

COUNCIL MEETING

9th December 2019

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC FOR ORAL REPLY

1. From Fiona Kerlogue, to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Community Services

In the light of the Climate Emergency and the 2018 recommendations of the Committee for Climate Change to double the number of new trees planted annually, what changes have been made or are planned to Bromley Council's Tree Management Strategy 2016-2020 which will ensure an immediate and substantial increase in the number of trees on Council-owned land in the Borough?

Reply:

As a minimum, the council will be planting 402 new trees this winter through normal service commitments. Also, as part of the Council's Carbon Management Programme, we are currently reviewing viable options for achieving our 2029 Net Zero Carbon target, with planting mini-woodlands being one of those options. However, it should be noted that significant capital investment for tree maintenance is an essential factor - establishing trees is not a cheap or low cost exercise. Proper investment is essential to achieve a healthy urban forest or mini-woodland of suitable tree species.

Supplementary Question:

Am I right in understanding that the Council is committing to planting thousands of trees next year?

Reply:

At this stage, no, we have not committed to any number in the current programme. The carbon Management Plan, which will feed in to the strategy for reaching the 2029 target, will come to the Environment and Community Services PDS Committee in January and from that we will be looking at further investment to plant more trees.

The number I have given is the first phase of our tree planting programme for this year and as yet we have not defined a number that will be in subsequent phases.

Additional supplementary Question from Cllr Simon Fawthrop:

Is the Portfolio Holder aware that if Sadiq Khan has his way in the London Plan we could plant as many trees as we wanted, but thousands of trees would be removed by his desire to build on back gardens across Greater London and that the Inspectors who have looked at that Plan want to build over swathes of green belt and, again, eradicate trees.

Reply:

Our Local Plan does indicate what developers are expected to contribute, in terms of carbon offset of any development and one would hope, although this is something that should be directed to Cllr Michael as Chairman of Development Control Committee, in terms of how we equate for the loss of carbon offset features, such as trees, in the development of a new proposal, and therefore what they have to provide as a minimum, either as carbon offset or solar or other carbon efficient features in new developments.

Additional supplementary Question from Cllr Vanessa Allen:

I would like Bromley to plant more trees, and it does not need to lose trees at the expense of house building. Can the Portfolio Holder liaise with the Chairman of Development Control Committee on that?

Reply:

I think Cllr Fawthrop has pointed out that trees will be taken out on non-public land and we will be planting trees on public land. They are completely separate issues. We obviously do need to protect the Green Belt and all the other elements that compose the lungs of our environment.

2. From Katie Lawlor to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Community Services

We would like to voice our serious concerns about the safety of our children crossing Nightingale Lane, Homesdale Road, Pembroke Road and Bishop's Avenue on their way to and from Bickley Primary School, as there are currently no pedestrian crossings.

What will the Council do to ensure the safety of our children on their journey to Bickley Primary School?

Reply:

The safety of children travelling to school is always of great importance to Bromley Council. To this end, the Council's team of School Travel Advisers liaise with every school to engage with them in a dialogue as to how best to develop plans to help parents and pupils walk or cycle to school, or use other active means such as scooters. Also, Road Safety Officers from the Council run a programme of targeted road safety education lessons and campaigns, aimed primarily at school children in the Borough.

In regard to adding crossing facilities, the Council will seek to introduce these where appropriate, but not every location where children cross the road is suitable. Of the roads listed, Homesdale Road is considered to be a barrier to walking, as it carries a heavy traffic flow, and consideration is being given to introducing a crossing here (most likely a zebra crossing). Traffic engineers have investigated the main crossing points on the other roads you have listed - Nightingale Lane, Pembroke Road and Bishop's Avenue - and have concluded that with the recent introduction of various safety signs and road markings, it is not suitable to add crossing points in these roads.

Supplementary Question:

Are we able to see a copy of the Traffic Engineer's report? We, as parents, have a slightly different view. Is there any way to feed in to that, or have that reviewed at a later stage?

Reply:

I did not imply that there was a report. This is through the general liaison and expertise of our Team looking at the road - there is not actually a formal report. You have a second question, and the best way to engage with this process is through speaking to the school and feeding in to the school travel plan.

3. From Pamela Hicks to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation and Housing

What is the current position regarding the proposed development of modular housing for temporary accommodation in Burnt Ash Lane car park and when is the application for planning permission to be submitted?

Reply:

The planning application for the Burnt Ash Lane housing is due to be submitted before the end of December this year, and local residents and traders will be consulted during the consideration process of that application, which is likely to be early 2020.

4. From Garnet Frost to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation and Housing

Regarding the Council's plans for Beckenham Library, the Beckenham Society, in partnership with local residents' and business groups, have commissioned a professionally sourced report, examining the feasibility as well as the desirability of these proposals. I know that the Council does not usually accept reports that it hasn't commissioned itself, but, in this instance, will the chamber please allow this particular report to be submitted and examined?

Reply:

The proposals to relocate Beckenham Library are at a very early stage. There is no reason why Council officers would not look at the report you have mentioned, alongside their own viability assessment and, indeed, wider community consultation.

5. From Reverend Agnita Oyawale, Bromley Town Centre Chaplin, to the Leader of the Council

The Council have indicated that they want to work effectively with community groups and charities. What measures are in place to facilitate this?

Reply:

The Council has a long history of working with a range of voluntary groups and local charities in a myriad of ways, both formally and informally, across the wide range of services the Council is directly responsible for and beyond. The Council has also been responsible for helping establish a number of groups and we continue to also work with groups to help build capacity within their group setting too. We continue to work closely with Community Links Bromley, who as well as being a leader and voice

for the third sector in Bromley, also has 260 voluntary and community groups in their membership. We have recently been consulting with Resident Association groups about the forthcoming budgetary priorities for the year ahead, which is something we have done for a number of years now. We were responsible for setting up the successful Mytime Active organisation, which operates as a social enterprise and charity, as well as operating leisure centres across the Borough. The Council was also instrumental in setting up the Friends Forum, which helps to represent Friends of Parks groups across the Borough and we remain highly supportive of the many Friends of Parks groups, as well as Street Friend and Snow Friends groups who are standby over the winter period. The Council also works with religious groups, with many churches and other organisations offering their premises in the event of an emergency whenever that may occur. More could be said about all of this but clearly whilst there are limits, we will continue to look to improve these many relationships and develop others, both in depth and breadth, for the good of residents borough wide, and particularly in addressing our loneliness agenda.

Supplementary Question:

That is very commendable and great to hear. I would like to know how many members of staff and how many hours has been allocated to ensuring that this work with community groups can grow and develop, particularly with religious groups, because there is a lot of goodwill towards the Council and they want to be more involved.

Reply:

I am heartened to hear that. We are on the same page. I do not have those numbers available to me this evening, but I will ask if officers to try and quantify that for you. Thank you for your helpful comments.

6. From Katie Lawlor to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Community Services

Will the Council approve pedestrian crossings on the surrounding roads to ensure our children's safety?

Reply:

As I have previously set out, crossings will most certainly be considered where they are needed, on a priority basis. As distances from the school get greater the number of different crossing points increases and therefore one of the things we do is to help children cross the road, so it is not just on the walk to school but is also when they go into the green spaces around here that they are safe on our roads. It is providing the skills to cross the road safely.

7. From Pamela Hicks to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation and Housing

Report No. DRR19/044a date 02/08/2019 - paragraph 3.8 refers to usage data (which is understood relates to a usage survey - carried out over 4 days in June 2019), states that the car park operates below its current capacity. Can the Council confirm if the usage of the car park by Driving Test Candidates (amounting to a maximum of 10 candidates parked in the car park at any given time - see Council document 18/01775/FULL1) attending the Driving Test Centre at 121-123 Burnt Ash

Lane was taken into consideration when the decision was made that the car park operates below its current capacity?

Reply:

The use of the car park was monitored through survey work over a complete week. The car park has also been visited by officers since then for additional monitoring. Whilst it was not possible to ascertain why particular users were using the car park during monitoring, all users were included in the survey.

Supplementary Question:

My actual question was whether or not you had taken account of the driving test candidates also using the car park, as that planning application went in last year and it was not mentioned at the Council meeting when you said that the car park was not meeting its current capacity.

Reply:

If driving test candidates were using the car park during the full week of our survey they were taken into account.

Additional Supplementary Question from Ms Hicks:

No, they weren't, it has only just opened, but the planning permission had been granted before the survey; when the decision was made in August it did not look as if you had taken account of the fact that the driving test centre was now going to open, using an additional ten spaces.

Reply:

We have not made the decision, the planning application is going in by the end of this month and all those issues will be debated during consideration of the planning application, including the use by the driving test centre.

Additional Supplementary Question from Cllr Michael Turner:

Is the Portfolio Holder aware that parking spaces for the driving test candidates are not actually in the car park, they are in the area behind the parade of shops which is separated from the car park by a low fence?

Reply:

I am most grateful for that information and I will pass it through to the officers.

8. From Reverend Agnita Oyawale, Bromley Town Centre Chaplin, to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation and Housing

I have met a number of young homeless, unemployed people while serving as the Bromley Town Centre Chaplain therefore, I would like to know what plans the Council has in place to effectively house young homeless people between the ages of 18 and 25 over the next 3 years.

Reply:

Bromley Council's Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023 has identified four key priorities as part of our work to prevent homelessness. One of these key priorities is to achieve positive outcomes for our young people (that means 18 through to 24) through a series of measures to prevent homelessness wherever possible or to secure alternative safe and suitable accommodation through a supportive housing

pathway which includes both access to accommodation, life skills training, and education and employment activities. This work has been developed using best practice guidance and the support of the specialist housing adviser for young people at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. The work-streams arising from the homelessness strategy are reviewed and monitored through the multi-agency homelessness forum. The full homelessness strategy can be found on the Council's website.

Supplementary Question:

I am wondering how we can do better because I am still meeting young people whose situation is dire?

Reply:

All ideas are welcome - if you have any ideas please tell me afterwards. We have considered 185 cases this year so far; 50 of those we managed to organise so that they stayed at home, 70 of them we had to put up in temporary accommodation and 65 we managed to put into more permanent accommodation, whether flat-sharing or the private rented sector. We are making good progress, but you are quite right, we never do enough and any ideas are welcome.

Additional Supplementary Question from Cllr Simon Jeal:

Could the Portfolio Holder please confirm how the Council assesses that its accommodation is safe and suitable for young people, particularly when the housing may be outside of the borough?

Reply:

I think I am right in saying that all accommodation is inspected by our officers before it is allocated.

The Mayor added that one of the two charities that he was supporting this year was the Latch, which aimed to help youngsters between 18 and 24, who were the hidden homeless, with lodgings. That is chaired by Mrs Moira Morgan who does an excellent job.