

Council Meeting: 13th February 2014

Councillor G.P. Crome asked the **Leader of the Council, Councillor Mrs J.M.A. Spiers** the following question:-

BATTLE BRIDGE SITE, MERSTHAM - TRAVELLERS

Can the Leader confirm what actions have been taken by the Council following this weekend's traveller incursions on to the Battle Bridge Site in Merstham and confirm what support they have received from the local police?

OBSERVATIONS

Thank you Councillor Crome for your question.

Council and Police officers attended the Battlebridge site together on Monday afternoon. All travellers on the site were given notice to quit by the Council. The Police followed this up by issuing a formal notice under S61 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 to all vehicles and caravans on the site, giving the travellers until midday on Tuesday to vacate the site.

I am pleased to report that the travellers responded to this notice by leaving the site on Monday night. The Police followed them and they left our Borough, ending up in Warlingham in the Metropolitan Police area. The Surrey Police have been keeping an eye on the travellers in case they return to our county and have been keeping in touch with our officers.

The S61 notice is what prompted the travellers to leave. The joint action of the Council and Police and their close working on this matter secured this excellent result.

Neighbourhood Services staff started clearing and securing the site on Tuesday morning and are to be thanked for their prompt action.

The travellers were moved on from the site within a day or two, which I think is a fairly speedy response.

I think that in future, we can look forward to an even speedier response, as we move towards a closer working relationship with the Police. Both the Council and the Police are committed to this. Our officers and Police officers will soon be sharing office accommodation on Middle Block 1 and sharing regular briefings to tackle problems such as this as and when they arise.

In the very short amount of time that the travellers were on the site they managed to dump a large amount of rubbish.

To ensure that the site was cleared up as quickly as possible we employed a contractor with a mini digger to push all the fly tipping up together, then we utilised grab lorries to remove it all from the site.

Whilst on site the contractor also repaired the height barriers and gate that had been damaged when padlocks had been cut off.

In addition the cost of replacing 5 padlocks together with a few hours of our own staff litter picking came to just under £2,000.

Council Meeting: 13th February 2014

Councillor J.C.S. Essex asked the **Executive Member for Economy and Jobs, Councillor R.C. Newstead** the following question:

MARY PORTAS FUND

We understand that the Council received £100,000 from the Mary Portas Fund, of which more than half remains unspent.

Does the Executive Member agree that Redhill town centre, which has two impending large supermarket developments, would benefit from a study into how best to mitigate the impact on the existing shops, similar to that recently conducted for Horley, and that this would be a good use of some of the Portas money?

OBSERVATIONS

Thank you Cllr Essex for your question, and your interest in the high street innovation funding.

The Council received £100,000 through the High Street Innovation Fund, which was split between Redhill and Horley.

I do not believe that we should use this funding for studies. As part of the Core Strategy development we have undertaken numerous studies. These have informed our planning policies and our regeneration plans and shown that Redhill needs 2-3 supermarkets to support local demand.

In Redhill, the focus has been on increasing footfall, which the retailers themselves identified as the best use for this funding. Events such as the Redhill & Reigate 150 celebrations and Christmas fireworks have already received approximately £13,000 of the funding. Further events are in development.

Council Meeting: 13th February 2014

Councillor Mrs L.J. Brunt asked the **Executive Member for Economy and Jobs**, **Councillor R.C. Newstead** the following question:

REIGATE MARKET

A recent survey carried out by local resident, PR Expert and blogger Philippa Ratcliffe has highlighted a growing desire from residents to see an improved farmers market in Reigate.

Firstly by making it more accessible to residents by moving it to a Saturday and secondly to encourage a greater variety and number of stalls.

Will the Executive Member for Economy and Jobs pledge to work with me to achieve this aim of bringing a much improved Saturday Artisan Food and Farmers Market to the people of Reigate and the wider Borough?

OBSERVATIONS

Thank you Councillor Mrs Brunt for your question. I don't want you to think, Madam Mayor, that there has been any collusion between the Councillors for Reigate Hill Ward in the planting of this question. I understand Councillor Mrs Brunt is asking the question on behalf of Councillor Crome, who has already asked a question.

So taking the last part of his question first, I would be delighted for him to work with me, but not the other way round, to achieve a better market offer for Reigate.

In fact this matter was first raised with me on 7th August last year at a meeting of Reigate Business Guild, which I try to attend regularly. At that time dissatisfaction was expressed at the Farmers Market, which had shrunk to three stalls. The Guild originally had ideas of running the market themselves but then found that there was more to it than setting up a trestle table, piling it high, and shouting the odds. The costs, particularly of Public Indemnity Insurance, plus the work involved, led them to drop the idea.

On 16th August I chaired a meeting between representatives of the Guild, one of our officers and Lew Hughes of Hughmark Continental, who operate markets in the borough for us, with a view to reinvigorating the Farmers Market which is scheduled to be held on the fourth Friday of each month. All parties wanted a successful market – the Guild and the Council because it would increase footfall in the Town Centre and Hughmark because without any traders they don't make any money. All parties agreed that the market should be moved to a Saturday when

there are more shoppers in the town, rather than a Friday when it was active only around lunchtime. Hughmark were happy to assist the Guild by providing stalls and facilities and to permit the Guild to nominate stall holders of their choice. The Guild went away to work on the detail but decided to relaunch the market in the spring rather than in the run-up to Christmas because they wanted to focus on their Christmas fair in Church Street.

Subsequently the Guild have held a number of meetings with officers. Clearly since Christmas our officer team have been engaged in more pressing priorities but I can assure members that we are prepared to explore any opportunity to enhance the market offer in Reigate. Mrs Ratcliffe is pushing on an open door.

Hughmark are on an annual contract and we will shortly be inviting tenders to run the market. This will be managed through the Council's procurement process, in accordance with the Financial Standing Orders. It will be open to the Business Guild or anyone else. The Market proposals will be subject to approval by Councillors in the normal way before any agreement is signed.

Council Meeting: 13th February 2014

Councillor D.J. Pay asked the **Executive Member for Health, Councillor Mrs R. Renton** the following question:-

LANDFILL SITE, REDHILL

In relation to the Biffa landfill site at Patteson Court outside Redhill, please can the Portfolio Holder update me on the latest actions which Biffa have taken to reduce the odours emanating from the site, in particular the actions requested by the Environment Agency on their recent site visits, which found shortcomings in the existing odour management arrangements?

Although extreme weather might account for some of the problem, does she agree that it unacceptable for Biffa and the EA to allow any repeat of the persistent odours which have seriously detracted quality of life of thousands of local residents in recent weeks and put at risk this Council's hard work in boosting Redhill's image?

OBSERVATIONS

Thank you for your question Councillor Pay and may I take the opportunity to assure you that our Officers in Environmental Health have been very active in putting pressure on both Biffa and the Environment Agency to do something about this problem.

The Environment Agency is the regulatory authority responsible for this type of amenity and enforcement action falls to them rather than the Council.

The smell that residents are suffering from is gas that is escaping from the site. In normal circumstances this gas would be burnt away and the odour would be barely noticeable, if at all, but since January the smell has been intolerable and over 200 residents have complained. Part of the problem has been the recent inclement weather but this is not the only problem and the Environment Agency have told us that work that they required at the site has not been carried out. In agreement with the Environment Agency Biffa have now produced an action plan which should alleviate the problem and I will be seeking reassurance from them that this will minimise the impact in future.

In addition to this the Environment Agency have given a commitment to carry out air quality monitoring to assess the health impacts of the odour and will be working closely with Public Health England and our Officers to consider the data obtained. A further regulatory inspection is due to take place at the site tomorrow (Friday 14th) to assess the progress of the work that is underway.

I, the Leader, Council Officers and the local MP are shortly meeting with the Environment Agency to seek assurances that this problem will not persist in negatively affecting our residents.

A question and answer briefing for residents will be available on the RBBC website tomorrow to inform members of the public of the work that has been done to deal with this issue.

Actions underway on site as follows:

In addition to additional capping and temporary cover to deal with the short term problem specific improvements that are underway by Biffa are:

- The installation of additional gas collection wells.
- The installation of gas infrastructure and collection wells in the currently operational;
- The sealing of leachate wells, by the installation of new caps.

Council Meeting: 13th February 2014

Councillor M.A. Brunt asked the **Executive Member for Health, Councillor Mrs R. Renton** the following question:

FOOD HYGIENE RATINGS

In last weeks Surrey Mirror there was an article on Food Hygiene Ratings.

In the Reigate and Banstead area it states that 2 premises have a 0 out of 5 rating and 17 premises have a 1 out of 5 rating for Scores on the Doors.

Can the Portfolio holder for Health please advise what is being done to ensure improvements are made to an acceptable level and how long premises are given to get to this level?

OBSERVATIONS

When a food business is visited and hygiene is poor immediate corrective action is required and in one of the cases of our current zero rated the premises actually closed for 2 weeks to undertake deep cleaning and staff training.

Further inspection and coaching is generally undertaken and in officers experience improvements are speedy. If not then formal action is the likely outcome.

Whilst the business can ask to be re-rated, in certain circumstances, even where there has been significant improvement, this re-rating cannot happen for 3 months.

Whilst the business cannot be re-rated for 3 months compliance visits are generally undertaken within 2 weeks of the initial visit to ensure that standards are improved and any risk to health has been removed.

Where formal action is necessary the time period for compliance will vary dependant on the nature of the risk

Council Meeting: 13th February 2014

Councillor C.T.H. Whinney asked the **Executive Member for Housing and Welfare**, **Councillor J.M. Ellacott** the following question:-

POVERTY IN THE BOROUGH AND THE COUNCIL'S ACTIONS TO ALLEVIATE THIS

There is growing concern among residents about the actual and perceived level of poverty in the Borough. An example of this is the increasing use by some residents of food banks. There are various categories of poverty including fuel poverty and the availability of support to improve boiler efficiency and home insulation.

BUT Madam Mayor - Besides these two, there are many other aspects including homelessness. So could the Executive Member please comment in the fullest detail on at least two aspects:

1. What has been the impact of the benefits cap in the Borough; and
2. How many families have so far been helped by the new Supporting Families team in the Borough?"

Since this is such an important subject could the Executive Member ensure that a press release is issued promptly please?

OBSERVATIONS

Benefits Cap

The Council worked in advance of the cap coming in, i.e. starting in 2012, to identify and send letters out to those who would have been affected had the cap come into effect at that point in time. This yielded an initial 77 households who would have been affected. As a result of some of these households getting work, others clarifying their eligibility for specific benefits, and (probably) some moves out of the area, when the cap actually did come in, the numbers affected had fallen to around 50. Since the cap came in, this has fallen further, to 35.

Since the national roll-out of the Benefits Cap in July 2013, the Council has had 52 Housing Benefit claims subject to the cap (to December 2013). This figure is cumulative, and there are currently 35 cases subject to the cap. The average weekly cap is currently £71.85 per week. The Council has been working with claimants and partners both before and after implementation, promoting awareness of the cap and to offer advice about claiming the right benefits and moving into work.

The Council has been working with partners, in particular the Department of Work and Pensions and Raven Housing Trust, and has secured DWP funding to take on a full-time employment advisor to work with claimants.

Officers have identified families who may need additional help and support, and in some cases they have been referred to the Family Support programme. Discretionary Housing Payment funding has been set aside to assist households in the short term with their rent whilst they work towards securing employment, and increased funding has recently been announced for the borough for 2014/15. The demand on this additional funding has not been as great as anticipated.

Family Support Team

The Family Support Team started working with families in Reigate & Banstead, and this has now extended to helping families in Mole Valley and Tandridge areas. In total, 46 families have been accepted into the Family Support programme, 36 of which are in Reigate & Banstead. Of the 36 families in the borough 31% are living in an area of poverty. In total, five families have now been through the 18-week 'Team Around the Family' meeting. Support for families is provided by a number of services, including Youth Support Services, Surrey Police, housing providers and other Council services. On an anecdotal basis (the only one possible this early in the process) the team's work is improving the lives of the families concerned.

Council Meeting: 13th February 2014

Councillor S.A. Kulka asked the **Executive Member for Planning and Development, Councillor M.J. Miller** the following question:-

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Jonathan Higgs, Chief Executive of Raven Housing Trust was recently quoted in the press as saying "Nowhere near enough affordable homes are being built in the borough of Reigate and Banstead to cope with the demand".

New figures reveal just 16 per cent of new homes built last year were designated as "affordable".

This is the second year running that Reigate and Banstead Borough Council has failed to hit its target of affordable homes, assigned as either social/affordable rent or shared ownership.

The East Surrey Strategic Housing Market Assessment shows a shortfall of 500 affordable homes a year in the Borough of Reigate and Banstead.

Everyone accepts that this Council is way behind its own targets. So what strategy is the Executive Member for Planning and Development going to adopt to ensure that this Council accelerates the development of more affordable housing for the vulnerable members of our community?

OBSERVATIONS

The Council is committed to ensuring that we provide housing which meets the needs of all residents, including the more vulnerable and those unable to access homes on the private market.

Our latest evidence shows a need for 336 affordable homes per year in the Borough. Although we are unable to meet these needs in full, the Council's Core Strategy seeks to deliver 100 affordable homes per year: an ambitious target given our overall housing target of 460 homes per year.

Adopting the new Core Strategy will give us the tools to increase the amount of affordable housing that we can secure from private housing schemes.

The new Core Strategy increases the proportion of affordable housing which larger housing developments will be required to provide on-site.

It also includes new provisions requiring developers of smaller housing sites to provide financial contributions which the Council can use to enable delivery of affordable housing off-site and support schemes brought forward by local Registered Providers.

We are progressing with allocating sites for housing to provide us with more certainty about which sites will come forward and the level of affordable housing which can be achieved on them.

We will also be exploring whether development on greenfield sites, such as our sustainable urban extensions, could contribute even greater levels of affordable housing.

Whilst recent performance has failed to hit targets, the economic situation has not helped. However, as our local economy and housing market improves, we will have in place a policy framework which puts us in the strongest position to increase affordable housing delivery.