

MEMBERS' QUESTIONS RESPONSES

Question 1	Cllr Joseph Dumont to ask Cllr Jan Goodeve, the Executive Member for Planning and Growth
<p>The members of Neighbourhood Planning Group in my Ward and Parish Councillors have been working hard and doing their best to develop the neighbourhood plan for Stanstead Abbots. They have found it difficult, especially because it is being proposed that green belt land is released. There is strong local feeling against the requirement to build 94 new homes.</p> <p>Will the Executive Member tell me whether it is or is not the case that Stanstead Abbots will be more susceptible to green belt development, and if the quota of 94 homes can be more easily exceeded by developers if a Neighbourhood plan is not adopted?</p> <p>Response</p> <p>We recognise and commend the hard work that is underway to develop a neighbourhood plan for Stanstead Abbots.</p> <p>In the East Herts District Plan, Group 1 Villages are identified as the most sustainable villages in the district and are expected to accommodate growth as part of the housing strategy. The requirement for at least 94 new homes in Stanstead Abbots and St Margarets is set out in Policy VILL1 of the District Plan. In accordance with the policy, if the housing requirement is not met by the adoption of a Neighbourhood Plan, the Council will consider</p>	

whether it is necessary to identify the site for development through a Site Allocations Development Plan.

In this scenario the parish council and neighbourhood plan group would have less control in the allocation and design of proposed sites.

Without a neighbourhood plan, there is potential for speculative development in the Green Belt. Even if the Council refuse an application, it could potentially be allowed at appeal if an Inspector considers 'very special circumstances' have been justified, particularly if weight is given to the argument that the District Plan requirement for 94 homes in the village has not been met. There is also no certainty that 94 homes will not be exceeded because the figure is not a limit but a minimum requirement.

The Council would prefer development to be planned so that the impacts on local infrastructure and character can be fully considered through the plan-making system. Allocation in a neighbourhood plan will ensure that the design and community benefits of any proposed scheme best reflect the ambitions of the local community.

There was no supplementary question.

Question 2

Cllr Mione Goldspink to ask Cllr Linda Haysey, the Leader of the Council

What actions can East Herts Council take to demonstrate its support for Asylum Seekers and Refugees who are seeking safety within our District?

Response

I would like to thank Cllr Goldspink for her question.

I believe that the council and indeed communities across our district can be proud of how East Herts has come together in recent years to demonstrate support those seeking refuge in our area.

Since 2016, the council has worked with local housing associations and community groups, such as Herts Welcomes Refugees, to support seven Syrian families settle in East Herts. The council has commissioned the Refugee Council to provide the necessary support. More recently, we have drawn on those same networks to provide homes for four Afghan families; so far, three families have settled here and we are currently identifying a fourth suitable property.

I know that Cllr Jonathan Kaye takes great care each year when leading the council's inclusive Holocaust Day commemorative event to recognise the often horrific circumstances refugees and asylum seekers are fleeing. I believe this demonstrates the genuine approach we have to welcoming people to East Herts. May I just take the opportunity, on Cllr Kaye's behalf, to invite you all to this year's commemorative event which will take place in person for the first time in three years at 6.30pm on Thursday, 26th January here in the Council Chamber.

Finally, let me turn to the council's response to the war in Ukraine. I find it quite humbling when I think about the number of local people who have opened their homes to Ukrainian people as part of the government's Homes for Ukraine programme. The council has worked with Hertfordshire County Council every step of the way on this scheme.

To date, our Environmental Health team has conducted 183 inspections of hosts' properties, with new inspections happening each week within a few days of being requested. Thus far, this has ensured that 320 Ukrainian people have already been able to settle in East Herts with another 61 people with visas waiting to arrive once their hosts are ready for them. Of the Ukrainians who have already arrived, there are 200 adults and 120 children. In addition, there will be a small number of Ukrainians who have joined family members who have lived here for some time but exact numbers are not collated.

It is worth noting that East Herts has the second highest number of placements through the Homes for Ukraine programme in Hertfordshire; only St Albans has more.

As I mentioned, work to inspect hosts' properties is continuing and furthermore officers in the Housing service are now working closely with colleagues across the county to provide high quality support and advice on housing options. To date, 15 Ukrainian *households* have turned to the council for advice. In most cases, the households are settled with host households and are simply asking 'what happens next' questions. However, the Housing service has matched two Ukrainian households with another host household and helped another three households access the private rented sector. Over this time, the Housing service has provided short-term temporary accommodation for four Ukrainian households while helping them find a new home.

May I remind you that the council's website includes a whole range of useful information for those coming to our district and residents wishing to support.

So, I hope I have been able to assure all members that East Herts Council has and continues to demonstrate its practical support for people seeking a place of safety in our district.

Supplementary question

Councillor Goldspink asked if the Leader would issue a statement expressing the Council's support for asylum seekers.

Response

The Leader said she would liaise with County Council colleagues to find the appropriate wording.

Question 3

Cllr Chris Wilson to ask Cllr Peter Boylan, the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods

Last month, a report was published entitled "The Better Social Housing Review". This report was jointly commissioned by the National Housing Federation and the Chartered Institute of Housing, and both these organisations accepted its findings in their entirety. Its recommendations included that Housing Associations should carry out an audit of every single one of their housing stock and that improved housing standards should be adopted by the associations within six months and fully implemented by three years. This of course is with particular reference to the prevalence of health-endangering damp in many of this country's social housing. I, like many other members, have been shocked by the state of some of the housing our residents are living in.

Does Cllr Boylan agree that it is right that the Housing Associations should conduct such an audit and apply the proposed standards? If so does he agree that this council needs to hold these associations

to account and make every effort to ensure they comply with all the recommendations of the Better Social Housing Review?"

Response

Both myself and officers within the Housing service are aware of this important report produced by the two leading 'trade bodies' for the affordable housing sector, the National Housing Federation and the Chartered Institute of Housing. It is also reassuring to note that the National Housing Federation's G15 group of housing associations was involved in preparation of the report as both Clarion Housing and Network Homes are members of this group.

The council welcomes the recommendations that, in summary, urge housing associations to work closely with their tenants to provide excellent support, maintenance and other services, including adopting a standard approach to stock audits.

The report's authors recognise the roles of the national Regulator for Social Housing and Housing Ombudsman in promoting and monitoring housing associations' standards and performance.

While the report does not articulate a specific role for local authorities, I'd like to assure members that East Herts Council can and does seek to promote high standards in the district. Of note:

- we have been proactive in establishing cross-party strategic member liaison groups with our two largest housing associations, Network and Clarion
- our Environmental Health team works with housing associations to tackle damp, mould and disrepair issues and
- we have provided grant and other support to enable Network Homes to set up a community hub in a previously vacant shop in Sele Farm.

In response to the report, officers will promote the council's support for its recommendations through the regular housing association liaison meetings, including seeking updates on the extent to which the associations are acting on the report's findings.

Question 4

Cllr Chris Wilson to ask Cllr Graham McAndrew, the Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability

At the full council meeting on 16th November, one of my residents, Mr James Dean, asked if the council would consider the adoption of a permit-type system to discount parking after 6.30pm for local residents who lived near council-operated car parks. Mr Dean, along with some other nearby residents have no other realistic place to park besides Crown Terrace Car Park. It was stated that this would be looked into by officers but the new late-parking charges have since been implemented and there has been no indication of whether such a scheme can be initiated. Can you please provide an update on what discussions and/or decisions have been made so that Mr Dean and other affected residents can be appropriately informed?

Response

I thank Cllr Wilson for his question

We have a permit option that is available for Crown Terrace residents to allow them to park in the Crown Terrace car park. The Traffic Regulation Order that provides the requisite authority defines eligibility criteria in respect of address and currently the cost of each permit is £1,494.00 per year. The benefits of the permit scheme are that no daily payment is required and therefore from a convenience perspective this may be considered beneficial. In response to your request,

I have discussed the matter with the Parking Services Manager, who has advised me that there are discretionary powers to offer this car park permit type to your constituent on the existing terms. I appreciate this isn't a discounted rate, however there is currently no authority for concessions.

Alternatively, the London Road resident has other options to park near their home. We have looked into this and there are several roads providing permitted parking on street, that are available in the evenings and on Sunday. These roads provide adequate capacity for parking and are all within 5 minutes' walk of the resident's address.

As you will be aware the Council agreed to implement the evening and Sunday charges to ensure that those customers using the council's facilities contribute towards the costs of operating and maintaining the assets. Crown Terrace is a very popular car park, serving a number of groups including local businesses, workers, shoppers, and residents.

Supplementary question

Councillor Wilson asked what authority would be needed to offer the discount and whether this would be a long process?

Response

The Executive Member said he would look into it and provide Councillor Wilson with a response outside the meeting.