

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

<p>Question 1</p>	<p>Colin Woodward to ask Cllr Ben Crystall, the Leader of the Council</p>
<p>In September 2022 EHDC formally recognised the Water Lane Hall to be an Asset of Community Value, yet the perception in Bishop’s Stortford is that the Council is still intent on proceeding with the proposal to dispose of the Hall along with its other assets on the Old River Lane site by transferring them to Cityheart for development of the site for a paltry sum or, possibly at nil cost in the case of the Hall, compared with the cost to the Council of their purchase. In the meantime there has twice been an extension of the lease of the hall to the URC church, demonstrating its ongoing utility and value to the community, though without any reasoned reply to alternative bids such as that of 17 March 2023 submitted by Community Initiative (BS) and Bishop's Stortford Civic Federation setting out several ownership and operating scenarios to preserve this asset.</p> <p>Given that the Water Lane Hall was designated by EHC an Asset of Community Value, what process is EHDC now following to allow the community the option to retain the building for community use, noting its (EHCs) own policies including CFLR8, before it takes an irrevocable decision to hand it over to Cityheart, potentially for demolition?</p>	
<p>Question 2</p>	<p>Jill Goldsmith to ask Cllr Carl Brittain, Executive Member for Financial Sustainability</p>
<p>It is now 4 months since my last question on EHDC’s accounts and hence the audited values of assets on the ORL site. As of 5/12/23</p>	

the Council website still is not disclosing the accounts from 2020-21 which were completed months ago and the inspection period has not commenced for the 2021-22 unaudited accounts. The 2022-23 accounts have also missed the statutory deadline.

It is my understanding that as yet, no contract exists with Cityheart, but that the terms of the potential contract (Development Management Agreement) could go back to values set when Cityheart was selected as preferred development partner. That is nearly 5 years ago now, so the values then may or may not reflect best value now. The answer to me in July 2023 was that *“The Council would not enter in an agreement with a developer whereby we are not getting best value”*. The FAQs on the Council's website say that *“An updated Section 123 report, with independent valuations, will be produced and agreed before the development agreement is signed”*.

This is such an important scheme for the town and for the Council's finances that residents need to be able to see how the Council is justifying the transfer of our assets before the Development Agreement is signed.

Has the Council now obtained independent valuations for the ORL site; and will it make this information and related 123 explanations transparent, before the Development Management Agreement is signed?

Question 3

Charlotte Lipscomb to ask Cllr Vicky Glover-Ward, the Executive Member for Planning and Growth

In the Council meeting held on the 18th October I asked the Executive Member responsible for licensing a question regarding the chaos created by the AMAFest Festival held in Bury Green on 2nd September. In her reply she confirmed that an investigation was

launched immediately after the event. The Executive Member also stated, and I quote "Please be assured, however, that East Herts Council is ready to take action against any event organiser that commits offences under the Licensing Act 2003 which may include not complying with the terms of a licence. Regarding AMA Fest, we have gathered information and data from various sources, all of which has now been reviewed".

It is now well over three months since the event and two months since she made that statement, and residents like me are still expecting answers. Can the Executive Member please confirm when the results of the investigation, and the action that may be taken against the event organisers, will be made public?

Question 4

Karen Burton to ask Cllr Tim Hoskin, the Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability

On October 18th, this council rejected a request from the Bishop's Stortford BID to allocate 100 spaces for town centre workers at a discounted rate in Northgate End car park to help with recruitment and retention issues and activate an unpopular car park with an average occupancy of 20%. During the meeting, Cllr Crystal expressed concerns about setting a "dangerous precedent" and emphasized that Bishop's Stortford should not receive special treatment. He stated, "it is far better to take a slower, more rational approach and make it the best it can be" and that car parking across East Herts needs to be dealt with as a whole".

Surprisingly, just eight weeks later, a new proposal is being presented to the council, targeting three Bishop's Stortford car parks for increased charges in long-stay tariffs and one car park is proposed to undergo a smaller percentage decrease in the 4, 5, and long-stay tariffs, with no other car parks across East Herts having the same treatment.

As a listening council where and how have you found the evidence in such a short space of time to support such a significant shift that could profoundly affect Bishop's Stortford town centre businesses' ability to recruit and retain staff, as well as impact residents and visitors. How can this be the slower, more rational approach be achieved in such a short time and is the council prepared to stop and think again and if not, why not?

Question 5

Philip Wylie to ask Cllr Sarah Hopewell, the Executive Member for Wellbeing

When and what were the serious Health & Safety issues raised by Everyone Active, which led to the decision to close the pool. Has a full and independent evaluation been undertaken of ways to address these serious Health & Safety issues?

Question 6

Ian Ballantyne to ask Cllr Carl Brittain, the Executive Member for Financial Sustainability

£1,100,000 (£1.1m) was list as being Approved by the Council for spending on Ward Freeman Joint Use Facilities, in the 2022/23 budget, out of a total capital expenditure budget of £25,561,000 (£25.56m) – see <https://democracy.eastherts.gov.uk/documents/s57368/Budget%202022-23%20and%20Medium%20Term%20Financial%20Plan%20-%20Appendix%20C.pdf?j=22>.

How, when, why and who decided to remove this from the budget or not include it for 2023/24?

Question 7

Christopher Davalle to ask Cllr Sarah Hopewell, the Executive Member for Wellbeing

Over each of the last 10 years, what have the net annual running been for the Ward Freman Pool and how much of this is routine

maintenance? Has any analysis been done on the impact of low expenditure on maintenance – the pool cover and air circulation systems are not working and boiler system is very old and inefficient.

Question 8

**Kirti Wylie to ask Cllr Sarah Hopewell,
the Executive Member for Wellbeing**

Are the Council Authorities prepared to continue funding the running costs of Ward Freman Pool if a solution to the "urgent" Health & Safety issues could be found?