

COUNCIL – 13 May 2026

MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Question 1	Cllr Bob Deering to ask Cllr Carl Brittain, the Executive Member for Financial Stability
<p>At the Audit & Governance Committee meeting on 24 February it was reported that the planning dept is overspent on budget but still understaffed. I asked what the further cost would be to bring the department up to a full staffing level. The Director for Finance, Risk and Performance said that he would provide a written answer. I chased for this on 5 April but it has still not come through. I would therefore be grateful if the Executive Member for Financial Sustainability would now answer my question and provide the requested costings.</p>	
Response from Cllr Carl Brittain	
<p>To clarify, officers provided a response to the question you raised at Audit & Governance on 1 April 2026, but you advised on 5 April that it did not fully address your question.</p> <p>At present, I am unable to provide an exact cost because the position is not straightforward and is being reviewed. In an ideal world, if we were able to recruit to the strategic sites team leader and principal planning officer posts within the Development Management Team, we could reduce our reliance on agency planners and lower overall costs.</p> <p>However, there is a national shortage of experienced principal-level planners able to handle complex major planning applications. This is supported by a recent report from the Royal Town Planning Institute reviewing recruitment and retention matters across the planning sector, stating that <i>“Most difficulty recruiting was reported at the principal planning officer or team leader level, with 96.9% of LPAs reporting these difficult or very difficult to recruit”</i>.</p> <p>More recently, uncertainty around Local Government Reorganisation has made it even more difficult to recruit permanent staff at this level.</p> <p>As you know, I can confirm that over the last five years, a range of recruitment and retention measures have been used to support the service, and further options to recruitment permanent staff in the</p>	

development management team, including likely costs, are currently being explored.

Supplementary question from Cllr Bob Deering

Cllr Deering asked by which date an answer to the question regarding the costing required to bring the planning department up to a full staffing level would be received?

Response from Cllr Carl Brittain

Cllr Brittain advised that he would provide a date after the meeting, following consultation with officers.

Question 2

Cllr David Andrews to ask Cllr Ben Crystall, Leader of the Council

At 2 of the last 3 meetings of the Planning Committee, officers have recommended approval for applications for two major residential developments in High Cross. The first was for 36 units and the second was for up to 95 units. These developments will increase the size of High Cross by approximately 40 % and are therefore very significant. Officers acknowledged that each application was unsustainable. The residents of High Cross and all of rural East Hertfordshire would like an explanation as to why unsustainable development is being recommended for approval, particularly when the Green Party forms a large part of the administration?

Response from Cllr Ben Crystall/Cllr Vicky Glover-Ward

Cllr Crystall advised that a response would be provided by Cllr Vicky Glover-Ward, Executive Member for Planning and Growth.

It is important to challenge the premise of the question, because it is not accurate.

Officers did not state, either in their written reports, in presentations to the Development Management Committee, or in responding to Member questions, that these developments were “unsustainable”. That characterisation is incorrect.

What the officer reports do, entirely properly, is identify both harms and benefits, including the fact that the sites lie outside the village boundary and that High Cross has relatively limited services and there will, inevitably be some reliance on private vehicle.

Those impacts were clearly set out in the reports, tested against both local and national policy, and given appropriate weight in the assessment.

It is also important to be clear that “sustainable development” in planning terms is frequently misunderstood. The National Planning Policy Framework does not treat sustainability as a pass-or-fail test, and it certainly does not require a site to be perfect in every respect. It requires a planning judgement, balancing economic, social and environmental considerations.

The fact that a scheme has identified limitations does not make it “unsustainable”, it simply means those impacts must be weighed in the overall planning balance.

That balance must include all three strands of sustainability, including the economic role of development. The Framework is explicit that significant weight must be given to supporting economic growth and productivity, reflecting the need to deliver homes, investment and infrastructure alongside environmental and social considerations.

The National Planning Policy Framework is explicit that sustainable development in rural areas includes supporting the vitality of villages. It recognises that housing can help sustain local services, not just within a single village but across a wider network of settlements. So, the suggestion that development in rural locations is inherently “unsustainable” is not supported by national policy.

Planning decisions are not made by picking a single policy and applying a simple pass-or-fail test. The law requires applications to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise, and the National Planning Policy Framework is a key part of that framework.

In particular, where housing land supply is constrained, as has been clearly reported by officers in their reports to the DMC, national policy requires the application of the ‘tilted balance’. That is not optional; it is the test that must be applied. It requires permission to be granted unless the adverse impacts would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits. That is exactly the test officers applied.

They concluded that, while these are not the most sustainable locations in the district, a point they were entirely transparent about, the sites are adjacent to the existing settlement, and the harms identified do not significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, including the delivery of much-needed housing, affordable homes and supporting infrastructure.

To suggest that the Council has knowingly approved “unsustainable development” is simply wrong. What is actually happening is that national planning policy is being applied properly and rigorously, even where that leads to difficult or unpopular conclusions.

Members were then presented with that professional planning judgement and, quite properly, made their own decisions on the planning merits. Members had every opportunity at the committee to ask and challenge the officer analysis and weighting that was provided. It was open for Members to draw a different conclusion.

Planning decisions must be taken on planning merits, in accordance with policy and material considerations. They are not determined by political preference—they are, by design, apolitical.

Supplementary question from Cllr David Andrews

Cllr Andrews asked the Executive Member to confirm that Members of her own party were not whipped in relation to planning decisions, and that officers would, as had long been the case, assist Members in formulating grounds for objection if they wished to do so?

Response from Cllr Ben Crystall/Cllr Vicky Glover-Ward

Cllr Glover-Ward advised that Green Party Members were not whipped on any voting and that it would not be appropriate, legal or moral to do so in relation to a planning committee, as it was apolitical and based on planning judgement. Cllr Glover-Ward further advised that officers had shared with all Development Management Committee Members that they were available to discuss concerns and answer questions in advance of meetings, without pre-determination, to assist Members in reaching a decision.

Question 3

Cllr Eric Buckmaster to ask Cllr Vicky Glover-Ward, Executive Member for Planning and Growth

From recent experience, the efforts and good work undertaken by our planning enforcement officers is commendable, however can the Executive Member say how many live enforcement cases there are currently and what is in place to reduce the number to a manageable level before handing over to a successor council?

Response from Cllr Vicky Glover-Ward

In May 2023, when the current administration took over control at the council there were 625 planning enforcement cases.

At the time of writing, there are currently 252 planning enforcement cases. This represents a 60% decrease since the current administration took control.

The planning enforcement team have four officers – one planning enforcement team leader, two planning enforcement officers and one planning compliance officer. Each officer has a caseload of around 60 cases.

This downwards trend shows significant progress by the team and means the caseload is manageable although we have two years for further improvement and I would like to be below 50 cases per officer in line with the norms which is doable as the more complex cases are now what is left from the backlog handed over.

Initial preparations for service delivery as part of LGR is underway and will proceed at pace once the decision has made by the government. This will include consideration of existing workloads. The team will continue to proactively manage cases and overall work pressures including working through the more complex cases, and balance against appropriate preparations for LGR.

In the last 12 months, the planning enforcement team have served

- 35 planning enforcement notices,
- 7 stop notices,
- 4 Remedial Notices,
- 1 Tree Replacement Notice ,
- 3 Temporary Stop Notices and
- 1 Section 215 Notice.

In addition, the team have successfully undertaken 2 prosecutions and obtained and served 2 injunctions.

There are currently 11 planning enforcement appeals awaiting a decision from the Planning Inspectorate during which time, no further action can be taken.

It is important to note that there is no statutory duty to take planning enforcement action but there is a statutory duty to investigate.

The vast majority of current enforcement cases that are open with the planning enforcement team are not straight forward. They often require

significant investigations, often involving multi-agency work and intra-authority work to provide the appropriate evidence which will stand up at appeal or in the courts. If this work is not carried out and the proper processes are not followed, there is a greater chance of notices being quashed at appeal or in the courts or, in some cases, especially with stop notices, compensation.

Many of the current and live enforcement cases are therefore taking time to work through the investigation process. This is all in the context of maintaining service response to complaints that are received every day – all of which need to be considered and responded to.

The planning enforcement team triage many of these complaints and deal with them 'on-the-spot'. For example, 516 planning enforcement complaints were received which, through the triage system, resulted in 258 cases being logged onto the system.

The planning enforcement team have recently updated their planning enforcement plan and this is currently with legal colleagues who are bringing together a corporate policy approach from all relevant teams who have enforcement functions.

Supplementary question from Cllr Eric Buckmaster

Cllr Buckmaster asked if additional officers could be recruited to manage enforcement cases, including particularly complex ones, such as the Esbies site in Sawbridgeworth.

Response from Cllr Vicky Glover-Ward

Cllr Glover-Ward advised that in order to manage the complex cases, Principal Planning Officers were required. Of the eight positions available, there were currently six vacancies, which represented an improvement on the previous position when all eight posts were vacant. It was noted that it was currently difficult to recruit to the Principal Planning level, with training unavailable from around 2008-2014. Cllr Glover-Ward further advised that she would review the position, however, noted that given concerns regarding overspend and planning enforcement being a non-statutory service, statutory services would remain a priority.

Question 4

Cllr Ian Devonshire to ask Cllr Ben Crystall, Leader of the Council

Hundreds of Jewish people live in East Hertfordshire. Every one of these individuals is entitled to live and worship in peace and safety or go about their everyday business just as all other residents.

Will the Leader of the Council confirm that he deplores any and all forms of anti-semitism, including the spate of anti-Semitic attacks in the UK over the past few months?

Response from Cllr Ben Crystall

Thank you, Ian. All of us here take pride in our inclusive district, which extends a warm welcome to people from diverse communities and faiths. Every person here in East Herts, whether a member of the Jewish community or any other group, deserves to be able to exist in complete peace and safety.

As leader of the council, and as someone of Jewish heritage, I absolutely condemn all anti-Semitism. The murder of 2 Jewish men in Manchester last year, and the recent attacks in London in which one Muslim man was stabbed in Southwark, followed by stabbings of 2 Jewish men in Golders Green, are all appalling. No community should be attacked in this way or feel it's under siege.

Here at EHC we work hard to support our Jewish community in a number of ways. We have adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance working definition of anti-Semitism to ensure clarity of purpose and help identify issues where they arise. We continue to hold and promote annual Holocaust Memorial Day in a meaningful, respectful and inclusive way. More broadly, the council also participates in community cohesion monitoring and information sharing with the police and other partners. Prevent training for officers and partners was held in December, and included training on spotting the signs of right-wing radicalism including anti-Semitism.

But to better tackle anti-Semitism, and to help the council ensure our communities feel safe, it's important that we all play a role. So, I'd urge everyone to

- report any literature, graffiti or stickering that may indicate Anti-Semitism or affiliation to the Far Right or other extremists to us at community.safety@eastherts.gov.uk – we monitor this account very closely
- report any disinformation or criminal behaviour to the police on 101 or by calling 999 if there is a crime in progress
- report hate crime to the police, or on the Herts Against Hate website (hertsagainsthate.org) or to East Herts Council via community.safety@eastherts.gov.uk. Please remember, you can make a report anonymously
- call out anti-Semitism, hate, racism and discrimination in all its forms here in East Herts and to reassure your friends, family and neighbours that all of EH councillors, officers and our partners in the police are

committed to making our district as safe and as inclusive an area as possible, just as we know the vast majority of people here want it to be.

Supplementary question from Cllr Ian Devonshire

On 8 August 2024, you posted a personal message on the Council's website asking the public to let the council know about any leafletting etc that "may indicate affiliation to the Far Right". You said that "all the council's councillors, officers and our partners in the police" are committed to making East Herts safe and inclusive". Given recent comments and discussion nationally, please can the Leader assure us that the police will have his and his Party's full support should there ever be a Golders Green type attack on the Jewish community in East Herts?

Response from Cllr Ben Crystall

Cllr Crystall provided assurance.

Question 5

Cllr Chris Hart to ask Cllr Vicky Glover-Ward, Executive Member for Planning and Growth

Is it the intention of the Administration to continue relying upon an out-of-date Water Cycle Study when determining applications for planning permission Ware2?

Response from Cllr Vicky Glover-Ward

No, it is not the intention of the Administration to continue relying on an out-of-date Water Cycle Study when determining planning applications, including WARE2.

The Council recognises the importance of having robust, up-to-date evidence to inform decision-making, particularly in relation to water infrastructure, environmental capacity, and sustainable growth. For that reason, we are currently in the process of procuring a new Water Cycle Study to ensure that our evidence base reflects current conditions, planned infrastructure investment, and the latest regulatory requirements.

In the meantime, planning applications such as WARE2 are not determined in isolation or solely on the basis of historic studies. They are subject to detailed consultation with statutory consultees, including Thames Water, Affinity Water, the Environment Agency and other relevant bodies. These organisations provide site-specific, up-to-date technical advice on matters such as wastewater capacity, water supply, and environmental impacts.

In the case of WARE2, Thames Water and Affinity Water, along with other consultees, will be expected to respond directly to the planning application and provide current, scheme-specific input. This ensures that decisions are informed by the most relevant and recent technical evidence available, alongside the Council's emerging updated evidence base.

We remain committed to ensuring that all planning decisions are underpinned by sound evidence and informed by the appropriate expert bodies.

Question 6

Cllr Aubrey Holt to ask Cllr Tim Hoskin, Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability

Given local media has suggesting this Council will be 'increasing collections' to address the district-wide crisis of overflowing public and dog waste bins, will the Executive Member provide a detailed breakdown of the specific additional resources and long-term monitoring measures being deployed to ensure this represents a permanent return to a clean environment, rather than a temporary reactive measure?

Response from Cllr Tim Hoskin

To confirm, there is no evidence of a district-wide issue relating to overflowing litter or dog waste bins across East Herts.

The recent media coverage appears to have mixed a number of separate operational matters, including different service responsibilities between Parks/Grounds Maintenance and the Shared Waste Service, which has understandably created some confusion.

In summary:

- The article referenced planned seasonal changes to litter bin emptying frequencies within parks and open spaces, which are routinely implemented during the spring and summer period to reflect increased visitor numbers and higher seasonal demand.
- These seasonal adjustments are part of normal operational management and not a response to any wider service failure or emergency situation.
- The Shared Waste Service is responsible for on-street litter bins, whereas dog waste/litter bins within parks and open spaces have

historically been managed separately through the Grounds Maintenance/Parks service.

- During periods of exceptionally warm weather and increased footfall, isolated instances of bins reaching capacity can occasionally occur before scheduled servicing. Where issues are reported, these are investigated and addressed as part of normal operational response arrangements.
- In the specific case highlighted through social media and subsequent press coverage, the matter was investigated and resolved within a short timeframe following the initial reports. However, social media activity and the continued circulation of historic images/posts appear to have prolonged the perception of an ongoing issue after the location had already been attended to and cleared.
- Both the Parks and Shared Waste teams continue to monitor cleansing standards, bin provision and contractor performance through routine inspections, reporting processes and contract management arrangements. At present, there is no operational data indicating any widespread or escalating cleanliness problem across the district.

Whilst we will continue to monitor usage patterns and respond where localised pressures arise, the Council also recognises the importance of encouraging responsible public behaviour alongside operational management. Officers are therefore considering additional educational messaging and signage on bins within key high-footfall locations, encouraging residents and visitors to either use nearby available bins or take litter home where appropriate, helping to maintain clean and welcoming public spaces for everyone.

The Council welcomes constructive feedback from residents and will continue reviewing both operational arrangements and public information to ensure services remain responsive, proportionate and effective.

Question 7

Cllr David Woollcombe, to ask Cllr Vicky Glover-Ward, Executive Member for Planning and Growth

I'm sure that we're all pleased that the Gilston Development is going ahead and that our Executive Member for Planning is committed to "... working alongside the applicants to help ensure the proposals are delivered to the high quality expected for this important site."

However, I'm equally sure that, due to the parlous state of Thames Water's finances, many of you share my concerns that the sewage treatment services required by these 10,000 new homes and all the other new build planning consents passed by this council, will not be met at anything like the "high quality" that we, or new residents of our District, have the right to expect.

My research tells me that Thames Water's forecast for equivalent population growth generated by these new builds is under-estimated by at least two-thirds.

What figures is the Executive Member working from on the Population Equivalent to be served by Rye Meads after the delivery of the Gilston and other planning consents agreed by this council to date?

Response from Cllr Vicky Glover-Ward

The issue of wastewater capacity, and specifically the performance and future capability of Rye Meads Wastewater Treatment Works, is clearly an important one. It is right that this is subject to scrutiny alongside the delivery of major developments such as Gilston.

For developments such as Gilston, and others granted planning permission, Thames Water is consulted at the application stage and provides detailed, scheme-specific assessments of anticipated population growth and the resulting impact on sewerage and treatment infrastructure. These assessments take into account occupancy assumptions, phasing, and wider planned growth across the network.

In addition, Thames Water is a statutory consultee at the plan-making stage. Its business plans already reflect strategic sites allocated in the adopted District Plan, and it will continue to provide input into the evidence base for emerging plan allocations.

It is also important to note that Thames Water has a statutory duty to provide and maintain adequate wastewater infrastructure to serve new development. This includes planning for growth through its business plans and investment programmes, which are subject to national regulatory oversight.

We are, of course, aware of wider concerns regarding Thames Water's financial position. However, these are matters within a national regulatory framework. The Council continues to engage with Thames Water, the Environment Agency and other relevant bodies to ensure that infrastructure provision keeps pace with development.

In the case of Gilston and other major sites, this is addressed not only through consultation responses, but also through planning conditions and, where necessary, legal agreements to ensure development is coordinated with the timely provision of infrastructure. It should also be recognised that strategic developments such as Gilston are expected to be delivered over a period of around 25 years, allowing time for infrastructure upgrades to be planned and implemented alongside growth.

In summary, the Council considers the evidence provided by Thames Water as the statutory undertaker, but does not rely on it in isolation. This evidence is tested through the planning process and consultation with the Environment Agency and others, to ensure that wastewater infrastructure is appropriately planned and that residents are properly protected.