

Council Meeting: 12th December 2013

Councillor J.C.S. Essex will ask the **Executive Member for Finance, Councillor V.W. Broad** the following question:-

RIGHT TO BUY INITIATIVE

I note that the Council received £800,000 from 25 right-to-buy sales in 2012-13 and is on track to receive at least double that figure this year on the basis of 51 right-to-buy sales so far in 2013-14. Will the Council allocate this money to fund the provision of replacement affordable housing stock in the Borough?

OBSERVATIONS

Firstly, I should like to thank Cllr Essex for his question.

The short answer is no, but I do have some observations.

I would like to make it clear that the numbers of sales quoted by Councillor Essex appear to relate to expressions of interest and/or applications to buy. Actual sales are less than half of the figures quoted.

For instance, Raven Housing Trust has confirmed that there were 14 right-to-buy sales in 2012/13 - not the 25 in the question - and that the figure for 2013/14 is similarly overstated with only 22 properties sold to date.

This is far fewer than the number of new homes being created in schemes such as those in Horley - and elsewhere.

Irrespective of the accuracy of these figures, I am sure Councillor Essex is aware, there is no constraint on how the Council spends the receipts received from right-to-buy sales under the terms of the Large Scale Voluntary Transfer of our housing stock to Raven Housing Trust in 2002.

The only requirement is that these monies are accounted for as a capital receipt and are used for capital expenditure purposes only.

Our capital receipts reserve is the main source of funding for the Council's capital programme.

Or, to put it another way, our capital reserves (currently in excess £20m) are what enable us - a relatively small Council - to deliver:

- very significant projects,
- in the middle of a recession, and,
- at a time of unprecedented reductions in central government grant support.

It was only last week that the Executive approved 3 major regeneration projects – with an overall value approaching £30m - which will deliver huge benefits to our residents. Affordable housing has been deliberately included as a major factor within these projects as have leisure facilities, community facilities and improvements to parks and public spaces.

In delivering our Corporate Plan priorities we are mindful of the need to deliver not only affordable housing but a balanced provision of other facilities for the Borough. This strategy ensures that we make the best possible use of our capital reserves.

As we do not normally build houses ourselves this means that to achieve our objectives, we must work with partners, such as Raven Housing Trust. In this respect we have three Councillor representatives on their Board. This arrangement ensures that the projects brought forward reflect our desire to satisfy the demand for affordable housing. On the strength of the projects recently approved in this chamber, it is an approach that delivers results.

Further, I should like to add that I am a little surprised at Councillor Essex's question as it indirectly suggests that this Council is not doing enough towards supplying Affordable Housing. The Core Strategy agreed for submission by this Council, and for which the examination hearings have just been completed, makes provision for 460 new homes per year, and aims to ensure that 30% of these will be affordable housing.

That is this Council's agreed strategy and one towards we are all working.

Council Meeting: 12th December 2013

Councillor Ms S. Finch will ask the **Executive Member for Planning and Development, Councillor M.J. Miller** the following question:-

LONGMEAD SCHOOL BUILDING, REDHILL - LISTING

At the Planning Committee meeting in January 2009, it was noted that the 1910 Longmead School building in Redhill met the criteria for local listing but its future was "dependent on the outcome of a feasibility study on its retention." On enquiry recently, I was told that this feasibility study is still ongoing. Is it possible to give an update on the feasibility study and confirm when it will be completed?

OBSERVATIONS

The Longmead School building in Redhill is not currently identified as a locally listed building. The last review of the Local Listing list was completed in late 2012 and at its meeting on 19th December 2012 the Planning Committee agreed revisions to the list and which have been subsequently adopted. No request to locally list the building was made at the Planning Committee when the revised list was agreed. It is not considered appropriate to locally list the building and any future proposals for the site will be considered on merit.

The Longmead School building is owned by Surrey County Council and therefore any proposals for the building and the site are likely to be formulated and presented by the County Council. At the present time no specific proposals based on a feasibility study have been presented to the Borough Council.

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Councillor Mrs P. Shillinglaw will ask the **Executive Member for Leisure, Councillor A.J. De Save** the following question:-

INCREASING TOURISM AND INWARD INVESTMENT

What steps has the Portfolio Holder for Leisure taken to increase tourism and inward investment for the Borough?

OBSERVATIONS

The Council has been working closely with Visit Surrey, the County Council and other partners to increase tourism for the Borough. The Visit Surrey website is now used to post information on local attractions and events and the Community Rail Partnership has also promoted our area.

Officers have been contributing to the creation of a Tourism Strategy for the County with colleagues from Visit Surrey, the County Council and other Districts and Boroughs.

Other inward investment opportunities have been pursued through Surrey County Council and Coast to Capital, the Local Enterprise Partnership.

Supplementary Question on Borough Boundary Signs

A decision was made about three years ago to remove all 18 of the Borough Boundary signs as they were around 20 years old and dilapidated. It was decided at the time not to replace them as limited funds were thought to be best used elsewhere.

There is no provision within existing budgets for new signs. It is estimated that like for like replacement would cost around £1,500 per sign, this gives a total estimated replacement cost of £27,000. The signs would need to be cleaned and maintained and there is a cost attached to this too.

If Members wish to fund new signs this will need to be considered alongside other potential projects as part of the review of the capital programme. The funding available needs to be used wisely, and the most important projects given priority.

I would comment that there is an ever increasing number of hits on the Visit Surrey website coming from mobile devices. This suggests that day visitors make their decisions about where to visit 'on the move' with factors such as weather and time of day and current location being important factors.

Signs might help give a sense of place at a local level, but might not be the best way to increase visitor numbers.

Council Meeting: 12th December 2013

Councillor C.T.H. Whinney will ask the **Leader of the Council, Councillor Mrs J.M.A. Spiers** the following question:-

MAINTENANCE OF THE PRIORY, REIGATE

Madam Leader, I asked you this question a year ago about The Priory, a Grade I listed building in Priory Park which you have described as “the jewel in the crown” of the Borough. This building is owned by this Council but on a long lease to Surrey County Council. You were kind enough to give a full answer then.

A year ago I had written advice from Surrey County Council that there was budgeted to spend in this financial year £1/2m with the same amount for this coming year. I note that there is work being undertaken on the first floor at the front (south side) of the building and netting on the first floor at the back of this part. In addition of course there is conversion of a room to another class room at the far back. However residents and myself are anxious to know what progress there has been in the last twelve months.

Please will you advise what has been achieved so far this year and at what cost, what is planned for the coming year and what is budgeted in the next financial year on the maintenance of this building, and is this to the full satisfaction of the owner, this Council?

OBSERVATIONS

Surrey County Council has a full repairing lease of this building and has been undertaking a significant amount of work at the property during the last year, both in terms of investigations, repairs and also construction works.

In terms of maintenance budget, they had made provision to spend £500,000 during the current financial year and have so far spent or committed £300,000. A further £500,000 has been budgeted for 2014/15.

There are two major items of work that have now been identified following structural investigations. The first item is the roof above the museum area. It was discovered during intrusive investigations that the supporting beams of this roof had failed and, as a result, the roof will need to be removed and replaced. This is a substantial piece of work that

will take around 9-12 months to complete and will cost some £350,000.

In addition to this, further critical structural issues have been identified with the floor beams of the classroom above the Holbein Room. Temporary supports are in place and specification and programme for the extensive structural work required has drawn up. That work will take in the order of 4-6 months at an estimated cost of £300,000.

This is obviously all very specialist work, because of the building's listed status, and has required the approval of English Heritage. In addition, detailed discussions have been ongoing with the contractor that will carry out the works. Those discussions have now been concluded and a programme and timetable to carry out the works will now be agreed.

In terms of future works, a maintenance condition survey was undertaken by external surveyors in 2010 and was updated in 2012. A further programme of condition surveys commenced in October. A first draft of that survey report is expected by the end of January and this will inform a new 5-year planned programme and full understanding of the future financial commitment.

I think that this demonstrates the County Council's commitment to the maintenance of this important building and reassures us that they are taking their obligations seriously.

Council Meeting: 12th December 2013

Councillor G. Norman will ask the **Executive Member for Recycling and Street Services, Councillor A.J. Kay** the following question:-

RECYCLING SERVICE

It has been reported that Lord de Mauley, a DEFRA Minister, will be writing to all local authorities informing them that new European Union Guidance coming into force on 1st January 2015, will require all Councils to collect recyclable materials separately.

The new guidance suggests that the separate collection of materials would minimise possible contamination, either at source or at the transfer station, allowing the recyclables to go straight to a processing plant.

As this Council has invested many millions of pounds in a co - mingled service, can the Executive Member advise as to how this guidance would be received?

OBSERVATIONS

This guidance does not align well with what is happening within Surrey. For Surrey, the preferred route to maximise recycling is through commingled recyclable materials. This guidance, depending on how it's interpreted, may be in conflict with current practice.

These requirements apply where separate collection is technically, environmentally and economically practical and is necessary to provide high quality recyclates. However we are already delivering high quality material, albeit comingled, to our reprocessors.

Reigate & Banstead, in conjunction with the Surrey Waste Partnership, will be monitoring EU guidance and any new legislation changes, especially how this is transposed into English law.