

WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

The following questions listed on pages 51 - 52 of the agenda have been received from Councillors and will be taken as read along with the written answers listed below:

(a) Councillor G. Theobald

“Will Cllr Kitcat please explain why Brighton & Hove was the only Council in Sussex to ignore official advice from the College of Arms and not fly the Union flag at half mast on the city’s civic buildings on the day of Baroness Thatcher’s funeral?”

Reply from Councillor J. Kitcat, Leader of the Council.

“The Council has a protocol for the flying of flags from its buildings and as a consequence an annual programme is managed by the Premises Team. The protocol was determined by Policy & Resources Committee (2006) and has proved useful when determining the numerous requests made in this regard.

There remains some flexibility within the protocol, the ultimate arbiter being the Chief Executive. On this occasion, and following discussion with Group Leaders, it was deemed inappropriate to commemorate the funeral of Baroness Thatcher by flying flags at half mast.

The College of Arms, whose jurisdiction is predominately ceremonial and not binding, acted on guidance issued to them by Downing Street. The information posted on their website was not directly communicated to Local Authorities. Neither the College of Arms nor the LGA considered it official advice or instruction.

Local Authorities were able to determine how to commemorate the event, acting on precedent and appropriateness. The decision reflected the diversity of opinion throughout the city and enabled elected representatives to mark the passing of Baroness Thatcher as they felt appropriate.”

(b) Councillor Mitchell

“Given the local opposition to the Government’s decision to site the King’s Free School on a permanent basis on the Brighton, Hove and Sussex Sixth Form College playing field, will Councillor Shanks undertake to make public the following information:

Confirmation that documents have been received by the council in relation to site searches for new Secondary Schools in the city.

The publication of any such site search documents and the council's response to their individual proposals.

Council conducted site searches in relation to the provision of new Secondary Schools in the city with accompanying evaluations."

Reply from Councillor Shanks, Chair of the Children & Young People Committee.

"Specific site searches to identify potential sites for the King's CE Free School have been commissioned by the Education Funding Agency (EFA) and as such it has been necessary to consult the EFA on the response to this question.

The EFA has confirmed that it has received a number of direct requests for information about site searches, and in response to these requests it has prepared a summary paper which includes all the sites that were considered. The EFA has removed comments on any short listing of sites and has stated that this is because until temporary and/or permanent sites are secured they may need to look at these other options and also because potentially some of these sites may be suitable for other Free School applications in the future. The EFA maintains that therefore disclosure of this information is commercially sensitive.

The EFA has shared this site search paper with the Head Teacher/Principal and Chair of Governors of Cardinal Newman Catholic School, Stanford Junior School and BHASVIC, and has authorised the Council to make it more widely available.

Officers were invited to comment on the site searches in draft. Specifically in relation to the Old Shoreham Road playing fields site, we commented:

- The site is well used by Cardinal Newman Catholic School (CNCS) and forms an integral part of the school facilities: without this area of land the school would find it impossible to deliver the sports and PE curriculum to its 2,200 pupils
- The land is covered by a joint user agreement between CNCS, Brighton Hove and Sussex Sixth Form College (BHASVIC) and Stanford Junior School, who all make use of the playing field: building on this site would deprive Stanford Junior School of its only access to outside green space and would make it very difficult for BHASVIC to deliver any PE curriculum at all
- Planning Policy protects the loss of urban open space (and this includes school playing fields) and over the last 15 years it has become much more difficult to secure planning consent for development on school playing fields
- The site has previously been proposed as a possible site for a school development but the proposal was submitted to Public Inquiry owing to the strength of local feeling and the planning inspector upheld that the site was not suitable for the development of a secondary school
- it is considered unlikely that planning consent could be secured for this site and even if this was possible the process would be likely to be lengthy

Officers have subsequently advised the EFA of the current application for the playing fields to be given village green status.

The EFA has concluded that despite the challenges this site presents it offers the most suitable solution to the search for a permanent site for the King's CE Free School. The EFA's lead officer has met with senior staff and governors of CNCS, BHASVIC and Stanford Junior to set out the proposals and to identify the issues these present for the schools and college. He has asked them to provide full information about their use of the field. It will be for the EFA to demonstrate to the schools and college how their needs may continue to be met at the same time as developing a new school on the site.

The local authority is required to cooperate with the EFA in the development of plans for new schools. Part of this role is to advise EFA of the issues and challenges relating to proposed sites, as our officers are doing in this case.

The Council has not as yet conducted its own site searches in relation to the potential need for a new secondary school. The School Organisation Plan sets out the likely need for new secondary school places later in this decade, as the most immediate need for new places is met by the opening of the King's CE Free School."

