

WANDSWORTH BOROUGH COUNCIL

NORTHCOTE WARD “LISTENING TO YOU” MEETING

**Held at Bolingbroke Academy, Wakehurst Road, SW11 on
Thursday, 6th November 2014 at 7.30 p.m.**

PRESENT

Council Members

Councillor Govindia, Leader of the Council (in the Chair);
Northcote Ward Members: Councillor Peter Dawson, Councillor Jane Dodd,
Councillor Martin D. Johnson; and
Councillor Rex Osborn (Graveney Ward Member and Leader of the Opposition)

Council Officers

Mr. John Johnson – Assistant Director (Education and Social Services Department)
Mr. John Scully – Senior On Street Services Officer (Housing and Community
Services Department)
Mr. Martin Byrne – Area Housing Manager (Housing and Community Services
Department)
Mr. Mike Singham – Waste Policy Manager (Housing and Community Services
Department)
Mr. Wale Adeyoyin – Head of Parking and Road Safety (Housing and Community
Services Department)
Mr. Nigel Granger – Area Planning Manager (Housing and Community Services
Department)
Ms. Sue Yoxall – Community Safety Manager (Administration Department)
Mr. Gareth Jones – Committee Secretary (Administration Department)
Ms. Rachel Williamson – Committee Secretary (Administration Department)

Residents

Approximately 25 members of the public.

INTRODUCTION

The Chairman, Councillor Govindia, welcomed residents to the meeting and explained the format of the meeting.

Councillor Dawson introduced himself and explained that he was first elected to the Council in 2006 and had been a resident in Northcote Ward since 1982. He said that he had a particular focus on education and children's services issues and was pleased to have been part of the successful campaign to establish Bolingbroke Academy. The building works at the Academy were now complete and the Heritage NHS Practice would shortly be moving into the building. He continued by explaining that he worked closely with businesses in Northcote Road and was campaigning for

greater protection for secondary frontages, ideally from Battersea Rise to Salcott Road. He was also pleased to have been able to support the establishment of Northcote Books.

Councillor Dodd explained that she was first elected in 2014. Her professional background was as an actor, lawyer and she also had military service. She serves on the Council's Planning Applications and Licensing Committees. She explained that she is particularly focused on planning, waste and tidiness issues and is a proud supporter of Northcote Books.

Councillor Johnson explained that he had been elected as a councillor 13 times. He currently serves on the Finance and Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee. He often inspected and reported to the Council on local street scene problems and generally secured swift action from officers. He noted the importance of Northcote Road which makes liaison with local businesses very important. In this regard, Councillor Johnson was involved in Clapham Junction Partnership Board and works with the Town Centre Manager.

Councillor Osborn said that he was elected in 2006 and represents Graveney Ward. He had previously sat on overview and scrutiny committees for environmental and adult health matters. As Leader of the Opposition he was now taking a broader overview, although he continued to serve on the Standards Committee and the Conservation Area Committee.

The Chairman then invited questions and comments from the residents.

ISSUES, RESPONSES AND ACTION

1. Parking Fines

Question/Comment - A resident said that the levying of parking fines on customers attending and using the car park at Latchmere Leisure Centre was unethical.

Response – Councillor Govindia advised that management of the car park was a matter for the leisure centre contractor. He suggested that fines may be enforced to ensure that spaces remained available for leisure centre users.

2. Roads

Question/Comment - A resident noted that the Northcote area was built on gravel and that as a result a small defect in the road surface can swiftly become a large pot hole. He suggested that the speed bumps in the area are unsuitable for the foundation on which they are built. He asked whether there were any statistics on the numbers of accidents before and after the installation of speed bumps. He said that he had witnessed accidents caused by the bumps, including one on Swaffield Road where the gentleman involved required hospital treatment. He suggested that half the speed bumps should be removed.

Response – Councillor Dodd agreed that there was a problem with some of the speed bumps, as evidenced by the damage to the road surface either side of the bump. There was less of a problem with some of the newer speed bumps which have a lower camber. She added that she personally did not favour speed bumps as a measure to calm traffic and the Council was looking at alternative measures for Northcote as part of the potential extension of the 20 mph zone.

Councillor Dawson concurred that some of the speed bumps were a little steep whereas others have a reduced camber. The Council listens to residents' concerns regarding speed bumps and in response to demand the speed bumps had been removed from Broomwood Road. He urged residents to report potholes to the Council so that they could be repaired.

Mr. Adeyoyin advised that when road resurfacing is undertaken the profile of the older, steeper speed bumps is altered. He confirmed that before and after studies are undertaken and he offered to provide this data if requested. Most of the highway was in good condition which pointed to it being well constructed.

Question/Comment – Are there proposals for a one way system to be implemented around Bolingbroke, Belleville and Honeywell schools?

Response – Councillor Dawson advised that a petition for a 20mph zone between the Commons was being launched. However, demonstrable support would be needed for the measure to be introduced. He was cautious about one way systems and would prefer to look at alternative road safety measures.

Councillor Johnson commented that one way streets often have the effect of increasing traffic speeds. They also gave rise to an increased need for right turning traffic which is more dangerous.

Question/Comment – A resident welcomed the response of the Ward Councillors to the issues raised. She noted that if a 20mph limit was introduced it would need to be properly policed.

Response – Councillor Dawson said that the police faced competing demands on their time and this could make it difficult to enforce a 20mph limit.

Question/Comment – A resident asked about actions being taken to limit speeding vehicles on Clapham Common Westside.

Response – Councillor Dodd said that the Northcote Councillors were pushing for an extra electronic sign to be installed to encourage drivers to observe the speed limit. Councillor Dawson reported that resolving the problem had been more complicated than expected; Councillors had liaised with the local Assembly Member and Transport for London. Transport for London has said that only one electronic sign was permitted. However, Councillors had found other examples where an extra sign was allowed and are continuing to pursue the matter.

Question/Comment – A resident complained that even with a reduced speed limit of 20mph, the noise from vehicles travelling over the speed bump on Wakehurst Road had not improved.

Response – Mr. Adeyoyin said that he would arrange an inspection of the hump.

3. Basements

Question/Comment - A resident noted that there was a substantial problem in the locality with basement flooding. He questioned what groundwater management measures were put in place in connection with basement developments.

Response – Councillor Dodd said that she was pushing for a review of the Council's basement planning policy. Where a basement is proposed for development a drainage plan is devised and this is considered as part of building control rather than planning.

Question/Comment – A resident asked about the policy considerations relating to basements.

Response – Councillor Dodd commented that in some instances residents were digging under their entire back gardens.

Mr. Granger said that outside of conservation areas permitted development rights could be used to develop under a property. Where basements are developed it was inevitably an uneighbourly process, although basements can because of their subterranean nature be very neighbourly once in use. Building Control would require an engineering solution to disperse water where there was an aquifer. Thames Water did not object to basement developments.

Question/Comment – Why was the Council concerned about residents digging under their entire garden? How fair was it on residents that wish to undertake basement developments in future to change the rules.

Response – Councillor Dodd remarked that her personal concerns included the effect the reduction in top-soil would have on the ecology of the area.

Councillor Osborn commented that he lived close to an old river course and flooding was more likely as a result. Northcote Road closely followed the course of the old Falcon Brook. The effect of basement developments could be to divert water.

Councillor Dawson noted that in 2007 the storms had resulted in a number of basements in the area being badly flooded.

4. Pavements

Question/Comment – A resident asked whether asphalt was now used as standard to repair pavements that had been damaged as a result of tree roots.

Response – Councillor Johnson confirmed that asphalt was now used as standard as this was more cost effective.

Question/Comment – A resident commented that tree roots can sometimes grow up through asphalt and that paving stones were better. She added that there was a particular problem with tree roots on the pavement near Honeywell School.

Response – Councillor Dawson said that trees can break through tarmac, but they can also cause paving stones to lift and rock. There were no easy solutions to the problem.

Question/Comment – A resident noted that many trees were under a Preservation Order, which can complicate the measures taken to tackle tree root problems. He suggested that a graduated mound of tarmac over the tree roots was the best solution to the problem.

5. Northcote Books

Question/Comment - A representative of Northcote Books, the proposed community bookshop, addressed the meeting and thanked the councillors for their support. She explained that Northcote Books had been created following the closure of the only bookshop on Northcote Road. It is hoped that the bookshop could be established in an under-used section of Northcote Library. However, there had been a delay and the representative sought assurances from the Council that it would work hard to make this venture happen. Leaflets were available for anyone that was interested.

Response – Councillors Dodd, Dawson and Johnson expressed their support for the initiative.

Councillor Govindia commended the work of the local community and the support of Ward Councillors. He said that the Council was supportive of the proposal and this was evidenced by the award of a Big Society Grant. Councillor Govindia made a clear commitment to continue to provide a library service in Northcote Ward and said that the Council was happy to safeguard the investment made if that was a concern. He apologised for the delay recently encountered which was a hiccup rather than a blockage and he hoped to be able to give a clearer answer in 10-15 days.

6. Planning

Question/Comment – A resident expressed concern regarding the quality of planning decisions, the Peabody Tower and the recent hotel development near Clapham Junction were particularly ugly. She also expressed concern about the potential future development of the union building which has had a change of use to residential.

Response – Councillor Dodd said that the change of use was a permitted development right.

On the Peabody, Councillor Johnson said that local Councillors had strongly objected to the development and could not have done more. However, the councillors on the Committee did not agree and allowed the development.

Councillor Dodd advised that the Planning Applications Committee meets monthly and considers planning applications with at least 3 objections and those proposing five or more residential units, along with certain other applications. Ward councillors can also ask for an application to be put before the Planning Applications Committee. The Committee in making their decisions had to apply planning rules and can only refuse an application on material planning grounds. She encouraged residents that wish to object to do so online.

Question/Comment – A resident asked if design could be grounds for refusal?

Response – Councillor Dodd said that there were a number of planning reasons which could be considered grounds for refusal which included, for example, the massing, size and bulk of a development.

Councillor Osborn said that there was an obligation on the Council to ensure good quality design and that the Council had not been strong enough in ensuring that this happened.

Question/Comment - A resident raised a concern that some of the tower blocks proposed were contrary to planning policy.

Response - Mr Granger said a tall building had to satisfy 14 planning requirements, including low impact on the community, the effects on micro climate and wind levels, and would only be considered in certain areas included in the Council's "Site Allocation" document. The definition of "tall" varied in different areas, for instance around the heliport anything over 9 storeys would be considered as a tall building but elsewhere 5 storeys could be considered as "tall". This did not mean that a 6th storey was not possible in that area but it would have to satisfy the tall buildings policy. For instance it might not be considered appropriate next to a heritage building. Councillor Dawson encouraged residents to get involved with the planning process, he added that he did not like the building on the Peabody site but it was a considerable improvement on what had been originally proposed; his preference was for a traditional style of architecture but accepted that others may prefer more modern styles. He could appreciate an area like Rockefeller Plaza in New York where the buildings defined the city and were iconic.

A resident added that the "More London" site near London Bridge station was a very exciting development, Councillor Dawson added that so were some of the buildings at Nine Elms.

7. School Admissions Policy

Question/Comment -A resident said that one of her two children already attended one of the local academy/foundation schools, she was concerned at the suggested 800 metre range for sibling admissions and she asked about the Council's thinking behind the policy. She had heard that Belleville School were looking at setting up another school in Wandsworth and asked what the Council were doing to assist.

Response - Councillor Dawson said that Belleville was one of two primary schools in the ward. Belleville had become an academy and has been very successful, there was interest in offering the “Belleville” model to a wider sphere and providing training for other schools through the “Belleville Teaching Schools Alliance”. Belleville had applied to the Department of Education to open a new free school and this had the support of the Council. They were exploring possible locations. The Council had previously bought two hospital sites at Putney and Bolingbroke for new schools and its own professional centre site was now Tooting Primary and Rutherford House School was located in the former Balham Youth Court. Other Council-owned sites in Roehampton and Earlsfield had been released for the development of new primary schools. . If residents had any suggestions for a possible site they should inform the Head at Belleville.

Mr. Johnson added that the consultation period on primary schools admission policy had now ended; the results would be reported to Committee in November. There had been a large response from Northcote residents and officers were currently evaluating the responses, some favoured distances less than 800 metres others wanted the range extended. The Council wanted to be fair to those already in the system. There would then be a further 8 week statutory consultation on the final proposals. 800 metres had been chosen as this was the approximate catchment distance of Wandsworth primary schools.

8. Street Cleaning

Question/Comment - What monitoring and spot checking is in place for street cleaning in Arundel Close/Chivalry Road?

Response - Mr Singham could not comment on those individual streets specifically but explained that the Council had one dedicated officer responsible for monitoring the street cleaning contract with support from the Waste Enforcement Team and that the contract allowed for a degree of self monitoring. He also described how the Borough is also surveyed in three tranches across the year, taking 900 samples of 50 metre sections of road or other Council managed open land which were then graded in accordance with the Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse. This survey found that only 4% of samples had unacceptable levels of litter. Additionally, the Council monitors levels of street cleansing related complaints and reports of fly-tipping, the numbers of which have greatly reduced over the past 10 years.

The resident added that self- monitoring was not a good way to monitor the contract, in her area residents picked up a lot of the rubbish themselves. Mr Singham then added that daily joint inspections are also carried out with the contractor and a Council officer on a small random sample of the scheduled cleaning work each day. Roads deemed to fall below the required standard result in payments to the contractor being reduced. Councillor Dodd added that if residents were unhappy to let the Council know. . Councillor Osborn added that any reported fly tipping was

usually removed within 48 hours and that the contract requirements were published on the Council's website although not easy to find.

9. Cigarette Stubs

Question/Comment – Outside the restaurants in Northcote Road, there was a problem with the accumulation of cigarette stubs which she frequently had to pick up. She asked whether restaurants could be made to provide cigarette bins.

Response - Councillor Dodd explained that this was a problem that occurred outside many business premises, the perpetrators could be fined and licensed premises could be made to clean outside their premises as a condition of the licence.

Councillor Dodd asked that the resident speak to her further after the meeting. Mr Singham added that dropping cigarette stubs was littering and the numbers of people fined for this offence had increased so the message was being sent.

10. Bins on common/Garden Waste disposal/Mansion Tax

Questions/Comments – There is a lack of waste bins on the Common in the area around the pond and rubbish accumulates particularly over the summer. Why can't the Council collect garden waste and what is the Council's view on mansion tax?

Responses - Councillor Dodd informed the resident that garden waste can be collected in a black bin bag. Councillor Dawson added that it was treated as normal rubbish, it did not go to land fill but would be taken to the waste transfer station at Belvedere where it was converted into energy. Councillor Dodd added that a new bin was being installed at the entrance to Bolingbroke School but if the resident spoke to her after the meeting she would investigate the options for additional waste bin capacity on the common.

The mansion tax was dismissed as a bad idea. Councillor Osborn added that this would penalise the asset rich and cash poor which included him. It did not have the full support of Labour members and the "PR" damage had been done. Councillor Govindia suspected this policy was on the skids but if it was maintained they would oppose it. Councillor Dawson added that council tax banding had not been reviewed in over 20 years and this was due for a sensible review.

Question/Comment – A resident said she knew her local Councillors but the meeting was a good opportunity to meet the council officers, she asked if the Council would pay a living wage?

Response - Councillor Govindia added that only a few council staff did not receive the living wage which he would like to address but it was difficult to have any influence over Council contractors. Councillor Osborn added that under Labour all staff would receive the living wage, Councillor Johnson concurred and suggested that paying less than the living wage encouraged benefit culture.

11. Northern Line Extension to Clapham Junction

Question/Comment – Are there any plans to extend the Northern Line to Clapham Junction?

Response – Councillor Govindia said it was an aspiration for the Council but no funding was available, the extension to Nine Elms had been possible because of the large contribution from developers. However, there were proposals for Cross Rail II with an underground link from Victoria to Clapham Junction via Kings Road.

CLOSE OF MEETING

Councillor Govindia 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 approach them with individual queries. He asked residents to make sure they left their contact details with officers where they had raised specific queries.

The meeting ended at 9.25 p.m.

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