p> <p>My portfolio covers Environmental Sustainability, while my colleague, Cllr Jan Goodeve, covers planning, however, I am happy to answer this question.</p> <p>When developing the council's District Plan in 2018, the cumulative impact of development on the allocated sites was investigated. This predicted no undue air quality pressures as a result of the Plan, once factors such as anticipated traffic patterns, improving vehicle emission standards and the likely uptake of alternatives to car use were taken into account.</p> <p>That said, applications for major development across the district, and <i>all</i> development in the Air Quality Management Areas in Bishop's Stortford, Sawbridgeworth and Hertford, must submit an air quality assessment as planning policy expects the applicant to demonstrate how the proposal would have at least a neutral, if not</p>	

a positive, impact on local air quality. Redesigns and mitigations can be insisted upon as a condition of planning consent in line with both national guidance and the more stringent air quality guidance found in the council's Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document.

I am very pleased that in the context of new development and although there remain traffic pressures at the four-way Hockerill junction, smart traffic light phasing installed by Hertfordshire County Council, regular East Herts Council anti-idling campaigns and lower emissions from more modern vehicles have together resulted in emissions dropping at the junction from 63 micrograms per cubic metre in 2017 to 48 in 2021.

We will, of course, continue to monitor pollution at the junction and work the Highways team at Hertfordshire County Council to identify any works, especially as pollution is still above the nationally set level of 40 micrograms per cubic metre. We are keen to ensure air quality gains during the pandemic are not reversed and I am hopeful, given the year-on-year reductions over the last decade, that pollution levels will continue to drop.

Finally, I think two important developments should hasten the reduction in air pollution at Hockerill and indeed elsewhere in the district. First, from 1st April, East Herts will have the most stringent taxi emission standards in the county and second, in February our bid for Defra funding for active travel planning was approved. This will see £126,000 spent on working with schools, local businesses and the town councils in the three AQMAs to support people make local journeys without their cars. The grant will also fund the installation of real-time air quality monitors in each AQMA to enable residents to take informed choices about whether to add to

local pollution, or not, by varying their journeys and means of transport.

COUNCIL – 1 MARCH 2023

MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Question 1	Cllr Rishi Fernando to ask Cllr George Cutting, the Executive Member for Corporate Services
<p>With the introduction of Voter ID being required in elections for the first time this May, I would like to ask the Executive Member for Corporate Services what steps East Herts has and is taking to make all residents and especially those groups most affected ie young people, older people and people with disabilities aware of this new requirement and would the Executive Member be able to give me specifics on how many applications there have been so far locally for the new Voter Authority Certificate.</p> <p>Response</p> <p>East Herts Council will be running a comprehensive local communications campaign to promote awareness of the Voter ID requirements prior to the May Elections. This will make use of a variety of channels including online and social media, Network, local press, parish newsletters and posters in community venues; and will complement the Electoral Commission's national television, poster and press campaign.</p> <p>In this regard the Electoral Services Team are working closely with Communications colleagues to identify the priority groups for East Herts and how best to engage with each of these, and with the Council's Healthy Lifestyles Programme Officer to make contact with community groups that the Council is already aware of.</p> <p>All electors who are registered to vote at a polling station will receive full information regarding the Voter ID requirements on</p>	

their poll cards. However, in addition to this the Council is sending in the next week a colour postcard to all 64,000 residential addresses in the district highlighting the change, publicising the availability of the free Voter Authority Certificate for any elector who does not have any of the accepted forms of Photo ID, and providing a web link and telephone helpline number for further information.

The Voter Authority Certificate application portal launched on Monday 16 January 2023. As at today's date, 1 March, East Herts Council had received 48 applications for these certificates.

Recruitment of staff to work in the polling stations on 4 May 2023 is now almost complete, with only a few poll clerk positions still to be filled. Additional staff have been allocated to some polling stations to ensure that the new ID procedures can be carried out efficiently and all polling station staff will receive full training, including on the new Voter ID requirements.

There was no supplementary question.

Question 2

Cllr Ben Crystall to ask Cllr George Cutting, the Executive Member for Corporate Services

What work is EHC doing with the groups most affected by the introduction of photo voter ID (young people, older people and people with disabilities), to raise awareness of this new requirement and how many applications so far have there been locally for the new Voter Authority Certificate (for people who don't have an approved Photo ID)?

Response

As Question 1 and 2 were on the same topic, the Chairman grouped the questions together and Councillor Cutting provided one response. Please see response under Question 1.

There was no supplementary question.

Question 3

Cllr Ben Crystall to ask Cllr Jan Goodeve, the Executive Member for Planning and Growth

Please can councillors be updated on alterations made to the plans for Hertford Leisure Centre and Hertford Theatre since DMC approval? In particular can you provide information on any that will impact the public realm, sustainability and services which the buildings provide to the public?

Response

In respect to Hartham Leisure Centre various applications to discharge conditions attached to the permission have been made. Application reference X/21/0477/CND approved details of materials. Full details of materials can be seen on Council's online planning database but the palette in summary was a steel standing seam roof and some areas of living roof, with glazing and cement reinforced cladding to the side elevations.

Application X/23/0068/CND has recently been submitted (24/02/2023) and proposes to change the cladding material due to material availability. This change is under consideration by officers.

In respect to Hertford Theatre various applications to discharge conditions attached to the permission have since been made. Application reference X/22/0363/CND approved details of some materials but a further submission is required in relation to other

materials. Full details of materials can be seen on Council's online planning database.

Application 3/22/1291/NMA was submitted to make non-material amendments to vehicular access and landscaping which would have increased planting, removed proposed trees, reduced on-street parking on the pavement and altered cycle parking. This was refused as the changes proposed were considered to be too extensive to be acceptable as a "non-material" amendment. This decision does not give judgement as to their acceptability but rather that a different type of application needed to be submitted.

There was no supplementary question.

Question 4

Cllr Chris Wilson to ask Cllr Jan Goodeve, the Executive Member for Planning and Growth

As part of a recent major planning application, a traffic report was submitted with reference to Bishop's Stortford. Essentially, it argued that the development would not have a severe impact on the levels of traffic in the town as by the time the development was built, the traffic would be at such a high level that any additional congestion would make no significant difference. Would you agree that such a report needs to be looked at very seriously, and that if it is correct it puts into doubt whether the District Plan is now fit for purpose? Do you also agree that the District Plan intended for there to be mitigation in place to stop air pollution in Hockerill increasing further as a result of nearby major developments, and that it is now clear that this mitigation has not and is not working? Do you therefore agree that we must seriously consider placing a hold on all developments in Bishop's Stortford until we can be sure that they are not damaging the town centre's viability as a place for

business, and residents' ability to travel in the town as well as threatening their health and wellbeing due to the unacceptable levels of air pollution in Hockerill and beyond?

Response

You would have already heard Councillor McAndrew's response to Alastair Cooke and my response today covers similar points.

The impact of new development on local air quality is an important planning consideration. When developing the Council's District Plan in 2018 the cumulative impact of building on the sites allocated for development in Bishop's Stortford and elsewhere were fully investigated. This work found that the scale of new development envisaged was not deemed to put undue air quality pressures on the town having taken account of factors including predicted travel patterns, improving emission standards of vehicles and likely uptake of alternatives to car use. The District Plan continues to provide a strong framework for air pollution in the planning application process. Policy EQ4 expects developments to minimise air pollution and incorporate measures in the design, construction and operation of all developments to address any negative impact on air quality.

Councillor McAndrew has already said that redesigns and mitigations can be insisted upon in conditions for planning consent in line with both national guidance and the air quality guidance found in the Council's Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document. An important objective of adopting the SPD in 2021 was to provide further technical guidance to developers on how to implement District Plan requirements. To incorporate appropriate air quality design and mitigation measures, major developments across the District and all development in the AQMA must submit

an air quality assessment as part of the planning application process to demonstrate how new developments will have a neutral or positive impact on local air quality. Therefore, the District Plan and its supporting documents do remain fit for purpose. Whilst there remains traffic pressures at the four way Hockerill junction, and as set out by Councillor McAndrew, smart traffic light phasing installed by HCC, regular East Herts anti-idling campaigns, and lower emissions from more modern vehicles have together resulted in emissions dropping at Hockerill Junction from 63 micrograms per cubic metre in 2017 to 48 in 2021.

Given the policy framework I have outlined and the progress that is already being made towards reducing emission at Hockerill Junction, there is no justification to put on hold all developments in Bishop's Stortford.

Councillor Wilson asked a supplementary question. He said he accepted that when the District Plan was prepared there was mitigation that was supposed to happen and studies at that point but my question is whether that study is still valid and what date that was. Do you have any data on change of travel habits of people in Bishop's Stortford?

Councillor Goodeve said she had not seen anymore recent travel data but said that the District Plan will have a five year review at the end of the year which will provide an opportunity for everything to be looked at in a holistic way.