

# **Merton Council Council**

**4 July 2018**

## **Supplementary Agenda 4**

Public and Councillor Supplementary Questions and Replies

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**1. From: Tom Killick**

**To the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture**

Will the Council provide drinking water fountains in public places, thereby reducing waste and litter from single-use disposable plastics?

**Reply**

The Council provides and maintains a water tap with drinking water for public use on the recently refurbished Clock tower in Mitcham Fair Green. We will continue to explore opportunities to provide drinking water fountains or facilities in town centres and around transport stations working with partner agencies and the Mayor of London.

**Supplementary**

Thank you. My supplementary question is will the Council promote the Refill scheme which encourages local businesses like cafes to advertise the fact that people can go and fill up their water bottles with tap water at those premises?

**Reply**

I thank the questioner for his supplementary question and say that yes, it sounds like an excellent idea and we will promote that with local businesses.

**2. From: Laura Collins**

**To the Cabinet Member for Finance**

Will the council ban single use plastics in its premises as Parliament has done?

**Reply**

Merton has been taking action to reduce plastic waste from the Civic Centre over recent years. For example Chilled water dispensers have been installed on every floor to discourage the use of single use plastic bottles, and recycling bins for plastics and other materials have also been provided throughout the building. Together with our onsite caterer, we are also assessing the feasibility of a scheme to promote the use of reusable coffee cups and decrease the sale of single use plastics.

**3. From: Sonja Timpson**

**To the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture**

When can the people of Merton expect to see Morley Park opening to the public, in accordance with the conditions of the planning consent awarded to the developers of the Atkinson Morley land?

## **Reply**

There are negotiations ongoing around the handover of the land to the Council. It is important that the condition of the land is acceptable to the Council before that handover. Local residents have also raised a number of issues regarding the condition of the land which are currently being investigated. A key issue for the Council is the control and eradication of Japanese Knotweed which is delaying a conclusion of the matter.

### **4. From: John Boyd To the Cabinet Member for Finance**

Will the Council now ban the use of single-use plastics on its premises, in the same way as Parliament has done?

## **Reply**

Merton has been taking action to reduce plastic waste from the Civic Centre over recent years. For example Chilled water dispensers have been installed on every floor to discourage the use of single use plastic bottles, and recycling bins for plastics and other materials have also been provided throughout the building. Together with our onsite caterer, we are also assessing the feasibility of a scheme to promote the use of reusable coffee cups and decrease the sale of single use plastics.

## **Supplementary**

Thank you. I had a reply from the Cabinet Member for Finance and in that reply there was the statement that 'together with our onsite caterer, we are also assessing the feasibility of a scheme to promote the use of reusable coffee cups and decrease the sale of single use plastics'. I would just like to know how that is progressing?

## **Reply**

I'd like to thank the gentleman for coming in and for asking a reply. Obviously concerns about the excessive use of plastics are widespread and they are shared by ourselves and that's why we along with a number of other Boroughs we are exploring what options are available. In Merton's premises we have a contractor that provides the catering services and I can say that we are exploring what can be done and hopefully some progress can be made shortly. More than that, I hope that we each have an individual role as members of the Council and as members of the public to think about our own use of plastic and if you can there is very wide availability now of the reusable coffee cups and I would encourage you to use them whenever you can.

### **5. From: Leonardo Monzon**

**To the Cabinet Member for Environment and Street Cleanliness**

Why is there always broken glass on the pavement and road outside my house despite countless reports to Merton Council and formal complaints and assurances? Why do we have to ask the council to empty bins for them not to be left for weeks? When is Veolia contract being annulled?

**Reply**

Our contractor Veolia is responsible for ensuring that Town Centres and residential roads are swept to the required standard. The contractual standards for street cleaning reflect best practice from Defra's Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse. The contract is based on an output specification requiring the contractor maintain consistent standards across the entire borough. This is a move away from a frequency based approach where standards can fall between sweeps without any obligation on the contractor to resolve the issue.

To achieve this consistent standard of cleansing, Veolia use a number of different methods of cleaning the streets and alter the frequency depending on the footfall and littering of the area concerned. Street operatives conduct manual litter picking and broom sweeping alongside mechanical and electrical sweepers which provide an efficient and effective way to lift litter and detritus from Merton's streets.

Our contractor is responsible for the emptying of all litter bins and is required to empty these at a frequency that ensures that they are not overflowing.

There are no plans to annul this contract. In order to hold the contractor to account we have created a new Neighbourhood Client Team who undertake site inspections and work closely with the contractor's Area Managers to ensure that service standards are maintained and any rectifications are addressed in line with our contractual agreements. They also undertake visits and walk-about with local ward Members who have concerns about littering in their area in order to address the issues in a proactive manner.

I would urge residents to report any streets, that they believe fall below the required standard, using the council's website.

**6. From: David Anderson**

**To the Cabinet Member for Environment and Street Cleanliness**

Please can you confirm the number of street litter bins that have been removed from the borough in the last 12 months and what the rationale is for such removal?

**Reply**

The Council has not arranged for the removal of any litter bins from our streets over the last 12 months. In February of this year we installed an additional 4 litter bins on

Streatham road bringing the total number of bins across the borough to 904. Any lost or stolen bin can be reported and our contractor will arrange for them to be replaced.

**7. From: Nicola de Brett  
To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration Housing and Transport**

Please can a cycle advanced stop box be installed outside South Wimbledon station going south?

**Reply**

Where possible advance stop lines are provided at signalised junctions. Transport for London carried out a review of junctions a few years ago and at that time, did not recommend an advance stop line on all arms of South Wimbledon junction. However, Merton has secured a project slot with TfL to model the signals and South Wimbledon and the opportunity will be taken to consider the introduction of the advance stop lines at all the arms in the near future.

**8. From: Andrew Biden  
To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration Housing and Transport**

Could the Council provide any update as to the status of the Darul Amaan Mosque on Merton High Street, considering it has been in its unsightly state for a number of years now?

**Reply**

Planning permission was granted on 26-4-2011 for the erection of a new part two, part three storey mosque, plus basement, dome and minaret involving demolition of existing single storey mosque. It is our understanding that this permission has been implemented as works started onsite, but did then not progress much further. In the interim, permission was granted for a temporary mosque at the site and renewed again in March 2017. At this time, we do not have any direct information about when the Mosque may be built. Whilst the site would benefit visually from development, it is currently surrounded by a hoarding which is reasonable and appropriate for a redevelopment site.

**9. From: Nicola Thompson  
To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration Housing and Transport**

In the local Labour Party election materials it stated that 20mph zones would be introduced in the borough. Please confirm where and when this will take place, and will there be a chance for resident input/requests for specific roads/areas?

**Reply**

The Council takes the safety of all road users very seriously and supports various initiatives such as a lower speed of 20mph. We have implemented 20mph speed limits and zones throughout the borough and have a rolling programme of

introducing localised 20mph speed limits with associated physical improvements outside all its schools.

We have expanded neighbouring boroughs 20mph zones into Merton along appropriate roads (e.g. Wandsworth, Lambeth which are 20mph boroughs]. Although the Council does have an aspiration to introduce a 20mph speed limit throughout the borough, due to limited funding, such a programme will be rolled out over a number of years.

Currently we are within the statutory consultation period for introducing 20mph speed limit in Wimbledon Village.

**10. From: Joyce Pountain  
To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration Housing and Transport**

Will the council provide a rail for pushing cycles, push-chairs and shopping trolleys over footway railway bridges? E.g. the bridge (nearest Wimbledon Town Centre) linking Alternate Grove with the path leading to Dundonald Road. This is a simple, inexpensive solution in line with the council's active travel and health policies.

**Reply**

There are plans to implement wheel channels in the borough although this is subject to Network Rail agreement as the identified bridges are owned and managed by Network Rail. Obtaining approval has proved somewhat challenging thus far. The Council will however continue to pursue this matter hopefully to a beneficial conclusion.

**11. From: Tony Burton  
To the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture**

Will Merton Council consult on detailed plans for a Quietway along the River Wandle from Merton Abbey Mills through Bunce's Meadow, Morden Hall Park and Ravensbury Park prior to an in principle decision being made as to its merits and confirm whether funding has yet been secured?

**Reply**

Transport for London are currently looking in the feasibility of this route as a whole so at the moment we do not have authorisation to proceed with the Quietway until approval is granted. Any proposal would be subject to the normal stakeholder consultation. Funding will only be provided after TfL approve the route and the proposal.

**12. From: Philippa Zielfa Maslin  
To the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture**

#changingplaces facilities were included in the original architect's plan for Morden Leisure Centre and now, shockingly, we are being told that there will not be any. Will Merton Council acknowledge the error of its ways and honour the original plan to ensure equality of access and opportunity?

### **Reply**

I am pleased to be able to advise that a 'Changing Places' facility will be included within the new centre along with 6 Accessible WC's; 3 Accessible WC and shower rooms and 1 further accessible shower room within the building. There will be a lift between the two floors; IFI accredited equipment in the gym and a pool platform to assist disabled users into our two pools.

There will also be 10 disabled bays outside the front entrance to the building.

The council is proud to be building a new family friendly leisure centre which is accessible for all.

### **Supplementary**

Obviously my question is slightly unnecessary now, in as much that a couple of days after I submitted it the Changing Places plan was reinstated. However I'm just wondering off the back of this, if there are any other plans for Changing Places facilities within the Borough that the Council is actively working to promote?

### **Reply**

I thank the questioner for her question. I think the answer on the process of reinstatement; I'm very looking forward to the changing places room being built and I'm looking forward to advertising its use for those who require its services and I'm sure that all members present and the questioner, will help in that respect. I'm looking forward to monitoring its use. In so doing, I'm going to take soundings from other public institutions who use Changing Places Rooms for instance the All England Club who I believe just recently installed one and I'm going to ask how often these are used. Other Local Authorities have suggested that they are underused; I want to find out the truth of that, to find out the reason and I want to make sure that our room within Morden Leisure Centre is used regularly and appropriately by users of the leisure centre so that I can present a case, and this is coming up to the answer to your question, I can present a case for expanding the number of them within Merton.

### **13. From: Sandra Vogel To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration Housing and Transport**

Has Merton Council had any pre-application discussions regarding future development at the White Hart in Cricket Green and will publish any advice that is provided immediately? If pre application discussion is had in the future on this property, will it publish that discussion?



## Reply

The following planning history is relevant to the question. There has been a pre-application meeting, however, a formal response has not been produced to date. In any event, pre-application meetings and advice are offered in confidence, often due to the commercial sensitivity of the sites.

- 17/P1515 - PRE APPLICATION ADVICE FOR THE DEMOLITION OF BUILDING REAR OF WHITE HART INN AND THE ERECTION OF A FOUR STOREY RESIDENTIAL BLOCK TO PROVIDE 22 X FLATS WITH ASSOCIATED PARKING. (Site known as 350 London Road Mitcham). No report issued to date
- 18/P2216 - PART CHANGE OF USE OF EXISTING BUILDING, MINOR DEMOLITION OF REAR EXTENSION, ERECTION OF A NEW 3-4 STOREY BUILDING TO PROVIDE A TOTAL OF 20 X DWELLINGS (CLASS C3) AND RETENTION OF GROUND FLOOR COMMERCIAL UNIT (CLASS C4) AT THE WHITE HART, 350 LONDON ROAD, TOGETHER WITH LANDSCAPING, PARKING, SERVICING AND OTHER ASSOCIATED WORKS. Invalid planning application – correct fee and drainage strategy requested.
- 18/P2217 - LISTED BUILDING CONSENT FOR THE PART CHANGE OF USE OF EXISTING BUILDING, MINOR DEMOLITION OF REAR EXTENSION, ERECTION OF A NEW 3-4 STOREY BUILDING TO PROVIDE A TOTAL OF 20 X DWELLINGS (CLASS C3) AND RETENTION OF GROUND FLOOR COMMERCIAL UNIT (CLASS C4) AT THE WHITE HART, 350 LONDON ROAD, TOGETHER WITH LANDSCAPING, PARKING, SERVICING AND OTHER ASSOCIATED WORKS. Invalid application – drainage strategy requested.

**14. From: Somayeh Aghnianejad  
To the Cabinet Member for Finance**

Who from Merton will be attending the London Business 1000 (year 2) results presentation?

## Reply

Sara Williams, Economy Manager in Future Merton, Environment & Regeneration will be attending. It is important that we regularly refresh our understanding of the views of business in London.

**15. From: Jennifer Cadwallader  
To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration Housing and Transport**

I would like to ask how and why Merton council think it's fair to continually issue parking tickets on roads where the marking are barely visible and under-kept. How can they keep taking residents money and think these actions are acceptable?

**Reply**

The Council regularly inspects, and has a rolling programme of maintenance works, that our contractors use to refresh Bay and yellow line restrictions where a need exists. This programme is informed by our own staff who identify works that need to be refreshed and following feedback from members of the public. It is not the council's policy to enforce areas where the markings are not visible, and monies raised from parking charges, are reinvested back into the parking infrastructure throughout the Borough.

**16. From: Emily Robertson  
To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration Housing and Transport**

What proportion of fire doors in Merton's social housing stock have been tested to ensure they fulfil the half hour fire resistance criteria?

**Reply**

As the Council is a non stock owning housing authority, it is not a Landlord of the social housing stock in Merton. Accordingly this is not information we hold and registered providers (housing associations) would need to be contacted individually to obtain this information.

**17. From: Richard Hackforth-Jones  
To the Cabinet Member for Finance**

What is Merton doing to make its website easier to use for residents?

**Reply**

The Council has been undertaking a significant change in the technology used to provide its website, online forms, and back-office processes, as well as a major update of our website content. The website is an ever evolving piece of work and we are continuously striving to improve our offering. As we come to the end of the end of the implementation stage of this work we will be using data to evaluate which parts of the website are working well, and which parts are in most in need of improvement. We welcome feedback from website users, and will continue to use this to give us a qualitative view of performance and to help us make further improvements.

**18. From: Klaartje Dresselaers  
To the Cabinet Member for Finance**

What provision is Merton putting in place to support residents who are citizens of EU member states during Brexit?

## Reply

On 21 June 2018 the Home Office released the latest details around the EU settlement scheme that will come into effect later this year. The council recently attended an event organised by London Councils for local authorities to be aware of the settlement scheme and the implications for EU nationals residing in London boroughs.

The council is currently undertaking research and gathering best practice in order to develop the offer of support to be made available to local EU nationals. We acknowledge that there is a role for local authorities in supporting the most vulnerable EU residents within their communities, such as adults and children in care, the elderly and those with limited English language skills or digital access.

In the interim, the council continues to fund a comprehensive information and advice service in the borough through Citizens Advice, Law Centres and Merton Centre for Independent Living where residents can seek advice.

### **19. From: Barry Smith To the Cabinet Member for Environment and Street Cleanliness**

What is Merton currently doing and planning to do in the future to reduce the incidence of fly tipping?

## Reply

We are very proactive in identifying fly tippers by:

- Investigating fly tips for evidence
- Where evidence is found we will issue either a fixed penalty of £400 or prepare a case for prosecution
- All fly tips on council owed land/property are reported to our contractor for removal
- We carry out engagement activities , notifying residents of their day of collections as often it's the waste black bags that can be a real issue.
- We advertise our Fly Tipping campaign on J C Deaux boards in the borough, along with articles on fly tipping in "My Merton"
- Officers attend joint patrols with our contractor Veolia identify hot spots and taking action when necessary
- We rely on good intelligence information on anyone seen fly tipping.
- We collate a list of vehicles that have been known to be involved in fly tipping.
- We carry out joint action on ANPR (Automated Number Plate Recognition) stops with the police to stop vehicles who are carrying waste. This is to identify the driver and to check for a waste carrier licence, failing to provide all relevant information we do issue a fixed penalty notice and can take further action which can result in obtaining a warrant for the vehicle to seize, which may be destroyed.

- We recently carried out a covert camera operation; 25 people were identified as fly tipping ,22 cases have since been prepared for prosecution and are awaiting hearing dates,
- 3 cases were issued with a fixed penalty fine of £400
- It is Council Policy to name and shame people once they have been prosecuted
- Last year we also issued over 7000 Fixed penalty notices for littering , a greater number than all but 2 other local authorities

### **Supplementary**

I'd like to thank the Councillor for their reply. I'd just like to ask a slightly more specific question on that, which is whether the Council has any plans to improve the number of prosecutions for fly tipping which I think it was less than half of 1% at present so whether the Council has got any concrete plans to try and bring that level up?

### **Reply**

I'd like to thank Mr Smith for his question and supplementary question. Fly tipping is something that is a blight across all London Boroughs and across the Country and we've seen a growth of it over recent years. We need to tackle it together and I agree that we need to prosecute successfully where we can but we also need to actually tackle the root cause of it, that's the real way of stopping it. So we need to be vigilant together, I'm not saying we be vigilantes but we need to be vigilant together and we need to sometimes question. I've personally reported over 20 fly tips in the last 3 weeks including taking pictures of addresses on one fly tip of some address labels there so I'll be pushing that through to prosecution. I think where we have the evidence we can prosecute that's the important thing. We need the evidence and it needs to be supported by witnesses or by our Client Officers who find the fly tips. So I'm very much in favour of pushing that more. We do have a success rate that's above many other boroughs in London on prosecutions of fly tips and I'd like to see that continue but more importantly I'd like to see the number of fly tips coming down with us working together.

### **20. From: Tamara Kohler To the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health**

What provision does Merton have for mental health support for its staff?

### **Reply**

Merton Council takes its responsibility towards the health and wellbeing of employees seriously, and has a number of policies in place to support both the physical and mental health and wellbeing of those who work at the council.

Specifically regarding mental health and wellbeing, policies include:

- There are a number of wellbeing initiatives that staff are able to participate in

- The Council has commissioned an independent provider which delivers a confidential service to our staff including counselling, advice relating to emotional well-being, managing stress, anxiety and depression
- Access to discounted gym membership
- Professional advice is sought from Occupational Health
- Events to raise awareness about mental health
- Dementia awareness provided to Council staff as dementia can affect mental health
- The Council is seeking to be a 'Disability Confident Employer'
- The council will soon be offering training to all managers in Mental Health First Aid

**21. From: Emma Maddison**  
**To the Cabinet Member for Children's Services**

Given the number of children able to ride bicycles independently from a young age having had balance bikes, what steps is Merton taking to provide road safety awareness training for Key Stage 1 aged children?

**Reply**

Merton provides an ongoing programme of road safety projects and training for Key Stage 1 children. We offer Scooter Training, road safety presentations on how to stay safe on the road, Kerbcraft, a practical child pedestrian training programme and promote Transport for London's Children's Traffic Club. In 2016-2017 we worked with 27 schools, Brownie and Beaver groups on road safety programmes and training, and trained more than 1,700 school-aged children across Key Stages 1 and 2. We also do transitional work with children in their last year of primary school (year 6) to help them prepare for walking and cycling safely on their own before secondary school.

**22. From: Geoff Cooper**  
**To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration Housing and Transport**

What proportion of fire doors in Merton's social housing stock have been tested to ensure they fulfil the half hour fire resistance criteria?

**Reply**

As the Council is a non stock owning housing authority, it is not a Landlord of the social housing stock in Merton. Accordingly this is not information we hold and registered providers (housing associations) would need to be contacted individually to obtain this information.

**23. From: Sam Pickford**  
**To the Cabinet Member for Finance**

The Merton local government pension scheme represents a significant cost to Merton taxpayers. What is the explanation for why no updates been made available to taxpayers on the status of the scheme since 2015?

### **Reply**

Local government pensions are an essential part of the package we are required to and happy to offer hard-working staff delivering local services for local people. All local councils across the country are in the same position.

Merton produces a wide range of information on our Pension Fund for the public to access. This information can be found on LBM's internet site. To illustrate:

The Pensions Fund Annual Report can be located on the 'Pensions Fund' section of the web site. This contains Annual reports from 2012/13 to 2016/17.

The Pensions Fund Annual Accounts can be found on the 'Finance' section of the web site (under 'Statement of Accounts') as part of LBM's annual published accounts. Here we have placed our annual accounts dating back to 2010/11 and the draft accounts for 2017/18.

Additionally, information on the administration of the Pensions fund (administered by Wandsworth Council) can be found by following the link on our 'Pensions Fund' page on LBM's web site.

### **24. From: John Braithwaite To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration Housing and Transport**

How many empty homes are there in the borough, how has this number changed over each of the last five years and what is the council doing to reduce this number?

### **Reply**

There are many reasons why a property becomes empty and this includes it being uninhabitable, unoccupied, repossessions and, second homes. The Council does not have a dedicated resource to deal with those dwellings which are considered to be long terms empty homes with a view to bringing them back into use. However the council does and will respond on a reactive basis to complaints of empty homes with a view to helping owners return their homes into use.

Officers looked into a similar matter in January 2018 and our Council Tax colleagues confirmed the following. These figures are unlikely to have changed significantly since this time. At this stage unable to provide the data over a five year period but using council tax data records show there were the following empty and unfurnished properties.

901 homes empty for six months or more, of these 272 of them have been empty for over two years and 22 over 10 years

It's important to point out that this source can not be relied upon exclusively as in the majority of instances there is no incentive for the council tax payer to advise if the properties are occupied.

**25. From: Alban Thurston  
To the Cabinet Member for Finance**

When will Merton commit to 100% divestment of London's highest share of fossil fuels, worth £54 million, from its pensions investments? In January 2018 Divest Merton submitted an evidenced draft Climate Risk policy. In March after 18 months' correspondence, the full pensions committee met us off-record. When will trustees commit?

**Reply**

Officers and Members have met with Mr Thurston on two separate occasions recently to discuss the concerns of 'Divest Merton'. During those meetings, it was explained that the new investment strategy adopted by the Pensions Fund Advisory Committee in March 2017, the implementation of which is well advanced, will ensure the Merton is better able to reduce the fund's carbon footprint, with investments being made in companies that actively seek to reduce climate change. In addition, we outlined to Mr Thurston that our Responsible Investment Statement (located in the 'Pension Fund' section of our web site) clearly details the fund's approach on Environment Social and Governance (ESG) factors within our investment analysis and decision-making including the active use of ownership rights to protect and enhance shareholder value over the long term – primarily through voting and engagement.

The objective of responsible investment is to decrease investor risk and improve risk-adjusted returns. Responsible investment principles are at the foundation of the Fund's approach to stewardship and underpin the Fund's fulfilment of its fiduciary duty to scheme beneficiaries.

The Fund requires its investment managers to integrate all material financial factors, including corporate governance, environmental, social, and ethical considerations, into the decision-making process for all Fund investments. It expects its managers to follow good practice and use their influence as major institutional investors and long-term stewards of capital to promote good practice in the investee companies and markets to which the Fund is exposed.

We also engage with Companies through a collaborative voice to air any concerns we may have via our membership of the Local Authority Pension Fund Forum (LAPFF) and the Pensions and Lifetime Savings Association (PLSA).

We have to act within the law to ensure our pensioners are looked after, and the law demands any pension fund's investment managers seek to maximise returns for staff. However, Merton Council itself has a proud track record of investing in sustainability. Our "Merton Rule" requiring new developments to generate renewable energy on site has been copied across the country and is now part of national

planning guidance, and in the past five years alone we have invested over £4.6m in energy efficiency.

### **Supplementary**

Supplementary question for the Cabinet Lead for Finance. First of all thank you very much indeed Council and Chair for the opportunity. I'm tempted to ask if such an inaccurate answer could have been given but I'll limit myself in the time available to say, is the answer as given this afternoon regarded by Finance as the final statement on the question of carbon divestment from the Pension Fund at the London Borough of Merton which proportionally is the worst in London. We were promised in the course of three meetings, not two, with Divest Merton including myself, which included UNs environment programme specialist in green capital markets and indeed one or two other members of Divest Merton, some of whom are in the chamber today. We were promised in the course of those three meetings continuing dialogue with the officers on the question of divesting London's heaviest share of fossil fuels in a pension fund portfolio. I don't see mention of that continuing dialogue appearing in the written reply this afternoon.

Is the reply given this afternoon regarded by the Finance Lead the final statement? Divest Merton has drafted and submitted to the Pensions trustees of this Council a draft climate risk strategy and we have no mention of that. That was submitted to the Pensions Committee six months ago we see no mention of that whatsoever in the written reply.

### **Reply**

I'd like to thank Mr Thurston for coming and asking a supplementary and commiserate with him obviously on his defeat at the election, but it's good to see him in the Chamber. He's made a number of lengthy points here this evening I think that first of all I should stress that decisions of the Pension Fund are not strictly made by the Council because they are held on behalf of our employees and past employees, retired employees and quite rightly the Pensions Fund Advisory Committee takes a leave over those matters. However it does matter greatly to us as a Council that we do what we can to reduce the amount of climate change activities taking place and we have asked that we bore in mind as we look to explore other ways of investing our Pension Fund in the future we welcome Divest Merton's very long contributions to our discussions.

### **26. From: Paymon Khamooshi To the Cabinet Member for Community Safety Engagement and Equalities**

What is the council's strategy on diversity and what is it doing to improve diversity across the borough?

### **Reply**

The council's [Equality and Community Cohesion Strategy](#) 2017-21 sets out the council's priorities for equality and diversity and the specific actions to achieve these priorities. The strategy's overarching aim is to promote equality and community cohesion in Merton by addressing issues of concern and narrowing the gap in



outcomes between residents in the East and West of the borough. The strategy sets out 6 Equality Objectives:

1. To ensure key plans and strategies narrow the gap between different communities in the borough
2. Improve equality of access to services for disadvantaged groups
3. Ensure regeneration plans increase the opportunity for all Merton's residents to fulfil their educational and economic potential, participate in the renewal of the borough and create a health promoting environment.
4. Promoting a safe, healthy and cohesive borough where communities get on well together
5. Encourage recruitment from all sections of the community, actively promote staff development and career progression opportunities and embed equalities across the organisation
6. Fulfil our statutory duties and ensure protected groups are effectively engaged when we change our services.

The accompanying action plan sets out the actions the council will take to meet its equality priorities both corporately and departmentally. The actions and performance measures are linked to service plans to ensure effective implementation of the strategy. Good progress is being made in the implementation of the strategy including:

- An increase in library usage by 11-16 year olds from a CR4 postcode.
- A 20% increase of learners enrolled on employability or family learning courses coming from deprived wards in the East of the borough.
- The Local Welfare Support Scheme has provided support to approximately 250 residents, also between April 2017 and December 2017 the Welfare Benefits Advisor secured over £270,000 in benefits for Merton residents.
- A range of community engagement events including Holocaust Memorial Day, LGBT History Month, Faith Week etc.
- Our schools continue to improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged groups. Provisional outcomes at Key Stage 2 for 2016-17 show that 66% of pupils attained the expected standard (a 9% increase on the previous year).
- At Key Stage 4 Merton has the highest Average Progress 8 score in the country.
- During the last financial year the provision of housing advice and assistance has successfully met the target to prevent homelessness in 450 cases.
- A review of polling places was undertaken in November 2017 and March 2018 to make sure that all polling stations were accessible ahead of the council elections in May 2018.
- A Work Experience Scheme 2018 has been launched with 32 placements being made available to Merton Schools.

**27. From: John Tippett-Cooper**

**To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration Housing and Transport**

What percentage of newly built social housing is Merton on track to achieve this year, both in total and developed by its own property development company, and does this meet Merton's own targets?

## Reply

The Council does not currently build affordable housing and works in partnership with registered providers (housing associations) to deliver new build housing supply.

Current predictions are that 80 affordable new homes are planned for 2018/19. This figure may change as schemes may stall for a variety of reasons or new schemes may be approved.

In addition the council is currently undertaking site visits and will report on the number of new homes built in Merton (social and market housing) in the Authority Monitoring report at the end of the year.

[https://www2.merton.gov.uk/environment/planning/planningpolicy/localplan/annual\\_monitoring\\_report.htm](https://www2.merton.gov.uk/environment/planning/planningpolicy/localplan/annual_monitoring_report.htm) Merantun Developments has not submitted any planning applications to Merton Council at present. Merantun Developments will be policy compliant with regards to affordable housing provision. Merantun Development's financial viability reports will be published in the public domain as part of the planning process for openness and transparency.

### **28. From: Luke Taylor To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration Housing and Transport**

What has been the net change in the number of households in the social housing waiting list in each of the last five years and what is Merton doing to ensure a net decrease in the length of the waiting list this year and in future years?

## Reply

The housing register (often referred to as the waiting list) is an indicator of housing need in the borough and does not accurately reflect rehousing activity. Each Council will have its own system of rehousing priorities and as such borough statistics cannot be considered on a "like for like" basis.

Numbers of households on the housing register do not reflect that one council rehousing activity is greater than another just because the numbers on the waiting list are low, this could be achieved by having an access policy that may restrict entry onto the list thus producing lower numbers of households waiting for accommodation.

Detailed below are the numbers on the waiting list over the last five years. The figures reflect year end statistics

2013/14. There were 7625 households on the waiting list

2014/15. There were 8229 households on the waiting list

2015/16. There were 8938 households on the waiting list

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2016/17. There were 9851 households on the waiting list

2017/18. There were 9802 households on the waiting list

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**From Councillor Eleanor Stringer to the Cabinet Member for Education**

Can the Cabinet Member provide an update on the building of the new secondary school at High Path?

**Reply**

The new Harris Wimbledon School is opening as planned for September 2018 at its temporary site in Whatley Avenue SW20 and is fully subscribed. This year more than 260 extra children are leaving primary school in Merton, and our existing 'outstanding' and 'good' secondary schools - the best in the country for progress between entering secondary schools and doing their GCSEs - are more popular than ever.

Harris Federation is undertaking minor refurbishment to ensure the Whatley Avenue building is suitable for two years and the planning application for the permanent site in High Path, South Wimbledon has been submitted by the Education and Skills Funding Agency; the representation period as part of this application is expected to commence in the week of this council meeting.

Projects to provide suitable buildings to re-locate the High Path Resource Centre to Leyton Road SW19 and Elim Church to Merton Hall and so enable a clear site at High Path for the new permanent school are now progressing well.

**Supplementary**

Thank you Madam Mayor. I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for her answer and I do have a supplementary question which is, I wonder if she can explain further how the new school will benefit the children of Merton?

**Reply**

I'd like to thank Councillor Stringer for her supplementary question. Madam Mayor, officers advise us year on year about the number of places that we need for our secondary school students and come March this year we received 268 additional residents school applications for secondary schools. Because of Harris Wimbledon at its temporary site we are able to offer school places to each and every one of those students and can I just remind all of you here especially to all the new members of all the fantastic schools we have in Merton. All of our secondary schools are Ofsted rated good or outstanding and only 3% of all schools are good or outstanding. In fact, our secondary school results last year put Merton first in the Country as a whole and I think that is a good result to be proud of and because of that we know that with the new Harris Merton they will follow the same and be a good or outstanding school and we want each and every child in this Borough to have the opportunity to go to such a school and to be achieving the best they can and I think that the Harris School can do that for us.

**From Councillor Daniel Holden to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Street Cleanliness:**

How many public litter bins are there in Merton?

**Reply**

## 06: Non ST Questions

This year we have increased the number of litter bins in town centres and on the highway to 904. There are approximately 430 litter bins located within the borough's parks and open spaces.

### **Supplementary**

Thank you to the Cabinet Member for his answer. Is the Cabinet Member aware that lots of public litter bins have apparently disappeared in Merton since Veolia took over last year? Is he hiding these bins and will he put them back?

### **Reply**

I'd like to thank Councillor Holden for his question and supplementary question. There have been no bins removed from the streets of the Borough and despite I understand, there was some misguided tweet today that said that some had been removed, they were not removed and my answer to that in terms of the number there, that is my understanding that we have bins, we are not removing them and a few additional ones have been put in. I will be constantly monitoring where bins are to see that we actually have clean streets as much as possible and the litter bins help that, where it can help that.

### **From Councillor Ben Butler to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care**

Can the Cabinet Member update me on recent work to bridge the gap between the east and west of the borough?

### **Reply**

Merton's Community Plan sets out the vision and priorities for borough. The Community Plan's first priority is working to bridge the gap between the east and west of the borough and between different communities. The strategy for bridging the gap is to focus on those factors that reduce inequalities. Good progress is being made across the council on a comprehensive range of initiatives that improve outcomes for disadvantaged and excluded groups. Notable recent examples include:

- Social Prescribing has gone from strength to strength in Merton and the independent evaluation has shown a reduction in GP appointments, a reduction in attendances at A&E and improvements to the self reported wellbeing of those going through the programme. Merton's approach to Social Prescribing is being used a case study in a GLA commissioned report on Social Prescribing in London and has now been rolled out to all nine practices in east Merton and an additional four in the west of the borough.
- The Healthier Catering Commitment engages with local businesses to get them to sign up to the scheme or make some positive changes to provide healthier options. The project was targeted in the east of the borough where there are higher rates of childhood obesity.
- There has been a narrowing of the gap for students from disadvantaged families at the primary stage including early years foundation stage and at the end of KS1 and KS2.

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- The gap in the school attendance and exclusion figures between disadvantaged pupils and their peers was also narrower than those seen nationally.
- Town centre improvements to Mitcham and Colliers Wood and a bold vision for the future of Morden working in partnership with TFL.
- Working closely with Clarion and Moat on major regeneration schemes that will also deliver new affordable housing.
- The council's strategic partner programme providing information and advice to citizens and support to the voluntary sector as a whole is being recommissioned and expanded to include preventative physical and mental wellbeing services.

The council adopted a new Hate Crime Strategy on the back of a major engagement exercise and there were events across the borough during Hate Crime Awareness Week to raise awareness of the council's zero tolerance approach to hate crime.

This year's Merton Annual Public Health Report will focus on tracking the trends in health inequalities between different communities in Merton over time (particularly the east and the west of the borough, and the 30% most and 30% least deprived wards). This will chart progress made to date, and serve as a baseline to inform the refresh of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy post 2018 and most suitable indicators to monitor progress in reducing health inequalities going forward.

### **Supplementary**

Thank you Madam Mayor. I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for his answer. The Annual Public Health report makes it clear the difficulty in addressing long term inequalities that exist. Given this does he agree with me that it is more important than ever that those living in the East of the borough have access to good quality healthcare?

### **Reply**

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Councillor Butler for your question and your supplementary and welcome to the Chamber. Madam Mayor, Councillor Butler refers to the annual public health report which this year focuses on health inequalities and bridging the gap. I'd like to thank the director for public health for all the work she's put into this which will provide us with a very rich source of data and statistics and inform a number of plans and policies over the coming years like the Health and Wellbeing Strategy refresh. I think it's important that we acknowledge there are a number of factors which affect inequality; some of which are within the Council's power to address and some of which are not and I think it's equally important to acknowledge as the report does Madam Mayor, that tackling inequality is extremely complex and there is not going to be one silver bullet to bridge the gap. However, in answer to Councillor Butler's question, I think it's relatively uncontroversial to say that access to high quality healthcare is imperative if we are to address the inequality that exists in our Borough and that's why the Council is working very closely with the CCG to deliver the redeveloped Wilson Hospital site which will provide a comprehensive health and wellbeing campus for residents in the East. Likewise Madam Mayor, this administration has a very clear commitment to campaigning for full acute services to remain on the St Helier Site and indeed for a new site to be built on the St Helier site and we will continue to make this argument very strongly in the process the commissioners are now going through.

**From Councillor Nigel Benbow to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Street Cleanliness**

What height do weeds and grass verges need to reach to trigger the council's contractors to actually make amends?

**Reply (From the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture)**

The contractual standards for street cleaning including weeding and detritus reflect best practice from Defra's Code of Practice on Litter. The contract is based on an output specification requiring the contractor maintain consistent standards across the entire borough. This is a move away from a frequency based approach where standards can fall between sweeps without any obligation on the contractor to resolve the issue.

The approved method for managing weed growth is to apply a chemical weed killer. For this to be applied the weeds need to be 2- 3 inches with full leaf growth. This ensures that the weed and the supporting root system is killed. The weed spraying scheduled started this year in April with the next spray due to commence the first week in July. In between sprays the weeds are manual removed by the beat sweepers.

The maximum acceptable height for grass on highways verges is 70mm.

We are requiring the contractor to remove weeds that have not been dealt with by way of a chemical solution.

**Supplementary**

After last year's failure by Veolia to do weeding until compelled to, will the cabinet member 'take responsibility' and act or will he abdicate responsibility like his leader did in his recent letter to Ravensbury residents?

**Reply (From the Cabinet Member for Environment and Street Cleanliness)**

Thank you Councillor Benbow and thank you also for written notice of the supplementary, I do appreciate that; very courteous. Congratulations on your election as well to the Council and welcome to the Chamber. I'm not going to say I wasn't responsible last year, I'm a Councillor so we are collectively responsible for everything that happens but certainly I'm passionate about clean streets in Merton I will be making sure that Veolia do their task completely. I'm not aware of any letter that went out but I'm sure that there was no abdication of responsibility intended in any letter that has gone out from anyone on the majority side of the Council. So I give an undertaking to make sure that we work with Veolia to make sure that the weeds are cleared at the right time. It's a difficult time of year obviously where things grow fast, the weed killers have to work as has been given in the earlier answer and so they have to be a certain height for that to work but we will be making sure that the weeds are cleared once they are there.



**From Councillor Simon McGrath to the Leader of the Council:**

What is the Leader's position on the newspaper reports that properties within 3km of Crossrail 2 stations will be asked to pay additional Council tax to fund this regional and national asset?

**Reply**

Merton Council has regular liaison meetings with the Crossrail 2 team, which, to date has principally been about the design and understanding the impacts of the scheme for Merton residents and businesses.

It is surprising that the first we heard of this proposal was in the press. We are currently in dialogue with Crossrail 2 to understand the provenance and credibility of the proposal. We know that the project is undergoing an independent financial review and is due to report back to Treasury in Autumn with an interim findings statement now imminent.

We believe that the land-value capture tax is just one of a range of possible funding mechanisms being explored for the project. At this stage, we understand that it is just an idea under consideration. We will of course stand up for Merton residents on this matter and we are seeking clarity around the proposal and its financial impacts on home-owners. Other than the press reports, there's no detail available at the moment. It is disappointing that the government has yet to guarantee funding for CR2 and I call on our local MPs to put pressure on the Transport Secretary to provide the help that he and our residents expect.

The Leader of the Council has convened a meeting with CR2 Managing Director Michelle Dix on 4<sup>th</sup> July and this topic will be top of our agenda; as well as seeking a timeline for when CR2 will undertake the next round of public consultation.

**Supplementary**

Thank you Madam Mayor. Ideas like this are put into the press to test out what the kind of reaction is. A consultant for Crossrail 2 at a recent conference said that he thought that he would put the Crossrail 2 tax at something like £520 per household for people who live near the stations. So I wonder if Councillor Alambritis could tell us the outcome of his meeting today and if he could assure us that he will write to Mike Gerrard who is carrying out a review of how Crossrail should be followed for the government, that he will write to the Mayor of London, to the Secretary of State to express this Council's concern about this extra tax and to leaders of other Councils on Crossrail 2 worth.

**Reply**

I thank Simon McGrath for his original question and for his supplementary. I did have a meeting with officers, with Michele Dix today at 4 o'clock where we all agreed that the proposals around tax for Crossrail 2 are newspaper, are reports, there's nothing solid or foundation but what we did all agree with, when one is talking about Crossrail 2 is that we need to apply the 3 P's; that's Patience, Positivity and Perseverance and then someone said in that meeting that we need to add two more P's to when we are discussing Crossrail 2 that's Pizza and Prosecco because that's what we need to get through the shambles of this government's proposals on

Crossrail 2, but I will take on board the concerns expressed by Simon McGrath and see what I can do about the future funding. It is a regional and national asset, we do want it but not at any cost to Wimbledon. All parties including Oonagh Moulton from the opposition and I think Mary Jane-Jeanes we all signed and Simon and Peter Southgate we all signed a joint letter welcoming Crossrail 2 but not at any cost to Wimbledon or to its residents. Thank you for your supplementary.

**From Councillor Natasha Irons to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services:**

How does the Council support care leavers who want to stay put?

**Reply**

The Council has a staying put policy, this policy originated from the Children and Families Act 2014 which placed a legal duty on local authorities to support every care leaver who wants to stay with their former foster carers with whom they were placed prior to their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday until their 21st birthday. It is the duty of the local authority:

- To monitor the Staying Put arrangement; and
- To provide advice, assistance and support to the young person (known as a "Former Relevant child") and to the former foster parent with a view to maintaining the Staying Put arrangement (this must include financial support), until the child reaches the age of 21 (unless the local authority consider that the Staying Put arrangement is not consistent with the child's welfare). The intention of Staying Put arrangements is to ensure that young people can remain with their former foster carers until they are prepared for adulthood, can experience a transition akin to their peers, avoid social exclusion and be more likely to avert a subsequent housing and tenancy breakdown.

We undertake a Leaving Care Assessment of Need at the age of (around) 15  $\frac{3}{4}$  which determines whether it will be appropriate to facilitate a Staying Put arrangement. Where it is appropriate, and where the child and the foster parent want to make a Staying Put arrangement, then we provide advice, assistance and support to facilitate that arrangement. Later, when the young person is (around) 16  $\frac{1}{2}$  a Staying Put meeting takes place with the right people involved to make these arrangements. This meeting is reconvened as necessary, depending on the complexity of the young person's situation, but as a minimum a second meeting takes place at (around) age 17  $\frac{1}{2}$  to make sure all necessary arrangements are in place by the time a young person turns 18.

For young people in local authority foster care, Staying Put carers will continue to receive the full fostering payment (allowance and fee) being paid at the point the young person turns 18 minus subsistence allowance which is paid direct to young people on means tested benefits. This will continue until the young person moves on or until their 19th birthday, whichever is sooner. For all young people who wish to remain with their IFA foster carer under a "Staying Put" agreement this agreement is made directly between the carer and Merton; the allowance and Level 3 fee element of the Merton foster carer payment minus the subsistence allowance will be paid to

the foster carer up until the young person's 19th birthday. In circumstances where the YP has income, (either from benefits and/or from wages), that is equivalent or more than the DWP subsidy allowance, the value of the DWP subsidy allowance will be deducted from the SP/SL carer payments. This will continue until the young person moves on or their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, whichever is sooner.

At the moment 8 young people are Staying Put with Merton foster carers and a further 5 young people are Staying Put with their Independent Fostering Agency foster carers. There are a number of young people turning 18 this year, foster carers have already expressed their wish to continue their commitment to the young people in their care beyond 18, therefore the number of young people remaining in staying put is set to rise.

### **Supplementary**

Thank you Madam Mayor. I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for her answer and congratulate her on her new role. My supplementary question is simply, what do you feel are the top 3 challenges in your new role?

### **Reply**

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Councillor Irons for that question. Again, a very warm welcome to the Chamber. As a new Cabinet Member I'd say that the challenges and my priorities for the forthcoming period would be; firstly, I have no doubt that you are all aware of the financial strain that Local Government is under as a result of Tory austerity. In spite of these constraints, Children Schools and Families has continued to deliver a service that puts our children and young people front and centre. Over the year, you will be scrutinising how we are performing against our budget and how this affects Children Schools and Families. My highest priority for the upcoming year is to ensure that when we review our budget any changes must be viewed from the perspective of our children and young people, their families and carers. We must continue to deliver user-focused services that allow our children and young people to flourish and uphold Merton's place as an example of best practice against other Councils. Secondly, I am very proud that Ofsted's inspection of Children's Services last year found us to be good with outstanding features. That doesn't mean that we can rest on our laurels and it does mean that I'll be focussing on developing those areas that are not yet outstanding, including, forgive the list; ensuring that all our plans for Children in Need, Looked after Children and Child protection pathway plans have specific actions, achievable timescales and clear and measurable outcomes, improving use of return to home interviews following a child going missing, ensuring that staying put is made available to all care leavers who wish to and ensuring that

[Point of order raised by Councillor Williams]

Okay, well I'll wrap it up. I won't finish it was just the list of the Ofsted Inspection outcomes. Basically what I am saying is we are not going to be complacent about Ofsted and also my third challenge will be focussing on smoothing the transition to adulthood. I believe that there is work to be done with adult social care in order to ensure that any barriers that place children moving to adulthood are removed

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[Point of order raised by Councillor Williams]

Not interested in Children's services, fine. Well I've given my three priorities and I look forward to working with you all on those.

### **From Councillor Nick McLean to the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities:**

With regard to the proposed closure of Wimbledon Police Station, did the Council conduct any impact studies in the vicinity and surrounding areas?

### **Reply**

As part of the London wide consultation, undertaken by the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime, a city wide EIA was completed and this is attached. As such Merton did not undertake its own EIA rather we worked, with our partners, elected members and community leads to ensure that Merton's response to the 17 questions asked by MOPAC were responded to in the richest manner possible.

The MOPAC EIA can be viewed here:

<https://www.london.gov.uk/mopac-publications/public-access-strategy>

### **Supplementary**

Thank you Madam Mayor. I would like to thank the Cabinet Member for their answer and quite frankly I think it's shocking that the Cabinet Member did not care enough about the safety of the people of Wimbledon to undertake any impact studies after the Labour Mayor of London decided to take such a poor decision. Will the Cabinet Member commit to undertake an impact study focussed on Wimbledon?

### **Reply**

Thank you Madam Mayor. First of all I thank you for your supplementary question. I'm pleased that England have qualified for the last eight next week and congratulations to the team. Turning now to your question, as you know in the answer that has been given to you MOPAC has been sent to you explaining that the consultation was run by the Mayor's office and therefore did not get involved in any consultation process and we've done our best to do what we can. Thank you.

### **Cllr Aidan Mundy to the Cabinet Member for the Environment and Street Cleanliness**

Can the Cabinet Member provide an update on the introduction of wheelie bins, and an update on the number of fly tipping cases that have been successfully taken to court?

### **Reply**

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The roll out of the new waste collection service is on schedule to come into effect from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2018. The service change will affect every household in the borough and is the biggest change in waste collection they have experienced in recent years. In order to minimise the disruption and to support the roll out of the new service Veolia and council officers have been working collectively to design and implement a communications and engagement plan which will reach every household in the borough. The first communication to every household is due to be delivered over the coming weeks.

In reference to fly tipping, This financial year we have 22 cases ready for prosecution and are currently awaiting court hearing dates, this is for larger fly tipping offences. We have been using new legislation that came into force May 2006 issuing £400 FPN for small fly tips.

### **Supplementary**

Thank you Madam Mayor and I do have a supplementary. I'd like to first thank the Cabinet Member for his answer and congratulate him on his new role. So residents across my ward tell me on the doorstep that they want to see the introduction of wheelie bins and welcome his answer today. They would be keen to hear what he believes success in this roll-out and his wider portfolio will look like in the next 12 to 24 months?

### **Reply**

Thank you Madam Mayor. I'd like to thank Councillor Mundy for his question and supplementary question and also congratulate him on his election and commend him for the work he is doing in Pollards Hill with his ward colleagues about working with Merton Veolia to make sure that the new refuse collection works well there. For me, I've lived in this Borough for over 60 years, should leave a pause there for gasps, my parents still live in Merton and they've lived here all their lives in the area that is now known as Merton for 90 years. My great grandfather was a street sweeper in Wimbledon over 100 years ago and I'm named after him with my middle name Arthur. So my connection with Merton and cleanliness in Merton is long standing. I was also the Chair of Environmental Services in the 1990s from 1991-1997 at a time when we had one bin collected per household per week. If you lived in the old what was called Merton and Morden Urban District Council you also had a paper collection once a month which you had to tie up and leave at the gate. So we've moved on much we've become more sophisticated the challenges of refuse collection and recycling are great, so my success criteria for myself and for the Council for the next two years are to actually have the smooth rollout of the new scheme which will see 5 visits per household every fortnight for collection. I would like to see the increase of our food recycling; currently on average, just taking March as an example, we recycled 3kg per household of food waste – Sutton is 7.5kg so what's the difference? We need to work that out. I'd like to see cleaner streets, I'd like to see the reduction of fly tipping, so I will do all that I can, judge me on that and judge the Council on that. If we achieve that in the next two years then that's success for me, that's what it looks like. Thank you.

### **From Councillor Paul Kohler to the Leader of the Council**

In light of the predicted damage Brexit will do to London's economy and hence this

## 06: Non ST Questions

Borough and its residents, will the Leader back a referendum on the terms of the Brexit deal, and will he write to both the borough's MPs, seeking confirmation that they will do likewise?

### **Reply**

I continue to talk to our MPs to push for a meaningful vote in parliament on the terms. This is one of the vital issues of our times, which is why I have also brought it in to the portfolio of the Cabinet Member for Finance, and why we are working constantly to assess the impacts and ways in which we can support our EU residents.

Anyone can see that the Conservative government are handling the result of 2016's referendum abysmally, putting businesses and families here and across the UK at risk.

### **Supplementary**

Thank you Madam Mayor. Can I thank the Leader for his answer, well I assume that's the polite way of saying no, so can I ask a very simple question. Do you agree with our local MP Siobhain McDonagh that there should be a people's vote on the terms of Brexit deal?

### **Reply**

I did some research following your question and I've picked up a Liberal Democrat leaflet that came through my door in Cannon Hill ward and there is some mention of continue to fight for our place in the EU and for the rights of EU citizens who live and work here and I agree with that and I did a letter to the Prime Minister on those lines. I think there should be a meaningful vote in Parliament and it's interesting, we need to be consistent and the Liberal Democrats need to be consistent. Their leaflet says that 6 brand new Lib Dem Councillors in Merton after a sensational win, Lib Dems on the rise, according to the South West Londoner which we all obviously read, but it makes out as though the Liberal Democrats have stormed the Council. Please be mindful that this is a Labour Council, with a conservative opposition with six liberal democrats which is ten percent. I will do all I can to engage with our local MPs; it just goes to show that they are Fib Dems not Lib Dems. Thank you very much.

### **From Councillor Owen Pritchard to the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance:**

How is the council working to support businesses in the borough and developing the local economy?

### **Reply**

The Council supports business and the local economy through provision of a broad range of services and functions that make Merton an attractive place to establish and sustain a business. These range from for example our approach to discretionary rate relief, our sponsorship of the Best Business Awards and our approach to parking management and the way this supports town centres and shopping parades. It also

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includes our work via the future Merton economic development team. The council has agreed to use CIL to fund town centre premises improvements this year and has selected sites to deliver parade improvements and to fund a town centre officer post.

Much of the support to business is now through the sub-regional south London Partnership (SLP). Future Merton works closely with the SLP to support employment through a skills and employment working group. The group have prepared a “Skills for south Londoner’s Strategy” in February 2018 and are now working in partnership to deliver the proposed actions, including aligning the skills offer with our growth and strategic sector needs identified.

The Council fully supports Small Business Saturday and the Leader has marketed local small businesses by visiting them on the National Small Business Day in early December each year. The Council also provides free parking on all council run car parks in the December weekends running up to Christmas Day. This is very popular with both customers and shopkeepers.

See also the link to our dedicated pages on business support  
<https://www.merton.gov.uk/business-and-consumers/business-support-and-advice>

### **Supplementary**

I’d like to thank the Cabinet Member for his answer. My supplementary is, how will he work towards a greater business diversity in Mitcham Town Centre which is currently dominated by takeaways, off-licences, hairdressers and betting shops?

### **Reply**

Again, one more; I’d like to congratulate Councillor Pritchard on a fantastic result in Cricket Green and welcome him to the area. It’s obviously a concern to us and to everyone that the offer in Mitcham could be better. I think in part that reflects the state of the economy in Britain today. My answer, my solution to that is very clear; we need to have a new Government and we need to have a government in place that is not obsessed by Brexit and starts to work for the interests of the public and the people of Mitcham.

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## **From Councillor Rebecca Lanning to the Cabinet Member for Education**

Can the Cabinet Member explain what support there is for schools to encourage active lifestyles as part of the fight against childhood obesity?

### **Reply**

There are a number of initiatives in place to support schools, children and families to increase their levels of physical activity. The *Child Healthy Weight Action Plan for Merton (2016-18)*<sup>1</sup> aims to deliver a co-ordinated and system-wide approach to tackling childhood obesity in Merton. The Action Plan has four key themes, one of which focuses on increasing levels of physical activity, particularly in schools.

Key actions include supporting the 'Daily Mile'. This is a free initiative being promoted in Merton schools that sees children run or jog for 15 minutes every day in their primary and nursery schools. Currently 20 schools across the borough are delivering the Daily Mile.

To tie into the Daily Mile, in 2018 Merton will be implementing a 'Merton Mile' which will mark out a 1 mile path in a local park in the east of the borough to promote daily physical activity. Children will be encouraged to replicate the Daily Mile they undertake in schools with their families/friends outside of the school day.

Merton School Sports Partnership, funded through its Merton School partners, deliver a number of initiatives promoting physical activity in schools, including supporting schools to sign up to the Merton School Sports Mark awards. Public Health further fund MSSP to support schools to achieve awards through the Healthy Schools London programme (HSL).

Merton Public Health have recently supported the All England Lawn Tennis Club (AELTC) to pilot a structured physical activity programme for early year's class teachers. The pilot was delivered with 25 schools with Public Health evaluating the pilot. This showed that there had been a positive increase in both physical activity among children and that staff felt supported and more confident to deliver this. The programme will now be offered to all Merton Nursery and Reception class teachers and a longer term in-depth evaluation will be conducted through an academic institution.

In the 2017/18 academic year, training has been offered for school staff to support them to have conversations with children and families about weight and healthy lifestyles, including the importance of physical activity. 300 primary school teaching staff from 15 schools have benefitted from training. The training raises awareness increases confidence to talk about the subject, deliver consistent messages around healthy weight and improve their ability to signpost to support.

### **Supplementary**

Thank you Madam Mayor. May I thank members and officers for all the work are undertaking to promote physical activity in our schools. Can I ask the Cabinet

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www2.merton.gov.uk/childhood\\_healthy\\_weight\\_action\\_plan\\_summary\\_for\\_web.pdf](https://www2.merton.gov.uk/childhood_healthy_weight_action_plan_summary_for_web.pdf)

Member if she would agree with me that working closely with our schools is the best way for the Council to ensure the greatest possible start in life for our children?

**Reply**

I want to thank Councillor Lanning for her supplementary question and congratulations as well and I also failed to congratulate Councillor Stringer so congratulations to you both. Merton is very good at working in partnership with other organisations and we've won awards for the contract process from the cabinet office for our partnering work and so in short the answer to that question is that yes I agree that organisations working together is the best way forward for the benefit of all of our children, thank you.

**From Councillor Janice Howard to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Street Cleanliness**

What is the cabinet members approach to decision making within parks and leisure facilities?

**Reply (From the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture)**

Decision making in parks and leisure facilities follows the council's standing orders and financial regulations with many decisions devolved to officers to make for operational efficiency.

The Cabinet Member has regular, fortnightly, meetings with relevant officers where current key issues within the parks & leisure services are raised, discussed and analysed. The Cabinet Member also attends and inputs to some relevant project working and steering groups as required: the Mitcham Carnival organising committee, for example.

Over and above this, strategic issues within the service are considered and agreed through the appropriate corporate governance arrangements, including Council, Cabinet and the Leader's Strategy Group and such key corporate business plans such as the Target Operating Model and Service Plan that the Cabinet Member has input to.

**Supplementary**

Thank you Madam Mayor yes I do have a supplementary question. I thank the Cabinet Member for his response but why has the Cabinet Member not had better consultation with local residents, residents associations and ward councillors regarding the work undertaken by IdVerde in parks i.e. Wimbledon Park where they replaced the paving with tarmac without any consultation with any of these groups?

**Reply**

Thank you Councillor Howard for her question and her supplementary question. I'm very much aware of the crazy paving in Wimbledon Park and I have to say that it's sad that local residents weren't consulted on this occasion. I would confirm that. But we have extreme staff shortages within Greenspaces and that means that decisions have often been taken quickly and without reference to other people. Most of those

are operational decisions and most of them are correct. As it turns out your paving in Wimbledon Park has now been replaced by a much safer surface, I've been to see the surface and the surface is not just acceptable the surface actually looks very good and fits in very well with the gardens that surround it. But I'm not going to sit here, or stand here for that matter and say that it's acceptable to do it like that. I have been talking with the director and with their greenspaces and we're going to make sure that local Councillors become far more involved in the process. Thank you.

**From Councillor Dave Ward to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport:**

Can the Cabinet Member provide an update on the development of the new AFC Wimbledon stadium on Plough Lane?

**Reply**

Demolition has started on site for planning permission 14/P4361 (which includes the new AFC Wimbledon Stadium, +600 homes, shops, public realm and other matters). Demolition and underground drainage works will continue until autumn 2018. Once the demolition and drainage diversion works are complete the main works will start on-site. The new stadium is expected to be completed late 2019. AFC Wimbledon, Catalyst, Galliard are working together to co-ordinate their community outreach work. The scheme has a dedicated public liaison officer, who will deal with all public enquiries for both the residential and the stadium sites. They can be contacted on [Public.Liaison@galliarhomes.com](mailto:Public.Liaison@galliarhomes.com) or 0208 418 3641.

**Supplementary**

Yes thank you Madam Mayor and thank you to Councillor Whelton for his response which includes the mention of 600 homes as part of the development. I wonder if he has any further details of the housing within the development particularly any targets on the proportion that will be social housing or genuinely affordable housing, thank you.

**Reply**

Can I welcome Councillor Ward to his first meeting of the Council and congratulations on his election. In terms of the breakdown of the housing, we are currently talking with one of the housing providers Catalyst and Wandle to get the proportion of affordable housing up and obviously we hope to have an announcement shortly in terms of that site. I think the Stadium is very welcome but obviously pay for the stadium it needed for those houses to be actually built. We also as well have very challenging housing targets to meet here in this Borough. So as an authority we do want to see a range of tenures which will be included in the affordable element at the stadium and I hope that when its completed that the proportion of affordable housing on that site will at least be around 30%. Thank you.

**From Councillor Daniel Holden to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture:**

Does the Cabinet Member think Merton has sufficient 'family-friendly' leisure centres for families who want to do activities together in an accessible manner?

**Reply**

All of the council's leisure centres are 'family friendly' in that families can take part in a range of activities in the same building at the same time, and if they should choose to, and the activity on offer allows, they could take part together.

All of the borough's leisure centres comply with the Disability and Equality Act and are therefore accessible to all.

**Supplementary**

Thank you to the Cabinet Member for his response. With the loss of the Battle Close gym, which was a very popular and well attended family gym in Wimbledon, and with insufficient space at the Morden Leisure Centre to accommodate all the extra people, why has the cabinet member made it difficult for families to enjoy a leisure activities in the Wimbledon area and is he ashamed of this?

**Reply**

I thank Councillor Holden for his question and his supplementary question and congratulate him on his recent rise to the deputy leader of the conservative group. The answer is no, I'm not going to apologise for what's happened; Virgin Active ran the gym, Virgin Active passed the gym to us, we didn't ask them to pass it to us, it was passed to us. We will be talking on this subject at length later. We have made the decision against a local businessman coming in to run the gym because we didn't see it as being worthwhile. We do have plans for the site which you will hear about later and I look forward to that debate and I'm sure that you do too, thank you very much.

**From Councillor Carl Quilliam to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture:**

Could the Cabinet Member detail the decision-making process that led to the removal and reintroduction of a "Changing Places" toilet in plans for the new Morden Leisure Centre, confirming both that this followed a standard process, and the administration's policy on funding Changing Places toilets in public buildings going forward?

**Reply**

The decision to remove the changing places was made by the project team during the development of the design of the project as they were trying to put as many of the requirements as possible into a land constrained site. In making this change the project team ensured that the new facility was still compliant with Disability and Equality Act 2010.

Once the council was alerted to the consequence of this change the project team were instructed to use their best endeavours to re-instate it. This took a period of time to resolve but this has been done successfully.

### **Supplementary**

Thank you Madam Mayor. Thank you to the Cabinet Member for his reply as well. Given that Changing Places toilets are needed for a section of our community to be able to make use of some of the local facilities at all, does the Cabinet Member really think that usage is really the most appropriate measure for whether we should have them in public buildings at all?

### **Reply**

Thank you Councillor Quilliam for your question and for your supplementary. You have to monitor the usage, it's essential that we do so. We provide this changing places room and I very much hope it will be used, I very much hope it will be successful and as I've said to a previous questioner I very much hope that we will be in a position to recommend in spite of the cost of these it's worth actually putting them in elsewhere. I have to tell the Councillor though, something he may not know; that I'm a parent of a now an adult of 33 years with extreme disabilities and I used to take him swimming, my family used to take him swimming, long before the idea of changing places existed, long before frankly, a lot of the current legislation was in place and do you know, it wasn't the lack of a changing room that made our lives difficult. To give you an idea; he loves the water, he enjoys swimming, but he swims like he's drowning which meant that the lifeguards were always jumping in to save him. Now, as a family we could laugh that through, we could laugh that through. We find it harder to laugh it through when he refused to come out of the water and so we had to clear an area by the steps whilst we tried to persuade him. That wasn't funny and we were, in our efforts to promote an equality of sorts we were inconveniencing other members of the public. But what we couldn't do and what no amount of kit and no amount of legislation can do is to get a family friendly reaction from other users – it was always staring, or 'don't stare darling it's rude' or 'ah poor thing' or 'can I help' or worst of all avoidance full stop and leave in disgust and that's not politics, that's human nature and it will take a seismic shift in human nature to change that. I don't see it coming too soon and I don't think changing places is going to make a substantial difference to that. I welcome changing places but sadly through my own account it's a little like putting a plaster on an open wound. Thank you very much.

### **From Councillor Billy Christie to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture:**

With the introduction of the new Leisure Centre in Morden, can the Cabinet Member detail how many gyms and leisure facilities there are in Merton supported by the Council, and the spread across the borough?

The council operates 3 Indoor Gyms at the three leisure centres – Canons LC in Mitcham; Morden Park Pools and Wimbledon LC. The council also has 12 Outdoor Gyms in public parks at Canons Recreation Ground; Donnelly Green; Dundonald Recreation Ground; Figges Marsh; King George's Park; Morden Park; Morden Recreation Ground; Mostyn Gardens; Oakleigh Way; Pollards Hill Recreation

Ground; Ravensbury Park and Sir Joseph Hood Memorial Ground. There is also a Trim Trail at Brenley Playing Fields.

### **Supplementary**

Thank you Madam Mayor. I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for his response and also ask him does he believe there are actually any areas of need in relation to leisure facilities in the borough?

### **Reply**

I'd like to thank Councillor Christie for his question, his supplementary question and I'd like to congratulate him on coming to the borough and on being a new councillor. I do, thank you very much indeed, I do think that there is need, there is particular need in Mitcham, particular need in Pollards Hill. Pollards Hill is very poorly provided, if I had the money to build new leisure centres, that's where I'd be building them. There's an irony here; Wimbledon from a marketing point of view is extremely well provided for, according to Sports England overprovided for, with both public and private facilities, where Pollards Hill has virtually nothing. Make of that what you will.

### **From Councillor Hayley Ormrod to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport**

What is the council's policy on plots of land it owns in Merton with regard to their disposal?

### **Reply (From the Cabinet Member for Finance)**

The Council follows the approach set out in the Asset Management Plan and the rules as set out in the constitution and Standing Orders.

The Council would comply with its statutory obligation under section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 to obtain the best consideration reasonably obtainable.

However, the General Disposals Consent (England) 2003 provides local authorities with the power to sell at less than best consideration reasonably obtainable provided the authority considers such a disposal will help it to secure the promotion or improvement of the economic, social or environmental well-being of its area. This power is conditional upon the undervalue not exceeding £2,000,000.

### **Supplementary**

Yes I do thank you Madam Mayor. Will the Cabinet Member be open and transparent about what is planned for the old Virgin gym site at Battle Close, particularly in regard to the huge amounts of public money keeping the site closed and derelict?

### **Reply**

First of all may I welcome Councillor Ormrod to the Council and congratulate her on her result in the election and the work that she put in, I hope that she enjoys her upcoming 4 years. Unfortunately the reality for us is, as we coming to in the debate

later on, that it would be a far more significantly better use of public resources not to have the Virgin Active continue or restart as a gym and we will be talking later on about the plans that we have for it which will provide the public with much needed services for people in the area and be a better far far far better use of public resources and the short term costs were unfortunately landed on us because Virgin Active closed, even despite those, it is much more in our interests to continue with our plans.

**From Councillor Marsie Skeete to the Cabinet member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities:**

On the 70th anniversary of the arrival of the Windrush, can the Cabinet Member detail the work being done to engage with Merton's diverse cultures and communities?

**Reply**

The borough has numerous consultative mechanisms to engage with the voluntary and community sector, including faith groups, many of who represent minority communities. These include:

- Joint Consultative Committee with Ethnic Minorities
- Faith and Belief Forum
- Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual and Transgender Forum

Officers are working with the LGBT Forum committee members to take forward the key issues for the community. The Forum celebrated LGBT History Month (in February) by putting on an exhibition in the civic centre and local libraries and a Sunday Brunch to round off the month.

The Faith and Belief Forum continues to promote community cohesion and integration in the borough. Faith representatives came together to deliver events in Inter Faith Week and also work with the council to put together the programme for Holocaust Memorial Day.

The council supported the development of Black, Asian and Minority Voice to provide a strategic voice for the borough's BAME community. BAME Voice representatives are also members of the JCC and work with officers to ensure that service development and commissioning decisions actively consider BAME issues and concerns.

The council also supports a range of community events that support integration and celebrate diversity, for example Merton Walk for Peace, the Merton Commonwealth Big Lunch and Armed Forces Day.

**Supplementary**

I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for her response. Given the predicament of the victims of the Windrush generation, will the Cabinet Member agree that working with all of Merton's cultures and communities should be at the heart of what we do?

## **Reply**

I thank Councillor Skeete for her supplementary question and I consider that Merton is a Borough of Culture and diversity. I am the daughter of a Windrush family; my late mother was a nurse and she worked in the hospitals for many years and I'm delighted that they are celebrating 70 years this year. Thank you.

### **From Councillor Nick McLean to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture:**

Will the council confirm when the new Morden Leisure centre in Cannon Hill ward will be opened?

The actual opening date to the public for use is not yet finalised, although we do expect it to be at the end of October / beginning of November. Construction is progressing well and is still set to complete by 21 September. Following that there will be a period of time, approximately 4 weeks, for the operators, Greenwich Leisure Limited, to install all of their equipment and to carry out staff training before opening to the public.

## **Supplementary**

Thank you Madam Mayor. I thank the Cabinet Member for the response. However, that said, the Cabinet Member should be ashamed of delivering this new facility in Morden several years late when the last Conservative administration had the plans ready to go in 2010. Is this just lack of prioritisation or incompetency on the part of the Cabinet Member?

## **Reply**

I would like to thank Councillor McLean for his question, his supplementary and welcome to the house as has been said on many occasions already now. No of course I'm not ashamed. If you'd been at the last Council you would know why I chose not to press, to have the Leisure Centre built as soon as I came to post; the reason being that at that time we were going through a large construction process for schools and I saw those as being our priority regardless of how that affected the Leisure Centre. I was thrilled when I reached the stage when I could actually put this Leisure Centre forward to the Cabinet and then to the Council. I am thrilled that this is going to be built, it's going to be open this year and I'm thrilled that it is going to be servicing your ward, my ward, St Helier, Lower Morden, Merton Park far beyond that as well and I look forward to inviting him and his colleagues in Cannon Hill and other councillors as well to have a pre-look at the thing before it opens, you'll have to wear a hard hat, I expect it will be sometime later in August or early in September but I will look forward to inviting him to that. Thank you very much.

### **From Councillor Mark Kenny to the Cabinet Member for the Environment, Regeneration and Housing:**

What measures have been taken to improve cycling infrastructure in the borough?



In recent years we have introduced a number of cycle infrastructure – some examples include

1. Cycle parking throughout the borough
2. Cycle lanes / shared surface e.g. Croydon Road and Beddington Lane
3. Improved permeability e.g removal of obstructions e.g. Fleming Mead Barrier removal linking Quietway link to/from Colliers Wood and Tooting
4. Improving cycling permeability on the Railway path between Raynes Park and Wimbledon by widening pinch points and removing vegetation.
5. **Clapham Common to Wimbledon Quietway** - Elements include:
  - Providing lighting columns on Wandle Trail between Plough Lane and Borough Boundary with Wandsworth.
  - Construction of shared-use path on the Wandle Meadow and Garfield recreation Ground including lighting.
  - Widening of footbridge across the Wandle Meadow leading to Garfield Recreation Ground.
  - Providing a parallel crossing for cyclist across Haydons Road at junction with South Park Road.
  - Provide lighting on the bridge underpass at Wandle Meadow
  - Creating a Shared-Use Path with lighting between Green Lane Riding Stables and Arthur Road.
  - Improving safety for cyclists at roundabout of Carshalton Road/Croydon Road by widening the path and converting it to shared space around roundabout
  - Construction of speed table with refuge island on Croydon Road opposite Ravensbury pub to assist provide safer crossing for cyclists.
  - Provide shared use path on Commonsides West at railway bridge in both directions.

**Proposed schemes for this financial year 2018-19 include:**

- Pedestrian/cycle phase at the junctions of Croydon Road and Windmill Road.
- Constructing a segregated cycle path between New Malden and Raynes Park alongside railway embankment in partnership with Kingston Council.
- Providing a segregated cycle path on West Barnes Lane between Camberley Avenue and junction with Coombe Lane to provide a safer route into Raynes Park.
- Morden to Sutton Quietway (awaiting scheme approval from TfL)
- Improving capacity of Civic Centre Cycle Parking to help encourage more staff to cycle to work
- Improving Watneys Road to make it more welcoming for cyclists and Pedestrians.
- Providing a short section of cycle track on Ravensbury Park and remove obstructive barrier. Currently there is conflict with pedestrians on the shared path.
- Provide a cycle path with lighting in Morden Park to provide a Quietway link and improve on existing path network within the park.
- Provide secure cycle parking for residents.

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- Making improvements on the West bound path of Bushy road in what currently is inadequate for cyclists.
- Making improvements to cyclists/pedestrians on Station Road and Wandle Bank.

Apart from introducing and improving infra structure we also offer Cycle training

Merton provides ongoing programme of road safety projects for schools which is also part of our cycling programme. We provide training for Key Stage 1 children. We also offer Scooter Training, road safety presentations on how to stay safe on road, Kerbcraft, a practical child pedestrian training programme and promote Transport for London's Children's Traffic Club. In 2016-2017. We worked with 27 schools, Brownie and Beaver groups on road safety programmes and training, and trained more than 1,700 school-aged children across Key Stages 1 and 2. We also do transitional work with children in their last year of primary school (year 6) to help them prepare for walking and cycling safely on their own before secondary school. Our road safety programme also includes adult cycle training and advice to HGV drivers on cycle safety on the road.

### **Supplementary**

Thank you Madam Mayor. I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for his answer and I do have a supplementary question. How important is close working with neighbouring Boroughs in relation to getting Cycle Paths approved and built?

### **Reply**

I thank Councillor Kenny for his supplementary and can I also welcome him to the Council as an elected Councillor for Cannon Hill. Of course it is extremely important to work with our neighbouring councils work closely with all our neighbouring boroughs, one of the projects we are currently developing is the quietway project cycle way through to Kingston which involves close liason with the Royal Borough of Kingston in terms of delivering that project. Of course as a Borough we work closely with all our neighbouring boroughs because you'll see a lot of these schemes going to neighbouring Councils, Wandsworth and Sutton being two examples. Cycling is something we do want to encourage in this Borough and its great that its been a priority of this current mayor Sadiq Khan, so it is good that we see more cycle lanes in the Borough, that people are taking up cycling and I hope to see the completion of this quietway, I recently visited Raynes Park and it's about to get underway in the next few months in terms of the quietway there, so there has been progress to be made during the course of this administration, we hope to see a further extension of cycle ways across this Borough.