

ENVIRONMENT PDS COMMITTEE

7th July 2015

5. QUESTIONS TO THE ENVIRONMENT PORTFOLIO HOLDER

(1) From Cllr Kevin Brooks

It has been reported to me that on the afternoon of Thursday 25 June, sewage pipes were pouring waste into buckets on the 3rd Floor of the Central Library building where the Children's and Families staff work. This was due to the public toilets in the park being closed and the hall toilets on Floor 4 being made into "community toilets" which apparently couldn't cope with the use they were getting. Due to vandalism, these toilets haven't been open for a complete day since the scheme started.

As school visits were taking place on Thursday, there were several complaints from teachers and parents.

Can the PH please report on what action has been or will be taken to address this problem? Would he also be prepared to consider re-opening the toilets in the park if the problems outlined above persist?

Reply:

It is true to say that there has been a recent blockage and some damage caused at Central Library which is currently being repaired.

Rather than re-open the Toilets in the park, additional Community Toilet partners will be sought if the current capacity issues at the library are confirmed and substantiated as being permanent.

Supplementary Question:

Councillor Brooks remarked that the Community Toilet scheme was still in embryonic stage in Penge, and asked the Portfolio Holder what plans he had to ensure that services did not suffer in the transition to the new arrangements, and what was being done to keep businesses on-side and encourage new partners.

Reply:

The Portfolio Holder recognised that the scheme did not have complete support, and that financial necessity rather than choice had driven the proposals, but there was evidence that the scheme was strongly supported and that criticism had been limited. The community toilets were secure, safer, better presented, resulted in less fear of crime, gave wider geographical coverage and could help attract custom to local businesses. There had not been any need to seek new partners as yet, but this would be done if necessary, and there were indications that more and more businesses were becoming interested in participating.

(2) From Simon Thackray, Chairman, Barnmead Road Residents Association

LB Bromley is well aware of the ownership of the road and how to contact us. Why were we, both as residents in the road and also the owners of the road, not consulted earlier in this process?

Reply:

This report is a first resolution report, which seeks authority from myself as the relevant Portfolio Holder for officers to explore the possible making up and adoption of the street or parts thereof. It is therefore the *preliminary* stage, prior to any public consultation, albeit I am aware that Officers have already discussed this matter with you informally.

Supplementary Question:

Mr Thackray drew attention to the letter dated 30th June to councillors, and stated that residents had not been consulted and had known anything about the proposals until the previous Monday. This was disappointing as the Council and the residents association had worked closely last year to bring in the parking scheme. He stated that the report was incorrect on some key points, and that residents wanted the matter to be deferred until September so that they could be consulted and the report corrected.

Reply:

The Portfolio Holder responded that he was content for the first part of the process to go ahead, as this would open up consultation and would not commit anyone to any particular outcome. He wanted to hear views on which option, if any, should be pursued, but he did hope that the route to the station could be improved as pedestrians did risk getting soaked in wet weather.

(3) From Simon Thackray, Chairman, Barnmead Road Residents Association

The report refers to “a long history of complaints” about the condition of the road. Please provide details of these complaints and explain why they have not been passed on to us. In recent years, we have only received one emailed complaint from an individual who was given our details by LB Bromley when she contacted the Council.

Reply:

The Council receives phone calls and emails from people walking to Kent House Station who have at times found the footways to be very difficult to negotiate, as large puddles can be present.

Officers will look at their records to see what details might have been retained and will pass on any information that can be released, mindful of any data protection constraints.

Supplementary Question:

Mr Thackray stated that the complaints were a mystery – he was not aware of any. He sought assurances that any scheme implemented would be sympathetic towards the Article 4 Direction covering these roads.

Reply:

The Portfolio Holder gave his assurance that the Council took planning designations very seriously, that the planning situation would be taken into account and that the Council would seek to follow what residents wanted.

(4) From Simon Thackray, Chairman, Barnmead Road Residents Association

We understand that a metalled road is necessary to designate parking bays for which charging can be made. The report makes no mention of any proposals in relation to parking and/or attempting to charge for parking in Plawsfield Road. Please confirm LB Bromley's intentions in relation to parking in Plawsfield Road.

Reply:

The Portfolio Holder accepted that there might be differing views about whether parking could be provided in Plawsfield Road, but he believed that there was a case and this should be considered. However, at this stage there were no plans or proposals. He stated that he had worked closely with residents and ward councillors in the area in the past and he hoped that the matter could be taken forward positively.

Supplementary Question:

Mr Thackray remarked that there was already some permitted parking in Plawsfield Road, but there was concern that if charges were to be introduced tarmacked bays would need to be laid out. He asked the Portfolio Holder if he recognised that this would conflict with the Article 4 Direction.

Reply:

The Portfolio Holder responded that he was aware that any proposals would have to be implemented sensitively and in conjunction with residents.

(5) From Mr Colin Willetts (for written reply)

Could the Portfolio Holder tell us how negotiations are proceeding in terms of 'when' will the removal of waste begin at the former W4F site in Cornwall Drive?

Reply:

Whilst the legal process remains incredibly frustrating and slow, the current impasse ultimately remains in the hands of the Environment Agency and the landowner to determine between themselves.

The current position remains that the Environment Agency served a Notice under section 59 of the Environment Act 1990 on the land owner on 8th April 2015, requiring them to reduce the remaining stock to 5,500 tonnes by 10th August 2015 or face the prospect of the Agency doing so themselves and pursuing all associated costs through any means possible.

Whether it remains possible for the owner to achieve this financially, or indeed whether they are minded to do so at all or instead challenge the EA through the Courts, still remains to be seen; we will hopefully know and I am cautiously optimistic that we will discover which, before that date is reached.

It remains impossible to predict with any certainty when the site will finally be cleared, or who will pay for it, until the outcome of the process described above has run its course.