

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ENVIRONMENT FORUM HELD ON THURSDAY, 1ST OCTOBER, 2020

MEMBERS: Councillors Mahmut Aksanoglu, Katherine Chibah (Chair)
Lindsay Rawlings

Dennis Stacey (Bush Hill Park Study Group)
Andrew Newman (Clay Hill Study Group)
John West (Enfield Society)
Carol Cragoe (Enfield Town Conservation Area Study Group)
Ann Bishop Laggett (Federation of Enfield Tenants and Residents Associations)
Denise Gandhi (Southgate Green Study Group)
Juliett Barnett (Trent Park Conservation Area Study Group)
Robert Wilson (Hadley Wood Conservation Area Study Group)
Chris Horner (Southgate District Civic Trust)

Officers: Sarah Cary (Executive Director Place), Dominic Millen (Group Leader Traffic and Transportation), Helen Murch (Head of Strategic Planning and Design), Christine White (Heritage and Urban Design Manager), Metin Halil (Governance and Scrutiny Team) and Penelope Williams (Secretary)

Also Attending: Amma Coleman-Green (Transport for London) and 11 members of the public

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Each member briefly introduced themselves.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Anne Brown.

2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

3. IMPACT OF COVID 19 ON BUS AND RAIL SERVICES

The Chair introduced Amma Coleman-Green from Transport for London and invited her to give a presentation on the impact of Covid 19 on bus and rail services. Copies of the slides are attached to the agenda and are available on request from the Committee Secretary.

1. Presentation on the Impact of Covid 19 on Bus and Rail Services

Amma Colman-Green highlighted the following:

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- A new enhanced cleaning regime, using a strong anti-viral disinfectant had been introduced on all train and bus services. Cleaning was taking place at the end of every day, as well as more frequently at key interchanges.
- Extra attention was being paid to poles, doors, rails and buttons.
- Over 1,000 hand sanitiser points had been installed across the network.
- Clear signage put in place to encourage social distancing and the wearing of face coverings.
- A new app had been developed for iphones, which allowed people to find out how busy a station was at a particular time of day, to help them to be able to plan to use services when they were less busy. It was also due to be extended to android users.
- Work was being carried out to encourage active travel, to enable people to walk and cycle more easily. Temporary cycle lanes had been put in place as well as temporary wider pavements to enable social distancing.
- Schools have been supported to maintain social distancing including through:
 - Temporary widening of pavements.
 - Schools streets with restricted vehicle access at school dropping off and picking up times had been bought in for certain school streets.
 - Traffic lights having more time for people to cross the road
 - Additional buses had been put on specially for school children. This fitted in with staggered starting and finishing times.
- Transport for London finances had been severely reduced as a result of the pandemic and they have had to ask the Government for bail out funds.
- Conditions of the bail out included changes to freedom pass use in peak hours and the proposed suspension of free travel for some young people. Discussions with the Government were continuing on the provision of free travel for young people with any changes still requiring funding.
- Local Implementation Plans have had to be suspended, but other schemes have been bought forward to help with the recovery. In August £20m was made available for projects such as low traffic neighbourhoods and the development of strategic cycle routes.

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- Usage figures for the tube had reduced from 6.7m journeys per day before the lock down, to 300,000 during the lockdown to 2.2m in the week preceding the meeting. For the Overground the figures were pre lock down 1.3m journeys to 150,000 to 700,000.
- Transport for London were now running 97% of services on the tube, 98% on the buses and 86% on the Overground and Docklands Light Railway.

Dominic Millen spoke about the impact, specifically on Enfield.

- Discretionary funding had been replaced by bidding for funding to deliver specific projects.
- The Council had had to implement a 12 month programme in 5 months, which had been challenging.
- Measures to encourage safe movement have been implemented, as well as work on longer programmes to encourage walking and cycling. This would have the benefit of reducing traffic levels.

2. Questions/Comments on the Presentation

1. Funding for the “Let’s Talk Enfield” Scheme was unaffected.
2. Low Traffic Neighbourhoods and School Street schemes would be going out to consultation. There was no clawback mechanism if the schemes were changed.
3. The message that travelling on public transport was safe was being heavily promoted. It was important to keep persuading people to travel by public transport rather than to use their cars.
4. It was felt that more needed to be done to maintain existing cycle routes, such as the lane on Mollison Avenue which is currently very overgrown. Dominic Millen agreed to ask highways to inspect.
5. It was felt that more should be done to enforce the wearing of face masks on public transport. Enforcement activity had increased, but there was always room for improvement.
6. Work was being carried out on developing a badge for people to wear if they could not wear masks for legitimate reasons. It would be downloadable.

The Chair thanked the officers for the presentation and summed up, saying that it had been very useful. She felt that it was essential to restore confidence in public transport to reduce traffic emissions and to help avoid another spike in infection.

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Encouraging the wearing of masks and making sure that those who could not wear them were easily identifiable was very important to instil confidence.

Officers would raise the problem of overgrown vegetation along Mollison Avenue with the relevant department.

4. GOVERNMENT HOUSING RETROFIT PROGRAMME

The Forum received a presentation from Dominic Millen (Traffic and Transportation) on the Government's new Housing Retrofit Programme. Copies of the slides are attached to the agenda and on request from the Committee Secretary.

1. Presentation on the Government Housing Retrofit Programme

Dominic Millen highlighted the following from his presentation:

- The Council had recently agreed a Climate Action Plan working with a range of partners. It was planned that the Council be a carbon neutral organisation by 2030 and for Enfield to be a carbon neutral borough by 2040.
- Retrofit was an important part of the plan as it would make properties more energy efficient and so reduce carbon emissions.
- Retrofit enabled changes to a building including the main fabric, heating sources and energy generation, each had different levels of impact and costs.
- The Green Homes Grant was £2 billion worth of funding, in the form of vouchers, from Government to enable individuals to carry out retrofitting measures. This could include loft installations, low carbon heat pumps, double glazing and draft proofing. All improvements must be completed by 31 March 2021.
- The barriers to the scheme included understanding eligibility, being aware that measures were not suitable to all properties, the availability of contractors, the need to make people aware of the scheme, the short timescales and the need to provide top up costs.
- Representatives from civic groups would have a role to play in encouraging uptake.
- For people on low incomes the Enfield Fuel Poverty Scheme was an existing scheme for vulnerable Enfield residents which provided energy advice and minor home improvements and could help people access Government funds. They would undertake home visits and carry out outreach events.
- Addressing fuel poverty could have a real impact on health.

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2. Questions/Comments from Members

- 2.1 People on very low incomes would not have to contribute to take part in the scheme. This message needed to be targeted at those people. The Council already had information on households in fuel poverty and those on low incomes so would be focusing any local communications about the scheme on them.
- 2.2 There was a national publicity campaign being delivered by the Government. This should cover voluntary groups including citizens advice bureaux in contact with vulnerable, hard to reach groups.
- 2.3 There was continuing work to reduce energy use in Council buildings including the civic centre, particularly while they are being used less. As part of this the Council was looking to run systems differently and more efficiently.

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- 4 Central control of school boilers ceased 4 years ago. All schools now had control over their own heating systems.
- 5 Some concern was expressed about the possibility that the scheme, if inappropriate interventions were carried out, would result in damage to heritage properties. Individuals would be able to apply to the scheme but if the works require planning permission this would still be required. Green assessors would need to be made aware of this aspect.
- 6 It was felt that some extra protections needed to be put in place for conservation areas and heritage properties. This was an issue that the Conservation Advisory Group could have been involved in.
- 7 It could be useful if people could write to the Government to make them aware of the problem from a heritage point of view. It was important to flag up the issue of potential problems in advance

The summing up by the Chair that communication was important and would be worked on to ensure that everyone including the most vulnerable were made aware of the scheme. It was essential to address fuel poverty and put in place actions to mitigate climate change.

5. FUTURE LANDSCAPE OF PLANNING

The panel received a presentation from Sarah Cary (Executive Director Place) on the future landscape of planning. Copies of the presentation slides are attached to the agenda and are available on request from the Committee Secretary.

1. Presentation on changes to the planning landscape

Sarah Cary highlighted the following from her presentation:

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- The changes set out were being proposed by the Government which she was reporting, not promoting. She would encourage as many people as possible to respond to the Government consultations which could be found on the Council website. The Council would also be making its own response.
- There were three types of changes, recently introduced, proposals for the current system and radical reform.
- The proposed changes to the current system were subject to legal challenge. They had been bought in as a result of the pandemic to stimulate the regeneration of town centres and encourage house building through amending general permitted development rights.
- The new general permitted development rights would give new rights to demolish free standing buildings to rebuild as homes and a right to extend upwards to create additional stories on existing buildings.
- These would be major changes and would change the look and feel of Enfield. The permitted development rights would apply in most places, but not conservation areas.
- The changes in use classes could be positive in that they would provide greater flexibility for business, help town centres evolve to meet new needs but they could also result in a loss of office and retail space, impact on the availability of strategic industrial land and place greater burdens on licensing authorities.
- The day before the meeting, new requirements had been bought in setting new space standards for residential buildings.
- It was proposed that they would make changes to the standard method for calculating the number of houses needed in an area. This would mean that the current cap would be lifted and more first homes but less affordable homes would be built. It could increase the number of extra homes for Enfield from 1,400 in the current draft local plan to 2,000 a year. This was a substantial increase.
- First homes were not necessarily affordable. They would mainly benefit wealthier households.
- The proposal to lift the threshold on schemes which required a proportion of affordable housing, would result in less affordable housing.
- Radical changes to the planning system were set out in the Planning White Paper, recently published by the Government. The paper contained a set of high level ideas to stimulate debate and responses. The stated aim was to simplify planning and speed up the plan making process. Plans would become more visual and use the latest digital technology.
- There were proposals to divide all areas into three zones: growth areas, renewal areas and protected areas.
- The Government hoped to involve more people at the plan making stage but not at the level of individual applications.
- They wanted to be able to agree new local plans in 2.5 years, rather than the current 5 or more.

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- There was a lot of focus on improving design and having national design standards.
- If enacted, these proposals would have an extensive impact on Enfield. It was difficult to see how they would work well in urban environments.
- There was an implied reduction in the amount of member involvement in the planning process.
- There was a lot of focus on housing, but not much on other areas and very little about biodiversity.
- The Government have said that they want to hear people's views so members were encouraged to feed their responses into the consultation.

2. Questions and Comments

- 2.1 The new space requirements were for a minimum of 37 square metres of floor space per property. These standards would still mean very small housing units were allowed but were welcomed as a step in the right direction. Converting office buildings to housing would still be subject to regulations but they would not require planning permission.
- 2.2 The radical proposals would result in taking powers to make decisions on local applications from local planning committees and could dent local democratic processes.
- 2.3 Councils were currently in the process of putting together their own local plans based on the Mayor's London Plan, but these new proposals would seem to change the rules. It was unclear how Councils should proceed. There were many constraints on land, so it was difficult to see where the extra new houses could be accommodated.
- 2.4 The changes could make things more confusing and less efficient.
- 2.5 Changes to the current system were temporary for 18 months, but these could easily be extended.
- 2.6 Now, most housing schemes require affordable housing. These proposals would raise the threshold so that the requirement would only apply to larger schemes. Most schemes in Enfield were small scale, so would not have needed to provide affordable housing.
- 2.7 The changes to affordable housing requirements went against current Government policy.
- 2.8 First homes in London would not be affordable.
- 2.9 The Government has said that it intends to move quickly on these reforms and a draft on the changes to the current system could be ready by Christmas.
- 2.10 Deciding which zone areas would fall into would be decided through the plan making process. They would seek to increase public engagement in this, envisaging a three-stage collaborative process with local workshops. It was not yet clear how this would be done but the Council was looking at international case studies and digital requirements. There would be a need for increased resources to manage the processes.

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- 2.11 In response to the question as to how the local authority would get the everyday public to engage, this would require additional funding. Planning budgets had been shrinking and were very dependent on planning fees. The digital tools required do not currently exist.

Councillor Chibah thanked Sarah Cary for her comprehensive and informative presentation and encouraged people to respond to the consultation. There were deep concerns about the implications for our existing democratic structures.

6. MINUTES FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 18 AUGUST 2020

The minutes from the meeting held on 18 August 2020 were received and agreed as a correct record.

7. REVIEW OF WORK PROGRAMME 2020/21

The forum noted the revised work programme for 2020/21 with the following amendments:

- The item on the Fair Trade Borough would be scheduled for discussion at the meeting to be held on the 16 February 2021.
- The discussion on the public realm improvements would include the consultation on the Fox Lane low traffic neighbourhood which was opening on 12 October 2020, and the trial in the Bowes area.
- A request had been received to consider the planning application for 100 Church Street, the former Metaswitch building, on the 27 October which was being considered taking account of the new referral procedure.
- A representative from the Friends of Whitewebbs Park would be invited to the meeting on 25 November 2020 where discussion on proposals for Whitewebbs was scheduled.

8. DISCUSSION OF PLANNING APPLICATIONS AND OTHER PLANNING POLICIES

The forum received and noted the new procedure for the referral of major planning applications for discussion at future meetings of the forum. This had been circulated as a “to follow” to the agenda.

NOTED

1. The procedure would be included on all future agendas.
2. Dennis Stacey reported that he had had a discussion with Christine White and Andy Higham about the future of the former Conservation Advisory Group and how best to maintain the input on planning

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applications with conservation implications from local conservation groups. He and John West would be meeting with Bridgit Pereira (Conservation Officer) on a monthly basis to discuss these applications. Larger applications would need a full public airing and he welcomed the new procedure which would enable this.

9. MEMBERSHIP REVIEW

NOTED

1. Councillor Katherine Chibah as the Chair of the Forum had received advice from Jeremy Chambers (Director of Law and Governance) on how to widen the forum membership to enable more representatives from more environmental groups to be involved. She had been approached by several groups asking if they could become members.
2. The Monitoring Officer had advised that this could best be done at Annual Council next May. Before then a transparent process to select groups for inclusion in the forum would be put in place.
3. In the meantime, the Chair had discretion to invite representatives from other groups and would always be happy to consider requests to speak and present to the forum.
4. The three groups who had had representatives on the former Conservation Advisory Group had been invited to send representatives to meetings and they had been attending. The formal membership however had not changed.
5. Errors had been pointed out at Annual Council and it was regretted that the membership had not been looked at in more detail previously.
6. Officers were working with IT to find a solution to the problem of not being able to fully involve members with outside email addresses in Live Events meetings. It was hoped that this could be resolved soon.
7. The suggestion was made that the meeting could be held as a basic teams meeting. This would be investigated.

10. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Forum noted the dates agreed for future meetings:

- Tuesday 27 October 2020
- Wednesday 25 November 2020
- Thursday 10 December 2020
- Wednesday 13 January 2021
- Tuesday 16 February 2021
- Tuesday 30 March 2021
- Wednesday 28 April 2021