

WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

The following questions listed on pages 25 - 27 of the agenda have been received from councillors and will be taken as read along with the written answers from Councillor Robins, the Chair of the Committee listed below.

The Chair will give an opportunity for the councillor who submitted a question to ask one supplementary question.

(a) Councillor Nemeth - Marlborough House

“What actions have been carried out by Brighton & Hove City Council to enforce a series of planning breaches (recent or otherwise) at Marlborough House on the Old Steine in Brighton?”

Reply:

“The council has issued two Listed Building Enforcement Notices in respect of unauthorised works to Marlborough House.

The first of these required the removal of unauthorised rooflights and the reinstatement of dormer windows, rear porch and internal plaster to the basement. This Notice is still outstanding and officers are pursuing compliance with the owner.

The second Notice refers to the unauthorised painting of the front elevation and requires the removal of the paint from the render and to return the windows to their previous colour. The period for compliance with this Notice expires on 6 November.

We are not aware of any other unauthorised works. We are seeking not only to secure compliance with the enforcement notices but also to find a way of bringing this vacant listed building back into long term use.”

(b) Councillor Nemeth - King Alfred

Note: The Question has been withdrawn.

(c) Councillor Nemeth - Running participation

“What plans does the Chair have to increase participation in running locally?”

Reply:

“A wide range of initiatives take place to increase participation in running locally in conjunction with local clubs, schools, events and other organisations. These include:

Running Challenge

The council's Active for Life Team work in partnership once a with the Sussex Beacon Brighton Half Youth race team and the Brighton Marathon Mini Mile team to deliver the Running Challenge.

The Running Challenge programme is for primary school children in Y3, 4, 5, 6. It consists of 4 weeks of athletics training, followed by participation in the Brighton Half Marathon Youth race at the end of February. The child then receives a further 7 weeks of athletics training, followed by participation in the Brighton Marathon Mini Mile at the end of April. The challenge is for the child is to improve on their initial February race time when they take part in the second mini mile race.

TAKEPART Festival of Sport

Running clubs promoted their activities at the launch event at The Level and offer taster sessions to encourage new members including Brighton & Hove Women's Running club and Brighton Triathlon Club.

National School Game Programme

Competitions in both cross country and athletics are organised in partnership with local athletics clubs to ensure there is a link to enable regular participation.

Startrack Athletics Days

Freedom Leisure deliver Startrack athletics days at Withdean Sports Complex during the holiday activity programme to introduce young people to athletics.

Events Programme

The events programme has developed in recent years to include a wide range of running events at a variety of distances in addition to the success of the Brighton Marathon. These events encourage regular participation in running to train for the event. Events such as Colour Run appeal to new runners and complement the regular opportunities available such as Parkruns."

(d) Councillor Nemeth - Effects of graffiti on tourism

"What representations has the Chairman made to colleagues (prior to the submission of this question) on the effects on tourism of the huge increases in graffiti around the city centre that we have seen over the past two years?"

Reply:

"Thank you for your rather specific question, but nonetheless raising an issue of interest to residents and tourists.

There hasn't been a huge increase in graffiti in the past two years, and we are very positive about our tourism offer, with attendances the highest for 51 years at the Brighton Festival this year, and the Palace Pier named last month as the fourth most visited tourist attraction in Britain, and the most visited attraction outside London.

However, there has been an increase in tagging in the last couple of months, and this can have an impact on residents as well as visitors, so we are mindful of the issue of graffiti overall, including the fact that we are a major tourist destination.

As a Labour administration we care about the city's environment – for residents and visitors – which is why we take enforcement action that is within our powers, and explore new opportunities for enforcement where we believe this will be beneficial. For example we have new enforcement action against fly-tipping and littering, as well as enforcement action to protect our parks and seafront.

I know that the Chair of Environment Transport and Sustainability is fully aware of the situation with regard to recent tagging, and has worked to ensure that all agencies are focussed on the problem: the police, enforcement officers and Cityclean.

For information, the council is responsible for removing graffiti from public property including the pavement, street signs, parks, lights and benches. We also remove offensive graffiti on both public and private property as soon as possible. Clearing other graffiti from private property is the responsibility of the owner, but the council will try to help prevent and remove graffiti where we can. We have cleaned the large graffiti from Barclays bank following requests from businesses and members of the public.”

(e) Councillor Nemeth - Planning Department

“What is the predicted date for the completion of the transformation of Brighton & Hove City Council's Planning Department?”

Reply:

“There is a two year work programme in place (March 2017- March 2019) to modernise the Planning and Building Control Service. This programme is made up of a number of projects of which many will be delivered earlier, for example service efficiencies (ongoing to March 2018), introduction of customer service standards (September 2017) and performance improvements (ongoing). Though the programme is for two years there is a commitment to continuous and ongoing improvement of the Planning Service in the future.”

(f) Councillor Nemeth - Sculpture trail

“What progress has been made by Brighton & Hove City Council over the past year in working with Hove Civic Society and other interested parties since the initial meeting with the Chair to establish a sculpture trail for the city?”

Reply:

“The Civic Society has worked with the Council on the Hove Plinth project, including negotiating the lease on the site of the plinth and obtaining planning permission for the first three planned pieces of art. The Society's proposal to aggregate developer contributions and use Community Infrastructure Levy to create a funding pot for the commissioning of sculptures to create a trail around

the city has been considered and officers from Planning have met the society on a number of occasions. As s106 contributions from developers are required to be spent specifically on the development sites, and Brighton and Hove does not yet have a CIL programme, the proposal as set out by the society cannot be progressed at this time. However, it is proposed to develop a more strategic approach to public art, which would include engagement with the private sector and could include a sculpture trail, following the publication of the new culture framework for the city in early 2018.”

(g) Councillor Mac Cafferty - Commercial estate agent boards

A Regulation 7 Direction is currently in place to restrict residential ‘for sale’ and ‘to let’ boards within most of the conservation areas in the city centre. The effect is that no residential sale or letting boards may be displayed on the street frontages of properties without express consent.

Although there is planning policy in place which regulates some of the aspects of advertisements, further to the growth of commercial estate agent boards along some of the busiest roads in a number of the conservation areas, I wonder if the Chair would consider:

- In the first place, discussing a voluntary agreement that could be reached between the council and the estate agents in the city on what can be done to limit the impact of commercial boards in the most sensitive historic areas or for promotion to be carried out in other ways;
- Seeking to trial the idea of a selected area where a more robust approach is taken with regard to commercial estate agent boards;
- Such a trial could be used to begin a broader discussion about potentially extending the current Regulation 7 to include commercial boards as well as residential estate agent boards in conservation areas. Any further commitment on this would obviously require a public consultation process and consent from the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

Reply:

“Your concerns regarding the proliferation of commercial Estate Agents Boards in conservation areas in the city centre are noted. As indicated in your question this is an area already covered by a Regulation 7 Direction for the control the display of residential boards only.

In terms of introducing voluntary pilot scheme for controlling commercial signs, unfortunately, at this time officer resources are not available to support this. Following the resolution of this committee, officers are focusing on implementing a pilot scheme for the voluntary control of residential boards in the Coombe Road Area where there is a problem with proliferation of estate agents/letting boards. A report will be brought back to committee next spring to outline how successful this pilot scheme has been; and whether and how it should be rolled out to cover a wider area. This will help to inform taking forward other voluntary schemes such as controlling commercial estate agents boards.

In addition, in response to your suggestion, officers have instructed the consultant appointed to undertake the Old Town Management Plan to assess whether commercial estate agent boards are a problem in the Old Town Conservation Area. This is the type of evidence required to determine whether additional planning controls are justifiable in Old Town and potentially the wider Regulation 7 Direction Area. The Old Town Management Plan will be brought to this committee for consideration in June 2018.”

(h) Councillor Mac Cafferty

Seafront radios.

“On several occasion over the summer months I witnessed with considerable concern that lifeguards were appearing to struggle to hear and transmit clear messages on their walkie-talkies on the seafront. I am assuming this had something to do with reception for their devices on the beach. Can I ask the Chair that this is investigated and for assurances that something will be done to improve this?”

Reply:

“The Seafront Office have not reported any difficulties with the reception for their devices on the beaches located in Hove and Brighton. Difficulties do occur when there are strong wind conditions and the lifeguard has to seek some shelter to undertake a call. There are some issues with reception for the radios at the beaches in the Deans, but the lifeguards have mobile phones which provide additional cover to ensure communication can take place.”

(i) Councillor Mac Cafferty - Cheaper train fares from London Victoria

“With regard to tickets bought in person at the station on the day of travel, many of us will know that there are often good offers on train fares from Brighton to London Victoria but there are currently no such similar offers on journeys from London Victoria to Brighton. We may never know but I wonder how much this has impacted on day visitors who buy a ticket in person at Victoria Station. If we are to keep pushing to maintain our place as one of the nation’s favourite seaside resorts, we need to unlock as many of these blockages to visitors. Can the Chair please indicate if he would be willing to approach the rail companies to ask for their cooperation in promoting cheaper day returns for in person, on the day of travel offers in good time for the start of the tourist season in 2018? Such offers could be done in coordination with Visit Brighton and partners in the tourist attractions and hotel and restaurant trade in the city.”

Reply:

“Thank you for your question, I agree that Brighton & Hove arguably has as many interesting and varied attractions as the Capital, including many characterful features that are unique to the City, such as its 12km of beautiful coastline, Regency and Victorian architecture, easy access to The South Downs National Park and a very interesting cultural offering, including a vast array of high quality shops, restaurants and entertainment places. Whilst there are good transport links to the City, the train network is vital in providing efficient, high quality mass movement, particularly for the daily commute to London but is also

important during the off peak hours and at weekends so is essential that the fare structure provides an incentive for visitors to travel to the City sustainably avoiding using their cars to support reducing both congestion and air pollution.

Officers have raised the issue of fare deals with Govia Thames Link Railways (GTR) who operate the Southern and Gatwick Express services and they commented that they “offer a range of advance fares for passengers travelling from Victoria to Brighton offering good value for money, for example fares for travel on Friday 22 September are available from £8.50. For those travelling on the day are Super Off Peak tickets available on the Thameslink route at weekends from London. However GTR operate a management style contract in this franchise with all passenger ticket revenue going to the government and this constrains their ability to offer cheaper fares.

Officers will pursue this matter further with GTR, in order to create a fare structure that will better serve and attract more visitors to the City. However lobbying of central government may be necessary to secure long term changes.”