

Appendix A to the Council Minutes – 24 November 2021

Item 6 – Questions from Public

The Mayor informed the Chamber that 1 question had been received.

1. From Mr Perrin to Councillor Jefferies

Mr Perrin

I congratulate and thank the Council for its intention to plant flowers on grass verges. However, would you please confirm that the planting of flowers will apply to all grass verges throughout the borough not to just a few select areas?

Councillor Jefferies

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Mr Perrin for your question. I am delighted to say that a new land maintenance strategy will be considered by the Cabinet in January, the strategy outlines how the boroughs public open space is effectively maintained. Where appropriate, allowing grass to grow alongside wildflowers and meadow planting will increase biodiversity and these areas will provide important habitats for insects and pollinators and provide new wildlife havens that are crucial to the development of our parks and open spaces and the wider environment.

Many factors need to be taken into consideration when introducing these areas, such as highway safety, site levels and underground services. They will initially be piloted with a view to making them a permanent part of our landscape.

There will be highways verges and other areas that are not suitable for Wildflower planting or Long Grass Regimes, the decision on where and how to plant will be taken on a site by site basis.

Mayor

Mr Perrin do you wish to pose a supplementary question.

Mr Perrin

Yes please Madam Mayor. I congratulate the council as I consider any proposal to enhance the appearance of grass verges deserves credit and is a cause for celebration. However if the scheme is to be successful grass verges must be protected from the vandalism of motor vehicles being parked on them. I think you are naive if you believe the planting of flowers on unprotected grass verges is going to deter drivers from parking on them. For many years I have pleaded for the protection of grass verges throughout the borough to no avail. At my request councillors and council officers have use the state of the unprotected grass verges in the vicinity of my home in Broxburn Drive in South Ockendon, and agreed the unsightly puddles of water and mud are acceptable. To date no action has been taken to protect these grass verges and as far as I am aware no action has been taken by the council to prosecute offending drivers who flout council rules and continue to park on grass verges. I therefore think it unlikely that I will see flowers planted in the grass verges in my

area. Councillor Jefferies will you prove me wrong and take speedy and appropriate action to protect all grass verges starting in my area of Broxburn Drive. Thank you. I would like to wish you all a very merry Christmas and a safe and prosperous new year.

Mayor

Councillor Jefferies

Councillor Jefferies

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Mr Perrin for your supplementary question. I am not familiar with where you actually live but I will give you an assurance that tomorrow morning I will raise it with officers. We will look at it and see what can be done to stop the nuisance of parking as I agree cars should not be parking on grass verges and if we are going to wildlife flowers and plants and vegetation there we don't want it ruined by cars and you have my assurances that we will look at it and take your comments very seriously.

Item 13 – Questions from Members

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO CABINET MEMBERS, COMMITTEE CHAIRS AND MEMBERS APPOINTED TO REPRESENT THE COUNCIL ON A JOINT COMMITTEE

The Mayor informed the Chamber no questions to the Leader had been received and 7 questions to Cabinet Members.

1. From Councillor Okunade to Councillor Maney

Councillor Okunade

Russell Road, Church Road, Dunlop Road, Adelaide Road, Leicester Road, Park Avenue, the Beeches and surrounding roads, as well as side roads along the Dock Road in Tilbury are worn and deteriorated and have been reported on numerous occasions. Due to a lack of attention, these roads have deteriorated even further. Is the Portfolio Holder able to ensure that these roads are inspected for structural problems and that necessary repairs are made?

Mayor

Councillor Maney

Councillor Maney

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Councillor Okunade for your question. Let me assure Councillor Okunade that all the roads you refer to are regularly inspected already. In the case of Dock Road it is inspected every two months and the others are inspected annually unless there was a cause to inspect them sooner following a complaint or something like that. They are already subject to regular inspections as I say. It is accepted if they are cosmetically poor they don't look very nice but in actual

fact they don't meet intervention levels. As I had said during my presentation earlier we had quite clear policies that we work with on things like this and they have not deteriorated to a level that we are required to intervene at this time. Of course if pot holes or defects appears we will respond to them, fill them and repair to them as that happens but in terms of this year's capital programme there won't be any substantial works or repairs. Thank you Madam Mayor.

Mayor

Councillor Okunade do you wish to pose a supplementary question.

Councillor Okunade

Yes thank you Madam Mayor. Thank you Councillor Maney for your answer. I don't know when you visited Tilbury last but I am just asking you and I am only making a simple request, that to get your commitment to at least to perhaps go with the officers who inspect this road. The roads that I listed you only have to go and see, they are not just cosmetic they are really really bad and people like to take pride in where they live and it's not just about cosmetic it's about road safety as well. So I would really, I am begging you to maybe take time to visit Tilbury and look around these roads. Thank you.

Mayor

Councillor Maney

Councillor Maney

Thank you Madam Mayor, please please don't beg it's not necessary. Look if it pleases you I will ask officers to have a look, I am happy to go, you could join us, we could have a jamboree, we could have a walk about, I am quite happy to do that. I do have to say, we will take a look and respond to any defects but I still have to keep coming back to this point we prioritise work in accordance with policies that we, as members, set. Officers don't set them we set them. We can't then complain when repairs don't happen within the rules that we set. Officers are quite clear and I have to take their professional judgement on this as this is a professional judgement it's not for members to go around. I would love to be able to pick roads, trust me every Conservative ward would be having roads resurfaced left right and centre if I could decide which roads would get done like Blackshots Lane. But like I say there are clear criteria that we have to adhere to. These roads are cosmetically poor, they don't look very nice but they are surface-able but I am happy to arrange a visit. You say these have been reported many times and I know there are various ways that people can report these but just looking at the information we have, I have to say the level of complains from those roads in relation to carriageway defects are actually quite low, with the exception of Dock Road and other roads combined it has been single figures. So I think if the residents who live there if they are unhappy with the state of the roads not quite sure where these many of complaints are going they are not coming to us. I don't believe there has been any this municipal year, there have been no enquiries from ward councillors on those roads either but as I say more than happy to arrange some visits. Thank you Madam Mayor.

Mayor

Councillor Okunade do you wish pose a second supplementary question.

Councillor Okunade

Thank you Madam Mayor just to thank Councillor Maney for agreeing to visit and would be happy to attend whenever you can visit and I would also like to mention that it has been reported many times and it has been many many years that the inspection whether they attended or not coming back to see if they are cosmetic but thank you for agreeing to that. Thank you.

Mayor

Councillor Okunade do you wish to pose a second supplementary question.

Councillor Okunade

No thank you.

2. From Councillor Okunade to Councillor Mayes

Councillor Okunade

As Portfolio Holder responsible for air quality, if you agree that dust pollution is a significant problem that has a negative impact on the health and well-being of Tilbury residents, how are you working with the Environment Agency to tackle dust pollution in Tilbury?

Mayor

Councillor Mayes

Councillor Mayes

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank your Councillor Okunade for your question. In terms of what I agree with versus what I don't agree with is that I find that disappointing coming from all the conversations that we have had on that especially over the years. The reality is has been tested by the Environmental Agency by themselves over a period of time. That has been shared with the Public Health team and the Public Health team have said in their professional option, being the experts that it is not damaging to health. Whether we agree with that or not, I am not a medical expert, neither are yourself, so we have to take their word on that. But in terms of working with the Environmental Agency, it isn't just the Environmental Agency actually it is also Port of Tilbury and Port of Health and the Environmental Agency that the council continues to work with and we will share information to make sure we are all up to date and that we all know what the latest data is. Especially when we get the new air quality officer we will be able to work with them a lot better to have an actual expert in the council.

Mayor

Councillor Okunade do you wish to pose a supplementary question.

Councillor Okunade

Yes thank Councillor Mayes you remembered that we had a meeting with councillors in July about this issue, because I do know it is understandable that you do not have the magic wand to just wish away this air quality issue, I do understand that. So I would just like you if you could undertake that you are identifying and working with all the Agencies, you have already mentioned some of them and doing everything that is required to tackle this problem and as you know we cannot not just accept that it does not affect health because nobody can say that, because sometimes things happen in years later that some people get affected by something where they have been exposed to. I would just like to ask the portfolio holder if he would continue to work with the rest of the Tilbury councillors on this issue and be responsive to our requests for information that would be great. Thank you very much.

Mayor

Councillor Mayes

Councillor Mayes

Thank you Madam Mayes and thank you Councillor Okunade for your supplementary. I found that quite a useful meeting I think bearing in mind the importance of this for residents and it was such a shame it took so long to get to that position because actually it shouldn't have. This is why I am so passionate about getting this air quality officer because once we do a full quality air review we would know a lot more. Then the Public Health experts would have a lot more data to work with so therefore that's the importance of it. So obviously will continue to keep everyone in the loop. Thank you.

Mayor

Councillor Okunade do you wish to pose a second supplementary question.

Councillor Okunade

No thank you.

3. From Councillor Byrne to Councillor Jefferies

Councillor Byrne

Thurrock Council ask residents to care for wild life without disturbing it, then continue to use pesticides. Can the Portfolio Holder explain why the Council continues to use pesticides?

Mayor

Councillor Jefferies

Councillor Jefferies

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank Councillor Byrne for your question. The council minimises the amount of pesticides used to twice yearly weed spraying. Unfortunately pesticides are essential in controlling weeds that would, if not treated, cause damage to the highway infrastructure. Contractors and staff undertaking the application of weed control are fully trained and take every precaution to minimise the impact on wildlife. This includes control measure on washing out the applicators and the disposal of the used containers.

Glyphosate is a licenced pesticide in the UK, and regulators including the US Environment Protection Agency, European Food Safety Authorities, and European Chemicals Agency, all support the conclusion that glyphosate-based products are safe when used as directed and is not carcinogenic.

Mayor

Councillor Byrne do you wish to pose a supplementary question.

Councillor Byrne

Yes. The World Health Organisation and the German Institute Risk Assessment, European Chemical Association say it is carcinogenic that it causes serious eye damage, toxic to life, evidence of lung, heart, bowel disease and Parkinson's and birth defects. So I challenge what you have just said.

Mayor

Councillor Jefferies

Councillor Jefferies

Thank you Madam Mayor. We can all have experts and we can all quote different experts but I am listening to officers. But what I would like to say interestingly in the Guardian newspaper, which I am not particularly fond of reading, "the biggest impact of glyphosate on bees in the destruction of wild flowers on which they depend and we are planting more wild flowers that is what we are going to do, we don't kill wild flowers when we are doing this. Evidence today suggests that direct toxicity to bees is fairly low", so the Guardian newspaper.

Mayor

Councillor Byrne do you wish to pose a second supplementary question.

Councillor Byrne

We could be here all day. The councils that are agreeing that it should be banned like Hackney, Glastonbury, Brighton, Hammersmith & Fulham, Isle of Wight, Chester, Cambridge, Scottish Isles, Lyme Regis, Greater London Authority, Colchester, Londonderry, Shetlands, Lambeth, Faversham, Edinburgh, Liverpool, Sunderland, Manningtree, Reading, Bath, Chichester and Folkestone and even Somerset so they are all the councils that totally disagree with you.

Mayor

Councillor Jefferies

Councillor Jefferies

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Councillor Byrne and have you visited any of those areas you would probably find weeds up to your armpits because they aren't actually killing them. I recently went to Brighton and I would hardly hold up Brighton Council as an expert on anything apart from the fact they have weeds growing everywhere, rubbish everywhere because they have a bin strike they can't settle so and homeless people everywhere so I really to think Councillor that you should really be carefully about what he quotes as being experts because if he visited those areas they aren't exactly very tidy.

4. From Councillor Byrne to Councillor Hebb

Councillor Byrne

I am going to speed it up Councillor Hebb the actual figure that I quoted should have been £9,600 which is less that we paid for a portfolio holder to look after the arts. Last week you ask me to contact you, I asked you a lot of questions, I sent you a very long email and you said you would get back to me so my lovely arts totally out ways throwing three curve ball questions at you and will rely on you to come back. It's a lot more than just about Thameside, it's a lot more than just funding it is about arts all over Thurrock. So I would rather await your answers than ask three curve ball questions of you so thank you.

Mayor

Councillor Hebb

Councillor Hebb

Thank you Madam Mayor – Councillor Byrne does raise a point that perhaps might not be widely understood or widely known and why should it be. There is a simply answer to the difference. So Thurrock is responsible for a range of sport pitches across the borough and that value of £184K spent on staff costs, machinery maintenance and any relevant gardening material to maintain those green spaces across the borough. The slight difference between the different types of funding is there is no funding specifically for pitch maintenance from external bodies. Although we have applied for pitch approval funding that is obviously more capital orientated than day to day revenue. We have always been clear as an administration that tidying

this borough up was part of our objectives following six years of neglect and forms part of the widely recognised clean it, cut it, fill it campaign and the pitches are obviously used for formalised club groups as well as providing people with a free point of access for recreational activities for all ages. Something which I think we all agree is good for all different groups across the borough. In terms of the arts and the figures we have just spoken about, this is direct funding for the council and it does not include the self-funding productions. So the conversations we have had this evening. Subject to approval in terms of that budget it is expected to remain again next year. But unlike sport pitches there are substantive more opportunities for the arts to draw on external funding and so the emphasis moves best on how do we maintain assets, fields of grass and sports pitches but to how we unlock that funding for the arts. Just to illustrate, so Thurrock has secured £184K from the Creative Estuary Programme for projects specifically designed to design cultural spaces and facilities into the Purfleet on Thames regeneration scheme and worthy of note is that those direct funding opportunities from the council in terms of revenue funding though the voluntary sector development fund and capital orientated stuff into the community environment development fund. Whilst those organisations can obviously access those sources I thought I would just point that out but a figure which I thought might help out for anyone who may have the same sort of passion that we are talking about is that Thurrock CVS are actually a really good service at supporting local groups in applying for bids, for helping them structure a component and capable bid to go through and hopefully be measured and awarded accordingly. We all know what their web site is, I won't call that out to you all we know who Thurrock CVS are. I hope this answers but happy to chat off line but I thought just in case people were wondering about the arts and stuff I thought I might as well share it.

Mayor

Councillor Byrne do you wish to pose a supplementary question.

Councillor Byrne

It's not actually a question but those sport pitches are staged for sport and actually performing arts is staged for arts performances but you are going to take away that stage but not going to take away those football pitches.

Mayor

Councillor Hebb

Councillor Hebb

Just to clarify, in regards to the funding for the arts I mentioned the community economic development funding, a few figures here which may be of interest, again stuff that anyone would be expected to know off the top of our heads. Cherry Wood scouts had been awarded over £10,000, Thurrock Play Network over £70,000, Chadwell St Mary scouts £4,000, Martial Arts over £7,000, Tilbury Band £5,500 so there is grant money out there, that is being attracted, which is being won for valuable assets and groups in our borough which bring a lot of enjoyable to all of us socially but let's carry on talking and see how we can help support those

organisations. I know Councillor Huelin and I have had conversations off line on how we can support that a bit further.

Mayor

Councillor Byrne do you wish to pose a second supplementary question.

Councillor Byrne

No thank you.

5. From Councillor Chukwu to Councillor Mayes

Councillor Chukwu

What additional measures have you put in place to reduce the surge of Covid cases in our schools?

Mayor

Councillor Mayes

Councillor Mayes

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you for your question. In terms of measures put in place on 12 October, the Director of Public Health and the Corporate Director of Children's Services wrote to all Thurrock schools in response to a rise in cases among 11-18 year olds. This letter outlined a number of measures in line with national guidance including testing, face coverings, and cohorting of groups.

Local guidance in the letter also suggested that where necessary in outbreak situations additional measures could additionally be implemented on an individual school basis, at the school's discretion but in agreement with the Public Health Settings Lead. Where schools can identify close contacts and/or siblings of positive cases, they should immediately ask that cohort to remain off school and obtain a PCR test 3-5 days after the contact with the positive student/case. The student should remain at home until the results of the PCR test had been received, and can return to school if it is negative.

Mayor

Councillor Chukwu would you like to pose a supplementary question.

Councillor Chukwu

Yes Madam Mayor and thank you Councillor Mayes. There was a sharp increase of Covid infections in our schools in Thurrock that was in October, may I ask you do you know the actual figure of how many of the children were infected.

Mayor

Councillor Mayes

Councillor Mayes

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you for your supplementary. I have the rate of infection not the actual amount of students, the rate of infection on the 15 October was 1197/100K so obviously considerably high. However that had fallen down as of the 11 November to 230/100K. Obviously we want to reduce the number of infections as possible which is why we had the vaccination rollout run as well at schools run by the school vaccination service of which sadly only 31% of students, aged 12 to 15 did take up so we need to encourage as many young people and of course all residents to take up the vaccine as quickly as possible.

Mayor

Councillor Chukwu do you wish to pose a second supplementary question.

Councillor Chukwu

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you for your response Councillor Mayes. Another question I would like to ask is what the latest guidance for vaccinations in care homes are.

Mayor

Councillor Mayes

Councillor Mayes

That is not a substantive question, obviously if we are talking about care homes this should be potentially directed to my colleague for social care as well so unfortunately unable to answer.

6. From Councillor Rigby to Councillor Maney

Councillor Rigby

In respect of Stifford Clays ward, please would the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport explain what highway works/repairs have taken place in the past three years including but not limited to all pavement repairs/reconstructions, road repairs/resurfacing work, street column replacements and bus shelter replacements?

Mayor

Councillor Maney

Councillor Maney

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Councillor Rigby for your question. I am happy to report that in no small part thanks to your diligent representation of your ward there has been a number of highway repairs and investments in Stifford Clays. There has been in the time frame that you have asked in relation to this there has been 355 reactive maintenance repairs. In addition there has been 19 street lighting repairs, 12 lamp column replacements, 7 capital funded carriageway resurfacing schemes included in Crammavill Street, Long Lane, Whitmore Avenue and St Anne Close and we are also spending money again as I said in my report this administration slab replacement policy has allowed us to get rid of some of that really old unsightly, unsafe slab footway that we have in the borough and your ward has benefitted from that. The roads included in that were Stifford Clays Road, Crammavill Street, Kingsman Drive, Leasway and Long Lane and in addition we have replaced two new bus shelters in Stifford Clays outside Headon Hall and Thurrock Hospital. Thank you Madam Mayor.

Mayor

Councillor Rigby do you wish to pose a supplementary question.

Councillor Rigby

Yes please, thank you. I am pleased to see that Stifford Clays had received its fair share of the highways and transport investment and I will continue to campaign for more going forward. One note of achievement this year was the introduction of the average speed check cameras in Long Lane. Could the portfolio holder please advise what the earlier benefits of this scheme were?

Mayor

Councillor Maney

Councillor Maney

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you for your supplementary question. Another thing I know you have taken a great interest in is the average speed camera check system and you were instrumental in lobbying me for that so I know it is something that is close to your heart. The scheme hasn't been in sufficiently long enough to get the full picture of the benefits but what I can tell you is that in first year prior to the scheme going live there were five accidents in Lodge Lane including one serious personal accident, so far this year there has only been just two minor accidents. We also know that prior to the scheme going live the speed studies were showing that about 44% of motorists were driving in excess of 35 miles an hour, which we now Lodge Lane has a 30 miles per hour speed limit, so a considerable amount of motorists were breaching the speed limit and residents in your ward particularly the avenues adjoined to Lodge Lane were concerned about safety issues hence your heavy involvement in lobbying for this scheme. What we know from the other average speed camera system which we have in the east of the borough, there the compliance of the speed limit was 65% prior to the scheme going live so again a lot of motorists were not complying. That now stands at 96% compliance and we have

no reason to believe that we would not see a similar trend in Lodge Lane. Thank you Madam Mayor.

Mayor

Councillor Rigby do you wish to pose a second supplementary question.

Councillor Rigby

No thank you.

7. From Councillor J Kent to Councillor Jefferies

Councillor J Kent

How many net tonnes of carbon were emitted by Thurrock Council in the calendar years 2019 and 2020?

Mayor

Councillor Jefferies

Councillor Jefferies

In 2019/20 the total annual net emissions was 5,491 tonnes of carbon. This was down from 6,150 tonnes of carbon in 2018/19 and 8,005 in the baseline year 2013/14. The figures for the total annual net emissions for 2020/21 are not yet available. Official figures are expected to be published in January 2022.

Mayor

Councillor J Kent do you wish to pose a supplementary question.

Councillor J Kent

Thank you Madam Mayor. This council declared a climate emergency when it met in October 2019 could I ask the portfolio holder when he thinks the carbon management plan and climate local plan will finish the reviews which are currently underway when we would expect to see these going through scrutiny onto cabinet.

Mayor

Councillor Jefferies

Councillor Jefferies

Thank you Madam Mayor. Thank you Councillor Kent. Unfortunately I am not actually responsible for what you're asking, I believe this to be Councillor Mayes. However I have got a couple of points I would like to make when it comes to carbon emissions to inform all members if anything. This administration was got

enforcement officers using enforcement vehicles which are electric reducing the carbon footprint, we had an investment in a solar power farm something that you opposed which was the equivalent of Thurrock being powered two times over, all street lights have been changed to more environmentally friendly LED lights, this was proposed by a very young fresh faced Councillor Gledhill. Something that you did not put into place but gladly when he became leader, slighter older, he did implement it. The new council offices which again are being built opposite this building will also reduce our carbon footprint something you opposed. Finally, just one thing, the Thameside which has been debated a lot in this meeting today is one of the most unfriendly environmental building that we have in the borough.

Mayor

Councillor J Kent do you wish to pose a second supplementary question.

Councillor J Kent

Madam Mayor I am pleased that from the 2013/14 baseline there appears to be appears to some 30% decrease in carbon and that is something to be welcomed and Councillor Jefferies, actually the LED street lights were introduced by the previous labour administration with cross party support but credit where it's due. But can I just ask when we agreed at 2019 that the emergency climate we did agree that as budget proposals came forward there would be a carbon assessment alongside them. Could I have the assurance that this happening this year.

Mayor

Councillor Jefferies

Councillor Jefferies

Thank you Madam Mayor. Yes I can give Councillor that assurance.

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