

## Councillor Candidate Hustings

Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> April 7-9pm

The meeting was chaired by Linda Watson, ex-leader of Thornton Heath Community Action Team (THCAT) who welcomed everybody after the health and safety briefing.

All THCAT members are volunteers and the Action Team Code of Conduct will be followed during this meeting as well as the set agenda and time limits which should be respected.

**Apologies:** Mohammed Mir, Christine Milton, Jackie Cross, Andrew Barret (LibDem TH), Chrishni Reshekaron, Stuart King (Lab WT), Janet Campbell (Lab WT), Karen Jewitt (Lab TH), The Green Party.

Linda then asked the candidates to introduce themselves in alphabetical order:

**Ben Andoh** (Taking the Initiative Party – WT) is a member of a group of individuals who want to make a change, particularly regarding drug use and the environment. Mental well-being is very important. Elected or not, his party will continue to work for the community as it already does, helping young people and working with various religious groups.

**Richard Harris** (Conservative – TH) has lived in Croydon for 4 years and has a vision for our area. Over the last few weeks, he has listened to people whose main concerns are traffic management and personal safety as well as fly-tipping and graffiti. The latter in particular is making the area look unloved which also turns away possible investors.

**Humayun Kabir** (Labour BM) has been a local Councillor for 12 years and Mayor of Croydon for one year. He and his family live in Croydon and he has been very active with faith groups, doing case work and holding regular surgery. Housing and overcrowding are major issues needing his attention. He introduced Councillors Walks in his ward to check on problem properties and fly tips. Funding from central government was badly cut but Croydon Council managed to keep essential services and continue to care for vulnerable members. It was central government who encouraged local authorities to invest in property. However, Croydon has a balanced budget now and is following a new direction to move forward.

**Graham Mitchell** (Independent BM) has lived in Bensham Manor ward for 25 years. He retired last September but used to work as inspector for Revenue & Customs. In 2018, he won a civic award for the community work he was and is still doing. He is Chair of the Friends of the Rec and sits on the Safety Neighbourhood Panel. Graham believes that the traditional party politics are broken and that is why he is standing as an independent. There are too many managers at the Council making the decisions when it should be local people to make decisions on local issues they know and care about.

**Andrea Perry** (Independent TH) moved to Thornton Heath 9 years ago. She created The Chronicle, TH free newspaper, to give the area a voice. She is currently Chair of THCAT as well as Friends of Grange Wood Park. Croydon Council are not listening to local people. The children's playground at the park has been a constant battle as well as the Lodge which has now been sold off despite protests and strong local opposition. The mentality at the Council needs to change. With graffiti and fly tipping rampant, Thornton Heath has become a dumping ground. Deteriorating housing conditions remain unchecked, domestic abuse is a serious issue which is not taken seriously enough. It is time for change: "I live here and I care. I will be fighting for you, not a political party" Andrea said.

Once all the candidates had introduced themselves, Linda turned to the 3 questions that had been submitted in writing prior to the meeting and asked each candidate to respond to each one.

**Question 1 - Mohammed Mir** (to all currently serving Councillors): What have you done for the community and residents for the past four years that you are proud of and why should we elect you after the mess you have made?

**Answers:**

**Humayun (Labour)** said his personal pride has been to work with a local food bank where the need has increased. Fuel costs have also increased and we need to respond. He has many links with local faith groups who are engaged in tackling these issues. He admitted that mistakes were made by 5 of the 40 Labour Councillors who had to resign. The others are ready to start afresh with new people to put things right. We need to move forward.

**Richard (Conservative)** His experience when he lived in Derbyshire was to hold the police to account. He also has experience with the charity sector and is a volunteer street champion.

**Question 2 – Paul Voden:** Why is the SNB (Safer Neighbourhood Board) still not functioning with proper meetings and notes?

**Answers:**

**Graham** believes the police are trying to rebuild the SNBs but Paul (who was in the audience) explained that there has not been a Board since 2017 and there is not information available to find out where it has disappeared to and where the money has gone.

**Andrea** added that she has been concerned about this situation for a long time. Another example of Croydon Council not following issues through.

**Ben** believes it is time to bring initiative, have the conversations. The community needs to come together.

**Humayun** added that we can't deny other work is going on.

**Ben** felt he had to ask: where has the money gone? Let's work with the police with integrity.

**Question 3 – Maria Greenslade:** How is the Councillor going to tackle antisocial behaviour and flytipping around the Green Lane and Brickfield Road area? Why are commercial vehicles parking all around, pick-up trucks and white vans? Why are registered businesses working from residential property allowed? On Maryland Road, we have a hostel for young people with mental health issues allowed to open without planning permission, causing constant disturbance to adjoining neighbours with noise, criminal behaviour, police cars and ambulances arriving on a regular basis. Is this OK when there are elderly and children living nearby?

**Answers:**

**Ben** suggests that we need to check the accounts and monitor the companies who do the waste clearance now and possibly employ another contractor.

**Graham** explained that Veolia, the current contractor, has a very long term contract with the Council. However, we need to check what the sanctions are when Veolia fails. Education is key so that people stop fly tipping and we need to find out why they do it in the first instance.

**Andrea** confirmed that Veolia have the monopoly in Croydon where there are 3 times more fly tips than in Merton and Thornton Heath is the worst in Croydon. The waiting list for replacement bins is extremely long. Fly tipping is in fact an easy problem to solve. Antisocial behaviour is usually due to alcoholism and drug use. A holistic approach is needed.

**Humayun** agreed that we need education so that residents take responsibility for their waste. Areas for improvement have been identified.

**Barbara (THCAT Committee Member)** made a comment that the Council has no strategy to deal with this issue. They are not using their statutory powers to find solutions.

**Gill (St.Paul's Church Secretary)** confirmed that the situation is now very bad. She witnessed this herself during her walkabouts with Barbara & Gaëtane, as part of the flytipping reporting Team. Some local Councillors just join the group for a photo opportunity but do not tackle the issues or find long-term solutions.

**Richard** added that poor street lighting compounds the problems as it is not making people feel safe. Neighbourhood Safety Officers (NSOs) need to be reinstated. Only 20 of them for a population of 300,000 in Croydon is ludicrous. Croydon is the 5<sup>th</sup> worst council in the country for fly tips.

**Humayun** pointed out that 200 tickets were issued last year for fly tip offences. Veolia's contract has restrictions imposed on its operations.

**Andrea** explained that no planning permission is needed to open a hostel.

Now Linda turned to the audience for their questions to the candidates:

**Sofia** asked why it is that money can be found to install cameras for traffic management but none to tackle fly tipping?

**Ben** replied that we need to educate people to take care of their own areas. It would also help their mental well-being.

**Humayun** thinks more resources could focus on domestic violence. He already has good connections with services dealing with this issue.

**Richard** believes that community safety is essential.

**Graham** is of the view that crime should be dealt as a mental health issue.

**Andrea** feels that powers should be devolved to the community.

**Alan** commented that the absence of the other party candidates tonight was disappointing. It does not show that they care. He wants to ask the Labour candidate when things are going to go back to normal at the council? We need investment.

**Humayun** is a believer in the glass half-full not half-empty. We need to be positive. We have to take extra steps to bring back normality. The council have now balanced the books.

**Michael** wants to ask the 3 independent candidates what their fiscal responsibility is.

**Ben** asks the community to trust the integrity of his party. The 3 candidates know the community they work for and will continue to work for, even if they are not elected.

**Graham** asks that people should not vote for a party but for a person.

**Andrea** says that Labour in Croydon has failed. She is standing for the community, she is listening to their problems and will work hard to find answers.

A lady in the audience asks about the planned LTN (Low Traffic Neighbourhood) in Melfort Road. What are the candidates' opinions on this?

**Graham** replies that we need to keep a balance on this issue which needs to be looked at again.

**Ben** found that in West Thornton, people don't want LTNs. We need to re-investigate what works.

**Andrea** thinks that proper consultation is needed before LTNs are introduced. Pollution has an impact on the health of young children.

**Joanna** asks how the candidates will encourage people to engage with them?

**Richard** wants to make an open-meeting commitment. At the moment, there is no buy-in from the community because there is no alternative but he will provide a different view.

**Ben** will be asking people what the problems are. He is a community person and believes that everybody can change.

**Humayun** says that Councillors are approachable. He would like to see more PSPOs (Public Space Protection Orders).

**Graham** is part of a community garden every Sunday at the Rec. He knows what the community problems are.

**Andrea** can see that people have not been listened to over the years. Engagement is key. If elected, she will make a difference.

**Barbara** asks why it is that with Thornton Heath having so much to offer, it is not thriving as other areas are and as it should be?

**Ben** believes festivals could bring the community together and celebrate its uniqueness.

**Humayun** is of the view that we should keep Thornton Heath clean first then look at the planning issues. Regeneration money should be spent in our area.

**Richard** says: let's clean the graffiti and bring investments in.

**Graham** thinks that we should receive fairer funding based on our high-density area.

**Andrea** is a firm believer in levelling up. We need to be more ambitious for our area.

Before the meeting closed, Linda asked the other candidates in the audience to make themselves known. Tamar Nwafor (Labour TH) and Carl Collins (TIP BM) stood up.

The meeting closed at 9pm.