

# Reigate and Banstead Borough Council

Meeting of Council 11 February 2021

## Questions by Members

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| 1 | Cllr Essex         | Executive Member for Investments and Companies, Cllr Archer         | Horley Business Park |
| 2 | Cllr Ritter        | Executive Member for Investments and Companies, Cllr Archer         | Proposed Crematorium |
| 3 | Cllr McKenna       | Executive Member for Corporate Policy and Resources, Cllr Lewanski  | Energy Costs         |
| 4 | Cllr Whinney       | Executive Member for Planning Policy and Place Delivery, Cllr Biggs | Cladding             |

**Councillor Essex** asked the **Executive Member for Investments and Companies, Councillor Archer** the following question:

**Question 1: Horley Business Park**

Horley Business Park LLP (which comprises Berwick Hill properties Ltd, Mill Hill Properties (Horley) Ltd and Reigate and Banstead Borough Council) commissioned ecological surveys in 2017. The preliminary ecological appraisal was undertaken by Avian Ecology dated 5th July 2017. The Council has stated that it does not hold the survey in answer to a recent FOI request.

Tree felling was then undertaken to clear the majority of the woodland (only perimeter trees now remain) in the south-eastern part of the Horley Business Park site on land owned by Mill Hill Properties (Horley) Ltd. This occurred on Saturday 28th and Sunday 29th November 2020. It was reported that residents were told this was to create the access road to the industrial park. One of the Directors of Mill Hill Properties was reported to be on site directing the Contractor as the trees were felled.

Would the Council please state whether the activities of the Horley Business Park LLP should be made public and reconsider its position, both morally and legally, in continuing to partner with Mill Hill Properties through the Horley Business Park company (or in any other arrangement in the future).

**Response:**

The land in question where the felling took place is owned outright by Mill Hill Properties Ltd and the actions were carried out by Mill Hill Properties Ltd alone. For clarity, the land is not owned in any way by the Council or the Horley Business Park Joint venture. The actions that took place on that land are being looked at very closely by all the appropriate authorities and the Council takes very seriously tree felling that is not properly carried out. I can confirm that the Council had no prior knowledge of the action and would not have approved such activity. The Council has acted via the Tree Preservation process and is currently cooperating with the Police and the Forestry Commission. This information is already publicly known. In terms of our current relationship with Mill Hill Properties, there is naturally a limit as to what can be shared at this point but the Member's comments are noted.

**Supplementary Question:**

Councillor Archer you stated that it's not possible to share anything at this time, but I'd be grateful if, when it is possible to share that, either a public statement is made by the Councillor or by the Council, or at least shared with all Members of the Council as to what the situation is, when the situation changes and that the surveys which have been carried out are also made public.

**Supplementary Question Response:**

Of course, the joint venture that is Horley Business Park is an investment that the Council has made and the Council has clear and transparent governance in place via

the Commercial Ventures Executive Sub-Committee where reporting takes place on all activities and changes in those ownership structures. In addition, as the Councillor will know, I report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee every six months on the performance and activities and I look forward to being able to date up him and other Members in due course.

**Councillor Ritter** asked the **Executive Member for Investments and Companies, Councillor Archer**, the following question:

**Question 2: Proposed Crematorium**

Over 600 residents have signed an e-petition asking the council to reconsider their plans for a crematorium in Woodhatch. This e-petition was accepted and published on the website in December and on reaching 400 plus signatures should “automatically be referred to the Full Council for debate’ (RBBC Petition scheme guidelines) Since deciding that a debate at Full Council might prejudice members of the Planning Committee and taking down the petition, can the council now ensure that all of the residents who signed it are emailed with this explanation along with instructions on how to register their views on the Planning portal before the 18th February 2021 deadline?

**Response:**

May I start by apologising for any confusion that has been caused over the status of the petition and the presumption of an automatic referral to Full Council for debate.

The Council's petition scheme which you have referred to and can be found on the Council's website makes it clear that some petitions are excluded. These include petitions about planning and licensing matters where other procedures apply.

This petition was rejected because of the potential conflicts that could arise from members of the Planning Committee debating a live planning application at a meeting of the Full Council and also because a petition about a live planning application is better dealt with by the planning process, as set out in the petition scheme.

We have e-mailed all the signatories to the petition with this explanation and have also made it clear how they can make their own additional comments on the planning application.

**Supplementary Question:**

As the petition was taken down on the 15th January and residents who had signed it only notified by e-mail this Tuesday 9th February, I'd like to request an extension to be offered as a recognition of that delay, especially as I don't believe that the Planning portal yet has the document that describes how this site was chosen over other sites within the Borough, which was agreed, when I asked for it at January's meeting, would be released as part of the planning process?

**Supplementary Question Response:**

You're absolutely right, the signatories to the petition were e-mailed this week as you state and in that e-mail an apology was made for any delay in receiving that information. In terms of the window for people to make comments, that's a matter for Planning and I won't make a comment about that, but what I will say is it's really important with this planning application and all planning applications that we ensure that accurate and non-erroneous information is shared. I would just like to draw to your

attention the East Surrey Green Party website, which at the moment, is currently stating, and I quote, "as many of you will be aware a crematorium has been given planning permission by Reigate and Banstead Borough Council". It's here as a screen print, I will email it you directly to you after this Council meeting. I think it's really important, as I said, that we do not misdirect and mislead residents and I would really appreciate it if that information that is incorrect and erroneous was updated.

**Councillor McKenna** asked the **Executive Member for Corporate Policy and Resources, Councillor Lewanski** the following question:

**Question 3: Cost of Energy**

Please can you provide a full breakdown, by supplier and fuel type, of the financial cost and carbon impact of the energy and fuel used by Reigate and Banstead Borough Council, in its buildings and vehicle fleet in each of the last three years?

**Response:**

To provide a full breakdown that you've requested is extremely complex and it's not possible within the time available in advance of this Council meeting. What I can do though is provide you with a summary.

Firstly, in terms of financial cost:

Annual average figures, derived over the last three years, across our buildings and fleet were as follows:

- Gas: £60,958
- Electricity: £232,967
- Vehicle fuel: £464,674

Over this period the majority of our property energy was procured from N Power and Total Gas and Power on our behalf by Kent County Council. In terms of vehicle fuel, the majority, for the period was supplied by Linton Fuel Oils Limited.

Secondly, in terms of Carbon impact:

Here, I would point you to our Environmental Sustainability Strategy agreed last summer. This provides estimates of the Council's annual carbon emissions (at the time of writing) for purchased electricity, purchased gas and vehicle fuel, as follows:

- Gas: 385 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>
- Electricity: 473 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>
- Vehicle fuel: 634 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>

You will be aware that our environmental sustainability strategy sets out how the Council is aiming to achieve carbon neutrality for its operational emissions by 2030. As part of our journey towards this target, I can confirm that September 2020 we moved to renewable energy tariffs for 72% of our electricity. When the rest of our gas and electricity contracts come up for renewal we will once again be looking to switch these to renewable tariffs as well. In the meantime, the remainder of our gas and electricity emissions are now offset through UN based carbon reduction schemes. In terms of fuel used by our fleet we have already switched a number of our vehicles over to hybrid or electric and our new bin lorries include electric bin lifts, reducing fuel usage.

This year I'll be working with the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services, Councillor Natalie Bramhall, to make sure our shift towards low carbon transport continues, as vehicles come up for replacement and as technology continues to

evolve, so that we can be confident that service delivery standards are not compromised.

Finally, I would just like to restate the commitments in our environment sustainability strategy to continue to move this Council towards being carbon neutral by 2030 and to reassure Councillors that we will report on progress towards this goal annually to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

**Supplementary Question:**

I'd like to thank Councillor Lewanski for that useful summary and would appreciate the more detailed information and the summary in due course can be supplied in writing to me. That would be much appreciated.

My question really is that obviously we're making great progress towards the objective of a low carbon. From what you're saying it's difficult though to pin down how much progress we're making, whether we're having fits and starts or whether it's a steady as she goes sort of approach. So, it would be very useful to have a greater understanding from you, as to your view as to the extent to which it's moving in the right direction, is it in fits and starts, or is it a gradual process of evolution. I would also like to request that when you have the full information that we can have a meeting to discuss potentially how we could look at further innovations in technology, in transport types or in the way that we heat and power outbuildings to see if we can reduce our carbon emissions even further?

**Supplementary Question Response:**

I'll give you a mixture of both a written response and I'll try and give you a brief answer to your question. Officers have only had two days to provide all the details and when we are going back over 3 years of energy costs it does take a bit more time to provide this level of detail and I think you will get a report rather than just the standard written answer in some form of spreadsheet.

On your second point about the steady approach or whether it's fits and starts, I think we're definitely taking a steady approach. With our environmental sustainability strategy, we have regular meetings every quarter and with our sustainability approach, we're thinking about the bin lorries being moved at hybrid ones, electric bin lifts. We definitely don't do it in fits and starts, we have a planned approach and a plan progress for that. In terms of your final question regarding a meeting with regards to your key issues, I'm very happy to have a meeting with you and Officers.

**Councillor Whinney** asked the **Executive Member for Planning Policy and Place Delivery, Councillor Biggs** the following question:

**Question 4: Cladding**

Following the Grenfell Disaster, it was found that the cladding did not meet fire standards and was flammable, so all buildings with such cladding are dangerous. Most of these are flats but some schools and other buildings are so covered. Many flat owners are leasehold but they can not sell their flats, the cost of removal of cladding is totally unaffordable. Some have “marshals on patrol” to try to ensure the flats are safe but even such costs are unaffordable for many occupants. I am advised that flats with wooden balconies are also included in being unsaleable some such flats are in the area of Beech Drive not far from the Police Station.

There is a grant scheme but completion will take years to achieve. What is the Council’s Policy and can any financial assistance be offered, please?

**Response:**

Members will be aware that there is a motion to be debated later this evening on the subject of cladding and the debate will cover this question and more. I would therefore respectfully request that the question you ask be answered through the debate on the motion.