

Merton Council Council

12 July 2023

Supplementary agenda

- 7b Strategic theme: Councillors' questions to cabinet members 1 - 8
The questions and written responses will be circulated at the meeting.

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From Cllr Mundy to the Cabinet Member for Transport

Pollard's Hill has one of the lowest PTAL ratings in Merton and has some of the highest car ownership. How is the Council supporting people in my ward to travel sustainably?

Reply

Currently Human Forest cycle hire and associated parking bays are being introduced in the area and, in due course, some secure cycle parking will also be installed. The council is also seeking to develop projects in the area to improve cycling and increase take up of active travel choices. This work is anticipated to start late 2023; funding is allocated in the budget and the project start will be subject to recruiting staff.

The Council have also been in dialogue with TFL regarding reviews and extensions to local bus routes to better service areas of low Public Transport Accessibility levels.

From Cllr Gould to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change

The impacts of a changing climate will be felt first and most dramatically through our rivers and water resources. There is the potential for disaster at both ends of the scale: predictions suggest that the frequency and severity of both flooding and droughts will increase as our climate continues to heat up and weather patterns change. What steps is the Cabinet Member taking to ensure that Merton has climate resilience within its rivers, ponds and watercourses?

Reply

Climate resilience is important to us. We are working closely with partners and regulators such as the Environment Agency and Thames Water to ensure that all parties are prioritizing investment in Merton to make the borough more resilient to the impact of climate change.

We have undertaken a [strategic flood risk assessment](#) across the river Wandle catchment informed by hydraulic modelling, to identify the places that are most at risk from flooding from all sources and we've summarized the finds in a [flood risk online map](#).

To increase investment, we've submitted funding bids to the Environment Agency and Thames Water to deliver flood alleviation schemes. Successful bids include Raynes Park Flood Alleviation Scheme (which will take place over three years), Derwent Road and Kenilworth Green, and modelling flood risk in the Mitcham area. We have also delivered several green infrastructure projects including sustainable drainage in the form of raingardens at Wimbledon Hill, Wimbledon Chase, South Wimbledon, Eastfield's and Raynes Park.

Recent completed projects include delivering additional flood storage at Raynes Park, making the Wimbledon Park lake reservoir resilient to the impacts of climate change and creating flood storage and a new river channel at Wimbledon Park brook. We are

also undertaking surveys of Merton's "lost rivers" to ensure that underground watercourses are also working as they should.

From Cllr Holden to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green spaces and Climate Change

What measures have the council taken to limit flash flooding during high rainfall events?

Reply

Climate change is leading to increasing incidences of heavy summer storms and associated flash flooding and we are undertaking a number of measures to improve Merton's resilience to the impact of climate change.

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We have also worked hard to build up partnerships to maximise investment in all assets that help with climate resilience in Merton, including supporting other organisations to invest in their infrastructure in Merton. We have delivered projects in collaboration with Thames Water at Hillside, including joint investigations into recent flooding and we're about to implement a scheme at Midmore Road to alleviate flooding on the railway path. In Raynes Park town centre we've delivered a large raingarden at the junction of Pepys Road and Coombe Lane. We've also worked with Thames Water to support them in removing silt from their systems, sharing traffic management so as to minimize the disruption for local residents and businesses while the roadworks were happening. We have also upgraded and replaced a large number of highway drains in Raynes Park town centre. We have installed 100 4G gully sensors at the most at-risk locations in Merton which automatically inform the council of any blockages or high silt levels so we can take action in advance of rainfall. We also run a high-risk gully cleaning programme across Merton, cleaning and, where needed, repairing high risk gulleys across the borough each year.

From Cllr Kirby to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change

As part of the council's commitment to biodiversity, it's encouraging to hear that this administration is trialling moving away from using glyphosate weed killer and replacing it with a biofriendly alternative. What are the next steps following the completion of the trial?

Reply

In an effort to deliver a greener Merton, we have undertaken a trial of using an eco-friendly weed killer. We aim to assess the feasibility of such alternatives, which are more forgiving to our environment. We're utilising weed killers that are free from glyphosate and formulated from natural compounds in our test. These weed killers have the added advantage of requiring less water for application.

The initial application Wandle ward trial commenced in July 2023 and anticipate the initial spraying will be complete. This area was chosen because its smaller size enables quicker application. Also, the ward is home to five Garden Streets, which are free from any glyphosate weed killers and will serve as control areas for the trial.

Analysis of Merton's weed control methods, along with evidence from trials conducted by other local councils, has led us to a chemical alternative to glyphosate, which will hopefully prove to be a practical and cost-effective approach to managing weeds at a larger scale. Katoun Gold and Chikara are the chosen products for this trial.

We're evaluating the effectiveness of these products in our trial areas, comparing them against areas treated with Glyphosate and the Merton Garden Streets control area, where no chemical weed killers are used.

The outcomes from Wandle Ward will be analysed against the application costs to determine if the product could be implemented on a larger scale. Moreover, the council will maintain collaborations with service providers and industry leaders to explore all possible options for sustainable weed management.

From Cllr Galea to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change

Can the Cabinet Member tell me the status of plans to assess the environmental impact of new policies and decisions, as well as the principles underpinning the Council's approach to implementing 'sustainable infrastructure'?

Reply

The council takes a holistic approach to embedding environmental matters at the heart of its policies and decision making. For example:

- We undertake a sustainability appraisal of Merton's emerging Local Plan from the first draft to final plan, scoring each policy against environmental, economic and

- social characteristics and amending policies as necessary to ensure their sustainability (link to example of [Local Plan submission sustainability appraisal](#))
- We implement sustainable infrastructure such as rain gardens at Wimbledon Hill, Wimbledon Chase, South Wimbledon, Eastfields and Raynes Park and flood storage at Raynes Park and Derwent Road based on evidence such as hydraulic modelling and Merton's strategic flood risk assessment (link to [flood risk online map](#).)
 - Merton's [Climate Strategy and Action Plan 2020](#) set out that we would seek to reduce carbon emissions in the contracts that we let, known as "scope 3" emissions. In 2021 the Council's procurement processes were changed to support us considering how contractors reduce their carbon emissions as part of the Council's tender processes and in 2022 funding was awarded to the council's Commercial Services team to recruit an officer dedicated to reducing carbon emissions from the services we procure.
 - In February 2023, Cabinet approved the allocation of £30k to develop and implement a tool to embed climate change and carbon reduction in all major Council decisions to ensure that decisions are in keeping with Merton's net zero commitments. Officers will liaise with teams across the Council over the course of 2023 in developing this approach to ensure the tool is effective and fit for purpose.

From Cllr Brunt to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development

What measures do we hope to be able to implement through the local plan which will help us build sustainably in the borough?

Reply

With circa 80% of greenhouse gas emissions in Merton being generated from the energy used to heat and power our buildings, decarbonising our building stock will be a fundamental step in becoming net-zero carbon. Extensive retrofit will be required to decarbonise Merton's existing building stock given that low carbon heat solutions require reasonable levels of energy efficiency (at least an EPC rating of C), and more than three quarters of Merton's 88,000 homes have an EPC rating of D or below. The costs of achieving higher standards via retrofit are three to five times higher than for new buildings and the carbon impact of delayed action is significant.

In order to achieve our carbon reduction target as cost effectively as possible, all new development must be fit for the future (i.e. be ultra-energy efficient and climate resilient, and maximise low carbon and renewable energy). Merton's draft Local Plan aims to ensure that new development in Merton does not create a legacy of poor performance that will require remedial action in the future and add to Merton's retrofit burden.

The Council has set ambitious Climate Change policies which go beyond the national building regulations and London Plan requirements to ensure that from 2025 all new development is compatible with operating at net zero carbon by 2050 without the need

for expensive retrofit (i.e. does not burn fossil fuels, has ultra-high energy efficiency and is 100% powered by renewable energy).

Merton's draft Climate Change policy proposals include:

- Increasing Merton's minimum on-site carbon reduction targets and carbon offsetting cost;
- Extending the Mayor's zero carbon target to all minor new build residential development involving the creation of one or more units and all non-residential development of 500sqm GIA or more;
- Introducing Fabric Energy Efficiency Standards, Energy Use Intensity targets and Space Heating Demand targets to drive a fabric first approach and minimise energy demand; and
- Requiring all development to use low carbon heating systems and maximise renewable energy generation on site.

From Cllr Matthew Willis to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development

I was glad to see the administration reaffirm its commitment to build 400 genuinely affordable council homes, with the aim that these be zero carbon/passiv haus homes. The cabinet paper in June though however said the Council would seek cost savings now that the Merantun plans are for affordable housing rather than market rent to assist with viability. Would the Cabinet Member please set out what he proposes cutting from the designs to make those savings?

Reply

It is part of any good design process, for either private or affordable homes, to look at options for delivering good quality and value as part of the design and tendering process. This is particularly important in the current environment of rising inflation and increasing build costs. It is in that manner we will assess the designs for potential cost savings as we move forward, but these cost savings would be tenure blind. There could also be opportunities to tweak designs slightly, subject to feasibility and planning, to make our homes more appropriate to the housing needs of those on our waiting list rather than the housing needs of private tenants that the schemes were first designed for.

We should not be under any illusions, however. The rise in global temperatures now apparent, necessitates that even more care is exercised to ensure that buildings are suitable for changing climate conditions. Getting this right so there is no subsequent deterioration in building performance requires time, refinements of building design and to some extent changes in materials used. Taken together, there will be overall cost increases rather than savings.

From Cllr Anthony Fairclough to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development

Could the Cabinet Member please set out for each of the last 20 years the number of affordable homes: (a) approved each year, and (b) delivered each year? Please can he also set out the above figures as a percentage of the total planning permissions granted and homes completed for each year of the same time period?

Reply

This information is published in [each Annual Monitoring Report since 2004](#).

(a) approved (as a percentage of total approvals) and

Financial Year	Total affordable homes approved	Total number of Approvals (schemes)	Total Approved Net Gain (homes)	% approved are affordable homes
2004/05	48	172	579	8%
2005/06	416	224	1332	31%
2006/07	160	193	767	21%
2007/08	284	145	1063	27%
2008/09	140	156	450	31%
2009/10	159	130	649	24%
2010/11	188	122	591	32%
2011/12	289	141	602	48%
2012/13	19	77	339	6%
2013/14	134	186	823	16%
2014/15	137	205	947	14%
2015/16	4	162	504	1%
2016/17	108	251	981	11%
2017/18	378	197	1554	24%
2018/19	59	184	642	9%
2019/20	209	162	484	43%
2020/21	21	176	694	3%
2021/22	256	173	1317	19%

(b) Homes built

Councillors' Ordinary Strategic Theme Questions to Cabinet Members

Please note that currently affordable housing London's policy only applies on site to developments of 10 homes or over (although we are proposing to reintroduce a policy of collecting financial contributions towards affordable homes from smaller sites in Merton's new local plan). Merton is a borough of fragmented and expensive land ownership; over the last 12 year on average more than 90% of the planning applications Merton Council receives for new homes are for sites of less than 10 homes, which don't have to contribute towards affordable housing.

For example from the table below shows that only 2% of homes built were affordable in 2018/19. However in that year only one scheme in Merton was built that was eligible to provide affordable housing: it was a development of 11 homes scheme that provided 45% affordable homes, 3 affordable rent and 2 intermediate homes.

Financial Year	Social Rented (homes) completed	Affordable Rented (homes) completed	Intermediate (homes) completed	Total affordable homes completed	Total new homes completed	% net gain completed are affordable homes
2004/05	289	0	38	327	560	58%
2005/06	76	0	2	78	705	11%
2006/07	101	0	44	145	382	38%
2007/08	134	0	74	208	531	39%
2008/09	200	0	65	265	774	34%
2009/10	27	0	16	43	318	14%
2010/11	32	0	30	62	359	17%
2011/12	51	0	20	71	454	16%
2012/13	83	0	47	130	509	26%
2013/14	121	89	96	306	461	66%
2014/15	110	2	45	157	453	35%
2015/16	2	58	19	79	684	12%
2016/17	0	19	58	77	447	17%
2017/18	8	57	28	93	677	14%
2018/19	3	0	2	5	279	2%
2019/20	8	27	31	66	351	19%
2020/21	17	16	62	95	554	17%
2021/22	3	15	209	227	920	25%

From Cllr Butcher to the Cabinet Member for Transport

It is encouraging to read about the work being done to monitor air quality in the borough. How are we using this data to drive positive changes to clean up the air we breathe?

Reply

We monitor air pollution for a number of reasons, firstly the borough is an Air Quality Management Area, and as such is legally obliged to monitor priority pollutants such as Nitrogen Dioxide and fine dust (Particulates PMs). This means we need to report annually on how the borough is delivering against the national objectives for local air quality. As part of this we also publish what's called an Annual Status Report on air quality, this is a statutory document that is submitted to our governing body for air quality for approval. (Defra & GLA). A document that is published on our website. (Latest is awaiting approval)

It's also important to understand the causes of pollution, areas that exceed, where the receptors are, as well as the overall picture of pollution in the borough. This allows us to make policy decisions and take action (that we can control) that is affective and targeted.

Merton has a number of ways of measuring air pollution, including automated stations, an extensive diffusion tube network and more recently we have been piloting real-time low-cost monitors as part of the Breathe London Network.

Throughout 2021 -22 we ran a grant funded project where we installed an additional 68 real time monitors in the borough, this has provided very clear information on very fine dust (PM2.5) something we haven't managed to achieve before due to the lack of technology. This granular data has been peer reviewed and will help us shape our new air quality action plan this year and target actions we can take in the borough.

We have continued this monitoring project in 20 key locations, and I am pleased to announce that Merton is currently refreshing its automated network in the borough to include more sites and capture PM2.5, a pollution that is linked directly to health.

In general, we are seeing pollution in the borough getting better, but we still exceed the national objects for nitrogen dioxide along some busy main roads and town centres, with the picture around PM2.5s is only starting to become clear. Mainly pollution in the borough is from traffic/transport, heating systems wood burning and construction. All areas we need to focus on in our new air quality action plan.