

Council – 15 December 2021

Responses to Members' Questions

Question 1

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

The recent cancellation of the Hertford Hydro scheme is regrettable but given the delay and challenges that the project faced, it is understandable.

However this does mean that EHC has now missed an opportunity to harness clean renewable energy to generate income that could be used to cross-subsidise further activities to cut the district's carbon emissions.

Every month that goes by is a further month of opportunity lost in our urgent transition towards zero emissions, meaning we must squeeze more and more action into the diminishing time that remains.

So will EHC use the capital originally earmarked for the hydro scheme to fund new projects that can both cut carbon emissions and generate an income to cross-subsidise further carbon reduction measures?

Response from Councillor Graham McAndrew:

I'd like to thank Cllr Crystall for his question and I agree with him that it was regrettable that the hydro scheme ultimately proved financially unviable despite the council's best efforts to accommodate the increasing requirements placed on it by the Environment Agency.

Capital resources for the hydro scheme were approved. Given the ongoing uncertainty about delivery, however, they were *not*

committed, meaning that they would have only been made available once the scheme was ready to proceed. Thus, the borrowing and associated costs were not included in the budget and Medium Term Financial Plan and so there are no resources that can simply be reallocated.

I'd like to remind members that the council has made considerable investment in various works to reduce carbon emissions, including energy efficiency measures at Hartham and Grange Paddocks Leisure Centres, upgrades at Wallfields and Buntingford Depot and installation of e-vehicle chargers in the district.

The council will wish to continue to look for opportunities to achieve carbon neutrality and I am always open to consideration of new projects which can cover the council's borrowing costs and make a financial return without undue risk to the council. It is in this way that the council can work towards meeting its sustainability and transformation goals.

Question 2

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

The rapid rise in electric vehicle numbers is already helping East Herts Council tackle problems with damaging air pollution. Despite this benefit, the district council seems to lack enthusiasm for providing residents with on-street chargers. Already we are hearing reports of residents who lack driveways running charging cables across pavements and though these cables are often hidden under rubber mats, there are reports of accidents as people trip over them. By delaying the provision of on-street chargers, we are in danger of letting events run away from us, as more people start to resort to these measures. To help prevent that, and reassure our residents

that we are acting, would EHC consider a small scale trial of lamp-post based chargers, at spots with suitable cabling and where lampposts are close to the kerb edge to avoid such trip hazards? These are already being trialled in Watford and there is no clear reason why this can't happen in East Herts too.

Response from Councillor Graham McAndrew:

I'd like to thank Cllr Crystal for his question. I would also like to assure him and all members that I and the administration share his eagerness to expand access to e-chargers in East Herts.

With regard to on-street chargers, I am aware of examples in the county and am assured that learning outcomes, including those relating to safety and technical issues such as the charge speed capacity, are feeding into the e-vehicle strategy currently being drafted by Hertfordshire County Council. We obviously wish to act in partnership with the County Council given that they are the highways authority and, as with all other districts, we have committed to support the strategy once it is finalised early next year at which point we can determine our approach to on-street chargers.

In the meantime, we have commenced feasibility work with a number of town and parish councils with the aim of applying to the Office of Zero Emission Vehicles for funding to install chargers in various village hall and community centre car parks. If successful, this would see a network of chargers with 24/7 access in localities currently ill-served by public charging facilities. We aim to make this bid by the end of March.

I hope I have been able to demonstrate the council's proactive steps towards increasing access to chargers across the district.

Question 3

Cllr Norma Symonds to ask Cllr Peter Boylan, Executive Member for Neighbourhoods

We are all very aware of the significant impact Covid-19 has had upon individuals and families across the world. Can the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods please explain how the pandemic has impacted on the numbers turning to the council for help with housing and how our performance compares with other councils in Hertfordshire?

Councillor Symonds chose to defer her question to the next Full Council meeting.

Question 4

Councillor Chris Wilson to ask Councillor Graham McAndrew, Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability:

The Demand Responsive Transport bus service, Herts Lynx, launched on the 19th September. It has, thus far, been more successful and popular than expected and represents one of the few ways rural public transport can be made more viable for our residents.

Can you please update the council with respect to its progress, and advise what measures East Herts can take to promote it further? And are there any plans to extend it to more villages and destinations in our council area?

Response from Councillor Graham McAndrew:

I'd like to thank Cllr Wilson for his question and I most certainly share his delight in seeing the high usage the scheme is already attracting; there have been over 3,300 passenger journeys since its launch in

mid-September. Usage is steadily rising and indeed a special 'free trip' introductory promotional offer has just been launched to further encourage sign-up.

In the main, journeys are taking place from the rural villages into the 'Key Hub Towns', notably Bishop's Stortford in East Herts, in line with the fundamental aim to improve rural accessibility to employment, education, healthcare and shopping.

I am particularly pleased that 43 extra pick-up points were added in November which saw Much Hadham coming into the operational zone. More pick-up points are due to be added in January. East Herts Council is in contact with the team at Hertfordshire County Council to share views on highly used business parks and the like so as to maximise access to key areas in our district.

Looking to the future, the service is currently being run with a fleet of three minibuses but an additional two vehicles have been ordered with an estimated delivery date of Summer 2022. Furthermore, Hertfordshire County Council has made a funding bid to expand the HertsLynx operating zone. The outcome of the bid is as yet unknown, however, if successful, the operational area would be extended into the south of the district to include Hertford, Ware and the surrounding rural areas.

With regard to promoting the service more locally, we have links on our website and will, of course, continue to promote HertsLynx through social media and our other contact with our residents. Also, I was pleased to see the scheme promoted at the Hertfordshire Eco Fair at County Hall last month and we are aiming to use a similar promotional approach via our partners on the East Herts Climate Change and Environment Forum in the new year. In the meantime, I strongly urge all members to spread the word about this excellent service.

Question 5

Councillor Chris Wilson to ask Councillor Graham McAndrew, Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability:

Since the last lockdown, it has been clear to anyone living near or passing through Hockerill Junction in Bishop's Stortford that congestion and pollution are returning to pre-pandemic levels.

Are any figures yet available for the levels of pollution present at this site for 2021, and do you agree it is time we had live monitoring of this site so that we could spread awareness of the issue further and encourage a change in behaviour whenever possible?

Response from Councillor Graham McAndrew:

I'd like to thank Cllr Wilson for his question.

As I have discussed before in response to previous questions raised about this topic, air quality monitoring in the district's air quality management areas is subject to specific criteria and calibration methodologies prescribed by Defra. For this reason, the statistics for any particular year are only published about half way through the following year once discussed with Defra. Therefore, the latest calibrated figures relate to 2020. These are available on our website and show a fall in air pollution at Hockerill junction in 2020, a large degree of which is likely to be due to the drop in traffic during the Covid lockdowns.

The more recent raw, uncalibrated readings up to October 2021 suggest that NO₂ levels are around 10% to 15% higher than last year on the four approach roads to the junction. If this is reflected in the full year, calibrated figures, the air pollution would remain under the 40 micrograms per cubic metre threshold in Stansted Road and Hockerill Street. The threshold would, however, be breached again in

Dunmow Road and London Road although the raw data indicate emissions would be lower than pre-pandemic.

Real time, live monitoring of air quality is an interesting question. In terms of informing action by East Herts Council and Hertfordshire County Council, the highways authority, the current monitoring arrangements work well as we are able to gauge air quality improvements on a robust like-for-like basis each year.

Given the council's limited resources, we feel it is better to focus on tackling the issue of air pollution rather than investing in more monitoring. To help address the issue at Hockerill junction, we, for example, work with local groups to encourage modal shift to greener travel options. To support this joint approach, should a local community group or any other partner wish to investigate the acquisition and installation of real time monitoring equipment, East Herts Council officers would be very happy to advise of the products available.