

Homes & Gateway Services

Cabinet Member Bulletin

Councillor Alison Butler

October 2019

LATEST NEWS

Fairfield's Hall

Brick by Brick are delighted to have handed over the first spaces at Fairfield Halls to enable the first performances organised by the new operator BH Live. The refurbishment of Fairfield Halls is the largest and most complex project Brick By Brick has undertaken since being set up by the council in 2016 and is a perfect example of what can be achieved by local authorities if they are prepared to be bold and do things differently.

The aim of Brick By Brick has always been to lead development within Croydon for the council so that value is retained by the public sector. The borough has not necessarily been served well in the past by the operation of the property market, with land trading often preventing actual development. And when development actually happened, particularly with the housing market, it often meant homes that were unaffordable for local people. Brick By Brick have been working to change that and they now have a pipeline of over 1,200 homes across the borough, of which around half will be affordable.

Brick By Brick work across all kinds of sites – from small underused areas of public land where they create schemes with just a handful of units, to large developments on carparks or other sites that can accommodate hundreds of homes. Brick By Brick aim to be flexible and pragmatic, creating high quality, beautifully designed homes for all kinds of people.

And the refurbishment of Fairfield Halls demonstrates their flexibility. As development manager on the project they delivered the project for the council, bringing not only their development expertise to bear but also their local knowledge and understanding of Croydon. Importantly, Fairfield Halls is not just a much-loved cultural venue, it is also the jewel in the crown of Croydon's emerging cultural quarter. Adjacent to the site Brick By Brick are bringing forward a large-scale mixed use development called Fairfield Homes which will provide 421 new homes above flexible office, retail and leisure space, as well as new public realm bringing the neighbourhood together.

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As an independent development company wholly owned by the council, the value created through these developments goes back to the council, not only paying for the refurbishment of Fairfield Halls (alongside contributions from the Coast to Capital LEP and the Mayor of London's Creative Enterprise Zones scheme), but also providing revenue for the council to spend on public services as we see fit. Rather than working to create profit, Brick By Brick aims to create value, which is retained by the public sector and put to work for the people of Croydon.

Stonebridge Lodge

In August, the council was informed that the Home Office had taken a 10-year lease on Stonebridge Lodge, a building used as emergency accommodation for up to around 80 Croydon families at any one time.

For over 20 years this building in Thornton Heath has allowed the council to keep local homeless families close to their support networks, schools and jobs while a longer-term home is found.

Now, without giving advance warning, the Home Office has offered more money to take over the lease, meaning these homeless families have had to move out.

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The council has written to the Home Secretary to complain – not about the decision to move asylum-seekers into Stonebridge Lodge, as Croydon has a long history of welcoming asylum seekers and we will continue to do so, our concern is about the lack of notice and squeeze on local housing supply.

Croydon Council already looks after around 2,000 local families in temporary accommodation, and last year alone there were 50% more homeless applicants. The Home Office's move means less local supply and more costs and also shows their contempt for working in partnership with local communities.

To date, the council has yet to receive a response from the Home Secretary, but will continue to press for this decision to be reversed.

Full-fibre broadband deal for council tenants

I am pleased to announce that thousands of our tenants and leaseholders will be able to receive full-fibre internet access direct to their home following an agreement between the council and two providers.

Community Fibre will start work in the coming weeks on providing full-fibre broadband to 11,000 council properties across the borough. Another agreement has been signed with Openreach, whose coverage covers social and private residences in Thornton Heath, with plans being discussed to extend coverage. The installation comes at no cost to the council or residents, with residents only paying if they decide to sign up for the faster broadband. Once it is installed, residents will be able to choose between different price packages depending on the relevant provider's offer.

Under the agreement with the council, free wi-fi will also be provided by Community Fibre in communal areas of sheltered housing and council-owned community buildings. Apprenticeships and job opportunities for Croydon residents are also being discussed and encouraged to be part of the council's 100 apprenticeships in 100 days campaign.

As the network infrastructure improves across the borough, businesses and those living in private properties will also be able to benefit and have the ability to sign up and access the faster internet speeds. At the moment most properties only have copper cables from the cabinet in the street to the building, which limits internet speeds. Within the new agreement, fibre cables will be installed to the customer's router. These agreements will ensure our council tenants and leaseholders have the option to get a high-speed internet service, which will reduce digital exclusion in the borough.

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Improved help for those leaving prison

To improve support for people coming out of prison with nowhere to call home, the council have awarded a grant of £45,000 to Evolve Housing + Support

The £45,000 funding for a prison discharge navigator is part of a £622,000 grant given to Croydon Council's Gateway service to offer vulnerable homeless people a bed, wraparound support and help into settled, permanent accommodation through a 24-hour, 365-day hub opening this winter.

The council's Gateway service already works closely with partners such as Evolve to not just tackle homelessness but also prevent it. Last year alone our outreach services helped 70 rough sleepers with a history of being in prison, so this £45,000 funding will allow Evolve to give vulnerable prison leavers more support and from an earlier stage.

The Prison Discharge Navigator will provide a fast track assessment service for people whom have potentially complex housing needs and are at risk of rough sleeping. The service will deliver a combination of practical, emotional & ongoing support to help make the transition to independent living for those whom prison discharge may be a challenging time. They will help to implement early interventions and action the housing needs, acting as an advocate for people leaving Prison with statutory and voluntary services. The role will involve leading on engagement between various services that are involved in various stages of prison discharge ensuring best practice is in place reconciling gaps in services as needed.

Council chooses winning community housing bid

The council has chosen a community group from Crystal Palace to be the first to develop its own affordable community led homes.

Crystal Palace Community Land Trust (CLT) has been selected for its commitment to turn a piece of council land at The Lawns in Upper Norwood into high-quality, low-carbon affordable homes by working with local residents to provide a scheme that best fits the local area.

A panel chose the winning community-led homes bid out of four shortlisted applicants from across the borough, considering factors including viability and design. The winning group, formed of local residents with professional specialisms including architecture, transport, housing management, planning and sustainability, submitted a bid that aims to:

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- Meet low-carbon Passivhaus building standards
- Build a community food garden available to site residents and their neighbours
- Explore volunteering and job opportunities

Crystal Palace CLT's proposals are outline and will become more detailed as the scheme progresses. Issues such as design, layout, whether the homes are flats or houses, the number of homes and the number of bedrooms will be considered before a planning application is submitted.

It was clear that the passion and expertise in our communities for developing high-quality homes for local people has shone through our bidding process, and we had great submissions from all applicants. Crystal Palace CLT was the outstanding applicant. They impressed me with their commitment to not just design sustainable homes but also work with neighbours at every stage of the process so the proposal is the best it can be.

Council and Brick by Brick staff will offer help and guidance at every stage of the process, and I look forward to Crystal Palace CLT working with the community to turn their ideas into full proposals that boost the supply of much-needed affordable homes for local people.