

Appendix A to the Council Minutes – 8 July 2020

Item 6 – Questions from Members of the Public.

No questions were submitted from members of the public.

Item 15 – Questions from Members

The Mayor informed the Chamber that one question had been received to the Leader of the Council and six questions had been received to Cabinet Members, Committee Chairs and Member appointed to represent the Council on a Joint Committee had been received.

1. Councillor J Kent to Councillor Gledhill

The unemployment rate for 18 - 24 year olds in Thurrock has been above the national average for the last two years, an issue that has been exacerbated by the impact of Covid 19. What plans does the administration have to get Thurrock's youngsters into work?

Unfortunately Councillor Gledhill was taken unwell from the chamber and would provide a written response to Councillor J Kent.

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

1. Councillor J Kent to Councillor Johnson

Will the portfolio holder withdraw the Elm Road Open Space from his list of possible housing development sites?

Mayor

Councillor Johnson

Councillor Johnson

Thank you Councillor Kent for your question I am sure you will recognise the Council has agreed ambitious housing targets as there continues to a pressing need for additional housing of all types to meet our community's needs. The site you refer to is on the long list as Manorway and is included as our initial analysis suggests that the site could potentially be developed in conjunction with the adjoining (privately owned) site in a joint venture approach. Although I must stress further feasibility studies will need to be undertaken and at this present moment the Council has no proposal to develop this site on our own. The process of consultation which was recently been endorsed by the Housing Overview and Scrutiny in June 2020 will be carried out in close liaison with the immediate community and having regard

to the identified need for additional housing I am not minded to remove this site from the long list without it being fully and properly considered.

Mayor

Councillor Kent do you have a supplementary question.

Councillor Kent

Does the portfolio holder understand just how disappointing that response will be to the community that live around the Elm Road open space. Is he aware that this is entirely within green belt. Is he aware that we have planted hundreds of trees right adjacent to where he is proposing to build. That the site is well used for instance for exercise classes on a Saturday, for party in the park during the summer and many other activities. This will be a real blow to the community living around the park and I would ask him to reconsider as he has done already with other sites that were on his long list.

Mayor

Councillor Johnson

Councillor Johnson

Yes please. Thank you Mister Mayor. Councillor Kent you asked me three times if I was aware of certain things. Are you aware that this is a consultation list only as you quite rightly said have already removed sites, we have actually amended sites as well through consultation. As I said at the bottom of my last reply was that I am not willing to remove it at the moment until we have fully consulted. If those of the local community consult and make their feelings really heard for this particular proposal then I am sure no one can blame or say that I don't listen. I will listen and take it from there.

Mayor

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

Councillor Kent

No thank you.

2. Councillor Worrall to Councillor Johnson

Can the cabinet member for housing advise what steps he has taken to ensure that there is a clear and consistent approach to consulting with residents and the wider communities who may be impacted by the housing development sites?

Mayor

Councillor Johnson

Councillor Johnson

Of course Mister Mayor and thank you Councillor Worrall for that question however I must admit I am little bit confused by it. If I may, can I refer anyone in the chamber and anyone at home to page 72 of this evening agenda and in particular to your piece as the then chair of housing overview and scrutiny committee that you praise the ambitious cabinet approval of 500 new council homes and go on to say that you were concerned about the level of resident consultation and therefore amended the recommendation to ensure that residents views could be heard throughout the process. You also point out we have helped residents this year by making sure that homes are built in the right places across the borough and decisions considering local residents views. So surely you have answered your own question there however I will reiterate the process and approach to formulate the Housing long list was discussed by your then O&S committee in November 2019 before being agreed by cabinet in January 2020. This was followed by a much more detailed report outlining the approach to be used to engage and consult with residents and the wider community were necessary and was presented to the O&S Committee on the 16 June of this year and discussed with the following approach: engage with residents or community at an early stage; ensure the consultations are accessible; encourage hard to reach groups to participate and take a proportionate approach to consultations, depending on the scale, complexity and above all the sensitivity of the site. This approach was designed to ensure that residents are made aware of sites that are being discussed for possible housing development at the earliest stage and therefore have the chance to comment in good time. The list will be an ongoing concern and I can assure you that all additional sites will be reported to the O&S committee. Please remember this is a consultation list only and none of the remaining sites will be presented to planning until this consultation has ceased.

Mayor

Councillor Worrall do you wish to pose a supplementary question.

Councillor Worrall

Yes, of course I do Mister Mayor. I would like to ask you two questions in two parts. We have got a consultation process which of course you put forward and I was just wondering why you didn't follow your own consultation process that you agreed in cabinet and I would just like to quote you your own words in a letter that is all over social media that should residents show me evidence that there is an area of regular use by the community in demonstrates the desire for the space to remain as it is I would consider that a priority before any consultation. Could you please confirm to the chambers tonight that this process is exactly the same as all communities that have a community space at risk on the housing development list.

Mayor

Councillor Johnson

Councillor Johnson

Thank you. This is the same for any resident that has any type of comment that they wish to make but you say to me I am not sticking to my own rules well engage with residents or communities at an early stage I've certainly done that. I have been to quite a few resident meetings where they have invited me. Ensure the consultation is accessible well I am very accessible as Councillor Kent quite rightly said I have taken some off so I am certainly accessible. To encourage hard to reach groups to participate, that's the most difficult thing. Take a proportional part to the consultation I don't see what I haven't done. I've done all that and we sit here and you quite rightly say there were actually 20 sites that came to Housing Overview and Scrutiny should only have been 19 one was an error and of those four have been removed through consultation that I have had with lots and lots of residents, their children and petitions that I have received one of the applications was quite significantly changed because of resident feedback. So I'm sorry Councillor yes is the answer to your question I am following the appropriate rules and I will continue to do so.

Mayor

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

Councillor Worrall

Yes I do, thank you. So you are quite right that one got took off and the other ones were in your own ward, of Orsett. Where you wrote the letter, you delivered the letter, you collected the letter then you took it off. That is not exactly consultation clearance transparent and other three are in the ward that you actually live. What I am asking you to agree that everybody is given the same opportunity to have their sites, their green sites removed. We have a park, you know a green park. We have another park in Ockendon where you have taken some off the same sort of green that you have not taken off. How can that be seen as fair and transparent. It is like a pick and mix where you choose as portfolio holder where to build regardless of what it may mean to that community. I just think you need to be fair to the whole of Thurrock and just where you choose to be.

Mayor

Councillor Johnson

Councillor Johnson

Thank you Mister Mayor and thank you again Councillor Worrall. Let's get something straight here are you saying you think I have not been fair and therefore you would like me to put all these removed sites back onto the list.

Councillor Worrall

You know damn well I don't like any of them.

Mayor

Councillor Worrall please.

Councillor Johnson

So therefore you would like me to put them all back on the list and go through another full consultation process.

Councillor Worrall

You wouldn't have any way if we hadn't carried out our campaign.

Mayor

Councillor Worrall please.

Councillor Johnson

Mister Mayor I don't think I need to answer that question, I am not being listened correctly to anyway.

3. Councillor Holloway to Councillor Mayes

What is the Portfolio Holder for Health doing to attract health and care professionals to work and live in Thurrock?

Mayor

Councillor Mayes

Councillor Mayes

Thurrock has been actively engaging in a draft Regional Workforce Development Strategy which will contribute to the recruitment of care staff in particular by identifying key causes of high turnover and difficulties recruiting and developing strategies and actions to mitigate and reduce these causes. We hold regular recruitment days to attract social care workers into the borough which are directly linked into the National Recruitment Campaign for Social Care. Additionally we have been working with health partners and local authorities across the Mid and South Essex to contribute to the development of an integrated health and care workforce strategy, which will

include workforce planning. The Council's recruitment policies aim to attract employees into the Borough through competitive salaries as well as valuing them as employees but providing them with training, development plus opportunities for career progression. For existing staff we use apprenticeship schemes which show commitment to our existing workforce as well as being attractive to new employers. We are also mindful that most care in Thurrock is delivered through the private, voluntary and independent sector providers and we work closely with them to support recruitment and retention. Our social care providers are adopting innovative approaches to identifying and attracting staff to the Borough through, for example, Care Friends - an employee referral application that aims to boost the number of quality social care candidates, care managers and staff teams can also access to a range of support resources through NHS People. Whilst we are not directly responsible for recruiting NHS staff also we work in partnership with the Thurrock Clinical Commissioning Group and system partners to consider how to attract GPs and health specialists to Thurrock. For example, our commitment to developing the four Integrated Medical Centres across the borough, providing 21 Century facilities and attractive environment for professionals across the health and care sectors alike.

Mayor

Councillor Holloway I am sure you want to ask a supplementary question.

Councillor Holloway

I do thank you Mister Mayor and thank you Councillor Mayes for that very very detailed response. Our NHS and care staff work tirelessly to look after us, it is a vacation who have over recent months put their lives at risk for ours and our loved ones but this isn't just about COVID this is for always and I think it is important that we in Thurrock can demonstrate that it is a place that they want to work and live and I am going to ask the portfolio holder if he will work with us to establish an awards event to be held annually to celebrate NHS and care workers.

Mayor

Councillor Mayes

Councillor Mayes

Thank you Mister Mayor and thank you Councillor Holloway for your supplementary question. Of course we will look at all those sorts of things because the work that the health care professionals have done, not just during COVID but throughout their careers and the NHS have been fantastic so honouring them not just by clapping them on a Thursday or clapping for the anniversary I think the more we can do the better so I will definitely have discussions with you on this one.

Mayor

Councillor Holloway do you have a second supplementary question.

Councillor Holloway

No not a question but to thank Councillor Mayes and of course with Councillor Halden with his social care hat on will also be invited to join those discussions. Thank your Mister Mayor.

4. Councillor Kerin to Councillor Coxshall

What infrastructure has the Portfolio Holder put in place in the last six months to encourage Thurrock residents to walk and cycle around the borough?

Mayor

Councillor Coxshall

Councillor Coxshall

Thank you, well there are a lot going on the walking and cycling and I will read out just a few. The Council is still working with the South Essex Active Travel Programme who are providing recycled and new bikes and maintenance for them in the local community via the cycle hubs in Stanford le Hope and Tilbury. The Team continue to explore opportunities to provide cycle storage facilities for local employers so see if we can deliver more cycling now rather than instead of us jumping in cars going backwards and forwards. Wayfinding signs are being provided to Stanford le Hope which being funded through the SEAT Forward Motion Programme and provides useful directional and distance information for walking and cycling locations around the borough. That Thurrock Council, directly in walking and cycling improving to develop some support from the Government's recent Transport Restart Policy coming out of COVID to see what we can actually do. The Public Rights of Way team have also delivered a number of access improvements on public footpath routes. These include improved signage and repair and replacement of stiles. Work is also underway to digitise the network in the borough. More recently, you may be aware, or not after tonight, that the Council had received funding through Tranche 1 of the Government's Emergency Active Travel fund so we have some funding coming through for that. This will allow for the implementation of temporary 'pop-up' measures to encourage more cycling and walking coming out of COVID. An addition we are putting in a submission to develop Tranche 2 funding which will be the same fund and usage and will be coming in later in the year and will be announced by the Government shortly.

Mayor

Councillor Kerin do you wish to pose a supplementary question.

Councillor Kerin

Thank you Mister Mayor all very welcome. I was looking more in terms of, something big, a project which would have lasting infrastructure and a legacy for cycling around the borough. I appreciate that you mentioned Tranche 1 which was welcomed, but that came in, I believe, on the 23 June and was more for signage and existing line painting and things like that so out of all the schemes that you have mentioned including Tranche 1 which one of those projects will have the lasting legacy for cycling within Thurrock.

Mayor

Councillor Coxshall

Councillor Coxshall

Electronically tranche, another £270,000 immediately spent to pop up and in Tranche 2 is for permanent is being produced and if you can help produce a bid. I am sure considering we have not lost a bid as yet for a long time in Her Majesty's Government if we can get a good bid together we shall still do that. What they have cited is the digitalisation of our network, over and over again, since I took over this we got £5 million when I got first elected on the first night and I don't really know where that went, what we did with that £5 million, some dodgy gravel was put in and it all disappeared didn't get used in the road links until 2011. So what we need is a great ideal of digitalisation, the way finding, it will make it easier, what travel South Essex are doing and making sure there are cycling hubs, proper cycling hubs where you can actually borrow a bike, maintain that bike, employers making sure we can have bike racks here for employers. I think these are sustainable forever legacy items. Sorry if you don't think they are that's why I read them out first.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Coxshall. Councillor Kerin do you have a second supplementary question.

Councillor Kerin

Firstly thank you for that. I didn't say I didn't welcome it at all that was your interpretation I don't know why you were interpreted at. I was actually asking what you personally thinking in terms of the legacy and was asking your opinion and you gave it. I wasn't actually saying anything negative about the first answer that you gave. Ok. Now looking forward, the previously six months waiting for tranche 2 to come in which if you can correct me when you stand up I don't think we have a date for that coming in yet. But looking at how other cities and areas are looking to improve their cycling, obviously Greater Manchester are bringing in a 150 mile of protected cycling track and other cities are looking at more permanent infrastructure that can't just go away that will be there as a legacy and to encourage future cyclists. As a question in a positive way if you could answer this please what plans already do you have for tranche 2 and at the end of tranche 2 what will you be able to stand up in

this chamber at the time and say this is what we have spent it on, this is actually going to be a lasting legacy for Thurrock.

Mayor

Councillor Coxshall

Councillor Coxshall

Let's get away from tranche 2, tranche 2 is the government funding, another tranche. Let's talk about what is happening here and now we have got tranche 1 where we can produce a bid for that, we can produce a great bid for tranche 2 building on what we are already doing. Digitalisation the government restart programme, the brighter ways team making sure we can get better signage, making sure we deliver and make sure that Acting South East deliver and making there are places to put your cycle and what happens when I spoke to, sit on, had a conversation Transport East that is this is sustainable transport, it is really important that and how you deliver this is part of that local plan process. It shouldn't be looked at in isolation, through the local plan, good planning on how we build our new houses over the next 20-30 years that delivers that. So it can't be one thing in isolation. I am not hanging my hat in tranche 2 that will be the icing on the cake. What we are doing at the moment is really important. You mentioned two other places there, you mentioned metropolitan cities they are not the same as Thurrock. I never want Thurrock to be a metropolitan city so I don't want to follow metropolitan city rules. This is a borough, a borough and will stay a borough as long as it has a conservative administration not a metropolitan city.

5. Councillor Shinnick to Council Johnson

Following your recent decision to remove the green spaces from the housing development sites in South Ockendon can you now treat the residents of Enborne Green equally and remove this well used green space from your list.

Mayor

Councillor Johnson

Councillor Johnson

Thank your Mister Mayor. Thank you for your question. As I said earlier the Council had agreed an ambitious housing target and in order to achieve the numbers needed, to ensure the young people of Thurrock we have to explore sites for potential development and right through that period. As I have said in earlier responses again to questions the process for consultations to be followed was presented to the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June this year and that process will form the decisions whether the site is to progress or to be withdrawn. It does remain the case that no decision has been taken at this point as to the remaining sites on the list suitability and for

the site at Enborne Green to remain on the long list for that process to continue.

Mayor

Councillor Shinnick do you wish to ask a supplementary question.

Councillor Shinnick

Yes please, thank you. I am a bit amazed actually I think the residents of Enborne Green are being treated differently to all the other people in Ockendon and as this is the case would you allow those residents of Enborne Green to drop off their petition to your address as did the residents of Humber?

Mayor

Councillor Johnson

Councillor Johnson

Most definitely. If you recall though Councillor that Belhus and Ockendon Community Forum invited me to attend their meeting in the South Ockendon Centre on the 2 March.

Councillor Shinnick

I know, I organised that actually.

Councillor Johnson

I know you did, I have the letter calling on people to come there, on your headed paper as capacity as ward councillor requesting residents to come to the meeting to discuss local issues which included proposals to build on a number of green spaces. Not technically correct, the proposal is to go out to consultation on the options list however as you are aware there were many residents there in attendance and if you can recall I suggested that local feelings and concerns would resonate highly with me as this would be considered as good community engagement and therefore consultation. I can tell you I have received petitions, emails and many letters from residents and their children to why their community space was particularly special to them regarding the sites at Callan Grove, Garron Lane and Humber Avenue and Derry Avenue many of which those residents were in attendance. To this day I have only received one letter from a concerned residents in regards to Enborne Green and whilst that letter will be added to the consultation process it did not reach nearly the level of interest from the other sites. Therefore it is obvious that Enborne Green must undergo the process agreed by Housing O&S to ensure that any hard to reach residents are included. Possibly they did not wish to attend a very loud public meeting.

Mayor

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

Councillor Shinnick

Yes I would like to say that I will be organising the petition that I have got for Enborne Green and Councillor Johnson will be receiving it very soon.

Councillor Johnson

Mister Mayor, there was no question there but I would like to come back and say why have you held on to it for so long.

6. Due to time limit of meeting being met, Councillor Fish requested his question be resubmitted to September Council.