

Appendix A to the Council Minutes – 30 September 2020

Item 6 – Questions from Members of the Public.

There was 1 question submitted from members of the public.

1. From Cathy Sisterson to Councillor Mayes

Last year, at the Council meeting on the 23rd October, the Council voted to declare a climate emergency and to set up a citizen's assembly to look at ways to reduce carbon emissions to zero by 2030. Since then there has apparently been no movement on this. Please could you say when this citizen's assembly is to be set up, particularly in view of the escalating climate and ecological crises facing the world?

Councillor Mayes

Thank you to the resident for the question.

As everybody knows and is acutely aware, things have changed this year and quite dramatically, hence we are doing what we are doing now with people at home. The way we travel to work, the things we do, the way we live our lives is dramatically different. So, with that in mind, we obviously have to take time, that's very much the position now that we should start to pause and reflect on what is happening and what a post COVID world would look like. Which is why, in terms of air quality and climate change, it's very difficult to look at what we will be doing in six months' time, a year's time, two years' time and so on and so forth.

So with that in mind, a great deal of work has already been done in terms of the sort of preparation for plans and targets, working towards the government's guidelines and targets on this one. So, there's been a partnership group that's been established, that is led by Members and also we elected residents. So therefore, we will do our best to represent them on that board or that group. So therefore, that is where we are at with it and thanks very much.

Item 15 – Questions from Members

The Mayor informed the Chamber that one question had been received to the Leader of the Council and 11 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 government has chosen Thurrock as one of 29 areas covered by a Special Development Order to enable the building of a lorry park to help facilitate the extra paperwork that may be needed post Brexit. Will the Leader

of the Council tell us the location of the government's preferred site for this lorry park?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mister Mayor and I'll try to shorten the response that I've drafted.

Thurrock Council has been named as one of 29 areas covered by the Special Development Order to enable temporary planning permission for development consisting of land to be used for border processing and the associated stationing of vehicles (particularly goods vehicles) entering or leaving Great Britain, and the provision of facilities and infrastructure associated with this use. Specific development proposed in relation to each site must be approved by the Secretary of State.

An initial discussion has taken place between relevant consultants on behalf of HMRC and relevant officers of the Council to seek initial local input on the implications of a potential location specified in this order. The location of the specific development being considered and the development area cannot be shared at this time but if approved would we understand be operational from April 2021.

We have been assured that engagement with stakeholders including Members as well as with residents and businesses will take place prior to the submission of any final application. Formal consultation will also take place as part of the planning process.

Mayor

Councillor John Kent, do you wish to propose a supplementary question?

Councillor Kent

Yes, can the Leader of the Council confirm that he does know the location? Can he tell us whether there's one Lorry Park or two lorry parks, how big the lorry park may be, how long it may have to operate for?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mister Mayor. Yes I'm fully aware of the location that's been suggested. Officers have told me a brief outline of the engagement that's taking place. As in relation to the answers to the others, I think that will be down to how well the negotiations go with our former colleagues in the EU. Hopefully, we won't end up with the need for these lorry parks at all.

Mayor

Councillor John Kent, do you wish to propose a second supplementary question?

Councillor Kent

Mister Mayor, I believe the people of Thurrock have the right to know where this lorry park is planned and I'm really disappointed with the Leader of the Council who has admitted that he knows where it is. But once again, wants to keep it secret. You know, I have to say, a lot of people voted to want to leave the European Union, the majority of the people of Thurrock voted to leave the European Union. I believe that those people thought that one of the benefits of leaving would be to make democracy stronger, not weaker. To make things more transparent, not hidden. Can I ask the Leader of the Council again, if he would tell us where this lorry park is planned?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mister Mayor.

What a surprise. I'm fully aware that Councillor Kent has asked this question of Officers and have been told very, very clearly that the instructions were from consultants of HMRC that the area in question, should not be shared at this moment in time. I made very clear at the end of my statement and just to make sure that it's fully appreciated again, "We have been assured that engagement with stakeholders including Members as well as with residents and businesses will take place prior to the submission of any final application. Formal consultation will also take place as part of the planning process."

I'm sorry Mister Mayor but the Leader of the Opposition is standing up and saying that he feels that I should be breaking the rules of central government, isn't going to persuade me to break those rules. I'm sorry, government is going to tell us what we will be doing and will say what we can and cannot disclose of these areas. And the very second we can, I can assure you, we will.

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

1. From Councillor Fish to Councillor Mayes

Following my question to the Portfolio Holder around a year ago he undertook to review the Clean Air Strategy. What changes have been made as a result to improve air quality for residents in Grays Riverside?

Councillor Mayes

Thank you Mister Mayor and thank you Councillor Fish for your question.

The Portfolio Holder at the time did undertake the review and procedures were put in place. In fact, it went to PTR O&S in February. That was pre-COVID, obviously, air quality wise, we did have an undertaking to do an air quality strategy. It would be, in my view, completely irresponsible to waste

taxpayers' money doing it when air quality is not at the right levels because otherwise the models that we create will not be accurate and this is a model that we want to build on and work with and actually improve air quality moving forward. We just cannot do this at this moment whilst people are working from home. I don't know how many Councillors are in this room compared to what it normally is. That sort of thing has an impact, that's just one example. So, unfortunately, it has to be put on hold. It still is one of my aims to get that through because obviously, we need to have a baseline, we need to know what we are working with to know how to make improvements. Thank you.

Mayor

Councillor Fish, do you wish to propose a supplementary question?

Councillor Fish

Yes thank you Mister Mayor.

Actually, my question was deferred, delayed for a few meetings. So, in fact, it's been much more than a year since I asked the original question. So ok, I accept your response about the COVID situation. Why did it take nine months, before the COVID situation, to get it to the point, where you sent it to scrutiny?

Councillor Mayes

Thank you Mister Mayor. Thank you Councillor Fish for your supplementary.

Obviously, I took over the Portfolio Holder in January, obviously, it did go to O&S in February and it was going to proceed from thereafter. Money was allocated for each of the surplus that we had at the time so obviously, things have changed. Things are not where they was. Obviously, commenting on what someone did nine months previous, when I wasn't even sure if I was in the Chamber at that point, so unfortunately, I can't give you a direct answer on why it went there. All I can say is that since I've been Portfolio Holder, we've been pushing it along. Obviously, COVID has unfortunately changed that.

Mayor

Councillor Fish, do you wish to propose a second supplementary question?

Councillor Fish

Yes thank you Mister Mayor.

Obviously, that shows the administration's interest in making improvements in my ward, in Grays Riverside. It takes nine months to come forward with a strategy and then it gets delayed by COVID. My question is, ok it's fair enough to bring forward a strategy, obviously as a Portfolio Holder, you have a vision

to drive in that strategy but is your vision for Grays Riverside, to make improvements?

Councillor Mayes

Thank you Mister Mayor and thank you Councillor Fish.

I understand your frustration to be honest. However, in terms of Grays Riverside, we have got the £50 million town's fund that will be used to improve Grays that will also have an impact. There are little things, for example, the improvement of the one way system in Grays to ensure traffic flows, that's in the middle of your ward. Those sort of things would have an impact, the reality is that air quality doesn't just hit ward boundaries and say, 'That's Grays, I'm not going to go there'. It's for the whole of Thurrock so the actual air quality strategy wasn't Grays Riverside based, it was for the whole of Thurrock so unfortunately, at this time, and it is on hold. However, it will be picked up once the new norm is known. Thank you.

2. From Councillor Worrall to Councillor Watkins

Can the Portfolio Holder for Environment update the chamber on the progress he has made on replacing the bins at cemeteries?

Councillor Watkins

Thank you Mister Mayor and thank you Councillor Worrall for your question.

To date, we have had successful installations of the new bins style and layout at Stanford le Hope and Chadwell St Mary. This, as you may remember, was an extension to the various successful bin reviews and replacements which had taken place across Thurrock for a couple of years. They have been delayed this year, as you expect, due to the pandemic and we still very much want to roll out the rest of the bins across the remaining cemeteries, that is of course, subject to funding availability and we will be assessing it over the remains of this financial year. However, in the meantime, we are putting together a pilot of the existing heavy litres bins which we have across the Borough as part of that review. The intention is to pilot into these specific cemeteries, this one being West Thurrock based on the feedback from the Grounds Team as the initial trial. These will sit alongside the existing bins, not replacing them, to allow for a greater usage within the cemetery and will be signposted appropriately. This is based on the bins we currently have in storage and sits within the current budget lines.

Subject to the initial success of this, we would then look to roll out a similar bin style across the remainder of the cemeteries until a time in which we can obviously secure the funding for the remainder of the bins as per the original trial in Stanford Le Hope and Chadwell St Mary.

Mayor

Councillor Worrall, do you wish to propose a supplementary question?

Councillor Worrall

Yes I do thank you Mister Mayor.

Thank you Councillor Watkins, I went to Chadwell St Mary today and in all honesty, I expected that, with a month's notice, you would have sorted the problem out so that I wouldn't have to ask the question tonight. But tonight, there were still general street waste bins in two sections including where they got the dog waste at the top, just like what you would get in the high street is exactly what you got in the cemeteries. And then in another little area, I'm hoping this isn't your answer to our bins, there was two little bins in the section with a bit of wood around it, with two bins inside, one said general waste, one said garden waste. They're no bigger than what I've got in my kitchen at home. And then if the wind blows, there's nothing to stop all the mums and dads and all the other stuff that people are piling in there, they're just blowing onto people's graves which is why I've brought this back here.

I went up there and there was all old stuff all over other people's graves and it's not good enough. This is two years that we've been looking at bins strategy for cemeteries and we was promised that you had people going out, looking at best practice, please don't tell me this is what's come back as best practice. We need to get it right. This is our parents, our families, our loved ones, please can you tell us when you are going to make our cemeteries and our bins work? Because what's up there today, please don't tell me that's what you're replacing with.

Councillor Watkins

Thank you Mister Mayor and Councillor Worrall.

I'm glad you mentioned one thing actually so you are right. When you were the Chair of CGS a little while ago, you spoke very passionately about cemeteries back then and obviously following the KPI results which we had back a couple of years ago and seeing the most recent KPI results we got, have excelled any that we had previously. We did instigate the internal standards review for the cemeteries and we do stick by those and we have seen through the number of complaints that we have received and I'm also going to take last year's into account as well because I know that lockdown would have restricted the amount of people into cemeteries but also when you take into the consideration of last year, the number of complaints we've had about our cemeteries have gone significantly down and I do mean that – significantly down. Thanks to the work that our teams do.

If there are individual issues, such as the one you mentioned of today, the teams will address those as they are going through in cleaning cemeteries. We've had two successful pilots and as I've alluded to, in my answer, that

subject to funding, we would go out then to the remainder of the cemeteries to have the new style bins, which would be different to what we now have on our high streets. However, the pilot in which I have mentioned, would be the very heavy duty bins, the massive bins which are across our high street, which would then sit alongside the existing bins that's within our cemeteries so that they can accommodate more rubbish and obviously more general waste equally at the same time as well. Guard ways would also be included within that so that a greater storage is allowed and we wouldn't have the small bins which you've alluded to.

However, we do take the pride of our cemeteries to heart. We do ensure that our cemeteries are always at the highest standard and that the team do a fantastic job.

Mayor

Councillor Worrall, do you wish to propose a second supplementary question?

Councillor Worrall

It's just a quick one Mister Mayor. So if you're running a pilot, when can we expect that we will have these bins? Because two years is a long time to not have got it right. If not, can I just ask the question again in six months because I want to get it right for our residents.

Councillor Watkins

Sorry if I haven't made myself very clear as I've alluded to. The remainder of the cemeteries outside of Chadwell St Mary and Stanford le Hope will have the new bins stores in subject to funding. Now, obviously, we do welcome comments and that's what CGS sits there for so please do send on your suggestions to CGS if you feel that the existing bins aren't doing what they potentially should be doing. Obviously again, we would seek feedback from the wider community as well in relation to that and that can change in reflection to the new styles when they come out.

The pilot in which I mentioned, is in relation to West Thurrock cemetery which is what our teams have identified as a good trial for the use of these new heavy style bins which, again will be rolling out in the next few weeks, subject to the success of that pilot and feedback. We would then roll that out to the remainder of the cemeteries.

3. From Councillor Byrne to Councillor Coxshall

Can we be given assurances that Thurrock residents will not be asked to contribute to the A13 widening projects overspend?

Councillor Coxshall

Well, the simple answer to that is no I can't give that even if I wanted to. Just like having a charge against your house for a bank loan, before the bank gives you money, the government will not give us the funding unless we underwrite the scheme in its entirety. We would never be able to, if we did that, win again anymore government money, anymore bids, or vast amount of infrastructure that we want for this Council, for our infrastructure for our policy.

But what I can do is give you the absolute assurance that the weight of this Council, the weight of this administration will be working to find alternatives for the cost of the A13 and all the work of this will continue to be reported to the Standards and Audit as we go forward with all the alternative options.

Mayor

Councillor Byrne, do you wish to propose a supplementary question?

Councillor Byrne

Yes please Mister Mayor.

I watched in amazement, the Chair of Regeneration (PTR) and the Vice-Chair praising the great work we done at Stanford le Hope station. As part of this great work, he failed to mention the deadline to apply for London Gateway funding was missed three times and that was the tune of £600,000, despite all their warnings. And that obligation has now timed out and that money was for a bus turnaround, not the station upgrade and so have we secured the funds without the DP World contribution?

Councillor Coxshall

Sorry do you want me to answer that or do you want me to...?

Mayor

I'm sorry, I can't accept that as a supplementary question because the main question was regarding the A13.

A discussion ensued about Councillor Byrne's supplementary question in which the Mayor did not accept as it was not related to the main question.

4. From Councillor Anderson to Councillor Halden

Can the Portfolio Holder outline what he is doing additionally to make the children's partnership more accountable?

Mayor

Councillor Halden

Councillor Halden

Thank you Councillor Anderson for your question. Nothing is more important than make sure that all members are clear sighted on what we are doing to keep our children safe and well and making sure they can reach their ambitions. We've made a lot of progress as a Council since 2011 when we set up the Corporate Parenting Committee to make that all members had a correct forum to champion looked after children. We've recently announced an independent review of the safeguarding partnership which is nearing its conclusion which will be published soon. What we have done since is offered cross party members more information than they have ever had before on committees so the Corporate Parenting Committee is seeing special reports on children missing. The overview and scrutiny committee will be seeing special reports on the so-called high risk notifications and a newly constituted prevent committee will see information regarding unaccompanied asylum seeking children and what I would say to committee members is that I really urge all members is please use these forums. Scrutiny is a powerful tool, corporate parenting is an important tool. If there is additional information that you feel that you need in order to champion children in your ward or children in care by all means ask for information probe further. We're very proud as a department of the things that we are going for children so we are always happy to attend scrutiny and indeed I think Councillor Coxshall bleats every now and then that the best disinfectant is sunlight. Ask us questions it helps us build a stronger department so we would urge members to please use these forums we are making sure more information is available the type of information that's normally only available to the portfolio holder and we are keen to continue in this vein.

Mayor

Councillor Anderson do you wish to pose a supplementary question.

Councillor Anderson

No supplementary question Mister Mayor but just like to say that I certainly welcomed the contents of Councillor Halden response there.

5. From Councillor Byrne to Councillor Mayes

Would the Portfolio Holder be prepared to write to the Secretary of State on behalf of the Council to ask him to account for the Government's despicable treatment of NHS workers over its pay increase decision?

Mayor

Councillor Mayes

Councillor Mayes

Thank you Mister Mayor and thank you Councillor Byrne for your questions. The decision to award the pay increase does not actually rest with me however what I will say is a bit of background with this because actually there is an independent NHS pay review body which makes recommendations to the Government on the pay for NHS staff and I am under the understanding at the moment that has not come back yet that may not be the case as it currently stands but that is my understanding. The Government has also pledged that obviously they will listen to the independent board because it is also been in conjunction with trade unions to ensure that everybody is fully rewarded. I do understand that NHS staff are currently benefitting from the final of the three year pay deal agreed by trade unions previously which is delivered on a year on year increase such as increasingly starting salary for a newly qualified nurse by 12% by 2021. I do not think appropriate for me to write to the secretary of state on this matter. Thank you.

Mayor

Councillor Byrne do you wish to pose a supplementary question.

Councillor Byrne

Yes I take that as a no then. The chair of the regeneration scrutiny was very vocal on his motion to build an A&E in Thurrock before the local plan starts concreting over Thurrock. Are you to join him and I would assume his portfolio holder is up for this so are you going to be another big gun that's going to join Councillor Allen's quest to go all guns blazing for an A&E in Thurrock.

Mayor

Can I suggest that Members look at how to put questions in it is quite clear that any supplementary question must relate directly to the main question asked. I will allow it on this one instance if you're happy to do so Councillor Mayes but be aware that in future if it is something that is not directly related to the main substantive question then I will now allow it. And I was going to mention this later on I am getting rather perturbed about the trap door questions that go in where the initial question in my mind in some instances is not the actual question you want to ask so if members want a full and truthful answer than make sure that their question that they actually want to ask is that question and Councillor Mayes would you like to reply.

Councillor Mayes

Thank you Mister Mayor and thank you Councillor Byrne for your second question. The reality is with the new IMCs of which one will be Grays the urgent what we are pushing towards at the moment there is going to be an urgent care centre. What we are pushing for as a 24 hour urgent care centre will actually to be an upgrade to minor injuries which will obviously benefit the residents of Thurrock. Looking at the statistics obviously the decision to

implement a new hospital isn't within my gift however obviously improvements to things such as Grays IMC hopefully and things that I will push for his 24 hour urgent care centre that will actually improve people's health care in Thurrock.

Mayor

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

Councillor Byrne

Okay. With a no to that a no to supporting that great opening from his chair begs the question why did you clap every Thursday for the NHS.

Mayor

Councillor Mayes

Councillor Mayes

I can answer that one. I clapped every Thursday for the NHS because I support the NHS, I think they are doing a fantastic job and at the end of the day there are things outside of this council's control. We can influence, we can push however we are at the behest of Governments and unfortunately I know it's your third question I do think that is the reality, I generally think the clapping for the NHS should be annual thing, I am totally on board with that, I think that it was a fantastic community to come outside when were actually being locked down one time or if you go out for exercise you actually go out and you see people, you see your neighbours that was absolutely lovely for everyone to come out to clap for the NHS but I do not think hypocrites to come and do that based on my role as portfolio holder. Thank you.

6. From Councillor J Kent to Councillor Johnson

When will all residents living in council sheltered complexes be able to use their community halls?

Mayor

Councillor Johnson

Councillor Johnson

Thank you Mister Mayor. Thank you Councillor for your question. After changes were made to the guidelines on Monday 14 September 2020, permits only six people from different households to meet. All twenty nine risk assessments were required to be amended to reflect the said guidance. A letter was issued on 16 September to Councillors and tenants regarding the need to ensure strict infection controls in place so the actual phased opening

of the halls began yesterday. Tenants will be asked to continue the infection control by using the cleaning equipment provided by the housing service to wipe down surfaces used and disposing of the wipes safely in the bins provided. In addition each entry door now has a wall mounted battery operated hand sanitizer, which tenants are encouraged to use both when entering and leaving the building. A simple on the door booking system for tenants will be introduced, which will clearly identify that only six people are permitted in the communal hall at any one time. Sheltered housing officers will be monitoring the simple on the door booking system which will clearly identify the six only permitted at any one time. However there are still some restrictions on activities due to numbers and possible cross contamination on equipment but consideration is being given to looking at how a flexible scenario can be adopted for all activities in the future.

Mayor

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

Councillor J Kent

Thank you Mister Mayor and I am really grateful for both the response and the work that has been going on to get community halls open again. I think my supplementary revolves around that last bit which is looking to be as flexible as we can. Some of the community halls that we have are, you know, larger than this council chamber and it is more than possible to get different groupings of six with adequate distance between them to enable residents to be able to use the hall. My question is that although I understand we all understand the absolute need to rigorously control the virus many of our older people do suffer some loneliness. In our complexes many of the people living there are single, they are not married, and those community halls are literally a lifeline to them. During the summer, if I take the example of Dexter Close which is the closest one to me they had lots of tables outside where people could come and sit and be two metres from the next bubble that is clearly not possible this time of year so can I just ask that that flexibility and as much common sense as possible is used to enable as many of our older vulnerable residents to use the community halls as possible.

Mayor

Councillor Johnson

Councillor Johnson

The immediate answer to that counts again is yes obviously but however it has to be some kind of generic opening just to make sure that everything is correct and then I will ensure the officers do look at each individual hall. Thank you.

Mayor

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

Councillor J Kent

Yes again I am grateful for that. Could I ask that at a time of his convenience the portfolio holder comes with me to meet residents of Dexter Close to see the hall for himself and to see what more can be done to get it as open as possible as quickly as possible.

Mayor

Councillor Johnson

Councillor Johnson

By all means.

As the item fell due to time limit of the meeting Councillor J Kent withdrew question 7, Councillor Worrall withdrew question 8, Councillor Kerin resubmitted question 9 for October Council and Councillor Holloway withdrew questions 10 and 11.