

Council – 28 July 2021

Responses to Members' Questions

Question 1

Councillor Alexander Curtis to ask Councillor Graham McAndrew, Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability:

Can the Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability confirm what is being done to prevent fly-tipping in our District, and hold perpetrators of fly tipping responsible for their actions?

Response from Councillor Graham McAndrew:

“Thank you Councillor Curtis for your question about this important issue. Please let me explain the council’s preventative and enforcement approaches.

“Our preventative approach includes conducting anti-fly tipping campaigns and providing advice, all backed up with the use of mobile CCTV cameras and signage at fly-tipping hotspots. This approach can work. In 2018, a combined campaign across the county led to the second lowest annual total of fly tips in Hertfordshire since 2012. Unfortunately during 2020/21 and the pandemic levels have risen again and so our work continues.

“The council cannot, of course, deal with fly tipping alone. We are a member of the Hertfordshire Fly Tipping Group, a multi-agency taskforce with other councils, the police, the Environment Agency and the National Farmers Union among others. This has had tangible results including securing funding from the Police and Crime Commissioner to work with the National Farmers Union to clear fly-tips on farmers’ land and increase target hardening.

“At the same time, we will take enforcement action when needed. This includes issuing community protection warnings and notices and, for more serious or persistent offences, fixed penalty notices and prosecutions. Indeed, the council has a strong track record in prosecuting offenders. In the five years to 2020/21, the council secured 17 court prosecutions and issued 79 fixed penalty notices.

“So far in 2021/22, the council has successfully prosecuted four individuals. Three cases were heard at Stevenage Magistrates Court; the offenders were fined and ordered to pay costs. In the fourth case, a man from Hoddesdon was fined by the council after he deposited a sizable boat in a layby near to Pearce’s Farm Shop causing obstruction in late 2020.

“The council gained good publicity in the local press about these actions. That said, we and other authorities see a case for strengthening sanctions nationally. We are joining others to ask the Sentencing Council to review the Environmental Offences Definitive Guideline 2014 so as to address inconsistencies in court judgements.

“The FTG is also leading national lobbying efforts to address what it sees as significant deficiencies in the current legislative framework relevant to fly tipping and is about launch a major new lobbying effort targeting the Sentencing Council with a view to securing a review of the Environmental Offences Definitive Guideline 2014 to address what the FTG believes are serious inconsistencies in typical court judgements rendered in response to successful prosecutions and the alternative fixed penalty regime implemented in 2016. This latest effort, which is about launch, is being supported by 124 local authorities across the UK and 10 professional bodies.

“Finally, all members have a role to play. It is hoped that our enforcement actions, along with our continued campaigns and joint working, will discourage people from fly-tipping in our district. So, if

colleagues are able to publicise the things I've mentioned through their own networks and social media, this will amplify the council's strong anti-fly tipping message."

Supplementary question from Councillor Curtis

Councillor Curtis thanked the Executive Member for his response and asked if East Herts could continue to look at what other local authorities are doing across the country to deal with fly tipping.

Response from Councillor McAndrew

Councillor McAndrew said that East Herts continue to work with the Fly Tipping Group who network with councils across the country. East Herts will continue to look at best practice but often other councils look to us as a great example.

Question 2

Councillor Mark Pope to ask Councillor Jan Goodeve, Executive Member for Planning and Growth:

Can the Executive Member for Planning and Growth provide an update regarding the *Shop Safe Shop Local* campaign and other measures that are being taken to support local start-up businesses?

Response from Councillor Goodeve

"The Shop Safe, Shop Local campaign is going well and of course has been ramped up in recent months as more operating restrictions on businesses have been lifted. The messages have actually shifted from shop safe to "welcome back" to emphasise the importance of supporting your local businesses as well as being safe. Members may

have seen the various messages that have come out over social media, newspapers and indeed on ivans in recent months.

“On Facebook the campaign had 27,000 impressions over 2 weeks in May and then a little over that again in the middle of June. On Spotify it reached just over 27,000 people.

“Alongside this various editorials were taken out in the Mercury and Bishop’s Stortford Independent encouraging residents to make a pledge and support a local business. This work will continue over the coming weeks and more content will be released under the Welcome Back campaign publicising events that are happening this summer in our towns including the food and drink festival in Hertford and the outdoor cinema in Bishop’s Stortford for August. This will be followed by more communications about events in early September including the classic car display in Buntingford and Rock in the Priory in Ware. If any Members are aware of local events that you want publicising then please let myself and the portfolio holder for Corporate Services know.

“I’m glad the second part of your question asks about start up support. You may have seen that just 2 weeks ago we launched a new grant scheme offering £5,000 for any new or existing businesses in the district that are interested in opening up new premises. This grant be used to cover some of the costs of doing so such as rent or fitting out making it much more affordable for businesses to expand or for entrepreneurs to test out a new product or service on the high street. This sits alongside the over £30m we have given out in grants to businesses over the past 12 months and is another good example of where we are supporting businesses.”

There was no supplementary question from Councillor Pope.

Question 3

Councillor Carolyn Redfern to ask Councillor Eric Buckmaster, Executive Member for Wellbeing:

Figures up to March 2020, raised in a motion by Labour Councillors to Hertfordshire County Council, show that East Herts has seen the second highest increase in rates of child poverty in the county.

We know that the long-term costs of children living in poverty place a huge amount of strain on public services. Early prevention and support can result in dramatic savings later on and ensure all of our children receive a good start in life.

Can I ask what action the Executive on East Herts District Council plans to take to tackle rising child poverty in our district, and whether they will impress upon their colleagues on Hertfordshire County Council the importance of this?

Response from Councillor Buckmaster

"I'd like to thank Councillor Redfern for her question. Just a word of caution in that increases can be relative, because on looking at County Data and National Data East Herts is not an area with very high levels of child poverty but there are what we would call pockets of deprivation.

"East Herts Health and Wellbeing Strategy has two main priorities that can relate to the question.

1. Help all children to start off well
2. Empower children, young people and adults to achieve their life potential

"One of the ways we can achieve these is in our criteria for grant giving to meet Health and Wellbeing objectives particularly in certain areas, and of course through the affordable housing supply where since 2017 768 family sized homes have been let to those with limited means and where the household is in receipt of means tested benefits.

"Community grants have enabled the new Network Homes Sele Farm development *support a scheme* that enables families accessing

affordable housing to encourage good healthy food preparation and meet children's dietary health needs.

"Another community grant has been recently awarded to Buntingford Homestart who support families and young children with their health and wellbeing needs.

"Herts Sports Partnership and County are currently running the HAPPY programme of food and activities this summer which is targeted at those who normally access free school meals – this is in addition to the £50 per child offered during the school holidays

"A range of Healthy Hub East Herts partners also provide direct support around the areas of providing domestic abuse support for families and children, mental wellbeing, job employment and skills assistance, and money management.

"The much broader range of Childrens Services is of course provided by County. **Families First** is but one example of how families are supported. These are services that work together for early help to create a package of support. They can help with issues in common with those available from the Healthy Hubs. There is also the Herts Help, helpline which can enable people to find the support they need.

"Hertfordshire Council is absolutely committed to supporting families and children. In terms of influence that East Herts members have at County, well it is considerable. Of the 8 Conservative dual members we have 2 full cabinet members, 2 deputies, plus the chairman and other members of Overview & scrutiny. Councillor Deering as Exec Member for Resources recently announced a Covid Recovery package of £9.6million including a £2m joint 'Building Life Chances' package from Adult Care, Children's, and Public Health services, to tackle some of the impacts on families. Including, crisis intervention funding, community projects and financial advice to support families in, or at risk, of poverty. There is also two-year funding package includes £3m for Children's Services to finance initiatives such as the 'Coming Back Stronger' programme of educational recovery,

including mental health support for pupils, and mentoring delivered by Herts for Learning. As mentioned we are all absolutely committed to helping those in need.”

There was no supplementary question from Councillor Redfern.

Question 4

Councillor Mione Goldspink to ask Councillor Graham McAndrew, Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability:

Does the Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability agree with me that it would be an excellent idea for East Herts Council to take part in the Queen’s Green Canopy project? This project is designed to mark the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee in 2022, and every person across the whole of the UK is invited to plant a tree. Planting needs to be done between October 2021 and March 2022. If the Executive Member does agree with me, would he be willing to set up a Working Party to look at the practicalities of taking part in this project?

Response from Councillor McAndrew

“I would like to thank Councillor Goldspink for her question. I share her enthusiasm for the Queen’s Green Canopy project and I’m pleased that encouraging participation has been listed in the council’s Sustainability Action Plan for some time.

“A project like this is all about collectively doing something for which the outcome is greater than the sum of the parts. Therefore, as proactive members of the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership, we are already liaising with Hertfordshire County Council’s dedicated officer for this project.

“The primary emphasis of this important national project is, however, for communities and individual residents to take up the challenge to

increase green cover and so I'd like to assure members that publicity and opportunities to get involved will shortly be promoted by the council. Mostly notably, we aim to highlight initiatives such as that at The Woodlands Trust, which is providing tree packs free of charge for schools and community groups, and provide information on species and site choice to ensure truly sustainable benefits.

"Importantly, we in East Herts are particularly keen to use this opportunity to not simply promote an increase the *number* of trees but to encourage residents and local groups to strengthen or reintroduce indigenous species of trees and shrubs. We haven't waited until October to start this and I'm very pleased to say that on 24th May this year the council showed what can be done when a number of residents, members and officers came together at Northgate End in Bishop's Stortford to plant 336 native trees and 288 native shrubs.

"At the same time, we'd like to see tree planting that preserves and indeed increases biodiversity through planting in appropriate locations. We have an enviable track record of demonstrating what can be done and have just declared Pishiobury Park as a local nature reserve given the quality of its biological, geological and historical interest.

"Given the vital importance of residents and community groups taking up the challenge to increase the Queen's Green Canopy, I would like to invite all members to promote the project and share the council's publicity which will be issued in the next few weeks."

Supplementary question from Councillor Goldspink

Councillor Goldspink asked for clarification about whether there would be a specific project that East Herts District Council would be running or just supporting local groups?

Response from Councillor McAndrew

Councillor McAndrew said there would be a social media campaign highlighting local community groups who are planting trees and to encourage others.

Question 5

Councillor Alastair Ward-Booth to ask Councillor Eric Buckmaster, Executive Member for Wellbeing:

Our Parks and Open Spaces have proven to be invaluable to the health and wellbeing of our residents, especially during the past year. Could you please update members as to any projects underway or completed in our parks and any ideas for the future?

Response from Councillor Buckmaster

“During the last year we have certainly seen more of our residents enjoy our parks and open spaces more frequently.

“Two key projects we have delivered recently include the Trinity Close play area in Bishop’s Stortford and Hartham Play area in Hertford.

“Our new facility at Hartham was developed from a shared vision between ourselves and local residents, and funded through a combination of crowd funding and section 106 money, enabling us to create an inclusive and attractive play area for our residents to enjoy.

“Trinity Close is a much smaller park which was ready for a makeover. The site had some access issues that were not going to be easy to resolve owing to the lie of the land. When funds became available through planning contributions from an adjacent development, we were able to launch a quite visionary project which included re landscaping to assist those with mobility issues. The

resultant play space, now with an area in which the local community will be able to hold events, has been warmly received.

“Members will also be aware that this week is Love parks week and we are celebrating by encouraging residents to enjoy our parks and open spaces through picnics, walks and exercise. But please, I urge residents to take their litter home. Details on a number of organised activities can be found on our website. In addition, we have now launched our parks and open spaces strategy consultation. We encourage members and residents to provide us feedback to help shape the future priorities for our parks and open spaces in the district. The consultation closes on 24 September 2021.

“A snapshot of our beautiful parks and open spaces can be seen in our consultation video which is also available on the website with some beautiful drone footage, so please all take a look.”

Councillor Ward-Booth gave his apologies for this meeting so there was no supplementary question.

Question 6

Councillor Chris Wilson to ask Councillor Jan Goodeve, Executive Member for Planning and Growth:

Uttlesford District Council is in the process of producing a new local plan. Given their proximity to Bishop's Stortford, any developments on the edge of the town, but over the border in Uttlesford, have the potential to place an even greater burden on the already overstretched infrastructure. Can the Executive Member for Planning and Growth advise what meetings she is planning to have with Uttlesford and what she is doing to safeguard the interests of the residents of East Herts in this regard?

Response from Councillor Goodeve

“The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that public bodies, including local planning authorities, have a duty to co-operate on planning issues that cross administrative boundaries.

“As part of the Council's ongoing commitment to meet the requirements of the NPPF and to engage constructively with a range of bodies, a Co-operation for Sustainable Development Board was established in 2014, comprising the West Essex/East Herts housing market area partners, which includes Uttlesford Council. The Board is now well-established and has previously undertaken comprehensive work on strategic cross-boundary issues, including housing, transport infrastructure, employment and environmental impact. It is through this forum that key issues such as infrastructure have been, and will be continue to be discussed.

“Furthermore Uttlesford Council has also established a Strategic Infrastructure Delivery Group to identify strategically significant development proposals, infrastructure requirements and other matters where cross boundary collaboration is required. Councillor Haysey recently attended a meeting of this group (28 June 2021), specifically to discuss transport infrastructure proposals to support sustainable growth.

“As you would expect officers will continue to engage constructively with colleagues at Uttlesford Council during the formative stages of their Plan-making process, with a view to arranging a Member level duty to co-operate meeting once their spatial strategy is clear. At this meeting the Council will be seeking to ensure that any growth proposals put forward have been properly assessed by Uttlesford Council, particularly those in the vicinity of Bishop’s Stortford, and that future infrastructure needs are identified.”

There was no supplementary question from Councillor Wilson.