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Chairman and Members of the
Council

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cc. All other recipients of the Council
agenda

Dear Councillor,

COUNCIL - 15 MAY 2024

Please find attached the responses to Members' Questions submitted to
the above meeting:

11. Members' Questions (Pages 2 - 5)

To receive any Members' questions.

Agenda Item 11

COUNCIL – 15 MAY 2024

MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Question 1	Cllr David Jacobs to ask Cllr Carl Brittain, the Executive Member for Financial Sustainability
<p>At full council on 18th December during a discussion on the proposed changes to car parking tariffs in Bishop's Stortford, the Deputy Leader stated with particular reference to the Northgate End multi-storey car park that "many people are scared and frightened of using it" and that "I would like the council to take urgent action to improve the stairwells, lighting, and disabled access...I hope these changes can be made as soon as possible and before these changes (the new car parking fees) come into effect in April." During the same debate the Executive Member for Planning and Growth confirmed "there is a shopping list of improvements for Northgate End – I know there is a budget set aside for them".</p> <p>Can the Executive Member for Financial Sustainability confirm a) how much money has been set aside for these improvements, and b) when they will happen?</p>	
Response from Councillor Carl Brittain	
<p>Thank you, Councillor Jacobs, for the question.</p> <p>I am in complete agreement with Cllr Goldspink that Northgate End Car Park needs a number of improvements to both enhance the user experience and improve safety. With budget constraints as they are it could take some time before the council has the resources to make all the desired improvements, but I am pleased to be able to report that we do now have a budget of £30,000 to use on improvements to the car park. The priority projects will be installing two sets of automatic opening access doors in the lobby area and making decorative enhancements in the foyer to make the building more welcoming. We</p>	

are also investigating the cost of making changes to the lighting to make the car park more user friendly, particularly at night.

These projects are all very much in the early stages of development, so unfortunately I am unable to give a time frame for completion of these works, but improvement of Northgate End Car Park is important, as the car park offers substantial capacity, and could make a greater contribution to the parking needs in Bishop's Stortford.

Going forward we are continuing to work with officers, local councillors and the Bishop's Stortford BID to further develop ideas and identify local suppliers where practicable to continue the development process

Supplementary question from Cllr Jacobs

Councillor Jacobs asked if the Executive Member anticipated any further changes to the car park beyond the £30,000 in subsequent years.

Response from Cllr Brittain

Councillor Brittain said that he thought more changes would be needed to the car park but the council was not in a financial position to do them all at once.

Question 2

Cllr Nahum Clements to ask Cllr Mione Goldspink, the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods

'Affordable' housing is typically defined as being 20% below local market rates. However, the high cost of housing in East Herts means that 'affordable' housing remains unaffordable for many people.

EHC's Corporate Plan commits the council to "*prioritise actions that can provide housing which is **truly** affordable*". In light of this, and the ongoing housing crisis, does the administration have any plans to update its housing strategy?

Response from Councillor Goldspink

Cllr Goldspink thanked Cllr Clements for the question. She said that housing was such an important matter and having a safe and secure

home was a basic human right. Cllr Goldspink said that it was a national scandal that thousands of people in this country are homeless and a source of shame that so many families with children were having to live in bed and breakfast hotels or other unsuitable and insecure accommodation.

Cllr Goldspink said that Cllr Clements was correct in that the corporate plan commits this Council to prioritise actions that provide housing which was truly affordable. She said prices for buying or renting in East Herts were extremely expensive and 80% of extremely expensive was still very expensive and way beyond reach of many people on average incomes and such houses and homes were not therefore truly affordable.

Cllr Goldspink said that there were no plans to update the housing strategy as there was no need as the strategy, which was a very good one, was developed in 2022 under the previous administration with considerable input from Members of all four political parties and from an independent study by the housing quality network. She said that the number 1 priority in the strategy was to deliver more affordable homes and page 1 of the action plan set out the goal to increase the amount of affordable housing at social rents or affordable rents at or very near to between 50 to 60% of market rents. She said that there were detailed action plans for all the priorities and there was also a detailed paper which listed 10 possible ways in which social rent housing could be developed in East Herts and this was discussed by Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2022. One possible way was to use council owned land to provide new build housing and this option was being looked at very seriously by Officers. She referred to 10 other opportunities and these could be seen in the papers that went to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September 2022.

Councillor Goldspink added that the council had done very well in the provision of homes for shared ownership and the council would soon be reviewing the District Plan and this would be an opportunity to strengthen and improve the wording on affordable housing. She said

that this would be an opportunity to strengthen and improve the wording on affordable housing.

Supplementary question from Cllr Clements

When can we expect to see the results of the initial work that is being done?

Response from Cllr Goldspink

As soon as possible and possibly by the end of year in terms of some progress being made.