

NORTH EDGBASTON WARD MEETING NOTES

WARD: North Edgbaston	DATE: 14 th November 2023
VIRTUAL: via Teams	START/FINISH TIMES: 6.30pm – 8pm
COUNCILLORS Marcus Bernasconi & Sharon Thompson	NOs OF ATTENDEES: 19
OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE: Deborah Cadman, Chief Executive, Birmingham City Council Pat Whyte, Community Development & Support Officer Kay Thomas, Community Governance Manager	VISITING SPEAKER: Barry Walker, BRSK

CURRENT WARD ACTION PLAN PRIORITIES:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cleaner North Edgbaston 2. Greener North Edgbaston 3. Safer North Edgbaston 4. Inclusive North Edgbaston

MATTERS DISCUSSED AT THE MEETING INCLUDING LOCAL CONCERNS:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome & Notice of Recording Councillor Bernasconi welcomed all to the meeting and advised residents participating/listening to the on-line meeting that a recording of the meeting would be available for future reference on the Council's You Tube channel. 2. Q & A with Deborah Cadman, Chief Executive, Birmingham City Council Following introductions the Chief Executive outlined the following main areas – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Current financial situation facing BCC & explained how challenges were being dealt with - The challenges had made the council more creative and innovative, but the city was still 'open for business.' - The challenges were not being underplayed but assurance given that Birmingham was still functioning.

- Commissioners had been appointed and were working collaboratively with BCC on the way forward.
- The introduction of Job Evaluation, working with trades unions, to stem equal pay liability and deliver equality for all staff.
- Commissioners also working on governance, service issues, waste.
- Significant savings & transformation required to deliver balanced budget. Organisation would be leaner & smaller.
- Savings would be made with following principals in mind –
- Protection for most vulnerable (statutory duty to deliver for children/elderly); bins would still be collected; any changes undertaken with local people; critical services for assistance would continue; non-essential spending halted; every item of expenditure reviewed; improvement plan to be delivered within 6 months

Residents then asked the following questions and responses were provided –

- Q - Oracle, was it fit for purpose? A – the system had not been ready for implementation, processes and training had not been in place. Oracle & BCC were committed to fixing the issues and working closely to move to compliance by end of year, then through the following 12 months to full implementation.
- Q - Press suggested 3 ways to make savings – Sell assets, cut services, increase council tax? A – Services – lot of duplication, so would work to deliver greater effectiveness/efficiency. Services would be redesigned, looking at BCC owned companies and services that could be better delivered by private/voluntary sector. The size of the organisation would reduce alongside a reduced workforce. Assets – BCC was asset rich therefore must sell 'right' assets, no 'fire sale of heritage/cultural assets and some assets needed to be retained due to income generated for the council. Discussions re sales ongoing with Commissioners. Council tax – government would require an increase but as the council tax base in Birmingham was low an increase would not generate substantial income.
- Q – Edgbaston Reservoir Master Plan – concern in community around non-involvement of LNR Management Committee as vehicle through which residents could be involved to shape development of the site. Involvement had been assured by planning officers when the Master Plan was adopted. The LNR Management Committee had not met, emails had not been answered and it had not been included as a stakeholder in discussions or implementation of plans. A – Concern acknowledged and Chief Executive to take query away and provide response via councillors. Councillor Bernasconi added concern at inability to consult with community stakeholders. The LNR Management Committee should be a key partner engaged in the process.
- Q – around Shared Prosperity Fund awarded to Collective Arts Organisation in July, but funding still not received. Work had started on basis of awarded funding and information those activities had to be delivered by 2024. A – Shared Prosperity Fund was a WMCA responsibility, but Chief Executive undertook to investigate and respond.
- Q – plea for Mobile Household Recycling Centres to be retained.

- Q – figures involved in savings seemed to create an impossible situation and considerable concern for the future of services, assets etc. Meeting was being told about an efficient/lean organisation, but this transformation was extremely worrying despite the optimism voiced by the Chief Executive. A – the seriousness of the situation and the challenges faced were known and a rosy picture was not being painted. Work to fix those challenges was underway. Figures on equal pay were a potential liability but had to be accommodated and the Job Evaluation Scheme and redesign was being implemented to deliver a smaller/leaner organisation that would hopefully see BCC in a better place.

3. BRSK – Telegraph Poles

Councillor Bernasconi advised of residents concerns in relation to the roll out of BRSK broadband and installation of telegraph poles. Councillors had met with BRSK re those concerns and had received an apology/feedback on management so far.

Barry Walker, BRSK, outlined work undertaken so far, engagement with residents and improvements/what could be further improved. He made the following main points –

- Current infrastructure in place was outdated so BRSK was offering an upgraded service via full fibre.
- Majority of roll out utilised existing BT infrastructure either via underground ducts or telegraph poles.
- Telegraph poles used to deploy at speed and minimise disruption. There was agreement with BT to do this.
- Under Ofcom regulations any provider could do this, network was not exclusive to BRSK.
- Service offered was more competitively priced, no mid-contract price rises. Service used in schools, community centres etc not just private homes.
- In response to question re concern around reason for the installation of poles, meeting advised other providers could also do the same and were under no obligation to have a local conversation provided a permit from the relevant local authority was in place. BRSK had engaged locally.
- Re use of existing infrastructure, in terraced properties ducting was not always direct to each house so there was no direct connection, therefore poles were installed as the most straightforward option. It was not a cheaper or easier option. Other services with underground ducting/pipework also had to be taken into consideration.

Residents asked questions and the following responses were provided –

- Re installation of a pole adjacent to Magdalene Court Grade II listed building – concerns had been noted and a pole would no longer be installed at that location.
- Concerns had been heard regarding the locality of some poles and therefore would also not be installed near Perrott's Folly
- Overall position of future poles difficult to determine as dependant on existing infrastructure & types of housing but several have been put on hold in response to concerns from residents. Assurance given that there would be no build without consultation with residents.

- Attempts had been made to arrange a meeting with Preet Gill MP and her response was awaited. Councillor Bernasconi undertook to feedback and arrange meeting.
- Re Monument Road poles – 2 poles referenced had been taken out of the design.
- Carlyle Road poles already installed despite resident's objections & 5G mast also put up without consultation. Meeting advised Carlyle Rd infrastructure was buried in the ground so poles had to be utilised, but homes had been taken into account and attempts made not to obscure views etc. Acts/regulations in place allowing permitted development rights to telecom providers had been followed.
- Perrott's Folly pole had been removed following campaign that also uncovered residents who had been impacted by the poles. Research found poles should only be used as last resort where other infrastructure was not in place. Virgin cable was available in the area. Query regarding survey work, engagement to ascertain desire for BRSK broadband and adherence to legislation.
- Meeting advised survey work undertaken before work commenced. Copper ducting could only cope with certain amount of traffic and degraded over time. Fibre optics provide better quality connection/lasted longer. BRSK operated within existing legislation.

Councillor Thompson advised local councillors did not have jurisdiction over legislation, but Preet Gill had written to Michael Gove asking questions re this particular scheme/legislation/loopholes. She raised concerns re previous assurances given by BRSK that had not been honoured and lack of engagement but welcomed the assurances given at this meeting.

Barry Walker advised new members of staff had been appointed to deal with community engagement and there would be contact with residents regarding poles, moving forward. A commitment was given to a letter drop with relevant information and more direct conversations with residents through direct engagement from the team. It was noted that engagement was not compulsory under the legislation but any resident not receiving the required service should contact him via the councillors.

Questions that had been put in the chat to be referred to Barry for response.

** The following questions had been asked in the chat box during the meeting and the responses provided by Barry Walker after the meeting –

- Q - According to BRSK website a lot of the ward is not able to access this? A - Currently our focus is on the Reservoir area, however the plan is to extend the build further into Edgbaston, Ladywood, Woodbourne & Rotten Park, these areas will encompass the remainder of the ward.
- Q - Re Magdalene Court – there is no access to any full fibre networks. A - This is correct, we are currently looking at ways we can service Magdalene Court. I am happy to share our proposals once this has been agreed.
- Q - BRSK built poles within the 30-day period – that is a breach of legislation. A - I am not aware of BRSK building poles within a 30 day notice period. The permits we apply for are only ever a Standard Permit, the cost of which is a maximum of £104.

- Q - Legislation suggests poles are used as a last resort and where there are no alternative options. We have 2 alternative fibre broadband providers. Why was BRSK invited to work in the area. A -Whilst I appreciate there are other providers within the area, I strongly support the need for competition to improve service and drive costs down.
- Q - Why can't existing underground BT Open Reach infrastructure be used. A - The majority of BRSK build utilises the Openreach existing network of underground duct or poles. In some instances, infrastructure does not exist for us to utilise or it is full to capacity, hence the need for an alternative.
- Q - Letter drop did not happen. None in Carlyle Road except no. 23 A - The residents that would be affected by the poles were notified.
- Q - Despite most people objecting to the telegraph poles you are continuing regardless to install poles. A - I don't believe most people are objecting to poles and since attending this meeting I have been contacted by residents that don't object to poles if it means they can get a better, more reliable & faster connection.
- Q - Poles are very unsightly, inappropriate for the area. A - I take onboard your opinion.

4. Councillor Updates

a) WhatsApp Group – Councillor Bernasconi promoted the ward WhatsApp group as a way of finding out information/updates from the councillors

b) North Edgbaston Christmas Appeal – information provided re scheme which launched start of November to fund raise for Winter food boxes for the vulnerable. So far £1200+ had been raised.

c) Neighbour Night 6 December 6pm – packing food boxes for above appeal and would be joined by Lord Mayor.

d) Summerfield Park – Councillor Thompson referred to traveller encampments on the Park and ASB around the Reservoir. This had been reported to the Chief Executive and her team with a request for a sustainable solution to prevent caravans gaining access. Response to be shared at the next meeting.

AOB – Police meeting, Summerfield Police Station 15th November 6pm.

ACTIONS/ RECOMMENDATIONS MADE	WHO	BY WHEN
1. Permission to pass on email addresses to	1. Cllr Thompson	2. asap
2. BRSK – questions in chat to be forwarded to Barry Walker	2. Kay Thomas	
3. BRSK – meeting with Preet Gill M.P.	3. Cllr Bernasconi	