

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC FOR ORAL REPLY

From Hedwig Hegtermans to the Portfolio Holder for Education

1. How does closing the Widmore centre for adult education (AE) fit in the council's vision for 2020 'Building a better Bromley'? If there was not such a broad AE, surely this vision means to install at least something like what we have already in our BAEC.

Reply

The proposal for the reorganisation of adult education aims to align the main focus of the service more closely with those of Building a Better Bromley (BBB).

In BBB the Council makes clear its commitment to look after and support those who are most disadvantaged and vulnerable in our community and for residents to lead healthier, more independent lives. The document also emphasises the need for BAEC to play a key role in helping local people to become work ready. In order to help the Council achieve the BBB objectives we recognise the need to work in partnership with local community organisations, the voluntary sector, and public bodies such as Job Centre Plus and Public Health.

We readily acknowledge the contribution that adult education already makes towards strengthening and empowering individuals and communities through its family learning programmes, community partnership work, and targeted qualification programmes. However, the Ofsted report of March 2015 highlighted to us that the adult education funding could and should be making an even greater impact on the lives of local disadvantaged adults. By redirecting more of the public funding received for this purpose towards the community and partnership provision, adult education will be able to support more disadvantaged and low waged residents and communities, providing them with the helping hand they need to lead healthier more independent lives.

Increasing the volumes of partnership working that will be required to achieve this will result in the service delivering more of its curriculum within local community settings and venues provided by our partners. By releasing the Widmore site a considerable expenditure will be removed from the adult education budget, helping the Council to invest more of the grant in curriculum rather than an old building that has become expensive to maintain and repair.

Supplementary Question

Hedwig Hegtermans suggested that many activities were involved in leading independent, active lives. These were not necessarily vital courses such as English or Maths, but were courses providing much joy e.g. to the elderly. Hedwig Hegtermans further suggested that some people would be prepared to pay more for courses but this had not been mentioned.

Reply

The Portfolio Holder indicated that there was no weighting on the value of courses – the current position had been reached, in part, through the level of Government funding provided. The Portfolio Holder was confident of provision being available in the market place to take courses forward and he encouraged potential providers to come forward to this end. On residents being prepared to pay more for courses it would be necessary to look at this in the round. To continue some courses at the Widmore site (e.g. painting/design) it would be necessary to increase their cost by 150%, quickly creating an unstable position.

2. How come that the Widmore centre has already been earmarked for being the most likely candidate to house the free school La Fontaine before the fate as its main centre for BAEC has been decided?

Reply

No decision has been made about the future of The Widmore. If a decision is made by the Executive to cease BAEC provision on the site, the Council will then consider the best use of the site for Bromley residents. Given that it has previously operated as a school and we are experiencing an unprecedented demand for school places, one of the options will be for it to be used as a school. The reference to La Fontaine reflects information in the Draft Local Plan which sets out the education need and assesses a range of sites across the borough which may offer potential to meet that need. The Widmore is suggested as one of three possible permanent sites for the school but this is dependent on the adult education decision.

Supplementary Question

Hedwig Hegtermans suggested that the Widmore site is an obvious candidate for the school, the other two sites being located on green belt land.

Reply

The Portfolio Holder indicated that the Draft Local Plan referred to possible sites for the school including the Widmore site. However, this did not mean that the site would definitely be included in the Local Plan. No planning decision was taken lightly and there remained intense pressure for education places. The Widmore site was one location on the list but no decision had been taken.

From Mr Andrew Newlands to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal and Recreation

1. The Airport pledged that no development would be outside the existing airport boundary. Could you therefore provide a map of such existing airport boundary?

Reply

The airport lease is registered at the Land Registry and a copy of the registered title, which includes an official plan showing the area leased, is publicly available from the Land Registry on payment of a small fee.

Supplementary Question

Mr Newlands asked the Portfolio Holder whether he had a copy of the plan and enquired further whether any development would be within the airport boundary.

Reply

The Portfolio Holder indicated that he did not personally have a copy of the plan and indicated that any development plan would have to come to L B Bromley as Planning Authority. However, the Portfolio Holder felt that it was highly unlikely that approval would be given to develop on green belt land.

2. We are informed by LBB that the NAP will run in tandem with the Lease to protect residents amenity - has the lease been updated by Bromley Council's legal team, in line with recommendations re current noise standards, as recommended by ICAO? If not, what is/are the reason(s)?

Reply

We are in the process of agreeing the timescales for implementation of the numerous conditions and the necessary deed of variation to implement the changes to the lease will be agreed and entered into once that process has been completed.

Supplementary Question

Highlighting that noise standards must be updated, Mr Newlands sought an indication from the Portfolio Holder on the level of adherence to clauses.

Reply

The Portfolio Holder indicated that the lease is already consistent with the latest Government revisions about aircraft noise limits, which broadly in turn adopt the ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organisation) methodology. The

most recent Government revision was in 2002, when a ban on aircraft not complying with Chapter 3 limits, or better, was instituted and this is already in operation at the Airport. By implementing the NAP, which an Airport of Biggin Hill's size is not required to do, alongside the lease, the result is greater noise protection than is currently the case. The limits in the NAP are more stringent than the Airport had originally proposed and for the first time, in the early morning period, in the same morning period that aircraft can already operate, there will be absolute and average noise level limits along with a limit on movements too, none of which exist currently or is covered by ICAO or Government guidance.

The Portfolio Holder further confirmed that Chapter 4 does not apply to an airport of the size of Biggin Hill.

From Mr Nicholas Mulholland to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal and Recreation

1. Of the 309,392 LBB residents, can you please advise how many have indicated their support for an increase in airport operating hours?

Reply

The responses to the Council's consultation can be found in the Council report which was considered last March. In total, out of the 41,711 responses received, 31,500 or 76% indicated that they support BHAL's proposals, with 10,211 or 24% indicating that they were against the proposals. Therefore almost 300,000 of our residents either supported or didn't object to the proposal. If you take out discredited responses there was still a number in favour of the proposals.

Supplementary Question

In his supplementary question, Mr Mulholland indicated that 88% of residents who responded to an independent survey (by Flightpath Watch) were against an extension of hours.

Reply

The Portfolio Holder confirmed that from the survey conducted by L B Bromley, a majority were in favour of the proposals. Concerning the independent survey, the Portfolio Holder suggested that the type of response depended to a large extent on how the question is asked.

2. In light of the recent scrutiny committee's decision to not scrutinise and evidence that BHAL do not propose to deliver on pledges, how can the public trust Councillors' processes?

Reply

There has rightly been much scrutiny and discussion about this whole proposal including three separate Council meetings, over 100 Council questions at numerous Council meetings, not to mention extensive consultation and individual discussions with individual residents. Rather than pledges and an agreed plan, the Council has wanted a legally binding Noise Action Plan which was also one of the comments received in the Council's consultation. This is what the various recommendations give and this is what the legal agreement will be based on. The proposals actually give more information and transparency to local people so they can monitor Airport activities in terms of aircraft movements in virtual real time, giving us all a greater ability to scrutinise.

Supplementary Question

In highlighting that the second part of his question referred to process, Mr Mulholland suggested that in excess of £100k had been donated to the Conservative Party by Biggin Hill Airport and Mr Mulholland asked the Leader about any contact he might have had with Sir Edward Lister.

Reply

Concerning any contact with Sir Edward Lister, the Leader recalled that there had been a couple of conversations involving the Biggin Hill Strategic Outer London Development Centre and generating employment opportunities at the airport. However, the Leader could not recall any discussion with Sir Edward Lister specifically about the airport itself. The Leader felt that the GLA would probably support the extension of operating hours for the airport.

3. Without effective scrutiny of Council processes, what measures exist to allow a resident to protect their amenity and environment within this borough? I wish to prevent increased aeroplanes over my home.

Reply

The current lease allows up to 125,000 aircraft movements per year, with higher noise levels. The Noise Action Plan gives greater noise protection than the lease and with a review being triggered if 50,000 movements are exceeded, numbers of movements are to be tackled too. If you want to prevent increased aeroplanes over your home you should surely be supportive of these measures.

Supplementary Question

In a brief dialogue which followed, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that, once the new NAP had come into effect then, if the number of flights were to

exceed 50,000 in a year, it would be possible for the Council to rescind the amended hours approval.
