

Harrow Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Forum Environment & Sustainability Subgroup meeting

Notes from 3rd meeting, held on Wednesday 24 January 2018 at 3.00pm
at Young Harrow Foundation, Christ the Redeemer College, 23 Village Way East, HA2 7LX.

Attendees

Mick Oliver	Harrow University of the Third Age (Sustainability Group) – Acting Chair
Marion Garner Patel	Harrow University of the Third Age (Sustainability Group)
Gerry Devine	Harrow VCS Forum Vice-Chair, Harrow Community Transport
Steve Bolsover	Harrow Nature Conservation Forum
Swan Kazi	Harrow Parks Forum
Jane Galbraith	Harrow Parks Forum
Jane Skelly	Harrow Friends of the Earth
Judy Walker	Harrow in Leaf
Linda Robinson	38 Degrees Local Harrow Group - Notetaker

Paul Nichols Harrow Council, Divisional Director of Regeneration, Enterprise and Planning

Apologies

Pamela Swain	Harrow Friends of the Earth
Kathy Westhead	Harrow University of the Third Age (Sustainability Group)
Phil Bryson	Harrow Green Drinks

1. **Welcome** by Acting Chair, Mick, and **Introductions** all round – Thanks to Paul for attending to answer members' questions on Harrow's Regeneration and Planning:
2. **Notes from the last meeting** no corrections requested. Some actions since followed up by Cllr Graham Henson and circulated. Still awaiting some answers from him.
Action:
Mick to chase promised follow-up from Graham on outstanding questions re air quality and recycling issues.

3. **Questions and Answers**

3.1 **What is Harrow Council's official position on the latest proposals for the expansion of Heathrow Airport? At one time it was opposed to a third runway and then it came out in favour. Is the council submitting an official response to the latest consultation?**

(question from Harrow U3A Sustainability Group)

Paul's answer: Council Leader changes led to U-turn on official stance. Unlike other West London authorities, Harrow now supporting expansion in hope of economic gains for businesses and more jobs. Responsible officer (Hanif Islam) under Transport Planning in the Community Directorate, not Paul's Regeneration division. Unaware of current consultation or of any planned response to it from Harrow Council.

Comments / Concerns / Suggestions:

Documents available for inspection throughout the consultation period (until 28 March) at the Civic Centre itself (www.heathrowconsultation.com).

General expressions of opposition to increased air traffic capacity anywhere in UK.

Calls for very generous financial settlement to Harrow as compensation for extra pollution, disruption, noise, congestion etc. should third runway at Heathrow ever go ahead.

Proposed changes to actual flight paths unknown until next round of consultation.

3.2 **Are there any buildings in Harrow which have been found not to comply with fire safety regulations subsequent to the Grenfell Tower tragedy? If so, what action does the council intend to take?**

(question from Harrow U3A Sustainability Group)

Paul's answer: All council owned property checked and found to be unaffected; luckily no tall tower blocks. Council trying to put together database of any buildings at risk, despite gaps in access to information about materials used in construction of privately owned buildings because of market competition for building control work. Grenfell-like cladding at Bradstowe House known to have failed post-Grenfell flammability tests; London Fire Brigade cooperating on action plan to leave its cladding in place and take other measures to reduce risk. Bradstowe House's US owners, Greystar, taking very seriously and will review.

Comments / Concerns / Suggestions:

Regulations have now changed, so new buildings will be safer.

3.3 How robust is Harrow's enforcement of building regulations to ensure that uncontrolled 'beds-in-sheds' and other developments are not being built with, for example, misconnections of foul waste water into the borough's water courses?

(question from Harrow Friends of the Earth/Harrow Nature Conservation Forum)

Paul's answer: No council control at all over illegal bed-in-sheds unless discovered, so very problematic for enforcement – not only re waste pipes but many other overcrowding and safety issues too. Reliant on public reporting non-compliant building works to planning department. Beds-in-sheds reports always followed up. Enforcement staffing reduced to save costs, but now back up to four permanent enforcement officers and still seeking one more. Long delays in receiving council's share of any fines from prosecutions.

Comments / Concerns / Suggestions:

Prosecutions also by Thames Water and the Environment Agency for polluting waterways. Rules against paving over entire front gardens being breached, increasing flood risk by depositing deceptive, cosmetic soil on top of impermeable concrete base.

Action:

Marion to send Paul details of suspected non-compliant building in Kingsfield Avenue.

3.4 Do you expect all decisions at tonight's Planning Committee meeting to follow the usual pattern of approving your officers' recommendations, with any objections being overcome by a party politically split majority in favour of proposed dense developments?

(question from Harrow Friends of the Earth)

Paul's answer: Majority approval usually expected for officers' recommendations. Otherwise indicates worryingly different policy interpretations.

Comments / Concerns / Suggestions:

At least five Subgroup members attending tonight to support residents' objections to Persimmon Homes' latest intensification proposals for Harrow View West.

Ruling administration's majority vote for approval expected as usual.

3.5 How confident are you that Harrow will be able to cope with its ever expanding population - its need for more traffic, more sewerage and waste disposal, more utilities and facilities?

(question from Harrow Green Drinks)

Paul's answer: Population increase linked to wider housing crisis, overcrowded homes, construction of smaller homes, immigration and natural growth. Traffic needs being addressed in new London Plan. High density development concentrated in opportunity areas near transport hubs to reduce traffic and parking needs. Council working with Harrow Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to address shortage of GP surgeries, but very slow and difficult. CCG has 'hub' strategy for primary care needs. For energy demand, active council support for 'combined heat and power' (CHP) plants to serve new developments, including Harrow View East site incorporating original Kodak chimney and possibly one separate CHP centre at council's Forward Drive depot.

Comments / Concerns / Suggestions:

Members grateful to Harrow Council for resisting housing development on Green Belt. Harrow U3A submitting comments to the [new London Plan](#) consultation.

Existing transport links not sufficient for proposed higher densities in Harrow View West.

Stories of sewage pipe bursts affecting parks and open spaces. Specific alarm bells from some green groups in advance historically ignored by council, developers and water companies alike, only to be proved right by leaks from inadequate sewerage infrastructure.

Not much public awareness that rainwater harvesting can qualify for water rates discount.

Grey water re-use no longer much favoured in new build blocks following infection scares. Residents in blocks of flats unable to recycle waste as effectively as those in houses.

3.6 *Of all the thousands of new residential properties in the pipeline for Harrow, **what sort of percentage do you envisage will be purchased by foreign investors?***

(question from Harrow Green Drinks)

Paul's answer: Estimate of 5 to 10 per cent of new builds in outer London boroughs, not as alarmingly high as in more central ones. Problem being addressed by London Mayor's plans to penalise owners of homes left empty. Harrow Leader's aim to prioritise housing Harrow people. Council's own 'build-to-rent' plans to give more control over allocation to locals.

Comments / Concerns / Suggestions:

'Compulsory renting' scheme in Oxford forcing owners to let out empty properties. Like many London boroughs, Paul and other Harrow Council delegates to attend MIPIM (Marché International des Professionnels d'Immobilier) in Cannes, as opportunity to connect with many big players at once - developers, contractors, housing associations etc. Subgroup members recommend attending Ecobuild in London too.

Actions:

Jane G to send details of Oxford's compulsory renting scheme to Paul.

Paul to investigate and consider sending a Harrow contingent to Ecobuild.

3.7 *Our group has identified housing as one of its most pressing local issues to address – its poor quality and unaffordability. **Will Harrow be signing up to the GLA's much publicised Rogue Landlord Checker scheme** to help prospective renters avoid private landlords and letting agents who have been prosecuted for housing offences?*

(question from Harrow 38 Degrees Local Group)

Paul's answer: Asked Richard Le-Brun, believed to be officer responsible. Seems like an initiative Harrow should be supporting.

Action:

Paul to pass on Richard's response to Subgroup (via [Mick](#)).

3.8 **What is the legal position about building blocks of flats in parks in Greater London** (as proposed at the Byron Quarter 3rd Consultation)?

(The follow up is that we think it would be in contravention of the Open Spaces Act 1967:

http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukla/1967/29/pdfs/ukla_19670029_en.pdf

Furthermore the same may apply to Byron Hall.)

Harrow Parks Forum believes that the calculations done by the Regeneration Unit to show how much Designated Open Space in Byron Recreation Ground would be lost under the Byron Quarter proposals is deeply flawed. We have estimated the amount of designated open space that would be lost to be about 5,255 square metres or about 6.6% of the designated open space in Byron Recreation Ground. (NOT 1.8% as claimed in Consultation Board 11).

(question from Harrow Parks Forum)

Paul's answer: Thanks for bringing attention to the legalities. Aware of conflict with Harrow's own Open Space Strategy, but Open Spaces Act not checked before as not part of planning legislation. Planning law may trump open spaces law. Improved leisure facilities necessitate building in the park. Consensus reached by park users. Both bowls clubs happy with plans for relocation. New London Plan to help protect parks in future.

Comments / Concerns / Suggestions:

No consensus recognised among park users.

Grateful for offer of hard surfaces for play/sports on new Leisure Centre roof.

Subgroup members generally opposed to loss of green space in parks.

Reduce footprint of new leisure facilities to save park.

No particular need for Byron Hall's function to be replaced at this specific site; not ideally accessible – could go elsewhere in Harrow.

Should Byron Hall be classed as commercial premises, not leisure, for planning purposes?

Alternative re-provision of indoor bowls suggested, underneath relocated gymnastics school, but concerns re child safety and lack of sunlight.

Opposition councillors promising no tower blocks in parks, so what contingency if plans blocked by new administration after May's local election? None!

Planning application to be submitted imminently, then three weeks to comment. Probable delay reaching Planning Committee due to local election purdah, possible committee changes.

Actions:

Paul to check with Legal Department and revert to Subgroup (via [Mick](#)) with response, including Open Spaces Act and correct classification of Byron Hall as leisure, commercial or other category.

Swan to investigate the possibility of Harrow Parks Forum running a workshop on 'Fields in Trust' Deeds of Dedication.

3.9 To enable a more accurate calculation:

Please could you provide the following information, as requested in Jane Galbraith's email to Alison Mayer of 22nd December?

Namely:

- a) the area of currently designated open space within Byron Recreation Ground that would be built upon,
- b) the area of the new open spaces that would be created within Byron Recreation Ground,
- c) and the total area of the pocket parks that would be formed outside Byron Recreation Ground.
- d) Finally could you tell us the total area of designated open space within Byron Recreation Ground currently ... NOT including the cemetery or the Belmont Trail.?

(question from Harrow Parks Forum)

Paul's answer: Answers received from Alison Mayer: a) 8417 m², b) 3984 m², c) 2263 m², d) (as per consultation board) 123,900 m².

Comments / Concerns / Suggestions:

Loss of over 4,000m² by Jane's calculation.

Council's calculations disingenuous, e.g. manipulated by disguising 'pocket parks' (expected anyway) and replacement of existing unprotected green space (outside the park) as newly created compensation for the loss of park area.

Council's official percentage loss therefore misleading at 1.8%.

Harrow Parks Forum calculation 5.6% loss of park's open space.

3.10 What guarantee is there that the dominance of the car in Harrow will not result in traffic congestion and air quality levels approaching those of Mexico City, Bangkok or Delhi when the regeneration programme is complete?

(The intensification of residential development in many areas of Harrow, particularly the town centre and former Kodak site, is largely predicated on negligible additional car usage. It also seems to be assumed that there will be little new public transport infrastructure apart from step free access at Harrow-on-the-Hill station, plus what can only be described as tweaking of the bus, cycling and walking networks. So there's no incentive to abandon the car as main mode of transport for suburban journeys). (question from Harrow Community Transport)

Paul's answer: No guarantee, but policies are trying to reduce reliance on cars. Restrictions as the stick, more infrastructure to be the carrot, but slow progress.

Comments / Concerns / Suggestions:

Calls for more 20mph zones, more off road parking, more car clubs.

4. Other matters discussed

4.1 Kenton Recreation Ground. Council built bus park, against regulations. If unchallenged, possible future change of use, e.g. to school. Paul unaware, guessing temporary consent granted as used in Alexandra Park for circus.

Action:

Paul to find out about permission for bus park in Kenton Rec and explain to Subgroup (via [Mick](#)).

5. Next meeting – Transport for London or housing department mentioned as possible targets/topics for questions. Details to be confirmed.