

## Report of the Member Champion for Climate Change

### 1. Introduction

1.1 Since last year's annual report, the council has been working hard to build on the work it does on the 'green agenda' and tackling climate change.

1.1 Our climate change targets fall under three broad categories which I have used my role to champion. These are the built environment, transport, and parks and open spaces. There is also the vital work we are doing to improve air quality across the borough.

### 2. The built environment

#### 2.1 Retrofitting

2.1.1 We have been working on a strategy to retrofit approximately 18,000 homes in the borough that desperately need it. Retrofitting brings down emissions and utility bills, saving money and the planet.

2.1.2 Retrofitting poses a couple of key issues:

- The cost of deep retro fit of one property is around £80k.
- There is a skills shortage which limits the scale and pace of delivery.

2.1.3 I joined workmen from JJ Crump and reps from E-on onsite to see cavity wall insulation being installed along with loft insulation.

2.1.4 I am currently looking to work with other London boroughs that have similar housing stock, possibly through the Greater London Authority to establish a working group that can collectively bargain or establish a baseline of delivery to put out to tender in order to bring down the cost of retrofitting per unit.

#### 2.2 Construction

2.2.1 I have quarterly meetings with Be First to discuss current and future projects. From these meetings I have requested the following:

- An audit of contracted construction companies used by the council and Be First to ensure they meet environmental standards.
- Research into new greener, fire safety approved building materials which would reduce the reliance on steel and cement. Obviously, this must be financially viable.
- A review of how funding from the Carbon Offsetting Fund, S106 and CIL is used, can it be used to make developments more sustainable or enhance existing green space.

- 2.2.2 Be First recently appointed a lead on sustainability and I am awaiting the establishment of a new working group on sustainability in the built environment, which I will sit on.
- 2.2.3 A new biodiversity metric has been introduced by government which requires developers to evidence biodiversity net gains in new scheme proposals. This is a step in the right direction.

## **2.3 Energy**

- 2.3.1 I am working with officers to establish the national grid potential for Barking and Dagenham. I have asked that we look into utilising council owned roof space and renting leasehold roof space to create a borough wide solar farm.
- 2.3.2 I have also been working with external organisations looking at the potential to capture lost heat to generate power.
- 2.3.3 One of the key issues we face is energy storage, which is expensive to establish. However, there are talks with potential delivery partners in the borough to create such a facility.
- 2.3.4 We are looking at the roll out of air source heat pumps as a green energy solution, which would form part of a wider retrofit strategy.
- 2.3.5 Also using district heat network schemes, which is being trialed on new developments such as the Gascoigne Estate.

## **3. Transport**

### **3.1 Walking and Cycling**

- 3.1.1 I am an active member of the 'Walking and Cycling Strategy Steering Committee' and have helped identify and set in place the priorities for the next few years. The strategy is about making our roads safer for all users – drivers, cyclists and pedestrians. I recently learned to ride a bike at Valence Park with Vandome Cycles who offer free bikeability courses along with Sustrans to local residents. The point being is, if I can learn at 34 anyone can!
- 3.1.2 This is part and parcel of promoting the benefits of walking and cycling for short local journeys that don't require a car – whilst also recognising that if you want to get from one side of the borough to the other you need a vehicle.
- 3.1.2 I have also been working with other Members across the borough to establish areas where we can make the street scene more inviting for pedestrians and cyclists. Two excellent examples are Rainham Road South and Whalebone Lane South where we have created bee corridors and replaced tired railings with wooden bollards.

### **3.2. Electric Vehicle infrastructure**

- 3.2.1 Be First intend to publish a draft electric vehicle infrastructure strategy for the borough. This is not without its challenges. For example, looking for a delivery partner to ensure there are accessible charge points in every ward.
- 3.2.2 There is not a huge demand for this infrastructure but as petrol and diesel are phased out, we must be ready. Then there is the issue of power – that is a lot of additional energy which will be required which poses its own questions about long term sustainability of electric vehicles.
- 3.2.3 The council wants to ‘electrify’ its fleet of vehicles across services, with work starting with enforcement.

### **3.3 Public Transport**

- 3.3.1 The council is consistently lobbying Transport for London to ensure our transport links are upgraded.
- 3.3.2 Many of the bus routes through the borough are still serviced by older polluting vehicles rather than electric or hybrid models.
- 3.3.3 Crossrail is still in the pipeline and the new overground extension is on the way into Barking Riverside.
- 3.3.4 The Council’s success in bringing the Thames Clipper to Barking and in doing so, opening up the river for commuters, will reduce congestion on the District Line and c2c service.

### **3.4 Parks and open spaces**

- 3.4.1 This is my real passion – our parks are the jewel in the borough’s crown. None more so than Eastbrookend Country Park. Our achievements in this area include:
  - In December 2020 working with delivery partners SUGi and the Conservation Volunteers we planted 32,000 trees in Parsloes Park – the Forest of Thanks.
  - Assembly passed a motion to double canopy cover across the borough by 2040.
  - Increased street tree planting and looking at more woodland creation.
  - Working with external partners and the community on the ‘Greening the Fiddlers’ project, how we can green urban areas and change our understanding of ‘the environment.’
  - Opened the Ripple Greenway earlier this year – transformed an area of wasteland into a linear park with amazing sculptures based on the revolutionary book ‘The Lost Words’.
  - The Wild and Free in LBBD scheme that I designed back in 2019 launched in 2020 but due to the pandemic was limited to a photography competition. This year the full range of events for families has taken place.

- Idea behind WildFreeLBBD was to engage young people in the outdoors – educate residents and evoke a greater appreciation for our green spaces and nature.
- Many of our parks received Green Flag Awards this year for accessibility, cleanliness, and biodiversity.
- The old Millennium Centre has been rebranded and relaunched as the Discovery Centre. It is now open seven days a week and is a core part of our strategy to engage the community with our parks and the natural world.
- We have an amazing, enthusiastic, and knowledgeable Park Ranger team. Want my thanks for everything they do on record.
- There have been talks about establishing a ‘LBBD Springwatch/Autumnwatch/Winterwatch’ but this has stalled. Hoping this can be something we introduce next year via one borough voice to really reach out and show people what amazing things can be found on their doorstep.
- The Greening Network was established through BD Can – has been a great way to get people involved in mapping what they would like to see in the borough.
- I was on the BD Giving Panel which awarded £20k to the Roding River Trust to plant trees and wayfind the River Roding footpath.
- One of my early ideas was to create a ‘green barrier’ along the River Roding and barking creek to reduce particulates and emissions from the city being brought over by the prevailing wind direction. This is now being realised.
- Next year I am hoping to launch a monthly nature walk through Beam Parklands and Eastbrookend Country Park which will be bookable.

#### **4. A note on Air Quality**

- 4.1 I was a key stakeholder in the Air Quality Action Plan Steering Committee. Since its introduction I have monitored the plan closely and aim to work with services and other members to see it delivered.

#### **5. Conclusion**

- 5.1 All in all, I have been incredibly busy.
- 5.2 Over the last few months, we have seen a significant acceleration of global climate change, which has had local manifestations in Barking and Dagenham. We have seen flash floods and an unprecedented tornado rip through our streets. We have some of the poorest health outcomes relating to air pollution in London and the time for action on this is now.
- 5.3 I am wholeheartedly dedicated to the cause and want to see a greener, healthier borough in the coming years. The reality is that we cannot avert climate change now, but we can mitigate the worst effects from causing damage to our communities.

5.4 Part of the solution is educating towards behavioural changes, part of it is legislating with future generations in mind. There are natural solutions and solutions in how we deliver services sustainably. The bottom line is that we all have a part to play, and the council aims to lead by example.