

**REIGATE AND BANSTEAD BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**COUNCIL: 16<sup>th</sup> April 2015**

**Questions by Members**

<b>Question by</b>	<b>To be answered by</b>	<b>Subject</b>
Councillor Stevens	Leader of the Council (Councillor V.W.Broad)	Oil and Economic Benefits
Councillor Thomson	Executive Member for Housing and Welfare (Councillor Mrs R. Renton)	Homelessness
Councillor Whinney	Executive Member for Property and Regeneration (Councillor Mrs. N.J. Bramhall)	Old Town Hall

**Council Meeting:** 16th April 2015

**Councillor C. Stevens** will ask the **Leader of the Council, Councillor V.W. Broad** the following question:

**Oil and potential economic benefits**

With regards to the recent discovery of 15 billion barrels worth of oil at the Horse Hill Site, has the Council considered what benefits, if any, this could bring to the borough's economy, local employment and for residents and could it result in any other beneficial investments for the Borough as a result?

**OBSERVATIONS**

As Members will be aware planning permission for exploratory drilling at Horse Hill, Horley was granted by the Minerals Planning Authority, Surrey County Council in November 2011.

News reports last week suggest that this drilling, carried out by exploration firm UK Oil & Gas Investments, has identified large reserves of oil in the local area. We are obviously all interested in this announcement.

UK Oil & Gas Investments have also stated that further drilling and well testing will be needed before these findings are confirmed, to ascertain the potential volume of recoverable oil, select the appropriate extraction method and importantly identify the location for any extracting. It is therefore very difficult to estimate the economic benefits that this would have on the local area at this time. The Council will, of course, monitor the situation closely.

Before any production could take place, the operator would need to seek further permissions. This would include licensing by the Department of Energy and Climate Change and planning permission.

Any future planning applications would be determined by the Minerals Planning Authority, Surrey County Council. The Council would be consulted as part of any planning application process, and our response would need to balance the economic benefits with the impact on the environment and quality of life for our local residents.

**Council Meeting:** 16th April 2015

**Councillor Mrs B. Thomson** will ask the **Executive Member for Housing and Welfare, Councillor Mrs R. Renton**, the following question:

### **Homelessness**

Can the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Welfare outline the Council's Strategy for addressing homelessness in the Borough?

### **Observations**

The Council has a number of initiatives in place to tackle the unprecedented levels of homelessness that we are seeing in this borough, which is a trend seen both in Surrey and at a national level. These include providing more accommodation in the borough for homeless families and preventative work aimed at helping families remain in their homes in the first place. We have also seen an increase in families who present themselves at the Council as homeless where investigations must take place to establish if this Council has a duty to house them.

Using emergency accommodation outside of the borough - legislation dictates that Local Authorities should not accommodate households with children or pregnant woman in accommodation with shared facilities (cooking & bathroom) for longer than a six week period. Currently any household placed into emergency accommodation as part of their homeless application is likely to be in their emergency accommodation for longer than six weeks. The Council is unable to procure on a nightly basis any self contained accommodation in the borough so we must rely on finding suitable accommodation outside of the borough.

We are using affordable housing Section 106 contributions to increase the supply of temporary accommodation. We have projects underway to purchase property on the open market, bring our own assets back into use and have one project underway to build new homes.

We are currently in the process of purchasing three properties. These are going through the legal process, and we are waiting for the sellers' solicitors to act in all three cases. The fourth property fell through, and we intend to look for a replacement.

I am pleased to say that the new temporary accommodation units that have been developed by Raven Housing Trust in Redhill are due to open this weekend. This will provide a further 19 units of temporary accommodation and significantly reduce the

number of families who are currently housed in bed & breakfast or emergency accommodation. We will continue to work with Raven Housing Trust and other housing providers to supply more accommodation, and are already liaising with Raven Housing Trust on converting some of their former sheltered accommodation into temporary accommodation.

We work closely with housing providers to develop more affordable housing in the borough. For example, this summer Thames Valley Housing Association will complete work on 75 shared ownership homes and 15 affordable rental homes at Russell Square in Horley, and Raven has provided 60 new rental and shared ownership homes across several developments.

Our strategy includes making better use of privately rented accommodation, and make full use of our Discretionary Housing Payments funding to secure properties for families by helping with deposits and rent in advance. We have also successfully piloted a new scheme whereby the Council will act as a guarantor in order to secure private tenancies for families.

For single homeless people we can offer a rent deposit of up to £500, and have successfully bid for government funding to help people who are street homeless across East Surrey. We fund a Deposit Guarantee scheme run by East Surrey YMCA who house around 50 homeless families each year, and work with the Council on homelessness prevention. We have a longer term plan to bring back into use some of the many empty properties in the borough which can be used to house families who are at risk of homelessness.

To ensure that we are meeting the current needs of our residents we have reviewed our Housing Register and Allocations Policy, which will enable us to better assist those families with most need.

Prevention work is carried out through negotiating with social and private landlords, mortgage companies and other family members, aiming to prevent homelessness wherever possible.

**Council Meeting:** 16th April 2015

**Councillor C.T.H. Whinney** will ask the **Executive Member for Property and Regeneration, Councillor Mrs N.J. Bramhall**, the following question:

**Old Town Hall:**

“The Old Town Hall in Reigate Town Centre is an important building in the Borough. Some years ago it was refurbished and leased to Cafe Nero. A few days ago I was in the top half of the cafe and saw some water marks on the ceiling.

Will the Executive Member assure us all that an officer has been, or will go, to see the management, either to explain the marks or arrange with the management or with whomsoever is responsible the necessary repairs with priority to the fabric so that the building is watertight and re-decorate the ceiling, and also keep us informed on progress, please?”

## **OBSERVATIONS**

Caffé Nero is responsible for all repairs to, and maintenance of, the building, with the exception of the clock. Property Services is aware of the issue and will ensure that the company carries out any repairs that are necessary. The terms of the lease may not allow us to require Caffé Nero to carry out immediate redecorations if the staining is cosmetic damage only, as the redecoration requirements are cyclical rather than on demand.