

NORBURY HUSTING EVENTS 21 APRIL 2026 7.30 PM

NORBURY METHODIST CHURCH

POLLARDS HILL NORTH

Notes from the Meeting: This is a compilation of a couple of people taking notes, not official minutes – we did not record the meeting and acknowledge that a few points may have been missed.

Introduction

Deborah Bestwick, Chair of LOVE NORBURY and Chair of local residents association, NVGRA, welcomed the attendees and introduced the candidates for the Croydon Mayor (election 7 May 2026).

Jason Perry – Conservative Party

Richard Michael Howard – Liberal Democrat Party

Michael Pusey MBE – Taking the Initiative Party

Peter Underwood – Green Party

Rowenna Davies – Labour Party

Ben Goldstone – Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition

Deborah introduced Ian Clarke, Committee member of LOVE NORBURY and Chair of local Residents association, SERA, as the Chair of the event. It was agreed that there would be no videoing (to protect attendees privacy) and as a welcoming and respectful event, no heckling.

Ian asked the candidates to deliver a 2 minute introduction , following which a series of questions (submitted in advance by Norbury residents) would be put to them.

Introductions

Opening Remarks

Jason Perry

- He has been Croydon Mayor since May 2022, inherited a borough in decline and had a huge task ahead. He focused on turning Croydon around
- Key areas were
 - Stabilising finance of Croydon
 - Improving the town centre. Worked closely with Westfield in Croydon. New planning permissions in Croydon
 - Cleaning dirt and decay with a zero tolerance approach
 - It had taken 2-3 years to get the council to function

Richard Howard

- Background is 20 years in the Army, then Investment banking and now his own financial business
- In 4 years the Council's finances are still not fixed with £100m a year deficit, despite a 33% increase in Council tax
- The cost base is still too high and is not delivering best value
- The biggest issue is finance and Croydon needs a government deal
- Croydon needs somebody with credibility who can deal with this issue

Michael Pusey

- He is not a career politician
- He has created youth clubs between Croydon and Birmingham, improving youth clubs, trying to give young people opportunities
- He raised over £1m in fundraising
- Wants Croydon to be a safer place, bring it back to the Community
- Works in finances / hedge funds

Peter Underwood

- 'Hope' should be normal; need to build from the positive
- Transparency is required – open up the finances and publish contracts.
- Honesty about what can and can't be done
- Proactivity to get things done

Rowenna Davis

- Norbury is a secret hidden treasure – visits for the Sea Garden and restaurants, was active in saving the Tennis Club
- Background as a teacher in Croydon, lives in Croydon
- Croydon is not on schedule. She wants to (i) fix the town centre, using the vacant sites, (ii) fix fly tipping and (iii) tackle crime and anti-social behaviour.

Ben Goldstone

- Standing on a No Cuts Anti-Austerity basis
- Works for a homelessness Charity
- Raised Croydon housing problem – lack of Council housing, rogue landlords issues and need for rent controls
- Stepped up as a candidate as council tax has risen by 33% with decline in services e.g. library, youth engagement team. We need a campaign from Croydon taken to Central government

Ian thanked the candidates and then began the process of asking resubmitted questions. Each candidate was then invited to answer.

Question 1. LOVE NORBURY has been trying for years to get artwork installed at the railway station bridge, welcoming people to Norbury, but has struggled to get engagement from the various parties such as TFL, Network Rail, etc. We're delighted to see that Public Art under the Railway Bridge has been included in the list of projects to benefit from the £1.5 million awarded to Croydon through the Government's Pride in Place Impact Fund. Are you committed to this project and if so, how will you ensure that the project is successfully delivered by 31 March 2027?

[opening question from LOVE NORBURY team]

Richard Howard

- Yes, committed, Need to view positive outcomes of art projects, Art is always the first item cut
- Suggested forming a committee to delivery this multi-agency task

Michael Pusey

- Committed
- Has experiencing campaigning and raising money for the Community e.g. worked with community to raised £1,2m for a new BMX track in Burgess Park, would look to create a structured plan, involving community, be strong in seeing it through

Peter Underwood

- Completely committed – improve the green and built environment
- His slogan is 'Making Croydon Happier'
- Should invest in talent and creativity in Croydon to achieve

Rowenna Davis

- Full support and loves idea of using local talent
- Would sit down with LOVE NORBURY in the first 100 days to make plans

Ben Goldstone

- Committed to local art at railway station with local artists from Norbury and Croydon

Jason Perry

- He allocated the funding for this project and also for some investment in Green Lane . Bridge clean needed

- Said we can trust him to deliver
He has invested in Norbury Park and Norbury Hall Park (new paths)

Question 2. What plans do you have to regenerate Norbury? All we have are takeaways, vape shops, barbers and gambling establishments. There is a finite amount of money that can be spent in such establishment – why so many? Also, if the current application for a gambling licence for Merkur Slots is granted at the former NatWest bank , that will make 5 gambling establishments in close proximity. How can we be allowed 5 places to gamble but no bank? I have objected to the application, but this is something you could intervene on if you became Mayor?

[Julie McDonagh – not present]

Michael Pusey

- Important that the community stick and work together on this matter. It's all about Planning, and we need to work together to deter young people from gambling

Peter Underwood

- The idea of the old High Street is clearly going/ gone
- We need to look at 'Third Spaces' where people can come together and not spend money
- Need to look at some new ideas of places to have in a High Street e.g. Board game café
- Planning should be about what local people want

Rowenna Davis

- In the first 100 days, she would launch a Land Commission to look at derelict sites across Croydon
- She knows that Norbury already 'saw off' another gambling licence application on the old Barclay building – the Local Plan should / could be used to keep gambling out – create a Local Plan for the people
- She suggested it be used for other use : supermarket or restaurant

Ben Goldstone

- Cares what happens in the Hight Street
- Would hold a People's Budget and help fight for funding
- Gambling is predatory on the poor

Jason Perry

- Norbury has a very vibrant and distinct High Street
- The council needs to support distinct district centres. Parking is important – e.g 1 hour free parking

- Wants to make it a nice place
- Set up 'Croydon means business' for SMEs to start new businesses. Support young people to start new businesses – with units. Start Business Associations where they don't exist
- Not a fan of gambling but it is a licensing and a quasi-judicial process, and it is good that Norbury is good at fighting

Richard Howard

- Problem in District Centres – the system of business rates has broken town centres. High business rates mean that only low overhead businesses can survive
- Wants to pass the planning decision down to the local communities via statutory byelaws – citizens decide
- 50% of CIL monies must stay within the local community
- Suggest an impact assessment to show it (Merkur Slots) will do harm

Question 3. What assistance, if any, will you provide to local residents who are fighting the proposed development at the NatWest Sports ground on Turle Road, whose residents lives are going to be blighted by the proposed over development?

Peter Underwood

- Would to meet the residents to find out the details - Doesn't know the issue
- Problems of Councils not talking to each other is real
- Would have more cross borough communication

Rowenna Davis

- Residents have been let down
- No help given by Council against Merton
- It will go to the GLA
- Croydon should fight for some S106 money

Ben Goldstone

- Affordable housing is needed.
- Suggest a join campaign between Merton and Norbury residents

Jason Perry

- Planning is a contentious area.
- Croydon Council should have been consulted

- Jason's last campaign was tough on Planning issues and he has changed how planning operates in Croydon
- He said he would happily support the local residents, and would campaign with Norbury Councillors against the plans

Richard Howard

- Refer to the Neighbourhood Plan which should include the road boundaries
- Empower voices of communities
- Neighbour -plan sign off
- Bottom up not a top down approach required

Michael Pusey

- Bring the developers into the residents meetings
- S106 is great funding for a community – use for youth and elderly
- Focused on youth – use the land for purposes which address youth crime

Question 4. There is no money. There are few assets left to sell and few cuts that can still be made. Council Tax has been increased by the maximum allowed in recent years. How will you go about bring the Council's finances under control, whilst protecting and improving services.

Rowenna Davis

- Croydon Council finances are not on track. Council tax has increased 33% over the last 4 years
- 17% goes to debt interest financing. Need a deal with the National Government on the debt which will be hard as precedent for this. Fight for Fair Funding – funding based on and according to deprivation
- Has good contacts on Central Gvt
- Council own finance need to be put in order. Money is wasted in agency workers and picking up fly tipping piecemeal
- 'Just because Croydon Council is bust it doesn't mean we are' Need to seek new funding and development – attract capital investment. Croydon has potential

Ben Goldstone

- Get a deal - debt addressed by Central Government
- Use powers to have a No cuts Needs based budget
- Use reserves

Jason Perry

- Local government finances challenging because of the £1.4b debt
- Top 2 spending items are Adults and children social care spent; 3rd is servicing debt interest
- When JP took office the debt was rising by £15k per hour. Has now plateaued.
- The debt is stabilised – strategy to continue working with Central Gvt
- Despite challenges there has been ongoing investment e.g libraries opening hours, youth engagement work.

Richard Howard

- Has delved deeply into this
- The lack of a deal with the government is directly due to the fact that Croydon has a high value costs base / not delivering Best Value
- There has been a lack of progress – despite huge expenditure on consultants there are delivery plans based on assumptions not evidence
- Stated his financial planning and major logistics qualifications and experience in big organisations
- Performance management and delivery of best value is what is needed

Michael Pusey

- There is a £1.4b debt – it will take baby steps to address – like his experience of coaching – get it done bit by bit
- Look at relief for Council Tax and Business rates
- Get qualified people in to negotiate a debt deal

Peter Underwood

- Fundamental issue is how Croydon got into this situation
- Immoral that the government are keeping councils underfunded – it is a Gvt choice
- Boroughs need to work collectively to address this

Question 5. Fly tipping and enforcement

Q from Tony Hooker, founder of Litter free Norbury.

At the hustings here 4 years ago, I asked what the candidates would do about rogue fly-tipping. Since then, the problem had escalated significantly, with around 1,000 reports a month in Norbury alone. If elected, what specific strategy will you implement to bring fly-tipping under control and address the root causes of this growing problem. How will you deliver enforcement?

Ben Goldstone

- No sufficient bulk rubbish pickup
- Fund free bulk-waste disposal for residents

Jason Perry

- The refuse crews pick up waste where reported
- Croydon has the highest number of reports – which doesn't mean highest level of fly-tipping
- Reports are high because Croydon has the LoveCleanStreets app – only a third of boroughs have this
- Taking a zero tolerance approach on Blue Badge Fraud, dumped cars, the things that take away people's pride

Richard Howard

- Had been behind garages, observing weekly fly tips
- need to focus on prevention via security, CCTV etc
- There needs to be joined up action between the council, police and community

Michael Pusey

- Move to heavier fines – and the fine income allocated to removing the waste, and the money put back into the community,
- Talk to the community about the best places to site CCTV etc.

Peter Underwood

- Enforcement is important, ensuring the teams are properly resourced
- Reducing waste
- Make disposing of bulk stuff easier - make it easier for people to do the right thing
- Regulation of waste disposal companies
- The Council Veolia contact has not yet been published – he would publish.

Rowenna Davis

- Fly tipping makes her furious
- Enforcement side – need much higher fines, crush the fly tippers vehicles, get points on their licence, Name and Shame!
- Prevention such as Big Skip days, bringing back more bins - 100 new bins in Norbury – save money via prevention
- Get neighbourhood involvement , work with people – e,g Tony Hooker
- Publishing the Veolia contract

Here Ian asked all participants to confirm that they would publish the Veolia contact. All confirmed that they would.

Question 5. How will each candidate ensure the maintenance and safety of our local parks, in particular Northborough Park and Pollards Hill. Also street trees and trees in our parks are being removed and not being replaced. Will you commit to mandatory tree replacement and maintenance?

Jason Perry

- Invested in local parks and green spaces, mentioned Norbury Park and Norbury Hall Park, investing in the playground (in Northborough Park)
- He reintroduced grass mowing which had been stopped

Richard Howard

- Echoes what Jason said – parks are not a luxury
- Wants a register of ‘notable trees’

Michael Pusey

- Has experience of transforming green spaces for young people
- Said it’s a simple thing to keep the grass cut in parks, allowing the community to use them – involve the community

Peter Underwood

- Volunteers, in the context of park care should be ‘the icing on the cake, not the cake, Take care of biodiversity – it is a simple matter to mow pitches / play areas while keeping wild meadow areas
- Protect green areas across the whole of Croydon

Rowenna Davis

- There is a noticeable difference between the parks that have Friends groups and those that don’t
- Lack of investment in green areas for poorer areas – needs to be more investment
- Bid for more external funding
- Suggested a Great South Run, a cross-country run across Croydon’s parks
- Tree Inequity is an issue for her– lack of investment in street trees in poorer areas – needs looking at.

Ben Goldstone

- Shouldn’t need to rely on volunteers
- Utilise Park Wardens

- More trees
- Find out the issues and improve lighting, benches etc

Here Ian asked all participants to confirm that they would commit to street tree replacement. All confirmed that they would.

One Minute Closing Comments: anything additional the candidates would like to say

Ben Goldstone –

Would focus on addressing the lack of council housing, and knife crime. Would not look to pass cuts on to residents

Rowenna Davis –

Loves this town (Norbury) and would seek to put it on the map – invest more. Address issues in the Town Centre – the loss of VUE / spate of stabbings shows CC is not on the right track. Suggested people check for Manifestos – only Labour has a 26 page Manifesto outlining policies.

Peter Underwood –

Time for a real change – start with hope

Michael Pusey –

Would address crime – we need more police, more cameras

Richard Howard –

Important not to promise stuff you can't afford or have no control over – the most important thing is to get the finances under control

Jason Perry

It has been a great privilege to be Mayor. Huge change in Norbury. Huge change in borough. Says he has kept all his promises: he has brought investment and regeneration into the borough. He believes he is the man to continue this work

Deborah Bestwick thanked all the candidates for participating, Ian Clarke for Chairing, and all the volunteers who had contributed to making the event happen thanked everyone for attending, reminded us all to vote on May 7th, gave credit to Democracy and to Norbury, and closed the meeting.

