

QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

Council Meeting – 17th April 2019

Question 1 from Councillor Ayles to the Cabinet Member for Infrastructure

Question

April 28th national drive it day. So what's that you ask?

On this day, a Sunday, everyone with a classic car is encouraged to drive their classic cars with almost every vehicle repair yard back street garage in Southend depending on the economy of repairing restoring classic cars. Many businesses in Southend that just repair and restore classic cars and the add on small traders doing upholstery, spare parts, paints, oils etc.

The amount of Southend residents employed directly and indirectly in the classic car economy you would have thought Southend Council would have supported this day but no.

Southend council have placed an injunction on the seafront of more than three vehicles having an event for example three mates deciding to drive their cars along the seafront on drive it day.

From all over Essex car clubs, a few mates etc. will be wanting to drive along Southend Seafront stop for a drink meet others. Many will be dressed the part, vehicles that have been mothballed taken of axle stands polished up often only for this one day. Others encouraged to take the dust sheets off that restoration project that came to a halt because the other half wanted the kitchen redecorated and the potential for the seafront economy to prosper and that of Southend's classic car movement and economy.

But no despite repeated requests to lift the injunction for one day to the Cabinet of Southend not even an answer, not even why, not even a thank you for your email. Please explain this reaction?

Answer

The injunction does not stop people from getting together along the seafront in a sensible way and peacefully showing their cars. It was introduced to keep residents and visitors safe from dangerous driving and antisocial behaviour associated with unauthorised car cruise events. If individual classic car drivers want to visit Southend-on-Sea seafront on 28 April then they will be most welcome. Classic car meets are organised on City Beach regularly and successfully through the year.

Question 2 from Councillor Wexham to the Cabinet Member for Infrastructure

Question

How much money has been spent on resurfacing roads in West Leigh & the amount for Leigh Ward and how much money has been spent on resurfacing & repairing footpaths in West Leigh & the amount for Leigh ward, and the same for potholes in each ward?

Answer

The amount spent on resurfacing in West Leigh and Leigh wards are as follows:

Carriageway Resurfacing 2018/19

- Crescent Road - £140,000
- London Road - £40,000
- Ashleigh Drive - £25,000
- Leigh Road - £35,000

Footway Resurfacing 2018/19

- London Road junction with Cliffsea Grove and Recreation Avenue - £40,000

Potholes Within Leigh Wards 2018/19

The amount spent on pot holes in Leigh wards is £48,000.

Question 3 from Councillor Burton to the Cabinet Member for Adults and Housing

Question

14 Eastwood Road North in Blenheim Ward has stood empty for many years and is becoming derelict. What barriers are in the way to bringing this property back to habitation?

Answer

Restoring Empty Dwellings back into occupation is often a lengthy and complex process, requiring particular skills. Until recently we have not had a dedicated Empty Homes Officer due to recruitment and retention challenges in this sector both locally and nationally. This has now been rectified in Southend and work will soon begin in respect of addressing empty homes concerns within the Borough. This work will include 14 Eastwood Road North.

Question 4 from Councillor Burton to the Cabinet Member for Infrastructure

Question

St James Close in Blenheim is in dire need of resurfacing but other roads with seemingly fewer issues are being done first. Can the administration explain the methodology for deciding the order of roads to be resurfaced in Southend?

Answer

The Council carries out at regular intervals a visual survey of the entire network. This has been undertaken by a specialist company called Gaist. This leads to a general classification of the roads and footways. For example, Grade 1 are roads free from defects, Grade 3 are roads that show some signs of fatigue and defects but do not present problems to road users, to Grade 5, which are roads that are showing signs of structural impairment. This classification is supplemented by annual, six monthly, three monthly and monthly inspections depending on the road type.

In addition to this, information from members of the public, Officers and elected Members about defects is also used. All this information is used to prepare a series of programmes, including resurfacing entire roads,

patching and small repairs. Some roads may look visually unappealing but from a structural integrity and safety point of view may be perfectly serviceable. The location and level of usage is also taken into account (for example, main distribution routes will take priority over cul de sacs).

Question 5 from Councillor Borton to the Cabinet Member for Public Protection

Question

The Local Government Association has called for the Hackitt review of high-risk buildings to be widened to include 19 metre tall buildings (approximately 6 storeys). It has also stated that automatic fire suppression systems should be retrofitted in existing blocks of 18 metres and above to offer reassurance to residents post-Grenfell.

What steps are the Council taking to ensure that 18 metre and above buildings which are managed by South Essex Homes are as safe as they can be in the event of a fire?

Answer

South Essex Homes began its fire safety compartmentation programme in 2009 starting with the 13 high rise blocks. The works were undertaken as part of an initial pilot and were commended by the Government's Chief Fire Advisor at the time.

At their meeting on 20th June, Cabinet considered a report of the Director of Finance & Resources outlining the capital programme outturn for 2016/17. On consideration of the report and in light of the Grenfell Tower tragedy, the Leader of the Council proposed the re-profiling of £2M from the 2018/19 HRA Future Programme into the 2017/18 financial year. This enabled the existing on-going programme of fire safety works to the Council's tower blocks to be accelerated – it was completed at the beginning of 2018.

Since then the programme has continued to include the medium rise blocks of 6 storeys. Two have been completed (Barringtons and Riverstone) and the third (Nicholson House) is part of the 2019/20 capital improvement programme. Works have also been begun to bring all the sheltered schemes up to the latest fire compartmentation standard.

South Essex Homes regularly hold meetings with residents of the blocks as well as briefing Councillors and resident's bodies of progress on fire safety initiatives and the Council holds a register of high building within the borough.

South Essex Homes, along with colleagues in Southend Council and Essex Fire and Rescue Service continue to look at other initiatives to improve fire safety in the high rise blocks.

Question 6 from Councillor Dent to the Cabinet Member for Growth

Question

Can the Cabinet Member for Growth please provide an update on progress with the high street action plan, and the status of the deadlines within the plan?

Answer

The High Street Action Plan covered four key themes:

- Communication;
- Magnetism;
- ASB & Enforcement;
- Rough Sleeping & Street Drinking.

Over 60% of the actions across the Plan have been completed against the initial deadline of October/November 2018. The remainder will be subject to ongoing actions, remaining relevant going forward, hence not marked as complete on the Plan. These ongoing matters relate to issues such as:

- improvements to the town centre highway;
- improving the look and feel of the town centre;
- Commissioning events and continued work with rough sleepers.

To ensure the Action Plan continues to be progressed, it has been agreed that the Community Action Group (CAG) - which reports directly to the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) - takes ownership of the Action Plan. This will enable all existing actions to be progressed and monitored and will also enable any new issues to be included for attention. The Action Plan will therefore continue to be refreshed and will be a live Plan going forward.

Question 7 from Councillor Dent to the Cabinet Member for Infrastructure

Question

Many residents across the town who live in controlled parking zones have contacted their councillors to complain about the inadequacy of the 100 visitor permits per year.

Could the Cabinet Member for Infrastructure update me as to what the review process is for this limit, and whether it will be increased?

Answer

The threshold on the number of visitor permits was introduced as part of a previous budget set by the Council. There is no proposal in this existing year's budget to review the threshold.

The restrictions are in place to ensure parking spaces are used for their correct purpose, and ensuring valuable kerb space is available for residents of the Borough. There were also concerns, about misuse of parking permits and consequent loss of income to the Council. There are however, various, parking spaces within the Borough via pay and display on-street and in car parks should you feel you need other places to park. The visitor's permit scheme represents great value for money.

Question 8 from Councillor Ayles to the Cabinet Member for Growth

Question

The Deputy Leader, Cllr James Courtney, approved what I believe is a very poor business decision of demolition of two Council owned buildings in Brunel road.

Could he explain the reasoning behind his approval to lose the council £40,000 per year income together with additional costs, when a better suitable site was available that would have returned £16,000 per year and is currently abandoned by the council?

Answer

The decision to locate the City Fibre point of presence for the west of the Borough on the site of the vacant units 2 and 4 Brunel Road is not a poor business decision and I welcome the opportunity to remind Councillors and our residents and businesses about the significant benefits of this exciting project.

The decision to locate a Point of Presence site at Brunel Road is a key part of the project which enables the Borough and its residents and businesses to benefit from a multimillion-pound project to bring full-fibre broadband to one million homes and businesses by 2021 through City Fibre's investment of £45m in the delivery of a high-speed fibre network – up to 150 times faster than the average fixed broadband connection in the UK.

As one of the first cities in the UK to benefit from the new Vodafone and CityFibre fibre-to-the-premises programme, Southend is set to become a beacon of digital transformation. The town's existing 90+km network – which was launched in 2017 to serve Southend's public sector and business community – will be expanded to reach nearly every home and business in the town with construction starting this year.

For the first time residents and businesses across Southend will have access to broadband services of up to 900mbps.

The Point of Presence site at Brunel Road is located so that the surrounding land holding still offers a good future development site whilst meeting City Fibre's site requirements, providing all the benefits for residents and businesses and generating rent for the Council starting at £15,000 per annum which is index-linked going forward. The Council will also receive business rates from the site and achieve the demolition of these two very tired industrial units at no cost to the Council.

Although it is an entirely separate matter, a planning application to demolish the buildings on the site and redevelop it for purposes to facilitate the delivery of full-fibre connectivity for residents, businesses and visitors to borough was considered and approved on its planning merits by the Council's Development Control Committee on the 3rd April 2019.

Question 9 from Councillor Bright to the Cabinet Member for Infrastructure

Question

The Portfolio Holder will be aware of the current condition of the highway in Rebels Lane, Southchurch Ward.

Can the Portfolio Holder please provide me with an update on a proposed course of action to bring the road up to a suitable standard?

Answer

The road is programmed for annual inspections; this year's took place on 11th April 2019. The Inspector identified the worst areas for patching, orders were placed to have these works carried out and they were completed on 15th April 2019.