

COUNCIL MEETING

9th December 2019

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL FOR ORAL REPLY

1. From Cllr Angela Wilkins to the Leader of the Council

The officer's recommendation to refuse permission on a planning application for 10 Hazelwood Road, Cudham, Sevenoaks TN14 7QU ref 19/00594 was over-turned by just one vote at Plans 4 on April 25th 2019 and approval was given.

I am told by officers who have investigated this for me that this application was not called-in by a member of this Council.

The property involved is residential, relatively isolated and of no public interest; there were no objections from neighbours or elsewhere.

Please provide a full explanation for why this application was decided at committee and not under delegated authority.

Reply:

I am advised by the Assistant Director, Planning that the application was subject to discussions between a Councillor and the case officer and the officer decided to put the application up for a committee decision based on this interest. As well that, officers are permitted to refer applications to committee even if they fall within delegated authority.

Supplementary Question:

Are you aware that the report that went to the planning committee for this application stated quite clearly that this application had been called in by a member, and also in reference to a written question put in by Cllr Allen, it was also confirmed in that reply that this application was called in by a Member, so I don't entirely accept your explanation.

Reply:

Whether Cllr Wilkins accepts my explanation or not, that is what the Chief Planner told me. Unless you know more than that, there is not much more to say other than that there has been some confusion whether this item was called in or not, but officers are stating very clearly that it was not. It is mentioned within this report that it was passed by one vote, and that Cllr Ahmad voted in favour of it, so there cannot be anything wrong with it.

2. From Cllr Simon Jeal to the Leader of the Council

I understand that, following preparation by officers, proposals for the care homes options appraisal have been provided to you by the interim director for adult social services. What recommendations have been made as a result of the review?

Reply:

At my personal suggestion, a detailed options appraisal was carried out to investigate the potential for the Council to provide residential/nursing provision for older people in Bromley. The work identified that this option would not prove cost effective, requiring the Council to charge way above the standard rate that it pays to existing providers in order to break even.

Since that time, and, again, at my request, the interim Director of Adult Services has reviewed this work in close detail and she supported the findings. In addition, she observed that the Council no longer has the infrastructure or expertise to manage a service of this sort internally, which would add additional cost and burden to the service. We will therefore not be progressing this idea at this time.

Supplementary Question:

I believe in the budget there is £1.5m of either the Better Care Fund or the Improved Better Care Fund allocated for this options appraisal. What will happen to that money given that it will not be used on this project?

Reply:

It will be used on other worthy health initiatives as decided between the CCG, Care Services and the Health and Wellbeing Board here in Bromley.

3. From Cllr Marina Ahmad to the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education & Families (as Cllr Ahmad was not present a written reply would be provided.)

What safeguards do we have in place to monitor and protect our children who are placed in unregulated and unregistered homes?

Reply:

We have NO children in unregulated placements and Bromley do not place children in any placement that is not rated good or above.

4. From Cllr Vanessa Allen to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation & Housing

In July I submitted a written question asking for details of planning applications which had been called in for decision by committee, including the name of the councillor who called them in. All of the information requested was provided with the exception of the name of the councillor who called each application in.

Please explain why this information was not provided?

Reply:

We have not got the information tonight, but it is in course of preparation by the officers - it is quite a long piece of work. I am told that I will have it this week and it will be sent by email to all Councillors. You will have all the numbers and all the names then. (See Appendix 1)

Supplementary Question:

Cllr Allen thanked the Portfolio Holder and stated that she would await the document with great interest.

Additional Supplementary Question from Cllr Angela Wilkins:

Can the Portfolio Holder confirm that the application referred to in my first question, which is on that list, will include the name of the member who called it in?

Reply:

I believe that all of the ones that were on that list will have a name against them.

5. From Cllr Ian Dunn to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation & Housing

Is the Portfolio Holder aware that the Supplementary Planning Guidance for the Elm Road Conservation Area describes Beckenham Library as -

Number 22 Beckenham Road (the Library) is a good example of late Art Deco architecture and was built in 1939. A large multi stock brick building with large vertical metal framed windows with concrete surrounds. Fine decorative bust in keystone in the surround on the window above the main library road entrance. There is also a large decorative keystone above the large window facing Beckenham Road. The entrance facing Beckenham Road has an imposing pair of geometric panelled wooden doors with a moulded concrete coat of arms above it.

Reply:

Yes.

Supplementary Question:

What do you think the impact on the Elm Road Conservation Area will be if the library is replaced by a five storey block of flats?

Reply:

First of all, we do not know that it is going to be replaced by a five storey block of flats. The illustration in the document that we looked at last week at the Executive was simply a space study. Whatever goes on that site, if anything goes on there at all, will be carefully designed. There will be an architectural competition and we will invite members of the public to comment. The supplementary guidance which you refer to describes all of the buildings within that conservation area. This particular building is not either locally or statutorily listed, however the heritage impact will be fully considered for any proposals being made and, if applicable, as a key part of any planning application.

6. From Cllr Kathy Bance MBE to Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation & Housing:

Can the Portfolio Holder explain why with the funding High Street Penge received from the New Homes Bonus and TfL for regeneration the effects of the money spent has shown no improvement to the High Street? Officers have been allowed to agree to losing a perfectly mature tree and provide two unsightly trees planted into huge tree pits, 2/3rd too big and which take up so much of the concourse. The seating is too close to filthy bins and electricity cases and face the oversized tree pits.

Reply:

I cannot agree with the Councillor's assessment that the public realm works have shown no improvement to the High Street, although the Member should note that the improvement scheme is not yet complete.

The scheme has included works to the carriage ways to improve bus routes and junctions, works to improve the public footway, decluttering of the public realm, improvements to the legibility and use of Arpley and Empire Squares and a shop front improvement scheme.

Supplementary Question:

There may be fringe benefits, but the work is absolutely appalling. Will you agree to have a senior officer come and do a site visit with me so that we can point out exactly what all the problems are, although they are clear to be seen if you walk down the High Street.

Reply:

I will do my best to arrange that, and I will come myself.

7. From Cllr Josh King to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation & Housing

What is the justification of the description of Beckenham Public Halls as "underutilised" given in the paper on the relocation of Beckenham Library discussed at the last Renewal, Recreation and Housing PDS Committee?

Reply:

The data provided by the current lease holder of the facilities, MyTime, indicates the under usage. There are many rooms in the building. This year there have been just six one off events at the Hall, and the regular weekly activities do not make full use of all the space. For example on Thursdays the following activity takes place at the Hall:

- 9.30am – 12.30pm meeting
- 2.00pm – 4.00pm meeting
- 4.00pm – 6.30pm Bridge Club
- 7.30pm – 9.30pm Yoga

The Public Hall is a large building, with many rooms, so this booking information does demonstrate that it is underutilised. Additionally it is worth noting that all these activities are compatible with a library setting and there is no reason why they could not continue if the library were relocated.

Supplementary Question:

When I visited the halls and looked at the notice-boards I did see a large number of activities and groups, some of these during the day when one might expect the Library to be open. Despite what the Portfolio Holder said, there could be events that will not be compatible with a quiet library. Do you not understand the residents' dismay about the reduction in community space which the relocation of the Library to the Beckenham Public Halls will result in?

Reply:

We will look at all these things when we do our study.

Additional Supplementary Question from Cllr Alexa Michael:

What assurances can the Portfolio Holder give that there will be no reduction in the volume of book stock as and when Beckenham Library moves to its new home, and that the same number of facilities will remain available to the public in the Library?

Reply:

If we find that the facilities are not adequate for a similar number of books and the same number of facilities and activities then it will not proceed.

8. From Cllr Kevin Brooks to the Portfolio Holder for Public Protection & Enforcement

LBB's CCTV service is responsible for the management and operation of cameras installed in crime hotspots and town centre. Penge Traders and BID team recently attended the CCTV Control Room where it was clear that Empire Square (McDonalds) is a known black spot in our High Street, yet there is no CCTV cover. Would the Portfolio Holder meet the Penge BID team halfway with the cost of installing a CCTV camera?

Reply:

There are 12 cameras in Penge which cover the High Street. The CCTV control room report that when they get calls to McDonalds they are able to cover the entrance by using three of the existing cameras. However, if Police consider this is an ASB hotspot which would benefit from an additional camera then we would consider this in the usual way. To date, we have not received any requests from Police to install any more cameras at this location, and additionally Mr Terry Eagle - who is the Manager of McDonalds in Penge - is a member of the Bromley Safer Neighbourhood Board, and he has never raised any concerns about the camera coverage outside his business.

Supplementary Question:

I'll be pleased to go back to both Mr Eagle and the Police with your answer because the Penge BID is one of the smallest in Bromley so therefore has a similar budget. It is already sponsoring community cohesion events and is funding two part-time High Street Wardens. This is one of the biggest hotspots for crime in Penge so any help that we can get from the Council would be very much appreciated. If I can get the Police and Mr Eagle back to you that would be great.

Reply:

I will be happy to hear back from Mr Eagle and the Police. This morning I was sent a screenshot of a camera from the CCTV room, and it did have McDonalds and Empire Square in shot, so I am not sure that there is a need for an additional camera, but I am always happy to look at further applications.

9. From Cllr Simon Jeal to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Community Services

What events, initiatives or other communications did council officers undertake to mark or raise awareness as part of National Road Safety Week (November 18th to 23rd)?

Reply:

The Road safety team believe that every week should be road safety week and they have an extensive education, training and publicity programme that runs throughout the year.

The programme includes:

- Child car seat fitting and checking
- Year 2 road safety role play
- Year 3 Scootsure- Scooter training
- Year 5 Speed Gun workshops
- Year 6 road safety talks
- Recruiting and supporting the JTA (Junior Travel Ambassador) Scheme
- Year 6 Bikeability level 1 & 2 cycle training
- Year 7 Transition talks
- Year 7 Bikeability level 3 cycle training
- Year 11 Moped Education
- Year 12 Pre Driver Training
- Year 13 New Driver Training
- Police Road Safety Education stops.

They always try to support any additional requests from schools and their partners during road safety week but try to encourage road safety to be to be delivered at more regular intervals than just one week.

Supplementary Question:

Would he agree that other weeks and initiatives, such as the safeguarding week performed by the Adult Safeguarding Board have proved very effective at highlighting some of these issues. Given your reference earlier to the importance of road safety awareness will you agree to look at what we could do for Road Safety Week next year?

Reply:

There are a large number of weeks. Often what we do in that week is publicise what we are doing all year round. For example, the week following that was National Tree Week. We do not only plant trees in one week - we plant them in the planting season which is about three or four months long. Certainly, if it is useful to highlight exactly what we are doing we can look at doing that next year.

10. From Cllr Marina Ahmad to the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education & Families (as Cllr Ahmad was not present a written reply would be provided.)

Why is Bromley paying more than other boroughs to place children in the same unregulated children's homes?

Reply:

Bromley do not pay more for any placements.

11. From Cllr Vanessa Allen to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation & Housing

The government has recently relaxed legislation relating to the sale of housing stock by registered social landlords or housing associations. Previously RSLs were required to seek the permission of the local authority who had formerly owned these properties before they put them up for sale.

There is clear evidence of RSLs in the north of the borough selling off homes which are desperately needed by this Council, and our housing team report reductions in the number of properties which they have been offered by our in-borough housing associations.

Will he agree to make the strongest representations locally with RSLs and nationally with the government to be elected later this week?

Reply:

Yes, this continues to be raised through the Bromley Federation of Housing Associations, which I generally attend, and meetings with the GLA. Whilst legislation has changed, the vast majority of housing associations with stock in the Borough do continue to liaise with the Council's housing department in respect of potential availability. Options are considered prior to disposal to try and maintain stock within the social housing sector. Where a decision is taken to dispose this is usually because it is not economically or structurally viable to maintain the accommodation at the necessary standard. It may be worth noting that this has resulted in some stock being disposed of to other housing associations or social housing providers.

Supplementary Question:

I would like to have more specific information about how this is monitored, how many have been lost as opposed to being sold to another provider, and whether there is any other action that you can consider taking?

Reply:

I will endeavour to provide that information for you.

Additional Supplementary Question from Cllr Simon Fawthrop

If a housing association either offered right to buy or sold a property and as a result of that was able to invest in other properties, who would be against it?

Reply:

Not I.

Additional Supplementary Question from Cllr Aisha Cuthbert:

Is the Portfolio Holder aware that under the social housing regulator, housing associations must still have permission. Could he follow that up?

Reply:

I will indeed. I am sure that they all comply with whatever rules and regulations they have to.

12. From Cllr Ian Dunn to the Leader of the Council

Can you please explain why the Council permitted a backlog of £400,000 in maintenance to build up at the grade 2 listed Beckenham Public Halls?

Reply:

Members will be aware of the financial pressures the Council has faced in recent years and indeed continues to face looking forwards.

As a result of these pressures, the maintenance of all Council assets have had to be dealt with on the basis of evidenced need and on a prioritised basis, rather than by pre-set maintenance schedules, which have had to be extended in the light of the financial reality.

Supplementary Question:

The Library paper stated that the Beckenham Public Halls was last surveyed in 2014/15. Could the Leader tell the Council when our property will next be surveyed, because, being five years since it was last surveyed does not strike me as being very prudent?

Reply:

I clearly do not have that information to hand, although I believe it was quite recently, and I will feed back with a written answer.

Additional Supplementary Question from Cllr Michael Tickner:

Is the Leader aware that Beckenham Public Halls currently has scaffolding being erected, and maintenance work being carried out on a substantial scale?

Reply:

I have not been advised of the works, which clearly are a good thing if they are putting right the maintenance backlog.

13. From Cllr Kathy Bance MBE to Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation & Housing

Waterman's Square is part of the Heritage in Penge. Can the Portfolio Holder confirm that LBB is responsible for the historic aspects of Waterman's Square? If he is, is he also aware that Clarion's processes for reporting faults are ensuing that Waterman's Square slowly falls into disrepair and will he agree to a joint inspection with LBB and Officers to address the issues on this historic site?

Reply:

The Council is responsible for Waterman's Square itself, but not the buildings therein. The Council is not aware of Clarion's fault reporting process, as the Council does not have any responsibility on that. We are not aware of any outstanding repairs which are the responsibility of the Council. However, if matters are brought to the Council's attention, in relation to the Square itself, then they will be inspected and dealt with as normal, although that probably falls within the Environment and Community Services Portfolio.

Supplementary Question:

If I give you a matrix of the outstanding work that I and the residents have been working on for two years, would you take a look at it and point me in the right direction?

Reply:

Of course.

14. From Cllr Josh King to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation & Housing

What is the Portfolio Holder's view of the motion passed by CILIP members (the librarian's professional body) against the decision to admit GLL into CILIP's 'Employer Partner' scheme?

Reply:

At its annual general meeting the CILIP considered a motion to review its Employer Partner scheme. The motion proposed a series of changes that might be made to the scheme generally and was not a motion about GLL specifically which is already a partner. Reference was made to the industrial action taken against GLL by some of its employees and asked CILIP to provide a statement on its position. The motion was passed by 77 votes for and 47 against. The motion has advisory status for the Board of Trustees who are currently considering the matter.

Supplementary Question:

Do you not agree that the members' perception of GLL as an employer who is casualising and de-professionalising the role of librarians will not attract the best librarians to work in Bromley in the future and that this poses a risk to the quality of Bromley's Library Service.

Reply:

No, because I completely disagree with the supposition that you make.

(During consideration of question 14, Councillor Alexa Michael declared an interest as a member of CILIP (the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals).)

15. From Cllr Kevin Brooks to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation & Housing

The security lighting in Queen Adelaide Court is fixed to the portals of the facade has not worked for 18 months despite regular reports. Clarion have not yet accepted responsibility nor have LBB. This is a Health & Safety issue as one resident has already fallen in the dark. Can you advise when action will be taken to identify whose responsibility this is and to implement repair/replace of these lights or issue notice to Clarion to do so?

Reply:

These lights are not the responsibility of the Council and as a consequence officers will be raising this directly with Clarion.

Supplementary Question:

Clarion seeming to own half of Penge, I put the wrong information down here, so can I ask the same question but about Watermen's Arms? (The Mayor advised that this did not arise from the original question or the reply, so could not be taken.)