

WANDSWORTH BOROUGH COUNCIL

WEST HILL WARD “LET’S TALK” MEETING

Held at St. Paul’s Community Centre, 23 Inner Park Road, SW19
on Wednesday, 1st November 2017 at 7.30 p.m.

PRESENT

Council Members

West Hill Ward Members: Councillors Cuff, Grimston and Peterkin.

Councillor Govindia leader of the Council (in the chair)

Councillor Hogg leader of the Opposition

Council Officers

Environment and Community Services Department

Mr. Henry Cheung - Head of Inspection & Enforcement
Mr. Nick O'Donnell – Assistant Director Traffic and Engineering
Mr. Steve Lane - Parking, Engineering and Highways
Ms. Elen Richards – Planning – Area Team Manager
Mr. Mike Singham – Waste Strategy Manager

Housing and Regeneration Department

Mr. Brian Reilly – Director of Housing and Regeneration
Mr. Ian Stewart – Assistant Director Housing Management

Chief Executive’s Group

Ms. Emma Calvert – Democratic Services
Mr. Gareth Jones - Democratic Services

Children’s Services Department (Wandsworth)

Mr. Gary Hipple – Head of Schools, ICT

Residents

Approximately 120 members of the public.

INTRODUCTION

The Chairman, Councillor Govindia, welcomed residents to the meeting and explained the format of the meeting. The Chairman, Ward Members, Leader of the Opposition and officers then introduced themselves.

The Chairman then invited questions and comments from the residents’.

ISSUES, RESPONSES AND ACTION

1. Housing Issues

Fire resistant doors in leasehold properties

Residents of leasehold properties had received a leaflet from the Council advising that their front doors must be rated to be at least 30 minutes fire resistant. The information regarding the differing responsibilities of the Area Housing Team and Building Control were unclear. Mr. Stewart advised that the Area Housing Team are available to visit properties to offer advice on request. Building Control could provide specialist technical advice if needed and would be contacted by the Area Housing Team as needed. Mr. Stewart undertook to take the resident’s details and arrange a visit.

Residents suggested that the timescale of six weeks for compliant fire doors to be fitted was unrealistic. Mr. Stewart advised that details of suitable fitters could be provided and that they would be able to fit a suitable door within this timescale. Any leaseholders struggling with this deadline should contact the Area Housing Team regarding this.

Installation of sprinklers

Residents asked why the Council had decided to install sprinklers in some Council properties and how this would be funded. Councillor Govindia advised that the Council had agreed to ringfence the money to allow the installation of sprinklers in all Council owned blocks of ten storeys or above. He noted that private blocks over ten storeys are already required to have sprinklers systems and the aim was to ensure there was no disparity in safety standards for residents in private blocks and those in Council blocks. The technical specification and details of these works were to be decided. Mr. Reilly added that current advice from the Local Government Association, Royal Institute of British Architects, the Coroner and Fire Brigade was that properties with sprinklers are safer. Mr. Reilly noted that leaseholders would have the opportunity to query and challenge any charges involved.

Councillor Grimston suggested that statistical analysis suggested that there was little benefit to the fitting of sprinklers. Deaths from fire are a third of what they were thirty years ago. Residents in tower blocks of ten storeys or above are less likely to die as the result of fire than residents in other types of property. The statistics suggest that sprinklers may save the life of one resident over a twenty-five year period. Mr. Reilly advised that any statistical analysis needed to take account of factors such as the decreasing number of old council owned tower blocks and the fact that new blocks have sprinkler systems.

Residents asked whether sprinklers would be installed in communal areas or also in individual properties. They raised concern about the aesthetics of sprinklers in individual properties. Mr. Reilly advised that the installation of sprinklers would be part of a package of measures including the installation of fire resistant doors.

Modern sprinkler systems are designed to operate on a room by room basis only where heat is detected. Mr. Reilly noted that 95% of fires start within individual properties rather than in communal areas and this was the reason why sprinklers are normally installed in individual properties. Residents queried the merits of sprinkler systems given that water will not extinguish all types of fire. Mr. Reilly advised that sprinklers will prevent the spread of fire. Councillor Govindia confirmed that there would be a need for the Council to work with residents to explain about the operation and appearance of any proposed system.

Residents asked who would be liable in the result of a sprinkler needing to be repaired or causing damage to property. They expressed concern that such damage might result in an increase in insurance premiums. Mr. Reilly advised that it was likely that block insurance would go down as result of sprinklers being installed.

Residents asked whether the Council could insist on the installation of sprinkler systems in leasehold properties and queried which clause of the lease allowed this. Mr. Reilly confirmed that legal advice obtained by the Council had confirmed that it could be installed under the terms of the lease which referred to the security and safety of the block.

General fire safety procedures

Residents asked about fire safety procedures in Council owned blocks lower than ten storeys as they did not have fire drills and few fire safety notices were in place. Mr. Stewart advised that fire drills do not take place in residential blocks. Fire safety notices should be on display on the ground floor of all Council owned blocks. Mr. Stewart encouraged any resident who was concerned that the correct fire safety notices were not in place to give him details and he would ensure that the appropriate checks were made.

2. Waste Management Issues

Refuse collection vehicles and pedestrian/cyclist safety

A resident commended the Council for using dustcarts with low cab floors and mirrors due to the safety benefits. Nick O'Donnell spoke about how this still relies upon the driver to look in the mirror and how he's been involved with developing high tech safety systems for vehicles using 360 degree cameras that can give drivers three seconds warning of a hazard. He also reported that the Council would be investigating the trialling of this system.

Litter, litter bins, waste collection and fly tipping

A resident commented that some litter bins had been removed and that the remaining bins were not being emptied reliably. A further problem was that street cleansing does not reliably follow waste collection the day after. Councillor Grimston and a number of residents commented that bins had been removed as a result of budget cuts and asked for them to be replaced. Residents asked how many people have been fined for fly-tipping.

Mr. Singham advised that there had been a policy change in 2016. It had been decided that in locations where there is daily street cleansing, bins will remain. In locations where the street is cleaned once per week, there will be no bins as there was no contractor to empty them. He acknowledged that there was an additional problem with bins attracting fly-tipping adjacent to them. Mr. Singham commented that the Council have increased their rapid response service to deal with fly tipping and litter as well as introducing a new "Report It" app.

Councillor Govindia acknowledged that all Councils have been forced to make changes to services as a result of the removal of the Revenue Support Grant. He undertook to ensure that the requested information about reductions in this area be included in the notes of the meeting.

(Post meeting note – Government grant has reduced in cash terms by more than £100m per year since 2010. As a result the Council has reduced its ongoing service budgets accordingly)

(Post meeting note – Changes to street cleansing services has included:

Litter bins: Rationalisation so that these are retained on roads swept at least daily and were removed from other residential locations. This ensures that litter bins are likely to be allocated based on need and are emptied when the contractor is there anyway. This should reduce problems with fly-tipping around litter bins and ensures that any fly-tipping around them that does occur can be cleared within 24 hours.

Coordination of weekly street cleansing and low-rise waste collection

services: This changed so that street cleansing is scheduled to take place following waste collection to occur on the following working day (including Saturday). This avoids co-ordination problems with trying to deliver both services on the same day.

Scheduled cleansing frequencies: Based on an assessed need frequencies have been revised to provide the cleansing operations required for many roads that were previously litter picked 3 or 4 days after a weekly sweep.

Beefed up rapid response service: From efficiencies delivered as a result of the changes outlined above additional resources have been provided in order to be able to respond to reports of litter and fly-tipping requiring clearance before the next scheduled cleansing.

New Anti-Flytipping strategy: Council funded project to tackle the increasing levels of fly-tip reports being received in recent years and feedback from residents indicating that they would like to see more education and enforcement in this area to effect behavioural change amongst potential perpetrators.

A further significant change in February 2017 was the introduction of externalised FPN enforcement of littering & fly-tipping offences.

Litter – specific areas of concern

Residents highlighted specific concerns about litter in the following locations:

- Southfields Station – two litter bins opposite is not sufficient for a station which is used by 20 thousand people per day.
- Saint Cecilia's School – there is no bin outside the school.
- Southdean Gardens – a resident mentioned problems with bin collections.
- Bathgate Road – a resident picks up rubbish every day. She specifically mentioned the area outside a Fara charity shop and litter in a seating area at the junction of Bathgate Road and Victoria Drive.
- Bus stop in Wimbledon Park Road – there is a large amount of litter.
- Southfields cross roads - Councillor Peterkin suggested there was a problem with waste from shops on pavements as well as from flats above.
- Fly-posting regarding events such as fairs.
- Galgate Close – fly-tipped mattress.
- Urmston Drive – a resident expressed frustration that he had been trying to get the Council to clean this for weeks and that it had still not been done. Officers confirmed that the Housing Department are responsible for the cleaning of this street.
- Southfields Court – a resident expressed frustration that he had contacted Officers a number of times regarding a bag of litter outside Southfields Court. Officers had eventually visited and had marked the bag with fly-tipping tape.
- Recycling bank on housing estate – a resident requested a litter bin beside the bank.

Councillor Govindia provided reassurance that the Council takes residents' concerns regarding litter seriously and advised that Officers from the appropriate departments would look into the issues raised.

(Post Meeting – Urmston Drive was inspected the next day and reported to be spotless)

3. Crime and Community Safety Issues

Cycle Safety

A resident suggested that the proposed new Quietway on Sutherland Grove would not be safe for cyclist due to the high number of people using this road as a "rat run" to avoid West Hill, Granville Road and Girdwood Road. Councillor Cuff encouraged residents to look at the online plans and noted that the plans included some excellent engineered solutions such as a raised bed between the Quietway and the road.

A resident highlighted that speed humps can cause difficulties for cyclists and asked the Council to be considerate when considering their positioning on the road. He identified Bathgate Road being used as a rat run as a specific issue. Mr. O'Donnell advised that all new speed humps installed by the Council are standard issue humps which are lower and rounder and recognised as being cycle friendly. Older humps are being replaced gradually. He advised that if a petition could be raised regarding Bathgate Road, the Council could investigate the concerns raised and install measures as appropriate.

Mr. O'Donnell explained that on the general problem of rat running in the roads off the A3 between Augustus Road and Merton Road the Council had taken a holistic view. Data had been recorded on vehicle movements which had been analysed and shared with local Councillors this would be made public in January 2018 with a list of options for consideration.

20mph Speed Limits

A resident asked how many prosecutions had there been for exceeding the 20mph limit, speed humps were ineffective on Victoria Drive, vehicles traversing the road humps made her home shake, the "smiley face" speed signs were a waste of money which could be better spent on reinstating litter bins, only CCTV cameras would address the problem.

Councillor Cuff responded that those that had speed humps in their road seemed to want them removed and those that did not have them wanted them installed but that they do help to reduce speeds and save lives. Mr. O'Donnell explained that enforcement was the responsibility of the police but there was also the Community Roadwatch scheme with local residents working alongside the Police, he added that vehicle speeds had been monitored on Victoria Drive and recorded at an average of 28 mph.

Crime

Residents then raised a number of crime related issues, including concern over the reduction in police numbers, theft of property (two bicycles) and drug use.

Councillor Grimston explained that there had been a spate of crime mid-year, with 25 burglaries in April. The smart water scheme (SmartWater is a traceable liquid and forensic asset marking system that is applied to items of value to identify thieves and deter theft) had been introduced in Southfields and may have initially displaced criminal activity into West Hill. West Hill had subsequently introduced smart water and there had only been 6 recorded incidents during July and August. Relatively, West Hill is a safe ward which had meant a reduction in policing, he urged residents to come along to Safer Neighbourhood meetings held at St. Peter's Church in Victoria Drive every 3 months.

In response to a question on how smart water was funded and whether Southfields had received this for free whereas West Hill had to pay, Councillor Grimston responded that he was not sure how this was funded but he would look into it.

(Action – Councillor Grimston)

Drugs

A resident said that there was a strong smell of drugs around Bisley House which had been reported to Police. The Chairman said that it was a police matter to investigate illegal drug use. Mr. Byrne said he would speak to the resident after the meeting.

Police Station Closures

In response to a question on the future of local police stations, the Chairman said that City Hall had announced that morning that the front counter reception at Wandsworth Police Station would be closing, Lavender Hill was earmarked for closure and Tooting for closure and disposal.

Murder in Southfields

In response to a question on the recent death of a Southfields resident, the Chairman responded that no further details were known other than those that had been reported in the press, and was the subject of an ongoing police investigation.

4. Southfields Post Office

In response to a question on the future of Southfields Post Office, Councillor Grimston said that representatives from Sainsbury's had indicated that they were willing to consider sub-letting part of their premises for the relocation of the post office and that both parties would be meeting shortly. He explained that the current premises had been affected by a £3,000 pa increase in business rates and that, as part of a chain, they were exempt from a business rate reduction. The largest cost of relocating was the expense of moving the safes. The Chairman explained that the Council could not subsidise the operation but would help where it could, Councillor Grimston lamented that in the past the Council used to be imaginative when it came to resolving this type of issue.

5. Whitlock Drive Garages

A resident highlighted the problem of parking in Whitlock Drive and Galgate Close, and the problems that this caused for emergency vehicles trying to get into the road, she asked whether derelict garages in the road that had been fenced off since 2010 could be demolished, as this site could provide parking for over 20 vehicles, until such time as the Council sold the site, this received applause from the audience.

The Chairman responded that the point had been noted and Housing officers would follow up.

6 Affordable Housing

Beaumont Road Parade

Residents claimed their views were ignored regarding the redevelopment of the shopping parade and took issue with the expectation that new residents would not be car users. They wanted to know what had happened to the affordable housing.

Councillor Cuff acknowledged that affordable housing is important but the main intention with this redevelopment was to improve the public realm and an unattractive parade. The developers had made a contribution of £10k for a parking study and £140k towards social housing. Councillor Grimston explained how developers were using viability studies to get around affordable housing provision, he added that new homes on the John Bosco school site cost £1.7m. Councillor Cuff

explained that the sale of the site had paid for a new school. Ms. Richards explained that if there was only a small number of affordable housing units in a development it made it unattractive for a social landlord to manage. Councillor Carpenter asked why it was allowed and that if the Council had developed the Beaumont Road parade there could have been up to 8 affordable units.

In response to a further question on where local residents could afford to live, the Chairman explained that there were 26 new homes planned on infill sites on local estates, and new affordable housing developments at Southside. The Ram Brewery developers were paying for a re-working of the Wandsworth one-way system and there would be affordable housing although he was not sure of the exact percentage, he added that the Alton and Winstanley Estates were in the process of redevelopment and 1,000 new social housing units were planned across the borough which was the third highest in London, he conceded that this was still not enough, and it was a huge challenge but there is a commitment to deliver.

7. Distribution of Leaflets

In response to claims that the leaflet publicising the meeting had not been delivered to every household in the Ward the Chairman asked Mr. Jones to investigate.

(Action – Mr. Jones)

(Post meeting – Sutherland Grove was mentioned as not having received the leaflet although GPS tracking indicated that Sutherland Grove had been delivered, however, the GPS could not monitor the distribution within blocks)

8. A resident asked the Council to remove expired planning notices left on lampposts.

9. Southfields Centre Improvement Project

A resident asked what was happening on the improvement project for Southfields Centre – The Chairman responded that the project had been delayed but there would be a final consultation in the next few weeks.

CLOSE OF MEETING

The Chairman thanked residents for attending the meeting and invited the Councillors to say a few final words. All of the Councillors thanked the residents for coming to the meeting and for their contributions. Councillor Hogg praised Councillor Grimston for the amount of casework he undertook on behalf of the residents and said the Council had stopped listening to residents and had an engagement problem, he criticised the reduction in affordable housing at Battersea Power Station. Councillor Grimston reiterated his views on sprinkler systems expressing his surprise and concern that the Director of Housing had advised the meeting that residents of high rise council blocks were unsafe at which point Mr. Reilly interjected to make it clear that what he had actually said was that sprinkler systems would make residents safer in their homes. Councillor Grimston went on to say that he would never say that he is giving up and as a case in point that the long awaited yellow lines in Victoria Drive will be implemented in the next few weeks. Councillors Cuff and

Peterkin announced that they were not standing for re-election, they both thanked the residents for making some good points.

The meeting ended at 10.03 p.m.

Gareth Jones (020 8871 7520)
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