

Reigate and Banstead Borough Council

Meeting of Council 30 July 2020

Questions by Members

Number	Question by	To be answered by	Subject
1	Councillor Brown	Councillor Humphreys, Executive Member for Place and Economic Prosperity	Communal Working Hubs
2	Councillor Brown	Councillor Horwood, Executive Member for Wellbeing and Intervention	Theatre on Earlswood Common
3	Councillor Essex	Councillor Knight, Executive Member for Housing and Benefits	Proposed Monthly Rents and Purchase Price at Council-led Housing Developments
4	Councillor Ritter	Councillor Bramhall, Executive Member for Neighbourhood Services	Pollinator Action Plan
5	Councillor McKenna	Councillor Biggs, Executive Member for Planning Policy	Extension of Permitted Development Rights
6	Councillor Sinden	Councillor Ashford, Executive Member for Community Partnerships	Ground Floor Community Space – Former Youth Association Hall, Marketfield Way

Councillor Brown asked the **Executive Member for Place and Economic Prosperity, Councillor Humphreys** the following question:

Question 1: Communal Working Hubs

The coronavirus pandemic is changing the way we live and work, with many residents of Reigate & Banstead moving to a pattern of homeworking for the foreseeable future.

In this context, the many building developments in towns such as Redhill being constructed and marketed to cater for an expected demand from commuters could become redundant or at least underused.

Has the council considered adapting to the 'new normal' by developing communal working spaces instead, or assigning part of a residential development for a shared working space?

Any such space could double up as a community hub promoting local arts initiatives, enhancing wellbeing in the community through creativity and collective purpose.

Examples of local residential developments where this type of communal working/leisure space are could be installed include Longmead centre, the former gasholder site in Earlswood, or the former golf clubhouse on Pendleton Rd. The pandemic has been a tragedy but there is now the opportunity to reshape the kind of town we want to live in.

Response:

The Council has been working hard through the pandemic to ensure we continue to deliver high quality services for our residents and businesses.

We have clearly demonstrated our resilience, with many of our councillors and officers working remotely from home.

Learning from this experience, I am sure this will have a positive impact on our future ways of working as an organisation.

While it is far too early to know what the long-term consequences of COVID-19 will be for businesses, we recognise that it is very likely that there will be an increasing demand to work more flexibly, at home or in shared work space.

I am pleased to say that the Council's adopted Development Management Plan already supports this.

The Plan recognises that whilst employment areas will continue to be the focus of economic activity, many small businesses operate outside of these areas both for flexibility and to save on costs.

To support entrepreneurship, the Plan seeks to provide opportunities for appropriate business uses, including home-based businesses, to be introduced outside of designated employment areas. It also requires high speed broadband to be provided on all new residential developments.

As part of the Planning Policy team's ongoing evidence gathering work, any changes in residential or office needs will be captured and responded to in any future plan.

In relation to the Council's own developments, I am pleased to say that we have been looking at providing workspace as part of our schemes for some time and well before the recent pandemic.

In Marketfield Way, internal amenity space is being provided in the residential part of the scheme for residents to meet and to co-work.

We are also exploring the feasibility of using part of the commercial space both in our Marketfield Way and Cromwell Road schemes to provide workspace or employment use.

The Council will continue to respond to the changing needs of businesses by actively supporting more flexible ways of working, as we recover from Covid-19.

Councillor Brown asked the **Executive Member for Wellbeing and Intervention, Councillor Horwood** the following question:

Question 2: Theatre on Earlswood Common

Could we have a free open-air, natural, theatre on Earlswood common? If not, what are the valid reasons for denying the community such an asset?

Response:

I am committed to continuing to explore ways in which we can provide new opportunities for residents and visitors to engage in the arts and expand the excellent work which the Harlequin Theatre and Greenspaces teams do in this regard.

Whilst an open-air theatre is an excellent idea – and one which I have discussed previously - it's one which will need proper consideration which will need to include site analysis (particularly as the site mentioned is common land) and likely requirement for planning consent.

I will continue to look in detail at this concept and work with officers at bringing some proposals forward.

Councillor Essex asked the **Executive Member for Housing and Benefits, Councillor Knight** the following question:

Question 3: Proposed Monthly Rents and Purchase Price at Council-led Housing Developments

This question concerns the council-led plans to develop housing, at Pitwood Park, Cromwell Road and the Marketfield Way road (ex-car park) sites. Please can you confirm the monthly rents and purchase price proposed for the affordable rented and for sale units, and who will hold the freeholds for all of the homes, both for the properties to rent and the properties to be sold.

Response:

Council officers have worked hard to keep these projects on track during the pandemic and I am pleased to say that all three projects have well and truly broken ground.

The Cromwell Rd and Pitwood Park developments sitting in my People Portfolio and Marketfield Way in my Executive colleague Cllr Humphrey's Place Portfolio.

Pitwood Park is currently expected to delivery 11 shared ownership units to be sold to a Registered Provider, providing 44% affordable housing with the remaining 14 units to be sold on the open market. Dependant on property size and type the expected sale range is between £250k - £410k. The site includes a mix of 1 & 2 bedroom flats and 2 & 3 bedroom houses.

The Council will be the freeholder of the block of flats including any communal areas and the houses will be transferred to the purchasing Registered Provider on a freehold basis.

The Council will receive a capital receipt for this transfer. Applicants for these properties will purchase an equity share from the RP and pay a discounted rent back to the RP on the remaining share. The RP will set the sale price and rent amount charged.

The current plan for the 32 flats being built on Cromwell Road is that 50% of the homes will be sold on a market sale basis, and 50% sold on a shared equity basis (75% sale to the applicant, with 25% share retained by RBBC). The market sale flats ranging from £240k - £310k and the Shared Equity sale value ranging from £180k - £233k. The homes are a mix of 1 & 2 bed flats and the freehold will be retained by the Council.

However, since adopting of our flagship Housing Development Strategy with the objective to enable more housing that is affordable to people who live or work locally, on both Pitwood Park & Cromwell Road we are looking at alternative tenure options, with the view to retaining a higher percentage of the stock and letting a greater number of the properties on an affordable rental basis.

With regards to the Marketfield Way development, the Council will retain the freehold of the entire development site, including the residential units in Marketfield Way and the long leasehold interest will be sold to Kooky Redhill.

The sale price for the residential elements of the scheme is commercially sensitive, however it has been provided in previous part 2 reports to the Executive in December 2019 and in a recent report to Commercial Ventures Executive Sub Committee in July 2020.

Councillor Ritter asked the **Executive Member for Neighbourhood Services, Councillor Bramhall** the following question:

Question 4: Pollinator Action Plan

In September 2019 Cllr McKenna put a motion to this council about wildlife friendly verges and open spaces, seeking to address the urgent need to support the biodiversity of our borough by changing cutting regimes to enable seed setting by wildflowers, thus supporting vital pollinators. It also addressed the need to reduce the use of harmful pesticides and followed the motion passed by Surrey County council last July, which required the production and implementation of a pollinator action plan.

Residents have raised concerns this year about grass cutting being done too often and cutting down areas where lots of wildflowers were in bloom.

Reigate and Banstead website states the following: "The grass cutting programme starts in March each year and runs until October. Each verge cutting cycle takes about five weeks and the teams continually cut until the end of the grass growing season."

Can the Executive member for Neighbourhood services tell us what progress has been made in Reigate and Banstead towards producing and implementing a pollinator action plan?

Response:

Thank you for your question. As a result of the motion tabled in September 2019, I can confirm that Officers from both the Borough and County have since been working collaboratively on the plans, measures and initiatives required to contribute towards the achievement of the motion.

Despite the onset of the pandemic, progress has continued to be made towards their implementation. At a Borough-level, four locations on the highways network through which to trial the introduction of wildflower-seeded verges have been identified. Of the four locations identified, one on the A217, near Burgh Heath has been prepared and seeded – the remaining three locations will be prepared at an appropriate point in future.

Officers have also been working with County-colleagues on the drafting of the SCC Tree Strategy that was subsequently approved at Cabinet in April 2020 – this contains a section on the maintenance of highways verges in a way which will restore biodiversity and support wildlife and grassland species.

I can offer reassurance that work is being undertaken on the production and implementation of the action plan, and I expect that I'll be able to offer a further update on progress in the coming months.

Councillor McKenna asked the **Executive Member for Planning Policy, Councillor Biggs** the following question:

Question 5: Extension of Permitted Development Rights

Relaxation of permitted development rules from August 2020 will allow extra flats to be built above existing blocks of flats built between 1948 and 2018, which could impact on the quality of our urban environments in many areas of the borough. In addition, the government has signalled its intent on undermining local planning, potentially replacing it with some form of zoning. This together with plans to require district councils to be replaced with unitary authorities could further weaken local democracy if this leads to decision making on planning being weakened. In light of these agreed and potential future changes will the Executive Member confirm if they have already written, or if not will write to the government objecting to these further extension of permitted development rights to resist these pressures, and what can the Council do to resist these and future muted measures so that the Council stand up against an increasingly centralised government?

Response:

This Council has consistently written in objection to the expansion of permitted development rights where they are felt to undermine design quality or local democracy and we will continue to do so.

In response to our lobbying of Government earlier this year, I am pleased to report that office to residential conversions now require an assessment of natural daylighting to the new properties created although this did not go as far as we had hoped in requiring them to set out minimum unit sizes.

The new permitted development rights due to come into force relating to extension of flatted blocks do require an assessment of various factors such as design and amenity and so allow us to retain greater control than could otherwise have been the case.

The long awaited Planning White Paper is yet to be published and so it is hard to speculate what it might include in the way of zoning or other changes.

However I can confirm that we will continue to defend the need to retain local control and democratic scrutiny over planning be it as part of any response to the White Paper or other Government consultations or in any future discussions regarding moves to a unitary authority.

Councillor Sinden asked the **Executive Member for Community Partnerships, Councillor Ashford** the following question:

Question 6: Ground Floor Community Space – Former Youth Association Hall, Marketfield Way

Please can you confirm what the future plans for use of the ground floor community space in the new block of flats on the site of the former Youth Association Hall on Marketfield Way, Redhill now that this building is nearing completion, including whether this includes evening and weekend use for activities that meet the needs of young people such as previous youth clubs and martial arts which took place in the earlier use of the site, and what support in terms of staff and funding the council will be providing to make this happen.

Response:

At the time of the 2017 planning application to redevelop the Lodgecrest site on Marketfield Way for 50 new homes including affordable - plus a community space. The small Community Hall which formed part of the site was principally the home of the Redhill Corps of Drums.

The application itself was actually supported by the Community Hall Tenants who were happy that there were appropriate alternative facilities for them in the locality and the Applicants had offered them financial support to relocate.

The Applicant agreed to transfer the community space to the Borough Council on a long-leasehold interest. And in addition to the lease, the council negotiated a £200,000 contribution from the Developer toward the fit out of the community space.

As the previous tenants had found alternative accommodation at the time of the planning application, there is no necessity for the community space to provide the same or similar uses as the Community Hall had done previously

My feeling is that this space provides a real opportunity for this council to support our community and voluntary sector partners. Work on how the voluntary sector space will be used is by no means finalised - but one of the recurring themes in our conversations with the voluntary sector has always been around access to affordable space. Possible uses might provide for short term hot desking, provision of private interview rooms with an additional possibility for larger safe spaces suitable for staff training, seminars and such like. More recently of course, our thoughts are focussed on how the voluntary sector has been affected by lockdown and the Sector's requirements post Covid-19.

The Community Partnerships team has recently conducted a survey of Voluntary and Community Sector partners and we are now also actively looking at options around how the Marketfield Way community space might benefit those organisation in need of access to Safe Spaces for their operations.

Turning to your concerns around youth clubs, would remind you that youth services are provided by Surrey County Council and I would signpost you to Cllr Essex in that respect. What I can say though is that the Community Partnerships team has responded to Surrey County Council's consultation on the future of youth provision and we remain very keen to pursue any opportunities to work with the County in this respect to ensure there are safe and inspiring places for young people across our Borough to spend their leisure time.