

DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held at 7.30 pm on 20 May 2021

Present:

Councillor Alexa Michael (Chairman)
Councillor Yvonne Bear (Vice-Chairman)
Councillors Julian Benington, Katy Boughey, Peter Dean,
Simon Fawthrop, Christine Harris, Colin Hitchins,
William Huntington-Thresher, Charles Joel, Josh King,
Keith Onslow, Tony Owen, Richard Scoates, Kieran Terry,
Michael Turner and Angela Wilkins

Also Present:

Councillors Neil Reddin FCCA and Melanie Stevens

40 HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION Report HPR2021/025

This report contained information relating to Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and the nature and scale of HMOs in Bromley. The report also set out the options available for controlling HMOs in the Borough and whether such options were justified given the available evidence.

Visiting Ward Member for Biggin Hill, Councillor Melanie Stevens reported that the type of houses being purchased were three bedroomed terraced, semi-detached or end-of-terrace family affordable properties which provided much-needed housing for families. While one or two HMOs would be acceptable, the area had been flooded with 20 within a very small area which tipped the balance in providing a mixed balance of housing stock to meet the needs of local residents. The room sizes were tight and the configurations awkward. Such poor quality accommodation should not be permitted. Although fitted out with the health and safety requirements, no thought had been given to insulating the properties and the increase in noise generated by this type of independent living would be a disturbance to neighbouring properties.

Councillor Stevens went on to state that transport in Biggin Hill was limited to public buses and did not allow easy access to potential work opportunities or support networks across the borough. The type of people moving into the properties would not be able to afford to buy their own vehicles and local residents were concerned about the type of people moving in and the effect this would have on the local community. In this regard, a petition had been started which had already obtained over 1700 signatures. With the full support of the Biggin Hill Residents' Association, Councillor Stevens asked that the

recommendations in the report include the introduction of an immediate Article 4 Direction as she believed there was an immediate threat to the local area.

Councillor Scoates stated the Council should be bolder in how this problem was resolved. He suggested that a recommendation be added to bring in a non-immediate Article 4 Direction across the entire borough giving a 12-month period in which to avoid potential legal action. He also suggested a further recommendation to bring in an immediate Article 4 Direction for Biggin Hill and Darwin on the basis that PTAL rates were too low in those areas. It was not acceptable to have people with low car ownership levels trying to get around the community to find work or visit job centres, medical practices or supermarkets.

Councillor Bear agreed with the issue of a non-immediate Article 4 Direction across the borough. There was currently a proliferation of HMOs across the borough. Cray Valley Ward had the highest proportion of HMOs in Bromley and about 25% were known to be problem HMOs. Problems arose when HMOs became concentrated in a particular area. As well as the recommendation for a non-immediate Article 4 Direction across the Borough, Councillor Bear suggested that licensing colleagues be asked to look again at the licensing requirements for smaller HMOs.

Councillor Fawthrop supported the making of immediate Article 4 Directions for areas in the borough with low PTAL rates of between 0 and 3.

Councillor Benington stated there were major problems in Biggin Hill and Darwin. A very large multi-national company was purchasing many properties in the area and converting them to HMOs. House prices were relatively low compared to the rest of the Borough and this company was making a substantial return on the conversions. If this was allowed to continue the area would be inundated. For this reason Councillor Benington moved that an immediate Article 4 Direction be made Borough-wide; if that failed then one should at least be made for Biggin Hill.

Councillor Wilkins declared she would not vote on this item. Some residents of HMOs were the victims of domestic abuse, modern slavery and people with mental health issues. A major housing crisis existed in the Borough and she was nervous about going down the route of issuing immediate Article 4 Directions.

Councillor Onslow advised that consideration should be given to current and future residents of HMOs as the conditions of some of these properties were detrimental to their health and wellbeing. In this regard robust action should be taken.

Councillor Huntington-Thresher seconded the motion for an immediate Article 4 Direction to be made for Darwin and Biggin Hill.

The Head of Planning Policy and Strategy reported that the tests in the planning practice guidance stated that assessments on the impact on local

amenity and wellbeing were the main considerations when making Article 4 Directions. Once formally approved by the Portfolio Holder, the intention to make Article 4 Directions would be sent to the Secretary of State who would ask for evidence.

While Councillor King supported the need for HMOs in certain situations, he acknowledged the need for affordable accommodation in the borough. He also supported the recommendation for improved licensing.

In response to Councillor Bear, the Head of Planning Policy and Strategy confirmed that low PTAL ratings was in principle, a sufficient reason to apply for Article 4 Directions but in practice, mapping of PTAL would be difficult so they may not be a reliable basis for a Direction.

RESOLVED that:-

- 1 the impacts of HMOs identified in the report and accompanying evidence base document at Appendix 1 be noted;**
- 2 evidence relating to HMOs in the Borough, including seeking more information on smaller HMOs borough wide and within existing and developing clusters, continue to be monitored and kept up-to-date with further reports to be submitted to future meetings of the DCC;**
- 3 a non-immediate Article 4 Direction be introduced across the entire Borough (to avoid compensation claims) and that licensing colleagues be asked to review arrangements for all sizes of HMOs including those with three or more occupants;**
- 4 an immediate Article 4 Direction be introduced for Biggin Hill and Darwin wards given the timing of public transport; and**
- 5 recommendations 3 and 4 be referred to the Executive for consideration.**