

Colliers Wood and North East Mitcham Community Forum  
22 October 2013  
Chair's Report

Councillor Greg Udeh chaired the meeting. 15 residents attended, as well as seven other councillors and officers from the council and its partners.

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

## **Leaders Update**

The Leader of Merton Council, Councillor Stephen Alambritis, congratulated the Colliers Wood Residents Association and local groups for developing such a vibrant community. Stephen said it was crucial to build voluntary capacity so that the Council could engage with local communities. Councillor Alambritis said that having frozen council tax for the last three years he wanted to freeze it again for 2014/15. He was proud that there have been no library closures whilst he was leader, and was delighted to announce that Donald Hope library would start opening on Fridays from January 2014. Stephen was also pleased that Colliers Wood Rec has received a Green Flag.

Another important local issue is school places. The Council has worked hard with local schools to increase the number of forms of entry at primary school level to keep up with demand. Plans for increasing capacity at secondary level were now being considered.

Adopting a partnership approach with volunteers has been crucial for the council. This had helped the Council win the Best Achieving Council award at the Municipal Journal Awards, a huge success for Merton.

In response to a question about the Colliers Wood Tower Stephen said he was pleased to see that a contract to build 150 flats has been issued to Western Homes and that all the asbestos has been removed from the building. Progress has been made because of the pressure from the Council and the local MP, Siobhain McDonagh.

In response to a question about publicising the meeting the Chairman said any suggestions for how to market the meeting were welcome and could be sent to [getinvolved@merton.gov.uk](mailto:getinvolved@merton.gov.uk)

## **Connecting Colliers Wood**

Paul McGarry and Pip Howson from the Future Merton team explained what the Connecting Colliers Wood programme was trying to achieve and how residents could get involved.

The programme brings together funding from the Mayor of London and the Council through planning gain on the Tower. The project area includes the

station and tower area, Baltic Close, Wandle Park, Priory Road, and Wandle waterside at Merton Bus Garage / Sainsbury's.

An initial consultation had asked residents to describe what they felt were the strengths and weaknesses of the area. Residents identified strengths as the history, the parks, the transport links, the library and crucially the people. Weaknesses included the Tower, the A24 and difficulties faced by local businesses.

Outline designs would be put out for consultation in November. The designs draw heavily on the history of the area, going back to Roman times, and aim to make it easier for pedestrians and cyclists to move around the town centre.

The consultation would involve a leaflet being sent to every household in the area and being made available in local businesses, the library and community centre. More detailed information would be available online and both the leaflet and the website will include a survey for residents and local businesses to complete. There would also be a number of public events:

- 7.30-9pm 21 November – a design workshop at Merton Vision
- 11am – 3pm 30 November – drop-in session at Sainsbury's
- 2-3.30pm 5 December – coffee afternoon at Donald Hope Library
- 4-7pm 5 December – drop in session for local businesses at Coffee in the Wood.

### **Healthwatch Merton**

Adele Williams, Information and Outreach Worker for Healthwatch Merton outlined the role of the new service and how residents could get involved. Healthwatch Merton is the new independent consumer champion for health and social care services. Healthwatch is made up of a national body – Healthwatch England, and local bodies for each council area. Healthwatch Merton's role is to listen to the voices of health and social care users, gather evidence and use these to influence commissioners and decision makers.

Healthwatch will be undertaking a series of outreach activities to raise awareness and get residents involved in setting priorities. There would also be a number of roles for volunteers to get involved with.

Healthwatch will not be providing health services or dealing with complaints. There is a new complaints advocacy service, run by VoiceAbility, which can help those making a complaint about an NHS service. Please see <http://nhscomplaintsadvocacy.org/> or call 0300330 5454.

For more information about Healthwatch Merton, or to sign up for their newsletter, please see <http://www.healthwatchmerton.co.uk/> or call 020 8685 2282.

In response to questions Adele said that whilst Healthwatch cannot deliver changes to services itself it can use it's position to influence decision makers and try and get them to change services. They would be working with a wide

range of existing local organisations including Age UK. To start with they have been looking at key priorities identified by LINK Merton including dementia, mental health, patient participation groups, and services for BME residents. New priorities will be identified through research and engagement with communities over the next few months. Raising awareness of Healthwatch and how residents could get involved was crucial and would be a big priority over the next few months. A newsletter would be available shortly.

Asked about Better Services Better Value Adele said that Healthwatch's role would be to represent the views of residents and patients so research would play a crucial role in gathering that evidence.

### **Planning Update**

Colliers Wood Tower – in addition to Cllr Alambritis' earlier comments Paul McGarry said that the engineers had looked at the cladding issues, and now plan to remove all the existing concrete cladding and replace it with floor to ceiling windows.

Paul McGarry explained some of the recent changes to planning rules. Since May 2013 rules on extensions had been relaxed. The size permitted had been doubled, and planning permission replaced with a 'pre-approval' system. The new system means that extensions will only be reviewed by planning officers if objections are received from neighbours. It is essential that neighbours who are unhappy with proposals make their objections known. The deadline for the planning process has also been reduced from 8 weeks to 6 weeks with assumed approval in the cases where a deadline is missed. These changes only affect extensions to the rear of properties, garden developments remain unchanged.

Paul also updated the meeting on the Rediscover Mitcham and OneMitcham projects. Paul said that they have learnt a lot from supporting businesses in Mitcham and hope that this model can be used elsewhere in the borough, including in Colliers Wood.

Asked about the Wandle Industrial Museum Paul said that the Museum is currently assessing the Ravensbury Mill site and hope to be moving in 2014. Merton Priory Trust had been successful in applying for Heritage Lottery Funding to develop a visitor centre for the Chapter House site. They are expected to apply for planning permission in 2014. There have not been any plans submitted for use of the empty retail units below the Holiday Inn and this might depend on the retail offer in the Tower. Asked about use of shop fronts Paul explained that retailers were entitled to display goods on their own land and it would only become a problem if they encroached onto public the pavement.

### **Soapbox**

A number of opportunities for young people and small businesses were raised.

Pop-Up Talent Shop would be holding a showcase day in Mitcham on 13 November for 16-25 years olds. More details are available at [www.popuptalent.org](http://www.popuptalent.org)

Get Started offers small loans to for 18-30 year olds who want to start up their own business. More information is available at <http://getstarted.ioee.co.uk/>

Merton Council also offers loans to small businesses. More information can be found at <http://www.merton.gov.uk/business/businesssupport/businesssupportguide.htm>

7 December is being marked as Small Business Saturday. This is already being marked in Morden but if Colliers Wood businesses would like to come together to plan an event this could be supported.