

Council, 29 July 2021, 19:30

Member questions on notice.

Council procedure rule 2.15

Q1

Question from Councillor Torra to Councillor Schofield

Question:

What is the Council doing to ensure that all of the hedges and trees next to paths and public roads, particularly on walking routes to schools, that Reigate and Banstead Borough Council is responsible for are cut sufficiently – noting the specified non-cutting season of May-October - to ensure, alongside efforts by Surrey County Council, the full width of pavements, paths and associated sight lines (for vehicles and pedestrians at junctions and visibility of road signs) are maintained?

Response:

Thank you for your question. I can confirm that as part of our highways maintenance operations, areas designated as priority sightlines such as junctions and concealed entrances are maintained to ensure both pedestrian and road user safety when using the highways network – this includes not only the mowing of grassed areas, but also the cutting back of vegetation and hedges.

It is important to note that where hedges and vegetation border footpaths and alleyways, it is the responsibility of the landowner or occupier to ensure that these do not encroach or create a potential hazard to the public using them.

Whilst hedges and vegetation across the borough and highways network are not generally cut during bird nesting season -as per the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981-, if potential public or road user safety risks are identified during the active season, targeted remedial works will take place subject to bird nesting surveys being undertaken.

In addition, I can also confirm that trees situated adjacent to highways are generally the responsibility of Surrey County Council, and their ongoing management and maintenance is dealt with by the County directly. However, where Borough Council trees are concerned, a regular inspection and maintenance programme is in place to ensure that any issues identified are addressed in an appropriate and timely manner.

Supplementary question:

Thanks to the Executive member for their reply. Can the cuts be scheduled and would the Executive member agree with me that the hedges on approaches to St John's, Earlswood and Lime Tree Schools are the responsibility of Reigate and Banstead and school timetables and the growing season of brambles and nettles

etc mean that these particular hedges need to have a more frequent schedule of cutting to allow safer access, especially when term starts in September and so we are not all having to brush ourselves against these brambles when we enter into the school playground?

Response:

I will take this up with the Greenspaces Team and take note of these particular hedges for a more frequent cutting schedule and will look into this and come back to you with a fully written answer.

Written response after the meeting:

Thank you for your questions. I can confirm that with regard to the hedges leading to St. John's School, these are the maintenance responsibility of the Borough Council, and as such, the sides of the hedges closest to the footpath will be considered for cutting on a more frequent schedule. However, aligned with the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 cutting the top of the hedges will still be maintained twice per annum, outside of nesting season.

In relation to the maintenance responsibility of the other schools mentioned, these are:

- Earlswood School - the hedge at the front of the school does not fall within the maintenance responsibility of RBBC, and as such, confirmation should be sought directly with the school; and
- Lime Trees School - the hedge around the perimeter of the school does not fall within the maintenance responsibility of RBBC, and as such, confirmation should be sought directly with the school. However, the Battlebridge Recreation Ground perimeter hedge is the responsibility of RBBC to maintain.

In anticipation of the commencement of the next academic year, I can confirm that we will ensure that the hedges are cut back on walking routes over the coming weeks to facilitate unobstructed passage upon their return in September.

Q2

Question from Councillor Harrison to Councillor Biggs

Question:

The government has unveiled their long-term plan to support the evolution and regeneration of high streets, with a commitment to breathe new life into town centres, with the 'Build Back Better High Streets' strategy.

We are told that it will transform derelict buildings, clean up streets and support a renewed sense of community. Councils are to be given new powers and are encouraged to use existing powers to upgrade towns.

On a scale of 1 (good) to 5 (poor), how does the Council evaluate the situation in

each of its 4 towns – Banstead Village, Horley, Redhill and Reigate? What are the Councils top priorities in each of these towns?

Response:

Each of the Borough's 4 main centres have their own individual opportunities and challenges which make them unique and so it is impossible to score them in a simplified way. We are fortunate that, to date, vacancies within the centres have remained relatively low but we are acutely conscious of the challenges facing the retail sector which have been accelerated by the pandemic.

Between the Economic Prosperity, Planning and Place Delivery Portfolios we are considering and undertaking measures to revitalise each of the centres. Part of the Build Back Better High Streets strategy includes the changes to the use classes order which, whilst offering flexibility of use also reduces a key tool that we once had in helping shape our centres to best suit their overall needs and the effects of this will be monitored.

Aside from this we have been successful in recent years securing almost £5million external funding to invest in our town centres. This funding has been used to undertake a range of activities to boost the centres, such as the commitment to the development of Marketfield Way in Redhill which has the potential to transform the town and its leisure offer. In Horley a major project is underway to deliver change to the town centre through a range of public realm and infrastructure improvements and potential regenerative developments. We have supported pop-up shops and active shopfront displays to maintain vibrancy as is evident in Reigate town centre.

We also work hard to maintain the attractiveness of the centres' public realm such as using CIL funds to support the floral displays in Banstead. We also hold a Town Improvement Fund which looks after low level maintenance and cosmetic improvement across our towns as we are acutely aware how a towns attractiveness contributes to its vibrancy and vitality. Rather than each centre have a single focus or priority, we are therefore undertaking range of activities to ensure they are attractive, welcoming and vibrant places for our residents and businesses.

Finally, we are using the Welcome Back Fund to perform research on how residents view and use our Town Centres and what our High Street Businesses are thinking, plus footfall/visitor analysis that will give us some insight on how the town is used and who is visiting. This data will help formulate our overall Town Centre Strategy.

Supplementary question:

It wasn't my intention to have a long debate at this meeting but I think it would be helpful if you (Cllr Biggs) could agree to come to Overview and Scrutiny or to other meetings with Councillors to go through these in detail and see how this develops, if I could have that undertaking that would be appreciated?

Response:

Councillor Harrison I would be pleased to do that, and I would suggest that I do this with my colleague on the Executive, Councillor Humphries, on the business side.

Q3

Question from Councillor Essex to Councillor Brunt

Question:

I would like to ask this question on behalf of Reigate and Redhill CND group who are concerned the government is planning to increase nuclear weapons by 40% and that our borough council area should recognise that this is against the Nuclear non-proliferation treaty, which the UK government is signed up to. Would the Leader join me in writing to our MPs to challenge the increase of Nuclear Arsenal by 40%, which is against the spirit of the non-proliferation treaty, which the UK has committed to, and will the Council formally recognise this being the 40th anniversary of the non-proliferation treaty in some way?

Response:

Thank you Councillor Essex for making your request on behalf of Reigate and Redhill CND and I would just say if they are watching this evening, I would hope that they feel in the future they can actually bring this question to us directly. I respect that they filtered it through yourself Councillor Essex, but I do hope, and I'm sure Madam Mayor you would join me in saying this, that we are welcoming to all to come and present their questions directly.

The question I think relates to the Government's Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy published earlier this year. The request as you will recognise does not relate to any functions of the Council.

On that basis, I consider that it is not a request I can support on behalf the Council. With regards to the marking of the 40th anniversary of the Nuclear non-proliferation treaty, which I certainly recognise was a significant achievement, if a residents group wish to mark this. I will obviously urge them to do that in a responsible way. If they wish to approach the Council in terms of using its parks and open spaces, then I'm sure that our team at the Council would be happy to help them with their enquiry.

Supplementary Question:

In terms of the 2-part answer to the 2-part question, thank you for the answer to the first part. With regards to the second part, as well as supporting a local group, as we all do, as the Council and using our public spaces and facilities, would you feel it's appropriate for the Council itself to formally recognise this 40th anniversary, for

example, at the Hiroshima Peace Day which is on the 6 August, which is relatively soon?

Response:

Thank you Councillor Essex, I am happy that we consider that and in liaison with the Mayor's office we can look at how this can be built into the Corporate Programme for the year.

Q4

Question from Councillor Booton to Councillor Brunt

Question:

What can the Council do to ensure resident's views are collected and considered in respect of improvements and ideas in relation to the Borough's Greenspaces? This is in addition to online provisions that I acknowledge are already in place however are often overlooked or simply not accessible to residents who don't have internet access.

Response:

Thank you for your question. I wholeheartedly agree that the feedback from residents is essential to the Council when it is reviewing and considering improvements to services and not just in green spaces, that we provide to our residents and we have a responsibility to ensure we provide this feedback in the most straightforward and easily accessible means as possible.

For many residents, online methods are quick and easy and so a significant proportion of the Council's resident engagement take place through online means and I think we have particularly seen this through Covid, a lot more people have used this as their primary way of communicating with the Council. However, offline methods are also used to ensure that those who are currently digitally excluded or socially excluded will also have a voice and also have the opportunity to contribute.

I can confirm that those without internet access regularly engage with the Council through various means including by post, by phone, the Borough News, its network of Community Development workers, billboards on the side of our bin lorries, just to name a few.

I would also highlight one of the key responsibilities for all of us as Councillors is to consult and engage with our residents over the services that they enjoy from the Council. This can and does take many forms and is a great way for the Council to reach out to some of our most excluded and difficult to reach groups. In my own ward, this weekend, we have community fun day at our local football club, where we as local Councillors will have a stall, which will enable us to discuss and take feedback quite literally from residents, and at the same event, the team that is developing proposals for the improvement of the Merstham Rec, will also be there on hand to talk directly to residents and receive feedback from the proposals and take feedback and suggestions. This is a project additionally that the Council has also established a focus group of local residents, who all volunteered to take part in

the discussions at various stages of the project. While it may not be practical to set up focus groups on everything we want to do, I hope this is an example of the different ways the Council tries to reach out and engage with people through all mediums and not just through the digital medium of the internet.

Supplementary question:

Really happy to hear that there are other alternative methods that residents can communicate their thoughts back to. One suggestion I had, and this stems from a belief that it's always good to get at the source feedback if you can. For people that specifically use our green spaces such as the Earlswood Lakes area, would it be possible that we could consider putting a comments box or something similar there, so users of the area at the time they are using those facilities, are able to leave their comments directly with us for regular review by Council workers?

Response:

Thank you Councillor Booton for your suggestion, I certainly think this a good idea and I would suggest that this is something that could be raised with the Earlswood Commons Steering Committee which covers the governance over Earlswood and I have another question about that in a minute.

Question from Councillor Sinden to Councillor Ashford**Question:**

This question is about what support sufferers from Long Covid can receive in Reigate and Banstead. I understand that there is a Long Covid Clinic at East Surrey Hospital, but it has a long waiting list. Can you confirm how many Long Covid clinics are operating in the Borough and what other support is being given to them?

Response:

Unfortunately, this question directly relates to matters which are the domain of our NHS colleagues and are not part of my portfolio. As such, I cannot comment on the numbers of Long Covid clinics in the borough or their waiting lists.

What I can tell you, is that since the arrival of Covid, the Community Partnerships team has forged really strong partnerships with health sector colleagues across Surrey Heartlands, First Community Health and Care, local Primary Care Networks and the GP Federations.

These new partnerships combined with excellent partnerships with our Voluntary and Community Sector partners and Surrey County Council help us support the wellbeing of all our residents.

I am also very pleased to say that our new community centres transformation project increasingly offers growing opportunities for partnership working with NHS and Voluntary and Community Sector colleagues to support those residents whose wellbeing has been impacted by Covid.

The original written question also refers to Leisure Services and with this in mind, I have consulted with my colleague, the Executive Member for Leisure and Culture, Councillor Sachdeva, who has asked me to tell you that she will provide a written answer in due course.

Question from Councillor Harp to Councillor Schofield**Question:**

To provide clarity for our residents, could the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services explain the council's current policy and practice relating to the mowing of grass verges for both residential roads and larger highways?

Response:

Thank you for your question. I can confirm that the Council are contracted by Surrey County Council to undertake highways verge mowing, which comprises four urban cuts and two rural cuts per year. However, dependent on grass growth rates, the Council may undertake additional cuts where required.

As I stated in an earlier question, areas designated as priority sightlines such as junctions and concealed entrances are maintained to ensure both pedestrian and road user safety when using the highways network – this obviously includes the cutting of grass, but also the cutting back any other vegetation as well.

I can also confirm that some highways areas are left to naturalise for their biodiversity benefits, and these are cut in the late summer to prevent the growth of any scrub and dominant vegetation, with any arisings collected where possible. However, in these areas a 1m swathe from the roadside will continue to be cut throughout the year, and is a contractual requirement conditioned by the County Council.

Supplementary Question:

Thank you Councillor Schofield for your answer so far. I am not certain if you're aware, Surrey County Council recently published a new document called Surrey's New Tree Strategy, and as you mentioned Reigate and Banstead cuts the verges in our area on behalf of Surrey County Council and it used to be 8 -10 cuts per year in urban areas and it is currently 4 cuts. In this document that Surrey County Council has produced, they maintain, as you say, rural verges will be cut twice a year with that 1M strip by the side of the road, but there is no mention of the forthcoming policies specifically relating to urban verges. What they do say is all verges should have a full width cut in the autumn to prevent woody shrub growth. They also say with that 1 autumn mowing, residents should be encouraged to rake up the grass themselves to discourage the growth of coarse weeds and rank grass. Do you know whether Reigate and Banstead intends in future to only cut residential roads once a year in the autumn and to encourage residents to rake up the grass themselves, or will it be the case as in the past, where the County Council contracts might stipulate a minimum number of grass cuttings and the Borough Council will do additional cutting to keep our residents happy?

Response:

Thank you Councillor Harp, no I hadn't read the new Tree Strategy from Surrey County Council yet, but obviously I will look into this very closely. I'm pleased it confirms rural twice a year, this is consistent with my reply, but I'm surprised it doesn't mention urban verges as you said so I will look into this, and if I may I will ensure there is a full written response given to you on this.

Written response after the meeting:

Thank you for your question. I can confirm that Surrey County Council's new tree strategy states that four urban grass cuts and two rural grass cuts will take place each year, and this is the frequency that the Borough Council intends to maintain as part of our highways maintenance obligations, subject to any changes stipulated by SCC in future.

With regard to the point relating to encouraging residents to rake grass arisings post-highways maintenance operations, further clarity is in the process of being sought from SCC – a further update will be provided once received.

Q7

Question from Councillor Chandler to Councillor Biggs**Question:**

Following the progressive proposals set out in the Surrey County Council Local Transport Plan LTP4 for Consultation, will Reigate and Banstead Borough Council confirm how they will take a lead on the measures set out by the County Council, and in particular how this could be applied to manage demand down for fossil fuel powered transport to Reigate Town Hall?

Response:

We have been engaging with Surrey County Council in the drafting of the LTP4 and will be providing comments on it. Of course, we are supportive of its measures to promote more sustainable modes of transport, reduce reliance on the private car and manage down carbon emissions though I think the Borough can help far beyond just those trips to the town hall.

Many of the proposals within the draft LTP4 dovetail with measures that the Borough is already undertaking or seeking to introduce, such as supporting digital connectivity, requiring electric charging points and cycle parking within our Development Management policies and incorporation of sustainability measures into our planning decisions.

We are also preparing a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (or LCWIP) to improve infrastructure for cyclists and pedestrians. The outcome of this work will be a list of priority projects which have been carefully assessed and reviewed. These will then move on to the detailed design and engagement stage which will form the next generation of improvements which comply with the latest and very rigorous

Department for Transport LTN1/20 guidance. These routes will extend and enhance the existing network including routes and local improvements already in the delivery pipeline. These ongoing plans and programmes will provide tangible support and help promote active travel throughout the Borough.

In addition, we have recently consulted on our own Climate change and sustainable construction SPD. Overall, this has been well received with much positive feedback and helpful suggestions which officers are working through. The SPD is scheduled for adoption in the autumn.

In some areas, the County will be responsible for bringing about change, such as introducing traffic calming measures or redesigning street networks and we will support them in this, assisting where we can.

We are also consulting on a new Strategic Infrastructure Programme starting this autumn, which I hope will see many of these sustainability measures funded by development within the borough.

I am therefore encouraged by LTP4 and can see many ways in which the Borough Council can help implement and supplement the measures within it to help us drive down carbon emissions.

Supplementary question:

Thank you for your remarks Councillor Biggs, would the Council consider introducing a workplace parking levy at the Town Hall in order to stress the urgency of where we are with our fossil fuel emissions and also to try and change the culture towards using the sustainable infrastructure that we are hoping to put into place, i.e. electric charging points, cycling and walking infrastructure?

Response:

Thank you Madam Mayor, I'm more than happy to look into those.

Q8

Question from Councillor Ritter to Councillor Brunt

Question:

Many residents have been commenting and asking questions about the way in which our Greenspaces are managed, perhaps since the lockdowns over the past year have brought many more people into contact with their local outdoor areas but also as there is a growing awareness of the need to turn the tide on biodiversity loss by managing our green spaces to enable insects, pollinators, butterflies, birds and other wildlife to thrive, alongside our enjoyment of them.

As a new member of the Earlswood Common Management steering group I am aware that there has been a discussion about public consultation on the Management plan that is currently under review. However, it would appear to the public, from our website, that the last time this group met was in February 2020 (as Nov 2020 and June 2021 meeting minutes are not yet posted on the website) and

there is no mention about the Management Plan review or how residents will be able to feed into this.

Given the strong public interest can you give assurance that the review of Redhill and Earlswood Commons Management plans are being given the urgency they deserve (particularly as the last Earlswood Common plan expired in 2013 and the golf course closed in March 2019) and that a date will soon be set for a public consultation to enable the plan to be agreed and in the public domain this year and in time for winter tree planting?

Response:

Thank you for your question. I can assure you that the Management Plan for Earlswood and Redhill Commons, while it has expired, the site appropriate management and operational activities do continue on site.

Furthermore, I am happy to confirm that public consultation for the development of the new Management Plan is currently being planned and managed by the Council's Communications Team, with an announcement on the dates and timescales expected over the coming months.