

# Questions for candidates for HCC, elections May 6<sup>th</sup> 2021

## Calvin Horner

### Introduction:

Prior to answering the specific questions I would like to make a few brief comments. I do not consider myself to have any more than a general understanding of the climate emergency and the steps that need to be taken to avoid its worst consequences. I had hoped to be able to undertake research so as to give the detailed answers that your questions deserve, but this has not been possible during a busy election period and I will therefore have to give broader answers than I would have liked. Having said that, I would want to assure you that tackling the overlapping crises of climate change and the threat to biodiversity would be a major consideration in all my decision making as a councillor, whether I am elected to the County Council, Town Council or both. In presenting my answers I will seek to differentiate between the actions that are possible for the two authorities to which I seek election as they have very different powers and responsibilities.

**1. The FoE analysis of progress on addressing climate change in different local authority areas across England and Wales (Dec2020) says that EHDC has made average progress on addressing climate change. Researchers at the Tyndall Centre say that East Herts should reduce its carbon emissions by at least 13% per year. What would be your priorities in reaching the HCC target of zero emissions by 2030?**

In order to reach the target of being carbon neutral by 2030 HCC needs firstly to transform its energy consumption. This has two elements, the reduction of energy usage and replacing the use of fossil fuels with renewable forms of energy generation. My priority would be to ensure that both these elements are pursued concurrently to meet the 2030 target.

In order to reduce energy usage a range of actions need to be taken across the council's activity. Insulation levels must be increased in council buildings, including offices, depots, care homes, day centres and schools. Furthermore, consideration needs to be made of the way these locations are managed and operated in order to reduce unnecessary energy use. It may be appropriate to reduce the number of offices due to staff working from home, but for any staff in this situation they should be encouraged and where appropriate given incentives to improve the energy efficiency of their homes, otherwise there may be no overall reduction in carbon emissions. Patterns of work which entail the use of council vehicles should be reviewed to avoid unnecessary journeys being undertaken. Street lights should also be dimmed whenever it is safe to do so, such as in the early morning where there

are no footpaths, and the hours of illumination reviewed to ensure it minimises electricity consumption whilst ensuring road and pedestrian safety.

Changing energy consumption to renewable sources of power will entail the installation of photo-voltaic (PV) electricity generation, both through solar panels on council buildings and schools and for the lighting of cycle routes and footpaths where they are not covered by existing street lighting. I would seek to ensure that heating systems in council buildings are progressively replaced with ground or air-source heat pumps as appropriate, to ensure replacement by 2030. Similarly, a priority must be the replacement of Council vehicles at the end of their economic life with ultra-low emission or zero emission vehicles by 2029 at the latest, which should include vehicles used for contract bus services and other contractors operating on behalf of the County Council. I would prioritise the provision of electric pool vehicles for the use of staff for business journeys.

In addition I would push for the development of anaerobic digestion capacity for all Hertfordshire's food waste so that rather than contributing to greenhouse gas emissions by going into land fill or by being burned it generates sustainable energy.

With regard to the Town Council I am aware that there are proposals with regard to reducing energy use, replacing council vehicles with electric powered replacements and a move to renewable heating systems. I would seek to ensure that these are brought to fruition so that the 2030 target is met.

**2. Transport is the biggest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the UK. In E Herts 43% of emissions come from transport. Here in Bishops Stortford and Sawbridgeworth congested roads and poor air quality (in particular at Hockerill and in Sawbridgeworth) have become the norm. What would you do to address this issue which is so harmful to the health and well being of the population here as well as to that of the planet?**

Poor air quality is a major health issue, which is a constant concern for those with respiratory illnesses, including several members of my own family. Whilst I support the move to electric vehicles and the County Council's provision of additional charging points, both in car parks and on street, as a way of encouraging the move away from petrol and diesel vehicles I do not believe this goes far enough. Adoption of electric vehicles will not relieve congestion and the production of the vehicles and in particular the batteries on which they depend, contributes to carbon emissions and the unsustainable exploitation of the planet. I would therefore promote the adoption of alternative modes of transport, such as walking and cycling for short journeys and buses and other rapid transit schemes for longer distances. Currently provision for both are woefully inadequate.

To encourage walking I would seek increased investment in repairing the footpaths across the town and for the provision of safe routes with adequate pedestrian crossings and good lighting. There are major junctions in Bishop's Stortford, such as Hockerill, where it is frequently perilous to try to cross in order to walk into the town centre and new crossings need to be provided. To facilitate safe cycling I would

promote the development of a network of cycle routes around Stortford that link residential areas with frequently visited destinations like shops, schools and workplaces. These are far more important than long distance cycle routes between towns. Wherever possible these would be separate from the major roads, to provide an environment that reassures those who are less confident or new cyclists. Cycle racks should be located close to the destinations used by cyclists. I would also press for the introduction of 20 mph zones, predominately on safety grounds, but also to protect and encourage walking and cycling and discourage use of cars for short journeys.

My priority for public transport would be to ensure that there are convenient and reliable bus routes between Bishops Stortford and neighbouring towns and villages. Because of the need to ensure all communities have access to the bus network I would advocate the introduction of 'on-demand' services. I would also support plans to introduce mass transport systems in Hertfordshire, between important centres, but would press for this to include Bishop's Stortford.

**3. Home heating: In East Herts 33% of emissions come from housing, only 44% of homes are well insulated, individual gas boilers continue to be installed in the new developments in Bishops Stortford and Sawbridgeworth. A detailed Heat Decarbonisation strategy is essential. What would be your priorities here?**

Whilst neither the County Council nor the Town Council is the planning authority for new developments in Bishop's Stortford I would use my membership of both to push for the installation of sustainable forms of heating in all new properties. Where the County Council is the planning authority or is promoting development on its own land I would support the use of Passivhaus standards. These standards minimise the requirement for space heating through insulation and incorporate sustainable means of heating such as heat pumps when this is needed.

The decarbonisation of existing housing, even those recently constructed using traditional methods and heated by gas is particularly challenging. My priorities for the County Council would be to promote the take up of schemes to improve insulation by the public, whilst pressing the Government for more resources both for insulation and to replace gas boilers with sustainable forms of heating. I would also press for the Council to actively support all initiatives with this aim, including the provision of combined heat and power and other neighbourhood heating schemes. Both the County and Town Councils should seek to educate the public on the need for changes in home heating and insulation and the ways in which this can be achieved in different housing types.

**4. Biodiversity: The recent report by the Herts and Middx Wildlife Trust (Hertfordshire's State of Nature) calls for 30% of land in Hertfordshire to be restored for nature by 2030.**

**How would you address this?**

I recognise that the connectivity of habitats is of major importance in enabling endangered and struggling populations to recover and spread and the County Council has an important part to play because of its widespread landholding across the County and especially through its management of highways land. I would therefore support the re-wilding of grass verges alongside roads, by changing grass cutting regimes. By allowing verges to remain uncut over winter and cutting others less frequently habitats can be created that allow native plants, insects and invertebrates to flourish.

I would also seek to ensure that the management of land owned by the County Council is frequently reviewed so that it does not pose a threat to biodiversity and that habitat protection is a central consideration when the County disposes of any land or buildings.

I would also push for trees to be replaced at a rate of two for each one felled, whether by developers or the Council and to ensure that new plantings are of native tree species. The councils should also increase urban tree planting.

The County Council also has an important part to play in promoting biodiversity to other landowners and supporting the work of the Wildlife Trust and others to educate the public.

The Town Council should also seek to encourage the re-wilding of private gardens and commercially owned land in ways that will create valuable habitats. This could be achieved in a variety of ways, including providing advice, seeds or organising voluntary efforts. The enhancement of habitats for wildlife on allotment land that is unusable for cultivation should also be pursued. I would also work to ensure that the enhancement of biodiversity is an important consideration in the improvements to Castle Park.