

SUMMONS ITEM 6

MEMBERS' QUESTION TIME COUNCIL MEETING, 28TH July 2003

The two questions nominated by Leader of the Conservative Group

1. Question in the name of Councillor Taylor

Given the strong reaction of residents against the proposals to de-designate 10 conservation areas in Brent, will the Lead Member now withdraw these proposals foisted upon her by the previous Lead Member for Environment?

Answer:

By the Lead Member for Environment and Planning, Councillor Jones

No organisation would be acting wisely if it did not review its policies and practices from time to time. The Council has duty to continually review its Conservation Areas to ensure maintaining their quality and integrity. So no, I do not agree that the proposal has been "foisted" upon me. It is a sound management procedure.

The proposed action is consistent with recent Government Guidance supported by English Heritage. The dedesignation considerations include the erosion of their special historic and architectural character over time and the limited resources the Council has for conservation area maintenance.

Section 69 of the Planning (Listed building and Conservation Area) Act 1990 requires all Local Authorities to designate as Conservation Areas:

"Areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance"

It goes on to say:

"Authorities should seek to establish consistent local standards for their designations and should periodically review existing Conservation Areas and their boundaries against those standards: Cancellation of designation should be considered where and area or part of an area is no longer considered to possess the special interest which lead to its original designation".

The definition requires that any area should have a special character for it to justify its Conservation Area Status. Officers and representatives of English Heritage, after many hours of survey, now consider that 10 of the Borough's Conservation Areas do not now retain the special character that would justify the retention of their status.

The Council's Executive agreed at its meeting on 31 March 2003 to consider de-designation of 10 Conservation Areas due to the erosion of their historic

and architectural character and to a programme of consultation prior to the Executive making a final decision. The areas being considered for dedesignation are:

Butlers Green Conservation Area
Kenton Conservation Area.
Stanley Avenue as a Conservation Area.
Woodheydes and Gresham Conservation Area
Slough Lane Conservation Area
Manor Close Conservation Area.
Wembley Hill Conservation Area.
Preston Park Conservation Area.
Queens Walk Conservation Area.
King Edward VII Conservation Area.

The review was carried out by Brent Officers, representatives of the London Borough of Harrow, English Heritage and the Twentieth Century Society. Each Conservation Area was individually surveyed to establish the survival of original Windows, Doors, Roof coverings, Front Gardens and Garden Walls. These factors are important in deciding whether an area retains the special character that prompted its designation.

The survey identified that many Conservation Areas are in serious decline because of many years of un-sympathetic change through Permitted development, unauthorised works, and lack of enforcement resources. These problems were compounded because the Council has had very restricted Conservation resources for many years and these meagre resources have been spread too thinly to prevent insidious decline.

The programme of consultation is underway but is not yet completed. The Planning (Listed buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 does not require Local Authorities (Councils) to consult with residents for either designation or de designation of Conservation Areas. However, it does recommend that residents are consulted to establish attitudes and preferences and this Administration has adopted this position.

The views of all residents and occupiers within the 10 Conservation Areas have been sought and the results are being analysed. The views of Statutory bodies are still awaited as is the outcome of discussions at relevant Area Consultative Forums programmed for September and October 2003.

It is inevitable that some residents will want to retain Conservation Area status regardless of the level of preservation of character. However, the assessment and decision making process should be based on sound technical Planning factors and Central Government guidance, whilst still understanding residents concerns, the Council must be rigorous in its application of consistent standards in the management of its historic assets.

Only after the completion of the consultation programme is it appropriate for the Executive to make a decision.

2. Question in the name of Councillor B.M. Patel

A public consultation on parking controls on Wembley Event days will take place in September. Please confirm that no scheme will be imposed on residents against their wishes and any proposed scheme must have the support of the majority of residents across the proposed zones before implementation will be considered?

Answer:

By the Lead Member for Environment and Planning, Councillor Jones

Public consultations will NOT take place in September 2003.

A strategy for taking forward the schemes must be endorsed by the Highways Committee prior to public consultations taking place. Highways Committee considered a report on 23rd July and have deferred a decision until the next Committee meeting on 16th October when more detailed information will be provided. The Committee also recognised the need to have a strategy in place that would protect the interests of residents before the new Wembley National Stadium is completed.

The council has only produced permanent residents controlled parking zones where majority support is demonstrated. Wembley event day control will operate on only the thirty days per annum on which events occur, and will not include some of the usual features associated with zones, such as pay and display. Clearly, the council will be mindful of the results of residents consultation, it's obligations under the planning consent for the stadium, and it's duty to manage traffic routes around the stadium area in the decision making process.

We have no option in this matter. The planning application for the new Wembley Stadium includes the requirement for protective parking within a 2 mile radius on the 30 event days per year once the Stadium is open. No sensible administration would reject the Stadium application and its potential for regeneration, employment and trader prosperity in the Wembley area. However, we also recognise the need to consult with interested parties liable to be affected by this requirement and we do take this seriously.

The one question nominated by Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group

3. Question in the name of Councillor Daniel Brown

With the National Stadium on target for 2006, but no Wembley Park upgrade until 2006, the Stadium Corridor not ready before 2009, the Met Line upgrade being 2010, and no Brent Crossrail, what steps are the Council taking to stop the opening of the new Stadium re-creating the Dome disaster?

Answer:

by the Leader of the Council, Councillor John

Only a Liberal Democrat could make a comparison between the National Football Stadium and the Millennium Dome. A football stadium has a shelf life of decades whilst the Dome was a once off project for a particular occasion.

And only a Liberal Democrat would want to talk down the biggest regeneration project this part of London has seen in a century.

There was a football stadium at Wembley from 1923 to 2000. That stadium regularly housed up to 100,000 spectators most of whom, particularly in the early years, arrived by public transport and without the benefits of the Metropolitan line upgrade or Crossrail.

I am happy to report that the stadium development is ahead of schedule and will be completed in September 2005. At present the stadium is due for completion two months before the upgrade to Wembley Park station but I am assured that work on the station will be brought forward to ensure that it is ready in time for the stadium opening.

I am pleased that all three party groups have been fully briefed by our partners in this project, notably Quintain. I welcome the fact that the National Stadium project has enjoyed the full support of both major parties and I ask the Liberal Democrats, whose constituents stand to benefit so much from this project, to stop carping and put Brent first.

The 3 questions selected from Labour Backbench Members

4. Question from Councillor Harrod

Brent suffers from high rents, high homelessness and poor conditions of housing across tenure resulting in poor health and high stress for all.

How will

- rents be reduced
- government standards be met
- levels of temporary accommodation be reduced

Can the action plan to achieve these targets be shared with members?

Answer:

by the Lead Member for Housing, Councillor Thomas

This Council has recognised that since 1998 the borough's housing crisis is such that cannot be solved in the short term. Years of under investment and increased demand for housing (arising from economic factors affecting London as a whole) requires long term co-ordinated strategy to improve both the quality and quantity of our housing stock across all tenures. For this reason the Council's Housing Strategy has adopted an overall goal of trying to achieve a decent home for all Brent residents by 2010.

This objective is reiterated in the Council's Corporate Strategy under the quality of life theme. The Housing strategy sets out clear objectives as to how we can move towards these objectives for all tenures. For example within the private sector the Council approved changes to the private sector grants policy to ensure that resources were directed at the worst parts of the private sector (rented) and where the greatest gain in meeting the Council's homelessness demand could be met (empty homes). The full council has approved the housing strategy which the government has since assessed as "fit for purpose" The Council's HRA business plan has also been awarded a fit for purpose status by government. This business plan sets out in detail how the authority, in conjunction with Brent Housing Partnership will achieve the governments "decent homes target" for Council properties. The current plan envisages that this will be achieved by 2006 four years ahead of the government target. For this to be achieved BHP will have to achieve at least a two star rating in its inspection to enable the additional resources allocated by government to be released. We are currently awaiting the results of the inspection and I am confident we will achieve a positive result.

The Council therefore has clear plans which have already been shared with members for achieving the governments prescribed target of decent homes within its own stock. Turning to the level of rent. The Council has had an historic high level of rent a factor which the administration has been aware of and as a result has minimised the level of rent increases to the absolute necessary during the last few years. Indeed overall rents have been increased only once over the last 4 years, and taking account of inflation, rent has decreased in each of the last four years.

The Government has introduced rent convergence across the social housing sector which will have the overall effect of moving rents in Brent towards the London average.

Finally moving on to temporary accommodation, the overall lack of adequate affordable housing will mean that Brent continues to be a significant user of temporary accommodation for some years. We are working with our West London partners to achieve as a high as possible allocation of resources to build new affordable homes and continue to use 106 agreements to further increase the level of affordable Housing. The publication of the West London Housing Strategy (approved by Members last month) is a positive step in strengthening the West London Case for additional resources. We have now published the Council's Homelessness strategy which again sets out a clear action plan as to how we are aiming to both reduce the levels of homelessness and also provide quality temporary accommodation for those who are homeless. The numbers of families in Bed and Breakfast has nearly halved over the last 18 months and the council is on target for achieving the governments requirement for not using Bed and Breakfast for families by April 2004.

In conclusion the Council has a housing strategy and HRA Business plan that is fit for purpose.

- We are either ahead or on target for meeting government's targets and standards.
- The Housing Strategy aims at achieving improvements across all tenures.
- Council rent levels in Brent are on target to meet the governments rent convergence levels which will result in a relative reduction in overall rent levels
- The homelessness review and strategy sets out clear action plan for prevention of homelessness and the provision of quality temporary accommodation.

5. Question in the name of Councillor Gladbaum

What actions are the council taking to ensure that the drive towards e-government does not disenfranchise those sections of the community who do not have private access to the internet?

Answer

by the Lead Member for Corporate Resources, Councillor Coughlin

The last MORI survey showed that 64% of the Brent population has access to the Internet (compared with 45% nationally), and whilst this is good news our e-government vision puts the needs of the excluded 36% to the fore. Indeed one tenet set out in our 2001 Implementing Electronic Government statement states that 'all Brent residents will have access to the internet either at home, at work or through free access via Brent libraries and community centres'.

At present, all of Brent's twelve libraries (as well as the Grange Museum and the Brent Archive) have free Internet access, delivered over broadband, with one terminal in each library having adaptive technology to meet the needs of disabled people.

There are currently over 150 public terminals in the libraries, and Ealing Road library has a multicultural ICT language and learning centre with 8 PCs with transliteration and word processing software in 10 languages, and online English language learning programmes.

Brent has three LearnDirect Centres in libraries - Kilburn, Willesden Green and Harlesden. These centres provide low cost or free training for Brent residents in ICT skills, computer skills, CVs etc., whilst BACES provides more comprehensive training in ICT skills.

Brent has also partnered with the London Borough of Harrow, Harrow College, Stanmore College and the College of North West London in the North West London Online initiative. The project is targeted at excluded groups and individuals who do not make use of conventional education and training facilities, such as unemployed and disabled people, and will introduce

25,000 people to the use of computers and ICT in a number of centres across the borough. A list of the 22 centres that are currently in operation in Brent is appended to this document.

BRAIN is the "Brent Resource and Information Network" that brings community information to the London Borough of Brent. (Brent Library Service manages BRAIN in partnership with the local community). As part of the Government funded CrimeZone project, BRAIN will be providing set-top boxes to enable Internet access via TV sets to selected residents involved in Neighbourhood Watch schemes who do not currently have Internet access in their homes. These residents will be from areas that have the greatest social exclusion in Brent.

Apart from crime reporting as part of the CrimeZone project, access to BRAIN will provide these participating residents with greater awareness on health, crime prevention, arts and lifelong learning, and multicultural issues. Additionally, this facility will give greater empowerment to residents, and increase community consultation with the council by expanding opportunities for socially and economically disadvantaged residents to make their voices heard at Area Consultative Forums, and online consultations.

E-government isn't just about ensuring access to services via the Internet. Many of the citizens that use our services do not wish to use the Internet and would prefer to employ traditional means of contacting the Council - by post, by phone and in person. Using new technology to improve the customer service experience for these citizens is also one of the main objectives of our e-government strategy.

Our new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system (which was a major e-government project) has already been successfully implemented, and is being used by staff in our Contact Centres and One Stop Shops for *all* customer interactions. Future e-government plans centre around integrating the CRM system with major back-office systems so as to provide a seamless customer service experience for our citizens regardless of which type of access channel they prefer to use.

NORTH WEST LONDON ONLINE CENTRES IN BRENT

ORGANISATION	ADDRESS	Tel.
1. INNIT Project, South Kilburn Learning Access Centre	24 Peel Precinct, London NW6 5BS	020 7372 9595
2. Community Careers	William Dunbar House, Tenants Hall, Albert Road, London NW6 5DE	020 7372 3613
3. IT Works	Kilburn Centre, Priory Park Road, NW6 7UJ	0208 208 5000
4. Kensal Green	130 Mortimer Road, London	020 8968 6095

ORGANISATION	ADDRESS	Tel.
Under Five's Group	NW10 5SN	
5. Pakistan Workers Association	The Pakistan Community Centre, Marley Walk, off Station Parade, Willesden Green, London NW2 4PU	020 8452 4103
6. Brent Indian Association	116 Ealing Road, Wembley HAO 4TH	020 8903 3019
7. Dudden Hill Community Centre	Dudden Hill Centre, 19 Dudden Hill Lane, London NW10 2ET	020 8459 1107
8. New Millennium Day Centre	1 Robson Avenue Willesden London NW10 3SG	020 8451 3501
9. @kshar IT Centre (Swaminarayan Hindu Mission)	54-62 Meadow Garth London NW10 8HD	0208 838 4645
10. Brent Association of Disabled People	154 Harlesden Road, Willesden, London NW10 3RX	020 8451 3822 ext 224
11. Church End	Garnet Road London NW10 9HX Home Address: 17 Maundeby Walk London NW10 2TG	020 8451 7874
12. Roundwood	Block 2 33 Hugh Gaitskell House Curzon Crescent London NW10 9RT	8459 3768
13. Bridge Park	Brentfield Harrow Rd London NW10 0RG	020 8838 1255
14. Asian People with Disabilities Alliance	Disability Alliance Centre The Old Refectory Central Middlesex Hospital Acton Lane, Park Royal London NW10 7NS	020 8838 0594
15. Muslim Welfare Association	Wembley Mosque 35-37 Ealing Road Wembley HAO 4AE	020 8902 5538

ORGANISATION	ADDRESS	Tel.
16. Ashley Gardens-Brent Adult & Community Education Service	Pavillion Building Ashley Gardens Wembley HA9 8NP	020 8838 0808
17. Bengali Community Education Centre	106 High Road London NW10 2PP	020 8451 6800
18. Cricklewood Homeless Concern	60 Ashford Road Cricklewood London NW2 6TU	020 8208 1608
19. An-Nisa Society	85 Wembley Hill Road Wembley Middx HA9 8BU	020 8902 0100
20. Local Employment Access Projects (LEAP)	Harriet Tubman House 24-28 Hazel Road Kensal Green London NW10 5PP	020 8962 1900
21. African & Caribbean Resource Centre	Park House 1 Manor Park Road London NW10 4JW	020 8937 4754
22. Harlesden IT Works	CNWL, Dudden Hill Lane London NW10 2XD	020 8208 5050

6. Question in the name of Councillor Joseph

How does the Islamia school compare to other LEA schools in terms of examination results?

Answer:

by the Lead Member Education, Arts and Libraries, Councillor Lyon:

The attached table contains analysis of pupil attainment data for Islamia against Brent averages.

Key Stage 1 - % of pupils achieving lever 2 or above			
Subject	Islamia Primary School	Brent	Differen

		Average	ce
Reading	97%	85%	+12%
Writing	85%	86%	-1%
Spelling	82%	79%	+3%
Maths	100%	90%	+10%
Key Stage 2 - % of pupils achieving lever 4 or above			
Subject	Islamia Primary School	Brent Average	Difference
English	83%	75%	+8%
Maths	83%	76%	+7%
Science	83%	85%	-2%

Four questions drawn from the general ballot

7. Question in the name of Councillor Mrs Fernandes

Please explain why several community organisations, which act as transport providers for Brent residents to attend day care and voluntary organisations, have had their grant halted? Equally, why are intrusive questions being posed about the users, which may infringe Data Protection legislation?

Answer

by the Lead Member for Health & Social Care, Councillor Fox

In order to ensure that we are targeting grant funding appropriately a review of all transport grants to voluntary organisations is currently being undertaken. The review is considering what the organisations provide, to whom, for what purpose, where and how often. Letters were sent in April 2003 to twenty one organisations asking them to provide the information needed for the review and to make a case for continued funding.

The organisations that have not responded to Social Services letter of 11 April are as follows:

Brent Association for Disabled People
Brondesbury and Willesden
North Kensington Stroke Club
Salvation Army

Of these the Brondesbury and Willesden and North Kensington Stroke Club had made no claim on their grant allocation in the year 2002–3. Seventeen organisations have responded of whom eleven have made a case for continuation of grant.

Monitoring carried out in 2001-2 revealed that some organisations were providing a service to people who did not live in Brent and that on occasion costs appeared to be high for the numbers of people transported. In order to verify the numbers of service users and that they are residents of Brent,

officers of Social Services requested from each organisation the names and addresses of the people to whom they are providing the transport service. This was the only information of a personal nature requested. This information is confidential and is not shared with anyone other than the officers concerned with administering the grant. It does not infringe data protection legislation, as the information is not held on the department's electronic database. Organisations may wish to seek their service user's permission before giving Social Services the information.

Decisions about who should continue to receive grant funding will be made using the following criteria:

- That the service is provided to Brent residents.
- That service users fall into one of the social care categories for which services are provided by Social Services.
- That the service assists the user to maximise his or her independence.
- That the grant is spent only for transport.
- That evidence of expenditure can be produced and that this can be justified by the numbers transported.

8. Question in the name of Councillor Kansagra

Can you assure this Council that no teachers have been made redundant in Brent, and could you also confirm that without exception the teachers pay award was paid in full?

Answer:

by the Lead Member Education, Arts and Libraries, Councillor Lyon:

There have been no compulsory teacher redundancies in Brent. There have been 4 voluntary redundancies at Willseden High School as a result of the transfer to City Academy Status, the cost of which is being met by the DfES.

Sufficient resources were added into the delegated schools budgets in total to cover the cost of the teachers' pay award (+9.6%). The actual additional funding received by an individual school will vary according to a variety of factors, particularly changes in the number of pupils at the school.

9. Question in the name of Councillor Jack Sayers

Local residents are increasingly concerned about the number and location of mobile phone masts. Why has the Brent Council policy on this subject been delayed for more than a year and when can we expect to see a proper report presented to the Executive on a policy to be adopted?

Answer:

By the Lead Member for Environment and Planning, Councillor Jones

Councillor Sayers is right that residents do have concerns about mobile phone masts. And a number of Councillors share that concern. But that concern is matched by people's enthusiasm for using their mobile phones – including Councillors.

This is an area of policy where there are no easy answers.

It is also an area where the context for developing policy is changing rapidly. A new Code of Best Practice on Mobile Phone Network Development was published in November 2002 as was guidance to schools and LEAs.

A draft report is being finalised in Environmental Services and Departments across the Council will be consulted on it over the next few weeks. The report will be presented to the Executive on 22 September.

10. Question in the name of Councillor Chandubhai Patel

How many children are the Education Directorate aware of who have not yet got admission to schools for the Autumn 2003 term? (please breakdown by nursery, primary, and secondary). Which parts of the Borough are most affected, and how do we compare with other Councils in London and nationwide?

Answer:

by the Lead Member Education, Arts and Libraries, Councillor Lyon:

The schools themselves currently carry out the admission process in Brent. This means that there is no central database of children on Roll in Brent schools, nor is there a central system for school admissions. This is a product of the fact that there are 14 Secondary schools in Brent, of which 13 are currently legally responsible for administering their own admissions. The administration of Primary School admissions was devolved to schools some years ago.

There will be a central database of schoolchildren in Brent up and running in September 2003 and the Education Act (2002) requires LEAs to co-ordinate school admissions from September 2005.

We are initially dependent upon schools to let us know the offer lists for entry into Nursery, Reception and the transfer to Secondary school. We have not received all of these lists and will, over the Summer, be contacting parents to establish where they believe their children will attend in September.

The Children's Information Service keeps data on Nursery provision in the borough. There are sufficient places available at nursery level, whether in Nursery classes, Nursery schools or through independent providers. Park Lane Primary School has been expanded to include a Nursery Class, which will open in September.

For the reasons given above, there is no current reliable data for children who do not have admission to a school in September. The data will be firmed up over the summer months and then completely clarified in September.

Projections show a sufficient number of nursery, reception and Year 7 places in the borough as a whole.

The greatest number of appeals and requests for information come from the Kingsbury area. This problem should start to ease as Kingsbury High School and Preston Manor High School have removed ability testing from their admissions arrangements for September 2004, Kingsbury have changed their arrangements to give priority to children attending the four Kingsbury Community Primary Schools in an attempt to provide more places to children living in the local area.

There is no hard data available from any borough as to their equivalent situation, though the pressures on school places are being felt right across London.