

Merton Council Council

15 November 2023

Supplementary agenda 2

5 Public questions to cabinet members

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The questions and written responses will be circulated at the meeting.

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From Gary Hammocks

To the Cabinet Member for Sport and Heritage

We can access over £100k tomorrow to help us continue improving MSG. We can't access it as you won't sign a two page agreement. Are you hesitating to do so because you want to kick us out after we have spent hundreds of thousands bringing the site back into use?

Reply

Thank you for your enquiry. As you know from our discussions, there are plans to undertake a strategic assessment of all pitches within the Borough, starting with a feasibility study of Morden Park which will commence shortly, following advice from the football foundation and Surrey FA. Once completed, this will allow us to make longer term decisions in relation to leases and usage of the spaces in the borough. We are committed to providing accessible, good quality facilities for everyone in the borough and therefore need to consider the needs and wants of all not just a few. We appreciate all you have done for grassroots football in the last 12 months on Morden Park – however, it is important to make clear that use of Morden Park was only offered on a temporary basis whilst works at Sir Joseph Hood took place. Longer term decisions relating to usage of green spaces in the borough will be considered after the completion of the strategic assessment.

From Matthew Cottee

To the Cabinet Member for Transport

Why is LSOA data, which does not reflect an individual household's circumstances, being used in the scrappage scheme? The LSOA is a postcode average therefore band A to D homes are excluded while band H homes, including a deprived £16.5m home on Wimbledon Common, are included.

Reply

The criteria applied to Merton's ULEZ scrappage scheme is set out and agreed by Cabinet on 10th August 2023 and detailed in the following report.

<https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=146&MIId=4507>

LSOA (Lower Super Output Areas) are defined geographic areas identified and used by the National Office of Statistics and typically provide for a range of data more detailed than at ward level; but not at individual house levels.

Whilst LSOAs define geographic areas; the Scrappage Scheme criteria applies the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) to provide an overview of relative deprivation levels across Merton.

The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) isn't solely focussed on income, current house prices or council tax bands as a measure of financial standing.

The IMD at LSOA level draws together various data sets to produce an overall relative measure of deprivation. The domains are combined using the following weights:

- Income Deprivation (22.5%)
- Employment Deprivation (22.5%)
- Education, Skills and Training Deprivation (13.5%)
- Health Deprivation and Disability (13.5%)
- Crime (9.3%)
- Barriers to Housing and Services (9.3%)
- Living Environment Deprivation (9.3%)

The Index of Multiple Deprivation is a useful tool for targeting services and provides a means of identifying the most and least deprived areas (LSOAs) in Merton.

Eligibility areas are those which are within the top 90% of the Index of Multiple Deprivation and mid-low Public Transport Access Level (PTAL) areas 1-4. The grant has also been made available to this borough's hard-working carers, irrespective of their location within Merton.

As a London borough with a broad range of incomes and demographics, there is always a possibility that within each LSOA, there may be a household, or households, with higher or lower household incomes than the average of its LSOA. That is why Merton Council kept this portion of the eligibility broad.

From Marguerite Blackett

To the Cabinet Member for Transport

At each elections residents were promised step free access to the train stations (like Wimbledon Chase or Raynes Park). When will the Council honour these promises?

Reply

Within the last year the Council has worked with both South-Western Railway and Govia Thameslink to support the submission of bids for Wimbledon Chase and Raynes Park Stations for the next round of Government funding for step free access

schemes. We wait to hear the outcomes of these bids, and will continue working towards securing step free access at stations in Merton. The Council has been successful in securing and contributing financially to step free access schemes currently under construction at Motspur Park and Tooting Thameslink stations.

4 From Khalid Majid

To the Cabinet Member for Transport

What plans are in place to bring the quality of School Streets Zone Signage in Merton up to the standard evident in other London Boroughs e.g. Croydon?

Reply

All school street signs in Merton are designed in line with Department for Transport regulations and are enforceable.



From Rosemary Butt

To the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change

Why fell mature valuable trees (without public consultation) when we are told to grow trees to refresh the air NOW? Young saplings cannot refresh the air NOW like the destroyed mature trees. You should plant saplings near mature trees so we don't sacrifice valuable, carbon-dioxide-reducing trees. Climate emergency is NOW.

Reply

I agree that action is needed now to tackle the climate emergency – and that trees are a key part of taking climate action. That's why I was especially proud that this administration planted 10,000 trees in our first year.

However, it is the case that we will inevitably have to fell mature trees on occasion – and this can be for a number of reasons. Whilst all trees have a value, the location and condition of any tree has to be quantified against the benefits they provide and the risk they pose, while also considering the species and lifespan of the tree. The council tree team use information and national guidance, such as the National Joint Utilities Guidance, and our own tree strategy to determine how best to manage existing trees and plant new trees for future generations.

Over the last year, Arboriculture Officers inspected 23,794 trees across the Borough to ensure the safety of the people who live, work and visit the Borough. The condition of the trees inspected are recorded on a central database and works planned dependant on the outcome of the inspection.

It may not be apparent why a tree is removed due to non-visible factors and the multiple conditions trees have to endure in droughts or storms. Felling a tree is always a last resort. Public consultation is not always achievable, due to the large number of trees in the Borough, or suitable, particularly where immediate action is required for public safety or insurance resolution. I can assure you that the removal of any tree is taken as the last step and often many interventions, including tree maintenance works, are undertaken to minimise the risk a tree may pose or to promote new growth.

From Lee Walker

To the Cabinet Member for Sport and Heritage

Dundonald recreation ground suffers from having only tennis courts instead of a MUGA. Given the drive for Merton to be the Borough of Sport (and not just tennis),

what's the process for Dundonald obtaining additional sporting facilities, such as basketball hoops, cricket stumps or goals, like other rec's with MUGAs?

Reply

Thank you for your question regarding the provision of diverse sporting facilities at Dundonald Recreation Ground. We are proud of the broad array of activities currently available at the ground, as well as our recent improvements which have been part of Merton's Borough of Sport ambition.

Dundonald Recreation Ground is equipped with facilities that cater to various sports, reflecting our commitment to supporting a wide range of recreational activities. The amenities include:

- Artificial cricket and cricket pitches (two)
- Football pitches (three)
- A bowling green
- A playground
- Pavilion available for hire
- Tennis courts (recently refurbished through a joint investment with the LTA and the Council)

In addition to the above, we have ensured that the tennis courts' refurbishment includes markings for multi-sport use, further enhancing the versatility of the space. This multi-sport functionality allows for various activities beyond tennis, accommodating sports such as netball and mini-football within the existing infrastructure. The shared use with Dundonald Primary School, established through a Community Use Agreement, exemplifies our approach to maximising the use of Merton's sporting facilities for both the school and the wider community.

We are continuously evaluating the community's needs and exploring opportunities to expand and improve our recreational offerings. In regard to the addition of new facilities, such as basketball hoops, cricket stumps, or goals, the process typically involves assessment of demand, evidence of community interest and need for additional or specific facilities.

From Philippa Woolley

To the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change

For many months, the Cottenham Park playground has been in a very depressing state. Wimbledon Park benefitted from extensive refurbishment and the residents of SW20 have very much been forgotten. Outdoor space is so important for young families and young children, please could the playground be repaired.

Reply

Thank you for raising your concerns regarding the play facilities at Cottenham Park.

Cottenham Park offers great play value for children and families visiting the park – however there are issues with the park as you have identified in your question that we are working to resolve.

One of the many projects we have carried out at Cottenham Park, in conjunction with the Friends of the Park, involved extending the existing playground down towards the Cambridge Road end of the site, with the introduction of lots of play items offering further play opportunities. Later and in addition to this, we piloted the first use of a special rubber mulch safety surface for these items that offers improved permeability and impact absorbency so that children can safely enjoy the play facilities in the wetter months.

The large multi-play unit at the North end of the play area has unfortunately reached the end of its serviceable life having offered more than 25 years of faithful service. This unit is inspected routinely by our service delivery partners and independently by The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA) and upon one of these inspections it was noted that structural integrity of the unit was compromised. In the interest of not wanting anyone to suffer an injury on the unit the decision was made to close the it down.

However, we have been working with suppliers to come up with alternative options for the next financial year to ensure that this section of the play area can be enjoyed once again. Once we are in a position to do so, we will share these options with local residents and stakeholders.

Regarding the roundabout, this unit has been removed as part of the routine inspection process, as it was noted it wasn't functioning properly. It has now been taken back to their depot for repair. New parts are required due to wear and tear, and these are sourced from the continent, so this is taking longer than desired. We

recognise how popular the roundabout is with families and we will ensure its reinstalled as soon as practicably possible.

We of course thank you for your patience and understanding in the interim whilst we work to address these issues.

From Thomas Gibbons

To the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change

Prince George's Avenue SW20 trees have not been pollarded in years. Pedestrians trip and hit heads, street lights are blocked and people walk in the street at night to see the way. Some trees damage property. When will the trees be pollarded or removed?

Reply

Our last inspection of the trees on Prince George's Avenue took place earlier this year – and following that inspection we have scheduled maintenance works to be carried out. Work for the pollarding of trees on the road shall be undertaken this season and I expect the work to begin before the end of December.

In the broader context of our urban tree management, we have 42 trees being managed on Prince George's Avenue, with 17 of those due for their regular three-year pollarding cycle. These maintenance cycles are determined by a risk assessment approach, based on location, age, species type and maintenance work, ensuring we prioritise our interventions where the need is greatest, in line with our Tree Strategy to optimise the efficacy of the council's budget allocations.

Beyond these scheduled operations, our officers are also proactively engaging in allocating ad hoc tasks such as tree crown reductions and trimming low-hanging branches to maintain clear pavements. These efforts are in direct response to ensuring pedestrian safety and accessibility but are balanced with the needs of the trees to ensure that they are maintained to provide maximum benefit.

We encourage residents to report any instances where the trees may obstruct public pathways, as this will alert the tree team to take the necessary action promptly. Regarding concerns of property damage, please report this to us via the Council website so that we can investigate this further: <https://www.merton.gov.uk/planning-and-buildings/regeneration-urban-design/trees/street-trees>

From Charlie Gallannaugh

To the Cabinet Member for Transport

At the July 2023 Council meeting he stated that funding was in place, contracts let, and locations decided for traffic sensors to be installed in East Hillside, and that works would take place over the summer months: why has this commitment not been delivered?

Reply

The Council has agreed to install traffic monitoring sensors in East Hillside to build a base-case for any future traffic calming interventions –and this commitment still stands. This has involved, as the question recognises, identifying funding sources and additional contracts. Unfortunately, there has been a delay due to electricity connections on the selected lamp columns. This work forms part of the highways team’s work programme and is undertaken within the resources available. We are grateful to residents who are in support of the scheme, and we remain committed to delivering the sensors as soon as practicably possible.

From Sanjeev Patel

To the Cabinet Member for Transport

Can the criteria for dropped kerbs be amended as the government’s announcement and pledge highlights the increase of Electric car ownership? Charging from home is more cost effective and safer especially if there is a driveway in place currently but does not meet the depth criteria.

Reply

The Council’s current criteria on driveway applications including on depth, is intended to protect pedestrians, particularly those with disabilities, from obstruction from overhanging vehicles. This was reviewed in 2018 supported by Merton’s Scrutiny process. There are no plans to amend the criteria.

The Council is currently developing an EV charging infrastructure strategy which will include consideration of policies to support safe EV charging from home for residents that do not have private off-street parking. The strategy will take into account guidance that is due to be produced by Government in the coming months on the use of cross pavement charging solutions, as set out in their recent “Plan for Drivers”.

From Sandra Vogel

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

During a summer site meeting at Mitcham Bridge, Merton Council's officer expressed surprise at the Canons Leisure Centre/Better banners displayed on lampposts. He was to investigate if planning / other had been granted, but never contacted me with an answer. Was permission granted? If so what income is derived?

Reply

Better Leisure have installed several lamp-post banners in the borough to publicise the range of leisure facilities available to residents. The banners were authorised by the Council via a highways licence and planning permission is not required. Better Leisure are a partner of the Council and a not-for-profit organisation; therefore, there is no fee charged for the banners.

From Kevin Clarke

To the Cabinet Member for Transport

Merton is proposing a CO2 based permit scheme for otherwise ULEZ compliant vehicles. Are there plans for an accompanying CO2 based scrappage scheme?

Reply

There are currently no plans to introduce a vehicle scrappage scheme related to the proposed changes to parking permit fees which are currently subject to consultation.

From Jackie Schneider

To the Leader of the Council

On the 10th October the Leader of the Council publicly expressed sympathy with those suffering from the conflict in Israel and Palestine.

Would he now take the opportunity to support the call by the UN Secretary-General for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire?

Reply

Merton is proud to be a borough of many faiths and communities, and we know the terrible events of recent weeks in Israel and Gaza will resonate with many. The thoughts of myself and everyone at Merton Council are with all those who have been affected by the shocking events and violence that has taken place.

As the Leader of a local council, my primary focus and responsibility is to the communities who have been affected by these events here in Merton. I have been deeply concerned by the reports of the rise in antisemitic and Islamophobic hate crimes in the UK in recent weeks.

It is of the utmost importance therefore that our Jewish and Muslim communities are supported and reassured during this difficult time. The Deputy Leader and I recently visited the Wimbledon Synagogue to reaffirm our commitment to working alongside the police and the Jewish community to tackle anti-Jewish hatred wherever it is found. I also visited the Baitul Futuh Mosque with the Chief Executive as part of National Hate Crime Awareness Week, to show our support for the Muslim community and restate our commitment to work with the police to tackle Islamophobia wherever it exists.

This is a concerning and challenging time for all of us, and Merton Council will do everything we can to support residents and stamp out hatred.

From Sheila White

To the Cabinet Member for Sport and Heritage

We at Hercules Wimbledon AC have heard of plans for another track to be built in Morden. What would the impact be on the facility at Wimbledon Park? Can we have reassurance about the future of our base and that the proposed further development of the stadium will take place?

Reply

Thank you for your question regarding the future of athletic facilities in the borough, particularly in light of the discussions around a potential new track in Morden.

First and foremost, it is important to clarify that at this stage, no final decisions have been made regarding any new athletics facilities within the borough. Such decisions will only be approached after a review of our outdoor sports facilities, which is expected to begin in 2024. This review will be carried out in partnership with key stakeholders, including Sport England and national governing bodies.

The recent refurbishment undertaken on the Wimbledon Park running track, which now holds Track Mark certification for the coming five years, demonstrates our commitment to providing quality athletic facilities on this site. This enhancement ensures that our athletes have a secure and upgraded base for training and competitions in the short to medium term.

Looking ahead, we will engage in a collaborative process with Hercules Wimbledon AC and England Athletics. The purpose of this partnership will be to evaluate and make informed decisions on the long-term prospects of athletic provisions in our community.

The concerns of Hercules Wimbledon AC and the future of your club are of great significance to us. We promise to maintain clear and open communication as we move forward, valuing your input as an integral part of this process.

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to athletics in Merton. We share a common goal in fostering a strong and vibrant sporting community, and we look forward to working together towards a bright future for athletics in the borough.

15 From John Davis

To the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change

Merton Council's frequent announcements of 10,000 trees planted this year has provoked many queries asked of Tree Warden Group Merton. To answer these please provide us with a list numbering every planting site, a full breakdown of species per site, and % success rates at each.

Reply

In response to your question and to assist the Tree Warden Group Merton regarding our achievement of the planting of 10,000 trees, I have asked officers to compile a detailed report of this information. This will include a site-by-site breakdown of planted trees, a record of species planted at the locations, and the preliminary success rates. It is important to note that trees planted in 2022 and 2023 are in the establishment phase, and accurate survival rates will be more ascertainable by 2024-2025. Our approach recognises the natural process of succession, which includes the thinning of whip tree plantings to allow stronger species to thrive.

Our commitment to trees and the increased number planted is reflected in various projects such as the Inter Faith Week Tree Planting, Street tree planting, Trees for Streets, Ward Tree Planting for the Queen's Green Canopy 75th Anniversary, the London Road Playing Fields Growing Together Orchard Project, and others. These initiatives are integral to our Merton Tree Strategy 2023, which guides our efforts to enhance the urban canopy while ensuring responsible management of existing trees.

We welcome the community's interest in our greening efforts and will provide the Tree Warden Group Merton with the requested information as soon as it is fully collated.

From Lesley Sorrell

To the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change

Despite frequent requests to Greenspaces I have not been given a list of prospected replacement trees for those lost both in parks and on streets. As the planting season for 2023/24 is now here, can you please provide a full checklist?

Reply

Thank you for your question regarding the replacement of trees within our parks and streets. As we approach the 2023/24 planting season, officers have been delayed by the unusually dry autumn, resulting in a slight postponement of our planting program. The tree team are finishing the planting schedules, which will encompass various projects, including Trees for Streets and requests by Merton residents for specific tree locations.

The comprehensive checklist you've requested is extensive, reflecting the scope of our planned work. Given the breadth of data, these documents will be provided under separate cover once completed.

I assure you that the enhancement of our parks and streets through thoughtful and sustainable tree planting remains a priority.

From Pippa Maslin

To the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development

Of the 400 homes that the Council is aiming to build on Council-owned land, how many will be M4(2) units (i.e. accessible and adaptable dwellings) and how many will be M4(3) units (i.e. wheelchair user dwellings)?

Reply

The designs for the homes are still being finalised, so we are not able to give numbers for these units at present. However, all schemes will be designed to be London Plan compliant in terms of the number of accessible and adaptable dwellings and wheelchair user dwellings.

From Alexander Forbes

I wish to ask the full council meeting whether the council will look at Knowsley Council's experience and consider Empty Dwelling Management Orders to re-occupy any of the alleged 2,000 empty homes in Merton possibly for people on the council's 10,000-person Social Housing Waiting List?

Reply

The Council has recently allocated capital funding to an empty homes scheme to help bring back empty properties into use for those on the Council's housing waiting list. We are currently investigating which homes are truly unused. Of those 2000 homes, it is likely the majority of them were only empty for a short period of time prior to sale or reuse. We will aim to work collaboratively with the owners, which is the fastest and most cost effectively way of bringing these properties back into use. However, if this is not possible, for those properties which meet the Empty Dwellings Management Orders requirements, we may then consider this route.