

CLr Alison Butler - Homes and Regeneration

October 2017

Latest News – Regeneration

Croydon's first arts store to open in the heart of town centre

As part of the Growth Zone's programme of 'meanwhile use' a former furniture store in the Whitgift Shopping Centre has been temporarily taken over by a consortium of local and neighbouring arts organisations.

Croydon Arts Store (CAS) has opened its doors at the former site of Grange furniture store and will provide a participatory visual arts and events programme with a focus on youth engagement and learning.

Spread across four floors, Croydon Arts Store will hold arts workshops and activities, have an artist residency space, be the new home for artist-led project Turf's ongoing free exhibition and public events programme, and host a research space to develop a Croydon biennial art exhibition in partnership with Kingston School of Art.

There will also be a free bookable area available for young creatives to propose projects for the public programme – this can range from events, workshops, screenings, performances and more.

The store is a collaboration between Croydon Council; Turf Projects, Art Halo, and Kingston School of Art. The space was taken over with the support of the Croydon Partnership.

Croydon Arts Store is a fantastic initiative and will add real value to the borough's cultural provision. The transformation of an empty shop into a temporary art space enables activation and regeneration through art and creative businesses.

It has many positive impacts, including increased footfall, visitor spend, youth engagement and providing opportunities for young people to develop new skills and training for future job opportunities, all of which will feed directly into Croydon's overall growth.



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Croydon i-street competition winner revealed



An interactive, LED-lit, halo device that will help people find their way around Croydon's changing streetscape has been crowned winner of the Croydon i-street competition.

The halos which could come in different forms are designed to hover above street level, suspended by cables from nearby buildings or metal poles. Their LED displays will deliver a range of information from wayfinding, locations of local landmarks and the time, to information about local events or the weather.

The striking displays also have the ability to turn an area of pavement into a temporary stage perfect for street theatre, by projecting light down on to the street as well as up into the sky to promote the fact a performance is taking place.

The concept was submitted by a multi-disciplinary team - consisting of vPPR Architects, Twelve Studio and HTS Structural Engineers – that came up with a state-of-the-art piece of tech that, as well as being a useful directional tool for visitors, was interactive and easily adaptable to accommodate Croydon's rapidly changing streetscape.

More than 60 groups entered the competition, which was part of Croydon's Growth Zone programme and for which the council partnered with the Architects' Journal. Six shortlisted teams presented their concepts to the judging panel, which was chaired by BBC journalist and presenter Razia Iqbal.

Other finalists' ideas included the Croydon Dragonfly – a series of bold, artistic wayfinding installations; cognitive paving that can widen or narrow depending on the number of users and automatically produce resting surfaces when needed; and large sculptural lettering integrated with tech.

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Thornton Heath streetscene improvements move into next phase

The next phase of improvement works to enhance the streetscene in Thornton Heath began on Monday 18 September.

Works will be carried out by the roundabout on Whitehorse Lane at the junction with High Street and Whitehorse Road and will include the removal of old street furniture and new paving and kerbs. New trees will also be planted and new public seating installed to create a more pleasant environment.

As part of this there has also been work done to the front of buildings, public art installations, business support provided to local businesses and new wayfinding signage fitted to highlight key destinations in and around the area.

Improving the look and feel of Thornton Heath has been a high priority for residents and the council alike. I am pleased the first stage of public realm works is coming to an end and the improvements around the Whitehorse Lane roundabout can now begin.

The input from the local community will ensure that these works will further enhance Thornton Heath, making it an attractive place for residents and visitors alike.

Ashburton



In Croydon, we have a number of hidden gems, one being the former convent library building in Ashburton Park. This attractive building which was built in 1882, has become a real landmark in the area and something that local people and park users want to see brought back to life.

After significant council investment, the building has had a complete makeover making it ready for community use. It's a big space with a lot of potential and we are working to ensure it gets used and enjoyed in the best ways possible.

Latest News - Homes

Croydon pressures government for funding towards fire sprinklers

The council has pressed government ministers to confirm whether they will contribute towards Croydon's fire sprinkler investment in the borough's 25 tallest tower blocks. Croydon was the first council in the country to announce on 19 June it will pay for and install fire sprinklers in residents' individual flats as part of its response to the Grenfell Tower tragedy.

Our first request was to ask the Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP to contribute towards the sprinklers' estimated £10m cost and for greater borrowing powers to do any future fire safety work. Housing minister Alok Sharma MP replied that financial resources will not prevent "necessary" work to ensure the fire safety of social housing, adding that it was up to councils to take action.

So, I wrote again to communities and local government secretary Sajid Javid MP. It read: "We completely agree that there should be no hesitation in putting in place additional measures to ensure the safety of our tenants, and that is why we announced a programme to install sprinklers in all of our blocks of 10 storeys and above within days of the Grenfell Tower tragedy. We believe these works are necessary to ensure the fire safety of our housing and therefore should receive financial support from government."

I have been bitterly disappointed to receive a response from Alok Sharma MP, stating that placing sprinklers in our tenant's homes is 'additional, not essential'. This is despite Dany Cotton, the Commissioner of the London Fire Brigade, saying: "I think Grenfell should be a turning point. I support retrofitting - for me where you can save one life then it's worth doing. This can't be optional, it can't be a nice to have, this is something that must happen".

We will continue to lobby the government to either help fund the sprinklers or to remove financial restrictions on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) as it has claimed it would.

The sprinklers will go into individual flats in Croydon Council's residential blocks of 10, 11 and 12 storeys. Work will start in October and finish next spring.

We have now completed sprinklers works on our first property in College Green, in order that our tenants get the opportunity to view what they look like and how unobtrusive they can be.

Photos of the finished flat and a video of the works taking place can be seen on our website at www.croydon.gov.uk/housing/firesafety. Frequently asked questions (FAQs) about the sprinklers can be found on the same page.

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Landlords fined and face ban after council prosecution

A pair of private landlords who rented out a damp and mouldy Croydon house to a family of four have been fined £4,000 each by a judge and face a ban from letting properties in the borough.

Croydon Council inspectors found a number of serious hazards when they visited the house last year in Bensham Lane, Thornton Heath, including no electricity, a kitchen strewn with rubble, partially-collapsed ceiling plasterwork, and significant damp and mould.

At Croydon Magistrates' Court on Tuesday 5 September, District Judge Susan Holdham found Mr Samir Sakka and Ms Besarta Zeneli guilty in their absence for failing to obey an improvement notice to upgrade the property issued by Croydon Council under the Housing Act 2004.

Croydon Council's property licensing team will now begin the formal process of banning Mr Sakka, aged 58, of Nelson Road in Wimbledon, and Ms Zeneli, aged 27, of Leigham Avenue in Streatham, from holding a property licence to let to Croydon tenants in future.

The council, which carried out over £22,000 worth of urgent repairs to the flat in default and billed the landlords, will also begin the process of ensuring that Mr Sakka and Ms Zeneli repay this bill.

No family should live in such appalling conditions, which is why we stepped in after these private landlords failed to do the responsible thing and fix the house. While most private Croydon landlords are good, this case underlines why we will continue to prosecute the minority of people who fail to protect their tenants.

Tenants of private houses or flats in Croydon with major concerns about the state of their property can contact the council via propertylicensing@croydon.gov.uk or call 020 8726 6103, available Monday to Friday from 9am-4pm

Housebuilding company Brick by Brick shortlisted in five awards

The housebuilding company set up by the council, Brick by Brick, has been shortlisted in five separate categories at the Inside Housing Development Awards.

Brick by Brick has been announced as finalists in the following categories: Best Affordable Housing Development, Best Regeneration Project (London), Best Development Team, Best Architectural Design and Best Shared Ownership Development.

The winners will be revealed on Thursday 23 November.

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It is fantastic news for Croydon that Brick by Brick has been shortlisted for these awards. Our ambition has been to help address the housing crisis with high quality, well designed homes that will give Croydon people access to affordable homes of their own and it is great that this is being recognised within the industry.

Council strikes better deal on homelessness housing

A new contract has started that guarantees Croydon Council a supply of quality accommodation for homeless people over the next 40 years.

Three sites on London Road – with 338 units in total – will remain used as much-needed council temporary accommodation for decades to come after the council agreed a new contract.

The council will save around £5m in comparison to the previous lease by paying 30% less each year under the new deal struck with the buildings' landlord Cheyne Social Property Impact Fund, which bought the sites in December from the previous freeholder.

The leases on all three buildings – Concord House, Sycamore House and Windsor House – had been due to expire by 2025 after the council originally took them on in 2015 and 2016 to provide a far better standard of accommodation for people avoiding homelessness and to cut the Council's use of expensive and less suitable nightly bed and breakfast accommodation.

The contract means two of the buildings – Concord House and Sycamore House – now have a 40-year lease, while Windsor House's lease has been extended by 21 years. The council has also taken over from contractors the buildings' day-to-day management, including repairs.

Council approves £25m investment in affordable rented housing

Croydon Council approved a £25m investment in more affordable housing via a new independent charity that guarantees cheaper rents for local people.

In June the council's cabinet agreed the setting up of an independent charity provisionally called Croydon Homes to rent out 340 local homes costing 65% or lower of the usual private rent. This £25m allows the council to fund Croydon Homes's purchase of another 250 properties on the open market.

At July's cabinet meeting, the council gave approval to a £25m revolving fund to be loaned to Croydon Homes, which then buys the 250 properties and rents them out to local people. Croydon Homes repays the council through the rent it receives, and will receive extra investment money from the council in stages as more properties become available.

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The move means that a two-bedroom privately rented flat in Croydon at £1,380 per month would instead cost £900 through Croydon Homes. Tenants would also get a three-year contract instead of the usual six months with a private landlord.

As well as setting affordable rent levels, Croydon Homes will also prioritise housing for borough residents. Croydon Homes will be able to use around £30m in Right to Buy sales receipts, and the overall scheme will save the council up to £1.2m on its temporary accommodation costs.

Universal Credit (UC) / Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP)

Croydon now has over 20,000 households in receipt of universal credit, the largest amount of any council in the country. Unfortunately we continue to experience issues in relation to delays and difficulties in making application and supporting our more vulnerable families.

However, through the work in our Gateway service we continue to offer support in discretionary funding, budgeting, money management and finding work which is greatly assisting families. This year to date we have worked with and support over 5,000 residents.

We are concerned however, by the number of families affected by spiralling debt and the threat of eviction. Croydon has an excellent record in preventing homelessness through the use of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP). In 2016/17 the council spent £2m on discretionary housing payments helping families stay in their homes and avoid homelessness through contributions towards rent or deposits. £1.5m of this money came from the DWP, plus £500,000 from the council's finances. From April-August this year the council made 958 discretionary housing payment awards – up from 529 for the same period last year. This goes alongside the work in preventing homelessness by negotiating with landlords and changing outcomes for families through education, employment and benefits take-up.

However, we are continuing to say quite loudly that as the number of people affected continues to rise, this financial assistance becomes more and more unsustainable. We are also continuing to lobby and challenge the Department for Work and Pensions for policy and operational changes especially with regard to our more vulnerable customers in emergency accommodation.

Croydon Local Plan

The Croydon Local Plan is entering its final stages. The Local Plan examination hearings, before an independent planning inspector, took place during May to June this year and gave the opportunity to those that made representations to express their views at the hearings. Following the hearings the inspector has published a number of Main Modifications he considers are necessary to make the Local Plan 'sound'. The consultation on the Main Modifications commenced on 29 August and concluded on the 10 October.

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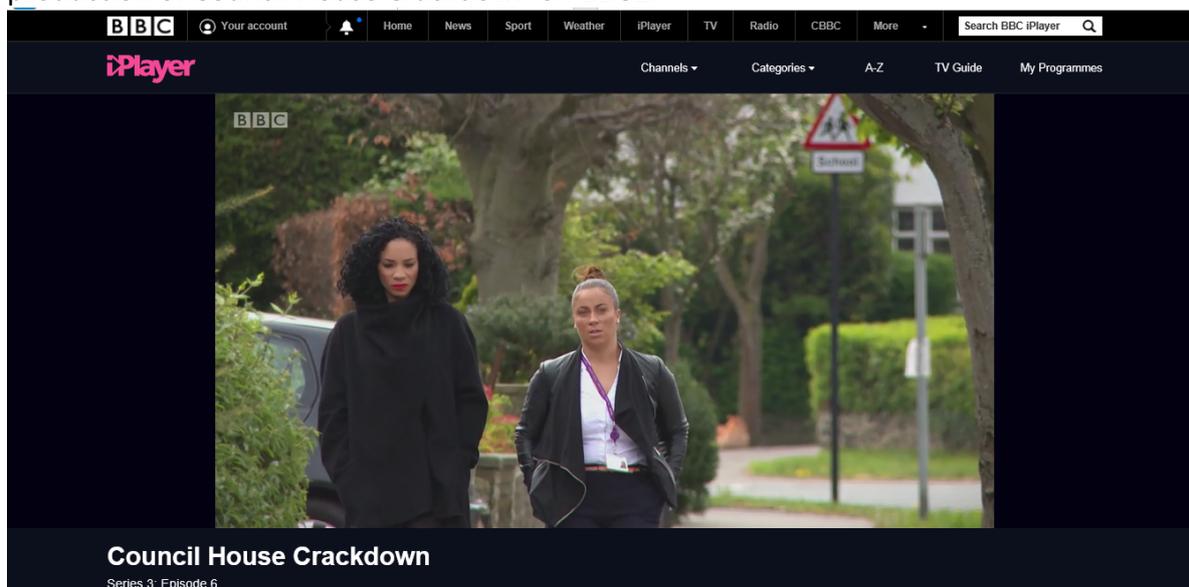
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The Council has made a representation to the consultation that expresses disappointment that the deletion of Local Green Spaces is proposed by the government appointed inspector. Also that we are disappointed that he has not fully supported our plans for the control of hot food take-aways and also to outline the further importance of the protection of the borough's most valued community public houses.

In terms of next steps, all the duly made representations received will be submitted to the inspector to inform the Inspector's final report. It is anticipated the Inspector will submit his final report to the Council on the soundness of the Local Plan this autumn. Subject to the Local Plans being found 'sound', adoption of the Local Plans is anticipated December 17 / January 18.

Council officer in BBC1 – Council house crackdown

In April 2017, Leanne Manning currently acting Tenancy Manager took part in the filming production of Council House Crackdown on BBC1.



Working in partnership with our corporate fraud team Leanne alongside other Council officers had a successful outcome of prosecution for Ms Catherine Maloney. The programme reveals how the Turkish Pensioner pretended to be Scottish to deceitfully gain a Council property and £170,000 in benefits. The programme detailed the amount of work, resources, partnership working and length of time it takes to tackle Fraud and demonstrate the zero tolerance for it here at Croydon Council.

The full programme can be seen [here](#)

Croydon Choice makes its 100th let

The Council has now let its 100th home through Croydon Choice, which went live at the end of May. Croydon Choice is the dedicated website used to advertise all available council and housing association properties – providing a radical new approach to openness and transparency in the letting of social housing. Housing applicants can bid for up to three

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properties at any one time; so far almost 20,000 bids have been placed. In addition to the website, there is a mobile app – making home searching even easier. Applicants can browse properties, and place bids by downloading the app from the app store / google play (it is called “Home Connect”).

The website is a great vehicle too for helping to manage the expectations of housing applicants. It is very easy to see that only a handful of properties are available each week, and what position in the queue each applicant is, should they place a bid. This information is being used to help target information about other, more realistic housing options to people. For more information www.croydonchoice.org.uk