

Reigate and Banstead Borough Council
Meeting of Council 30 November 2023
Questions by Members

Verbal responses given at the meeting			
	Question by	To be answered by	Subject
1.	Councillor McKenna	Councillor (A) King, the Executive Member for Commercial & Community Assets	Reinforced Aerated Autoclave Concrete (RAAC)
2.	Councillor Smith	Councillor (A) King, the Executive Member for Commercial & Community Assets	Reinforced Aerated Autoclave Concrete (RAAC)
3.	Councillor Sachdeva	Councillor Neame, the Executive Member for Housing Support	Homelessness
4.	Councillor Essex	Councillor Neame, the Executive Member for Housing Support	Right to Buy
5.	Councillor Sinden	Councillor Ashford, the Executive Member for Communities, Leisure & Culture	Safer Streets funding
6.	Councillor Booton	Councillor Moses, the Executive Member for Environment & Sustainability	Replacement of felled trees
7.	Councillor Proudfoot	Councillor Moses, the Executive Member for Environment & Sustainability	Greenspaces management plans
8.	Councillor Ritter	Councillor Moses, the Executive Member for Environment & Sustainability	Biodiversity obligations
9.	Councillor Chandler	Councillor Avery, Executive Member for Neighbourhood Services	Litter bin requests
10.	Councillor Khan	Councillor Michalowski, the Executive Member for Place, Planning & Regulatory Services	Permitted Development Rights
11.	Councillor Tora	Councillor Michalowski, the Executive Member for Place, Planning & Regulatory Services	Licensing obligations
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12.	Councillor Khan	Councillor Ashford, the Executive Member for Communities, Leisure & Culture	Youth Work
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Councillor McKenna asked the **Executive Member for Commercial & Community Assets, Councillor (A) King**, the following question:

Question 1: Reinforced Aerated Autoclave Concrete

Can the Executive Member confirm whether all our public buildings across Reigate and Banstead have been or are being checked for the presence of Reinforced Aerated Autoclave Concrete (RAAC) - both Council owned as well as other public buildings including East Surrey Hospital and schools, and in the case of the Council's known building with RAAC, the Harlequin, provide an update as to the progress to date with the surveys and when this building might re-open depending on the best and worst case scenarios.

Councillor Smith asked the **Executive Member for Commercial & Community Assets, Councillor (A) King**, the following question:

Question 2: Reinforced Aerated Autoclave Concrete

The Harlequin Theatre is a real jewel in the Crown for the residents across the Borough, it channels business and footfall through the town centre and is a place for people of every age group to join together and laugh, cry and have their five minutes of fame.

It is with great sadness that The Harlequin Theatre is temporarily closed but I also have great admiration for my old colleagues continuing to keep the dream alive and the show running while they negotiate the current issues. I'm certainly looking forward to seeing Beauty & the Beast in a big top in Memorial Park!

Following the discovery of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) in The Harlequin Theatre and Redhill Library, strangely leaving one closed and the other open, would Councillor King please let the residents, visitors and businesses of Redhill know whether substantive checks for RAAC have now been performed on the rest of the building forming the Warwick Quadrant as they were all built at the same time and whether any further cases of RAAC have been found in the complex and any other Council owned property in Redhill Town Centre?

Response:

My response will focus on this council's buildings - I have no information about the position regarding assets owned by other public bodies other than the updates we have seen in recent press reports.

We have followed guidance from the Royal Institution for Chartered Surveyors. This comes after the Government's decision in September to instruct schools where reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (known as RAAC) is present, to close them as a precautionary measure.

We have carried out a desktop review of asset records to identify those buildings where RAAC may be present, based on the date of construction. This was followed by a visual inspection of the buildings thought to be at risk to identify any obvious signs of RAAC.

The outcome was to confirm that RAAC was present in the Harlequin theatre, as a precaution the building has been closed until the holder of the headlease confirms the action they plan to take. We expect that they will need to carry out a full intrusive survey and await confirmation of the timing. You will appreciate that there is a high demand for surveys at this time.

In the meantime, the Harlequin team has been proactive in ensuring that the panto can take place, the team are working hard to convert the Big Top in Memorial Park into a temporary theatre – the show will go on, and the first performance of Beauty and The Beast will be on 8th December.

As you will appreciate, this has been an incredible undertaking in just 8 weeks and I would like to recognise the hard work and achievement of the Harlequin team, and other officers across the Council, in delivering this in such a short period of time. In addition to the panto, we have also moved the 'Santa and the North Pole Show' into our Pop-Up shop in The Belfry Shopping Centre. This space has been vital to us continuing to have a town centre presence – as we have since 1986 – and I'm very pleased to confirm that the Harlequin Pop-up will continue to host events and performances – as well as be available to hire – for the foreseeable future. This is especially important for our customers and many of our community partners.

Supplementary Questions:

Councillor McKenna asked following supplementary question:

What action will the Council take to protect the public and contractors from any coincidental risk caused by asbestos fibres being released when remedial repair is being undertaken to the RAAC?

Councillor Smith asked the following supplementary question:

Is it correct that currently it is not known how long inspections will take and therefore to know the full implications of RAAC for the Council's buildings.

Response to Supplementary Questions:

The Council and the leaseholder will only be using professional surveys and professional teams to undertake any work. All necessary health and safety and risk assessments will be done to make sure that workers, staff and the public remain safe.

Specific dates are not yet available for the intrusive surveys to be carried out. It will be appreciated that demand is currently high for these services. I think it will be accepted that organisations such as schools are ahead of the Council in the queue and that we would not want to change the priority of the order.

Councillor Sachdeva asked the **Executive Member for Housing Support, Councillor Neame**, the following question:

Question 3: Homelessness

With the cold weather approaching fast, Could I ask what details we have about the street homeless that seem to be congregating in Redhill, and what are we as Council doing to alleviate the situation?

Response:

Anyone who is homeless can approach the Council and request advice and assistance. The Housing team, which includes our rough sleeper outreach team (ESOS), are aware of the individuals that are currently rough sleeping as well as those that join the rough sleepers during the day and evenings but are not homeless, it is important to note that some of those perceived to be rough sleepers have access to accommodation. ESOS carry out regular outreach shifts to locate and support rough sleepers with accessing services and our rough sleeper pathway.

Every year Local Authorities must carry out a rough sleeper annual estimate or count. This year it was undertaken during the night of Wednesday 15 November. The outreach team checked all the known places rough sleepers have used in the past and counted one in Redhill town centre and two on Redhill Common. There were three further rough sleepers identified in other parts of the borough. The team were in the Redhill area from 1.30 am.

All known rough sleepers have had contact from either the Housing team or the outreach team. Those that have no local connection with the borough are offered reconnection to their local authority, others have been housed in the past, in some cases multiple times, but have since lost their accommodation and some have no interest in accepting our assistance. There are/have also been a few rough sleepers that have no access to public funds rendering them not eligible for our services.

Apart from not eligible cases, the offer of assistance of some sort is available, examples include, reconnection, rent in advance and deposit to secure accommodation, a referral to supported housing or for those that have a priority need under homeless legislation, an offer of emergency accommodation. All rough sleepers that engage with the team will have a personal housing plan detailing the steps they need to take and the steps the Council will take to try and end their homelessness.

There is a multi-agency approach to tackle the ongoing issues in Redhill town centre which includes working closely with the Council's Joint Enforcement and Community Safety teams and the Police to monitor and assist local rough sleepers.

The Council work in partnership with the local homeless charity Renewed Hope and I am pleased to say that they are reopening their floating winter homeless night shelter on the 13 December until the 29 February, after a three-year absence of not being able to open due to the complications brought previously by the Covid pandemic. The Council have provided some financial support towards the opening of the shelter. Housing and outreach staff will directly refer local rough sleepers to the shelter.

Finally, to help protect rough sleepers further from the cold weather, the council will initiate its Severe Weather Emergency Protocol when the Met office's forecast for Redhill, shows a 'feels like' temperature of zero or below for three nights in a row. The council provide discretionary accommodation during this period whilst we work with them to assist them to solve their housing issues.

No supplementary question was asked.

Councillor Essex asked the **Executive Member for Housing Support, Councillor Neame**, the following question:

Question 4: Right to Buy

Please confirm the number of homes sold under Right to Buy in the borough for each of the last five years, how much receipts have been received from this where this money sits now?

Response:

This Council has not made any Right to Buy Sales in the past 5 years.

Supplementary Question:

I understand that the Council itself hasn't had any such sales. However, I understand that if there are any Right to Buy sales in the Borough, the Council would normally receive such receipts. Please can the number of Right to Buy sales be confirmed and whether the Council has received these receipts.

Written Response:

Right to Buy receipts paid to RBBC following the Large Scale Voluntary Transfer (LSVT) of housing properties to Raven Housing

Financial Year	No of Sales	Value £
2017/18	9	1,371,195
2018/19	10	1,596,527
2019/20	9	1,363,291
2020/21	4	695,264
2021/22	8	1,844,204
2022/23	1	282,315
Total	41	7,152,796

Councillor Sinden asked the **Executive Member for Communities, Leisure & Culture, Councillor Ashford**, the following question:

Question 5: Safer Street funding

Following the award of nearly £1 million of Safer Streets funding for Redhill please can you confirm what the council, police and YMCA and other partners will each be doing differently and how long the project will last.

Response:

Redhill is one of three communities in Surrey that is sharing nearly £1m in the latest round of the Home Office's Safer Streets funding. The other areas who are receiving this funding are Elmbridge and Guildford. Each area is receiving around £330,000. The funds must be spent by the end of March 2025.

In Redhill, the funding will focus on the town centre with measures to tackle anti-social behaviour and violence against women and girls. The activities planned include:

Community Safety training for Council officers and voluntary groups, including street pastors. This training will increase staff and volunteers' knowledge of the relevant legal powers and approaches they can take.

A Safe Space Hut for the town centre. The Hut will be a visible presence in the town centre for the police and other community partners to support them to engage with the public. It can also provide a quiet, safe place for anyone being supported by the police or partners while they gather their thoughts or contact friends or family.

A YMCA bus and youth worker time will provide outreach activities for young people in the town centre. Wider educational activities will also be funded in local schools, colleges and youth groups.

There will be community engagement activities and an information campaign on how to address anti-social behaviour for residents and users of the town centre. The communications work will include a youth campaign, designed and delivered with local young people.

It is also the intention to put in place target hardening measures in Redhill, these are physical changes that reduce the risk of crime taking place. Often referred to as target hardening measures. The detail of these measures will be informed by police hot spot data and local feedback.

The work will be delivered in partnership with the police, YMCA and wider local organisations. Today I attended an event bringing organisations together to develop the plans in more detail and it was great to see such positive engagement from everyone involved.

No supplementary question was asked.

Councillor Booton asked the **Executive Member for Moses, Councillor Environment & Sustainability**, the following question:

Question 6: Replacement of felled trees

When a tree is felled on Borough maintained land, what do we ensure as a council that we will do to replace such trees with at least one new one as close to the felled one as possible? And for historically felled trees where stumps remain, can we organise for a similar scheme to that which Surrey County Council are doing for land they maintain, whereby they are committing to replacing every tree stump with a new tree, inviting residents to add to an already existing map showing the location of previously felled trees, via their County Councillor?

Response:

Prior to Ash Die Back disease's arrival in the borough, replacing felled trees as they reach the end of their life was achievable to a degree, be it costly. However, the impact of Chalara (Ash Die Back) has changed this for many Authorities. It is now no longer viable to replant a tree for each one lost at this time. The resource associated with the removal of dead Ash trees across the Borough is high. Whilst planting a "Standard tree" is relatively cheap as one off, around £100 per tree including accessories, the watering needed for the first three years is very expensive and resource intensive and the watering process that we employ is not environmentally sustainable.

However, it is achievable and reasonable to replace ten to twenty trees per year in locations such as parks or greenspaces where more prominent trees have been lost. We take a similar approach to The National Trust's in relations to Ash Die Back and woodland management, by seeing how well the existing soil seed bank would regenerate the woodland naturally.

More generally, our future approach to trees and woodland management will be set out in the new Tree Strategy that is being preparing – this will complement the work that the Council already do to support local community tree planting initiatives across the borough.

Supplementary Question:

What is the plan, when the time is right, to increase the number of trees back to the level pre-felling?

Written Response:

When it comes to felling Ash due to Ash die back we are not seeking to replant the losses at this time and instead we are leaving the land to monitor the natural seed bank recovery. This is how woodlands have responded in the past to fire or other ecological disasters. As Ash generally make up a high percentage of trees in a woodland, the areas opened up from the felling will become open glades, exposing the ground to light and water which should ultimately lead to seeds in the soil coming up, so it is entirely possible that these glade areas will stimulate hundreds of diverse species. So, through natural processes we may well end up with more trees than were felled. Our monitoring of cleared areas in 2024 and 2025 should give us an indication of numbers, species and success rates of this approach.

In regards to replacing stumps, we leave as many as possible as they are critical for stag beetles, inverts and fungus. Where we have prominent trees felled due to safety reasons we will seek replace were possible, for example we recently felled a tree in Wordsworth Mead near the play area due to decay, this tree was replaced with 4 new trees.

Please be aware that human intervention is not always the best approach, Woodlands are multi-generational dynamic ecosystem capable of recovering given time and protection.

Councillor Proudfoot asked the **Executive Member for Moses, Councillor Environment & Sustainability**, the following question:

Question 7: Greenspaces management plans

The Council has greenspaces which are required by government to have publicly available up-to-date management plans. However, Earlswood Common's management plan only runs to 2013, and there is no active management published for Redhill Common, New Pond Farm or Felland Copse and the management plan for Tanyard Meadows has now also lapsed. Please provide a full list of all council owned greenspaces and other Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI) within the borough and for each confirm when public consultation on these plans will start and when new plans for each of these areas will be in place, or in the cases of areas that are not in Council ownership what enforcement action has been taken to ensure such plans are in place.

Response:

The Greenspaces team values the importance and understands the need for management and/or maintenance plans and has a number of them covering various sites across the borough.

We have High level stewardship agreements with Natural England across a number of sites.

Regarding the Earlswood & Redhill Common management plan, as a member of the steering group you are aware that the team are in the process of finalising the additional comments that have recently been submitted, following the change in ward representatives for the group, this will be going to executive for approval and shortly after will be published as will the Reigate heath management plan.

Tanyard meadows management plan runs out at the end of this year and the greenspaces team will be carrying out further onsite surveys that will update the new management plan in 2024.

A list of council owned sites is available on our website.

A full list of land designation for Surrey, will be shared by email, due to the size of the list.

Our understanding is that it would be Natural England who have enforcement powers over other land managers, not Reigate & Banstead Borough Council.

No supplementary question was asked.

Councillor Ritter asked the **Executive Member for Moses, Councillor Environment & Sustainability**, the following question:

Question 8: Biodiversity obligations

In light of the government requirement for local councils to shape action plans to meet their biodiversity obligations by January 2024. Can the Executive member please give an update on progress this council is making towards the action plans supporting the biodiversity of the borough's green spaces?

Response:

The council's obligation is to *consider* what we can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity, by January 2024. This forms part of the strengthened 'biodiversity duty' that the Environment Act 2021 introduces.

This means that, as a local authority, we need to

1. Consider how we can conserve and enhance biodiversity.
2. Agree policies and specific objectives
3. Act to deliver on those decisions

Local authorities (excluding parish councils) and local planning authorities must write and publish a biodiversity report, by January 2026.

This report will be a mechanism to communicate what we are delivering to improve the environment and to show the positive changes our plan will deliver.

To fulfil our requirement to *consider* our obligations, as you are aware the Greenspaces team has committed to the production of a Greenspaces Strategy, which will look at all area & functions that fall within the scope of our Greenspaces, including Biodiversity improvements.

We are currently in the procurement phase of engaging a consultant to support the development of the Strategy and will be able to update in the new year what we expect the timeline for the process to be.

The specification for suppliers explicitly includes biodiversity net gain and habitat enhancement.

Supplementary Question:

Does the Council feel it is adequately resourced in terms of budget and skills to comply with the biodiversity provisions of the Environment Act?

Written Response:

From a Greenspaces Department perspective, we expect the answer to the above question will become clear as we move through the process of writing the Greenspaces Strategy. At which point if we believe we require an increase in Budget or additional skills, we will consider that as part of the Council Service & Financial Planning process. Within Planning, extra budget has been secured in the 2024/25

budget to enable provision of ecological advice which is considered sufficient for that year but will be reviewed for subsequent years.

Councillor Chandler asked the **Executive Member for Neighbourhood Services, Councillor Avery**, the following question:

Question 9: Litter bin requests

Several residents have questioned the lack of information given when a litter bin is requested. Does the council have a system to record the actions taken in relation to an online reported issue? Is it possible therefore to provide further information on the action taken or the reason for not completing a request in full and communicate this to the resident in addition to and I quote "the matter is now concluded and we have closed your report". For instance, is there a policy relating to bins at bus stops or outside schools which can be explained.

Response:

We do not offer the ability to request litter bins through the website. Requests are usually received via email from ward councillors, following a request from a resident. Therefore, the response mentioned in your question, suggests that the process being used is not the correct one and may not be reaching the correct team. Happy to take offline to discuss and resolve.

The team were successful in securing Strategic CIL funding to purchase & install 80 solar powered bins, which provide a significant increase in capacity and therefore efficiencies in the emptying schedules.

The Cleansing team are in the process of a bin mapping exercise, which will inform the project & relevant locations for the roll out of Solar Compaction Bins around the borough.

Currently we provide litter bins in places where we expect them to be needed most, including:

- shopping areas
- promenades
- car parks
- adjacent to educational establishments
- areas identified as litter hot spots, including bus stops where appropriate

Supplementary Question:

Is information on litter-picking, where this happens and to what extent, used to inform the Council of the location of litter and therefore where bins should be sited?

Response to Supplementary Question:

Rubbish collected by litter-pickers is collected from across the Borough. However, this may not always be in locations where littering is happening. This is because it is possible for those who are litter-picking to take the bags of rubbish collected away from the location. For example, further down a street.

Written Response:

Councillor Avery has covered the relevant points in the verbal response give during the meeting. However, to add that the majority of litter filled purple bags are left by volunteer litter pickers next to one of our existing bins, to allow for ease of collection.

Councillor Khan asked the **Leader, Councillor Biggs** who was responding on behalf of the **Executive Member for Place, Planning & Regulatory Services, Councillor Michalowski**, the following question:

Question 10: Permitted Development Rights

At September's full council meeting, this council unanimously resolved to identify where there is the potential for an Article 4 Direction to restrict Permitted Development Rights in the four town centres and 27 local centres. The first step requires the council to gather evidence through a new 'Retail Needs Survey'. Can the council update members on the progress of the new 'Retail Needs Survey'?

Response:

The Council is progressing well with its Retail Needs Study. It has appointed Nathaniel Lichfields who are experts in this field to undertake the study which includes gathering evidence on retail trends and consumer habits through consumer surveys. A specialist survey company, NEMS, has been instructed to conduct these surveys with the work ongoing currently. As we wrote to Members earlier this month, the survey responses are vitally important so please encourage residents to complete them if they are able to do so. The survey responses will then be considered together with market data and other information to build the retail study which is expected around March 2024. Like to take this opportunity to encourage residents to use local shops. The way we can influence the local community.

No supplementary question was asked.

Councillor Torra asked the **Leader, Councillor Biggs** who was responding on behalf of the **Executive Member for Place, Planning & Regulatory Services, Councillor Michalowski**, the following question:

Question 11: Licensing applications

As residents, we are entitled to make a 'relevant representation' to a licensing application, which the Council will take into account when considering whether to grant the application and, if so, in what terms. However, residents are only made aware of these applications if they spot by chance an advert in say, the Surrey Mirror on a given day or read the license application that the applicant puts up outside their premises for 28 days.

In a recent case that has been brought to my attention, the Licensing Team were sent a photo of the blue licensing application announcement attached to a gate, and shown the advert posted on the same day in the local paper and on a website. Yet, from my understanding, no member of the licensing team visited the site to confirm the poster remained up for the full 28 days. It would appear that the application sign was not visible to residents and in the position that we believe it was placed, if still attached, would have been obscured for part of the day by workers vans.

In this case, the only knowledge of this application to some residents was the sign appearing attached to a fence a full month after the deadline date for representations. It is therefore disputed that the sign remained up for 28 days. Yet in challenging this, a resident would obviously need to know the sign was not there in the first place, in order to take a photo of the missing sign as evidence. A catch 22.

In light of this, how can councillors and residents sign up to be notified for licensing applications, just as they can for planning applications? And, in this era of falling local newspaper readership, what does the council consider as 'sufficient' advertising of a licensing application?

Response:

The advertising of applications is set out in section 25 of The Licensing Act 2003 (Premises licences and club premises certificates) Regulations 2005. This states that applicants must advertise their applications on pale blue paper of at least A4 size on the premises where it can be conveniently read from the exterior for 28 consecutive days.

Additionally, they must place a notice in a newspaper or other publication that circulates in the local area. This is the law that has been in place and followed by applicants for 18 years and is considered to be sufficient by central government.

The council does not have a system that notifies local residents or councillors of a licensing application however unlike planning, the Licensing Act 2003 does include provisions for local residents to call for a Review of a licence if the licensing objectives are not being adhered to by a licensed premises.

If a person is experiencing crime and disorder, a public nuisance or has public safety or child protection concerns about a premises then they can apply to the Council for that licence to be Reviewed by a Licensing Sub-Committee.

Supplementary Question:

How can the Council support a better system for notifying residents of licensing applications so that relevant representations can be made?

Response to Supplementary:

A meeting will be organised between Councillor Torra and the Portfolio Holder, Councillor Michalowski, Executive Member for Place, Planning & Regulatory Services to review the issue raised.

WRITTEN RESPONSES TO BE PROVIDED AFTER THE MEETING

Councillor Khan asked the **Executive Member for Communities, Leisure & Culture, Councillor Ashford**, the following question:

Question 11: Youth Work

With regard to the S507B statutory duty, the National Youth Agency identifies nine 'essentials' to help local authorities evaluate whether local youth work offering complies with the duty. One of the aforementioned 'essentials' is a Needs Assessment that identifies gaps in the "provision of youth work in the community." If Reigate and Banstead council identifies areas where services are lacking, will it communicate this to the upper tier, namely Surrey County Council?

Response:

As a Council we work closely with colleagues in Surrey County Council to consider the needs of our residents, including those of young people.

Through our Community Safety work we convene partnership meetings where we discuss and support young people who may be at risk of entering the criminal justice system.

Our Family Support team is one of the routes within Surrey's County Council's Early Help offer, which brings agencies and professionals together, meaning that a family can access support services through a single coordinated family plan. With young people and their needs often being central to that plan.

In the New Year we plan to re-convene the "Get Connected" network of partners working with young people in the borough. This networking group operated successfully before the COVID pandemic and partners have been keen to see it re-started.

We also take forward specific work in individual communities which often includes work with young people. Work currently underway comprises: a project in Redhill on Safer Streets, where YMCA are a key partner; discussions with partners around Merstham; and, our Community Development team supporting local projects such as football for young people in Timperley and Preston.

We will continue our dialogue with Surrey County Council as all this work progresses and flag needs to them as they emerge. I also hope to meet with Councillor Khan to discuss his ideas about young people further.