



## SUMMONS ITEM **6**

### LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT COUNCIL MEETING 13<sup>th</sup> JULY 2009

#### MEMBERS' QUESTION TIME

#### 1. QUESTION IN THE NAME OF COUNCILLOR AHMED:

How much money was collected in parking charges and parking fines across Brent in 2005-06, 2006-07, 2007-08 and 2008-09?

*Response from the Lead Member for Transport and Highways*

	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	
Parking Charges - (meter)		£2,825,534	£3,128,470	£3,308,880	£3,330,341
Parking Fines (net of Bad debt)		£5,076,661	£4,408.014	£5,431,982	£4,750,339

#### 2. QUESTION IN THE NAME OF COUNCILLOR J MOHER:

The Lib Dems issued a leaflet in 2006 urging residents to use the free bulky collection service "before the Conservatives make you pay!" When and why did the Lib Dems reverse this policy?

*Response from the Leader*

I must thank Councillor Moher for his question, as it gives me an opportunity to highlight one of the travesties around the Recycling and Sustainability Agenda imposed by the Labour Government he supports.

Collection services were never of course free to provide, there was always a cost to the Council Tax payer. Bulky collection had cost Brent £725,000 a year until we reduced this as part of the new, higher-spec contract to a figure of £534,000. Even with this better value for money, the charge of £25 for up to 5 items raises only a small contribution towards this. NO charge is payable for the collection of fridges or freezers; nor does the charge apply to pensioners or to those on benefits.

Councils have to balance their budgets in line with financial constraints and fair principles. Government grant levels and funding regimes play a large part in this. The Treasury Committee agreed with us that there are fundamental flaws in data from the ONS which underestimates Brent's population by around 18,000 people. Meanwhile, the Labour Government have given Brent one of the smallest grant rises of all Councils. Our job is to take a fair and balanced approach that does not see us setting Council Tax rises in the region of Labour's famous 22 percent rise under Councillor Ann John.

The most invidious hit on our finances in the area of the environment has been the Government's Landfill Tax. With increases of £19 per tonne being levied by the Government since 2006 this has amounted to a rise in cost to Brent residents of over £2 million. Gordon Brown has also failed to fulfil the promise to return this money to Councils to re-invest in recycling equipment and sustainable schemes, making Landfill Tax one of the Government's most cynical raids on Council funding.

Residents have backed our recycling rollout and commitment to cleaner streets and a better environment. The Labour Government's contribution to this campaign has been to raid millions of pounds each year that should be spent on Council services – not on bailing out a Government that has put the public finances in such a mess.

### **3. QUESTION IN THE NAME OF COUNCILLOR R MOHER:**

Does Councillor Lorber agree with Sarah Teather, MP that "all responsible political parties need to make sure they don't make promises they can't keep" and, if so, how does this reflect on his promise of FREE personal care for the elderly?

*Response from the Leader*

I welcome the attention drawn to the Liberal Democrats' General Election policy of providing Free Personal Care to the Elderly, by giving this adequate Government funding. You seem to be confused about the point of that campaign.

The whole of local government has been telling the Labour Government for years that social care is underfunded. Most people know that, as a result of the Liberal Democrats forming part of the administration at the time, the requirement for older people to pay for personal care was removed, as a result of it being centrally funded. This is one of the key differences people have seen between Scotland, where the Liberal Democrats held a share of power, and here in England, where Labour continue to be mean-minded and force the elderly to pay for personal care.

Meanwhile, the Government continue to turn a deaf ear to the need for nationally provided assistance to our elderly and disabled. The Government has spent months delaying its Green Paper on the future of Adult Social Care. It was revealed only last week that Government Ministers are still wrangling over and delaying a decision on a plan to scrap both Attendance Allowance, and the care component of Disability Living Allowance, pending the forthcoming by-election in Norwich. Charities such as Age Concern and Help the Aged are deeply worried at the potential impact of such

measures on older and disabled people, with an estimate that around £10 billion of benefits could be proposed to be clawed back.

I suggest the Councillor should perhaps ask her own Labour Ministers to end the infighting, stop considering further cuts, and start delivering for elderly and disabled people in Brent, if she is really concerned about the issue she has raised.

#### **4. QUESTION IN THE NAME OF COUNCILLOR MOLONEY:**

In August 2006, the council changed the planning brief for the Queen's Park station area and reduced the maximum height of buildings to no more than twelve storeys.

Since then, how many buildings higher than 12 storeys have been approved in Brent and in which wards?

*Response from the Lead Member for Environment, Planning and Culture*

Planning laws are set by central Government and guidance is given by the GLA. The Planning Committee are independent from the Executive and always face the possibility of having their decision overruled by a Government Planning Inspector, as happened with the North End Road student accommodation.

Many of the precedents which are now held up in places such as Wembley were set pre-2006 while the Labour Group were in charge of Brent. A different approach will always be possible in residential areas and areas such as old industrial sites.

The Planning Committee have resolved to approve the following original or revised applications above 12 storeys in height since August 2006:

##### **Oriental City (Queensbury)**

Application ref: 06/1652

Planning Committee: 21 November 2006

Maximum Height: 18 Storeys above commercial "plinth", 68 m

##### **Central Square (Wembley Central)**

*Original* application ref: 03/3765

Planning Committee: 8 April 2004

Maximum Height: 12 storeys, 36.7 m

*Revised* application ref: 07/3548

Planning Committee: 26 February 2008

Maximum Height: 13 storeys, 46.5 m

##### **Wickes (Queensbury)**

Application ref: 08/2823

Planning Committee : 7 April 2009

Maximum Height: 17 Storeys above commercial "plinth", 66 m

##### **Shubette House (Tokyngton)**

Application ref: 08/3009

Planning Committee : 17 June 2009

Maximum Height: 20 storeys, 60.9 m

**Developments over 12 storeys and were *refused* by committee but were approved on appeal during this period:**

**Atlip Road (Alperton)**

Application ref: 08/0856

Planning Committee : 10 October 2006

Maximum Height: 14 storeys, 42 m

**North End Road Student Accommodation (Tokyngton)**

Application ref: 07/2772

Planning Committee : 5 February 2008

Maximum height: 20 storeys, 61 m

**5. QUESTION IN THE NAME OF COUNCILLOR POWNEY:**

Given that Liberal Democrat objections to the Brent Cross development have been accompanied by thousands of pounds in donations to their party from a fellow objector, what plans are there to publicise party political donations in the same way as personal or prejudicial interests at planning meetings?

*Response from the Leader*

The Liberal Democrat Group was first made aware of local concerns about the Barnet plans by local Lib Dem councillor, Alec Castle. Local residents had informed him of their concerns. They are concerned about the impact this development will have on pollution and traffic in the area. The waste transfer facility and incinerator are located immediately on the Brent Council border – relocated from a site in Barnet across the railway line; local residents are also concerned about the nature of this waste facility. A development on this scale could bring 29,000 extra cars per day, with 400-800 more HGV's a day using the waste transfer plant. All of this extra traffic will use local roads in Brent.

As Councillor Powney well knows, unlike Brent's 2 Labour MP's expenses, which have caused so much anger, donations to political parties must be registered with the Electoral Commission in accordance with the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 and the Electoral Administration Act 2006. Declared donations are freely and publicly available to view on the Electoral Commission's website and there is therefore already a national framework for the declaration of donations to political parties.

As Councillor Powney should know Brent Council's planning committee is entirely independent from the Council's Executive and assesses each planning case on the merits of the case alone. For Councillor Powney to imply otherwise is deeply insulting to all members of that committee. Moreover, this application will actually be determined by Barnet, not Brent, Council.

The Liberal Democrats are committed to campaigning for local people on issues which matter to them, and will remain so. However, if Labour colleagues of his

representing residents in that area would rather support the development, then perhaps they will say so openly and honestly.

**6. QUESTION IN THE NAME OF COUNCILLOR MOTLEY:**

Following the news that just 13 colleges have been given the go-ahead to proceed with rebuilding plans, following the collapse of the Labour government's Building Colleges for the Future programme is the Lead Member concerned about the fact that the College of North West London was not included in the programme?

*Response from the Lead Member for Children and Families*

I am very concerned about the impact on the College of North West London. The College plays a vital role in providing vocational training for young people who are facing great difficulties as a result of the recession. The College received Government approval "in principle" for investment in a new building in Wembley. It had already spent £4.2m on the project and has decanted into temporary accommodation in anticipation of the building going ahead. Now it has been told by the Government that there is no funding available.

Many colleges have been affected by this debacle. It appears to be the result of incompetent management by the Government's Learning and Skills Council, which had promised colleges investment funding on a scale that far exceeded the resources available. The mess also reflects badly on ministerial oversight by the short-lived Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills.

I am concerned also that this may be a sign of things to come for local government investment. The Government plans to borrow £175 billion this year, a scale of borrowing never before seen in peacetime. Borrowing on this scale is clearly unsustainable and the government's own plans, as stated in the budget, are for capital investment to be cut by 40% starting from 2011-12. This Council must progress investment projects as quickly as possible this year, because central government funding may not be available in future.

That is why I think the right course for the rebuilding of the John Kelly Colleges is to build on the existing site, rather than continue with a CPO process which could take two years to resolve. The Labour Government has made a mess of this country's finances, whether we like it or not it is time to face that reality and the consequences it brings.

**7. QUESTION IN THE NAME OF COUNCILLOR CASTLE:**

Will the Leader of the Council confirm if he has approached the Secretary State asking whether the plans for the Brent Cross development will be called in, and if so, what has been the Secretary of State's response?

### *Response from the Leader*

On 15<sup>th</sup> June I wrote to the Secretary of State, John Denham, to express the concerns of many local residents about this development. In my letter I explained that I objected to the proposals for these main reasons:

1. The waste transfer facility and incinerator are located immediately on the Brent Council border – a relocation from a site in Barnet across the railway line. Pollution and traffic from this site will adversely impact our residents. However, Brent Council has no formal influence over Barnet Council on this matter.
2. LB Barnet have consistently failed to answer questions and FoI requests including those concerning the technology proposed for the incinerator and the levels of Section 106, or other future development funding under another regime, from the developer.
3. Most of the 7,000 residential properties planned as part of the scheme will only meet minimum standards required by planning legislation. Perhaps more importantly, these are only an idea for a late phase of the development. The commitment to providing these is minimal when compared to the more profitable elements such as the Waste Transfer facility and commercial expansion.
4. Barnet Council's own traffic analysis already shows that a development on this scale would bring 29,000 extra cars per day, with 400-800 more HGV's a day using the waste transfer plant. All of this extra traffic will use local roads in Brent. Independent advisers have already described these plans as seriously flawed. Add the changes proposed to some of the most major junctions in London, and we will have increased traffic problems.
5. The Cricklewood Brent Cross plans make little provision for parking. Whilst the push towards "green transportation" is commendable, unfortunately, this particular corner of London is not well served by public transport. The reality will be that users of the new development will have little alternative but to travel by car. With no extra parking provided, the impact on streets in Brent, and also of course in Barnet and Camden, will be significant.

On 26<sup>th</sup> June I received a letter from the Government Office for London acknowledging my letter and on 3<sup>rd</sup> July I received a response from Ian Austin MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Department for Communities and Local Government, which read:

*Dear Councillor Lorber*

***REQUEST TO CALL IN BRENT CROSS, CRICKLEWOOD, OUTLINE PLANNING APPLICATION***

*Thank you for your letter of 15<sup>th</sup> June to the Rt Hon John Denham MP, requesting intervention on the Brent Cross Cricklewood Development. Your letter has been passed to me as planning issues fall within my Ministerial responsibilities. I*

*appreciate you will have also received a response from officials at the Government Office for London.*

*I understand that Barnet Council is considering the application with a committee date anticipated for mid-June 2009. I have been informed that because of the size and significance of the proposed development if the Council is minded to approve the application, it will be formally referred to the Secretary of State. This will enable him to consider whether it raises issues that warrant calling it in for his determination. I attach a copy of the Secretary of State's call-in policy for your information.*

*I know that you will appreciate that it would not be appropriate to comment on the merits of any development proposal as to do so could be seen to prejudice the Secretary of State's consideration of the case.*

*Officials will keep you informed of the Secretary of State's decision on the planning case.*

*Yours sincerely  
Ian Austin*

## **8. QUESTION IN THE NAME OF COUNCILLOR CLUES:**

Can the Leader of the Council update us on the Administration's Efficiency Programme; will Brent Council be ready for tough times ahead caused by the Labour Government?

*Response from the Leader*

The Council's overall approach to improvement and efficiency is set out in the Brent Improvement and Efficiency Strategy 2008-12 and the Medium Term Financial Strategy. These documents, the only ones to have been formally adopted by the Council so far, recognise the reality that the climate for public finances has changed fundamentally as a result of the recession and that business as usual is not an option.

The two key elements in our approach are to enable the Council to protect and improve front line services to Brent residents whilst making major reductions in how much it costs the Council to deliver services. In practice, this means that we aim to cut the costs of delivering key services by at least £50 million between 2010 – 2014.

We shall do this by making Brent One Council with more efficient and streamlined systems and procedures and by radically re-shaping service delivery and business processes. Key strands of activity which will help in this include service transformation and reviews, rationalisation of the Council's property portfolio and new ways of working and extended use of IT.

Although local government faces a difficult period over the next four years, regardless of who forms the next Government, I am determined that my administration will plan its response in an intelligent and pro-active way rather than

making panic cuts year after year, or resorting to the kind of budgeting that saw Labour set Council Tax rises of 22 percent the last time they were in office. The development of our new Civic Centre also gives us a fantastic opportunity to change and modernise the way we work and we will be exploiting the opportunities that this presents, such as greater public access, more energy efficient buildings, and closer proximity to key partners and Brent businesses.

We cannot pretend that everything will continue as usual over the next few years. I don't believe that, you don't believe it, and the public don't believe it. The current level of national debt stands at over 50% of GDP. This Labour Government has pushed us into the red and we will all have to pay it back. That will inevitably mean less money for Local Government. I am not prepared to sit back and foolishly hope things will be alright.

The Liberal Democrats are determined to make Brent Council, lean, efficient and ready for difficult times ahead. I want excellent, value for money services for our residents, whatever the national financial mess may be. That requires vision, ambition and determination - qualities notably lacking from our Labour predecessor administrations, who delivered consistently poorer services, while more than doubling the Council Tax in the 10 years to 2006.

#### **9. QUESTION IN THE NAME OF KANSAGRA:**

What proposals have been received by the Council for revisions of the proposed development at Copland High School and are there any changes to the housing provision?

*Response from the Lead Member for Environment, Planning and Culture*

There have been no alternative plans for the Copland site submitted to the Council, although discussions have taken place with a developer on a greater proportion of affordable dwellings to be provided as part of the approved scheme for the site - up to 50% instead of the previously agreed 30%. There is no planning objection to this change. The planning permission granted requires a minimum of 30% of the scheme to be affordable, however there is no upper limit stipulated.

#### **10. QUESTION IN THE NAME OF COUNCILLOR MISTRY:**

Please can the Lead Member give an update on what arrangements are being made to provide improvements to Eton Grove Open Space?

*Response from the Lead Member for Environment, Planning and Culture*

Eton Grove Open Space is a small local park approximately 4.28 Ha in size located at the rear of residential properties at Rugby Rd and North Way, Kingsbury.

The park comprises a children's playground, bowling green, sports pitches, tennis courts and a disused and dilapidated community centre. Recent improvements have



included new entrance gates, new play equipment and a new toilet installed in the bowls pavilion.

Medium term plans for improvement include the demolition and landscaping of the dilapidated community centre, soft landscaping of the old pavilion site and the upgrading of the tennis courts with the inclusion of a Multi Use Games Area [MUGA]

Longer term plans have not been developed yet but Eton Grove will be considered for further improvements as part of the development of a new Parks Strategy which is currently being drafted by Officers and which will be subject to public consultation later this year.

The park has an established and active 'Friends of' group and once the Parks Service has completed its current restructuring it is envisaged that future detailed improvements will be developed in partnership with this and other groups and organisations to meet local needs, raise local awareness and increase participation in the enjoyment of the park.