

Agenda Item 5

Council 10 September 2014

Public questions

Procedure

The Mayor will call your name and ask if you have a supplementary question arising from the answer you have received.

If you do not have a supplementary question then simply respond thank you, no. If you do have a supplementary question respond thank you, yes. You will be shown to a seat in the chamber where you will ask your supplementary question. Make sure you use the microphone.

Having put your question, please be seated whilst the Cabinet member responds. Once the response has been given, please return to your seat in the public gallery. The questions and answers and all supplementary questions and replies will be published on Merton's website after the meeting.

**1) From Jacqueline Heys Robinson
To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration**

Has the Council considered that proposals to demolish and regenerate High Path, Eastfields and Ravensbury estates would give rise to serious difficulties? Included are disruptive building works, severe congestion on roads and underground, loss of privacy, and further strain on electrical wiring and plumbing.

Reply

In response to Circle Housing Merton Priory Homes proposals to explore the regeneration of these three estates, the council has committed to working with residents, to ensure their voices are heard and their needs are met throughout the consultation process. The council has convinced Circle Housing Merton Priory Homes to jointly sign up to a list of 10 key commitments which will keep residents at the heart of these proposals. In recognition of concerns about disruption, should regeneration go ahead, one of these commitments is that Circle Merton Priory Homes will keep disruption to a minimum and provide extra help to those who most need it. The council is also preparing an Estates Local Plan to explore the investment in these estates so that we can fully understand all the issues presented by this project and that any redevelopment would be bound by planning rules to maximise benefits and minimise disruption as far as possible.

Supplementary:

I would like to enquire as a result of a survey I made in July, is the council aware that the sample taken of the survey, showed that 10 out of 12 residents were not in favour. I have no reason to believe that the other closes, Priory, Beckett and adjoining close have any different view to this. Could the council explore alternative solutions to meeting the housing criteria without the need to demolish this particular area? The claims of poor building and poor condition are questionable. Also the loss of numbers of rooms for some residents will have a detrimental effect. Would the council take due consideration all these concerns?

Response:

The answer is that we want to hear all the voices of residents of the three estates concerned and take fully into account their views on every aspect of the scheme proposals as it is developed next year. Obviously the council itself is not running the housing, it's being transferred to Circle Housing Merton Priory Homes, so before we agree to their proposals next year, and without saying now whether we are going to agree to them or not, we want to see the full detail of what is proposed on each of these three estates. We want to hear those voices of individual residents, of residents by tenure, of residents by block, of residents by estate, so that we councillors can act as champions for those residents and their interests.

**2) From Me Wei Li Hur
To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration**

I would like to know when cashless parking is going to be implemented. I see the last update was in March 2014, in which council stated cashless parking would be implemented "by the summer".

Reply

To be answered by the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking

The date for implementation of cashless parking is the end of Sept (30th). The first phase (council car parks) will be introduced to all council managed car parks. Dependant upon the successful implementation of the first phase then cashless parking will be rolled out to all of the on street pay and display locations.

Background information

Once the first 2 rollouts have been completed we will introduce virtual permits. No date has been agreed for this but a more detailed timetable is to follow.

Rationale for this approach

As with any changes such as this which relies on data transfer over the airways, implementation should be carried out in a phased way so that any problems encountered can be resolved before moving onto the next phase.

**3) From Paula Shapland
To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration**

Is there anything that can be done about the dangerous pedestrian crossing point at the entrance to Lidl car park in Morden? Many children and elderly get caught out half way across being narrowly missed by cars. My daughter was clipped and knocked off her scooter. There is a blind spot when cars turn in (often at speed) also very little walk way space on the entry side making it difficult to get out of the way of oncoming vehicles quickly.

Reply

The zebra crossing was improved approximately 4 years ago. Although this incident is extremely unfortunate, the zebra crossing is not considered to be unsafe. The zebra crossing is fully visible and sightlines from both pedestrians' and motorists' point of view are also unrestricted from every direction.

According to recorded personal injury accident records there have been no accidents at this location. Additionally, given the junction and access points officers do not believe that speed is an issue.

Regrettably, however, there are those few drivers who may not pay attention to their surroundings and incidences caused by poor driver behaviour or lack of concentration cannot be addressed through engineering measures.

**4) From Anthony Fairclough
To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking**

Will the Cabinet Member ensure that details of how to subscribe to the garden waste collection scheme by cheque are published online and in the leaflet, and consider online booking? All that's advertised is subscription by phone, and I'm always held in queue – and don't have time to wait.

Reply

We try to encourage residents to pay for their garden waste collections service by direct debit as it is an on-going service and the administrative processes are much smoother than if a customer pays by cheque. The service is fortnightly therefore it is necessary to speak to the contact centre to ensure the correct day and week of collection is booked.

We are currently awaiting a new system to be implemented (approximately April 2015) but consideration needs to be given to the complexity of the collection service before committing to operating an online booking service.

**5) From Paul Carter
To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking**

At the Council meeting, 9/7/2014 we were advised that you were working "particularly hard" towards gating access to the land off the footpath running 33-49 Langdale Avenue to Commonsidge West to prevent further fly-tipping. There has since been further fly-tipping. When will the gates be in place and the rubbish removed?

Reply

The alley gate scheme is a decision for local residents who can actively participate in preventing crime in their area by agreeing to restrict access to private alleyways by installing alley gates. There had been previous attempts to gate this area but due to an objection the scheme did not proceed.

The council's Enforcement Manager sent out consultation letters to all properties that have access to the alleyway at the rear of 33-49 Langdale Ave, Mitcham asking residents if they would be prepared to consent to alley gates to this alleyway/land. To date 8 consent forms have been returned but yet again an objection has been raised by one of the businesses. Further reminder letters and communication with the objector will take place and we will endeavour to complete this scheme as soon as possible.

I am pleased to add that the post of alley gate coordinator has recently been recruited to after the departure of the previous postholder. A new member of staff

will take over this role from 15th September and will be able to assist in focusing resources on this issue.

Supplementary:

If all those contacted say yes, and one objector continued to say no, does that mean that the gating scheme would not go ahead or would it be a democratic decision bound to the feelings of the majority?

Response:

I don't actually know the answer to that. At the end of the day this has been going on for so long, I want to see it cleared up as much as you do. The most important thing is that we can apply the law, we can't break it, so we have to make sure we conform to the law as it is and we know it is on private land. I hope that means we can move forward on this, we need apparently 95%. I want the area gated just as much as you do because I am aware of what is happening. Thank you for coming along this evening.

**6) From Kathy King
To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration**

I first heard of the Fifteen Year Improvement Plan for Morden six years ago but can't see any evidence of improvement. How far into this 15 year plan is the Council? When might we expect to see strong evidence of improvements in the town centre?

Reply

The transformation of Morden town centre is a main priority for the Council's regeneration team. Something as complex as the redevelopment of the whole town centre cannot be achieved overnight, particularly as we are reliant on the active cooperation of Transport for London as a major landowner and transport operator at the heart of the centre.

Since the positive feedback from local people towards improving and regenerating Morden, the council has been undertaking a lot of work to make this happen, such as:

- 2011 Brought this vision for Morden into the council's planning policies, which means that it can be considered in deciding planning applications for the area
- 2012 Worked with Transport for London (one of the major landowners in the area and the owner of prominent site at Morden Station) to persuade them of the value of redeveloping their site and the local support for it
- 2013 Consulted on proposals for a redeveloped Morden station
- 2014 Adopted Morden Station planning brief which will guide development on this site.

Other on-going improvements during this time include the removal of unsightly guard rails, cleaning the council's own buildings in Morden,

For the future the council is working with the landowner, Transport for London, to encourage them to redevelop their site in line with the adopted Morden station planning brief, providing a new leisure pool facility at Morden Park Pool and continuing to work with shop owners and other high street businesses. We are currently identifying funding opportunities to kick start physical regeneration of Morden including ambitious plans to radically improve London Road and create new public spaces at the heart of Morden.

**7) From Shaketa Welch
To the Cabinet Member for Finance**

With regards to unemployment, why doesn't Merton be the first to encourage employment by recruiting residents to work in some council departments?

Reply

The Council has a good record of employing local people, with 46% of the workforce currently comprising borough residents.

The Council also seeks to employ local young people through apprenticeships and gives first priority to those that are Merton residents in order to seek to ensure young Merton residents gain opportunities for work and education. The Council specifically allocates apprentice places to looked after children to seek to support some of our most vulnerable young people in to training and employment.

Additionally, the Council holds an annual week "work taster" event that aims to provide work experience for disabled people who are borough residents seeking to provide them with improved opportunity to gain experience of work to support improved opportunities for employment.

However, the council cannot legally discriminate against residents of other boroughs when recruiting and equally we would not want our neighbouring boroughs to discriminate against our residents should they apply for jobs with them.

**8) From Simon McGrath
To the Cabinet Member for Cabinet Member for Education**

Could the Cabinet member confirm whether any infant classes in Merton have more than 30 pupils as was reported in the Evening Standard, and if so which schools are affected? If not true how has he sought to reassure parents in the Borough by rebutting the claims?

Reply

The report in the Evening Standard was somewhat misleading. The report was based on the council's last annual return to the DfE which is based on the January 2014 school census. As confirmed by the information published on the DfE website, just two of our 249 infant classes had more than 30 pupils and in both cases it was

31 pupils. Both were lawful exceptions to the KS1 class sizes requirement, being SEN pupils admitted to the school after the normal school admissions round.

Although it is very early in the new school year to confirm final class sizes, officers in the school admissions team anticipate a similar position to last year.

We have had no indication from parents that there are concerns following the article and I hope this answer sets the record straight.

Supplementary:

The original article in the Evening Standard quoted Tristram Hunt as saying we had seven classes in Merton with more than 36 pupils. My question is what steps has the council taken to inform Mr Hunt this isn't correct and the Evening Standard that it is not correct?

Reply:

We have two classes of 31 and that was because of statutory responsibility. It was a misleading article, and I can assure you that it was a Labour Government that introduced maximum class sizes for infant schools and this plan is something we continue to support and is one of our lasting achievements.

**9) From: Tony Burton
To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration**

When will the Council implement the Heritage & Design Working Group's March 2014 agreement that (1) Design Review Panel meetings are included in subscriptions options for email alerts; (2) its reports are put on Planning Explorer; and (3) it conducts Design Reviews of Merton Council's development proposals at pre-application stage in public?

Reply

The Heritage and Design Working Group is an informal advisory group to the Council and we have been working to deliver on the suggestions relating to Design Review Panel where practicably possible.

1. The Design Review Panel agendas and minutes have always been made available online at www.merton.gov.uk/designreviewpanel
The DRP isn't administered in the same way as formal committees, we have been able to add DRP to the corporate iCalendar and are working with Democratic services to make the email alert system live in the coming weeks.
2. DRP comments are included, verbatim, in Planning Committee Reports. We have agreement that the Development Control team will include the DRP notes as a separate document on Planning Explorer, for live planning applications (pre-app notes are not made public)
3. It is already in DRP's terms of reference that the Panel review major development proposals by Merton Council at both pre-app and planning

application stage (for buildings, public realm and masterplans) The pre-application process is a method of testing ideas and approaches to development before submitting formal plans. Like many private sector developers, It is not always appropriate to put plans into the public domain prematurely (for reasons ranging from commercial sensitivity to being at an earlier design stage than RIBA stage D (new RIBA stage 3)

The Council will not, as a matter of course, make the DRP notes for LBM, pre-application schemes public. The council has previously decided that it would be inappropriate to implement this recommendation.

**10) From John O'Sullivan
To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking**

Given the recent inappropriately located Recycling Facilities and Smart bin placed in the Mitcham Cricket Green Conservation area, what criteria is used in selecting locations, and at which locations will any new facilities be installed during the rest of 2014?

Reply

We have an agreed process for identifying areas that might benefit from recycling facilities in the borough. Enforcement officers and street cleaning operatives give advice on the potential for fly tipping and abuse in the area. We also consider whether it is a residential area, public area or a main thoroughfare. Providing there is sufficient space, all of these considerations are met, and the land owner agrees to its installation, we trial the facility for 3 - 4 months to test the suitability of the site before actual installation. Using this process, no further sites have been identified for the remainder of 2014.

With respect to the installation of the smart bin, this has been installed to replace a standard litter bin at the very same location that was commonly observed to be full and overflowing. The standard bin has now been removed.

All the new smart bins planned for 2014 have now been installed: 25 new units across the borough.

**11) From Sandra Vogel
To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration**

Can the council commit to providing clarity on how the delayed Mitcham town centre works will proceed. Will the council (1) publish online and make accessible at Fair Green the full timetable for all elements of the work (2) keep this information up to date (3) publish full explanations for any further slippage.

Reply

Construction for the Rediscover Mitcham project is scheduled to commence in October 2014. The works prior to Christmas will comprise enabling works, including changes to underground services, alterations to bus stops and the removal of the clock tower for refurbishment in mid-November 2014. Full construction works for Phase 1 (Fair Green) will commence in January 2015. Merton Council will shortly (mid September 2014) be providing an update on the Rediscover Mitcham project to all stakeholders via email. A timetable for the works will be included as part of this. This update will be made available on the Rediscover Mitcham website and new information boards will be put up at the vacant ex-McDonald's site in the centre of Mitcham. Regular updates on progress will be sent out in the coming months.

12) From Melanie Nunzet To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration

Mitcham Common is used by dogwalkers who use the space for profitable gain, eight or more dogs, led by one person. This is dangerous and intimidating for other users. They often do not clean up afterwards. Are there plans to introduce a byelaw limiting the number of dogs per walker?

Reply

Yes there are and the matter of new Dog Control Orders will be presented to and considered by members for their approval imminently. Measures to control the number of dogs being walked by an individual are indeed an identified priority.

13) From Dr D.G. Dawson To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration

Given Wimbledon Park's significance as a Grade 2* listed park designed by Capability Brown, what plans does the Council have to mark the 300th Anniversary of Capability Brown in 2016; celebrations of which are being considered by the National Trust, English Heritage and numerous other custodians of Capability Brown's work?

Reply

The Council has no specific plans itself to mark the 300th Anniversary of Capability Brown at this stage but may be willing to support any proposals emanating from the local community.

The Council is however planning to undertake a master planning exercise for public park area of Wimbledon Park whose timetable is likely to run into 2016. This will undoubtedly consider and reflect insofar as possible the historical elements introduced by Capability Brown into the wider landscape.

Supplementary:

I welcome your intention to work with Friends of Wimbledon Park. Interested parties also include the All England and Wimbledon clubs. Would the council work with us all in drawing up suitable plans?

Reply:

I think the interested parties would also include the Wimbledon Park Heritage Group, who have also done superb work in Wimbledon Park in the past. I think the attitude we will take on this is that the celebration of Capability Brown impact on Wimbledon Park is probably a matter for the community. If community groups come forward with plans to celebrate Capability Brown, I am sure the council will want to support that, but obviously Capability Brown being so capable made a contribution to many parts of Britain, in particular the large country parks that surround those large Palladian homes of dukes, marquises and earls and that, no doubt there will be many celebrations in many parts of the country.

**14) From Maureen Pascal-Rochester
To the Cabinet Member for Finance**

Merton is losing its entire fraud investigation team on 1st November 2014. This is unprecedented leaving the council exposed to fraud and reputation damage. My question to you is as decision makers, what actions are members taking to reassure their constituents that probity and public funds will be protected?

Reply

In 2010 Central Government agreed to form a Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS) to be administered by DWP. This is being carried out on a phased approach, with councils being provided with a transfer date for transfer of fraud cases and employees undertaking the role of investigating housing Benefit fraud.

The current role of Housing Benefit investigations will be transferring to the DWP on the 1st November 2014 along with the staff carrying out this task on a TUPE like basis. There will be also be a reduction in government grant funding from 2015/16.

The council takes its approach to counter fraud seriously and will therefore set up a Corporate Fraud Team to be able to ensure an appropriate response to pro-active and reactive fraud investigations.

Our constituents can be reassured that the council has a strong anti fraud culture and will continue to investigate all cases of fraud as well as ensuring there are strong controls in place to prevent fraud

**15) From Richard Hilton
To the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities**

To what does the Cabinet Member attribute the increase in anti-social behaviour and crime in Mitcham, and what is she doing about it?

Reply

The Mayor of London has significantly cut neighbourhood policing across the borough, not just in Mitcham. No doubt this has had an impact on crime and anti social behaviour in the borough and I know that our excellent local MP Siobhain McDonagh has recently held a public meeting on this issue.

Sadly I don't recall Mr Hilton campaigning against these cuts by the Mayor of London whilst he was a Conservative Councillor in Merton. It is interesting to see his sudden interest in the issue.

For my part I am continuing to work closely with our remaining safer neighbourhood officers, for example with regards to the dispersal zone in North Mitcham, which covers a large proportion of Graveney ward, and on the borough-wide Controlled Drinking Zone which I introduced and which I expect to continue to drive down on ASB and alcohol related crime in Mitcham and borough wide.

Supplementary:

I would like to ask a question around the views of a single resident who told the local newspaper that the council had made Mitcham 'a disgusting place' that we have been promised that regeneration will start in the autumn, but we were told this a year ago, and the year before so my question is how long before these promises are carried out?

Response:

This administration has done everything possible to listen and 'easy residents' concerns on antisocial behaviour, including the MP having a stand at the Mitcham Fair. It was well attend and with the Police all questions were answered. I have been working very hard with officers and the police to make sure we listen to the residents of Mitcham about their concerns around antisocial behaviour. We have taken every precaution possible, taking into consideration the cuts made by the Mayor of London, we will do our best to introduce drinking zones in Mitcham and in the Borough as a whole.

16) From Bob Grahame To the Cabinet Member for Education

Question: Are any of the current Primary School expansion schemes over budget and, if so, which schools and by how much?

Reply

All current primary school expansion projects are within the overall budget allocations.

**17) From Suzanne Evans
To the Leader of the Council**

Question: Do you intend to make any Council Tax cuts in the next four years?

Reply

This majority Labour administration was elected by the people of Merton on a manifesto promise to keep council tax low whilst at the same time protecting services. For the first time in the history of Merton the Labour administration delivered a four year council tax freeze. And we have committed to local people that we will do the same over the next four years. That's an unprecedented eight year council tax freeze. At the same time we have protected local services from the worst of her former political party's cuts. We have managed to do this due to our good financial management and our business like approach to running the council. Residents acknowledged this and agreed with our sensible approach. This is why they resoundingly backed us in the local election to run Merton for the next four years.

**18) From Carlyne Price
To the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture**

Question: Following the much vaunted y-cube homes development can he confirm that these new homes will be prioritised for those who have been in the borough for some time and, if so, what will the selection criteria be?

Reply

The council welcomes an increase in housing supply by the development of Y cube homes and remains committed in ensuring that homes are offered to local people. The council will be working with the Wimbledon YMCA to develop a nominations agreement which will seek to ensure that any person being offered a home will have a local connection with the borough in accordance with its published housing register and nominations policy and the Housing Act 1996 Part 7 (homeless legislation). The policy is clear in that any person who has not lived in Merton for at least one year will not be eligible for a social housing tenancy.

Supplementary:

Under the circumstances do you think the minimum residency requirement should be possibly extended to two or three years?

Response:

This is something we have under consideration to increase it to two years, at the moment it is one year.

19) From Stuart Morrison

To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration

Question: When will the illegal car sales which have been refused planning consent be removed and the dilapidation of the listed Burn Bullock be put right?

Reply

An enforcement notice was issued on 9th July 2014 against the sale of motor vehicles from the car park.

The notice came into effect on 20th August and the Planning Inspectorate has confirmed that no appeal has been received. The compliance period is two calendar months which expires by 20th October 2014. The owner will be prosecuted if the sale of cars from the car park persists after the compliance date.

With regard to the state of the Building, a Listed Building Repair Notice was issued on 27th August 2014 to require a number of steps to be taken and identified works carried out for the proper preservation of the building.

The notice came into effect immediately and requires the owners to submit a Planning and Listed Building application by 27th October 2014 to cover the required works so the Council will be aware of what materials to be issued. The owner will have 5 months to complete the required works following the grant of permission.

If an application is not received by the Council by the required date of 27th October (or two months after issuing the notice) the Council can apply to the Secretary of State to make or confirm an order for the compulsory purchase of the building.

20) From Andrew Boyce

To the Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking

Question: Can Council please outline what measures – specific to South Wimbledon – it has undertaken to address the amount of weeds and litter that blight our pavements and verges, and whether its approach is consistent with its obligations under Section IV of the Environmental Protection Act?

Reply

In order to meet our obligations we aim to maintain all residential streets to an acceptable standard of cleanliness by cleaning them regularly at least once a week. Streets are cleaned by manually litter picking and sweeping the areas which need it.

In terms of South Merton specifically, Merton High Street is cleaned at least four times a day, with additional cleaning outside of the tube station. From 8pm-4am we have a dedicated “hot spots” cleaning team who regularly check Merton High Street for litter and who empty bins.

New bins on lampposts to deal with the problem of cigarette and chewing gum waste have also been introduced in the South Wimbledon area.

We undertake weed control in Merton three times a year. This involves spraying live weeds with non-residual chemicals. Roads are checked following the spray and where there is evidence that the spray has not been effective the roads are re-sprayed. The dead weeds are swept away upon a successful treatment. Unfortunately the most recent treatment has not been successful but the contractor is taking steps to re-do this work at no extra cost to the council.

Where we find or receive reports about littering or fly tipping we will attend to rectify which is in line with our obligations under the Environmental Protection Act 1990.