

**COUNCIL – 24 FEBRUARY 2021****QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC****Questions to Portfolio Holders**

(A) Question from David Healey

What is the Council doing to make electric car charging spaces and facilities accessible in town and residential areas, noting the government requirement for all electric and hybrid cars by 2030? Will a task team be appointed to see the rollout for facilities in the residential areas, on request, for those without off street parking? There are extensive Government grants available for up to 75% and even more funding has just been added. A joint team from the environmental and transport portfolios should work on a master plan.

*Answer (Cllr John Gardner):*

*The change that is coming is not a requirement for all cars to be electric and hybrid cars by 2030, but that from 2030, conventional vehicles will no longer be sold new. We recognised change is needed and we're already working to introduce chargers to help residents without off-street parking be able to refuel electric and plug in hybrid cars.*

*Three of SBC's car parks have chargers and we are trying to double this provision as soon as possible. In 2020 we opened our first public on-street chargers in Swingate and four electric car charging bays will be installed in Marshgate thanks to the Queensway development.*

*The Parking Standards Strategic Planning Document assures provision of charging points at 20% of communal parking spaces, and infrastructure so that this can be extended to all parking spaces, when new developments are built.*

*On most existing roads however we don't have the legal power to install chargers. Our Engineers are liaising with Hertfordshire County Council (the local Highway Authority) to reach an agreement for SBC to install chargers on the public highway. In the meantime, we are necessarily focussed installing chargers on SBC land.*

*The "75% grant" covers much of the cost, but it is capped at £7,500 per charger. Engineering works and the legal requirements to dedicate the space for electric vehicle charging only (which can cost several thousand pounds on its own) on top of installing the charger can mean the balance outstanding exceeds the £2,500 per charger you might expect. Simultaneously, to be affordable for residents electricity charges need to be kept low and cannot be counted on to recoup the costs of installation and maintenance. Given the financial pressures facing all Councils, widespread installation of chargers would be approached with a level caution, though Officers are seeking supplier match-funding that would reduce the financial commitment required of SBC (but also reduce the potential future return from sales of electricity).*

*A large part of demand for chargers in residential streets is from expected range anxiety. Drivers who are new to Electric Vehicles (EV) can fear they will need to top their car up at every opportunity or charge every night. Often, more experienced EV drivers don't take this approach but, like those driving other cars, plan to refuel only when needed. Affordable modern EVs have a range of 150-200 miles, while half of workers in Hertfordshire commute under ten miles so would only need to recharge once a week. As the charging technology is fast evolving, Officers will continue to assess the merits of fast charging points, as well considering residential charging options.*

*We are therefore working to hopefully introduce chargers at a number of local neighbourhood centres, allowing residents to fill up their electric cars a few minutes' walk from their homes. These would also be useful for customers of local shops, helping to support the town's economy. Exact locations are still being confirmed, looking at requirements such as the layout of the energy grid, and a bid prepared for government funding. They will be primarily on SBC land, spread across Stevenage, with permission likely to be sought for on-highway units in one or two locations. Completion of this project will depend on both successfully bidding for the government grant and gaining joint funding from an installation partner. Should this be successful we hope to have a total of at least ten residential chargers, offering power to up to twenty vehicles at a time, by the end of the 2021/22 financial year.*

*Development of a formal strategy around the provision of EV charging taking into account the considerations above, and if the funding bid for the current project is successful then the lessons we will doubtless learn from it, is to take place once the Council has consulted on and finalised its new overall Parking Strategy.*