

WANDSWORTH BOROUGH COUNCIL

SHAFTESBURY WARD “LET’S TALK” MEETING

**Held at Shaftesbury Park School, Ashbury Road, SW11, on
Monday, 9 October 2017 at 7.30 p.m.**

PRESENT

Council Members

Shaftesbury Ward Members:

Councillor Cook (Conservative),

Councillor Cousins (Wandsworth Independent Alliance)

Councillor Senior (Conservative).

Councillor Jones (Opposition Group Deputy Leader).

Councillor Mrs. McDermott – Cabinet Member for Education and Children’s Services
(in the chair)

Council Officers

Environment and Community Services Department

Mr. Henry Cheung - Head of Inspection & Enforcement

Mr. Camillus Donnelly – Head of Network Management

Mr. Nigel Granger – Development Management – Area Planning Team Manager

Mr. Nick O’Donnell – Assistant Director (Traffic and Engineering)

Mr. Steve Lane – Senior Parking Policy Officer, Engineering and Highways

Mr. Michael Singham – Waste Strategy Manager

Housing and Regeneration Department

Mr. Mark Hickey - Central Area Deputy Estate Services Manager

Chief Executive’s Group

Mr. Graham Collins – Democratic Services Manager

Ms. Lorinda Freint – Business and Enterprise Manager

Mr. Gareth Jones- Democratic Services Officer

Mr. Roger Lyddon - Community Safety Officer

Children’s Services Department (Wandsworth)

Mr. Adam Wells - Head of Pupil Services

Members of the public

Approximately 40 members of the public (not necessarily all residents in the Ward).

INTRODUCTION

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

The Chairman then invited questions and comments from the residents.

ISSUES, RESPONSES AND ACTION

1. Pavements

A resident of Sabine Road who was a wheelchair user raised the issue of the poor state of paving across the Ward, particularly in areas around street trees. A second resident supported this view, he added that an area around a tree in Elsley Road had been repaired three times but that tarmac was not sufficient and looked unattractive; the area should be re-laid with paving stones.

Councillor Cook explained that tarmac is flexible and durable and can accommodate tree root movements. He added that as a last resort some roots could be removed although this was not an ideal strategy as it would impact the life span of the tree; also paving stones would not solve the problem as the edges are much more hazardous when lifted by tree roots.

Mr. Cheung also added that tarmac only needs to be 6mm in depth whereas a paving slab is rigid, generally 50 or 65mm thick and requires a subbase foundation which means it cannot be laid on top of shallow tree roots without causing a hazard.

Mr. O'Donnell informed the meeting that a full inspection was carried out on pavements across the Borough; the Council is currently undertaking a 5-year programme of repairs, spending had been increased by £2m and the works were being prioritised to deal with the worst cases first.

A resident pointed out two particular areas outside Nos. 2 and 4 Sabine Road which needed attention but also indicated that this was a general problem across the Shaftesbury Park Estate.

Councillor Cousins agreed that this was an issue across the Estate.

A resident did acknowledge that some street trees were just too big and should be replaced.

2. Chestnut Trees on Tooting Common and Council Consultations

A resident accused the Council of not listening to public opinion on felling of the 51 Chestnut Trees forming the Avenue on Tooting Common (Bedford Ward).

Councillor Senior emphatically stated that several the trees were diseased and one especially determining factor had been the fact that some of these were next to a children's playground with the obvious potential for severe injury or worse if a tree

were to fall on them. In this respect, it was vital for the public to recognise that the Council has a duty of care. Several residents requested that he stop shouting and that they were entitled to full answers. The Chairman called for everyone to discuss the matter in an orderly way.

Councillor Cook provided a lengthy response in which he emphasised that he was willing to speak on this topic for as long as residents wished as there was so much that could be said by way of background and explanation of the Council's position. He went on to explain that from his own experience, including having worked in conservation, he has been well aware that many persons – for excellent reasons - became very strongly 'attached' to 'their' local trees and that nobody (including himself) wanted to see mature trees cut down. Any removal of trees, however healthy they might seem to be, takes place with a "heavy heart". He then pointed out that this issue first arose when professional officers and experts reported to him and other leading Members that they had identified trees at Chestnut Avenue which had three different diseases and were also in structural decline. As a result, the risk of branches falling in a public area was too great and therefore regrettably it would be necessary for officers to recommend to Councillors that the trees be cut down. It was known that branches had already fallen, fortunately during the night so thankfully no one had been injured, but during the day this was a well-used avenue and the Council therefore had to have due regard to this. He said he would be happy to elaborate further and supply full details of the reports; 51 trees were taken out and 64 (small leafed lime) were planted.

Councillor Cook explained that the wood of Chestnut trees tends to become softer (and hence the trees less stable) as they age, whereas oak trees tend to become steadily harder as they mature (hence the well-known fact that oaks trees usually live for literally hundreds of years) and can survive even with large cavities [there are some examples of this in Richmond Park]. The Council was effectively presented with just two clear choices, seeing that "Do Nothing" was not an option: either –

- (a) allow the mature, diseased, Chestnut trees to decline and die (with the risks involved becoming steadily greater as time passes) meanwhile taking precautionary measures on a piece-meal basis, e.g. removing branches or taking out individual trees as and when necessary); or
- (b) take an immediate but longer-term approach by replacing the 51 chestnut trees with 64 small leafed lime trees (which do not normally suffer the same ageing/deterioration process as Chestnuts) and restore the Avenue.

Following the felling of the chestnuts, 4 of the 5 trees next to the playground were found to have decay which was not visible from the outside; a stump has been left in the ground to demonstrate the progression of the disease. In summary, he said that if this problem had not been addressed then the tree would have fallen.

The resident contended that Councillor Cook's answer was "waffly" and failed to address her point that her question related to the Council not listening; she suggested that there was no justification for felling all of the trees because of just one diseased tree, she asked how many were found to be suffering from decay and

would the Council now be removing all of the horse chestnut trees from the Borough?

Several other residents then expressed frustration that time was being taken up about trees that were not in the Ward for which this meeting was being held - Shaftesbury Ward. The Chairman then asked the resident if she lived in the Shaftesbury Ward. She confirmed that she did - as a resident in Sabine Road, adding that the Council had ignored the 6,500 people who had voted for the trees to be kept.

Councillor Cook responded by explaining that there had been 800 responses to the consultation and 76% wanted the avenue replanted and that 9 of the 10 Councillors at the meeting of the Community Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20th September 2016 (one abstained) had voted in support (including Councillor Anderson) of the recommended option "to replace the horse chestnut trees with an avenue of new trees subject to the retention if possible of the five trees that remain in good condition", i.e. both of the main political Parties had agreed on this action. He added that it was unlikely that there were any horse chestnut trees on streets around the Borough as it was not a common street tree. In addition, he pointed out that the 6,500 mentioned by the resident was not a response to the consultation as such but was a petition signed by 6,500 persons from all over the world and, because of its poor wording, was misleading.

The resident suggested the Council had not listened to residents on the chestnut avenue issue as they had also not listened on other recent consultations; Formula E at Battersea Park and the Northcote Library (Paper No. 17-286); she contended that the questions on each consultation had been worded so as to achieve the Council's desired response and that asking whether or not the Council listened was a valid question for this meeting.

Councillor Jones signalled her strong support for the views being advanced very emphatically by residents opposing the felling of trees; she contended that there had been no expert reports to the Council on the trees' condition and that Council tended to ask questions (to the public) only on precise elements of a topic that it wished to hear.

Councillor Cousins said he agreed that it was a valid question, the Council had to listen to the residents and sometimes had to make unpopular decisions but in this case the Heritage Lottery funding could have led to the discovery of the disease; in addition he said that the Councillors should have some empathy with residents and show some humility with regard to the strength of opposition being expressed neither of which had he heard this evening. There was loud applause, from the majority of the residents' present, to this and Councillor Jones' comments, some of whom repeatedly accused Councillor Cook of significantly misrepresenting the situation.

Councillor Cook said he was willing to discuss this topic for as long into the evening as may be desired by residents and he was conscious of the emotional shock that felling of trees brings. He then briefly outlined that the new trees were 10 years old and 16 feet high; he understood that if one had grown up with the trees it was a shock to lose them; he had witnessed the devastation of Dutch Elm disease in the

1970s in Wiltshire and was sad to see trees cut down but in this case the result of the consultation was clear and doing nothing was not an option. There was loud and heated criticism of these comments.

3. Tree Stump in Eversleigh Road

A resident asked what was being done about the tree stump outside 36 Eversleigh Road.

Councillor Cook explained that the stump had to be left for two seasons for the roots to rot down and it would then be replaced. He said he would check the timescale for this and inform the resident accordingly.

(Action – Councillor Cook)

4. Improvements in Battersea Park (Queenstown Ward)

A resident asked about the plans for improvements in Battersea Park (Queenstown Ward)

Councillor Cook said that the plans included improvements to the children's play area, improvements to an entrance gate and a new water feature; and Councillor Senior added that the trees in the Park had been inspected and were healthy.

5. Chewing Gum on Lavender Hill pavements

A resident mentioned the improvements to the Lavender Hill pavements carried out a few years previously and how they had been made unsightly with chewing gum and asked what can be done; in particular, could the Council request the manufacturers of chewing gum to develop a product that is bio-degradable.

Mr. Singham said that the Council recognised pavement gum as being a real problem but 'street washing' was not something that was covered under the current street cleansing contract. He mentioned that many years ago the Council tried a Borough-wide 'gum busting' operation but it was a slow and expensive process and did not resolve the problem. He then explained that, in addition to educating the public about responsible behaviour concerning discarding used chewing gum (and litter generally), the Council was now using new powers under recent legislation whereby its Enforcement Team could issue on-the-spot fines of £80 to anyone caught dropping chewing gum but it was difficult to catch someone in the act. He added that it seemed unlikely that the Council would be able to influence national policy on this matter but that there was a national Chewing Gum Action Group www.chewinggumactiongroup.org.uk/ but as yet they had not come up with an answer to the problem.

6. Dog mess and bulky waste

A resident of Sabine Road said that most owners were responsible about their dogs' mess but the removal of litter bins and dog waste bins had increased the problem with dog owners placing the waste in residents' bins or not clearing up the mess,

especially around the base of street trees. She expressed concern that this was a public health issue.

Councillor Cook responded that, as a dog owner himself, he was familiar with the situation and agreed that dropping bags and/or leaving dogs' mess was disgusting and unacceptable; there were dog waste bins on main roads but there had never been a blanket policy to provide litter bins in residential streets per se as these had been found to attract flytipping around the bins, which was unsightly. He acknowledged that this was a problem around the tree pits on the Shaftesbury Park Estate but it was difficult to catch the perpetrators; the Council did not necessarily think it was fair to expect non-dog owners to have to contribute to the cost of dog waste bins (via their Council tax); however, a poster scheme – the “pink fairy campaign” - had been trialled in Ashbury Road to give a ‘behavioural nudge’ to dog owners.

The resident also wanted to know why it was so expensive (£74) for her to get the Council's refuse contractor to dispose of a small door; she said she lived on the ground floor and did not have a car so requesting collection by the Council was, in effect, her only option. She asserted that the Council's recent fly-tipping questionnaire survey on its website did not have an option for respondents to say that the cost of bulky waste collection was a factor that was resulting in people dumping their rubbish randomly on the pavement, etc. She also asserted that this was another example of the Council avoiding asking a survey question for which the answers would not be what it wanted to hear.

Mr. Singham explained that the Council had listened to residents in reducing the cost of bulk item removals from £21 to £16. In connection with the charge of £74 for collection of a door he explained that the charge was £17.50 for up to 4 bulk items (which was one of the lowest charges in the Country) but that the costs would vary depending on factors such as if it involved going upstairs. Mr. Singham then explained that, as a door was classified as part of the fabric of the building, it was considered to be industrial waste (as opposed to domestic waste) so was more expensive and that, unlike the standard bulky waste charge, it covered disposal as well as collection costs. The resident thought this was “insane” and was precisely why there was so much fly-tipping. She also asked what strategies the Council had tried regarding the problem of dogs' mess or whether the Council's attitude was simply “You've got to live with it”.

In response to the latter point, Councillor Cook denied that this was the Council's attitude but conversely the emphasis is that residents who failed to clear dogs' mess were inconsiderate and this attitude needs to be changed – hence the increase in fines; he explained that the Council's enforcement officer had patrolled Ashbury Road and had caught and fined guilty dog owners. He was pleased to be able to say that some people were being influenced by the signage and advised that residents should report any such offences to Mr. Singham's team.

Councillor Cousins added that he did regularly email the Council about dog mess problem areas including Elsley Road but the Dog Unit only had one officer on duty at

any given time to deal with the problem Borough-wide. [Note: The full complement of four staff is due to be in place in the New Year.]

7. Tree pits and pavement improvements in side streets

A resident of Elsley Road echoed the views on chewing gum and asked about the empty tree pits and whether the pavement improvements would include the side streets off Lavender Hill

Councillor Senior responded that the tree pits would be planted with new trees very soon and, with Community Infrastructure Levy funding, the plan was to extend the new paving along the side roads.

Councillor Cook informed the meeting that the Council would be planting hundreds of trees this season so there should be very few empty tree pits. The usual course tends to be that a period of up to three years can often be required before the area forming a tree pit has rotted down sufficiently to enable a new tree to be planted.

8. Pedestrian crossing at Latchmere Road

A resident asked for a safe crossing on Latchmere Road towards ASDA

Mr. O'Donnell asked the resident to speak to him at the end of the meeting regarding a location for a crossing; the Council would carry out a survey to see how many people were crossing - and at what points - to determine if and where a crossing was needed. Councillor Cousins pointed out that this was a Transport for London (TfL) road and he had raised the issue of a crossing with one of the London Assembly Members. A resident added that a crossing was needed outside the 'Fox and Hounds' on Latchmere Road.

(Action – Mr. N. O'Donnell)

9. Litter bins outside Shaftesbury Park School

A resident of Ashbury Road complained that Shaftesbury Park School children and parents were dropping litter (including empty cartons) in residents' gardens; he therefore requested that the litter bin be reinstated outside the School

Councillor Cousins said he would raise this issue with the Head Teacher in the morning; he had tried to get bins reinstated outside schools.

Councillor Jones expressed criticism that the Council had also removed bins from her Ward (Furzedown, SW17) and advised residents to lobby their Ward Councillors to demand that litter bins are reinstated as she had had some success in getting litter bins installed in her Ward.

10. Cars outside schools and related matters

Several residents complained about Car Parking outside schools, engines left idling (with the resulting pollution), safety issues, parking in disabled bays, throwing

rubbish out of car windows and parking across the Santander bike bays. The disabled bays outside Shaftesbury Park School needed repainting.

Mr. O'Donnell said he would send down a spot enforcement team, the resident added that this had been done in the past but had no long-term effect. Mr. O'Donnell added that mobile cameras could be deployed and if this did not work a permanent camera could be considered which can issue penalty notices.

(Action - Mr. N. O'Donnell)

Councillor Jones mentioned that she had three school-age children and witnessed this behaviour first hand, the Enforcement Team and cameras had not stopped the problem at her school so she had started a petition to pedestrianise the road. She considered that there were not enough officers to carry out all the necessary enforcement and there were only four officers with the necessary authority to issue fines for idling engines.

Councillor Cousins said he would raise these issues with the school.

Councillor Cook added that the catchment area for Shaftesbury Park School was not that wide and most parents should not have to drive; he also said that there were more than four officers who could issue fines for engines left idling.

(Action – Councillor Cousins)

11. Northcote Library (Northcote Ward)

The resident who had previously questioned the Council's method of consultation again asked what constitutes a good consultation, on this occasion in relation to the recent consultation on Northcote Library. She contended that consultation had been inadequate and that Councillor Cook's letter to residents misrepresented what was being proposed, to the extent that certain elements of it actually mislead the public; for instance she alleged that the letter said that the lift in the existing Library did not work whereas she had actually used the lift herself only very recently. In her view much, if not most, of what was said in Councillor Cook's letter was simply untrue. These comments were loudly supported (with applause) by a large number of the members of the public present.

Councillor Cook refuted the suggestion that his letter contained untruths and expressed surprise that, according to the comments being made, a significant number of residents of Shaftesbury Ward were apparently using Northcote Library, Northcote Road, despite the much larger Battersea Library (at 265 Lavender Hill) being so much nearer; the response to both the long and short consultation had a broadly equal response with 82% supporting the proposed new Library. The resident disputed this and asked where would the money go from the sale of the new flats. Councillor Senior responded that it would pay for the new library.

12. Rat-Running/Speeding

A resident raised the issue of rat-running across the Shaftesbury Park Estate and enforcing the 20 mph speed limit

Councillor Senior informed him that enforcement teams would be operating on Sabine Road shortly.

13. G1 Bus/Pollution

In response to a question regarding the route and the use of lower emission buses, Councillor Cook explained that the vehicles had been switched to the Putney High Street route to meet the Mayor of London's targets for that area, however, he had met with TfL and the low emission buses would be reinstated on the G1 route in due course.

14. Litter – on Shaftesbury Park Estate

A resident explained that there were three fly-tip sites in his street, one at each end and one in the middle, also the waste contractor collects the rubbish bags at 8am on Tuesday, piles them up in a heap, the bags split and they leave the contents on the street and then have to wait 36 hours before the street is swept; he asked why such a delay.

Mr. Singham confirmed that the gap between collecting the sacks and sweeping the street was correct. A closer schedule had been tried but, with the differing speeds that the two contractor teams operate, it was impossible to co-ordinate. He added that if the contractor collecting the sacks had caused the sack to split then they (the contractor) were responsible for picking up the contents and if they were not doing this then the residents should report it to the Council. However, the contractor could not be held responsible for split bags resulting from animal interference.

15. School Funding

A resident, who was also a governor at John Burns Primary School, said that the School was suffering financial difficulties that were outside of their control; he added that John Burns School and Shaftesbury Park School were both good schools but were already suffering from problems with the cost of housing for staff, and it was becoming unrealistic to expect parents to donate meaningfully, if at all, to school funds; he wanted to know what the Council can do.

The Chairman said that she appreciated that it was tough at the moment with the Government ensuring fair funding for the north and south of the country; she had discussed this with Justine Greening MP, Secretary of State for Education which had resulted in more money for Wandsworth schools in that pupil funding would rise by 1.0% over the next two years; the Council was fortunate to have very good schools and good head teachers and they would need to think outside the box to address the financial issues they are facing. The Council wanted to work with schools through this difficult time; the Council had reduced the costs of providing special needs education by increasing the capacity of Ronald Ross and Greenmead Schools and

providing autistic education provision within the curtilage of existing schools rather than paying for the cost of this service outside the Borough.

Councillor Jones said that in 2020 the Council's schools would lose £307k; in Shaftesbury Ward this was the equivalent of losing 6 teachers; she considered that the Government's concept of 'Fairer Funding' was unfair as it brought the standard down to the lowest common denominator when it should be working the other way round; however, when the Opposition asked the Council, at the Education and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to lobby the Secretary of State their proposal was rejected, so she was pleased to learn tonight that, despite this rejection, some private lobbying by Councillor McDermott had taken place.

Councillor Cousins said that the Council promotes excellent education but seemed unwilling to criticise the Government; in his view the Council should promote a large public campaign, including via 'Brightside', focussing on education, on a similar scale to its long-running campaign concerning Heathrow Airport. The Chairman confirmed that lobbying had been done and was continuing to be done.

16. Land adjacent to 1-5 Gowrie Road, SW11 5NN

Questions from members of the public were raised about consultation regarding planning applications for 1-5 Gowrie Road (Planning Application Refs. 2016/5528, 2017/0631 and 2017/3273).

[Post-meeting note: At the meeting of the Planning Applications Committee on 14 December 2016, following discussion and having taken into account all presentations, the Committee agreed (by 5 votes to 4, the Chairman having used his casting vote) that planning permission be granted subject to conditions set out in the report.]

Councillor Senior said the Committee's decision had to comply with the Council's approved planning policies and the established legal position was that Planning Applications Committees normally cannot refuse an application if it complies with those policies.

There was an intensely heated but inconclusive discussion (with loud accusations from the public that the Council failed to listen to the public consultation responses), following which Councillor Jones reverted to the general issue of consultation and the question of what constitutes a good consultation especially as, in her view, the specific options concerning Northcote Library did not include modernising the Library and the Council should seek views of residents on this. Councillor Cook pointed out that the reason why 'modernisation' was not included was because this was not an option.

CLOSE OF MEETING

The Chairman thanked residents for attending the meeting and invited them to stay and speak further with Councillors and officers about matters they had raised or to ask any questions that they had not been able to during the open part of the meeting.

The meeting ended at 9.15 p.m.

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