

London Assembly Environment Committee – Thursday 30 September 2021

Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Climate Adaptation and Climate Risks in London

Zack Polanski AM (Chair): Joining us virtually is Councillor Johnny Thalassites, Lead Member for Planning, Place and Environment, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. We are joined by Chris Lee, Director of Environment and Regeneration, London Borough of Merton, and Patricia Cuervo, Senior Flood and Water Management Officer, Royal Borough of Kensington and also Co-Chair (Planning Lead) of the London Drainage Engineers Group (LoDEG). Thank you very much and welcome all.

If I could dive straight into it with [Councillor] Johnny Thalassites in Kensington and Chelsea. Thinking about recent extreme weather events affecting London, such as those in July 2021, what has been the impact on London boroughs?

Councillor Johnny Thalassites (Lead Member for Planning , Place and Environment, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea): First of all, thank you for inviting us today. This is an extremely important issue for us all to tackle. In Kensington and Chelsea, the impact of recent extreme weather events has been enormous. If I just run through some of the figures that we have from our borough alone, I know that lots of other parts of the city were similarly affected. We know that over 200 residents have had to be accommodated in local hotels and provided with food and clothing while steps were taken to assess the extent of the damage. Three schools had to close due to flooding, at a time when we know that education has been extremely disrupted over the last 18 months. I know at least one large block of flats in my ward, Alison Court in Holland Park, where residents were trapped and unable to leave the court for almost a day as water flooded the car park area.

We know that vulnerable residents had to be evacuated from a Care Leavers Hostel and placed in temporary accommodation. Several council buildings running essential services, from day centres to youth centres and libraries, also were severely damaged over the course of the last couple of months. Just moving quickly on, we know that the cost of the response ran into the tens of thousands. It was over £50,000. We currently have eight council tenants still in temporary accommodation and work is progressing on repairs to properties. That is a quick run through of some of the tangible impacts. We know that there is also a mental health impact from flooding too, whether you have been affected in terms of having to leave your home for a period or whether your work has been impacted. I have spent time with residents in my ward, but also across Notting Hill and North Kensington, talking to them about how much it has affected them. It is important to register that that is a less-seen effect of flooding that we all need to be mindful of and make sure that we offer support for going forward.

Zack Polanski AM (Chair): Thank you, Johnny, and thank you again for joining us. I have a map from the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea from 2007 of properties flooded. Do you know if there is an intention for the borough to reproduce a map from this year?

Patricia Cuervo (Senior Flood and Water Management Officer, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea; Co-Chair (Planning Lead) of the London Drainage Engineers Group): Yes, the borough would produce a Section 19 investigation. We will be mapping the flooding event. We have a rough idea of the most affected areas. We will produce something by the end of this year or early next year. We are waiting for the outcome of the Thames Water Independent Review

Zack Polanski AM (Chair): Could I also ask you, what is your borough learning from recent extreme weather events, such as the flash flooding in July? How are you adapting in preparation for future potential occurrences?

Patricia Cuervo (Senior Flood and Water Management Officer, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea; Co-Chair (Planning Lead) of the London Drainage Engineers Group): One of the key messages discussed in Panel 1 was that we need to improve our response, working together with other boroughs and other response authorities. We also need to understand our different roles and responsibilities as Lead Local Flood Authorities and contingency planning authorities. We need to have a clear understanding of our roles and how we communicate with each other. In terms of surface water particularly, there are quite a few key points that we need to focus on. We need to understand our assets and the assets of others. We need to understand their maintenance, their state of repair and their capacity. We also need accurate modelling of surface water and its interaction with other types of flood risk, because water does not understand boundaries.

We need to know how surface water is interacting with groundwater flooding. The July event happened when there was tidal lock, when the tide was high, which had quite bad consequences. We need also proper forecasting and warning system for residents. We need a change of legislation and also a change of British Standards. As a local planning authority, new developments need to be resilient to climate change. However, water companies will need to plan infrastructure to be resilient to climate change. That is something that needs to change at a much higher level. It is something that [The Rt Hon] Boris [Johnson MP, Prime Minister] can change. We also need to warn residents. We need to make everyone aware that they are vulnerable to flooding and what they can do to protect themselves.

As Lead Local Flood Authorities, we also need to be properly funded. The Government has announced £5.2 billion funding on flood-risk projects, not just surface water, but flood risk projects in general. The way of Lead Local Flood Authorities accessing this funding is heavily diminished because we do not have enough resources to be able to put projects forward and to implement those projects. We really need to think outside the box, and we need to think in a holistic way and stop saying surface water only, it is flood risk in general and all the agencies need to work together for that.

Zack Polanski AM (Chair): Thank you very much, Patricia. Moving to Chris now, the same question but with a Merton perspective, what is your borough learning from recent occurrences and how are you adapting to avoid these in future?

Chris Lee (Director of Environment and Regeneration, London Borough of Merton): Thank you and thank you for inviting me. Thankfully the events in Merton were less impactful than those I have just heard about from Kensington and Chelsea. That is not to say that there is not a problem. Despite all of our flood risk assessments and our flood management plans Merton still suffered very significantly during the events in July 2021. What we are learning from that, and our partners Thames Water are learning from that, is the need for investment in an aging infrastructure and in an infrastructure owned by Thames Water that requires probably more regular annual maintenance and a planned maintenance programme. Unless that infrastructure is working at the capacity for which it was designed and operating fit for purpose these problems will recur.

As the previous respondent said, there needs to be that holistic approach and working across the agencies with the local authority to ensure that all the assets, whether they are owned by Merton or whether they are owned by Thames Water, are operating satisfactorily to ensure that these events reduce in terms of frequency. We are seeing, however, that the abnormal is becoming the normal. Even with the sort of programme that is required

to ensure that the water flows satisfactorily through the system, in the longer term there is going to have to be more significant capital investment in order to ensure the system is fit for purpose.

Hina Bokhari AM: Back as far as 2007 councils were warning and worried about what was happening in that particular borough with flash flooding. Why is it still taking so long to have some sort of actionable approach to dealing with flooding proactively rather than reactively?

Chris Lee (Director of Environment and Regeneration, London Borough of Merton): There is not a single bullet to resolve this problem. It would be unfair to say that there has not been action. Since we took the Lead Local Flood Authority responsibilities at the start of the last decade we have fulfilled our responsibilities to the letter in terms of establishing that assessment of the areas that suffer from flood risk and preparing and publishing detailed plans where we take action in order to minimise that flood risk. That is an evolving and developing picture. We need and do take account of recent flood events in order to inform that picture and to adapt and change our activity. However, our activity is just one part of that bigger picture. We feed our information into Thames Water and other agencies to ensure that they can take the requisite action.

A lot of our work is done in terms of trying to mitigate the problem, trying to prevent the problem occurring through our activity in cleaning gullies. We have around 17,500 gullies in Merton. We have regular programmes to clear those and the higher risk ones, to clean at a more regular frequency in order to ensure that they do not contribute to the problem that we are facing. We work very closely now with Thames Water in order to ensure that the problems we identify in their systems can be taken into account and that Thames Water can take the appropriate action. That needs to continue.

Hina Bokhari AM: You mentioned the gullies and the drains, which is a particular area of interest. I want to know how the communication between the council and the residents is ensuring that there is sufficient clearance. For example, do you notify the residents when you are going to be clearing the drains so there is adequate space for that clearance to happen, because, for example, cars could be parked on those roads? How successful has that been? Do you think there could be some improvements?

Chris Lee (Director of Environment and Regeneration, London Borough of Merton): Firstly, we have a programme which identifies the high-risk gullies across the borough. Around 10,000 of that 17,500 are high-risk. Some of those are in town centres, some are in the areas which suffer more intense flooding during the high rainfall. We have that programme of clearing those gullies. We also have a facility where residents can inform us of gullies that are blocked. We have a 72-hour response and a dedicated webpage for those to be reported and for us to respond and clear those gullies. You are right, there are problems where there are parked vehicles in our streets. Merton is a very heavily parked borough. Where we suffer from that, where we have vehicles parked over gullies, it is often extremely difficult to have those removed.

That is going to be a challenge for the future and one we are looking at whereby we could seek residents to voluntarily remove their vehicles from one side of the road or the other, so that we can get that more intense clearance of the gullies and the road in order to ensure that they are dealt with on a regular basis. That is going to continue to be a problem in terms of vehicle parking. With the number of roads and streets that we have and the number of vehicles, getting a Traffic Management Order (TMO) - which we do in some instances, in order to lift vehicles and remove them, so that we can clean the gullies properly. I am sure we can improve the communications with residents in order to seek their cooperation. That will be a constant challenge. We do have instances where residents simply do not remove their vehicle despite our requests and the cost and burden on the council taxpayer in order to get vehicles lifted or have the gully clearance vehicle return on a number of occasions is significant.

Hina Bokhari AM: Can I suggest that the communication then between residents, councillors and officers could be improved, not just in Merton but in every council when it comes to these situations?

Chris Lee (Director of Environment and Regeneration, London Borough of Merton): I am sure there are areas that we can work on to help that, yes.

Hina Bokhari AM: I am going to leave it there because I know we are running out of time.

Tony Devenish AM (Deputy Chairman): My question is to Chris and then to Johnny. How is the London Environment Strategy making a positive impact in enabling your borough to adapt to the extreme weather?

Chris Lee (Director of Environment and Regeneration, London Borough of Merton): Merton has a Climate Change Plan. That Climate Change Plan, alongside our Local Plan, our planning policies, is doing everything we can, responding to the Environment Strategy in order to ensure that our policies and our actions are consistent with it and that we are adapting and seeking to mitigate the impact of climate change. That plays right into our planning policies around future development and the way that we are seeking, particularly in relation to flood and water management, to mitigate the impact of the increased weather events that we are seeing in the borough by shifting from grey to green, by having more water attenuation, by seeking to mitigate the impact of new development and existing development on Merton and London.

Councillor Johnny Thalassites (Lead Member for Planning, Place and Environment, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea): You will know about a lot of the work that we have been doing to adapt to extreme weather in our borough of Kensington and Chelsea. We do use the London Environment Strategy to inform our evidence-based documents, our Local Plan and things like the Greening Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) that we adopted last year. We are currently reviewing our Local Plan and intend to use the Strategy to develop robust approaches to extreme weather and all associated issues. We require Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) for all new developments as well, for major and minor developments.

We have also had £500,000 of funding from the Regional Flood and Coastal Committee to implement SuDS in one housing estate in the borough. We know there is a lot more work to do and we certainly intend to work closely with the Environment Strategy and with the Assembly to produce the right response to the flooding we have had.

Tony Devenish AM (Deputy Chairman): Thank you very much. My second question, and maybe Johnny could start first this time, there are some initiatives including the link to the Mayor's Environment Strategy around data collection and mapping. How is the data collection, mapping and monitoring having a material impact in enabling your borough to practically adapt to the impact of climate change?

Councillor Johnny Thalassites (Lead Member for Planning, Place and Environment, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea): Data and mapping are both very important. We talked about it a bit earlier in relation to assets in the borough, which is a key component. We do collect data and more on flood risk in evidence-based documents, for example, in the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, the surface water management plans that we have and also in forming our local planning policies and the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy and Action Plan. There is a lot of work happening. This data also helps us with flood-risk projects on the ground, specifically the selection of the best possible locations for things like the implementation of SuDS.

Chris Lee (Director of Environment and Regeneration, London Borough of Merton): To add to that, the supply of new information and that accretion of data is absolutely essential to us being able to respond to this. One good example that we have in Merton is that we have already installed over 60 internet of things devices into our high-risk gullies and we are investing in more of those. Those provide us with real-time information about the level of silt and the impact on that gully flowing. Over time that will help to build that richer picture, alongside all of the data that we are collecting around flood events, Section 19 investigations and information from other partners to add to the already rich supply of data and mapping that we have, so that we can adapt and shift our resources in order to ensure that flooding becomes less of a risk in the future.

Tony Devenish AM (Deputy Chairman): Thank you. I will leave it there, Chair.

Zack Polanski AM (Chair): Thank you very much. Assembly Member Bokhari.

Hina Bokhari AM: What is being done to improve the proportion of permeable surface in your borough for new and existing developments and spaces?

Chris Lee (Director of Environment and Regeneration, London Borough of Merton): I mentioned earlier that our planning policies are developing and adapting to seek to ensure that we have more mitigation of flooding. One good example of that is asking developers to build rain gardens into their development. We are also putting that into some of our infrastructure. There is one that is just about complete now in SW19, around High Path. In new developments on private land our policies seek to ensure that developers provide attenuation, that they are providing appropriate water storage, including rain gardens, green roofs and so on. Our planning policies are just at the stage of being reviewed by the Planning Inspectorate and they will further strengthen that in terms of the requirements to provide that sort of provision.

Hina Bokhari AM: Patricia, what is being done to improve the proportion of permeable surfaces in your borough?

Patricia Cuervo (Senior Flood and Water Management Officer, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea; Co-Chair and Planning Lead, London Drainage Engineers Group): We have a specific policy on SuDS. We went one step further than the London Plan, so instead of just requiring a very big reduction of surface water on the main development, we also require a 50% reduction on small development, which is what we get quite a lot in inner London boroughs. For any rear extension, side expansion or basement development, we would require the whole of the runoff from the site to be reduced by 50%. That is one of the policies that we introduced in 2019 and I can assure you that we are getting quite a lot of developments with new SuDS.

The other thing that we have is a policy on new permeable surfaces for all landscape areas because planning policy or permitted development rights allow for rear gardens to be paved over without any need for planning permission. It is not considered a development, paving over the rear gardens. Front gardens are protected in a way, but not rear gardens, and so we introduced a new policy on protecting all landscape areas or open areas within sites. That is for new development that is happening.

However, we definitely need to do more - not just us in Kensington but everyone everywhere in London or any big city - to repave existing development and existing areas when we are doing other works as local authorities, highways and so on, in our own buildings, and to encourage other people to introduce permeable surfaces and more green infrastructure.

Hina Bokhari AM: What do both the councils do when there is a breach of planning guidance? In 2008, it was very clearly made out that if you were to pave over your front gardens, that would be a breach. Is there any way that you are publicising this kind of guidance and providing information for people? They are paving over their front gardens to allow, for example, having electric cars to be charged. What kind of action are you taking against these kinds of issues that are popping up now in front gardens?

Patricia Cuervo (Senior Flood and Water Management Officer, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea; Co-Chair and Planning Lead, London Drainage Engineers Group): For the front gardens, you can pave over 5 square metres, but if you pave more than 5 square metres you will need to direct the surface runoff into green areas or you need to use permeable paving. Then you will find you have permitted development rights for that. What do we do to publicise that? We have it on our planning webpage, on our SuDS webpage, and on our Greening SPD. We included a small section on that to make sure the residents know what they can do. I also think that is on the householders' guide in the Greening SPD.

In terms of how we ensure that any breaches are looked at, we have a Planning Enforcement Team. They work proactively by looking at if development has been implemented according to the conditions of the planning permission granted. We also get residents calling us and saying, "We do not think that this development is being implemented according to the plans and according to the permission", so we go out and check.

Hina Bokhari AM: Is there any enforcement in Merton?

Chris Lee (Director of Environment and Regeneration, London Borough of Merton): The situation is almost identical in terms of the statutory position and the permitted development rights, and where there are breaches, they are reported or can be reported to Planning Enforcement. I am not aware of instances where planning enforcement has had to take action in order to reverse the position and to take the development out, but I am happy to investigate that.

Hina Bokhari AM: I would like to hear from you on that, yes.

Chris Lee (Director of Environment and Regeneration, London Borough of Merton): The point is well made that sustainable drainage is absolutely essential if we are going to mitigate the flooding risk that we face, and we do need to keep an eye on where non-permeable surfaces that are not consistent with permitted development rights are being installed.

Hina Bokhari AM: Thank you very much.

Zack Polanski AM (Chair): Thank you. Assembly Member Sheikh.

Sakina Sheikh AM: Building on some of what we have been talking about, especially regarding planning enforcement, it was a very interesting conversation because on our previous panel we had someone from the Environment Agency who did say that there are applications that pass that do not adhere to the advice or the recommendations of the Environment Agency.

It is good to hear from both you, Chris, and you also came in, Patricia and Johnny, on planning enforcement and ensuring that we do have applications that comply not only with the London Plan but with the advice of the Environment Agency, ensuring that we do minimise the risks. Part of it also is perhaps we have not really

seen the serious flooding that has more recently come onto our streets, so perhaps culturally we are still catching up. Here is hoping we continue improving.

I just wanted to build again on what we have been talking about regarding surface water flooding risks. I wanted to ask all of you what you think needs to be done in London so that we have fully adapted to surface water flooding risks caused by climate change. What support? What mechanisms? If there are far-reaching visions and action plans, it would be really good to hear from you about what they are.

Councillor Johnny Thalassites (Lead Member for Planning, Place and Environment, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea): It is a really good question and I agree with a lot of the comments you made. Largely, I would refer to some of the points we have been making over the course of this morning and this early afternoon, particularly about understanding our existing asset ownership, maintenance and repair capacity; making sure we have accurate modelling of surface water and its interaction with other types of flood risks, including sewer flooding, fluvial flooding and tidal-locking groundwater; a proper forecasting and warning system; and legislative change where necessary so that climate change is not only accounted for in a new development but also in the water industry and by all Risk Management Authorities (RMAs).

We also need to do an educational piece, making sure that people understand the risks that are associated with extreme weather like flooding in our city. We need properly funded Lead Local Flood Authorities and RMAs who can access Government funds. We also need to think outside the box, I would suggest, to understand and to try to mitigate what will happen soon when these events do become more frequent. Those are all points that reflect what might be done, particularly in London but also nationally.

Then, locally, there are the things we have been talking about in terms of the Local Plan, some of the resilience work that we are doing in policy and enforcement terms, and also continuous work with the partners. A joined-up approach is extremely important in making sure that, for example, Thames Water is playing its part, ensuring that major projects like Counters Creek in our part of London and the Thames Tideway, which are associated with water and related impacts, are taken forward in a timely way and in a way that is value for money for citizens of the city. Those are all things that we can help make happen so that flooding and surface water risk is reduced.

Chris Lee (Director of Environment and Regeneration, London Borough of Merton): To add to that, first, raising awareness generally across London for existing landowners to think about how they could adapt their property, even if it is not subject to development, and how they could return grey surfaces to green to assist with the challenge that we all face. General awareness-raising would help, so that the problem be better understood and enable people to see how they can deal with it.

The second point is, I suppose, around materials research, because that may deliver some opportunities to tackle the problem in new and innovative ways. Because so much of our city is covered with hard surfaces, the replacement of some of those hard surfaces in a way that uses new materials could assist. Then the point around funding cannot be underplayed in terms of the Lead Local Flood Authority's available resources to work with other agencies and developers to ensure that we can develop the city in a way that does not add to the problem but hopefully reduces that problem over time.

Sakina Sheikh AM: It is good throughout this meeting that planning has been at the absolute core, that adaptation and mitigation in terms of our strategies going forward. On the idea of thinking outside of the box there is cultural change we also need to see across the UK in terms of bringing people on a journey about how the very infrastructure of our city has to change in order to adapt to climate change. That has perhaps come

harsher than we had hoped it would through the floods. That thinking outside the box, and doing so very rapidly, in terms of how we make people feel positive about the infrastructure changes that are needed because of climate change, is essential for us to see that behaviour change.

It leads into my next question, really. How can we encourage behavioural change and what kind of behavioural changes do we need to encourage for our citizens, in regards to flooding and general climate change adaptation?

Patricia Cuervo (Senior Flood and Water Management Officer, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea; Co-Chair and Planning Lead, London Drainage Engineers Group): The first thing that we need to do is make residents aware of the risk that they are at, because one of the lessons learned for us was that residents had not been aware of this type of flood risks. They were totally unaware, and that is really dangerous when you have sewer water flooding and you have basement properties used for sleeping accommodation. It is extremely dangerous.

That is one of the things that we need to be better at. We need to tell everyone, or at least share information on which properties are at risk. The information is out there but it is only being looked at when this type of event is happening, really. People only worry about flooding when it happens, rather than before it happens.

Then, I do not know how but we need to make them take responsibility for flood risk. They need to have good insurance that covers this type of risk. They need to have practical measures like, for example, a contingency plan or a flood plan. They need to see if they need any measures to protect the property, which are called property level protection measures.

We also need to send a message out. For example, we had a big scheme in the borough - you referred to it before - and one of the parts of the project involved a large sewer enlargement which would take about three years to construct. Some of the sites were in really highly built-up residential areas and most of the residents living in the area who had not been flooded in 2007 were totally opposed to this type of construction impact. We need to make people aware that these infrastructure projects need to happen as well, and they need to not only think about the temporary construction impact that they are going to suffer, but also the ultimate benefits that they will have.

We need to make people aware and us aware that we are not going to solve this problem by only doing green infrastructure. Green infrastructure is great, but we have a big problem and we also require pipes and sewer infrastructure. We need to make sure that we are all on the same lines and understand that there are some types of impacts that we are going to suffer at this time to make sure that we reduce the flood risk in future. The key message that we need to tell - and it is very difficult to convey this message - is that we cannot stop flooding from happening and this will only get worse, so we need to make sure that we adapt to it and we try to reduce the consequences of flooding. The message that we will not be able to stop it is key. Everyone needs to be responsible for their own safety as well. That is what we need to tell residents.

Sakina Sheikh AM: Behavioural change and embedding the idea of not panic but responsibility in terms of expectations around flood risks is vital. It is always important, as politicians, to put things in the wider context. Comms around this would be key, in terms of bringing people on a journey and that cultural change around our behaviour of climate change, but also putting this in context nationally and internationally.

People should not have to feel like they are the only ones doing the heavy lifting to mitigate against climate change. We need to make sure the Government is also doing the heavy lifting in terms of bringing in

accountability around fossil fuel companies. Internationally as well, it is important to put it in the context that the flood events that we have seen have been devastating for the UK - and it really saddens me that so many people have had to suffer - have also been happening for many years in many countries around the world. In Bangladesh, for instance, the level of flooding is extremely intense, and small state islands are also highly at risk. This is totally related to what is happening in London and the UK because it is climate change at the heart of this. That international, national, and then regional and local action has to all be in sync in terms of actually activating behavioural change.

I will wrap up with this final question. This is around flooding incidents and we have spoken already a little bit about this but it would just be good to tease out your answers again. Are you satisfied and how do you communicate with Thames Water and London Fire Brigade (LFB) to help identify the most vulnerable residents when we do have extreme flooding, and what improvements can we hope for if there need to be some?

Patricia Cuervo (Senior Flood and Water Management Officer, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea; Co-Chair and Planning Lead, London Drainage Engineers Group): One of the lessons learned from this flooding event is that we need to improve our communication with Thames Water. We have been talking to Thames Water and they say that they have improved their phone facilities, because at the time it happened we are aware that some residents could not get through to them. They have improved their facilities and they have also given us a direct line to talk to them as officers in an emergency response, so that hopefully will have a very positive impact when the next event happens.

Chris Lee (Director of Environment and Regeneration, London Borough of Merton): If I could add, our mapping systems in Merton are quite advanced and sophisticated, so we can identify the areas of the borough that are more susceptible, more high-risk, and we can identify those households that are vulnerable. If COVID has helped us with anything, it has helped us to improve our connectivity with residents right around the borough in terms of identifying vulnerability and need. Our relationship with the LFB is very good and our relationship with Thames Water is good and improving. That bodes well for the future, in terms of us being able to ensure that we respond as quickly and as efficiently as we can with those other agencies to support those who are most in need in the event of flooding.

Zack Polanski AM (Chair): A few weeks ago I met the amazing campaigners at Save Earl's Court campaign. They were talking about the kind of dead space that we often see around lots of places in London, but particularly the wasteland that is currently there at Earl's Court. Do you see a role with that space, in greening it, that will deal with some of the issues that we have been speaking about today?

Councillor Johnny Thalassites (Lead Member for Planning, Place and Environment, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea): I spent a lot of time and met with the Save Earl's Court campaign too and I admire their passion and their interest in the area. I certainly think there is an opportunity to implement green infrastructure and a very green site on the Earl's Court Opportunity Area. It is one of the major opportunities in our borough to develop something really special. I would love to think that there will be, and we will certainly be pressing for it. Our policies support all the kinds of sustainable drainage and green infrastructure we have been talking about today.

Absolutely I share the aspiration that it will make a contribution toward mitigating flood risk, and I do think that it stands almost alone - also Kensal Canalside - as one of the key sites in Kensington and Chelsea that can make a significant contribution on many fronts to the challenges that we face at almost a regional level too.

Zack Polanski AM (Chair): Thank you for that. I also spoke to Councillor [Linda] Wade [Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea] and she talked about the possibility of a super-sewer along Warwick Road. I just wondered if you had any reflections, not just for Kensington but more generally, on that kind of infrastructure along with SuDS.

Patricia Cuervo (Senior Flood and Water Management Officer, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea; Co-Chair and Planning Lead, London Drainage Engineers Group): Do you mean the Counters Creek sewer enlargement?

Zack Polanski AM (Chair): Exactly, where the intersection is.

Patricia Cuervo (Senior Flood and Water Management Officer, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea; Co-Chair and Planning Lead, London Drainage Engineers Group): Yes, we as a council support the sewer enlargement, which was part of the Counters Creek Storm Alleviation Scheme, and it had other elements to it like local pumping stations, pumps for basement properties and SuDS within Kensington and Chelsea, and Hammersmith and Fulham. So we do support it, but the information that we are going to get out of the Thames Water independent review would be: how would this sewer enlargement behave or how would it have helped if it were built in July this year, in terms of reducing the flood risk consequences? We would be very interested in knowing what would have happened if that sewer was built, but we definitely support any infrastructure that is going to reduce the flood risk in the borough.

Councillor Johnny Thalassites (Lead Member for Planning, Place and Environment, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea): We certainly do strongly support building up Counters Creek, and it is a disappointment that it has not been done yet. Whilst we recognise there are financial challenges associated with delivering a project of that scale, we absolutely want to see it in the next Business Plan and we want it to be delivered as soon as possible.

I have met personally with senior representatives at Thames Water and encouraged them to do that, and it is something that we intend to keep lobbying for. I met a number of residents across the borough who have asked us about that. There was awareness of it in the borough as a project that we hoped would start to mitigate some of the flood risk. Councillor Wade is an ally in that and I am very happy to work cross-party within our borough to try and produce the best outcome for residents because an issue like flooding, with such serious impacts on people's lives and livelihoods, requires a joined-up response.

Zack Polanski AM (Chair): Thank you both very much. Assembly Member Cooper.

Léonie Cooper AM: We just heard from our previous panel about the impacts of the urban heat island effect, how that might particularly be impacting at night, and that we could be 1.5 to 3 degrees higher than surrounding areas but even warmer at night.

Chris, what is happening in your borough to increase surface area cooling, for example, through urban greening, which obviously has some flood mitigation as well?

Chris Lee (Director of Environment and Regeneration, London Borough of Merton): The planning policies that we have are seeking to ensure the future development reduces overheating, and as I said earlier, those are just going through a planning inquiry later this year. We hope to adopt the most advanced policies in terms of future development.

We are blessed in Merton with an abundance of green spaces, over 110 parks and open spaces. We are heavily 'treed', if such a verb exists, in terms of the tree cover that we have in the borough, which we seek to maintain and enhance. We do have plans for more tree planting, principally within our parks because they are easier and cheaper to maintain, but also on streets as well because of the canopy cover they provide in order to keep our streets cooler. Some parts of the borough benefit from more trees than others so we are looking at planting more trees in those areas which are currently deficient or relatively deficient. There are those two areas of activity.

Patricia Cuervo (Senior Flood and Water Management Officer, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea; Co-Chair and Planning Lead, London Drainage Engineers Group): I support what Chris is saying in terms of new development, we have policies and we also follow the London Plan on streetscape and layout of the building orientations to facilitate natural cooling rather than cooling by other mechanical ways. Then we are also planting additional trees and we have a Heatwave Plan, which is what would happen if temperatures increased rapidly. The Heatwave Plan has different levels or degree of implementation of practical measures such as talking to vulnerable people, providing water and ice, talking to general practitioners (GPs), etc. We are trying to put measures in place for new development, also for existing development, and for what would happen when it does happen.

Léonie Cooper AM: In terms of behaviour change, which is obviously quite an important area when responding to a heatwave, Chris, given your environment and regeneration remit, are you advising property developers around things like shading, awnings and shutters? Also, in the event of a heatwave in the way that we were just discussing, is that something that the borough responds to by sending out notices to people, alerting people through local WhatsApp groups or Facebook groups, or if there is longer, perhaps even leaflets to people? Do you pick things up particularly in care homes, things like that? Overheating and excess summer deaths particularly affect the older resident and the younger resident, just as the excess winter deaths tend to impact on those people. Is there something that the borough is doing around that?

Chris Lee (Director of Environment and Regeneration, London Borough of Merton): There is, but I suspect there is more we could do. Our Emergency Planning Team are well hooked into those supplies of information around extreme weather events and ensure that that information is disseminated on a daily basis, where necessary, to those staff across the organisations. For example, it can go out to care homes so they take extra precautions, and so that our parking staff on the streets make sure they put on sunscreen and carry extra water with them. We need to do more to get that message out to residents and to the community more consistently, and that is something that we will be looking at.

Our Climate Change Plan anticipates many of these changes that we will be facing in the city over the years to come. We will be working on how we improve our engagement with residents and raising awareness, and how we can adapt to those sorts of events and get that behaviour change. That is going to be the most challenging issue here. How do we use the most modern techniques in order to make people aware but not panic, and to make sure that we get the right behaviour change to adapt for the future?

Léonie Cooper AM: In terms of the Cool Spaces Initiative, how involved is the borough in that and what has been the local impact so far?

Chris Lee (Director of Environment and Regeneration, London Borough of Merton): We are absolutely aware of the Cool Spaces Initiative and we have a number of cool spaces in the borough in terms of

our parks and open spaces, which have an abundance of shade and protection, and we will continue to remain involved and engaged in that process.

Léonie Cooper AM: I am hoping that the advent of the pocket park and seeing more of those is going to be a way to create more of those cool spaces, and getting those trees planted down the street so it is not just in the wider open spaces as we were referring to earlier. I will leave it there, Chair, thank you very much.

Zack Polanski AM (Chair): I am with you there, Assembly Member Cooper. Assembly Member Best.

Emma Best AM: Just to the Kensington and Chelsea contingent, please, how is your borough working to ensure that the most vulnerable citizens are being protected against the effects of extreme heat in London, such as the elderly and children?

Councillor Johnny Thalassites (Lead Member for Planning, Place and Environment, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea): That is a really important question. We are ensuring that the Local Plan addresses extreme weather in new development, and the streetscape, layout and orientation of buildings enhance actual ventilation. The provision of green infrastructure is also reducing the heat island effect, and, as we have been talking about, there are additional street trees being planted and parks have been added to the Local Government Association's (LGA) programme.

The Greening SPD that I have mentioned a bit earlier today, particularly the section on building design, shows that the "Be Lean" step is at the top of the London Plan Energy Hierarchy; Chapter 5 deals with orientation and issues such as the glazing ratio, which is valuable; and the other element that might be useful is in Chapter 11, which is dealing with urban greening, so the green walls and roofs can be looked at in particular. All of these sorts of things can help but certainly Chapter 5, which is aimed at new build in particular and retrofitting existing buildings by greening, as in Chapter 11, may assist.

As we have talked a little bit about, we also have our Heatwave Plan that deals with different health alert levels and actions, warning meetings and practical measures. Things like measuring temperatures in locations used by vulnerable people, provisional cold water and ice, phoning or visiting vulnerable residents, and liaising with GPs are all things that we can do to try and protect the most vulnerable in the case of extreme heat in London, as we have been starting to see more and more of.

Emma Best AM: Thank you for that, Johnny. What could the Mayor do to support you in those initiatives?

Councillor Johnny Thalassites (Lead Member for Planning, Place and Environment, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea): I certainly think that there is a lot more that we can do. More joined up working in terms of producing policies. Where possible, we would want to feed into future London Plans and look at accessing funding to try to deliver more green infrastructure. There are things that we can work together on and, as I said before, working with the Mayor's Office and anybody with an interest in the issues would certainly be valuable for us.

Emma Best AM: Is there anything specifically you are doing to work with care homes in Chelsea and Kensington to protect those residents?

Patricia Cuervo (Senior Flood and Water Management Officer, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea; Co-Chair and Planning Lead, London Drainage Engineers Group): Yes, the Heatwave Plan talks about different actions, and the hotter it gets the more specific the action is. Our colleagues in

contingency planning would be talking to care homes and advising them on the different measures that they can take, and not just care homes but also local GPs that might provide further information or further practical measures that have been implemented. That is what we are doing at the moment.

Emma Best AM: Thank you. Do you believe that the policies in the London Plan, such as the management of heat risk policy, contain provisions to ensure that new large developments do not overheat? Do you believe those are working?

Patricia Cuervo (Senior Flood and Water Management Officer, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea; Co-Chair and Planning Lead, London Drainage Engineers Group): I am not specialised on heat and on the orientation and layout of buildings, but the London Plan has always been a reference to us on any specific policies that try to address climate change. I would assume that they do have a positive effect and, therefore, we can ask for them to be implemented in our new developments.

Emma Best AM: I suppose that you would not reflect that there is anything that you would like to see extra in the London Plan at this point?

Patricia Cuervo (Senior Flood and Water Management Officer, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea; Co-Chair and Planning Lead, London Drainage Engineers Group): Not for the time being.

Emma Best AM: Thank you. Finally, Chair, if I may, Assembly Member Cooper talked about the cooling initiatives. Are there any schools in your borough that delivered the C40 [Cities] Cooling Schools initiative?

Councillor Johnny Thalassites (Lead Member for Planning, Place and Environment, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea): I am not aware of any off the top of my head but it is something we would like to look at, and we are in close dialogue with schools about issues like flooding. Over the course of the recent flood events, at least three schools were affected and had to close for a period, so it is something that we are certainly liaising on closely and I work with colleagues on.

Emma Best AM: Chris, could I ask the same to you, if any of you have done any C40 Cooling Schools initiatives?

Chris Lee (Director of Environment and Regeneration, London Borough of Merton): I am sorry. I am not aware of that at all.

Emma Best AM: It is maybe a scheme that could do with some more promotion then, Chair, but I will leave it there. Thank you.

Zack Polanski AM (Chair): It sounds like it. Thank you all very much. Thank you to our panel for joining us. Thank you, Chris, Patricia and Johnny, really appreciated your contributions, and thank you to my fellow Assembly Members.