

Merton Council Council

20 November 2024

Supplementary agenda 8

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 Jonathan Kemmis-Betty

To the Cabinet Member for Transport and Cleaner Streets

Considering recent, curious bollard placements on Pepys Road where residents were not consulted and the aesthetics, the low-risk environment and soft planting alternatives were seemingly overlooked, what measures demonstrate the council's commitment to being resident-focused, particularly given an Officer's response of, 'we do not need to consult'?

Reply

The two bollards in question on Pepys Road footway outside numbers 11-15 were installed on 5 November to protect the footway as the paving slabs have been damaged by vehicle overrun and therefore pose a safety hazard to pedestrians. We did not consider a soft landscaping solution as it would not be in keeping with the street environment in this location at this time, and it would likely be overrun and damaged. We have a statutory duty to maintain the highway and ensure public safety, and as this was a small-scale reactive intervention to this end, it did not meet the threshold for a consultation. We would and do consult the community if we are proposing larger scale changes to the public highway.

From Barry Smith

To the Cabinet Member for Transport and Cleaner Streets

The council is rejecting FixMyStreet flytipping reports for public footpaths such as that next to the Wandle opposite Merton Abbey Mills as 'not public property'. Who is responsible for this path, and how can the public know who to report such issues to if the council simply rejects them?

Reply

Merton Council is responsible for the public footpath adjacent to the Wandle by Merton Abbey Mills. Our waste contractor is responsible for litter and fly-tip removal and our grounds maintenance contractor is responsible for the surrounding green areas to ensure the environment remains clean and well maintained for public use. One of our Street Environment Officers conducted an inspection of the identified location yesterday and confirmed that whilst some of the fly-tipped items on the path had been removed, there were still some fly-tipped items in the vicinity. As a result, this matter has been escalated to their management team for investigation and prompt removal.

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I have also asked officers to investigate why residents were being told the issues they were reporting were being closed. Investigating this issue, it appears the request on FixMyStreet was closed due to a technical error where photos were not showing up. We have now fixed this issue and so it should no longer be a problem on FixMyStreet. The resident who raised this issue on FixMyStreet did so in the right way and should continue reporting using this function, as the fault was at our end rather than the resident's.

As mentioned by the Cabinet Member for Civic Pride and Climate Change on 19th November, plans are well underway for parks and greenspaces to be incorporated into FixMyStreet reporting as part of the phased work, and this should be going live early in 2025.

From Ida Ogoudikpe

To the Cabinet Member for Transport and Cleaner Streets

Will the Merton Council teams be cleaning dead leaves on the pavement on a regular basis multiple times a week from now on in the autumn and winter seasons, please?

Reply

Merton Council's Street cleaning contractor deploy dedicated leaf clearance teams for a period of 10 weeks during autumn and winter. This year the resources commenced on 28th October and will overlay existing street cleaning resources to clear the leaves from the borough. So far, we have collected 116.8 tonnes of leaves this season. Street Environment Officers will be proactively inspecting roads to ensure contractor resources are appropriately deployed.

From Natasha Trewman

To the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development

Does the council think it is acceptable for a building owner who has failed to remediate several residential blocks with ACM cladding in the borough to be considered for a planning application to add a storey to a building over 18m that has yet to undergo a PAS9980 assessment?

Reply

All planning applications must be judged on their individual merits in accordance with the Local Plan and any other material planning considerations. The Council would invite a Building Control application to our service but if this is processed via a

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private Approved Inspector then a completion certificate will be required to confirm compliance with the national regulations.

From Heather Finlay

To the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Why is Merton employing Kooth as a mental health service for young people? It is not NICE approved. Its operation does not accord with the recommendations of the Cass Report. Recent article: <https://unherd.com/newsroom/nhs-mental-health-app-kooth-is-a-danger-to-girls/>

It is a waste of money. I would not let my children near Kooth.

Reply

Merton Council does not commission Kooth to provide a mental health service for young people in the Borough. However, the Integrated Care Board (ICB) for South West London has commissioned Kooth across South West London since the pandemic to provide an accessible online digital resource to support Children and Young Person mental wellbeing through a counselling and self-help offer. The service was commissioned to complement the wider (face to face) service offer provided by Tier 2 and Tier 3 CAMHS and the school based Mental Health Support Teams.

I am advised that Kooth offers a free, safe and anonymous online mental health support and counselling for 11–25-year-olds to help young people manage their emotional wellbeing and is often used in the late evening when other services are closed.

Kooth is commissioned by numerous ICBs and Local Authorities across England. Kooth is both NICE compliant and holds 'British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy' accreditation across the UK.

I am confident that our NHS partners in the ICB have robust procedures in place for commissioning and managing service providers.

If you wish to take this matter up with the ICB, you can submit questions to ICB meetings.

The next ICB meeting, in which the public can submit a question, is scheduled for Wednesday, 15 January 2025, between 14:00-17:00. If you have a question for the board, you should submit it via email before noon on Friday, 10 January 2025 using the following link:

<https://www.southwestlondon.icb.nhs.uk/events/integrated-care-board-meeting-november-2024/>

From Sarah Golby

To the Cabinet Member for Transport and Cleaner Streets

Does the council have any plans to provide and, importantly, to enforce designated parking areas for hired e-bikes? If not, how will you improve pavement accessibility and safety for wheelchair users, visually impaired people and others who are negatively impacted by the current situation?

Reply

The inappropriate parking of e-bikes, or any vehicle, reduces the accessibility of travel across our borough, particularly for residents or visitors who may be visually impaired, wheelchair users, people with mobility aids, parents or caregivers with prams and strollers, older adults, and those with injuries.

The Council are committed to ensuring everyone in Merton has safe, accessible and comfortable travel options and recognises that inconsiderately or inappropriately parked e-bikes can compromise the pedestrian environment.

I understand the frustration of residents, which is why I raised the issue with Lime to express our concerns regarding obstructive parking and urged them to take further action to address this issue. I am pleased that they acknowledged the issue and have reassured me of measures they are taking such as GPS-based No Parking Zones, mandatory trip photos, and an enhanced rider education programme, which have significantly improved parking behaviour. They have also stated that they have increased their out-of-warehouse team, in order to more effectively deal with obstructive bikes reported via email and make sure they are retrieved within two hours, with over 50 vehicles moved each week in the borough.

Whilst I am pleased that these measures are in place, it is clear that more needs to be done to make sure the problem of obstructive parking is properly dealt with. That's why I have recently raised this issue with the Minister for Local Transport, Simon Lightwood MP, who has since been in contact with me regarding the matter.

The Council are working to identify locations for 300 formal e-bike bays across the borough and once these are in place users will be required to park in these designated bays. Additionally, we are negotiating formal agreements with two operators and will include appropriate mechanisms in the contracts to ensure that e-bikes parked outside of these designated areas can be removed.

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From Jocelyn Cruywagen

To the Cabinet Member for Finance

Can the Cabinet Members advice how much of the Local Government pension fund is spent on arms companies supplying Ukraine?

Reply

The Merton Pension Fund has no investments in companies supplying arms to Ukraine.

From Domenic Teuma

To the Cabinet Member for Sport and Heritage

Having drawn inspiration to be truly the London Borough of Sport would you pledge your support and join me in hosting a children's football festival, in support and remembrance of the 1000s of children affected by the conflict in Ukraine and Middle East?

Reply

The council would be delighted to explore further with you establishing a new children's football festival in the borough. As a council we have played a leading role in supporting and welcoming Ukrainian refugees to the borough and will do all that we can to support charitable causes to support those effected by conflict. As you have rightly pointed out this initiative chimes well with our Borough of Sport initiative in getting more residents active through sport.

We would request that you contact officers via the events portal on the council's website to outline your plans and what support you are seeking.

From Chris Stanton

To the Cabinet Member for Transport and Cleaner Streets

In light of the Council's declaration of a climate emergency and subsequent development of carbon reduction plans, and the BBC's recent analysis concluding that '[b]urning rubbish [is] now [the] UK's dirtiest form of power', what is the Council's stance on future use of the Beddington incinerator?

Reply

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The SLWP partner boroughs have taken, and will continue to take, steps to reduce waste produced in our area. Despite reducing the total volume of household waste collected by 13% over the last six years and being some of the best recyclers in London, the four SLWP boroughs are still left with around 200,000 tonnes of waste each year that either cannot be recycled or has not been sorted for recycling.

There are three options currently available to the boroughs for treating that waste: bury it in landfill, export it out of the area for someone else to deal with (which would significantly increase local traffic movements and transport-associated carbon emissions), or treat it in a modern energy recovery facility within our borders.

We would all like to see a future where energy recovery facilities are not needed. But the present day reality is that they are a vital part of our waste management infrastructure.

We are confident, that in the Beddington Energy Recovery Facility, we have a proximate, safe, environmentally sustainable and cost-effective solution for managing our residual waste. The Council actively monitors the facility and is continually working to ensure that waste management and disposal across the borough is both efficient and environmentally responsible.

From Regina Griesshaber-Denton

To the Cabinet Member for Civic Pride and Climate Change

As we are concerned with Climate Change, please can you give me an update on: When will the tree, which had been in front of no 27 Kingswood Road and was cut down, be replaced?

Reply

Thanks for your question and it is great to hear that you share our concern for the Climate.

I'm aware of residents on Kingswood Road being in touch about the tree replacements. I can assure you that the council have noted the replacements trees required on Kingswood Road and stump grinding operations are in progress borough wide ahead of planting to commence early December 2024 onwards. It is anticipated that the replacement tree will be planted by the end of December 2024.

From Richard Poole

To the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development

Can the Cabinet Member please provide an update on what recent actions they have taken, or are planning to take in the near term with regards to the long overdue regeneration of Morden town centre.

Reply

Merton Council is committed to building a sustainable future for all our residents and businesses; a future that has civic pride at the heart of what we do. Morden town centre regeneration remains a key priority for the Council with three key workstreams:

- Placemaking and local economy
- Public Realm and Healthy Streets
- Development and Housing Delivery

This summer, the council started an engagement programme which is the start of an ongoing conversation on Morden town centre; focussed initially on Placemaking and developing a “meanwhile use” strategy for the town centre, as well as co-designing with the community, a series of streetscape improvements to the look and feel of streets in Morden Town Centre.

The Council's Regeneration and Economy Team have held a number of community workshops over the summer to gain people's views on Morden town centre's public spaces and opportunities to enliven the town centre. Residents, businesses and community groups were engaged in a number of workshops to;

- Find out what they like about Morden town centre and what doesn't work for them so we understand exactly what improvements they would like to see;
- Help us design some of the street furniture and other public realm improvements;
- Where they want to hang out and what underused public spaces can be brought into use for their benefit.

The workshops were held on:

- Pop Up event 1 – Wednesday 10 July 2024
- Pop Up event 2 – Thursday 18 July 2024
- Workshop 1: What does Morden mean to you? – Saturday 6 July 2024
- Workshop 2: Community Walkabout – Tuesday 16 July 2024
- Workshop 3: Biodiversity and Green Spaces – Wednesday 24 July 2024

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- Workshop 4: Public Spaces and Streets / World Car Free Day Street Festival Abbotsbury Road – Sunday 22 September 2024.

Across all events, over 450 people participated. Our publicity for these events reached 9,055 individuals through digital advertising on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. In total, 1,229 people engaged with the ads through clicks, swipes and ‘taps-through’ to find out more about the projects.

A full report on the engagement exercise will be presented to Cabinet in December and subsequently published on the Council’s website.

Our activities in the town centre have already delivered new seating, planters, community notice boards and repainted shop shutters in Abbotsbury Road. The next stage of public space improvements will commence in spring 2025 with the introduction of new street furniture and community art projects funded from Community Infrastructure Levy.

The Council is also in dialogue with Transport for London (TFL) to identify medium term streetscape improvements such as greening, sustainable drainage and improvements to the passenger experience at Morden Station. This work also includes our collaboration with TFL and campaigning alongside the community resulting in the Mayor of London’s announcement that public toilets will be reintroduced at Morden Station.

The Council has also appointed a town centre manager for Morden who will start imminently. The role will work with businesses and the Regeneration and Economy team to improve Morden town centre and develop a series of events to drive footfall and create vibrancy in the town centre, such as establishing a new street market.

The longer-term plans for Morden regeneration are underpinned by the Council’s new Local Plan and will take time to deliver with a partner. The Council is therefore putting in place resources to support Morden town centre now and advance of longer-term regeneration plans.

From M H Omarshah

To the Cabinet Member for Finance

Will the Council commit to divesting their Pension funds from Companies (particularly companies that deal in ARMS) and individuals complicit in engineering war crimes and atrocities within the Middle East? The immediate, total and permanent divestment would prevent further devastation and annihilation of vulnerable people

Reply

The Merton Pension Fund has no investments in companies or individuals supplying arms in the Middle East.

From Pippa Maslin

To the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development

For each of the three Clarion regeneration sites (Eastfields, High Path, and Ravensbury), what percentage of homes, upon completion, will be: (a) for social housing tenants; (b) M4(2) standard; (c) M4(3)a standard; (d) M4(3)b standard?

Reply

The Merton Estate Regeneration Programme being delivered by Clarion Housing Association creates a holistic approach to regeneration that provides existing residents with 1000 new homes, significantly increasing the number of bedrooms to address overcrowding for existing social tenants, as well as providing a future supply of 1,800 new homes across Merton.

(a): Social Housing

The following percentage of affordable homes will be created across all three estates (Eastfields, High Path and Ravensbury estates) In accordance with the signed s106 Legal Agreement.

33% of the Residential Units to be constructed across the Eastfields Development as Affordable Housing;

21% of the Residential Units to be constructed across the High Path Development (including the units constructed as part the High Path kickstart development at Station Road) as Affordable Housing; and

55% of the Residential Units to be constructed across the Ravensbury Development (including the units constructed as part of the Ravensbury kickstart development, Ravensbury Garages) as Affordable Housing.

(b.c.d) Wheelchair Accessible units

Across the whole Merton Estate Regeneration project, at least 10% of units will be M4(3) wheelchair accessible and the remaining new homes will be M4(2) wheelchair adaptable in accordance with planning policies.

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The breakdown by estate is:

Eastfields

- (b) M4(2) wheelchair adaptable - (90%) - 720 homes
- (c,d) M4(3) wheelchair accessible (10%) - 80 homes

Total number of homes in Eastfields across Phases 1 – 3 – 800 homes

High Path

- (b) M4(2) wheelchair adaptable – (90%) 2045 homes
- (c,d) M4(3) wheelchair accessible – (10%) 227 homes

Total number of homes in High Path across Phases 1 –7B (including revised phases 4-7B)- 2272 homes

Ravensbury

- (b) M4(2) wheelchair adaptable – (90%) 180 homes
- (c,d) M4(3) wheelchair accessible – (10%) 20 homes

Total number of homes for Ravensbury across Phases 1 – 4 - 200 homes