

Crawley Borough Council

Minutes of Council-owned Neighbourhood Parades Scrutiny Panel

Thursday, 11 March 2021 at 6.30 pm

Councillors Present:

R A Lanzer (Chair)

M L Ayling, T Lunnon, M Mwangale and D M Peck

Officers Present:

Sue Bader Asset Manager

Karen Hayes Head of Corporate Finance

Adam O'Sullivan Corporate Consultation and Research Officer

Jess Tamplin Democratic Services Support Officer

Also in Attendance:

Councillor P C Smith Cabinet member for Planning and Economic Development

1. Disclosures of Interest & Whipping Declarations

No disclosures of interest or whipping declarations were made.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Council-owned Neighbourhood Parades Scrutiny Panel held on 2 February 2021 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. General Updates and Information

The following updates were given regarding the actions from the previous meeting of the panel on 2 February 2021.

The extent of CCTV coverage at the neighbourhood parades

Panel members noted that this information had been provided by the Head of Community Services and circulated via email.

The publicity/guidance given to shop tenants about how to report crime

It was heard that parade shop tenants were not actively supplied with tailored guidance on how to report crime and anti-social behaviour.

The Chair outlined the reporting process, of which there were several channels:

- Dial 999 if a crime is in the process of taking place.

- Call the police on 101 for all other incidents.
- Contact a local Police Community Support Officer online at <https://www.sussex.police.uk/contact/af/contact-us/>.
- Contact the Council's Community Wardens team 7 days a week between 0800 – 2130hrs on 07884 492324 or at community.wardens@crawley.gov.uk.

The status of plans for a neighbourhood parade in Forge Wood

Following the receipt of information from the Planning Case Officer and Deputy Chief Executive, the Panel heard that the masterplan for Forge Wood included a 'local centre' area comprising of shops with flats above. The area also proposed a multi-use community building, a school, and a health facilities building. The detailed application for the shops and community building was approved under planning application CR/2014/0061/ARM. In terms of the status of the plans, the panel heard that it was believed that the trigger for the commercial units was approaching and that discussions between the developer and the Local Planning Authority may be underway in the near future.

A Panel member requested that the Cabinet member for Planning and Economic Development establish whether the shopping parade will be privately run or Council-owned.

The following information was given in light of the topics explored at the previous meeting of the Panel on 2 February 2021.

Advice/signposting by the Council's Business and Economic Development team

Following previous discussion regarding the extent of business advice offered to parade shop tenants by the Council, the Panel heard that the Economic Development team supports local businesses in a variety of ways including:

- Access to expert information and advice about business rates
- Support with planning and licensing enquiries (for example if a business owner wishes to apply for a change of use to their premises)
- Commercial property search – able to create bespoke reports that show the latest available commercial properties to buy/rent in Crawley
- Grant information – access to the [Small Business Grant Scheme](#)
- Covid-19 Business Support Grants – access to various government [support grants](#) in response to the Coronavirus pandemic
- Signposting/partner organisations – support and information from a variety of local business organisations including Coast to Capital Growth Hub, Chamber of Commerce, etc
- [Inward Investment Programme](#) – supporting businesses looking to invest in or relocate to Crawley.

The Economic Regeneration Manager had confirmed that, recently, the most common enquiries received by the Business and Economic Development team were about business support grants and access to funding, but that only a handful of these enquiries were from parade businesses. It was heard that the team considered there to be very little direct contact with parade tenants, but any queries were generally referred to the Asset team.

It was noted that information about the Business and Economic Development team's offering was not provided to new tenants when taking up a shop lease. The Economic Regeneration Manager had confirmed that the team would be open to contributing to the provision of this information in the future, if so requested by the Panel. The Chair noted that this could be further considered at a future meeting of the Panel.

Further information on Knowsley Council's Management of Council Owned Neighbourhood Shopping Parades Policy

In light of the Panel's previous discussion, Knowsley Council's Senior Estate Surveyor had been contacted to provide further details on the 2011 scrutiny review. The following information was relayed to the panel:

- The occupancy rate of parade shop units in Knowsley was very high.
- The review was undertaken due to concerns around crime and community safety, as well as public health issues such as high levels of gambling addiction, obesity, and usage of tanning beds. As a result the Council did not grant new leases or changes of use to bookmakers or premises with tanning beds. As a whole this policy was deemed to have generated positive results.
- When assessing offers made on vacant units, a scoring process was used to determine potential strengths and weaknesses of the businesses. It was heard that the Council may accept a lower offer from a business deemed to have high community value, in favour of a higher offer from a business deemed to have low community value.
- Knowsley Council's lease calculations are based on market rent.

Panel members discussed the information received and sought clarification from the Asset Manager regarding the property letting process. The Asset Manager confirmed that Crawley Borough Council had a similar approach to Knowsley Council regarding the need to seek a balance between community value and rate of offer when letting a unit. The Panel also noted that public health issues in Knowsley were not as prevalent in Crawley.

Actions:

- That the Cabinet member for Planning and Economic Development be asked to investigate whether the proposed neighbourhood shopping parade at Forge Wood will be privately run or Council-owned.

4. CBC Online Business Directory Update

Panel members received a relevant update regarding two new webpages on the Crawley Borough Council website.

The 'It's Local' business directory (www.itslocalcrawley.co.uk) was created in January 2021 and listed details of local businesses and services throughout the borough. It was heard that the directory was publicised via the Council's social media channels.

The Communications team had also specifically approached parade tenants with an invitation to provide information about their business for a neighbourhood shops webpage (www.crawley.gov.uk/culture/shopping/neighbourhood-shops). The Panel noted that communication with the tenants was difficult, on occasion, due to national Covid-19 restrictions; however it was assured that tenants would be approached again after restrictions were due to ease. It was also heard that business owners were appreciative of the publicity offered via this webpage.

Panel members discussed the content of the webpages and the channels through which the webpages could be further publicised.

Actions:

- That the Council's Communications team be asked to monitor engagement with the It's Local directory and 'Neighbourhood Shops' web page (such as number of hits).
- That all councillors be updated via the Councillors' Information Bulletin regarding both the directory and the web page, and be encouraged to publicise them.
- That it be explored as to whether the directory and the web page can be publicised via Crawley Live magazine or the community noticeboards across the borough.

5. Public Consultation Arrangements

Panel members discussed the draft consultation questions (appendix A to the agenda). It was agreed that there would be two strands of consultation; one for parade tenants, and one for all Crawley residents.

Following advice from the Corporate Consultation and Research Officer, the Panel agreed that, rather than open questions, closed questions with pre-set answers may encourage a greater number of responses. It was agreed that the majority of questions would be closed with an option for the respondent to provide further details if desired. It was also agreed that recent and current consultations should be checked to ensure that no questions are repeated.

The Panel noted that due to the upcoming pre-election period of sensitivity, it was recommended that no new consultations be published before the election date of 6 May 2021. It was provisionally agreed that the consultation begin soon after this date.

Actions:

- That the draft consultation questions be amended as discussed and sent to panel members with an invitation to make further minor changes, if desired, before the consultation's start date.

6. Dates of Future Meetings

Panel members considered the content of, and proposed dates for, future meetings of the Panel. It was confirmed that none of the suggested dates clashed with other formal meetings of the Council.

Actions:

- That a reminder regarding the Council's calendar of meetings for 2021/22 be sent to Panel members.
- That Panel members agree the date of the next meeting via email.
- That witness sessions be organised for the next meeting – suggested witnesses included an officer or councillor from Knowsley Council, Crawley's shopping parade tenants, and Council staff that regularly visit the neighbourhood parades.

Closure of Meeting

With the business of the Council-owned Neighbourhood Parades Scrutiny Panel concluded, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 7.40 pm

R A Lanzer (Chair)