

REIGATE AND BANSTEAD BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL: 27 SEPTEMBER 2018

Questions by Members

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Council Meeting: 27 September 2018

Councillor R. Michalowski will ask the **Leader of the Council, Councillor M.A Brunt** the following question:

Committee Webcasts

It was pleasing to see many residents visiting the Town Hall, and in fact this Council Chamber, as part of the Heritage Open Day on 15th September. In the pursuit of even more transparency and openness of the decision making processes by elected representatives, could more committee meetings be available as webcasts?

Response / Observations

Thank you Councillor Michalowski.

I've been very pleased with the current webcasting facility that broadcasts our meetings of Full Council; the Executive and Planning Committee live to the website.

I'm pleased to inform the Council that I've requested Officers to look into also webcasting meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee; Licensing and Regulatory Committee and Licensing and Regulatory Sub Committee (hearings).

The early feedback from Officers is that this can be delivered with minimal additional costs on the service and subject to putting in place the setting up of the facility for those Committees it could be implemented as soon as November 2018.

I am also giving thought to how we can utilise this facility with other possible engagement opportunities to expand our openness channels.

Council Meeting: 27 September 2018

Councillor K. Foreman will ask the **Leader of the Council, Councillor M.A Brunt** the following question:

A23 (Hooley) Highway Proposal

The Leader is, I believe, aware of the Highways England proposal to create a dual carriageway on the A23 in Hooley. There is considerable local opposition to this, and there have also been serious concerns expressed about the effect on air quality, which is already an issue on this stretch of highway. Could the Leader tell me what engagement he has had with the Secretary of State for Transport on this subject and whether he believes this will lead to any action?

Response / Observations

I am indeed aware of the proposal that you reference.

The failure of Highways England to listen to the concerns of local residents and work with this Council to deliver air quality improvements in the local area is, in my view, unacceptable.

I have already discussed this issue with Chris Grayling MP. He has reassured me that he will raise our concerns with senior Highways England representatives. I would therefore hope that we will see more genuine engagement and cooperation from them in the future.

In the meantime we will continue to pursue this matter with Highways England, highlighting local concerns and seeking a holistic solution to the problem.

Supplementary information

Hooley has the highest numbers of residential properties affected by nitrogen dioxide air pollution in the borough.

The Council monitors air pollution across the Hooley AQMA, which indicates that national standards for nitrogen dioxide are breached at a number of properties. We recently installed a real-time monitor in the area to understand the problem better.

In our view, implementing a road improvement scheme provides the perfect opportunity to consider how air pollution affecting local properties can also be tackled.

Officers are in contact with Highways England and seeking a more constructive and holistic solution to the air quality issue.

Council Meeting: 27 September 2018

Councillor J.C.S. Essex will ask the **Leader of the Council, Councillor M.A Brunt** the following question:

Councillors' Question Time

At Surrey County Council meetings, there is a Councillors' Question Time, which differs from Reigate and Banstead in two ways. Firstly, the answers to questions are provided in writing before the meeting, and secondly supplementary questions are allowed from any Councillor, not just those asking the original question. This increases debate and discussion involving more councillors in council meetings. Would you support Reigate and Banstead adopting a similar approach?

Response / Observations

Thank you Councillor Essex.

It is timely that you asked this question which is primarily about increasing engagement opportunities at our Council meetings.

I have already started a conversation with Officers about ways in which we can provide increased engagement opportunities for Members at our Council meetings.

Once I've completed these discussions I'll inform Members of my proposals to take this forward for the future, which might involve changes to our Constitution.

Council Meeting: 27 September 2018

Councillor H. Brown will ask the **Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Housing and Benefits**, **Councillor G. J. Knight** the following question:

Affordability of Private Rent

Please provide the difference between local housing allowance and the average private rent for 1 bedroom, 2 bedroom and 3 bedroom homes in Reigate and Banstead.

Response / Observations

Using information from the online rental advertising platform Zoopla to give an idea of average rentals, the shortfall between the Local Housing Allowance and the average rental asking price is around:

- £220 per calendar month for one bed flats
- £270 per calendar month for two bed flats and
- £416 per calendar month for three bed houses

Table below for information on figures used:

	1 Bed Flat	2 Bed Flat	3 Bed House
Average monthly rental	£900	£1,100	£1,380
Monthly Local Housing Allowance	£676	£830	£964
Monthly shortfall	£224	£270	£416

Council Meeting: 27 September 2018

Councillor S. McKenna will ask the **Executive Member for Property and Acquisitions, Councillor Mrs N.J. Bramhall** the following question:

Marketfield Way

Whilst the vitality and viability of town centres are in decline across the country due to the growth of internet sales, out of town shopping centres, food stores offering more diverse comparison goods lines and of course, rising rents and rates, the South East's town centres have often continued to prosper. Redhill town centre for example, benefits from an excellent location, has been identified as a key growth centre in the South East and should be seen as a key investment opportunity as a result. Can councillors be updated on the progress of our most important scheme, the Marketfield Way development as follows:

- Has the scheme as approved attracted the funding necessary for its construction?
- Have the major elements been secured i.e. pre-lets for retail?
- When will the project start on site and when will the scheme be completed?
- Has the viability position improved and if so can an element of affordable housing be introduced into the scheme?

Response / Observations

Thank you for the questions Cllr Mckenna;

- As we have set out previously the Council is likely to use Public Works Loan Board funding for this project and applications for this funding will be made after we have had confirmation regarding the outcome to the Compulsory Purchase Order enquiry which is due to be held next week.
- With regard to your second question, Councillors and Officers have been working hard to secure pre lets and pre sales. I am pleased to be able to report that we expect to exchange contracts on the pre sale of the residential element of the scheme shortly and we will be making a separate announcement about this at the time. This agreement would substantially underpin the financial viability of the scheme as a whole. I am also pleased to confirm that the Light cinema operator remains committed to the scheme and has successfully opened a number of new facilities throughout the country, the most recent being in Addlestone, Surrey which I hope to visit in the near future. With regard to retail unit lettings we still have interest but with delivery still some way off, it is considered a more effective letting campaign will be possible during and towards the end of the construction period when the retailers we hope to attract to the town can take comfort that the scheme is well on its way to completion.

- I am sorry to say that viability of the scheme has not improved such that affordable provision can be provided. I would remind the meeting however that the anticipated surplus income over debt that this project is forecast to deliver will support the Council services moving forward, and should the scheme make an unplanned surplus above the agreed Planning threshold a contribution towards the Councils affordable housing policy would be made. It is also worth mentioning that two of our other current schemes at both Cromwell Road and Pitwood Park include a significant amount of affordable housing provision.

Council Meeting: 27 September 2018

Councillor D. Allcard will ask the **Executive Member for Property and Acquisitions, Councillor Mrs N.J. Bramhall** the following question:

Cromwell Road and Pitwood Park

Please can the Portfolio Holder for Property confirm the exact details of the affordable housing contribution and the number of shared ownership units that this Council is proposing to deliver on the Cromwell Road and Pitwood Park developments?

Response / Observations

At Cromwell Road, 32 one and two bedroom flats will be constructed, of which half the flats will be sold as shared-equity housing. This will provide purchasers with a 25% discount on the full purchase price. The buyer purchases a 75% share of the property and the council will retain a 25% share until the owner sells it or buys the remaining equity share.

In addition, the Council has made a £420,000 financial contribution, to fund affordable housing on alternative sites. If a private developer was to build the site out, it is unlikely the financial contribution or low cost housing would be provided as commercial viability of the scheme doesn't deliver sufficient financial return.

Pitwood Park will see 25 new homes developed, being a mix of two and three bedroomed houses and one and two bedroomed flats. The flats and two-bedroomed houses will be developed as 'starter homes', this means the purchase price will be discounted by 20% from the market value or capped at £250,000, whichever is lower. All 25 homes will be sold at a 25% discount on the purchase price. As an example a typical 2 bedroom starter home priced at £250,000 would be sold for £187,500 once the further 25% discount is applied.

Council Meeting: 27 September 2018

Councillor G. Curry will ask the **Executive Member for Neighbourhood Services, Councillor A.C.J. Horwood** the following question:

Flats Recycling Service

Since 2012 this Conservative led Council has introduced a comprehensive kerbside recycling service to 45,000 homes within the Borough, which is to be commended, however currently 10,400 of the 14,200 flats in the borough have limited access to recycling. I am pleased to learn that following a decision taken on September 13th 2018, by the Executive, this Council will proceed with the roll out of the kerbside recycling service to an additional 4000 flats by the end of 2020. Please can the Executive member confirm the process by which the remaining flats will receive this service and how this decision is expected to affect recycling rates in the Borough?

Response / Observations

Thank you for your question.

The roll out to remaining flats and properties with communal bin areas within the borough will happen as part of our normal business. We will continue to work with managing agents, freeholders & landlords to help them understand what is required to accommodate the new service, in terms of accessibility for our trucks and the provision of suitable bin stores. We know that there will be some locations that will not be able to accommodate the service due to capacity/space restrictions. There is no firm timeline for the remaining flats but as we are approached and where we can identify and deliver this service to suitable sites we will do so without delay.

We need to have active partnerships with the owners and freeholders to find the right solutions for their properties. This may involve changes that they will need to make to their properties, to allow us to provide the service. We are committed to finding solutions that work for our residents.

We anticipate a potential 2% increase in our recycling once the roll out is complete.

Council Meeting: 27 September 2018

Councillor Ms B.J. Thomson will ask the **Executive Member for Community Safety, Councillor J.E. Durrant** the following question:

Activities associates with removing a drugs dealer

My Ward (Earlswood and Whitebushes) has recently been subjected to a great deal of disruption due to the activities associated with removing a drugs dealer.

Can the Executive Member for Community Safety tell me what plans and processes exist in this Council to support communities when these disruptions occur?

Response / Observations

When crimes occur, it is important that all agencies work together to support communities to recover, and as your fellow ward member I can attest to the impact of recent events. Council officers work closely with partners including Police, youth services, schools, housing providers and others around issues of crime or anti-social behaviour that impact our communities.

This work is delivered through the Community Harm & Risk Management (CHaRMM) & Joint Action Group (JAG) processes which bring partners together to identify problems, develop localised action plans, and manage their delivery.

In each case we ensure support for those affected is considered alongside any enforcement action. On a case-by-case basis individuals may be referred for targeted 1:1 support or intervention. Detached youth work can also help to engage young people and where a need is identified & funding can be accessed then this will also be delivered, as is the case in our Ward.

In terms of the wider local community, the Police will deliver certain reassurance activities when carrying out enforcement, although for operational reasons partners may not always be apprised of this. An increased presence from Neighbourhood Wardens, JET officers or PCSOs, clean-up or community days can also help and there is ongoing discussion regarding this at JAG although delivery is reliant on available resource.

For me, the key is delivering support which is appropriate to both the community and the incident. Contrasting the issue in our ward where pastoral support is needed, with the recent assault in Tunnel Road highlights this. In the latter case, it's important to give residents confidence that the town is still a safe place to visit. To do this we need to assess things such as the strength of the lighting, the coverage and quality of CCTV and the presence of enforcement officers. Applying a one-size-fits-all solution is unlikely to have the same benefits

On a wider point, in order to develop a more strategic approach the Council is also working on the Get Connected project. This aims to develop a shared local vision and cross-agency commitment to move us from merely responding and managing issues once they have occurred to earlier intervention & prevention which will help to build real resilience in our local communities over the longer term.

Council Meeting: 27 September 2018

Councillor G. Owen will ask the **Executive Member for Community Safety, Councillor J.E. Durrant** the following question:

Illegal Encampments

Firstly I would like to congratulate Cllr Durrant for all the hard and effective work he has put in during recent months to help to move on travellers from illegal encampments across the borough. This has not been an easy task.

In view of the apparently increased frequency of temporary encampments this year, some residents have suggested that a local solution may be for the Council to consider digging bund-ditches or erecting bollards to deter travellers from encroaching on key sites that are repeatedly invaded. From a financial point of view, the cost this work could be offset by a reduction in court and clear-up costs, and it may be impossible to have 'lockable' barriers to allow maintenance vehicles onto these sites. Could the Executive Member indicate whether this is possible please?

Response / Observations

This year we, along with the rest of the county, have experienced an increased number of illegal encampments, in part due to a particularly persistent group who have totted up five of the incursions alone. Whilst I thank Cllr Owen for his kind words, the credit must be paid to the efforts led by JET with evictions supported by bailiffs and Surrey Police, together with the robust procedures in place for dealing with encampments. Experience shows that any delays in eviction are as a result of getting time in Court.

Over the summer, I asked officers to investigate options for preventing illegal encampments on sites in the borough, and JET, Greenspaces and Engineering have been working together to produce a report which will come to Leaders and be shared with all members. In terms of physical solutions, a mixture of bollards, banks and tougher lockable barriers appropriate to the location as well as services below the surface are being considered. These measures will not prevent a determined group as those involved often have the machinery required to gain access but they will deter those moving swiftly from place to place. Officers are looking at costs involved and balancing these against the visual impact of some solutions. As I've said, this will be reported back once complete.

Alongside this piece of work officers are also investigating legal options to prevent illegal encampments throughout all of our green spaces, car parks and recreation areas. We provided a strong response to a recent Government consultation outlining our preference for better powers and simpler court processes and we await the outcome, hopefully resulting in more effective legislation.

I would also like to touch on the issue of a transit site, highlighted by the Police and Crime Commissioner. We should be looking at all options for preventing illegal encampments, including those which meet the needs of the travelling community. Transit sites exist in neighbouring counties and they have a positive impact. However, it's an issue which is bigger than a single borough, so yesterday I asked for it to be added as a topic for discussion at the next meeting of the East Surrey Community Safety Partnership.

Myself and officers are aware how important this issue is to residents and members, so please be assured we are giving it our fullest attention.