

Crawley Borough Council

Minutes of Council-owned Neighbourhood Parades Scrutiny Panel

Tuesday, 2 February 2021 at 6.30 pm

Councillors Present:

R A Lanzer (Chair)

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

Officers Present:

Sue Bader Asset Manager

Karen Hayes Head of Corporate Finance

Jess Tamplin Democratic Services Support Officer

Also in Attendance:

Councillor P C Smith Cabinet member for Planning and Economic Development

Kate Wilson Head of Community Services

1. Disclosures of Interest & Whipping Declarations

The following disclosures of interests were made:

Councillor	Item and Minute	Type and Nature of Disclosure
Councillor P Smith (invited witness)	Witness Sessions (minute 4)	Personal Interest – Member of the Labour and Co-operative Party (of which the Co-op supermarket is a supporter. Councillor Smith noted that there was a branch of the Co-op supermarket on his local parade that he regularly visited).

2. Minutes

The minutes of the Council-owned Neighbourhood Parades Scrutiny Panel meeting held on Tuesday 8 December 2020 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. Background Information: Reviews by other Local Authorities

The Chair introduced the item to the Panel, which set out details of two reviews of neighbourhood parade shop policies by other local authorities. The reviews by Slough Borough Council and Knowsley Borough Council were said to be detailed and

informative. Although the Panel recognised that there were differences in how Crawley's parades were managed, it was hoped that useful information could be drawn from each review to assist the Panel in its own considerations.

As part of a discussion on Slough Borough Council's policy on use classes, the Asset Manager confirmed that, in Crawley, shop leases included clauses to allocate a unit's specific use. This was said to allow the Council, in its role as landlord, to monitor the balance of trades and have some control over 'doubling-up' of the same trade on a parade. The Panel noted that following recent changes to the use classes, with the addition of a use class E, the use of a retail unit is not now so easily controlled by the Council when acting in its role as the Local Planning Authority. As Licensing Authority the Council has control over off-licences.

The Panel was asked to note the changes to use classes recently made by the Government. Takeaway establishments had become 'sui generis' while various class A, B and D establishments had been amalgamated into a single class E.

In response to a question from a Panel member about encouraging a wider variety of traders to take up parade units, the Asset Manager outlined the Council's tenancy process. It was heard that individuals were able to register with the Council their interest in becoming a shop tenant. Any vacant units were advertised online by the letting agent, Graves Jenkins, which was also given the list of interested persons. Any offers made to the Council in respect of the vacant unit were then considered. In doing so the Council did not focus only on finances, but aimed to select a tenant proposing a suitable use class. It was clarified that the Council did not require vacant units to be taken up by specific use classes; it could only consider those tenants/uses that had made offers. Panel members expressed support for traditional trades taking up leases on the parades.

It was heard that advice was provided by the Council's Business and Economic Development team to those starting their own businesses, which included information on becoming a parade shop tenant. Furthermore a free online advertising service for parade shops was currently under construction by the Council's web team.

Other matters discussed were:

- Incentives to encourage certain types of trade
- The sending of regular questionnaires to shop tenants
- Allocations of maintenance responsibilities and waste services
- Advice/signposting given by the Council to new tenants
- The extent of the Council's influence on encouraging parade shops to be 'responsible retailers', e.g. environmental impact and healthy food standards
- The Council's policy on the residential units above some parade shops.

It was suggested that Panel members keep these matters in mind throughout the process of the review and re-visit the reports for further information when necessary.

Actions

- That officers undertake research to gather further information on the various matters raised by the Panel.

4. Witness Sessions

The Chair introduced the invited witnesses, who had been asked to provide information on matters of interest to the Panel (as set out in the scoping framework).

Kate Wilson, Head of Community Services

Information was given from both the strategic and operational perspectives on controlling crime in Crawley. Although there was not a widespread crime problem specifically at the neighbourhood parades, patches of 'general nuisance' behaviour had been identified. Enforcement powers had been used under the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 as well as the Council's recently extended Public Space Protection Order, which limited the consumption of alcohol in certain areas of the borough. The Council worked closely with Sussex Police and the West Sussex Joint Action Group to respond collaboratively to issues of crime and anti-social behaviour.

It was also heard that the Council's Neighbourhood Services team had undertaken litter and graffiti removal at and around the parades and nearby green spaces, as well as the investigation and removal of fly tipping at Langley Green parade which had resulted in prosecution. Joint working arrangements with Sussex Police had helped to facilitate this.

It was emphasised that any concerns about crime or anti-social behaviour should be reported to the relevant authority; to Sussex Police on 999 or 101, or to Crawley Borough Council's community wardens on 07884 492324. Reports from residents or tenants were an essential part of tackling issues at Crawley's parades.

Questions were then put to the Head of Community Services regarding the usage of CCTV cameras at the parades. It was heard that CCTV was a useful tool that was operational in several locations and was managed by Sussex Police, but that installation and upkeep was of significant cost. It was also possible that CCTV may push criminal activity to other areas, but there was scope for the Council to consider the use of mobile CCTV.

Councillor Peter Smith, Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development

Councillor Smith shared information and opinions with the Panel on a variety of matters regarding the neighbourhood parades. It was felt that the parades were a key part of Crawley's historic identity and that their community value remained high despite the growth of online shopping. It was suggested that the Panel consider how to measure the success of the current parade policy; one indicator was the units' occupancy rates. The Panel heard that the Council's income from the parades for 2019/20 had been £3 million, in the context of a total £15.8 million budget (for 2020/21). It was concluded that a balance needed to be sought between welcoming a range of business types on the parades, maintaining affordable rates for tenants, and providing a valuable service to residents.

A question was put to the Cabinet member regarding plans for a shopping parade at the Forge Wood development. It was explained that planning permission for the development had been obtained through a non-standard route, so it was believed that there was allocation for a parade, but this was to be confirmed.

It was emphasised that a careful balance needed to be struck when managing use classes and identifying appropriate businesses to occupy parade units. Possibilities for encouraging responsible retail were discussed – it was considered important to adopt policies that allow scope for the responsible sale and purchase of goods (e.g.

alcohol or healthy food), but in a way that would not greatly restrict or remove freedoms for tenants or shoppers.

Discussion ensued regarding the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic on shopping locally. The Cabinet member encouraged a 'buy local, shop local' approach throughout the pandemic and into the future.

Following a question from the Chair regarding rental rates and reviews, the Cabinet member raised the following points:

- A desire to make policy that benefitted local people.
- Reductions in the Council's budget over recent years. As a result, the side-effects of any reductions in rental rates could force a reduction in, or increased charges for, other Council services.
- If any rates were to be reduced, it was questioned how a fair policy would be formed that would decide the rates payable by different businesses.
- Rates are currently set based on the going market rate for commercial property.

Actions

- That the Head of Community Services report to the Panel information on the extent of CCTV coverage at the neighbourhood parades, and whether there is known to be any relationship between a CCTV presence and criminal activity.
- That the Head of Community Services update the Panel as to whether publicity/guidance is given to shop tenants about how to report crime.
- That the Cabinet member for Planning and Economic Development report to Panel members regarding plans for a neighbourhood parade in Forge Wood.
- That the themes and matters raised as part of the Panel's discussion be carried forward for consideration at its future meetings.

5. Public Consultation Arrangements

The Panel discussed the nature of the public consultation that had been proposed as part of the scoping framework. It was recognised that the consultation needed to be carried out in a Covid-safe way, and would therefore mostly take the form of an online survey with the possible use of community noticeboards. The Chair suggested that the consultation have two differing strands; one targeted at parade shop tenants (example topics being maintenance policy, rent policy, and advertising) and one to residents (example topics being community value and preferred use classes) and invited Panel members to submit their suggestions for specific questions. It was advised that the Council's Corporate Consultation and Research Officer may be able to offer advice on the creation of a consultation which would encourage as many participants as possible.

It was suggested that the consultation include a summary of report [FIN/499](#), which would set out the Council's roles, responsibilities, and powers in regard to the parades. Panel members emphasised the importance of seeking tenants' and the public's views on the matters at hand, and it was agreed that the Panel was seeking genuine opinions to inform and assist with their considerations.

Actions

- That Panel members contact the Chair and supporting officers with suggestions of questions/topics to include in the public consultation, and that these be received by Tuesday 9 February.

- That supporting officers draft a set of possible questions for the consultation for the Panel's approval.

6. General Updates and Information

Following a question from a Panel member the Asset Manager confirmed that a legal case under the Landlord and Tenant Act, which involved several parade shop tenants, was ongoing.

Closure of Meeting

With the business of the Council-owned Neighbourhood Parades Scrutiny Panel concluded, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 7.58 pm

R A Lanzer (Chair)