

## **General Questions**

### **1) Councillor Tobin Byers to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture**

Can the Cabinet Member outline his plans for West Barnes library?

#### **Reply**

We are progressing plans to redevelop West Barnes Library to provide a brand new and improved library facility with a community hall and public toilets. Throughout the initial consultation we have received many positive comments on the proposal and we would like to hear more from the community. Over the next month we will be consulting with residents to ascertain further requirements for the new library, all of which will help inform the specification that will go out to developers. We hope to have developers appointed by autumn 2014 with the new library scheduled to be opened in autumn 2017.

The redevelopment will also bring new and affordable housing accommodation into the area and is based on the successful Raynes Park Library model. It will enable us to improve one of our much loved libraries whilst making it sustainable for many years to come.

#### **Supplementary:**

Can the Cabinet Member explain how the project is affordable to the council?

#### **Reply:**

We have at the moment the cheapest libraries in London by a long measure. We also have the best regarded libraries, which is something we can be particularly proud of. I would like to take this opportunity to thank every single one of our volunteers for helping to make our libraries just that, including Councillor Brian Lewis-Lavender who actually kept Mondays going at West Barnes Library over the last four years, and he has done an amazing job, thank you very much indeed. The way we are intending to do it following our consultation, is by redeveloping the same way as we did Raynes Park Library, that is, by putting flats above it and those flats (40% of which will be affordable flats) they will pay for the development. We don't intend to pay anything extra for West Barnes Library. In fact, because it is going to be a more modern building to run, it's actually going to be cheaper, so this, colleagues, is a long term investment. The consultation is up on the website. Anyone can take one of these home tonight and fill it in, I will be very grateful. Thank you.

### **2) Councillor Daniel Holden to the Cabinet Member for Finance:**

Could the Cabinet Member responsible please tell me how many member enquiries are successfully responded to within the 10 working day time frame?

## **Reply**

In the 3 months since 2 June when the new, faster target was introduced, a total of 357 member enquiries were responded to within target times, excluding Housing Needs enquiries, a total of 81%. There are still some outstanding member enquiries for August, so this figure may change. 93% of Housing Needs enquiries were responded to within target times in June. Unfortunately, figures for July and August are not yet available.

Data for previous years, when the target was 5 days longer was as follows:

2011/12 – 78%

2012/13 – 89%

2013/14 - 88%

## **Supplementary:**

I would like to point out that there has been a lack of responses to what are quite simple questions at times. Quite often these then escalate to more senior officers, and if we can't get responses to basic questions. Would you care to explain where you are taking the scheme to enable officers to respond more promptly, so that our residents who ask us these queries can get a response that is proper, correct and factual, and on time?

## **Response:**

I do appreciate that being an opposition councillor can at times be frustrating. However, this administration has improved response times for councillors. We've reduced the target from 15 days to 10 days for general enquiries. I can understand that sometimes people complex and convoluted questions because they are that frustrated that they want to undermine the administration, so there will be occasions where those answers can't be given in 10 days, but we are delivering very well against our targets and I hope to see further improvements in future years.

## **3) Councillor Mary Curtin to the Cabinet Member for Education**

Would the Cabinet member join me in congratulating our A level and GCSE students on this year's exam results?

## **Reply**

Indeed it has been another good year for results in Merton. The overall pass rate for 'A'-Levels is above the national average, the progress made by some groups of pupils in our sixth forms has been strong and it is pleasing that more Merton young people will be able to go on to higher education as a result. At GCSE, the performance of Merton pupils has continued to improve against key measures and I expect more will therefore be able to move on into sixth forms or further education.

My congratulations go to our young people and all our secondary schools.

**Supplementary:**

With this year's record breaking GCSE results, will no doubt mean that even more parents will be keen to send their children to Merton great secondary schools? Can he update us how he plans to meet this additional need in coming years?

**Reply:**

As a council we are actively addressing this matter, ensuring that we have the right applications to use our surplus spaces, expanding our existing schools. I am delighted that Harris have put forward an application for a secondary school - an organisation with a proven track record who have already turned around two schools in the borough I have no doubt that our education provision will go from strength to strength and we will have more applicants this year after all the great results for which I congratulate all our students on their magnificent achievements.

**4) Councillor Michael Bull to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:**

What efforts are being made by the council to advance the excellent plans drawn up and supported by the Raynes Park Association to regenerate the area south of the skew-arch in Raynes Park?

**Reply**

The Council's investment in Raynes Park over the past 5 years has certainly been both beneficial and transformational to the local centre. The improvements already delivered are the result of an excellent on-going partnership between the Raynes Park Association & Community Forum and Council officers in future Merton, Planning and Highways. We have always been supportive of delivering improvements where we are able to.

The RPA's vision for the area south of the skew arch is a good response for a neglected space. The concept was already agreed in the Raynes Park Enhancement Plan, but requires further detail design, and funding.

As Cabinet Member, I have met with the RPA and officers to discuss options open to us to deliver enhancements to Raynes Park southside. We have always been clear that the majority of funding is dependent on planning gain (s106/CIL) principally from the development of Rainbow Estate, and the Manuplastic sites. I expect the Rainbow scheme will be in planning soon. The Council is in a good position to get the scheme moving; but we must be patient.

We also have further opportunity for public realm enhancements via the Mayor's cycling programme. We have been invited by the Mayor's cycling advisor to prepare a bid to TfL focussed on Raynes Park. Officers are working to weave the RPA's aspirations for the skew-arch into the cycle scheme. The bid is at an early stage and we expect to confirm funding, and consult on proposals early in 2015.

**Supplementary:**

With regard to regeneration in Merton, can he explain to this chamber the lack of physical progress so far on the redevelopment of the Colliers Wood tower, despite continual promises that work was just about to start there, still we have no real activity on site. Will he assure my residents in Dundonald that progress on regeneration of the area south of the Skew Arch will be nowhere near as torturous as it has been in Colliers Wood.

**Reply:**

We worked very closely as an administration with the Raynes Park Association who themselves generated the ideas, which we have been very happy to support and supported strongly. Indeed outside Raynes Park Station our improvements outside the station are a demonstration of this council's commitment to improve the quality of the environment around Raynes Park. The answer to the question written down demonstrates how we will act in the future in relation to the Skew Arch. We have been very active in Colliers Wood, we have won significant sums of money from the GLA and we have also contributed capital money to the area of South Wimbledon and Colliers Wood ourselves. We've consulted on plans which are now very advanced for improving the whole public realm in Colliers Wood and works will begin this Autumn from October onwards, first of all in the area between the Sainsbury's bridge and the Priory retail park on a number of improvements there. We will be looking at new cycle facilities on the path by the Wandle and a cycle crossing just before the bus garage. We are looking further in the Spring, taking forward works around the tower. We anticipate doing that in tandem with the developer. We are not the developer of the tower. We don't own it, it is a completely separate company. We are not responsible for progress on the tower. What we have done is work with them where we can to support progress going forward. They have now appointed a contractor, officers are about to have a site meeting with the contractor and we anticipate that this tower will move forward, but it is not entirely in our hands. Nonetheless, the parallel with it, we will be creating a new public space between the tube station and the tower, so I think this council can claim a strong record in Raynes Park and in Colliers Wood and the outcome will be for the benefit of local residents.

**5) Councillor Katy Neep to the Leader of the Council**

At the last council meeting the Leader told us that he was in discussions with Circle Housing Merton Priory to get them to agree to a series of commitments to protect the interests of our residents living on High Path, Eastfields and Ravensbury estates. Could he outline what progress he has made in this regard?

**Reply**

I am pleased to say that my discussions with Circle Housing Merton Priory have been fruitful. I asked CHMP to sign up to 10 commitments to ensure local residents are at the heart of any regeneration plans and I am delighted that they have now agreed to this. An official signing took place on 4 September when the chairman of

CHMP, Sir Robin Young, came to Merton to personally put his name to the commitments.

The commitments cover a range of issues, including requiring CHMP to consider residents' interests at all times, to offer current homeowners at least the market value of their homes should they wish to sell their home to CHMP, to keep disruption to a minimum and to continue to maintain residents' homes, ensuring a high quality, responsive repairs service. CHMP has also given a commitment that it will not profit from any regeneration and will use any surplus to provide more housing or to improve the existing estates.

**Supplementary:**

Residents of High Path are particularly keen that the repair service is not neglected while the regeneration is being consulted on, and that the backlog of repairs that has been built up is addressed as a matter of urgency. Ward councillors and residents also expressed concern about recent allegations in mishandling of repairs by Circle's contractors? Could the Leader please confirm that the agreement with Circle was that these repairs will be prioritised and that the allegations of mishandling will be independently investigated by the council.

**Reply:**

I would like to look at commitment number 8, of the 10 commitments that we signed up to, and this is available on the website with Sir Robin Young, the former Permanent Secretary at the DTI, and he is now chairman of Circle Housing. Commitment number 8 reads as follows: Circle Merton Priory will continue to maintain the homes across the three neighbouring boroughs throughout the planning process until the regeneration starts, including ensuring a high quality, responsive repairs service. So that is critical to the regeneration should it go ahead and whether it goes ahead or not, we want them to lay great emphasis on a responsive repairs service.

I did get on the phone to Circle Housing Merton Priory Homes and after the front page of our brilliant local newspaper, the Wimbledon Guardian, I also had a word with a number of officers, quite high up in Circle, and they have assured me they will look into those allegations, and assured me that they have moved on since then are grappling with the backlog, they are catching up and the other thing they assured me was that if there is meeting in place to discuss these repairs I would be very welcome, as the Leader of the Council to attend. I know our cabinet member does intend to attend the next one, so I can give that reassurance to you and to your residents.

**6) Councillor Oonagh Moulton to the Leader of the Council:**

What plans, if any, does the new administration have to revise the Members' Code of Conduct or the Protocol on Planning Matters?

## **Reply**

There are no plans to revise the Members' Code of Conduct which was approved by Council on 11 July 2011. The current Planning Protocol was approved by full Council on 27 March 2013.

## **Supplementary:**

Is the Leader concerned about the potential for conflict of interest to arise between the member of this council who is setting the actual planning policy and the councillor chairing the planning application committee - given that they share the breakfast table. What does he say to residents of Merton who might question this situation, particularly when it comes to taking decisions on contentious planning applications and Madam Mayor, the reputation of the council?

## **Reply:**

The answer to that question is there are no concerns; we have a robust conflict of interest policy. All my cabinet members and all my committee chairs on licensing or planning are the best people for the job.

## **7) Councillor Peter Southgate for the Cabinet member for Education:**

"What are the total legal costs incurred (including staff time as well as external fees) in defending the proposed expansion of Dundonald Primary School against legal actions brought by the *Save Our Rec* campaign?"

## **Reply**

Legal proceedings brought against the Council are still ongoing. The current legal costs for defending the council's proposed expansion of Dundonald Primary School amount to approximately £25,000 of counsel's fees and £10,000 of legal officer's time.

## **Supplementary:**

I look forward to the conclusion of the final legal action and I hope he notifies us once it has finally completed. My question is what is his estimate of the total time that has been lost through the actions in delaying this expansion for this school?

## **Reply:**

It is regrettable that it has been delayed, we had hoped to have the extra class available for this school year. We are still hoping to provide for the next school year, but we are still going through the judicial process as members may be aware, we are in court again on Friday as they will be trying to get a judgement to stop the expansion proceeding. This is extremely regrettable; Merton Council to date has

won every single hearing with this. It is time for us to provide these much needed school places. The judicial review hearing has cost the council money, but we believe it is money well spent providing school places in an area of very high demand for school places, which will considerably enhance school facilities at a school rated as outstanding by Ofsted.

**8) Councillor Ross Garrod to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration**

Can the Cabinet Member estimate how many people used our parks and green spaces over the summer months?

**Reply**

Owing to the large number and widespread distribution of open space across the borough we do not, unfortunately, have accurate data for the annual attendance at our parks and open spaces. Estimates of our annual visitor numbers are in the range of 3 million however, and approximately two thirds of these visits occur in the period April to September. In other words, in the region of 2 million visitors during the summer months overall.

In a typical year, some 150,000 people use Wimbledon Park alone during the fortnight of the Wimbledon Championships.

**Supplementary:**

I am delighted that so many people are able to enjoy our parks this summer, and was pleasantly pleased to see that the new water playing facility at Tamworth rec is now open for many residents to enjoy. Can he explain how he is paying for this to our residents please?

**Response:**

This is an excellent water facility, very similar to the excellent facility in Wimbledon Park. They were paid for (the total cost was about £200,000) by the substantial generous gift of an individual who does not want to be named. Through a charitable trust just as he had contributed to the similar facility in Wimbledon Park. He has acted in connection with the Wimbledon Park Heritage group. He funded the facility in Wimbledon Park and wanted to fund a further facility in Mitcham. So about 2/3 of the money has come from him, through the charitable trust, and a third from the council.

**9) Councillor Hamish Badenoch to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:**

Can the Cabinet Member confirm that this administration is committed to the vital importance of implementing 20mph zones (where residents are in favour)? Given this commitment, can he also confirm what funds have been set aside this year for

the implementation of 20mph zones pending the outcome of the cross-borough enquiry on 20mph zone enforcement?

### **Reply**

The Council remains committed to managing excessive or inappropriate speeds in residential road. We are currently reviewing the effectiveness of all our 20mph zones and limits in the borough and also gathering intelligence on the effectiveness of borough wide 20mph zones/limits in London and nationally to inform future decision on speed management and agree policy shortly. An action plan will then be developed following the decision, which will include identifying the necessary funding to implement any agreed measures.

### **Supplementary:**

Given the importance of this issue, I want to be sure the residents of my ward don't read his answer, as kicking the issue into the long grass. Can the cabinet member confirm what steps he is personally taking to expedite this shortly and confident in the efficacy of his own adverts, will he commit to providing funding for 20mph zones this year.

### **Response:**

We are conducting research at the moment. We are very sure that the 20mph zones we have already introduced across the borough have had a significant impact. We are much less sure that the 20 mph limits, that are just signs rather than a physical traffic calming, have had an impact. We don't anticipate taking forward any more schemes until the report comes back and it will be reported to scrutiny on the efficacy of 20 mph zones. Once we have had the report, and we are sure we have good evidence base as to what is effective and what is not, then we will draw up the budget accordingly, but in the past we have funded these schemes, there is no stop in the scheme. We have depended on a great extent on Transport for London and the money they are able to provide for road safety schemes. When that money is reduced, we have fewer schemes. There is no prohibition on such schemes. If any councillors in this chamber wish to bring forward any particular road traffic calming schemes we will be very happy to look at them. The principle upon which we will be working is to work closely with the ward councillors and closely with local residents. What we are anticipating is that there will be consultation next month in October. All ward councillors will be invited to meetings around the physical interventions planned in their wards this financial year. I anticipate that we will be working towards in the spring to a further consultation with ward councillors about the physical interventions we anticipate for the following three years so ward councillors are able to have a very full dialogue of what they think is required in their local area.

### **10) Councillor Stan Anderson to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture**

Could he update us on the findings of the recent consultation with local residents regarding his plans to replace Morden Park pool?

## **Reply**

The recent consultation on the replacement of Morden Park Pools carried out on the council's behalf by consultation company PPS confirmed that the council was right to use the Sport England Affordable Leisure Centre Model as a basis for our new centre as this was endorsed by the majority of users and included strong support for the addition of the sports hall, gym and associated health & fitness facilities. They noted that although the base model included a sports hall and there was strong support for it, the respondents rarely mentioned the sports to be included, hence the detail of these sports is less well represented in the consultation findings.

As regards the additional facilities the local residents would wish to have included, ranked in the community's priority order, are: Firstly, a café, followed by the desire for the facility to be able to continue to offer diving facilities either by incorporating a movable floor in the secondary pool and/or by incorporating a movable floor in the main pool. On the size of the swimming pool the majority accepted that the 25m length would be needed for most users, but were concerned about the availability of water space to accommodate everyone and hence the third priority is to increase the width of the main pool to 8 lanes. Some of the younger respondents and the representations from our primary schools requested some fun/water play equipment for them to be included. Finally, the list extended to climbing wall, a sauna, a crèche, etc.

## **Supplementary:**

It is great that so many people have participated in the consultation and that has delivered such results. Does he think that the consultation shows that residents share our vision for the centre. Can he tell us how technology will help us not exceed the budget?

## **Response:**

There are two answers to that. First of all yes it does show our residents' share our vision. It was a brilliant piece of consultation. I hope everyone here took part in it because it was a very grown up way of doing things. It was saying you have got £10 million quid to spend on a pool/leisure centre, how do you want us to spend it? People responded very well, because we were treating them like our colleagues, and they have come up with some very fine answers. The thing about the modern technology, this is why I am so particularly proud that we are developing this swimming pool now not four or eight years ago for that matter, because technology has moved on so fortunately it has been made possible to build leisure centres much much cheaper using the technology that was used in the Olympic Park etc and that has been used all over Europe. One of the really cool things is that they have these movable floors they bring in, so what we can do, is bring in movable floors and below the movable floor, and because hot water rises, only the top half of the water will get heated up, so the water down below will not cost anything, and that is technology, I love this! It is going to be all about technology, and if you ask more questions about it, I will tell you more about it, because I am very enthusiastic about it.

