

Mitcham Community Forum  
18 March 2015  
Chair's Report

The meeting was held at Vestry Hall, and chaired by Councillor Ian Munn. 15 residents attended, as well as six other Councillors, and officers of the council and its partners. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

## Update from the Council

Councillor Mark Allison, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, presented the latest budget position for Merton Council. A copy of the presentation is available from the Council's website at:

<http://www.merton.gov.uk/community-living/communityforums/mitchamcommunityforum.htm>

When asked about reserves Councillor Allison said these are made up of general fund reserves that the council can use but keeps for emergencies; school balances that the council holds on behalf of schools; earmarked reserves that are held for a specific purpose; and capital receipts that are also restricted in their use. General reserves are already at low levels and are approaching the level it would be unsafe to have.

*Added subsequently to the meeting:*

*Reserves as of 31 March 2015, taken from 2015-16 Business Plan*

Type of reserves	Amount (000s)
General fund	14,239
Earmarked including grants and contracts	33,155
School balances	19,247
Capital Reserves	32,350
Total	98,991

*This was a decrease of £16,062,000 compared to 31 March 2014.*

When asked about increasing council tax Councillor Allison said that without a referendum any rise is capped at 1.99% and it would take a 20% increase to meet the budget gap. It was a manifesto commitment to freeze council tax in 2010 and in 2014 in order to protect those for whom council tax is difficult to pay. In addition there has been a grant from government for freezing. Councillor Allison also said that Merton's collection rate was higher than the London, outer London and national average. An increase in households helps slightly as does the New Homes Bonus.

Councillor Allison was also asked about the contract with the Wimbledon Guild, and explained that the contract was subject to a tendering process. Councillor Allison also said that it was not possible to put a numerical value on the contribution of volunteers but the council recognised the important contribution of volunteers across our communities.

In response to a question about proposed changes to business rate collection Councillor Allison said that whilst the council welcomed devolution of business rates it was not clear how the scheme would work or what impact it would have in Merton.

### **Canons Heritage Lottery Fund project**

Jil Hall, Community Engagement Officer, explained that the council had been successful in 2014 in a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund to improve Canons and restore Canons House and Madeira Hall. Work was now underway to develop more detailed proposals to submit to HLF by the end of 2016 in order to access the bulk of the £4million available.

A team of consultants from Southern Green have been commissioned to develop a Conservation Management Plan. This includes surveys on the grounds and buildings; an archaeological report; and a plan for how the site could be managed and maintained in the future. A draft of the plan will be available for a public meeting to be held in January.

Working with local community groups was a key part of the project. This includes recruiting volunteers to take part in a user survey to record current use of the park facilities. There will both an Activity Plan and a Business Plan that will look at potential uses for the grounds and buildings to ensure they are sustainable. Activities could involve a range of music events, like jazz, as well as recognising the sporting heritage of the Canons including Korfbal.

Once the next stage of the bid is submitted in December 2016 we expect a decision around June 2017 and then work to commence in autumn 2017.

### **Healthwatch Merton**

Jade Fairfax from Healthwatch Merton provided an update on their work. Jade joined Healthwatch in the summer and replaced Adele who attended the forum in 2014. Healthwatch is an independent champion for consumers of health and social care services and aims to make sure providers and commissioners listen and understand the voice of users. Merton is part of a network of local Healthwatch organisations that are linked to a national body, Healthwatch England.

Some of the current projects being supported by Healthwatch Merton include:

- GP access – spoke with residents across the borough and put recommendations to the Clinical Commissioning Group including training for frontline staff. The report is available on the Healthwatch Merton website
- Patient Participation Groups – every surgery should have one of these but quality varies hugely. Working with two surgeries (Morden Hall and James O'Riordan medical centres) to develop best practice that can be shared across the 24 practices in Merton
- Healthy High Street – spoke to 192 people Mitcham about the town centre for Public Health. Identified public toilets as a key issue.
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) – spoke to users and parents about the services to feed into a review.

- Outreach work – met with homeless drop-in group; YMCA service users; and visited Bond Primary.
- Enter and View – a programme of visits to residential homes will begin in November
- Urgent care – held a public meeting on 30 September to look at services as part of a review. Other events will follow.

More information about this work, including the Healthy High Streets report, is available from the Healthwatch Merton website:

<http://www.healthwatchmerton.co.uk/>

### **Rediscover Mitcham update**

Kris Witherington shared an update provided by colleagues:

#### Phase 1 – Fair Green

- All civils to be completed by 1 Nov 2015.
- Landscaping to be completed before the opening event on 27 Nov.
- Clock tower lantern design yet to be agreed and installed.
- Catenary lighting completed by 1 Nov.
- Granite wall uplighters may not be working in time for the event. Still being procured.
- Anti-skate studs to be installed on granite walls before the event
- Area opened to pedestrians and traders as from 1 Nov.
- Traffic permitted 1 Dec once all installation work is complete or earlier.

#### Phase 1B – Majestic Way

- New shared pedestrian and cyclist area.
- Works to commence mid Jan 2016 for 3-4 months.
- New lighting and street furniture.

#### Phase 2-5 – Main scheme

- New bus street and pedestrian/cycle provisions.
- Traffic signal audit still in progress. Expect final decision 1 Dec 2015.
- Construction expected to commence Apr/May 2016
- Completion Dec 2017

Residents asked about the layout of the market and if pitch sizes would be enforced; if any planting would be designed to withstand extreme weather conditions; and if the vinyl Lavender sign near the Co-op would be repaired. These will be raised with the Town Centre team.

### **Soapbox**

Concerns were raised about the state of gutters in the area and how leaf fall, and litter, was blocking drains resulting in flooding. This was a particular issue around the pond at Three Kings and outside the old Barclays Bank. Cormac Stokes from Merton Council agreed to look into this.

The issue of mopeds, quadbikes and motorbikes racing on Rowan Road and Church Road was raised. This has been reported to the police and Cormac agreed to raise this at the Local Multi-Agency Problem Solving (LMAPS) meeting, a partnership between the council, the police and other agencies.

A discussion about the need for controlled parking around St Georges Road, Cedar Avenue, and Cricket Green took place. Any controlled parking would need the support of local residents so it was suggested a public meeting was held by residents.

**Date of next meeting:** Tuesday 15 March 2016 at 7.15pm, at Vestry Hall.