

COUNCIL

8 NOVEMBER 2012

PUBLIC QUESTIONS (ITEM 6)

A period of up to 15 minutes is allowed for the asking of written questions by members of the public of a Member of the Executive or the Chairman of any Committee.

1.

Questioner: Rosalyn Neale

Asked of: Councillor Mitzi Green (Portfolio Holder for Children, Schools and Families)

Question: “Concerning the Vaughan School Expansion. I refer to the report by Catherine Doran to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 24th October in which she mentions a key risk is affordability. She details the cost for Vaughan School as £8.9million but we have an email from Adrian Parker dated 10th September quoting an all inclusive budget of £8.5 million. Can you please advise how costs have increased by nearly 5% in a month? This question was asked at the Overview and Scrutiny meeting but we were told the £8.5 million wasn't mentioned previously and so the question wasn't answered. We have this email with us and it has been forwarded to several councillors including the chair and vice chair of that meeting Councillor Miles and Councillor Osborn. May we please now have an answer?”

Answer: The expansion of Vaughan Primary School is a key element of phase 1 of the Council's programme to fulfil a statutory duty to provide sufficient school places for residents' children. Councillors and officers are working hard to implement a programme that provides these places, at a quality that is expected by residents and at a cost that provides the best value for money. Given the current demographic pressures in Harrow and the tight financial position, this is no easy task.

The Council is delighted that the current strategy is delivering the right number of good quality school places such that, unlike some London Councils, all Harrow residents can be offered a school place.

Any building programme will impact on the community and we are doing all we can to both deliver the school expansion

programme and address the very real issues that arise for residents.

Specifically, the £8.9m, referred to in the Overview and Scrutiny report, is the overall project budget for the expansion of Vaughan reported to Cabinet on 20 June.

In subsequent design development meetings with our construction partners we have been working hard to achieve greater value for money, whilst not compromising on the national school construction guidelines. As a result of these meetings we have set ourselves an internal construction target of £8.5m. This is what was referred to by Adrian Parker in his email.

Supplemental Question: We understand that there has been a delay in the planning process as extra information has been requested by the Planning Department.

Does the extra £400,000 relate to the additional information requested or if not, then will that also incur additional costs, as it appears that costs are spiralling out of control and of course, the funding has not yet been finalised?

Supplemental Answer: I do not believe it is a supplementary to your original question. I can only repeat what I have just told you.

In subsequent design development meetings with our construction partners we have been working hard to achieve greater value for money, whilst not compromising on the national school construction guidelines. As a result of these meetings we have set ourselves an internal construction target of £8.5m.

2.

Questioner: Graeme Neale

Asked of: Councillor Mitzi Green (Portfolio Holder for Children, Schools and Families)

Question: "If the Planning Application for the Vaughan School expansion is approved, the number of pupils arriving for school each morning will rise by 50% taking the current number of 420 to 630. There will also be an equivalent increase in the number of guardians and staff arriving at the school each morning.

I am therefore very concerned that there will be a serious road accident due to this massive increase in volumes.

The only strategy that seems to be in place for dealing with this

increase is the travel plan put forward by the school at the September residents meeting which states that their strategy is to encourage pupils to walk to school and use bikes / scooters.

However, the schools own newsletters have highlighted serious safety concerns that currently exist using bikes and scooters. It has been brought to the attention of parents in 7 of the school newsletters since February 2011.

If the expansion goes ahead, what is miraculously going to change to make this issue that is unmanageable today, suddenly manageable?"

Answer:

The increased traffic and congestion issues associated with the proposals to permanently expand schools in Harrow are fully acknowledged. These are existing issues in an urban area like Harrow and will be exacerbated by any school expansion programme.

The Council will consider all possible traffic management options as part of every proposed school expansion. We too will be anxious to do all that is realistically possible to avoid road accidents.

The school quite rightly does all it can to encourage safe and considerate travel to school, as demonstrated in its newsletters. The newsletters highlight issues of congestion in the playgrounds and on the pathways and ask that bikes and scooters are not ridden on the school premises at the beginning or the end of the school day. The plans for the proposed building works at the school seek to improve existing movement around the site and include provision of additional cycle racks to promote safe use for travelling at the beginning and end of the school day.

A Travel Plan has been submitted as part of the planning application pack. The Travel Plan aims to achieve 86% (2011/12 target) of pupils arriving by means other than cars. It will be a matter for the Planning Committee to determine whether the likely traffic impact of the proposals, when balanced against all other material planning considerations, justifies supporting the proposals.

The Travel Plan will be available to view online once the planning application validation is concluded. It is expected to be considered by Planning Committee in January.

Supplemental Question:

There is no doubt that the small roads around the entrance to Vaughan School are not designed, or capable of, handling the increase in traffic. When the inevitable accident happens and a child gets injured or worse, then who in the Council is going to

take responsibility for imposing this ridiculous, ill-thought out expansion plan and take responsibility for endorsing a travel plan which is already flawed and dangerous?

So my question to all of you is, which one of you will be able to justify this decision to a distraught parent?

Supplemental Answer: Mr Neale, I sympathise with your point of view. It is a problem we have in every school in Harrow. If you speak to any parents or any headteacher from any school in Harrow, they would tell you, we have problems in the morning and the evening with parents dropping off and bringing their children from school.

I know the roads around Vaughan School. I can see where you are coming from on this particular point of view. From our point of view, we have to find up to 300 more places for children in schools next year. It is our statutory duty to do that. All I can say to you at this particular point in time, and when it comes to it, hopefully the headteacher and the local authority will sit down with residents and try and find a way to get through this.

3.

Questioner: Dipak Raja

Asked of: Councillor Mitzi Green (Portfolio Holder for Children, Schools and Families)

Question: "My question relates to the Vaughan School Expansion. Residents were advised that a noise attenuation study was undertaken at the request of the planning department. Regarding this study, can you please advise what was surveyed and how the noise impact on the residents during and after construction was assessed and furthermore, what were the conclusions of the study? This question has already been asked in an e-mail but residents are still awaiting an answer."

Answer: An Acoustic and Ventilation Strategy and Plant Noise Limit Report, additional to all the other surveys undertaken in the development of the project, have been submitted as part of the planning application pack. This report pack will be scrutinised by Planning Officers and considered by the Planning Committee. The report pack will be made available online to the general public once the planning application validation is concluded. In light of the imminent release of this report pack that contains considerable amounts of information, it is impossible to summarise in a short answer. Once the report pack has been made available online, it would be better that any comment or objection is raised through the official planning application process.

4.

Questioner: Anant Shah

Asked of: Councillor Mitzi Green (Portfolio Holder for Children, Schools and Families)

Question: “There is a stream that runs across the school playing field called "Smarts Brook" in the Boroughs Strategic Flood Risk assessment Volume 1. planning and policy report this Brook is given the status of FLOOD ZONE 3 which classifies it as a High probability Zone with a high risk of flooding. Any development in this area will be subject to high Flood Risk. The potential development on this land will increase flood risk elsewhere through the removal of permeable surfaces such as grass and the addition of hard surfaces. As the proposed development removes the entire grass field and adds hard surfaces then I presume a flood risk assessment was carried out at the outset. Could you please confirm that a FLOOD RISK assessment has been carried out and what the recommendations were?”

Answer: An initial Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) has been carried out. This FRA is being refined at the request of the Planning Department to ensure that full and appropriate consideration is given to any flooding issues. The FRA, including its recommendations, will be available in the report pack to view online once the planning application validation previously referred to is concluded.

Supplemental Question: Is there any incurring further cost on the flooding areas?

Supplemental Answer: I am afraid I do not have that answer and I am unlikely to have that answer until the Flood Risk Assessment is in the plan.

5.

Questioner: Elzbieta Kaptur

Asked of: Councillor Mitzi Green (Portfolio Holder for Children, Schools and Families)

Question: “My question relates to the Vaughan School expansion. As there are utilities on the allotments adjacent to the school and the allotments share the same title number as the school then why the proposed new build on the playing field can't simply be built on the allotments?

Please be clear, we are not asking for a total re-build of the whole school we are just asking for proper consideration to be given to building the new part of the school on the allotments

rather than the schools playing field. Plans to re-furbish other parts of the existing school building could still go ahead. This would protect the schools only playing field and provide the opportunity for future growth on the allotments.”

Answer:

The accommodation solutions for all schools that are part of Harrow’s Primary School Expansion Programme are provided within the existing school boundaries. This avoids the extra issues, costs and time involved in site acquisition and development.

The use of allotment land to achieve the expansion of Vaughan Primary School is also not being pursued for the following reasons, amongst others:

- Development on allotments is not acceptable from a planning policy perspective. This is in line with an unequivocal presumption against the loss of Open Space in the Core Strategy and the London Plan.
- The complexities and additional expense that the new build on the allotment land would entail. This would include but is not limited to:
 - a requirement for explicit approval by the Secretary of State for development on allotments;
 - the need for re-provision of the allotment pitches;
 - new site access (roads, paths, car parking, site fencing etc);
 - new modern service provision (sewers, drainage, surface water attenuation, water, gas, electricity, phone, internet etc.);
 - additional demolition of the infant block;
 - reinstatement of all the existing school including the hard landscaping to either allotment or soft play;
 - additional consultations and planning applications;
 - legal and planning fees to change the use of the allotment land, if this were possible.

The allotments and the school having the same title number does not change the position stated above. While it is legally possible to seek the necessary permissions from the Secretary of State to allow development, this would be contrary to

planning policy, would add additional costs and would not be achieved in the timescales required to expand the school.

Supplemental Question: My question is, apart from that we are all stressed because of that, that the school is going to be built and will spoil our view as well. Can you just answer, is there any other options or other places that Government can use, other than Vaughan School or have they ever been considered, other places than the Vaughan School, plus obviously the allotments?

Supplemental Answer: I understand and sympathise with your stress but we have considered other options and this was considered to be the best option.

6.

Questioner: Jack Welby

Asked of: Councillor Bill Stephenson (Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Business Transformation and Communications)

Question: "Can the Leader of Harrow Council agree with Councillor Navin Shah who has changed his mind on a 10 storey high block of flats in Gayton Road and could you give us an update on the situation of this particular block because already, before the planning permission has been given, Fairview Estates have given eviction orders for residents of the flats?"

Answer: I think Mr Welby has extended the question originally submitted so I have not looked into Fairview Crescent

I agree with Councillor Navin Shah on many things, not everything. I did ask him to what you were referring, he was not sure.

So to talk about the site, the site consists of the Gayton Road Car Park and the former Gayton Road Library site which is owned by the Council and the flats which you are referring to, which are owned by a private company.

The previous administration had intended to develop this site and had indeed obtained planning permission for a high-rise, over-development for it. In our manifesto that we said during the elections, we made the following commitment:

That we would 'Immediately stop the Tories' high-rise over-development of the Gayton Road site and substandard replacement Leisure Centre, and will work to provide a state of the art Central Library and Arts Complex in the Town Centre'.

That is exactly what we have done. It is our land. We are not

proceeding with anything. We did what it says on the tin.

We continue to keep all council-owned sites under continuous review and in due course we will, of course, want to develop this site appropriately consulting with local residents and as far as I am concerned, that is the current position.

What Fairview do with their tenants is their issue and that is the current situation.

We own the site. We control it. We have to get planning permission obviously and we have made a guarantee that we will want to develop this site appropriately and we will want to consult the residents.

Supplemental Question: “How many units in the 381 flats are for social housing and is Harrow Council subsidising any flats for social housing?”

Supplemental Answer: I think this question probably refers to the development by the previous administration. Digging deep into my memory, I think it was 120, but as I have indicated we have no intention to go ahead with that development, so it is rather academic.

7.

Questioner: Prakash Thakkrar

Asked of: Councillor Mitzi Green (Portfolio Holder for Children, Schools and Families)

Question: “An Estate Agents Firm ... have a sign for sale for a 1.5 Acre plot situated on The Gardens adjacent to the underground railway tracks very near the school's (Vaughan School) entrance.

My questions are:

Have you considered buying this plot of 1.5 acres?

Answer: No consideration was made of purchasing this, or any other land, as the accommodation solutions for all schools that are part of Harrow's Primary School Expansion Programme are provided within the existing school boundaries. This avoids the extra issues, significant additional costs and delay involved in site acquisition and development.

For your information Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) powers can only be considered if:

- Planning permission for the school has been obtained in respect of the land.

- The Council can demonstrate the availability of finance.
- Cabinet approve the making of a CPO order and
- The Secretary of State confirms this.

Supplemental Question: If you are saying that that particular place is not suitable for the expansion of the school, can the Council consider buying the piece of land please to increase the parking spaces for the parents who bring their children to the school?

Supplemental Answer: No.

8.

Questioner: Jeremy Zeid

Asked of: Councillor Mitzi Green (Portfolio Holder for Children, Schools and Families)

Question: “What measures, procedures and official accountability by officers, are in place to ensure that children in care who entered the system with no criminal records, keep that status until such time they are released from the system, and conversely how many children with no previous records have offended and gained criminal records whilst in care?”

Answer: Harrow Children and Families services co-located in Civic Centre. This is supporting the development of effective partnership working between Children’s social care services and Youth Offending Team (YOT).

There has been specific work to raise the awareness of children looked after (CLA) young people offending to understand these trends and patterns. The CLA service and YOT have established a partnership forum meeting with all staff in respective teams that takes place on a quarterly basis. This will help to review partnership working, initiatives to prevent offending and address re-offending for CLA using strategic performance information. A Children & Families protocol for working in partnership has also been established to support communication between all teams/service and YOT.

As part of the Looked After Children (LAC) review process, the independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) meets with the individual children and young people, their carers and key professionals involved to review the child’s care plan, within one month of the child coming into care, then 3 months and 6 months thereafter. Before the LAC review, the IRO individually meets the child or

young person on their own to ascertain their views and contribution to the LAC review meeting and care plan. In addition to focusing on education and health issues, this discussion will focus on all significant events including those relating to the risk of offending.

There is an already established Independent Reviewing Officers protocol that is triggered when a looked after child becomes involved with a critical incident. This protocol must be responded to by the team manager within 5 days, if this is not addressed, then the matter will escalate to the service manager to respond within 5 days. If the matter is still not resolved, the Divisional Director will be asked to respond. The purpose of the protocol promotes responsibility and accountability with all officers.

Central to good child care planning is the requirement that the allocated social worker for the looked after child ensures support and intervention from a range of services, including; independent visitors and mentors. In addition, the Access to Resources service will be launched in January 2013. This service will further provide support to prevent children from coming into care and support rehabilitation. The CLA service has a performance management information once every month. As from October 2012, the YOT manager is to contribute to this regarding data information of children in care offending.

In relation to the current group of looked after children, of the 158 children and young people in care at the moment, 8 children are known to YOT. Of those 8 young people, 6 have become known to the YOT after their period of care commenced. All 6 of these young people had, prior to entering care, demonstrated concerning and challenging behaviour and were beyond parental control.

Supplemental Question: If I may put a very quick supplement because we have children in care here and obviously, children on the Risk Register. How many girls at risk of female genital mutilation are on the register and what is being done to assure their safety?

Supplemental Answer: I cannot answer your second question. We had no notice of that.

GUILLOTINE REACHED (the following answers were circulated after the Council meeting, by written response, at the request of the Mayor).

9.

Questioner: Stephen Lewis

Asked of: Councillor Thaya Idaikkadar (Portfolio Holder for Property and

Major Contracts)

Question: “What is your view on the outcome of the saga regarding the development of the Whitchurch Pavillion and playing fields?”

Written Answer: Mr Lewis, I am sorry but I cannot agree with your use of the word ‘saga’.

There have been four cabinet reports and extensive public consultation with local residents since the commencement of the Whitchurch Playing Fields project in November 2008.

Although the process for selection of the Council’s preferred bidder and the wide ranging work by the Council and the Whitchurch Playing Fields Consortium, to engage with local residents to allay the concerns has been time consuming, I am confident that the outcome will result in fabulous new facilities for our community.

I am therefore pleased that the current administration has persevered with these proposals despite early difficulties and criticism and I am convinced that the proposal will become a hugely successful and well supported facility for and by the residents of the Borough, which will transform the Playing Fields from their current status of an effectively redundant 25 acre site over the last eight years.

The process has ensured that:

- (1) The best candidate for the development and operational management of the playing fields has been selected.
- (2) The serious concerns of the local residents have been openly debated in a public forum and will be safeguarded through the lease terms and the statutory Planning and Licensing processes.
- (3) With the time and dedication spent by officers, which will continue through the development process, Harrow will receive a sustainable, first class sports and leisure facility.
- (4) The terms negotiated with the Whitchurch Fields Consortium in the Service Level Agreement will provide for extensive, low cost access for disadvantaged and protected groups of the Community.

10.

Questioner: Chris Baxter

Asked of: Councillor Thaya Idaikkadar (Portfolio Holder for Property and Major Contracts)

Question: "When tendering for council services, do you believe that, alongside out-sourcing options, an in-house option should always be considered as part of every procurement exercise?"

Written Answer: This administration is committed to obtaining the best services possible for its residents at the most economic cost. We will therefore consider the various models of service delivery available and adopt the most advantageous for residents. Where there is an existing in-house service this will apart from exceptional circumstances be considered with other options. Where there isn't an in-house option then this will normally also be considered as an option.

11.

Questioner: Veronica Jenkins

Asked of: Councillor Bill Stephenson (Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder Business Transformation and Communications)

Question: "Would the Leader please confirm which Portfolio Holder received the Petition submitted at the last Cabinet meeting, from residents of Durley Avenue, Pinner."

This question was withdrawn.