

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

5.1 QUESTION FROM IAN MOULES, ST JOHN'S CLOSE, UXBRIDGE TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES – COUNCILLOR SIMMONDS

After his visit to the Whitehall schools on Monday 18 October, what does Councillor Simmonds see as the key obstacles to expanding Whitehall Infant School and Whitehall Junior School while maintaining the excellent educational standards and meeting legal requirements, and what strategies do the local authority have in place to address these obstacles?

Personal Statement

I recognise that the Local Authority has a statutory duty to supply school places for all its children of school age, and that the increase in the birth rate and lower migration has led to a need for more school places within the Borough, especially South of the A40. I also recognise that this is not likely to be a short-term issue and there will be a need to build more classrooms.

However there is not only one way of delivering this need. My concern is that the local authority's policy is being determined by what it sees as the easiest option rather than the one that is most educationally beneficial. The Local Authority should take the opportunity to consider how best to provide a balanced provision across the Borough to meet the needs of all our children.

The Whitehall schools might on the face of it have some scope for expansion. However when you examine issues more closely then the picture is far more complex. There is not sufficient space to accommodate the extra children without constructing new buildings. This creates the problem that while the schools might be accommodating more children, there will be less space for them to play. The Whitehall schools site is already 'confined' and this problem will be exacerbated further by the construction of a children's centre at the end of the schools' field.

Further increasing the size of the Whitehall schools without a corresponding increase in the surrounding primary schools unbalances the provision of school places within Uxbridge and Cowley. Within Uxbridge, if Whitehall increased to four forms they would educate more children than the other three closest schools combined. And if you include Cowley St Laurence, then the Whitehall schools will educate four ninths of the children within that area. This is a significant distortion for primary education.

Therefore I would urge the Local Authority to take a more strategic look at how it could provide the education across the Borough, and in the meantime consider other arrangements for accommodating the extra children at this time.

5.2 QUESTION FROM PETER JAMES, THE GREENWAY, UXBRIDGE TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES – COUNCILLOR SIMMONDS

Would the Leader of the Council or Councillor Simmonds please tell the Council why an agreement between Council Officers and the Whitehall Schools on the location and boundary of the Children's Centre on Whitehall School playing field is not being honoured and why the Director of Education and Children's Services chose the afternoon of 22nd of October to inform the Headteachers of Whitehall Infant School and Whitehall Junior School that work would be commencing on site on the morning of 23rd October.

Personal Statement

A council Officer originally spoke to Whitehall Infant School Governing Body in early 2009 about locating a Children's Centre on Whitehall School site. The Governing Body were supportive of the Children's Centre and agreed in principle. Exact locations were not discussed but the impression given by officers that the building would be placed in the wild area in the corner of the field.

A planning application was submitted by the Local Authority in April 2009 but the governing bodies of both Junior School and Infant School were not consulted or informed about this application. The original plan showed the Children's Centre being mainly on open field and only a small section in the wild area in the corner. Following several meetings with the school and Officers revised plans were drawn up showing the building being moved 3-4 meters into the wild area, however over two thirds was still shown on open green playing field. This revised application was not agreed by the schools but submitted and the application was approved by Officers on 15th February 2010.

The schools requested and obtained a meeting with the Deputy Director of Education and Children's Services and the Extended Schools Coordinator which was held on 26th April 2010. Following this productive meeting assurances were given by Officers and a revised location for the building was agreed as was a revised boundary between school and Children's Centre. There were also productive discussions on the relocation of the path from the Children's Centre and the school.

Following this meeting revised plans which are supported by the schools were drawn up. These revised plans were submitted to the July Central and South Planning Committee, but were withdrawn on the night. Opportunities to submit revised plans in August, September and October have not been taken.

On the afternoon of 22nd October the Director of Education and Children's Services met with the Headteachers of Whitehall Infant and Whitehall Junior School to inform them that work will commence on site on 23rd October using the plans approved on 15th February. He chose the Afternoon before half term to inform the schools when he must have know about this decision at least two weeks in advance (to organise and arrange contractors).

5.3 QUESTION FROM MR BUTLER AND MISS JEFFRIES OF BYRON WAY, WEST DRAYTON TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR SOCIAL SERVICES, HEALTH AND HOUSING – COUNCILLOR CORTHORNE

Would it not have been better for Hillingdon Homes to have applied for and gained planning permission for the whole Glebe estate, and then spread the works over a longer period, by doing one section of the works at a time, for example fencing the whole estate at the same time, thus enabling better discounts for parts and labour etc., hopefully lowering the costs to leaseholders and the council, rather than the expensive, disorganised, and to the residents, disruptive way that these works have been proceeding on these two blocks at present?

Background Statement

The Glebe Estate Initiative is a project to replace existing asbestos roofing to sheds, demolishing garages, fencing communal grassed areas, and renewing play areas, along with some cosmetic alterations to the blocks of flats in the Glebe Estate, that Hillingdon Homes have come up with, after some minimal consultation with residents and children who went to a couple of fun days and residents who bothered to return a questionnaire. Planning permission was granted for works to blocks 10 to 42 Byron Way and 108 to 142 Coleridge Way on the 17th February 2010. Works were supposed to have started in early spring 2010, but were not started until 9th August this year. With regards to the Play areas, one planning application was granted on the 24/2/2010 and was built, two were withdrawn on the 21/9/2010 for reasons unknown to me. I assume the delay to the start of the works on the Byron Way and Coleridge Way blocks, was due to the Election this year, although the date of this Election was known well in advance.

The estimated costs at 27th Nov 2009 for each of the blocks that have already been granted planning permission were £63,331.95, a part of which is an estimated cost of £11,744.35 to replace the 15 communal bulkhead lights in each block, with 40 bulkhead lights per block, supposedly to save on electricity, with each Leaseholder having to contribute an estimated £4,972.90 towards the total cost of the works to each block. As there are 19 blocks on the estate, this would amount to a total cost for the works of £1,203,307.05 at Nov 2009 estimated figures. This does not include the cost of demolishing garages, building new Play areas, the new Caretakers Store, and the erecting of new street lighting, which I assume is either fully or partially covered by the grant that was given to Hillingdon Homes for this purpose. In 2009 Hillingdon Homes applied for planning permission to do building works on blocks 10 to 42 Byron Way and 108 to 142 Coleridge Way, as part of the Glebe Estate Initiative. To date, Hillingdon Homes do not appear to have applied for planning permission for the other blocks on the estate.

5.4 QUESTION FROM MRS SMITH OF STRATFORD ROAD, YEADING TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, PROPERTY AND BUSINESS SERVICES – COUNCILLOR BIANCO

The Council has responsibilities for animal welfare and for the welfare of children. It works in partnership with the Police, the London Boroughs, the GLA, M.P.'s, and other partners and agencies across London and it has a strong voice. Will the Council make it's position absolutely clear that dog fighting and abuse of animals will not be tolerated and, that enforcement action will be taken against those engaged in these illegal, cruel and barbaric practices?

Background Statement

The Council's ANIMAL WELFARE CHARTER is ten years old this year. 2010 also marks the 175th anniversary of the legislation to ban dog fighting and badger baiting. The Charter has been updated from time to time to reflect legislative changes and working practices in the welfare of animals: in particular -The HUNTING ACT 2004 - *that made it illegal to set dogs onto wild mammals for sport.*

The illegal practice of setting dogs onto one another for entertainment has, in recent years, shown an alarming 400% rise in this cruel and barbaric abuse of animals in rural and urban areas. Young men in particular are using dogs as weapons to express their violent tendencies. They set their dogs on to other dogs, and horrific injuries and often death is sustained by these animals for the gratification of their tormenters.

Dogs are used in badger baiting in a fight to the death which is a criminal offence! And in a new phenomenon, urban foxes are being targeted. Dogs are set on to foxes in suburban streets. Sometimes foxes are captured and tied to trees, to be set upon by dogs in a fight to the death. Police forces are obliged to send data on wildlife crime incidents to the National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU) but some forces don't do it correctly and some don't do it at all. Thus the true picture on animal abuse and wildlife crime isn't being revealed to the public. The Animal Welfare Charter needs updating to take into account crime statistics and the up- to -date research and advice in the matter of illegal dog fighting, which are available via leading animal welfare experts and agencies, such as the RSPCA and The League Against Cruel Sports.

Dogs are being bred for dog fighting and brutalised as puppies. Often in domestic situations, where young children reside and that poses a serious risk to vulnerable children as well.