

9th October COUNCIL, 2013

MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

1 Harrow Lodge Park

To the Cabinet Member for Culture, Towns & Communities, (Cllr Andrew Curtin)

By Councillor John Mylod

Question:

Given the appalling condition of Harrow Lodge Park, and in particular the water features, would the Cabinet Member set out what investment and improvements are to be made in the short and long term to deal with this highly unsatisfactory situation?

Answer:

I am very grateful to Cllr. Mylod for the question.

We have four main areas of focus in Harrow Lodge Park; the role of the park as a nature conservation corridor linking the centre of the village and Elm Park to the natural environment at Thames Chase and elsewhere; the aesthetic appeal of the park in the visual character of Hornchurch and Elm Park; play and recreation facilities in the park and the role of the park as a venue for major events such as the Havering Show.

We have spent over £400,000 in pursuit of these aims at Harrow Lodge Park in recent years, and further investment will continue to be made in the future. Two new play areas have been installed, as well as a new skate park, new lighting along some footpaths, the tennis courts have been refurbished, an outdoor gym installed at the southern end of the park and improvements made to the bowls club car park. A large amount of new park furniture has been installed including 9 bins, 6 benches, 34 bollards and other work including repairing fences and barriers and planting new trees.

Most importantly improvements have been made to the management of the park to strengthen its role as a habitat for nature conservation and to ensure that it acts as effectively as possible as a link through which nature can move, so that biodiversity does not become hemmed in to only certain areas of the borough - something which would be detrimental to nature and to our own quality of life.

This has contributed to our four main aims for the park by helping to improve the visual aspect of the park from the street at both ends of the park, improving nature conservation and providing new and increased play and recreational facilities.

Responsibility for infrastructure in the centre of the park is shared between us and Thames Water, who have a major interest in the site due to the hydraulics of the River Ravensbourne and the role of this part of the park in flood prevention in Hornchurch, Elm Park and Havering in general.

We feel that a number of aspects of the environment at the Warren Drive entrance to the park do not make a positive contribution to the aesthetics of the entrance to the park and are now outdated solutions to the flood prevention and water-flow issues to which they relate. But we recognise that this aspect of the environment of the park is primarily the responsibility of the Environment Agency and Thames Water and that a solution will require multi-million pound investment from them. We have actively sought funding which would have enabled larger-scale transformation and improvements to habitats at this site, but the level of funding that is required is no longer available.

None-the-less, we continue to take a pro-active approach to minimising the negative impacts of this area on the general environment of the park, and I hope that further measures can be taken in the future.

I understand that, happily, rapid action by the Parks Protection Service, Harrow Lodge Nature Conservation Volunteers and the Swan Sanctuary after the unforeseeable outbreak of Avian Botulism at the site in the summer meant that a great many of the birds survived. Despite this, I am very glad that we have pursued a policy of active intervention since then to reduce the risk of such an outbreak occurring again.

A timetable for works at the lake was published in September and implementation has been effective and on schedule. The new fountain and aeration equipment were all installed on time. Aqua liming of the lake to reduce silt and cool the water began on time in the week commencing 23rd September and, after completion of this round, will be done again in April 2014. Removal of wood from the lake began as timetabled in the week commencing 30th September, and trees around the lake will be cut back and unnecessary shrubs removed in October and November.

Debris is removed from the silt trap and around the lake twice a week and I hope that an effective way can be found of removing rubbish from the lake.

In tandem with this, measures will be implemented to improve the visual aspect of entrances to the park and key locations, and further work done to strengthen the role of the park as a habitat for nature.

Harrow Lodge Park plays an important part in the environment and character of Hornchurch and Elm Park. Writing in 1917 the first historian of Hornchurch, C. T. Perfect, said of the village that “the site of the golden corn in August, when the fields are ripe for harvest, is a thing of beauty, and worth coming many miles to see.”

Clearly much has changed since then, but the link to nature is still very important to Hornchurch and Elm Park, and Harrow Lodge Park plays a central role in this alongside measures such as the green roof at new Elm Park library, strengthening nature conservation in the High Street by increasing the number of trees in it as part of its recent refurbishment, introducing new planting areas to promote year round habitats and food sources at the green by the theatre and Appleton Way car park, and forthcoming improvements at Langtons Gardens and around St. Andrew’s Church.

In this context there is no foundation for Cllr. Mylod’s view that Harrow Lodge Park is in an appalling condition or that there is anything highly unsatisfactory about it, something which seems borne out by the fact that he has never felt moved to raise any concerns about the park with me.

In contrast, we will continue to take a coherent approach to further improving nature conservation, the environment, play and recreation facilities and events at this important site, and I note with great satisfaction that 80% of the over 1,000 residents in Elm Park, St. Andrew’s and Hylands Wards who responded to the recent Your Council Your Say survey said they were very satisfied or satisfied with the parks in their area, one of the highest scores for any service among those respondents.

We agree with them that the quality of the park is very important, and will continue to make improvements to reflect that view in the future. In the meanwhile I am very grateful to Harrow Lodge Nature Conservation Volunteers and to the borough’s excellent Parks Department for the work which they do at this complex site, and look forward to further improvements here in the future.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member confirmed that he would be happy to discuss issues such as consultation with residents and the potential establishment of a Friends of the Park group with the Member concerned. The Cabinet Member was happy that the Council’s work to improve the park had been praised by local residents.

2 London Living Wage

To the Cabinet Member for Transformation (Councillor Michael Armstrong)

By Councillor Keith Darvill

Question:

How many employees of the Council are paid below the current London Living Wage of £8.55p per hour?

Answer:

Currently there are 91 employees in the corporate and schools payrolls below the London Living Wage.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member felt it was important to consider the financial implications of the Council signing up to the London Living Wage and confirmed he would investigate the matter further.

3 Romford Leisure Centre

To the Cabinet Member for Culture, Towns & Communities, (Cllr Andrew Curtin)

By Councillor Jeffrey Tucker

Question:

Please provide an update regarding the new Romford Leisure Centre.

In particular what progress has been made in developing the Western Road site and has there been any changes regarding the projects financial viability?

Answer:

The Council is in the final stages of negotiation on a limited number of detailed legal, construction and financial issues. These need to be resolved before the contract agreement between the Council and Morrisons becomes unconditional and the building work can proceed.

Work on a multi-million-pound project of this scale will always be complex and lengthy – with a lot of legal and financial work going on behind the scenes. Getting the detail of the building right and the best people in place to do the work takes time, but it's the right approach to take.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member was confident that the new Romford Leisure Centre would be successful and added that

there needed to be constant downward pressure on the costs involved with the project.

4 Christmas decoration – Rush Green

To the Cabinet Member for Community Empowerment (Councillor Robert Benham)

By Councillor Fred Osborne

Question:

Can the Cabinet Member please advise as to the reason why there has never been any Christmas decoration supplied to the Rush Green Shopping area as this is a main thoroughfare to Romford. Also this is the only area without anything being carried out.

Answer:

In the run up to the Christmas period our focus will be on supporting local businesses to get the very best out of the season. Christmas street lights and decorations go some way towards encouraging customers from the borough and beyond to come to Havering to buy gifts, visit local cafes and grab a festive drink in the bars and pubs in the area.

Havering certainly doesn't scrimp on Christmas decorations and we've also brokered-in external funding in some instances to bolster our own investment. However, we do have to prioritise the areas with the greatest number of businesses and most shoppers, as the budget is not limitless.

Nevertheless, we are halfway through a programme of work worth £150,000 to make sure that Rush Green can get a well-deserved facelift. This work will include resurfaced pavements, including privately owned shop forecourts, and new street furniture to make the parade a more attractive and convenient place to shop throughout the year - not just at Christmas.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member reiterated that there was a limited budget for Christmas decorations and that the Council needed therefore to prioritise.

5 Fire Rescue Unit at Hornchurch

To the Leader of the Council (Councillor Michael White)

By Councillor Barbara Matthews

Question:

Would the Leader set out what steps were taken by this Administration to retain the Fire Rescue Unit at Hornchurch fire station?

Answer:

Cllr Matthews will remember the unsuccessful campaign we had to save the unit in Hornchurch in the year 2000. Since then, because of the work of our Assembly Member, that unit has been reestablished in Harold Hill. The spare space at Hornchurch was filled by the FRU.

The economic situation in London and the need to save money has hit all of the Mayor's services. There was a consultation on fire services which did not include recommendations to make changes in Havering. But you will know that following a very vocal campaign by the Labour group and others on the GLA, the situation has been reassessed and as a result of that reassessment, Havering will now lose that unit in Hornchurch.

You may also be aware that a number of local authorities are carrying out a judicial review in relation to the loss of stations in inner London. We've been asked as a Council if we might care to join that JR and up to yet we have not agreed to do that because I believe it won't benefit Havering.

In response to a supplementary question, the Leader of the Council expressed his disappointment at losing the Fire and Rescue Unit in Hornchurch. He added that Havering may be covered by the Fire and Rescue Unit in Thurrock and that the Havering Unit was only being used for 4% of the time.

6 Football pitches at Dagnam Park

To the Cabinet Member for Culture, Towns & Communities, (Cllr Andrew Curtin)

By Councillor Pat Murray

Question:

Have the proposed plans for football pitches at the Manor, Dagnam Park been fully approved by Sport England and Havering Sports Council

Answer:

The provision of football pitches at Dagnam Park was a requirement of a condition attached to the planning permission for residential development of a site in Gooshays ward.

The condition required details of the pitches to be approved in consultation with Sport England. Sport England raised no objection in response to the consultation, so the condition has been discharged.

Havering Sports Council (HSC) is notified of planning applications that relate to sporting provision but does not normally comment on applications itself. This proposal was discussed by the HSC and there were a number of views on it.

HSC acts as a very useful forum for discussing planning matters related to sports provision, but is not a decision-making body.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member would ask officers to confirm planning permission would be broken if the nearby school withdrew use of the parking and changing facilities for the park. The Cabinet Member was not aware of any negative impact on nature in the area.

7 **A&E at King Georges**

To the Deputy Leader of the Council, Cabinet Member for Individuals (Councillor Steven Kelly)

By Councillor Mark Logan

Question:

When will the A/E at King George Hospital close and merge in with the Queen's Hospital Romford

Answer:

That is an NHS decision – it's not a Council decision, but I'll reiterate the Administration's policy which is very clear:

We will not tolerate the closure of the blue light section of King George Hospital until it's declared fully safe by the necessary medical authorities.

Even when this has happened, it is the blue lights only that will be redirected to the Queen's. There will still be a doctors unit at King George which will provide services 24 hours a day for everything except blue lights.

In response to a supplementary question, the Deputy Leader of the Council reiterated that the decision to close A&E at King Georges was a decision of the Hospitals Trust, not the Council. He felt that this would benefit Havering residents as consultants would then be concentrated in Queen's Hospital rather than across two sites. The Deputy Leader felt that there was no risk to Havering residents from such a closure.

8 Road and Footway Lining

To the Cabinet Member for StreetCare (Councillor Barry Tebbutt)

By Councillor Brian Eagling

Question:

In respect of road/footway lining, would the Cabinet Member give an assurance that:

- a) All marked parking bays, including on footways, are clearly marked so that enforcement is carried out in a fair and transparent manner.
- b) All road/pavement lines are inspected after reinstatement works

Answer:

- a) We have a system in place for maintaining, implementing and inspecting parking bays. Officers out on patrol see and report any defects, and any enforcement on parking in those bays is temporarily suspended until maintenance work is carried out.
- b) StreetCare monitors all work sites, including those that have been carried out by utility companies, to ensure that all aspects of the highways, including road markings are put back. During footway construction and resurfacing works, officers also review whether the bays meet existing legislative requirements for parking bays as well, which could result in them being moved or removed.

If you're aware of somewhere that needs inspection, please let us know.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member advised that bays that had been resurfaced but not re-marked should be reported to Council officers who would inspect this. Officers were required to follow the relevant rules and Regulations as regards enforcement.

9 Briar Road Estate Parking Plan**To the Cabinet Member for Housing (Councillor Lesley Kelly)**

By Councillor Paul McGearry

Question:

When will the Council bring forward a draft parking plan to address the expected congestion during the building and construction phases due to commence shortly and also the long term pressures that are likely to arise following completion of the developments?

Answer:

Although Notting Hill Housing and Hill Construction are responsible for minimising parking disruption during the work on the Briar Road estate, the Council knows from regular meetings with residents that parking is an issue they want addressed.

That's why we're currently working closely with Notting Hill to produce parking plans for the period the works are taking place which will be available next month. These aim to reduce the inevitable disruption caused by any project of this scale.

In terms of the longer-term picture, when the works are completed, each new build plot will have its own resident parking. And the Council has already started making provision to increase the number of parking spaces through selected garage clearances. With these plans in place, we do not anticipate any long term pressures on parking in the future.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member confirmed that residents had been made aware of likely disruption during the construction phase. Work on the long-term plan was also being undertaken.

10 TFL consulting on London buses

To the Leader of the Council (Councillor Michael White)

By Councillor David Durant

Question:

TfL are consulting on London Buses going cashless!

The Council has responded listing the drawbacks and objected, particularly because the number of cash-fares remains high in Havering.

The final decision will be taken by GLA Mayor who was elected on a promise to support outer-London.

Does the Council Leader agree that Boris Johnson would be breaking this election promise if he allows London Buses to go cashless?

Answer:

No, I do not believe he would.

In response to a supplementary question, the Leader confirmed that Boris Johnson had made no election promises regarding cashless fares. Havering had the oldest population in Greater London and the Leader had written to the Mayor of London about the situation.

11 Roads & Pavements (weeds issue)

To the Cabinet Member for StreetCare (Councillor Barry Tebbutt)

By Councillor Ray Morgon

Question:

Would the Cabinet Member confirm what he intends to do to eradicate the annual problem of weeds covering many roads and pavements across Havering throughout the summer?

Answer:

We manage weeds on roads and pavements via a weed control contractor. All roads in the borough receive four weed spray treatments each year between March and November.

We did note a recent problem in some areas and we raised this with our contractor who then realised that there was a problem with their spraying equipment.

They've resolved the equipment issue and revisited the problem areas. The contractor has also provided additional employees to manually pull out large weeds and our supervisors continue to monitor the situation.

If required, a further spray treatment will be considered when the programme of treatment is completed in November.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member confirmed that the effectiveness of weed spraying was monitored by the contractor. The contract itself was also monitored and was due for renewal.

12 **Sunset Drive Park Home Site**

To the Cabinet Member for Housing (Cllr Lesley Kelly)

By Councillor Denis O'Flynn

Question:

Will she make a statement about progress in ensuring that the terms of the amended Caravan Sites Act License have been complied with?

Answer:

A full inspection of the site took place on Tuesday 13 August where it was found that the site road – a major issue for residents - had been completely resurfaced. It was also found that low level lighting had been installed.

However, the Chair of the Residents Association raised a few issues which prompted another inspection on Friday 27 September. Further improvements had been made which included newly replaced speed humps and a new pedestrian ramp.

There are still slight concerns around lighting in the park and road gullies which have been affected by road resurfacing work in the area. However, the Chair of the Residents Association has reported that the improved working relationship with the owner of the site remains positive and he is confident these issues will be resolved in due course.

In essence, sufficient improvements have been made to the site that there was no grounds for enforcement action. I am confident that the Residents Association will contact the Council if further assistance is required.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member confirmed that, as this was a private site, no Council road sweeping service could be offered.

