

Questions for Full Council Monday 15th June, 2020

Question 1

Cllr. Duffy to Cllr. Hallam.

Does the portfolio for the Environment agree with me that the tree policy needs to be amended to include lopping because of the nuisance caused to residents when trees that are too near to housing.

Response

Northampton Borough Councils tree policy includes a section to keep clear houses and brick built structures such as garages by two metres, this is beyond any legal requirements. This requirement is also part of our current environmental services contract specification with Veolia, and is included in the Trees frequently asked questions sheet point two (Trees FAQ Sheet, attached for reference).

Cllr M Hallam
Cabinet Member for Environment

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Question 2

Cllr. Duffy to Cllr. King

With the advent of West Northants Unitary and the importance of local voices should we be working with RAs and community groups to encourage them to Zoom?

Response

We have resumed our community neighbourhood working groups, community safety meetings and several of our meetings with our partners and our community and voluntary groups. i.e. our youth providers meeting, Pride partner meeting, youth forum, park management committees etc. All have been established using the zoom platform. If there are any groups that require further support or are finding the platform a barrier to engagement, we would be happy to provide support.

Cllr A King

Cabinet Member for Community Engagement & Community Safety

Questions for Full Council Monday 15th June, 2020

Question 3

Cllr. Duffy to Cllr. King.

THORPLANDS is suffering from rising violent crime and there are no cctv to assist police. Why is the town centre covered by cctv but there is none in the Eastern district- I am told there is a data protection issues but cctv is vital for good policing.

Response

Tackling Violent Crime is a key priority for the community safety partnership and across the Borough. Northampton Borough Council is working closely with the police and partners to deliver a range of initiatives. We adopt a problem-solving approach in our higher crime areas and look at what longer term solutions can be put in place, whilst CCTV plays an important role in tackling crime, additional CCTV coverage on the East of the Town is not something that the Police have put forward as a solution to tackling the violent crime issues that are taking place.

The Surveillance Camera Commissioner introduced new standards around protecting the public privacy and all Councils. CCTV operators have had to check all their cameras to confirm they were compliant with the revised standards "Privacy for the Public Impact Requirements"

The Council reviewed its aging stock and found several CCTV cameras failed to meet the new privacy standards and therefore they had to be switched off. These included two at the Thorplands shops. However, as part of the housing redevelopment in the area two new cameras were purchased and operational monitoring of the shopping areas and building site has been put in place.

Cllr A King

Cabinet Member for Community Engagement & Community Safety

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Question 4

Cllr. Birch to Cllr. King.

As we start to emerge from Lockdown we have to assess the changing needs of our residents and communities. What continuing support is there for local voluntary organisations and all the new volunteers whose work will be even more vital? .

Response

We have had over 600 individual volunteers and 126 groups register to support the work of the community resilience cell in Northampton. Regular liaison with these groups has been in place from the outset and a decision to match volunteers to the groups, to strengthen our community and voluntary groups was taken early in the process.

As part of the community resilience work, a recovery plan is being developed, A questionnaire has gone out to the groups/volunteers to establish their experiences and future needs. Working closely with the local infrastructure organisations, including Voluntary Impact Northamptonshire, Northampton Community Foundation and ACRE, we will ensure that the appropriate support is in place for these groups, we are aware that many of the new groups want to continue and the local infrastructure organisations are working with them to ensure they have the appropriate governance and support arrangements in place going forward.

Cllr A King

Cabinet Member for Community Engagement & Community Safety

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Question 5

Cllr. Ansell to Cllr. Hallam.

Since the government relaxed the rules for members of the public to use public parks, they have become increasingly popular. For example, in the first week after the easing of lockdown restrictions Abington Park, which falls partly within my ward, collected 2.62 tonnes of rubbish, normally, at the busiest time of summer it would be 0.75 tonnes. Many friends and families have come together to meet after months of lockdown bringing with them picnics to enjoy in this much loved premier park.

However, there are no toilet facilities within the 118 acres of parkland causing visitors to urinate inappropriately and unhygienically wherever they can. I understand the lower toilets near the swings were vandalised before lockdown and the ones near the bowling green have sewer problems.

Could the Portfolio Holder please advise me why the lockdown period was not used to carry out maintenance and to undertake repair work on these toilets?

Furthermore, what plans are in place under the present Covid-19 pandemic to make the toilets safe and ready for use when they do open in this current climate?

I understand there will be many complications and restrictions in these uncertain times, nevertheless, toilet facilities are a public necessity. To have no toilet facilities in the town's busiest park brings shame onto this council.

Other authorities, such as Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council, have already opened many of their toilet facilities, albeit for reduced hours. If others can do it for so many, can the Portfolio Holder please explain why Northampton can't for so few?

Response

Thank you very much Cllr Ansell for your support in relation to highlighting the challenges which the recent unprecedented levels of footfall have brought to our parks and I appreciate your time and input into how the Council responds to these challenges.

The lockdown period could not be used to carry out maintenance and undertake repair works as the Parks were closed on Government advice and all non-essential travel was banned.

As part of our preparations for the further easing of restrictions we have worked closely with the other Local Authorities in Northamptonshire so that we continue to be consistent on a Countywide basis. All have kept their Park toilet facilities closed until this weekend and have been closely monitoring. The health and safety of both visitors and staff, and preventing the spread of COVID-19 continues to be our main priority.

Those LAs outside of Northamptonshire that have opened some public toilets are not opening them all and those that are open have reduced opening hours and have to be closed on a regular basis for deep cleaning and sanitisation. Scientific evidence and advice is that urinals cannot currently be used.

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Question 6

Cllr. Ansell to Cllr. Hallam.

Billing Road Cemetery falls within my ward of Abington and has many notable characters of the town's past. One being Caroline Chisholm, who the Catholic Church have proposed to recognise as a Saint for her humanitarian work. Through my councillor empowerment fund, I was pleased to contribute to the restoration of her grave along with attending the rededication service at the cemetery. There have also been past Bishops along with Nuns from the Notre-Dame buried there. Furthermore, there is a beautiful white horse memorial that commemorates numerous members of the Fosset family who had their Circus winter headquarters along the Harlestone Road. It also has 'Commonwealth War Graves' within its grounds.

The Council's grounds maintenance contractor does an excellent job in maintaining the inside area of Billing Road Cemetery, which I commended them for at a recent overview and scrutiny meeting.

However, the hedge bordering the cemetery along Billing Road is an eyesore. Other such hedges in the area, such as that on the frontage of the ON's sports pitches, are far better maintained and are much better in appearance. The state of the hedge does not reflect well on the Council.

The Cemetery hedge looks unkempt and in great need of being trimmed. Also, there is a great deal of other vegetation growing within the hedge adding to its dishevelled appearance.

I believe that the hedge is regarded as shrubbery within our Grounds Maintenance Contract, thereby only being cut back once a year, where in fact it is an ornamental privet hedge.

Advice on the Royal Horticultural Society's web site is that privet hedges should be trimmed two or three times during the growing season. <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?PID=352> Similar advice is found on other such web sites.

Will the Portfolio Holder please:

- Arrange for the Billing Road Cemetery hedge to be trimmed as a matter of urgency before the end of the month?
- Arrange for vegetation that is growing through privet hedge to be cut down to ground level as a matter of urgency before the end of the month?
- Ensure that once removed, the vegetation growing through the privet hedge is treated and eradicated so that it does not return?
- Ensure that the hedge is trimmed at least twice a year throughout the growing season, including at the end of the growing season to maintain a good appearance throughout the winter, in accordance with professional advice, such as that of the Royal Horticultural Society?
- Vary the specification for the maintenance of Billing Road Cemetery hedge, and any other privet hedges across the Borough, in our Grounds Maintenance Contract to ensure that they are considered and maintained as ornamental hedges and not

just as shrubbery, kept free of growth other than privet, and are trimmed at least twice a year during, including at the end of the growing season, in this and future years?

Response

Thank you Cllr Ansell for raising the issues with the Billing Road cemetery hedge. This was previously annually maintained which was recognised as not frequent enough and is now scheduled for twice a year which is in accordance with the professional advice. The other hedges along the road are privately owned and therefore may receive a higher level of maintenance than that provided by the council's contract specification which needs to ensure value for money and a consistent standard.

The two cuts which are scheduled allow for nesting birds and take place in the summer and winter.

The works for this summer are scheduled for week commencing 29th June. The hedge will be checked for nesting birds and some areas of the hedge will need to be left and cut when the birds have left. The team will monitor and cut areas as soon as possible if this occurs.

This winter, the hedge will be cut back hard and a full clearance of any self-set and brambles etc will take place and the areas treated or eco-plugged. This will strengthen the structure of the hedge and improve the appearance for the future. The work undertaken in the winter will appear harsh and it will take 2-3 years for the hedge to grow back to full strength

To vary the specification for the maintenance will obviously attract additional cost although we can survey and review areas on a case by case basis to identify where an ornamental style of management is required to be 'in keeping' with the area. I have asked that this particular hedge is evaluated accordingly.

Cllr M Hallam
Cabinet Member for Environment