

## Public Questions and Responses – 25 February 2021

### Question 1 – Wandsworth Bridge Road and Imperial Road

From: Donald Grant, Resident

To: The Cabinet Member for the Environment

“Imperial Road at 10 metres wide, being built for industrial traffic and with minimal residential property is clearly much more suitable for traffic commuting through SW6 than Wandsworth Bridge Road, which is typically 9.3 metres wide, spans three conservation areas and is primarily residential with many small roadside businesses and countless pedestrians. The Council has concentrated on reasons why Imperial Road should not be re-opened, using disputed data that could not be validated and partial scenarios that do not explore options proposed by residents such as Southbound only, controlled traffic. No legitimate reasons have therefore been given for keeping Imperial Road closed and forcing all traffic to use Wandsworth Bridge Road instead.

What discussions have been held and / or agreements made with third parties outside the Council to close Imperial Road?”

#### **Response:**

The Council has not closed Imperial Road. The road is open to H&F residents, visitors with parking permits, carers, healthcare workers, minicabs, Black cabs and trades people and contractors working at local addresses.

There are restrictions on Imperial Road which have been put in place to prevent out-of-borough motorists largely from Surrey, Hampshire and the A3 corridor, using our streets as cut-throughs or rat-runs.

Imperial Road does not connect drivers directly to New Kings Road or Wandsworth Bridge. Drivers wishing to do so need to drive through the narrow and heavily residential streets of Townmead Road and Bagleys Lane. Re-opening Imperial Road to out-of-borough drivers, re-opens these narrow residential streets to all-comers.

Our engineers have discussed the suggestion of opening these roads back up to out-of-borough motorists in several meetings with the residents of Wandsworth Bridge Road. It is clear that any re-opening would increase not decrease traffic in the area. It fails the first objective of the South Fulham Traffic, Congestion and Pollution Reduction trial scheme - namely, reducing traffic in the area.

The data, which is from traffic counters, shows that there has been an average 75% reduction in traffic on the streets to the east of Wandsworth Bridge Road, and an average 12% reduction on Wandsworth Bridge Road itself since the introduction of the TCPR. This shows the scheme is working.

As with all traffic orders, we consulted with all relevant statutory third parties such as the emergency services, prior to implementation of the experimental traffic order.

**Follow up question:**

The real question I was asking was, have any discussions been had or agreements been made with third parties outside the Council, for example housing developers, to close Imperial Road?

**Response:**

I certainly have not had any discussion with any developers about Imperial Road, whether reopening it, making it one-way or whatever.

**Question 2 – Fire Safety in Private and Socially-Owned Buildings**

From: Ted Townsend, Resident

To: The Cabinet Member for Housing

“There are an estimated 112 private and socially-owned residential buildings in H&F that are over 18 metres high.

Residents in the buildings face many issues that stem from the risks of unsafe cladding such as being asked to pay for removal of the cladding, the costs of interim fire safety measures such as waking watches, increased insurance costs, an inability to move or sell their home because of the uncertainty, and the effect on their mental health of dealing with all these issues.

Could the Council explain exactly how many buildings are affected in this way and what it is doing to help residents in private and socially-owned buildings?”

**Response:**

This is an extremely important issue and I will respond in sections for, as you might be aware, it's actually the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government who are the holder of the central database for these buildings and as a Council we are very reliant on other landlords sharing information with us. I can therefore respond comprehensively on our own housing stock but in less detail on other buildings in Hammersmith and Fulham.

There are 68 buildings in our own stock of over 18 metres. Three have cladding that we are upgrading, and 24 others have spandrel/infill panels that require replacing. Programmes of works are in train to address all of these issues and the costs are not being passed on to Hammersmith and Fulham residents.

We are rolling out a significant programme of works under H&F's fire safety plus initiative. This has involved residents right from the very start via FRAG, the fire residents action group, which is resident led, and chaired by a leaseholder. The group, with officer support, reviews council fire safety policy, individual work programmes and

buildings, and informs the wider tenant associations and ensures transparency. The Council is fully committed to doing things with residents and not to them.

In addition to our work on cladding, physical works include:

- Upgrading (4,000+) fire doors from FD30s to FD60s in buildings over 18 metres in height
- All 68 buildings have an individual fire strategy, fire risk assessment, and Premise Information Box (PIBs) with schematics for the fire brigade in an emergency, in place.
- We are installing sprinklers in 5 tower blocks (10 storeys and above), upgrading wet risers and converting dry risers to wet in buildings over 50 metres. We are also installing dry risers where they are absent in buildings.
- We are populating PIBS in our tallest buildings with details of residents who are unable to self-evacuate their own flat in the event of fire for the London fire Brigade's information.
- We have a proactive scheme to visit every resident (tenant/leaseholder) and undertake a fire safety inspection. Any white goods (e.g., fridges) that fail PAT test are replaced free of charge. And any fire detection (including leaseholders) is upgraded free of charge.
- We also undertake Safety First visits with vulnerable residents to prepare an individual person-centred risk assessment and advise on bespoke solutions for them. Again, there is no charge.
- Where works are ongoing or due to take place, we have routine communications to residents in individual blocks.
- We also gave a period of amnesty for leaseholders to report any unpermitted alterations to their flats with corrective works to be undertaken for free.
- Housing officers proactively inspect blocks on a routine basis for safety.
- Being such a large landlord there will unfortunately and inevitably be some fires and we thoroughly investigate all incidents and adopt learning.
- Finally, as Cabinet Member for Housing, I personally receive a fortnightly update on all building safety and compliance issues.

In relation to privately owned blocks, H&F have organised a non-invasive survey of all private properties in the borough to identify the buildings with cladding.

All owners of privately-owned blocks have been contacted to advise them of our findings. They were encouraged to carry out invasive investigations to identify the full composition of all external fabric of the buildings and we have offered to help them to identify if any of the components that might cause risks.

The majority of the private owned buildings have low risk masonry cladding. There are a few buildings where the composition of the cladding is not known and in these cases the Council has written to the building owners, reminding them of their responsibilities. We will continue to follow-up with those owners until we are satisfied they have discharged their responsibilities. We have explained to all building owners that we are happy to assist by providing technical advice where necessary.

It is the responsibility of the building owners, whoever they may be, to assess the risks and take corrective action as part of their risk assessments under the Fire Safety Order. This is enforced by the London Fire Brigade.

This is also the case with registered providers, housing associations – many of whom have newer properties in the borough of mixed tenure. This tends to be the area generating most case work for councillors, from leaseholders with concerns over both costs for work and delays with the issuing certification enabling them to sell. These are taken up with each landlord and we do use our influence through regular dialogue with those landlords on a range of issues including fire safety to ensure that they are doing everything possible to make the building safe and not pass on charges to residents.

There are three registered providers known to the Council to have cladding issues in the tall blocks in the borough, we don't hold detail from two. However, Shepherd's Bush housing had three sites in Hammersmith and Fulham with cladding issues, two blocks over 18 meters high.

They've applied for central government funding to address the issues in these blocks and expect to find out the result in March. At present, Shepherd's Bush housing have installed more waking watching at the affected sites and are currently meeting the costs themselves for the in-situ services. To ensure safety they have agreed to actively engage with the Council and remain in contact should there be any developments in respect to fire safety in their approach.

However, many of these problems transcend borough boundaries and are nationwide and as you have an interest in the subject, you'll probably be aware of all the discussions at national government level. The fire safety bill was discussed in Parliament just yesterday with some amendments which were wanted by leaseholders not passed, and it would have been helpful had they been accepted. It now remains to be seen if what is in the bill goes far enough to address these concerns which is something I will be monitoring very carefully.

Thank you again for raising this very important issue.

**Follow up question:**

I would like to know what the Council is doing about fire inspections in HMOs.

**Response:**

We have an extensive HMO licensing scheme in Hammersmith and Fulham. You may be aware that we actually have an additional licensing scheme in Hammersmith and Fulham which covers 20 percent of our properties and we will be going through the process of renewing that shortly which would ensure that we have the best standards of inspection that we can. Very often this does rely on private tenants coming forward to us, but you can be assured that if there's any concerns at all, our team do go and inspect.