

# **Merton Council Council**

**12 July 2023**

## **Supplementary agenda item 8**

19 Supplementary Questions and Replies

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**From Malcolm Green**

**To the Cabinet Member for Transport**

On 1st February 2023 he stated that he hoped to install traffic sensors in East Hillside in March: is he aware that members of the East Hillside Traffic Management Campaign are disappointed that sensors have not yet been installed, and will he now give a date for their installation?

**Reply**

*We understand resident's disappointment on this matter, and we thank you for your patience. The project has been more involved than first anticipated. Since agreeing to move existing traffic sensors to East Hillside in 2022, which turned out not to be feasible, officers have secured additional funding via Section 106/Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) which had to go through a bidding process in late 2022 for this financial year's budgets. The funding is in place. Officers have also had to engage suppliers and enter into a new contract with the sensor providers which is also now in place. Locations for the data collection are now agreed and I am pleased to be able to share that the infrastructure works are planned to take place over the coming months (summer).*

**Supplementary**

Good evening and thank you very much. First may express gratitude to the Councillor for his reply to my written question, my supplementary is will he please arrange for officers to hold a site meeting with representatives of the East Hillside Traffic Management Campaign to explain the proposed location of the census which he is now arranging to install and also of course to invite Ward Councillors to attend such a meeting if it can be arranged?

**Reply**

*Thank you Madame Mayor and I thank Malcolm Green for his question and I thank officers for helping me with the answer and I will gladly arrange for that meeting of officers and Councillors to discuss and delve into the issues around East Hillside.*

**From David Caillard**

**To the Cabinet Member for Transport**

When is the Council going to address the significant increase in volume of skip juggernauts speeding along Alexandra Road, and illegally using East Hillside as a cut through to the A3?

## **Reply**

*Alexandra Road is a London Distributor Road and therefore skip lorries and such like vehicles are permitted to use Alexandra Road. However, speeding is not acceptable in any event. Monitoring and enforcement of vehicle speed on the highway is the responsibility of the Police and so I would advise residents that witness speeding to report it to <https://www.met.police.uk/notices/met/community-roadwatch/>*

*For locations with speed related issues, TfL in partnership with the Metropolitan Police undertake many speed management initiatives, e.g. Community Road Watch. Community Roadwatch is a road safety initiative which aims to reduce speeding in residential areas and gives the local community the opportunity to work side by side with their local police teams and use speed detection equipment to identify speeding vehicles in their communities.*

*Concerns from members of the public on speeding, can be sent to Roadsafe London. This portal is an information and intelligence gathering tool that can inform police activity.*

*The link shows the address for the Roadsafe London website <https://www.met.police.uk/notices/met/community-roadwatch/>*

*Any other road traffic offences/incidents can be reported on this link; <https://www.met.police.uk/ro/report/rti/rti-beta-2.1/report-a-road-traffic-incident/>*

## **Supplementary**

Well first of all I just want to associate myself with the remarks and sentiments that you had about The Study, my daughter was a pupil at that school for 7 years and absolute tragedy, but I'm very grateful to the Transport Councillor for his reply to my question, but I think that the proposals put forward are ones that have been tried before and proved totally ineffective and so my question to the councillor is whether there is an opportunity to engage directly with the skip companies in Wimbledon to ensure that we have much better driver behaviour so that the speeds on Alexander Road are kept down, if you walk along the pavement it's pretty frightening and secondly that they don't use East Hillside as a cut through to the A3 which is illegal.

## **Reply**

*I thank David Caillard for his original question, thank officers for helping me with the answer and yes as someone who was involved with the Small Business Federation, I have huge empathy as well with small businesses, with businesses, but yes I think that is a good opportunity to sit down with them and see whether we can resolve this and*

*I'm very happy to invite David to that meeting and I'll ask officer to arrange same, thank you very much.*

**From Alexandra Mac**

**To the Cabinet Member for Transport**

Since covid 2020, cars/delivery drivers have been parking on the now non existent double yellow lines on Aberconway Road, Morden. Any idea when the double yellow lines will be painted back on. The obstruction makes using the car park a hassle from people who clearly don't want to pay.

**Reply**

*Unfortunately, the service road in question is not owned or maintained by the Council, therefore we are unable to maintain the yellow lines or take any enforcement action.*

*However, we have been in touch with the land owner about the issue, asking how the Council can assist them. We have not yet received a response but we will update you when we do.*

**From David Cunningham**

**To the Cabinet Member for Transport**

I complained about building material being left on the street on double yellow lines and was told by the council that there was little they could do to stop this. I've found other councils use FPNs to deal with this problem. Is there any reason why Merton can't do this?

**Reply**

*Currently Merton does not have the ability to issue FPN's for skips, scaffolding or materials. Highway obstructions are dealt with by the Highways Act 1980 which requires a monitoring period where the items often are removed, and so no further action can be taken. The council is exploring a system to implement FPN's for these types of obstructions which will require additional staff resources, a new IT system and handheld devices to enable officers on the street to issue FPNs which currently only exists for Parking Services.*

**From Sandra Vogel**

## **To the Cabinet Member for Transport**

Please can you make the Current and Planned roadworks list (<https://www.merton.gov.uk/streets-parking-transport/roadworks/current-roadworks-and-traffic-disruptions>) more useful by doing two things:

1. Make it clear which entries are newly added each time the list is updated (bold text, a “new” marker or some other method).
2. Provide a second list organised by start date.

## **Reply**

*Thank you for your feedback. The design of the weekly bulletin is in such a way to meet the corporate standard for the website which enables accessibility features for those with disabilities to use the reader function on webpage and the PDF document circulated in the email bulletin. It would not be possible at this time to change the website’s format to be editable / searchable by category or date.*

*Most residents, when looking for roadworks information tend to focus on the roads affected, therefore the information is currently organized alphabetically by street/road name.*

## **From Baljeet Nijjhar**

## **To the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development**

Ukrainians cannot move on from hosts into the Private Rental Sector because they are low-waged, need benefits and lack UK-based guarantors. DLUHC recently released a £600,000 Ukraine Homelessness Prevention Grant to Merton. Will the Cabinet Member reconsider using this to create a guarantor scheme so Ukrainians can find suitable housing?

## **Reply**

*The Council recognizes that there are considerable difficulties for all homeless applicants in accessing private sector accommodation due to current market conditions. Recently published research by London Councils show that there has been a 41% reduction in London Properties available for private renting since the Covid-19 pandemic, amid warnings that turbulence and supply constraints in the private rental market is worsening near-record levels of homelessness across the capital.*

*The Council is committed to making best use of the recently announced £600,000 top up to the homeless prevention grant and to help Ukrainian households who are threatened with homelessness find longer term accommodation. Homelessness is complex and different for every household and each case needs to be assessed on its individual merits. Where necessary and appropriate the Council will consider increased incentives for households from Ukraine and this may include a deposit guarantee that will cover unpaid rent or damage up to a certain amount. However, it is important to recognize that all homeless families in Merton are facing the same challenges and the grant conditions do set out that it can also be used for other people at risk of homelessness in line with local pressures.*

**From Catherine Schumann**

**To the Cabinet Member for Transport**

I have appealed my PCN (MT75810732) because I was not notified of the due date, although the information given stated that I would be reminded 14 days and the 7 days before renewal. I would like to ask why this notification was not issued at all?

**Reply**

*The terms and conditions, which all permit holders are required to confirm that they have read and understood, do advise permit holders that, while we will endeavour to send reminders to permit holders 14 days and 7 days prior to the permit expiring, it remains the motorist's responsibility to ensure that their permit is renewed in good time to avoid receiving Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs).*

*It was identified that as a result of system issues at the Council, a small group of permit holders with permits expiring between 27 and 30 May 2023, did not receive either their 14 day or 7 day reminder. We apologise for the impact of this issue. While we have received more calls than usual recently relating to this issue, the vast majority of permit holders impacted by this issue renewed their permits despite not receiving any reminders.*

**From Mary-Jane Jeanes**

**To the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Greenspaces and Climate**

How and when will the council amend the welcomed Tree Strategy Part 1 to include dates for actions, including when Part 2 will be prepared, as without such dates there is no guarantee that any of the proposals in the Tree Strategy Part 1 will be delivered.

**Reply**

*The Arboriculture Team intends to implement the action plan that forms part of the Tree Strategy, adopted on 20th June 2023, with explicit timelines for each action which will be agreed before the commencement of 2023-24 tree works program in September 2023. This revision will be a recurring yearly activity, where tasks will be prioritised based on the resources available and priorities identified through our annual monitoring programme. The development and creation of the Phase 2 element of the ambition to have an overarching strategy is currently being discussed and scoped amongst officers and shall commence within this year.*

*The strategy specifies actions relating to our four key policies: Tree Research (TR), Tree Maintenance and Management (TMM), Tree Protection (TP), and Enhancement and Optimisation (EO). These actions, detailed in Appendix 3 of the strategy, span various stages including Implementation, Operational, and Developmental.*

*Our Tree Officers are tasked with formulating these actions, gauging outcomes, and leading stakeholder conversations throughout the process. This approach will ensure the successful execution of the proposals detailed within the Tree Strategy.*

**From Adele Lewis Jenkins**

**To the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Greenspaces and Climate**

In response to residents' complaints, I understand that if a street tree damaged by the footpath contractor dies, a compensation method for replacement has been agreed, but how will the loss of the potential amenity value of a tree that survives but fails to mature, be compensated for?

**Reply**

*An early warning under the term service contract that we have with our highway term maintenance contractor would be issued. This will stay on the early warning register until the contract expires. Trees within the borough are inspected as a minimum once every 3 years and during these inspections, using the London Tree Officers Association Capital Asset Value for Amenity Trees (CAVAT) system/matrix (which includes reducing its life expectancy) a CAVAT value (a cash figure) is calculated.*

**From Andrea Milde**

**To the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Greenspaces and Climate**

In the past two years, what financial penalties have been levied on the council's footpath repair contractor for the damage to trunks and roots of street trees, as such damage will inevitably result in a loss of amenity and tree years in the future?



## **Reply**

*Three Early Warnings have been issued against the term service contract that we have with the contractor. These three early warnings come to the sum of £11,383. This sum is calculated using the London Tree Officers Association Capital Asset Value for Amenity Trees (CAVAT) system/matrix following the last inspection that was recorded pre-damage and the inspection undertaken post-damaged. Therefore, if the trees that form part of these early warnings issued are required to be removed or die during the life of the existing contract, the highway term maintenance contractor would have to pay the associated cost (this also includes planting of a new tree, first 3 years of maintenance and construction of a tree pit).*

**From Pippa Maslin**

### **To the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development**

Will the 400 new homes that are to be built on council-owned land over the next four years be managed by the council or a housing association. If the latter, which housing association?

## **Reply**

*The Council is currently developing the delivery programme for 400 new affordable homes which will also include options for ongoing management and maintenance. The first 93 homes will be progressing this financial year and it is the Council's intention that the new homes are managed by the Council, either directly or through a third-party contract, who could be a registered provider. Any such contract will be subject to normal procurement rules.*

**From Tony Burton**

### **To the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Greenspaces and Climate**

Given newly planted trees need at least 50 litres of water per week will Merton Council work with Friends groups to assess the infrastructure of taps and other watering infrastructure for parks, green spaces and verges across the borough and prepare a strategy to prioritise improvements and future investment decisions?

## **Reply**

*The council currently has tree watering built into tree maintenance plan for all newly planted trees in Merton and each tree will receive periodic maintenance and watering visits for 3 years to establishment.*

*In light of recent Amber and Red weather warnings the support of Merton Tree Wardens and Park Friends will continue to be important as the council will continue to plant more trees in strategic highways and parks locations in line with its Tree Strategy aims laid out in EO3 Planning for tree planting and establishment.*

*The council are also looking into the use of TreeGatorBags (Treegator Original is a slow-release watering bag that is perfect for newly planted or established trees from 1" to 8 in girth, with branches beginning at least 25 inches from the ground or higher. It concentrates the watering of trees to one specific area - slowly releasing water which penetrates the ground and promotes deep root growth). As well as ensuring that best arboricultural practice is adopted in line with all tree planting and tree pit preparation.*

**From D J Markham**

**To the Cabinet Member for Transport**

What is the justification for the enforced exemption of Woodside from Merton Council's 2016 Footway Parking Policy, given not only that Woodside is a residential street in a CPZ, but also that this exemption facilitates its heavy use as a shortcut by out-of-borough traffic?

**Reply**

*The CPZ was introduced in 1997 and at the time footway parking was considered necessary to meet residents' parking demand. One of the key deciding factors at the time was the fact that only permit holder residents would be parking within the designated parking spaces and it was a requirement to make every effort to meet demand. Given the narrowness of the carriageway width, to remove footway parking would mean that parking would need to be removed from the entire length of the road.*

*There is no evidence that facilitating residential parking encourages rat running. Given that parking (by residents) on both sides of the road narrows the carriageway, it discourages speeding and any congestion is likely to discourage rat running. There is no evidence to suggest that those using this road are from outside the borough.*

*The 2016 footway parking was set up by Parking services in response to enforcement difficulties they face when enforcing footway parking by residents – more specifically outside CPZs.*

**Supplementary**

Thank you very much for the invitation to follow up with a supplementary question. Thank you to the Councillor for the answer that I received prior, I just would like to ask a supplementary question which hinges on the statements made in the answer from the Councillor. The reality is that parking on the pavement in Woodside on both sides only occurs between Rothstrevor and Leopold or 107 Woodside factually. If that south side parking was removed that would have three consequences, one, it would improve the statutory compliance with the width of the footpath on the southside of woodside so that families and wheelchair users can use that footpath easily. Secondly it would stop a two lane traffic flow on Woodside and Woodside, because it has two lane traffic flow and is parallel to Alexander Road which as we know is a London distributor road, clearly Woodside gets used a substitute for the London Distributor Road. If Woodside was a single lane road which would make it consistent with Kenilworth, Rothstrevor, Bernard Gardens. Would the Councillor consider removing pavement parking on the southside of Woodside or explain the justification for doing so on a residential street.

### **Reply**

*I thank Mr Markham for his original question, thank officers for helping me with the answer. I can't commit to anything, Mr Markham, in terms of Woodside. I am lobbied regularly from residents of Woodside. All I can commit to is meeting with you to discuss your concerns, your ideas for resolution and then take it from there.*

### **From Kate Haseler-Young**

#### **To the Cabinet Member for Transport**

In the interest of clarity and to inform ongoing discussions about traffic management in the area, could the Chairman please confirm the status of Abbey Road as a public highway maintained by the London Borough of Merton?

### **Reply**

*Abbey Rd is an adopted public highway maintained by the Council. It is subject to 20mph; it is traffic calmed and has a width restriction. Given the petition recently received, it is currently on the Pending list.*

### **From Elliott Jenkin**

#### **To the Cabinet Member for Transport**

Could the Council share the results of past 20-year formal and informal consultations on Abbey Road traffic, including breakdown of resident responses from affected roads (Abbey, Mill, Dane, Croft, Meadow) identifiable from other responses and

reasons why proposals including one-way streets and restricted access to Abbey Road were not implemented?

## **Reply**

*Schemes are often abandoned if, after an informal consultation, the majority of the residents oppose a scheme. Given the time that has lapsed, the Council no longer holds the information. In any event, to reconsider changes to this grid, it would be necessary to undertake up to date traffic surveys, develop fresh proposals and undertake the required consultation.*

**From Dickie Wilkinson**

## **To the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development**

Could the leader please explain what happened to the 300k set aside for small scale improvements to Morden Town Centre approved by Morden Regeneration Steering Group, what happened to the person appointed to help deliver the projects, where are the new bins promised to replace dirty bins outside Morden Station?

## **Reply**

*The £300,000 CIL funding is safeguarded for small-scale improvements to Morden Town Centre and the project is ongoing. Rather than appointing a new member of staff to help deliver the projects, Future Merton allocated the project to an existing urban design officer as a better value option.*

*A brief has been developed to procure a suitably qualified consultant to consult on, design, make and implement a meanwhile public realm strategy to improve Morden Town Centre. This will deliver socially focused interventions such as seating, planting and other structures. This project will cost circa £150,000 to deliver. The timeline for this project, subject to the methodology of the successful bidder, is to start the project in September 2023, to engage and design during Winter 2023, to design and make the small scale structures in Spring 2024 and to implement the project in Morden in Summer 2024.*

*The remaining £150,000 will deliver smaller and more ad-hoc projects as well to support any additional engagement and programming requirements for the temporary public realm project. Circa £60,000 has been notionally allocated to procure a consultant to deliver a 'meanwhile space' feasibility study that seeks to identify vacant spaces and council assets that can be transformed into projects that can help diversify Morden's offer with new uses. This 'meanwhile space' feasibility study can then be used as evidence to apply for relevant grant funding to deliver further improvements.*

*New litter bins for Morden town centre will be progressed via the waste services team through the Council's capital programme.*

### **Supplementary**

Thank you Councillor Judge for his very full response, which can be boiled down to, "this Council has not done anything in Morden since the money was allocated". So this evening I ask, given that we already have the funding, the staffing and ideas in place as per the Morden Regeneration Steering Group, along with installing the new litter bins that were ordered in 2022, what three visible things will this Council do to Morden Town Centre by December 2023?

### **Reply**

*Well I thank Mr Wilkinson for his supplementary question, he may see, I think, in the third paragraph of my answer that there will be a series of interventions in terms of seating, planting and other structures which are sought to be delivered over a timescale with implementation in summer 2024, so that is a very significant thing. Apart from that, the Council remains committed to that absolute regeneration of Morden, has commissioned a number of consultancy reports and will be coming to a decision on the way forward for Morden Regeneration by the end of the year.*

### **From Stephanie Biden**

#### **To the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Greenspaces and Climate**

Why is the recycling centre at Garth Road no longer accepting paint? Please can this service be reinstated?

### **Reply**

*The recycling centre at Garth Road has not been accepting wet paint since the Hazardous Waste (England and Wales) Regulations 2005 were implemented as it is classified as hazardous waste. If residents arrive at the site with paint, they are advised as to the appropriate disposal route via the City of London Corporation who provide a specialist collection service.*

*The council's web site provides clear information as to how to arrange for the collection of wet paint and other hazardous waste materials which can be accessed via the link as follows: [Dispose of hazardous waste | Merton Council](#)*

*Empty paint tins or tins with dried paint can be disposed of at the Garth Road recycling facility.*

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### **From Cllr Charles to the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care**

Following the recent announcements on the New Hospital Programme, what can the Council do to safeguard the future of St Helier Hospital for all the local people who rely on it?

### **Reply**

The Council continues to work to ensure that any investment in NHS services for the future, provides the maximum benefit for Merton residents. Whilst we welcome any investment in the NHS, the business case and integrated impact assessment on which the Future Hospitals funding decision is made was developed before the Covid 19 pandemic, an event which has significantly impacted on the NHS as a whole and further exacerbated and deepened the health inequalities that existed in our communities, prior to the pandemic. It is therefore vital that any future configuration of services ensures that Merton residents have equity of access to their south west London neighbours. We are concerned that the situation of the proposed new site will significantly alter the attendance pattern of Merton residents and put further pressure on other SWL hospitals. As has been announced, the Council has commissioned an independent review and assessment of the outline business case and integrated impact assessment

The Council also recognises that, irrespective of the configuration of services, St Helier Hospital remains an integral part of the operating model for the NHS trust into the future. The new hospital build will not be completed for at least 7 years and recent media stories have highlighted the state of total disrepair that St Helier is in. We will therefore continue to lobby NHS organisations and decision makers to ensure that adequate capital investment is made to provide St Helier with existing buildings that are fit for a 21<sup>st</sup> century healthcare system. In order for St Helier to operate effectively it must receive adequate capital investment to provide a safe, fit for purpose estate.

### **Supplementary**

Thank you Madame Mayor, and thank you to my colleague, Cllr McCabe, the Cabinet Member for your answer. I'd like to ask a supplementary which is, does the Cabinet Member believe that St Helier Hospital is currently providing Merton residents with an environment that is fit for a 21<sup>st</sup> century health care system. Thank you.

### **Reply**

Thank you Madame Mayor, and I can I thank my colleague, Cllr Charles for her original question and her supplementary. I think the answer, in one word, is 'no'. I visited St Helier Hospital some months ago and I was appalled at the state of

disrepair. There is an article on the ITN News website which details the state of disrepair there and I think probably the most shocking thing was when you walk into the reception of the maternity unit, there is, what I can only describe as a contraption, made of tarpaulin hanging down from the ceiling above the receptionist and it's got a pipe coming out the pointy bit at the bottom into which rain water falls and goes into a bucket. That's just one of many things that are wrong, and I think the problem has been that over the years there have been so many efforts to reorganise and close down bits of the hospital that the people who are responsible for its maintenance have probably thought what you and I would, what's the point of spending money on this place? Well the point is that our residents deserve better and they need to do better and now that this proposed new hospital in Belmont has been delayed again and won't be built until at least 2030, it's time they got their money out and started providing decent healthcare, the staff there are fantastic, they deliver services in the worst possible environment and yet they really care about their patients and deliver extraordinary care.

### **From Cllr Simon McGrath to the Cabinet Member for Sport and Heritage**

Would the Cabinet Member please state what consultation there has been - and when - with local and national athletics organisations about the proposed new Running Track in Morden Park?

### **Reply**

Officers have met with England Athletics in April to have initial discussions regarding the potential for a new track at Morden Park. During the course of the meeting, we discussed local and regional suitability, the potential types of tracks that are being installed, as some now include covered areas for 'warm-up and warm down' and training to accommodate unseasonable weather. We are due to carry out borough wide strategic facilities review of the sporting facilities to have updated information of the local need and facilities available to support our sporting ambitions, Morden Park will be a major part of this review. Following this, we will continue discussions with governing bodies and other key stakeholders.

### **Supplementary**

Thank you very much Madame Mayor, thank you to the Cabinet Member for the reply. You'll recall that in March we passed a budget that included a capital spending figure of \$2.75million for the running track. Does the Cabinet Member agree with me that it would have been better to find out whether there was a need for a running track before we put it in the budget.

### **Reply**



Thank you very much to Cllr McGrath for his original question and for his supplementary question. The proposed track is still in its early stage, and we have yet to do a feasibility study. Well you can see the attraction of having a track that will be right in the centre of the borough and it will increase accessibility for everyone else and that's what we're trying to do, but as I say, it's still yet in its early stages and we're looking into that. Thank you.

### **From Cllr Michael Paterson to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development**

When the Labour administration forced the unpopular Local Plan through council, with the assistance of the Liberal Democrats, a major reason given by the administration was that it would provide a five-year housing land supply that would prevent overdevelopment such as at the Burlington Road site.

The Local Plan was due to be adopted in Spring 2022, however, this has not happened, and the council still cannot demonstrate a five year housing land supply. This led to the Wimbledon Chase site being given permission as the council would not be able to defend a refusal. When does the Cabinet Member expect the Local Plan to be approved by the Planning Inspectorate?

### **Reply**

The date of the Inspector's report into the Local Plan will be at the discretion of the Planning Inspectors appointed by the Secretary of State. The council has participated fully with the appointed Planning Inspectors since we submitted the plan to them in December 2021, undertaken site visits with the Inspectors, supported the Inspectors chairing a total of five weeks of public hearings during 2022 in Merton's council chamber and responded comprehensively to their questions. We are hopeful that the Inspectors will provide a positive report in due course, thus allowing us to adopt Merton's new Local Plan.

Councillor Paterson complains of the draft Local Plan, which begs the question what exactly he would put in its place?

Undoubtedly, we face a housing crisis and need to build a lot more homes to meet the immense demand.

Councillor Paterson complains that the Council cannot demonstrate a five year housing land supply as recently required by the National Planning Policy Framework of Conservative Governments. I sympathise, but it is very difficult to find more appropriate sites in Merton. This question is an opportunity for us all. Answers please on the back of an envelope! Perhaps Cllr Paterson can write to tell us which

sites he thinks we have overlooked that can accommodate the hundreds, nay thousands of good quality, well designed homes situated in sustainable neighbourhoods that Merton residents undoubtedly need?

### **Supplementary**

Thank you Madame Mayor, thank you for the Cabinet Member's answer. We Conservatives have repeatedly put the case for a local plan that local residents have confidence in and not the one forced through by Labour and the Liberal Democrats which has led to inappropriate development across Merton and in particular in Burlington Road and St George's East. Why is the Cabinet Member so keen on building mega towers, particularly in Mitcham and Colliers Wood and yet so slow despite the fine words that we heard earlier to redevelop Morden town centre.

### **Reply**

I thank Cllr Paterson for his supplementary question, his consideration is simply wrong. We are not keen on building massive towers as such, we have a local plan that has been widely consulted upon and has gone through a detailed examination by government inspectors and there have been supplementary issues raised during the whole examination. Those have been answered, and we await the government inspector's response to our question. I am never clear whether the Conservatives are in favour of building any housing anywhere, or whether they will simply object to every application that comes forward. I would remind this Council that Michael Gove himself has called Britain's housing system, 'broken', saying we desperately need more homes to bring ownership within reach of many more people, but the management of mortgage rates has put paid to any chance of that and so has, in many cases across the country, objections by conservatives to the building of new homes locally. And the consequences of that is that home ownership is going backwards in the country and housing consultants expect another 580,000 people are likely to find themselves homeless. And so this an awful prospect for young people and young families in particular who desperately need a change of government. Thank you.

### **From Cllr Akyigyina to the Cabinet Member for Civic Pride**

It was fantastic to be able to attend Mitcham Carnival in June – back for the first time since 2019. How successful was the carnival, and how will be incorporating learnings from this year to make next year even better?

### **Reply**

I'd like to thank everyone who made the carnival a success, from organisers Andy Butcher and Charlie Shakespeare, to the many volunteers who performed, ran stalls and marshalled the event.

The carnival was met with an overwhelmingly positive response from the community, a testament to its success in fostering unity and promoting local culture. The event was marked by enthusiastic participation, robust turnout of over 5,000 people, and a palpable sense of shared enjoyment. The successful execution of the carnival is particularly noteworthy, given its smooth progression with negligible incidents. This further underscores the commitment and professionalism of all involved in its planning and conduct, ensuring a safe and harmonious environment throughout the festivities

Various council officers were in attendance to provide information and assist people, and to advertise a feedback consultation. A great way of improving next year's show will be to consider the feedback from this, and from the responses to the broader consultation being run by Future Merton about residents' ideas for Mitcham Town Centre.

### **Supplementary**

Thank you very much Madame Mayor, I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for her response and I'd like to ask here what other events and projects are the council supporting to build on our great community spirit in Mitcham?

### **Reply**

Thank you very much Madame Mayor and I'd like to thank Cllr Akyigyina for her continued commitment to Mitcham and its community and her many many hours of volunteering including helping to make the carnival a great success and please can I reiterate my thanks to everyone who was part of that. Many people on this side of the chamber, but also from the other side and beyond. If I'm allowed to single out somebody, Cllr Martin Whelton was there very very early in the morning helping us set up and Cllr Matthew Willis was there all day in the blazing sunshine with a very very hard job managing people coming in through the main gates. So thank you to everybody.

But there's lots else going on in Mitcham over the coming months, including many community events. At the Cannons there's an arts festival which is opening from this weekend and running throughout August, there's Tennis which you can watch on the big screen, Tennis isn't just for Wimbledon, come down to the Cannons lawn, there's a sustainable fair going on on 29<sup>th</sup> July. All of these are things that we as a council are supporting and working with the community. And we've appointed a town centre

manager and we're appointing a market manager to try and breathe even more new life into what is a thriving community and make it really live up to its promise.

### **From Cllr John Oliver to the Cabinet Member for Sport and Heritage**

Would the Cabinet Member please update Council on the outcome of meetings she has had with Wimbledon Tennis and Dean Jeeves to discuss the Junior Golf Programme?

### **Reply**

Last year Officers met to discuss possible alternatives that we could assist with in aiding the Wimbledon Park Junior Golf Academy to find local alternative locations to undertake coaching. The goal was to identify potential venues to continue their commendable work of providing golf lessons to young enthusiasts.

However, finding an adequate space that met with their approval proved challenging due to the extensive area required for golfing activities to ensure safety. As an alternative, we proposed the track area in Wimbledon Park and also recommended initiating a dialogue with Mitcham Golf Club so that a full golfing programme maybe offered.

The Academy expressed their gratitude for our efforts, but they are currently exploring opportunities outside the borough. We remain open and willing to continue these discussions and to collaboratively explore other options within an alternative location to support their programme.

### **Supplementary**

Thank you Madame Mayor, I hope you can hear me. Thank you to the Cabinet Member for her answer to my original question. And my supplementary is, you state in your cabinet paper that you've had consultations with 100 local groups with respect to sport that have helped shape your plans, can you share with us what plans you have for golf, particularly junior golf.

### **Reply**

Thank you very much Madame Mayor. Thank you for your original question and your supplementary question. I can assure you that we want to increase the offer that we have in the borough for sport. Your original question was about Dean Jeeves, and we did work with him to try to offer him an alternative as my response said. But it was not to his liking and he decided to look elsewhere. We are still available and willing to work with him and we are, as I said wanting to increase the number of sporting activities and options in the borough, in terms of golf specifically, I

won't be able to tell you exactly what that will look like but I can assure you that we will looking to make sure that where the opportunities are we will make sure that that is available for everyone to take part.

### **From Cllr Nick McLean to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green spaces and Climate Change**

The grass verges in much of the borough are currently in an appalling state and are completely overgrown. Please can the Cabinet Member tell me how frequently the grass verges should be cut and how often the gullies should be cleared?

### **Reply**

The councils verges are scheduled to be cut on a monthly cycle between March and October so 8 cuts per year. Service contractors from Idverde UK have been working hard during late May and June to catch up with the verge grass cutting.

Some early season staffing and machinery issues combined with a very wet spring and very warm early summer meant the rate of grass growth impacted the service heavily and were playing catch up, which is now in a much stronger position for the remains of the season

It is also worth noting that there are a number of wards including Canon Hill and Morden Park where a high volume of community bulb planting has been delivered in the last few years via the councils ward Allocation Scheme. Bulbs particularly in narrow verges does mean that grass cutting in these areas cannot happen until late May early June, but in these cases ward councillors tend to be aware of this impact at the bidding stage, but we are aware not all councillors and residents will always be aware of these issues.

In respect to the query about gully clearance, this would depend on the definition of gully. If the query is in reference to channel clearance, these are cleaned as part of the routine street cleansing operations. The frequency of cleansing is scheduled on an output basis and depends on the land type, footfall of the street in question and demand. Frequencies range from fortnightly in low footfall, low requirement residential areas, to weekly, twice weekly and daily in some high footfall areas such as Town Centres.

Some channels are hard to access due to parking and for this reason, the Council has a schedule of deep cleans, which involve a soft road closure (not an official road closure and relies on residents complying with the request to move their cars). The deep cleans take place over two days with a different side of the road being done each of the two days. The deep cleans are scheduled to take place every week in a different road across the Borough.

If the query relates to drainage gully systems, there is a schedule of routine gully cleaning as shown below:

- Scheduled routine borough-wide Gully (Non-priority): Minimum of once every two years
- Town Centres with high footfall: Minimum of three (3) times per year
- High risk (flooding) areas: Minimum of once per year, with additional cleans scheduled following Met Office flood warnings prior to weather events
- In addition to this, our Service Provider attends ad-hoc gully cleaning requests as made by members of the public and Client Officers (as requested during routine monthly inspections).

### **Supplementary**

Thank you Madame Mayor and I thank the Cabinet Member for the response. However the grass verges not where the bulb planting is, are a complete mess and the gutters and gullies are frankly a disgrace, this has been the case every summer, and not simply this year, so I would ask the Cabinet Member to meet me in Cannon Hill so that we can walk around and inspect the ward, I expect it's going to be the same in Lower Morden and also in West Barnes, thank you.

### **Reply**

Thank you Madame Mayor, and thank you Cllr McLean for your question and your supplementary. I am always happy to visit you in Cannon Hill, as I have been to your ward with your ward colleague on a couple of occasions. However, I would like to just reiterate in the response that you received, we have caught up with our grass cutting, it took a little time to catch up with it, and there were a lot of bulb planting occasions in your ward and that meant that we couldn't get in there early to cut down those daffodils, we wanted to let them grow and we also are adopting more wild ways in our borough, so we are changing the way we manage our grass verges and things like that so that we can manage biodiversity. But I am always happy to come and speak to you and meet with you in Cannon Hill.

### **From Cllr Williscroft to the Cabinet for Civic Pride**

I was pleased that our local armed forces community were able to mark Armed Forces Week with two events at the Civic Centre in June, and to see the Council recommit itself to the Armed Forces Covenant. How is the Council supporting serving personnel, reservists, veterans, and military families?

### **Reply**

Merton is proud to support our armed forces community and to be the location of [Haig Housing](#)'s original, and largest, housing estates for veterans.

Merton Council is committed to supporting the armed forces community and first signed the Armed Forces Covenant in 2013 as a promise to recognise the unique sacrifices that the armed forces make to support the nation and ensure that no member of the armed forces community should face disadvantage compared to other citizens.

The council reaffirmed its commitment in June 2023 by re-signing the Armed Forces Covenant at a special event at the Civic Centre in Morden attended by senior representatives of the armed forces and local partner organisations.

We make sure our commitment is reflected in the services that we deliver, and we are now asking our suppliers to make the same commitment when they deliver services for us. Additionally, in recognition of the disadvantages that members of the armed forces community can experience, as part of the development of our new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for the borough we are exploring ways in which the risk of disadvantage occurring can be reduced.

Further detail is available online at <https://www.merton.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/armed-forces>

The Council has a specific Armed Forces Quota on its Housing Register which gives priority for rehousing for those serving or leaving the armed services for a period of up to 5 years.

## **Supplementary**

Thank you Madame Mayor and thank you to the Cabinet Member for her original answer. I'm interested to hear more about how our new Equality Diversity and Inclusion strategy is proposing to support veterans and whether other disadvantaged groups will be included.

## **Reply**

I'd like to thank Cllr Williscroft, not just for his question but for his support work with veterans. Cllr Denis Pearce has for many years been a fierce advocate for veterans rights, and in his absence due to illness, James has stepped up with an equal passion. At Cabinet this coming Monday, we are going to propose starting a consultation on our new Equalities Diversity and Inclusion strategy and one of our proposals there is that alongside the nine groups named in the Equalities Act 2010, that we as a council explore how we can support other groups that experience barriers and challenges. So this will include for example, considering the impact on

them whenever we are undertaking an equality and impact assessment. So these groups and characteristics are: Care Experienced Young People, as previously discussed in this chamber, One Parent Households, those from low socio-economic status and armed forces veterans. So we really look forward to the responses to this consultation on our strategy.

### **From Cllr Reiss to the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care**

Could the Cabinet Member please set out what action the council is taking to address women's health issues?

### **Reply**

The Council continues to work closely with partners across Merton to improve the health and wellbeing of women in Merton, including:

- Awareness raising and uptake of breast and cervical screening programmes, with a focus on inequalities, through the Community Champions network, supporting cervical screening prevention week (June 2023), the development of a comprehensive action plan to increase uptake of breast cancer screening and making the case for a breast cancer screening site in Merton – including lobbying the NHS directly on this issue.
- Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) can have a long-lasting impact on mental and physical health and tackling VAWG is a key priority of the Council and Community Safety Partnership. Services are provided for women who are victims of domestic violence and abuse, sexual abuse, forced marriage, violence committed in the name of "honour" and other crimes listed as VAWG. The Council is White Ribbon accredited, with an action plan in place and the campaign is also promoted to staff encouraging them to sign up to become White Ribbon Ambassadors and Champions.
- The Council have signed the Menopause Pledge and have a menopause policy and guidance for staff, have a specific sickness absence category for the menopause, a dedicated menopause page with information, help and support, menopause awareness training for staff and managers, menopause cafes where staff can come together to discuss their experiences and support via occupational health and the Employee Assistance Programme. The Council is also raising awareness of the Menopause pledge with businesses and partners across Merton, including how to support women in the workplace through a series of Business Masterclasses.
- Perinatal mental health - supporting women's mental health during the perinatal period (during pregnancy until 1 to 2 years after birth) is led by the health visiting service. As part of their routine practice health visitors talk to women about their mental health and wellbeing at the mandated 6-to-8-week visit. There is also a specialist perinatal mental health visitor who supports



mothers with higher needs and provides support and training to other staff about perinatal mental health.

- In Merton, women make up an estimated 60% of those who are frail and in 2020/21 women made up nearly 57% of Merton residents aged 65+ admitted in an emergency to hospital for a fall. As part of an approach to 'active ageing', the Council have commissioned a 'Get up and Go' service delivering a number of activity classes in East Merton and Morden with a focus on strength and balance and Wimbledon Guild's 'Merton Moves' programme, which provides a one-to-one coaching programme for older people supporting them to take up physical activity.
- A workshop on Improving Women's Health and Wellbeing was delivered in March 2023, as part of International Womens Day, setting out the life course approach to women's health, the importance of fairness, equity and inclusion and the benefits of co-production in the design and delivery of services and taking a whole system approach to women's health.
- Nationally around 60% of informal carers are women and there are a total of 8,335 informal carers in Merton that are women. The Council commissions Carers Support Merton to provide support and advice to carers and other organisations are funded to support specialist groups of carers, such as the Alzheimer's Society for people with dementia.
- Access to contraception in Merton is via GPs, pharmacies and the integrated sexual health (ISH) service. The Council complement the ICB funded GP contraception offer, by commissioning long-acting reversible contraception (LARC) from 9 GP practices and emergency hormonal contraception service (EHC) for 13-24 year olds from 9 community pharmacies, with EHC available for other age groups via ISH and GPs.

## **Supplementary**

Thank you Madame Mayor and thank you to Cllr McCabe for the initial answer to my question. Good to see a list of initiatives being provided, half of which were down to Liberal Democrat action and us pushing for action, so thank you for confirming that. I do think there is an area that is missed out, and that is immunisations. We had a report last month. Merton is frankly appalling in this respect, we have a target of 85% for flu jabs, we only get 67%, it's going down year on year on year. It's not good enough. It's particularly bad amongst the Black African Caribbean community and I just don't think we're doing enough in that respect. I'm sure you'd agree with me that this is an important area for us to address, but I'm interested to know what we're going to do to improve the situation.

## **Reply**

Thank you Madame Mayor, and I'd like to thank Cllr Reiss for his original question and his supplementary. I think the Liberal Democrats form the view that they are running the authority and that everything that happens in Merton is as a direct consequence of them sending out notes to their supporters saying 'we've done this and we've done that'. The reality is that much of what we do in this field, there is common ground and there isn't an argument and certainly I would draw your attention to the fact that in my reply it said, 'including', we couldn't possibly cover all the areas in an answer, we'd be here all night. Yes of course that's an important issue, it's something that we will be taking up with our colleagues in Health and I think that the reality is that if you ask people from Health whether they hear from me about issues that affect the people of Merton, they will tell you they hear from me far too often, because I'm in their faces saying that this isn't good enough for the people of Merton. And I'm glad that when we do that, that we are joined by your colleagues who also work and contribute to the health field.

### **From Cllr Skeete to the Cabinet for Sport and Heritage**

It's fantastic news that we have embarked on one of the largest tennis court refurbishments in the country – how are we making sure these courts are accessible for everyone to get active and use them?

### **Reply**

Working in partnership with the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA), we are undertaking an extensive refurbishment scheme for tennis courts located within 11 parks throughout our borough.

This collaboration between Merton Council and the LTA has already seen substantial progress, with our valued public park tennis courts across the borough being rejuvenated. An investment nearing £1 million pounds is being channelled into this project, the aim of which is to enhance the tennis facilities for our residents, supporting our Borough of Sport ambitions.

The refurbishment, which is already halfway to completion, will offer top-notch facilities for our local community. In addition to this, we have also introduced 'pickleball courts' at three key locations in Mitcham, Morden, and Wimbledon. Once this project concludes, we will have 16 of these new dedicated courts across the borough, thereby broadening the spectrum of sporting opportunities for individuals of all abilities and mobility levels.

We will work with our Communications team to further publicise the courts to ensure as many people as possible are aware as they are completed.

### **Supplementary**

Thank you Madame Mayor, I would like to ask the Cabinet Member, it is great that we will broaden the spectrum of sporting opportunities for everyone. But in a cost of living crisis, how can we encourage residents to get active without any cost of them.

## **Reply**

Thank you very much Madame Mayor and thank you to Cllr Skeete for her original question and her supplementary question. One of the main reasons for the Borough of Sport is to provide free sporting activities for people under 16 and people above 65 and older. So we are making sure that that happens. We have invested money in working along with the LTA into tennis courts and so people will have free tennis lessons there. Those courts that had free lessons will continue to have free lessons there and people just need to book their free classes. We have this summer, kids swimming for free in all of our leisure centres right across the borough. Also just remember that we had the funding granted to BMX track in Mitcham and also the Mitcham Cricket Club, so that is also the Borough of Sport investing. We also secured funding for 23 schools in Merton to put up sporting activities and also to make their facilities available for people. We are also looking to have park runs in Morden and in Mitcham, so those will all be free and we will also have Park Run in Wimbledon, so we have those free activities across the borough and can I also say that we have up to 450 free classes a month in our libraries. All seven of our libraries have classes in there that people can book, all free of charge. And whilst I am here, can I also just congratulate our team, the London Youth Games, when we started this Merton was at 29, and we ended up this year at the 11<sup>th</sup> place, so we've moved up and we've won the most improved borough. So that's being active and also encouraging people to also be active and it's all free of charge. We have Sean McGuinness who is our organiser who did a brilliant job in organising this for us. And so we are working to make sure that people have free physical activity and sporting activity.

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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.

### **Supplementary**

Thank you Madame Mayor, I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for his speedy work on active travel in Merton. Can the Cabinet Member confirm two areas of policy for me? First in relation to the record take up of Human Forest offer in pollards hill, are there plans for more cycle ways in this part of the borough? And second would the cabinet member provide further details on the growth of bike hangers in wards in the east of the borough including Pollards Hill please.

### **Reply**

Thank you Cllr Mundy for your original question and thank you for your supplementary. Now this administration has allocated funding to explore improvements to the street network around Pollards Hill to encourage greater active travel choices. The project is intended to start late 2023 dovetailing with our walking and cycling strategy and that will include bike hangers. With regard to the launch of Human Forest ebike hire, in the borough, we have now received stats on usage and uptake in Merton. This makes great reading. In May there were 3733 journeys made on Human Forest bikes made in Merton, up from 391 in April. Average trip distance was 2.2miles, average trip duration was 16 minutes. All the trips in May add up to a distance of 8395miles travelled saving 1.4 tonnes of CO2 and from the heat maps provided by Human Forest and I can share these with everyone, the most popular area in the borough for starting and ending trips is in Pollards Hill. Thank you very much.

## **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.

### **Supplementary**

Thank you to the Cabinet Member for her reply. As the Cabinet Member did not answer the question in full regarding local infrastructure for rivers streams lakes and ponds to ensure Merton's bodies of water are accessible and healthy for wildlife and people, could she confirm that she will be voting in favour of our strategic theme amendment tonight?

## Reply

Thank you Madame Mayor and given that the Councillor thanked me for my answer, I'm not quite sure what was missing. Just to reiterate, we are planning ahead for flood mitigation and doing flood risk assessments as water doesn't just stay in our rivers, our real concern is it flooding over, and so I look forward to your contributions to the debate later and I will vote accordingly.

## 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.

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.

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 gulley 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 gulley cleaning programme across Merton, cleaning and, where needed, repairing high risk gulleys across the borough each year.

### **Supplementary**

I thank the Cabinet Member for their response. Every time there is a thunder storm Lower Downs Road and Martin Way keep flooding. Will the Cabinet Member meet with me, Cllr McLean and Cllr Patterson to see what further measures can be implemented at these locations to stop the flooding?

### **Reply**

Thank you Madame Mayor, I guess we'll have to do a bit of a round tour of your wards, I'm happy to do that with you of course, we have also done tours of areas in your ward and I'm more than happy to visit with you.

### **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.

## **Supplementary**

Thank you I don't have a supplementary question, but would like to congratulate Cllr Irons and her team for all the good work they are doing in this area.

## **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.

### **Supplementary**

Thank you Madame Mayor, thank you to the Cabinet Member for their response. I know that the response refers to undertaking a sustainable appraisal on the local plan and scoring policies against the environmental, economic and social characteristics, however I don't get the impressions that sustainable appraisals are being done before implementing infrastructure such as cycle parking, cycle lanes or EV charging facilities. Could the Cabinet Member explain how the approach is reflected when building sustainable infrastructure?

### **Reply**

I'm not sure if this is my portfolio, Cllr Alambritis's or even Cllr Judge's. But from our perspective in terms of local environment and climate change we are recruiting staff to do these analyses across the borough to ensure that we have the right infrastructure to support our ambition to become a sustainable borough. As you can imagine things like EV charging and solar panels and us trying to have EV buses take on lot more electricity than plugging in a kettle, so we do have to have the bigger strategic look at parts of our network, so we are looking at that withing the council. We may have a follow-up on specifics that you mention as it may sit within someone else's portfolio.

### **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.

### **Supplementary**

Thank you Madame Mayor, I stand before you as someone who used HumanForest bikes 11 times out of the 3000 that Cllr Alambritis mentioned. I thank Cllr Judge for his answer and my supplementary question is, it's great to hear of the plans for sustainability within the Borough, however, how are these proposals being introduced into the council building 400 homes and how will that benefit residents?

### **Reply**

I thank Cllr Brunt for an excellent supplementary question. Our intention is that these 400 homes will be exemplary and I think it's important that local councils take the lead in innovative construction. We've been exploring existing low carbon developments in other boroughs, in particular we've recently undertaken trips to investigate passiv haus schemes, with the Phoenix Housing Association in Lewisham and Camden Council and these schemes demonstrate a compelling case for building to passiv haus standards in Merton and this will be about design and materials rather than having lots of mechanical kit. It's about combatting climate change and reducing energy bills, potentially by up to 2/3rds of households, it's about getting the homes right in the first place with buildings that are meant to last rather than having to revisit schemes a short time after completion to correct mistakes. It's about comfort, building homes that maintain acceptable temperatures throughout the year in both winter and summer and we aim to show the way by building sustainable homes where the performance of the buildings in thirty years' time will be much the same as when the residents first moved in. I thank Cllr Brunt for his question.

### **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.

### Supplementary

Thank you to the Cabinet Member for his words then and to officers for making reference to building in this report on Building a Sustainable Future, on page 34. I am heartened in your reply that any cost savings in the proposed passiv haus build with LQ will be tenure blind. On the 400 homes, the February minutes from Sustainable Communities report you saying that some may be temporary accommodation. As the same meeting recommended that the council does everything in its power to house people in Merton, will some of these homes be used for that?

### Reply

I think our intention is to build 400 homes for social rent, which are council homes. We undoubtedly have a need for temporary accommodation, but I am not going to suggest now that they are part of the 400, we need to maintain focus on the 400 being social rent council homes, but I thank Cllr Willis for his important supplementary question.

### 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**

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%

### **Supplementary**

Thank you Madame Mayor and I thank the Cabinet Member for his detailed answer. I'm glad he mentioned the focus on the 400 homes. The detail of the answer he gave me is the 20 years of planning permissions and builds within this borough, which is pretty much the entirety of this administration's record, including when Cllr Judge was leader and indeed when he was previously the Cabinet Member for Regeneration. Now at 21% of approvals being for affordable housing, and only 66% or thereabouts of approvals for buildings, how can he assure me that things are going to be different now, and how is he going to meet his commitment to build council housing.

### **Reply**

Well the commitment to council housing is a prime priority for this administration and we will be tested on whether we succeed or not, by the end of this administration we want 400 homes to be at least in the course of construction, with a number already completed. In terms of our planning system, we do our utmost to ensure that truly affordable homes are delivered through planning applications, but of course that can be very difficult with the Government's approach to viability assessments for affordable housing. Which is really weighted in favour of developers and weighted against social housing being delivered through the planning system. But nonetheless, with the firm support and cooperation of Sadiq Khan as Mayor of London, we are striving to deliver higher and higher numbers of affordable housing through those planning applications. I thank Cllr Fairclough for his supplementary question.

### **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.

## **Supplementary**

Thank you Madame Mayor, I thank the Cabinet Member for his comprehensive answer on positive steps Merton Council is taking to monitor and deal with air pollution in the borough. Can the Cabinet Member confirm that there is also a role for national government in this significant environmental area.

## **Reply**

Thank you Madame Mayor and I want to thank Cllr Butcher for his original question and officers for helping me with the answer and to thank him for his beautifully



guided supplementary question towards me. Giving me an opportunity to comment on this national government. Of course there is a huge role for the national government in this area, but like in all other areas, the Tories in Westminster and Whitehall are all failing miserably. For example, in April 2023, DEFRA announced a formal consultation on its air quality strategy, this consultation ran for a paltry 10 days just after the Easter holidays. Responses of the consultation indicated that the Government strategy lacked ambition, it was truncated and it pushed actions to local authorities. It's unclear at this time if there will be further updates on central government support. Madame Mayor, local councils can't resolve the problems of air pollution alone as many levers are outside of our control. That said, Merton will play an active role. So Madame Mayor, air pollution also needs to be addressed by central government too, central government does have a role to play, but this government is only interested in navel gazing, a nasty habit they inherited from the Liberals opposite when they were bowed in that shameful coalition of 2010 to 2015.

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