

Council 14 September
07a_Councillor Priority Strategic Theme Questions

Councillor Judy Saunders

To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

Could he outline how the Housing and Planning Act will impact on Merton residents?

Reply

We have been preparing for the Housing and Planning Act for some time so that we can seek the opportunities it presents and minimise the challenges that may arise from it. A report under the Sustainable Communities and Transport strategic theme to February's full council summarised the wide range of Housing and Planning Act provisions. Most of the major changes require secondary legislation or further government guidance before they come into place, including the introduction of Starter Homes (homes for sale costing up to £450,000) as part of affordable housing. Officers are liaising with other London boroughs, the Greater London Authority and with government to keep track of the key matters and will keep councillors informed.

From Councillor Suzanne Grocott

To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

In light of the recommendations produced by last year's cross-party task group, can the Cabinet Member update me on how the council is now using the various powers it has at its disposal to challenge developers to ensure the provision of more affordable housing?

Reply

The council carefully reviews planning applications to ensure that we get the most affordable housing we can within government's national policies and consistent with our own planning policies locally. As a council we carefully scrutinise the viability assessments developers submit with their planning applications and employ independent consultants to review these where necessary as we are committed to providing 40% in line with our planning policy. We are also working closely with the new Mayor of London who is putting together a team of experts to scrutinise developer's submissions even further.

Following the Housing Task Group's recommendations, I am now taking a paper to Cabinet to propose even greater robustness in the way that the council deals with planning applications, including publishing developer's viability submissions for greater scrutiny by councillors and the public.

Councillor Dennis Pearce

To the Leader of the Council

What contact has the Leader had with the Mayor of London's office regarding sustainable communities and housing issues?

Reply

Since Sadiq Khan so convincingly won the recent election for Mayor of London I have spoken to the Mayor and his office on a number of occasions on these issues. In particular I have had discussions with the Deputy Mayor for Housing James Murray on how Merton can help deliver on the Mayor's commitment to increasing the supply of affordable housing, which Merton is well qualified to do having met our

affordable housing targets. I have also discussed Crossrail2 with the Mayor's office and expressed our strong wish to see alternative proposals put forward that will safeguard existing businesses and reduce the impact on local residents. I also wrote to the Mayor in relation to his consultation on the AFC Wimbledon stadium application which the Mayor has now agreed to hand back to Merton.

From Councillor Najeeb Latif
To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

For how long is the legal obligation to bring homes at High Path, Eastfields and Ravensbury up to the Decent Homes Standard going to be suspended so that Circle Housing can fulfil their contractual requirements?

Reply

Compliance with the Decent Homes Standard for High Path, Eastfields and Ravensbury estates are not currently suspended. The latest data from CHMP shows 0.24% of housing stock across all estates in Merton (not exclusively High Path, Eastfields and Ravensbury) remain outstanding. This is equal to 14 properties. In 6 cases the tenants have declined the works and the remaining 8 have plans in place to meet the standard. Only 1 home on the High Path Estate is non compliant with the Decent Homes Standard and the property is included in CHMP plans to make this compliant. Circle have told us they are committed to ensuring that properties on these three estates are still kept in good repair whilst waiting for the regeneration plans to be approved and hopefully implemented.

Councillor Laxmi Attawar
To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

What progress has been made since 2010 on developing the Colliers Wood Tower, which was voted the ugliest building in London in 2006?

Reply

Colliers Wood tower is now unrecognisable compared to what it was in 2010.

For over a decade the former Brown & Root tower stood derelict whilst various planning applications were made, and withdrawn.

Since 2010, the Council's regeneration team has worked closely with the land owner / developer to unlock the development. This included bringing the design up to date (the new glass is a step change in quality from the 2003 permission to simply paint it white) and re-assessing the development viability and phasing, to ensure that regenerating the existing tower was a priority over and above any future phases.

Work has progressed at a pace since construction started in early 2015. Much of the work was behind the scenes in terms of stripping out the remains of the Brown & Root tower and installing new infrastructure.

Since early 2016, the glass cladding has been installed and is now largely complete, which has utterly transformed the look of not only the tower, but has brightened up the centre of Colliers Wood. Shaking off its carbuncle tag has attracted more

investment in the area and is a key component of our strategic vision for Colliers Wood town centre.

Over the next six months, works will continue to fit out the inside of the building which will provide 150 apartments for rent.

The area has also benefited from a significant investment in the street scene and public realm funded by the Mayor of London, Merton Council and TfL. Baltic Close in particular, has undergone an incredible transformation in the past year. The plaza at the base of the tower will be the main focus of the public space improvements and should be complete early 2017.

**From Councillor Gilli Lewis-Lavender
To the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture**

In view of the fact that dog walkers must now either place their dog's excrement in the ordinary litter bins or take it home with them, is the Cabinet Member aware that there has been an increase in the number of owners who are not scooping up the dog waste? Is he not concerned about the increased danger of Toxocariasis that presents severe risks particularly to young children?

Reply

There has certainly been an increase in the number of reported incidents of residents not scooping up their dog mess in parks recently, but whether that is a genuine effect, or the result of an increased awareness of the problem arising from the change of policy is unclear. Certainly there appears to be some discontent amongst some dog walkers at the change, but since there are in excess of 400 litter bins in parks, including additional ones added following the withdrawal of dog waste bins, it is the Council's view that there is more than sufficient provision of waste bins overall, provided that dog walkers are prepared to behave responsibly and respectfully to the environment and other park users. Individuals who fail to clean up after their dog are committing an offence under pre-existing Dog Control Orders and are at risk of being issued with a Fixed Penalty Notice and a hefty fine.

**Councillor Mary Curtin
To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing**

The housing crisis is one of the biggest challenges we currently face in Merton; what will your priorities be as cabinet member for housing?

Reply

My top priority is to address the housing crisis we face as a borough to ensure that we build more affordable homes that ordinary people can genuinely afford and that we maximise the supply of affordable homes in the borough.

That is why we are committed to working with the Mayor of London and Transport for London on building more than 1,000 new homes as part of Morden's Housing Zone and on ensuring that the major regeneration opportunities are maximised and delivered.

The rebuilding of High Path, Ravensbury and Eastfields estates is also a priority and we are working closely with Circle Merton to transform these communities by rebuilding the estates and providing the additional homes we so desperately need.

Later this year I hope that the council will support setting up a development company which could develop sites (on its own or with partners) to provide new homes for sale or rent and generate a revenue stream for future investment and increase our local housing supply.

From Councillor Charlie Chirico
To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

Can the Cabinet Member please update me on whether confirmation has yet been received from Transport for London and the GLA on funding for the Wimbledon master plan?

Reply

Crossrail 2 and our Future Wimbledon project are a priority not only for unlocking economic growth, but for managing change strategically for the next 15 years. The Council is working in close partnership with TfL on alternative options for Crossrail, however, to date there has been no financial commitment from the GLA or TfL to support the Council's regeneration team in this project. There is a commitment to share data and studies that have been undertaken for Crossrail, which is positive, but a financial contribution has, as yet, not been forthcoming.

We recognise that there is considerable local interest in the masterplan and as cabinet member I have already met with residents' groups, businesses and attended forums to start this dialogue. I will continue to do this in advance of its publication as it's important to work with them in shaping our communities and listening to their viewpoints on creating a vision for Wimbledon.

Whilst the Council is funding the project at present, we will continue to pursue other sources of funding, including TfL and the GLA, for this vital project to ensure we not only create a great plan for our town, but ensure that it's also the best value for our residents.

Councillor Abigail Jones
To the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

Would the cabinet member update council on the estates plan and the liaison he has had with Circle Merton in improving housing and building additional homes?

Reply

The council is finalising the Estates Local Plan (ELP) which will provide strategic planning guidance for any regeneration proposals for High Path, Eastfield's and Ravensbury estates which will increase the supply of new housing in Merton over the next 8-10 years.

The council consulted extensively with local residents in February and March 2016.

All responses to the consultation are now online (anonymised, with personal details removed) at www.merton.gov.uk/estatesplan.

We'd also like to thank all residents who took the time to attend the consultation events and those who submitted responses to us.

Officers have been working through the feedback and making amendments to the Estates Local Plan (where relevant) with a view to taking the ELP through the Council's decision making process this autumn.

The feedback from the consultation and the revised Local Plan will be considered by the cross-party Borough Plan Advisory Committee (November) as well as Cabinet (November) and Full Council (November).

There is regular and ongoing liaison with Circle Housing Merton Priory on a number of matters including housing supply, maintenance, delivery on the promises of the Stock Transfer Agreement and the proposed merger with Affinity Sutton and ensuring Merton's residents (tenants, leaseholders and freeholders) benefit from better services as a result.

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