

### **1. From Councillor David Simpson to the Leader of the Council**

Now that the Leader has unilaterally instructed that Wimbledon Library should be removed from the Sites and Policies document, does he agree with me that he could and should have saved himself a lot of embarrassment, saved residents a lot of hard work and saved everyone a lot of time if he had just accepted the Conservative amendment put down at the last Council meeting?

#### **Reply (Councillor Stephen Alambritis)**

I was saddened that some members of opposition parties tried to hoodwink residents about Wimbledon Library. This sort of irresponsible scaremongering can worry our residents and cause real damage to the great, award-winning library service that we have fought so hard to deliver in Merton. To ensure there was absolutely no misunderstanding, I took the decision simply to remove this site from the Sites & Policies document. But I will take no lectures on libraries from the Conservative Party when every year for the past three years they have refused to back Labour in protecting library funding. Under Labour we have actually extended library opening hours when libraries up and down the UK are closing, we have brought in free WiFi and we have the best volunteers in the country.

#### **Supplementary**

It is abundantly clear that the Leader does not understand that it was residents who came to politicians to share their concerns about Wimbledon Library, and not the other way round. Will he tonight guarantee to this Council and to the public that there will be no further U-turns on this subject by him or by his minority Administration? A one word answer, yes, will be wholly appropriate.

#### **Reply**

There is actually another Councillor David Simpson in Hampshire County Council and he likes to quote Disraeli as follows “how much easier it is to be critical than it is correct”. You are wholly incorrect. We are offering longer library hours; we have kept all our libraries open; we will keep our libraries open. We are an award winning borough for our libraries. End of story.

### **2. From Councillor Peter McCabe to the Cabinet Member for Finance**

How much has it cost council tax payers to provide support and assistance for the new group (including all staff time, recruitment costs, additional allowances and any other costs to the council)?

#### **Reply (Councillor Mark Allison)**

All political groups are provided with a group office in which to work as well as administrative and secretarial support. The total amount that will be spent by the council on such support for the Merton Coalition group during the 2013-14 financial year is estimated to be £13,731.

This is comprised of:

- Minority group leader allowance of £6,477pa (including on-costs)

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- Group Secretary recruited on scale ME8 to provide administrative and secretarial support, working 7 hours a week, employed on a temporary contract until May 2014. Total cost 27 August 2013 - 30 March 2014 estimated at £3,900 (salary plus on-costs).
- Recruitment advertisement in Wimbledon Guardian cost £1,154
- Cost of partitions, other materials and labour to create a Group Office for councillors to work in was £2,200

This does not include the cost of other council officers who have supported the new group as part of their broader job role - the cost of this cannot be estimated.

### **Supplementary**

Would the Cabinet Member agree that the Council will find it difficult to keep council tax levels as low as Labour has, if members of fringe parties put their egos before the interests of council tax payers?

### **Reply**

It's hard for me to comment on a major split on the other side of the chamber. I would express my disappointment and concern but I shouldn't be surprised. Although UKIP talks a good game about taxes we now see what they're like in reality and it shouldn't surprise me because I remember them sat there applauding as we talked about the need for intervention against military despots around the world and now they're tweeting to say that it's not the thing to do. I remember them supporting equal marriage and now it's their policy to oppose it. We shouldn't be surprised with the political expediency of them because they are political lightweights.

### **3. From Councillor Henry Nelles to the Cabinet Member for Education**

Would the Cabinet Member join with me in lamenting the proposed loss of so many trees at Pelham School if the proposed expansion goes ahead, including the large willow tree which is their school emblem?

### **Reply (Councillor Martin Whelton)**

Of course we would prefer that no trees are removed but in developing this expansion scheme officers, working very closely with Pelham Primary School, found that we had to make a choice between providing an appropriate school environment for children's learning or keeping some existing trees. The end result of the scheme is that there will in fact be more trees on the site but they will not be in the way of important children's play space areas such as games courts. The council's planning application includes a letter of support from the Pelham school governors in this respect as they felt very strongly that children's education must come first.

The permanent expansion of Pelham Primary School is an essential element of our school expansion programme to ensure children have a local school place. The school only offered to 500 metres this year with the 30 extra

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reception places included as a temporary measure, so the idea of the school returning to an admission number of 30 seems incomprehensible.

### **Supplementary**

As a school governor of Pelham, I too am co-signatory of support that children's education must come first. However you must still lament the fact that because of the Administration's opposition to building a new primary school, we are having to consider sites that are too small really for expansion and in a better world would not be part of the expansion programme. Given that expansion seems to be ongoing and small sites are now the only way forward, will he reverse his dogmatic opposition to building a new school in the borough?

### **Reply**

I have to say that this supplementary is absolute nonsense. In Abbey ward alone we have doubled primary school places in the last four years. All Saints School, Merton Abbey and now Pelham. It's really interesting you asked this question, just a few weeks ago he was sending an email to Councillor Judge asking him to cut down another tree within the school. Pelham is a heavily oversubscribed school; if we hadn't expanded to 60 places, only people within 100m would have been able to have a place this year. It was the right decision to expand Pelham and many other schools across Wimbledon. Our policy will stay as it is and obviously we hope that many residents will be able to attend schools nearest to them.

#### **4. From Councillor Iain Dysart to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health**

Since the launch of the Ageing Well programme, there has been increasing concern from some clients and their carers (e.g. Wimbledon Guild, and the closure of day care centres) that the Council is placing too much emphasis on self-reliance of customers and too little upon engagement. What steps is she taking to rectify the damage to the Council's reputation?

### **Reply (Councillor Linda Kirby)**

Whilst there have been some initial concerns, which is to be expected in any change programme, this is now dissipating as the Ageing Well programme services embed themselves successfully. This is demonstrated by the positive responses to the new Wimbledon Guild and Age UK services. The council, with the voluntary sector, made a commitment to ensure that no one is left unsupported as a result of the change and has ensured that this is the case via a comprehensive joint customer engagement, assessment and support plan process. The voluntary sector organisations involved in delivering the Ageing Well services are engaging with the wider community to ensure borough wide access.

### **Supplementary**

How meaningful is her department's engagement when it has presided over such closures such as the Cumberland Day Centre and Fanham resource

centre whilst sitting on persistent and significant adult social care underspends?

**Reply**

I think we're talking about different things in terms of your earlier question because Cumberland is a contract, it wasn't a grant. There are reasons for our underspends and they are to do with specific sums of money that have been set aside for particular purposes. It's not in our interest to be having underspends in our budget. I think as a department we do our best to come in on budget and to meet our needs. I think we've worked very hard to find the huge amount of money we've had to remove from the overall council budget and generally speaking in terms of the way we have been running our budgets, we have been pretty fair and on top of it. I think the overall situation in terms of the council's predicament in terms of funding is one that has put pressure on all budgets. I don't accept that our underspend is creating a major problem for us. I think we have to work within a difficult framework and those underspends are complicated.

**5. From Councillor Oonagh Moulton to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health**

The threat of closure to vital services at St Helier hospital is of prime concern to residents. Could the Cabinet Member tell me what action the council has taken to keep residents informed and what action the council has taken to help preserve these services?

**Reply (Councillor Linda Kirby)**

The whole Council declared its opposition to any downgrading of St Helier hospital in March 2012. Since then the council has supported public meetings arranged by the MP for Mitcham and Morden aimed to keep residents informed. It has put a piece into My Merton so that every household is made aware of the issue and the council's position on this. Finally the council has recently engaged expert advisers in order to ensure that its response to any formal consultation is well informed and based on experience of attempted reconfigurations to health services elsewhere.

**Supplementary**

Previously this Council has passed unanimous motions on protecting services at St Helier Hospital and we all agreed to take political scaremongering out of this important issue. Yet the Leader of the council has repeatedly ignored this wish with political letters to residents. Would the Cabinet Member therefore agree that she and the Leader should meet with me and other political leaders as a matter of some urgency so that we can start working together on a cross-party basis to secure the best possible services at St Helier for our residents.

**Reply**

I was under the impression we were working on a cross-party basis. I think we have done quite a lot of significant work on the Save St Helier campaign, which has been going on for a long period of time. What I am anxious about is that this is going on up and down the country, not just in our area here, that

local authorities and health authorities are facing the same problems that we're facing. That is largely due to budgets and resources and it's your government that are in charge of that. I think you should go back to them and talk about what they want to do about reducing those problems.

#### **6. From Councillor Stan Anderson to the Cabinet Member for Education**

Could the Cabinet member comment on the recent GCSE results?

#### **Reply (Councillor Martin Whelton)**

Merton schools have continued to perform well at both GCSE and A level this summer. Indeed this year was our best ever set of GCSE results.

Early indications based on provisional returns from all schools, including academies, show that:

- 64% of the students secured five or more GCSEs at grades A\*-C including English and mathematics, an improvement of 5% on last year, when they were in line with the national average;
- the proportion of students securing at least five GCSEs (not necessarily at the highest grades) also improved; on provisional data, 98% of students secured five or more GCSEs at grades A\*-G, compared with 95% last year;
- the pass rate at A level was 97%, down by 1% on last year, but the proportion of students getting the higher grades improved significantly. The percentage of A level results at grades A\*-C (at 76%) represented an improvement on last year and just a little lower than the national average of 77%;
- Half of Merton A level results were at the very highest A\*, A or B grades. On the provisional data from schools this year, 50% of the A level results were at grades A\*-B, and 24% were A\*-A grades.

#### **Supplementary**

Would the Cabinet Member agree that the results indicate our policies of zero tolerance for failing schools and of investing in extending our best schools so every child has a chance of achieving their potential?

#### **Reply**

I would like to congratulate all our young people on the GCSE results which are the best ever. Yes Councillor Anderson is completely right, we should have zero tolerance for failing schools. That's why we took the necessary action last year to make Harris Academy Morden an Academy school. That was the right decision as it's had record-breaking results this year. Likewise in terms of Harris Academy Merton, formerly Tamworth Manor High School, and St Mark's Academy, formerly Mitcham Vale. These were failing schools and we took the necessary action to make them Academies under the leadership of my colleague Cllr Andrew Judge. We have seen the huge strides those schools have made. Children should always come first in terms

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of school improvement and I warmly welcome these GCSE results and hope to see further improvements in years ahead.

### **7. From Councillor Richard Hilton to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture**

How many migrants from Romania and Bulgaria is the Cabinet member expecting to enter the borough from 1 January 2014? What preparation is the Council making to deal with the influx?

#### **Reply (Councillor Nick Draper)**

The Council generally uses the GLA population projections for forecasting purposes. These are based on data supplied by ONS, in particular Census data. These forecasts indicate that overall net migration will continue to remain relatively low in Merton. In the past few years the level of net migration has fallen slightly in Merton.

The Council will, however, monitor carefully the impact of these changes to see whether there is any increase in demand for Council services.

#### **Supplementary**

The Cabinet Member hasn't answered my question which was a simple one. Could he do so now.

#### **Reply**

Of course I can't answer that. Nobody could precisely answer that. I can tell you however, Merton's Housing Department is the best performing housing department in London, with the lowest temporary accommodation figures by a long chalk. We have extremely stringent rules about who can receive help with the provision of housing. We stick to those rules. I can also tell you that the Census figures of 2011 don't even mention Romanians or Bulgarians but they do mention 5500 white South Africans, 3000 Irish, 1800 Germans, and 1450 Australians. I have to assume that the councillor isn't particularly worried about them. He reminds me slightly of another Merton resident, Uncle Bulgaria who spent his time picking up the pieces and making them into something new. I have to say, picking on ethnic groups is the wrong kind of new as far as I'm concerned. People who do that kind of thing are the wrong kind of people to represent this borough and should disappear soon.

### **8. From Councillor Debbie Shears to the Cabinet Member for Education**

With the rise in the age young people are now required to be in full time education or training to 17, could the Cabinet Member tell me how many extra

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pupils there are now in our secondary schools and how our schools have gone about accommodating these extra pupils?

### **Reply (Councillor Martin Whelton)**

Schools are responsible for admissions into 6th forms and at this very early stage in the new term final numbers are not yet available. However with the establishment several years ago of additional 6th forms in Merton's secondary schools we expect our schools to have sufficient capacity to take additional students into Y12 this year. There will be more detailed information available at the end of the month.

### **Supplementary**

I'm really pleased that the 6<sup>th</sup> forms that I introduced and had built are catering for the extra numbers. Could he please tell me why Labour have yet to start building a new secondary school with the increased primary numbers and the increased staying on at school age. Will he commit to this chamber that Labour are planning to build the new secondary school that the parents of this borough are demanding.

### **Reply**

Firstly can I say that we do have to fill our surplus spaces; this year we have 180 spaces alone in the borough. These need to be filled. There is also the capacity to expand our existing schools. Following on from that we are aware that new provision is needed and is included within the capital budget. Can I also say as well that Councillor Shears was the Cabinet Member for Education back in 2010 who had completely failed to plan adequately for the primary school expansion; indeed there was nothing on the blocks when we took over and we had to take measures to provide for 12 forms of entry.

## **9. From Councillor Russell Makin to the Cabinet Member for Performance and Implementation**

Can the Cabinet Member update us on the work his department is doing to keep our borough clean?

### **Reply (Councillor Mark Betteridge)**

#### Street Cleaning

Merton is a clean borough and we are working hard to maintain and improve on this position.

Our Street Cleansing Section works closely with colleagues in our Enforcement and Education Section to maintain high standards of cleanliness in Merton.

The street cleaning team provide a scheduled as well as reactive service dealing with the main issues for residents such as litter and fly tipping. We are working closely with businesses including LoveWimbledon to ensure we improve the environmental quality of town centres as well as residential neighbourhoods.

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The service monitors performance through reports received via the council's customer management system as well as internal monitoring of the service. Independent monitoring of service standards is undertaken four times a year in accordance with National Indicator 195 (NI195). Visual inspections assist the council in developing action plans to deliver ongoing improvements.

See table below regarding performance compared with previous years

	<b>2008-9 Performance (figures from Audit Commission)</b>	<b>LAPS 2012-13 overall result</b>	<b>LAPS 2013-14 current performance</b>	<b>Improvement</b>
<b>Litter</b>	21%	8%	5.25%	15.75%
<b>Detritus</b>	51%	11%	5.38%	45.62%

The above scores relate to the percentage of areas inspected that were found to be unsatisfactory.

Street cleaning satisfaction levels have increased and now remain consistent. In the most recent Annual Residents' Survey, more residents in Merton are satisfied with street cleansing when compared to other London Boroughs and outer London Boroughs, who have seen a decrease in satisfaction.

Level of concern about litter has continued to drop off over recent years. The majority of residents are satisfied or very satisfied with the way the council deals with litter (62%).

The young people's survey found that we are significantly ahead of pan London satisfaction levels when it comes to street cleaning.

### Education

We work in partnership with others to change behaviours and also to increase capacity to help maintain the quality of our environment. The following are examples of initiatives undertaken by our Education section.

- roadshows around the borough educating residents about the cost of littering to the council and to the residents, and to those who are caught dropping litter
- poster campaigns across the borough explaining our approach and enforcement activity
- partnering with Keep Britain Tidy to look at how we can keep our streets clean
- partnering with Keep Britain Tidy and the Chewing Gum Action Group for a month-long Bin-it campaign targeting chewing gum litter. This



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involved installing new lamppost gum and cigarette butt bins, road shows, media relations and poster campaign

- launching a street champions scheme – we now have 80 street champions signed up who help keep the borough clean and tidy and who alert the council to anything that needs attention
- A theatre group visits 43 primary schools each year to deliver a production that covers enviro-crime issues including graffiti and litter. Anti-litter talks were also given throughout the year and we have junior warden groups in schools who raise awareness of local litter, graffiti and recycling issues and arrange community litter picks.

### Enforcement

We regularly patrol and monitor high footfall areas and enforce against those who make our streets dirty. So far this year we have issued 172 Fixed Penalty Notices for fly tipping and littering. Whenever possible we publicise our actions and successful enforcements and we were recently in the news for fining a motorist £400 for littering from her car, achieving significant coverage across London following an article in the Evening Standard:

### Future projects

We are about to commence a time-banding pilot scheme in a specific part of the Wimbledon area to improve the quality of the street scene. This will limit the time that sacks can be left on the pavement for collection.

The pilot started on Monday 9<sup>th</sup> September 2013.

### **Supplementary**

Can the Cabinet Member comment on how the new smart bins helped us keep our parks clean in the hot weather over the summer.

### **Reply**

The smart bins have certainly grabbed a lot of attention for our borough. I am glad we are able to highlight the work we are doing, because it does highlight the great parks we have in our borough, which have been full and well used over the Summer and anyone who has been in them will be delighted that we're in the fortunate position that not all other London Boroughs are in, to have well used and celebrated parks. I remember a picture being taken in Trinity ward. These new bins are called "big belly" bins and they are certainly, I believe, one part of the strategy for dealing with the future of our waste in areas such as this. They use technology to compact the waste that goes into them, so they have more capacity which has got to be a help to us. As we're looking for increasing ways to better use our facilities in the borough, that sort of smart technology enables us to direct our resources better and keep our public realm much cleaner. We're in trial phase and will look at the results before committing any further. They do appear to be operating well as an integrated approach to keeping our parks clean.

**10. From Councillor Suzanne Evans to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health**

Like me, I know the Cabinet Member is keen to see a reduction in the numbers of people who smoke in the borough. Will she therefore join me in condemning moves by the EU to ban e-cigarettes and sales of cigarettes in packets of just 10, both of which help smokers to cut down and ultimately quit?

**Reply (Councillor Linda Kirby)**

About the EU directive<sup>1</sup>

It is now almost twelve years since the EU adopted the current Tobacco Products Directive (TPD).

This Directive introduced a range of tobacco control measures including:

- a prohibition on terms such as “mild” or “light” which could mislead smokers into believing that one product is less harmful than others
- maximum levels for tar, nicotine and carbon monoxide content (TNCO)
- reporting requirements on ingredients
- minimum sized health warnings on all tobacco products except smokeless tobacco products (STP) which must carry a general health warning
- a common set of pictorial warnings which Member States can opt to use on packages.

The current Directive was the subject of legal challenges by tobacco companies, but the courts upheld the validity of the Directive.

Twelve years on, smoking remains the leading cause of preventable death in the EU and kills around 700,000 people per year. Measures taken over the years to cut smoking have had an impact: in the past decade the number of smokers in the EU has fallen from nearly 40% in the EU 15 in 2002 to 28% in the EU 27 in 2012.

However, prevalence rates among young people (15-25) at 29% are higher than for the population as whole. We know that children, not adults, start smoking: 70% of smokers begin before their 18th birthday, many younger still. The European Commission therefore has focussed much of its attention in the new draft TPD at measures which deter young people from smoking, such as tougher health warnings and bans on packages and flavourings which can be particularly attractive to young people.

Packaging and minimum number per pack

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<sup>1</sup> Source: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-%2f%2fEP%2f%2fTEXT%2bREPORT%2bA7-2013-0276%2b0%2bDOC%2bXML%2bV0%2f%2fEN&language=EN#title2>

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The draft law introduces a requirement for combined picture and text warnings covering 75% front and back on all cigarettes and RYO (Roll Your Own) packets. The proposal also prohibits a range of features which could mislead people about the products: slim cigarettes, descriptors such as natural, organic and misleading colours. *A unit pack of cigarettes would contain a minimum of 20 cigarettes. These measures would ban lipstick/perfume style cigarettes packets.*

### E-cigarettes and other NCPs (Nicotine Containing Products)

The main development since 2001 has been the introduction onto the market of electronic or “e” cigarettes which have a growing market. There is no common approach at EU level on the regulation of e-cigarettes. In about half of Member States nicotine is considered a medicine by function so technically ***e-cigarettes cannot be sold unless approved as a medicine***- like other smoking cessation products. In other Member States, including the United Kingdom, as of yet there are no specific regulations (although in UK they are due to come into force in 2016), meaning e-cigarettes are covered by the General Products Safety Directive. ***E-cigarettes not authorised as medicines cannot make claims that they help smoking cessation.***

The Commission proposes a twin track approach to the regulation of e-cigarettes and other NCP. ***Products with nicotine content over a certain level – including most e-cigarettes currently on the market - would have to be authorised as medicines.*** Those below the threshold would be allowed on the market with health warnings.

### Expert views on e-cigarettes

Tobacco control experts' views differ about e-cigarettes. There is a general consensus on the need for better regulation but questions arise on whether e-cigarettes are a useful replacement product for existing smokers assisting with harm reduction or simply a way to allow smokers to stay smokers by getting nicotine in smoke free areas and/or are a gateway product to attract new users to nicotine addiction and potentially to tobacco. There are also concerns that e-cigarettes could renormalize smoking. European Parliament's services are looking at the evidence on e-cigarettes and will make proposals in this area once the study is available and after consulting colleagues and experts.

### Merton Public Health position

Supporting Merton residents is an important public health priority and the evidence based stop smoking service, now delivered under the LiveWell banner, helped 441 Merton residents to stop smoking last year.

The latest NICE (National Institute of Health and Care Excellence) guidance (Tobacco - harm-reduction approaches to smoking)<sup>2</sup> published in June 2013

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<sup>2</sup> <http://guidance.nice.org.uk/PH45>

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states that there is no evidence on the long term safety of e-cigarettes and that they aren't currently recommended for use in evidence based stop smoking services. The UK Government has decided that the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) will regulate all NCPs (including e-cigarettes) as medicines so that people using these products have the confidence that they are safe, are of the right quality and work. MHRA have reported that they will licence/regulate e-cigarettes, but this is not expected to be done until 2016<sup>3</sup>. A Regulation Q&A factsheet is available online from MHRA at <http://www.mhra.gov.uk/home/groups/comms-ic/documents/websiteresources/con286835.pdf>. NICE have said that once MHRA start regulating e-cigarettes, they will consider a rapid update of the guidance.

NICE guidance also states that 'abrupt quitting' offers the best chance of lasting success and this is the approach being used locally to support Merton residents to stop smoking.

Supplementary

Does this Council still have any investments in tobacco companies?

Reply

It's not my area and I'm not really sure but I don't believe that we do. I was doing a bit of a trawl on the internet today and I found this which says "UKIP accepts £25,000 donation from e-cigarette firm".

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.mhra.gov.uk/NewsCentre/Pressreleases/CON286855>

### **11. From Councillor Janice Howard to the Cabinet Member for Performance and Implementation**

As part of efforts to support local high streets, Secretary of State, Eric Pickles, has recently proposed grace periods for drivers to allow them to park outside shops. He also advised councils to stop being anti-car and stop using parking as a revenue raiser. Can the Cabinet Member tell me whether Merton council will observe these recommendations from the Government?

#### **Reply (Councillor Mark Betteridge)**

This administration is not anti-car and does not use parking as a revenue raiser. Our actions have consistently provided support to both motorists and our high streets including -

1. The freezing of resident parking permit prices and, in the case of visitor permits, a reduction in prices.
2. The introduction of free parking at weekends in the majority of Council owned car parks in the 4 weeks leading up to Christmas, with the majority of these car parks being in town centres.
3. Listened to shop keepers and residents to understand their views, leading to concrete actions including:
  - introducing the ability to pay by phone for parking charges
  - commencing discussions with the private sector regarding the introduction of electronic signage indicating the availability of parking spaces
  - reviewing all the parking tariffs aiming to reduce the complexity of the tariff structure to make them more user friendly

As part of any parking management every effort is made to accommodate the needs of local businesses – i.e. the needs of passing trade and loading provisions whilst being mindful of the Council's statutory duty to maintain access and deal with congestion.

#### **Supplementary**

Given Hartfield Road, regular stories about enforcement officers parking on double yellow lines, never allowing enough parking when granting planning permission, would the Cabinet Member that this Administration is not only anti-car but also anti-resident and anti-visitor in its policies.

#### **Reply**

I have to say that it's disappointing to hear that she's ignoring reality in what's taking place. We enforce Hartfield Road bus lane because traffic congestion's a major problem for our borough. How do you tackle such a thing, if buses can't get past because of cars. You have to enforce. It's a choice you have to make. It's not popular but what else can we do about that. With regard to this idea that our officers are out there with some sort of zero tolerance approach, they're enforcing sensibly, and actually are legally allowed to park to enforce. We've introduced a freeze on residents' parking

permits. They voted against it as part of the budget, they voted against the cuts in visitors' permits, it's the great dirty secret they're trying to hide from their residents. Of course, the ones they represent in Wimbledon, in the west of the borough, who have lots of CPZs, would be delighted to know you don't believe they should have the parking permits frozen. Good luck with answering that next May.

**12. From Councillor Caroline Cooper-Marbiah to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration**

What progress has been made on the extension of the S1 bus service to Victoria Road?

**Reply (Councillor Andrew Judge)**

Officers have been working very closely with Transport for London, Ward Councillors in Lavender Fields, Colliers Wood and Cricket Green and the Lavender Fields Residents' Association regarding the timescales to complete the extension to the S1 bus service. The scheduled implementation date of March 2014 has been influenced by two key factors.

Transport for London made the decision to extend the bus route from 31st July 2014. This was approximately 2 months later than originally planned due to the need to reconsider some of the route options in the Cricket Green area.

Secondly, there are a number of changes that will need to take place on Victoria Road to facilitate the movement of buses. These include changes to parking arrangements, new bus stops, a bus standing area and alterations to traffic calming measures. It is essential that sufficient time is built into the programme to consult with local residents and other key stakeholders, so that there is a full understanding of the proposals and an opportunity to influence the design. The delay with TfL's decision has meant that it has not been possible to undertake the first stage of the consultation until after the summer break, which will mean that the bulk of the consultative work will take place between September – November 2013.

**Supplementary**

Does the Cabinet Member share my disappointment in the slight delay in TfL obtaining approval for this route and will he ensure that residents of Victoria Road are fully consulted about the location of bus stops and traffic calming. Will he also share my amusement at the Tories trying to claim credit for this before residents have even been consulted.

**Reply**

I have been disappointed by TfL's delay. I can give a commitment to further consultation. In respect of the Tories trying to claim credit, I would only say that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.

**13. From Councillor David Dean to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration**

Does this council believe in emission beating electric cars? If so, what is the strategy?

**Reply (Councillor Andrew Judge)**

Yes, the council, as a member of Plugged in Places and Source London, has adopted a two pronged approach to electric vehicles. Through the planning process it will seek to facilitate that 20% of all new parking spaces incorporate electric vehicle charging points and that a further 20% of spaces are EV ready by encouraging developers to build in the necessary infrastructure from the outset, in line with the London Plan.

In addition, the council is exploring opportunities to provide publicly available charge points either in its car parks or on-street. This work has initially focused on Wimbledon town centre, as research has identified this area as having the highest propensity for early adopters of electric vehicles.

**Supplementary**

The fact is that in 2010 we had an electric car strategy and that disappeared for three years. We're talking about the future and this is the only borough I believe that doesn't have any electric charging points at all. Rather than not telling the truth, why has it taken him so long to get this off? Is it or is it not rocket science?

**Reply**

I don't think this is the case; we do have a policy, the policy's here, stated in the answer. We're very keen on electric vehicles. We're going to require 20% of all new parking places to be electric, with a 20% set up with the infrastructure so that they can become electric. That's the way of the future, which I'm sure Cllr Dean would endorse.

**14. From Councillor Iain Dysart to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration**

Please could he explain why such slow progress has been made following Council's acceptance last autumn of the Lib Dem motion asking officers to open negotiations with the Mayor's office to extend the bike hire scheme to Merton?

**Reply (Councillor Andrew Judge)**

Merton, as part of its Expression of Interest for its "mini-Holland" submission, has included a request for funding to support the development of a cycle hire and e-bike scheme in the borough. Following confirmation from the Mayor's Cycle Commission that Merton has successfully progressed to short listed boroughs in the next stage of this process, further work will be undertaken in relation to this aspect.

**Supplementary**

## Agenda item 7 – Strategic Theme Questions from Councillors

Slow pedalling is the tone of the answer. Previous advice I was given suggests that no specific discussion took place until 7 May this year, 8 months on from the motion. May I ask him, given the specific mandate which was received from this Council last September, by when would he like to see specific progress?

### **Reply**

I do think we've made significant progress. We've been shortlisted, beating 10 other boroughs, for the mini-Holland submission. We're not going to get Council hire, the 'Boris Bike' scheme, here, until it is contiguous with the existing hire area. Wandsworth have not yet been brought within but they are being brought within and we are bidding for bicycle hire within Wimbledon Town Centre, with an innovative e-bike scheme. I think this slow pedalling quip is just inaccurate. We are committed to expanding cycling, that's what we're doing.

### **15. From Councillor Diane Neil Mills to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration (ST)**

What is the cost of (a) the acquisition of the Wimbledon Community Association building (b) demolition of the building and (c) provision of car parking facility in its place? What is the expected parking revenue to be generated at this site and is this new revenue or displacement from other parking in Wimbledon? What budget has been used to provide the capital and operating costs of this initiative?

### **Reply**

The cost of the acquisition of WCA interest was £816,666.66. The Capital Programme 2013/17 contained provision for the acquisition. This budget was slipped into 2013/14 as part of the June Financial Report to Cabinet.

The cost of demolition was approximately £50,000

In order to minimise revenue running costs and obviate the need to secure the building against squatters a sum of £50,000 was transferred from revenue reserves to fund the demolition costs of the building.

The proposal to use the site as a car park is not being pursued as further investigation showed that it was not feasible and that there is excess capacity in the council owned St George's car park opposite the site. Therefore there will not be revenue or displacement implications.

### **Supplementary**

I was surprised to read that the proposal to use the site as a car park has now been cancelled; I would have thought the economic analysis would have been carried out before the proposal was announced. Can he confirm that this was the case?

### **Reply**



The analysis has been carried out now. We didn't make the decision to purchase the holding in order for it to become a car park, that was simply going to be a temporary use. We had two-thirds of the equitable interest in this site. It made sense in the context of it becoming derelict to buy the remaining third of the equitable interest, in the proceeds of sale, from the Wimbledon Community Association. I have to clear, as the figures make clear, very much to the benefit of that association. We will now look to use that site in the most sensible way, we're looking at all the options, including future development of that site as a contributor to the Wimbledon Town Centre economy.

**16. From Councillor Russell Makin to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability**

Would the Cabinet Member join me in welcoming TfL's investment in doubling the capacity of the Mitcham to Wimbledon Tramlink and does he believe this may bring the council's aspiration for a Tramlink extension from Wimbledon to Sutton any closer?

**Reply (Councillor Andrew Judge)**

The planned capacity improvements between Mitcham and Wimbledon represent a huge endorsement of the popularity of the tram. The Council also continues to work closely with TfL in developing the tram; including supporting recent engineering feasibility and funding opportunities review for the Sutton to Wimbledon Tram. This work has helped to improve our understanding as to how the planned capacity improvements fit together with the council's aspiration to deliver further tram extensions to Merton. The proposed second stop at Wimbledon Station will be particularly helpful, by providing much needed stabling and turnaround capacity. The Council will continue to lobby the Mayor to find the necessary funding.

**Supplementary**

In tandem with our longer term plans for the Tramlink through Morden, could the Cabinet Member comment on what progress there has been on working with TfL to bring forward plans to regenerate Morden Town Centre.

**Reply**

We've agreed a planning process for Morden Town Centre. We've been engaged in very constructive discussions with them around the station site and the potential of moving the bus stopping area immediately outside the tube station which takes up so much room, so that the buses more evenly stop outside shops along London Road, which gives us the potential for more public space for pedestrians in front of the tube station. I would say very good progress, I think they understand the case for public realm improvements.

**17. From Councillor Suzanne Evans to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration**

How many retail premises in the Borough are lying empty? What is the Cabinet Member doing to support our high streets and shopping parades and help get them back into use?

**Reply (Councillor Andrew Judge)**

Business rates records identify that there are 588 empty properties in our High Streets, shopping parades and elsewhere in Merton. Many of these include office accommodation, industrial units, workshops so not all are retail. We have approximately 5,500 properties in total. The latest Retail and Town Centre Capacity Study was carried out in 2011 which details the individual town centres vacancy rates which can be found here:

[http://www.merton.gov.uk/12465\\_-\\_final\\_report\\_\\_appendices\\_consolidated\\_\\_aug\\_2011\\_.pdf](http://www.merton.gov.uk/12465_-_final_report__appendices_consolidated__aug_2011_.pdf)

In comparison to other boroughs we fair relatively well in terms of retail vacancy rates. The London average is circa 10% and nationally it is 14%. Merton's town centre average vacancy rate, identified in the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) for 2011 to 2012 was 8% overall, 1% higher than in 2011. (The Council's AMR's can be found here:

[www.merton.gov.uk/planning/planningpolicy/annual\\_monitoring\\_report](http://www.merton.gov.uk/planning/planningpolicy/annual_monitoring_report)

We also carry out quarterly surveys of our town centres and currently the level of empty retail units in the town centres is:

Wimbledon 5.7%  
Mitcham 11.2%  
Morden 4.5%  
Colliers Wood 13.3%

In terms of supporting our High Streets we are implementing a suite of business support activities. Merton is currently offering support to new businesses wanting to locate in Merton and existing businesses through the Merton Business Support Service. This is a service providing practical advice to help small businesses. We offer shop front improvement grants, business rates support, an online commercial property database and will be launching a Merton Business Directory in October 2013 which will market local business products and services. We also have two loan funds available providing micro loans of £500 to £10k, or for more established businesses, loans from £10k to £20k who demonstrate viable business plans. The Council also works in partnership to encourage businesses to save money through reducing their energy bills and this is particularly supportive of retail units such as hairdressers and laundrettes. Merton provides sector support including the retail sector through town centre breakfast forums where local businesses can discuss concerns.

We have carried out parking surveys in our town centres (in 2012) and more recently across the 34 neighbourhood shopping parades to request views with regard to sufficiency, parking location and costs. Parking services and

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Highways are implementing some and considering other options to support the local High Street economy.

Alongside the council wide support there is specific business support for Mitcham Town Centre through the Mayor's Outer London Funding to enhance the market stalls and support the shops in the town centre with initiatives such as point of sales advice, cash flow and product advice. Previously enhancements were carried out in Raynes Park and Wimbledon town centre and plans are being prepared for the regeneration of Morden and Colliers Wood.

The Business Rates team provide hardship relief to some businesses that meet our criteria for assistance.

Details of the council wide business support available can be found here: [www.merton.gov.uk/business/merton\\_business\\_support\\_guide.pdf](http://www.merton.gov.uk/business/merton_business_support_guide.pdf)

### **Supplementary**

I do voluntary work with the long-term unemployed, helping them to set up their own businesses, so when I read that there are 588 empty business properties in our borough, I'm very disappointed not to see anything about pop up shops. A lot of them are retail businesses, we all know they're very difficult to set up. It would be a great opportunity for these people to have a bricks and mortar retail opportunity at low risk and low cost. Can we please investigate how we can set up pop-up shops for these people who desperately want to work and achieve something.

### **Reply**

We have a very good policy in respect of unemployed people and people who want to start businesses. We've been working in Mitcham Town Centre with a pop up shop idea as part of Mitcham Means Business which has proved very popular. We're about to engage in a food market there and one thing that has been growing are new food markets in the evening in areas that are not well used. As part of that we're looking at a proposal for a new covered market to encourage that kind of retail opportunity. 588 empty properties is too many, and we can't be complacent but we are in a better position than much of London .

### **18. From Councillor Henry Nelles to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration**

Can the Cabinet Member explain why, in the parking on neighbourhood shopping parades consultation that concluded in April, several neighbourhood parades appear to have been excluded from the consultation altogether including one in his, and my, ward between the Cecil Road to Merton Road junction?

### **Reply (Councillor Andrew Judge)**

The consultation that took place was on the shopping areas that are currently designated as 'neighbourhood parades' within Merton's Unitary Development

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Plan Adopted (2003). There were no exclusions, all 34 of the designated neighbourhood parades were included in the survey. While shops are present at the junction mentioned it is not possible to survey parking outside of every retail unit. Nevertheless we aim to reach general and specific conclusions with regard to what needs to be done with regard to parking and its support role in ensuring communities are well served by shopping.

### **Supplementary**

Just in terms of parking, I recall that the Labour Party were dragged kicking and screaming to a consultation. The only activity I've seen on that consultation is a proposal to build on the Wimbledon Theatre car park. Would he agree with me that he is indeed anti-motorist and doesn't really care about the parking conditions for our neighbourhood shopping parades and town centres.

### **Reply**

We've actually been working on shopping parades in different parts of the borough. We've worked with businesses to improve the local parking conditions and we've made amendments to local parking schemes to support short-time parking by customers. We've recently worked with a business very close to the question asked, in Kingston Road and we want to improve parking conditions there.

### **19. From Councillor Sam Thomas to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability**

Could he comment on how the RideLondon event went over the summer?

### **Reply (Councillor Andrew Judge)**

The Prudential RideLondon event was a two-day world-class cycling festival which took place over the weekend of 3 and 4 August. It comprised of four separate events: Prudential RideLondon FreeCycle, the Prudential RideLondon Grand Prix, the Prudential RideLondon-Surrey 100 and the Prudential RideLondon-Surrey Classic. Merton was part of the Prudential RideLondon – Surrey 100 for amateur riders and the Prudential Ride London – Surrey Classic for professional riders. On the 4th August 15,883 amateur riders passed through the borough on their way back to the finish line to receive their medals in advance of the elite cyclists coming through in their various pelotons with a cavalcade of support vehicles. For a unique moment the 'Tour of Merton' came through at high speed. Local people turned out in their thousands to enjoy the festivities and see the event as well as visitors from further afield and Merton people welcomed them with open arms and celebrated together. Also local people were participants in the amateur race including one member of staff who was selected to ride in aid of the Mayor of Merton's Charities and also Cllr Neil Mills:- congratulations to both of them. It was a wonderful day with the business communities in Raynes Park and Wimbledon Town Centre getting fully involved in local celebrations with their communities and visitors to the borough. There were a few people who had problems with the event and in particular the vehicle crossing points, but all

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these problems have been reported back to the organisers for their consideration and improvements in planning their event for future years.

### **Supplementary**

Would the Cabinet Member and all councillors join me in congratulating staff in the work they put into this event. Would he agree it shows this borough's ability to host a world –class sporting event and encourage sustainable modes of transport such as cycling.

### **Reply**

It does indeed demonstrate that. At first the route wasn't going to through Merton and we engaged in a comprehensive lobbying strategy over the period of about a week to ensure that the route did go through Merton, and long may it do so, as it was a very successful event, welcomed by thousands of residents, including local businesses and LoveWimbledon. Now we have two world-class sporting events in the borough on a regular basis.

### **20. From Councillor Rod Scott to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration**

Does the Cabinet Member believe motorists should automatically be held responsible for any accidents involving a cyclist?

### **Reply (Councillor Andrew Judge)**

No, my view is that the current law relating to careless and dangerous driving is fit for purpose. Obviously, I am aware that there is a campaign to look at so called 'strict liability' laws. However, the legal situation in other European countries, which are often cited, is complex. Any changes would be a matter for parliament, ideally following detailed consideration by a body like the Law Commission. The police investigate and ultimately the courts determine responsibility for road traffic incidents and this depends upon the facts of each case. The council is not involved in determining this but works hard to ensure that our roads are as safe as possible for all users.

### **Supplementary**

Is the Cabinet Member hoping that the proposal going to the LibDem Conference to land all the liability on the motorist is roundly rejected by them?

### **Reply**

What goes to the LibDem Conference is a matter of supreme irrelevance.

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