

DEPUTATIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

A period of not more than fifteen minutes shall be allowed at each ordinary meeting of the Council for the hearing of depositions from members of the public. Each deputation may be heard for a maximum of five minutes following which one Member of the Council, nominated by the Mayor, may speak in response. It shall then be moved by the Mayor and voted on without discussion that the deputation be thanked for attending and its subject matter noted.

Notification of one Deputation has been received. The spokesperson is entitled to speak for 5 minutes.

(1) Deputation concerning the role of ward councillors

Spokesperson Mr Adrian Hart

Supported by:
Annie Hill,
David Sassons,
Julia Basnett,
Jan Norris,
Rick Hurst.

Ward affected: All

Councillor Miller, Chair of the committee will reply.

Deputation concerning the role of ward councillors

This deputation pivots around two issues which I'd like the committee's view on. Both have arisen from discussions held by Amex Area Neighbourhood Forum (in Queens Park ward). We became concerned over how our 2018 pro-development resident campaign against what we regarded as a very poor planning proposal (namely 'The Edward Street Quarter' scheme for the old Amex House site) was always destined to fail. In short, we did not know what our council knew.

The first issue is ***how can ward councillors communicate back to their constituents vital information on neighbourhood matters which they know but citizens do not know?*** Acting as a 'forward look-out post' describes this democratic deficit well as there must surely be instances where ward councillors become aware of, for example, future planning proposals currently in discussion which, if approved, impact on their constituents in no uncertain terms. Had ward councillors been able to publicise (fairly and with their duty to their electorate in-mind) any prior knowledge or worry they have (or simply the facts) in a monthly Ward Newsletter then citizens might have had time to respond and seek rejection or amendment of the scheme. Such a newsletter/ bulletin would be delivered to all ward households as well as by online options.

Following the Edward Street Quarter example, despite developer-led public consultation ahead of application (see Brighton Society comment on this: footnote 1), BHCC statutory notices fixed to lamp-posts became the first indication to public that the proposal had changed (bigger, taller, poor public realm, a mere 20% so-called 'affordable housing' as the starting bid and so on). It was too late to effectively oppose. The issue of 'too late' is one underscored by the city's second year unable to demonstrate to Whitehall a 5 year housing land supply. However, if our neighbourhood *had known* earlier such a scheme was being discussed with planners it would not, in theory, have been too late. Recently, planners confirmed to us that prior to the start of the statutory time frame (from application to approval) there are indeed real opportunities for a council to have a developer return to the drawing board.

The second issue follows on from the first: ***will the council accept that there is a democratic deficit here by exploring possibilities of making production of Ward Newsletters a reality?*** Insofar as leaflets purporting to be 'ward newsletters' do exist, these are laden with the party promo items on behalf of party-focused councillors. 'Forward look-out' items might exist in these occasional leaflets but only when a party branch feels it serves party interests. Surely it would be better that our council look into ways of requiring these newsletters to conform to an entirely new model of 'ward newsletter'? I note that at the planning hearing for the 'Edward St Quarter' one of our local ward councillors on the planning committee commented, seemingly in despair, words to the effect 'I already have one of these ill-conceived schemes in Circus Street, I don't want another one in my ward'. And yet communities on the front line of both Circus Street [2] and Amex site had and continue to have little or no communication with residents least of all to warn their constituents and thereafter advise, support, defend or advocate. Indeed it feels at street level and citywide that troubled times inflict evermore distractions on councillors buried deep in party political warfare if not infighting. And so I end by asking that answers to my questions be placed in the context of 2019 and of, we hope, a new intake of councillors who, if our own Queens Park ward candidates are anything to go by, share my desire for better democracy and for councillors as 'look-outs' equipped with new methods of communicating to constituents *what constituents need to know*.

Supporting information:

Footnotes:

1. <https://www.brighton-society.org.uk/edward-street-objection/> (and other articles by Brighton Society on this application; also from Regency Society)
2. <https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/17420901.circus-street-building-site-is-a-living-nightmare-for-residents/> and
3. <https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/17471425.circus-street-developers-promise-changes-after-troubles/>