

7a) Strategic Theme Questions Priority (Sustainable Communities)

Councillor Ian Munn to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Regeneration

Could he update us on discussions he has had regarding Crossrail 2?

Reply

The Council's cross-party response to the Crossrail 2 consultation is available online at www.merton.gov.uk/crossrail2

"The consultation proposals as they stand represent an unacceptable level of upheaval and disruption to our business community. We have made it clear to Crossrail that if the plans remain as they are, we would be forced to reconsider our support for the project. We are committed to our local businesses and the welfare of our residents and will stand by their interests"

"Crossrail 2 could be huge opportunity for Wimbledon and Merton. But the development of this significant scheme can only go ahead if businesses can continue to thrive throughout the works and disruption to residents remains at a minimum."

Key points from our consultation response:

- We don't consider a consultation consisting of a single option for Wimbledon Station to be a genuine consultation.
- The potential impact on Wimbledon town centre and Weir Road is unparalleled and places Wimbledon in a uniquely vulnerable position. We require a thorough analysis of alternative route and station options.
- Development in Wimbledon town centre should not be led by new residential development – maintaining the vibrancy of our town.
- We want to see over-line decking to accommodate new commercial space prior to the demolition (if needed) of town centre shops and offices.
- There is a lack of any socio-economic analysis of the impact of the construction, including impacts on our businesses and residents.
- Wimbledon station proposals need to fit within a council led masterplan; to ensure the long term benefits of Crossrail are maximised and that, as community, we control design quality and protect our unique character and heritage.
- Merton Council supports the Tooting Broadway CR2 interchange option to alleviate the Northern Line in Merton and provide step-free access to St Georges Hospital.
- There isn't enough detail in the consultation to fully understand the impacts in the Raynes Park area. Further options need to be explored regarding the level crossings in West Barnes ward to minimise any severance or disruption to local business.

The Council continue to meet regularly with the Crossrail2 team and are exploring alternative route and station options for Wimbledon including:

- Tunnelling the southwest trains fast-lines

- Tunnelling the CR2 route completely through Merton
- Northern alignment (district line platforms)

There is a great deal of work to do and the council is taking a lead by initiating a collaborative masterplanning process throughout 2016, where residents and businesses will be able to work with the Council and representatives from Crossrail to help formulate a plan for the future of our fantastic town centre.

The Leader of the Council has met with Lord Adonis, Chair of the National Infrastructure Commission to put the case for Wimbledon which we hope will be heard. As cabinet member, I am also in regular contact with Michele Dix, Managing Director, Crossrail2 and have a meeting set for February to discuss how a better solution for our borough will be achieved.

Supplementary Question

I'd like to congratulate my Colleague on the work he did to coordinate the cross rail two proposal. But could he outline how he will continue to stand up for and promote the views of residents and businesses who will be surely affected by the scheme.

Reply

I think it's essentially by continuing the very strong course of arguments that we have already moved against the current proposals for Cross Rail two. We may support cross rail two in principal but not at the expense of people and businesses. So we will be discussing with Cross Rail two, we will be arguing with Cross rail two, we will be negotiating with Cross Rail two.

Councillor Daniel Holden to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking:

What is the current status of the ANPR cameras roll-out across the borough?

Reply

The installation/roll-out of the ANPR cameras will start in April 2016 with completion and operation programmed for June 2016.

Supplementary Question

My quick question today is what steps will the cabinet member and the council take to avoid having to repay parking fines relating to ANPR Cameras in light of a letter from Robert Goodwill MP who's in the department of transport who sent a letter to Council parking managers in December who said there uses are illegal in council public carparks.

Reply

I'm not sure I entirely know the answer to your question, but I will say that with ANPR, that at the moment we haven't even started it yet. In that there's a legal challenge on this so we haven't been able to start anything so I haven't actually had those discussions with the officers at the moment but I can certainly take that question to them and we can discuss that. I think that when we start to roll this out and hopefully it will be soon we can then look at the implementation and look at how we go forward with that. So thank you for raising that with me and I will certainly take

it back to them and we will have to see how the implementation starts and go from there.

Councillor Katy Neep to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

Could the Cabinet Member update us on our heritage strategy?

Reply

The new five year Heritage Strategy was agreed at Cabinet on 7 December 2015. It sets out an ambitious programme of projects and has been devised with community stakeholders. In recent years the borough has significantly increased investment from external agencies and continuing this growth forward is a key element within our new strategy. The new strategy is focussed around four key objectives:

1. Raise Merton's profile by increasing public access to the borough's unique and diverse cultural heritage;
2. Safeguard the borough's varied heritage sites and resources, protecting and conserving them for the benefit of future generations;
3. Ensure that Merton's heritage provision is inclusive by working collaboratively to widen public engagement and participation;
4. To recognise the important contribution of social enterprise and secure ongoing funding and investment in Merton's heritage through partnership work, external funding and sponsorship.

Supplementary Question

I would like to thank the Cabinet member for the answer to my written question and I would be quite interested to hear a little bit more about the exciting development, can you update us on the application for funding at the Wimbledon Library to be a cultural destination.

Reply

Yes I can, I'm going to read from an email sent to the ward Councillors for Hillside and to me today, by our Anthony Hopkins. Dear Councillors, I am very pleased to be able to inform you that following the recent mission of the Council's Proposal to transform the back state of Wimbledon Library into a multi-use cultural space. We have been awarded the funding in order to take the project forward. Now this is really exciting folks. Wimbledon Library, the back of Wimbledon Library used to be a theatre way back, it wasn't a very large or exciting theatre but it was a theatre. It is now the reference Library; it will stay the reference Library during the day only as it should be. But this money will help us to transform that space into a cultural space for use for performing plays, for meetings, for whatever Wimbledon wants, because we care. This is marvellous; I've got to make a point of getting the Hillside Councillors onside very, very early on. I think it's only right that they should have been involved as soon as I possibly could. It's really exciting; I'm looking forward to it. I hope to give you more news later. Thank you very much.

Councillor Suzanne Grocott to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

I have just been reading the 2013-14 traffic report which showed that the two places with the most accidents in the borough are the junctions of Dorset Road/Kingston Road and Hartfield Road/Wimbledon Hill Road and that total casualties in Merton increased by 20% to 617 between 2013 and 2014.

Dundonald Councillors have asked numerous times for some safety improvements to be made within the Dundonald grid area (in particular Lower Downs Road and Kingswood Road) only to be told that resources have to be directed to the areas which have seen the most accidents. Given the findings of this report outlined above, can the Cabinet Member explain what the council is planning to do to address these accident hotspots and when?

Reply

The borough receives a budget from TfL (following an annual bid) to investigate and deliver the local safety programme. This involves looking at all the accidents throughout the borough and identifying those areas that could be addressed via engineering solutions. The budget is modest and therefore any engineering solution would need to be affordable deliverable and address accidents. There are a number of places with higher numbers of accidents and it is not possible to address them all. It is important to look at reasons for accidents. There are a number of factors that contribute toward accidents, these include poor driver behaviour, weather conditions, road works, type of road etc. For example in response to Dorset Road/Kingston Road, the accidents are primarily due to driver error for which there is no engineering solution; sightlines are clear, there is no physical feature that contributes toward any potential accident. Measures such as banning certain movements could be considered but by doing so, it is likely that traffic is likely to migrate to other roads which have poorer sightlines thereby transferring a larger problem. It is also necessary to prioritise certain categories of road, for example road that accommodate schools, nurseries, etc

We will be developing next financial year's programme shortly and accidents in key places will be investigated and the appropriate action will be taken. It is acknowledged that there have been concerns raised by Dundonald Councillors regarding Dundonald grid. However, this area appears to have a better accident record than other locations except for the most recent serious accident involving a young cyclist (reasons for the accident still to be confirmed by the police).

Supplementary Question

I'm very sorry to hear that he's refusing to provide any assistance to mediate the traffic issues in the Dundonald grid area and I'm sure that residents will be sorry too. But doesn't he think that introducing more 20 mph speed limits where residents want them could help reduce accidents and address some of the issues at busy sites. And if so why is there no funding currently allocated by the administration for the expansion of 20 mph sites.

Reply

In fact this has been through scrutiny, we've agreed a possession in scrutiny at the crossing party, we don't support the limits that is signs without physical measures, because the evidence is there not effective. But we do support 20 mph zones and when we can get the funding from transport for London we will introduce them and in

terms of the Dundonald area, I would suggest that the characterisation of the answer is not true to the answer. We did not say we are not going to do anything about it, we say we investigate every accident area on the basis of the evidence and if the evidence suggests that through street management re-engineering we can reduce accidents we will do our utmost to act, but if the evidence suggests that actually in particular locations its simply driver behaviour and that no amount of street engineering will alter that fact then there's little we can do. Now there has been an accident in Merton Hall road recently and we are waiting for the police to report on that and we will look at that report very closely and no doubt we will see to act on any recommendations in that report.

Councillor Abigail Jones to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

Can the Cabinet Member outline how he expects the government's proposed Housing and Planning Bill will affect Merton?

Reply

The forthcoming Housing and Planning Bill, whose second reading in the Lords started on 26 January 2016, proposes further changes to a wide variety of council-related activities. These include the definition of "affordable" homes, management of rogue landlords, duties on local authorities to grant permission for custom builders, to sell high value housing, to register brownfield land and automatically grant planning permission on it. The Bill also proposes granting more intervention powers to the Mayor of London and the Secretary of State and revising the Compulsory Purchase Order process.

More details are available in a report to this meeting of full council (03 Feb 2016 Agenda item 7 "Strategic objective review - Sustainable Communities")

Together with London Councils, Merton Council is following the progress of this Bill and seeking to influence its final shape. We will update councillors once the Bill receives Royal Assent later in 2016.

Supplementary Question

I grew up in Wimbledon and see many of my friends who also grew up here and who want to stay here struggling to do so, they can afford to rent let alone to buy. So does the Cabinet member agree that the governments proposed housing bill exacerbate London's housing crisis further and impact on local residents.

Reply

I can give you the short answer but it is the long one I'm afraid. I went up to the Housing department on Monday. The Housing department if you haven't been up there is actually a very vibrant place where officers are enjoying their jobs, they enjoy what they do. They have a tremendous success rate. They were looking really miserable, I asked why and the reason was that they just had a case where a woman, a mother of 2 school children who has been living as an exemplary tenant, always paying her ways in the private sector for 18 years was summarily evicted by her landlord because her landlord wanted to make a bit more money on the property. So she had to come to Merton, register as homeless and she is now sad to say in a

place and they were utterly miserable about it. Let me give you a couple of other statistics, a bloke called Tim Griggs, Councillor Tim Griggs, he's the leader of the Conservative group at Lambeth Council. He runs a company called legal mentor, which he failed to declare and legal mentor is an eviction specialist firm which boasts a near 100% record in repossessing homes for landlords. How about Tony Bucknall, the former Tory housing spokesperson in Camden who failed to carry out necessary improvements on a property he rents out and he's actually being sued by the council bearing in mind that the government voted down labours plans to make homes fit for human habitation as a matter of course. The LGA estimates that the Council will lose 80,000 social rental homes by 2020. 80,000, there are currently in this country 68,000 people living in temporary accommodation and Mr Mayor there is no decent way out for them. The housing bill by itself is really bad but the housing bill mixed with the benefits cap with universal credit which we have heard recently has paired all these things together on top of what else is being put forward will make it more and more difficult for hard working families up and down the country but particularly in London to find let alone afford the most basic, decent accommodation. Now we in my belief are heading towards the awful, sickening projects system that they have in the United States and I'd like to say Mr Mayor that's down to incompetence because that would afford the opposition, many of whom as decent people, would afford them a little comfort. But I don't believe it, I believe this is done by design, the design of a horrible government that despises the poor and wants to put them down in every way they can.

Councillor Gilli Lewis-Lavender to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture:

Would the Cabinet Member explain a) how closing the Bowling Green at Joseph Hood Recreation Ground will deliver cashable savings when the use of mobile teams rather than specific grounds staff means virtually the same amount of machinery and staff will be required to maintain the remaining Bowling Greens in Merton and b) if the Cabinet Member agrees there will be very minimal financial savings - particularly when set against the loss of benefits to the health of Merton Bowling Club members - what the advantage therefore is for residents of forcing this club to merge with another one?

Reply

Bowling greens are very labour intensive facilities to maintain - approximately 240 hours per annum are spent on preparing this one green alone - and the Greenspaces team is facing a further reduction in its horticulture/sports team staff establishment of one full time post from April 2016 when the next season commences.

The Council's resource concerns in respect of bowling greens has been extensively discussed with the bowls clubs over the past 3 years and our current facility closure proposals have been anticipated since the start of the 2015 season. The context is that this service, overall, costs an estimated £77.5k per annum to provide. The total income received from all venues is in the region of only £16k per annum, and serves an estimated 190 active bowls club members only, currently spread over 6 separate venues.

Each individual bowling green consumes water & electricity, Materials (fertilisers, chemicals, seed, top dressing, etc), machinery operational costs (fuel & servicing) and where necessary items such as irrigation commissioning/decommissioning services.

The annual income received at each venue barely covers the non-labour elements of providing the service and in some cases, including at Joseph Hood Recreation Ground, it typically does not cover even this.

Our approach will deliver cashable savings in that we can reduce spending on both labour and non labour elements with less greens to manage and maintain.

The Council will, nevertheless, continue to support and manage four bowling greens across the borough in the coming season and with 4 bowling greens (2 public & 2 private) within 1.8 kms of Joseph Hood Recreation Ground (and two of these within 1 km distance), the Council's view is that there is sufficient opportunity and capacity for any individual who wishes to participate in the sport to do so within the local area with a minimum of inconvenience and there is, therefore, no obvious reason why the health of any current member of the Merton Bowls Club should be compromised by the decision to close this particular green.

Supplementary Question

I thank the cabinet member for this answer and am glad to hear that he cared and I'm hoping for a decent answer to my question. So given your reply to Councillor Simpson on the 8th July last year that mentioned bowls club and your ambition for the savings group would you not agree that the club that's going to go down that path already with great success are the Merton bowls club and should be allowed to remain open. Consequently would you give serious consideration to allow Merton bowls club to remain open if they undertook and carry out the maintenance of the greens themselves. Since you have already agreed to meet with me and the bowls club would be willing to consider this genuine proposal especially since a petition that I will present later to keep the club open which is the oldest club in Merton 106 years old has been signed by over 1000 people online. This shows the strength and the willingness to keep this club open and other clubs in Merton I think we should agree to get together and talk these things over.

Reply

That proposal of getting the club to look after their own green has been on the table for three years and they have consistently refused to do so. On the basis that they would look after their own green which isn't a cheap thing to do, that's why we are stopping doing it, then of course would renegotiate. We would renegotiate it not only with that club but we would renegotiate it with other clubs that we are closing the green on. That's fine, if that had come across this during the three years of meetings we have had with this club where they didn't have a junior bowls team. The junior bowls team has arrived very recently where up until very recently they had 25 bowling members, if it would have happened at that stage then of course we would. Yes we will talk about it, we will talk about it soon, but I want to be sure that that's a genuine offer from that club because they have already refused to do so in the past.

Councillor Ross Garrod to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking

Could the Cabinet Member update us on the next steps regarding the Scrutiny panel's consideration of the results of the wheelie bin pilot in Lavender ward?

Reply

The Scrutiny panel considered the results of the wheeled bin pilot in lavender ward before Christmas. The report demonstrated significant levels of support from local residents with 89% of residents happy with the system and 95 saying they found wheelie bins easier to use than the existing black sack and recycling container system. The report also found that there was a significant increase in the cleanliness of local streets. The Scrutiny Panel made a number of recommendations including in particular that the costs and potential savings of a borough wide roll out be looked at in more detail, which fits with this administrations commitment to finding value for money ways of improving street cleanliness in the borough while also saving money. The panel's recommendations will be presented to Cabinet on 15th February after which Officers will provide a full response on all the matters raised. These include the size and cost of bins together with their potential impact on the streetscape and on pedestrians where they are left on footways.

Supplementary Question

Could she comment on whether recent reports that wheelie bins could cost 7 billion pounds mean that she is considering gold plated bins and assuming this is another of Councillor Dean's invention. Could she explain how we would assure that any borough wide roll out would focus on achieving value for money for our tax payers.

Reply

I was a bit disappointed when I saw/read that it actually got to the paper as well about the 7 billion pounds it's going to cost for the roll out of their wheelie bins service. No they are not going to be gold plated or even gold for that amount of money, we have to accept that when we are going to implement something that's it's going to cost money for the initial roll out of course it will. But we have to think about the future which is what the supplementary question was about. The pilot scheme that we hold and this has gone to scrutiny already showed that after the pilot scheme, there were cleaner streets. This is what the residents were saying to us, there were cleaner streets, less fly tipping and increased recycling. That's one of the things that we really need to consider – increased recycling. But all these things if we did implement the wheelie bin service, these are the things that are going to happen across the borough now that would be a saving in itself, if we have cleaner streets, better recycling that brings revenue in. So at the end of the day I am happy with the way we are moving with this, I've made no secret about that I would love us to implement wheelie bins in the future. We are running this obviously in parallel with the South London Waste Partnership and with other boroughs that are going on and at the end of the day we have to look at the economy which will happen across the four boroughs. There will be a fall in resources and we are also looking at the ways and means that they are collecting their waste and what they're doing and there's things that we are doing that they want to look at and things they are doing that we want to look at. So it won't cost 7 billion pounds, there's a lot more discussion about this, it will be going back to scrutiny, it will be going back to cabinet, with no

doubt it will come back here 1000 times over. But I am happy to move this in the right direction.

Councillor Daniel Holden to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

What is the current status of the Cycle Quietways scheme from Wimbledon to Wandsworth Common?

Reply

There are a number of elements and their progress is outlined below.

Clapham Common to Wimbledon Quietway Update

Lighting and improved footpath alongside Wandle Trail and Wandle Meadow

Proposals were sent to the Wandle Trail stakeholders in August 2015 and there were concerns about proposed lighting elements for the sections between Wandle Meadow and the borough boundary with Wandsworth.

A new lighting design is being commissioned and Wandle Trail stakeholders will be consulted in April 2016. Construction is expected to begin in August 2016 which will involve path and lighting improvements along the trail.

Widening of Wandle Meadow Bridge

Works expected to begin August 2016.

Plough Lane improvement works

Due to perceived increased expected usage from the Quietway the existing Toucan crossing will be widened to 6m. It is proposed to remove the gate on the southern side of plough lane to provide improved permeability to the Wandle Trail for cyclists. It is also proposed to remove guard railing on the northern side of the crossing. The proposals are currently with TFL signals team and works are scheduled for April 2016.

Railway Bridge Underpass lighting

The design has been sent to Network Rail and currently awaiting approval of Basic Asset Protection Agreement (BAPA). Implementation date to be confirmed upon Network Rail approval. Works expected April 2016.

Haydons Road/South Park Road Junction

It is proposed to widen the existing refuge island at the zebra crossing to allow a safe crossing point for cyclists making the crossing from Cowper Road to South Park Road. Works expected April 2016. We are investigating whether there should also be a width restriction at this point.

Supplementary Question

One thing that you didn't really mention was the lack of consultation present for Wimbledon town centre, it's not mentioned here. I want to ask why have they not consulted on this scheme in that section where it would impact most residents bearing in mind Wandsworth council are consulting residents on the entire length of their scheme on their side of the border.

Reply

Because we haven't devised the scheme yet, we are still looking at the different engineering issues in particular junction treatments and width restrictions there is no secret to the fact that systematic came in with proposals two or three years ago for large scale closures across streets and we've taken the view that they are impractical so Merton officers are looking at far more limited interventions primarily around south park road, with a view to endeavouring to reduce the traffic in South Park road. But as I've said it's not good to be aware of closure, once we've got a proposal that we think stands up in an engineering way then we will be consulting with residents.

Councillor Fidelis Gadzama to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration

Could he update us on the next stage in the hoped for return of AFC Wimbledon to the borough?

Reply

Since 10 December 2015 when Merton's Planning Applications Committee voted to grant planning permission (subject to legal agreements) to the AFC Wimbledon / Galliard Homes scheme officers have been working hard to finalise the legal agreement in accordance with the Planning Applications Committee's decision. The Mayor of London commented on the planning application during 2015 when it was being considered by Merton Council. Now details of the Council's planning decision have been submitted to the Mayor of London and we are hopeful that the Mayor will tell us his decision in the next few weeks.

Supplementary Question

Can we confirm that the Conservative administration in Wandsworth has written to the Mayor of London regarding the AFC Wimbledon application?

Reply

By complete chance I've got a copy of that email on the 21st December. Dear Steven I am away from the office for a bit so please forgive this note that would otherwise be a call. As you know there is very significant concern in Wandsworth about the decision to approve planning permission to AFC Wimbledon for the proposed major developments. I intend to write to the Mayor of London proposing that this decision is called in by the Mayor for further consideration, I know you will understand our strength of feeling from our side of the boarder but I am equally

confident that this will not impact on the positive relationship Wandsworth council enjoys with Merton. With best wishes for the festive season. Some Christmas present, perhaps you think very disappointing, very disappointing for all those who want to see a higher quality regeneration of that site in Bell lane for AFC Wimbledon football club and for all the supporters and we will imagine they've got a direct line for Councillor's Office

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