

RAYNES PARK COMMUNITY FORUM
28 JULY 2020

(7.15 pm - 9.00 pm)

PRESENT Councillors Councillor Stephen Crowe (in the Chair),

1 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS (Agenda Item 1)

The meeting was held via Zoom, and chaired by Councillor Stephen Crowe with Chris Edge from the Raynes Park Association. 16 residents 6 councillors attended on Zoom with 77 additional views on [YouTube](#). The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained how the meeting would work.

2 MERTON COUNCIL RESPONSE TO COVID-19 (Agenda Item 2)

Councillor Stephen Alambritis, Leader of Merton Council gave an update on how Merton was dealing with COVID-19. Sadly 202 residents died from COVID-19, and the leader expressed his condolences to their friends and family. It is clear that COVID-19 is having a disproportionate impact on BAME residents. The Public Health team is working on how we can address these inequalities.

Residents may have seen in the news the iconic image of a Black Lives Matter protester, Patrick Hutchinson, carrying a counter-protester to safety. Patrick works with Hercules Wimbledon Working and we are looking at how to recognise his contribution.

The council has been supporting 7019 residents who have been shielding, with each of them directly contacted. Council staff were redeployed to support tackling pandemic, for example the Bailiffs Service has been distributing food and other essential supplies. Support from Foodbanks in Merton has also been essential.

PPE stock is in place in Merton and has been provided to care homes, we have worked across London boroughs to jointly procure 50million items. We have also accommodated 52 rough sleepers, 6 refused to be housed. We are currently working to retain the 52 in accommodation.

Reopening services

Schools have had to decide on how to meet government guidelines to accommodate some year groups and will need to develop plans for September.

Wimbledon, Colliers Wood and Mitcham libraries have reopened with a restricted service, the remaining libraries will open in August. Garth Road Recycling and Reuse centre has opened with a booking system. All Parks facilities now all reopened.

High streets are beginning to get back to business. Support has been made available including grants to small businesses, with Merton the 3rd quickest in London to distribute the funds. Additional discretionary grants are now being assessed along with the Chamber of Commerce and MVSC.

We have agreed an Emergency Transport Strategy to support social distancing and encourage active travel. This includes 28 new school streets funded by Government.

Local government has been urged to do what is required and Merton has done so, Government has provided some funding but Merton is still facing a £20m gap and there are similar issues in all councils.

Cllr Alambritis expressed thanks to Merton Mutual Aid, Wimbledon Guild for supporting residents, Wimbledon Foundation for providing funding and to Stephen Hammond MP, and Wimbledon Councillors for their support.

Getting the economy going will be a huge challenge, both nationally and locally. Encouraging development and employment opportunities in the borough will be important, for example AFC Wimbledon returning to Plough Lane, Francis Grove, and YMCA scheme should all generate jobs including apprentices.

Local government has been urged to do what is required and has done so, and whilst Government has provided some funding there is still a £20m gap for Merton Council and similar issues in all councils.

Cllr Alambritis expressed thanks to Merton Mutual Aid, Wimbledon Guild and other local groups for supporting residents. He also thanked the Wimbledon Foundation, AELTC, Love Wimbledon, and local residents associations for their contributions. Finally Cllr Alambritis thanked Stephen Hammond MP, and councillors for their work.

Non-COVID issues

Cabinet has passed a Climate Emergency strategy, which will go to full Council in September. Delivering the plan will need additional support from Government to meet its targets. There is a £88m cost to make the Council carbon neutral by 2030 whilst for a borough as a whole the cost could be £3bn.

The annual council has been postponed until September and hopefully it will involve physical attendance for the benefit of the new Mayor, Cllr Sally Kenny, but it could be virtual. Cllr Alambritis paid tribute to Cllr Janice Howard for her work during a not

normal year. Subject to the council make-up from 2022 there could be an opportunity for both to perhaps serve again.

There has been an issue with unlicensed musical events taking place in Merton and we have been working with Met Police to stop these dangerous events. Sally Benatar from Met Police stepping down, with new borough commander joining soon. Wimbledon Police station staying open 24/7 to cover Merton and Wandsworth but the Met Police are still working on overall property strategy. Mitcham will remain a 9-5 operation.

Cllr Stephen Crowe thanked the Leader and other councillors for supporting residents.

A resident asked how the Council can support care homes, and in response Cllr Alambritis said sadly 38 have died in care home settings. Merton Council has good relations with care homes, we have made sure they have sufficient PPE and will continue to work closely with them. Adult Social Cares officers work closely with care homes.

A resident asked if the Council can use the emergency powers to lift parking restrictions in order to help small businesses. Cllr Alambritis said that as a landlord the Council has waived rents for 3 months but will need to start secure income for the council in the future. There are also business rate holiday and deferral schemes. There is a tension between the desire to walk/cycle and parking provision. We have removed some parking spaces to accommodate social distancing on the pavement. We will keep the current 20 minute free spaces but can always look at other options. We will continue to support shop local campaigns and look at what other support we can give.

3 LOCAL ECONOMIC RECOVERY (Agenda Item 3)

Diana Sterck, Merton Chamber of Commerce gave an update on the state of business in lockdown and the impact of COVID-19. Diana said that business mood was desperate, no one had ever experienced this before. In Merton there are more than 7000 VAT registered businesses, and more than 4,000 'home based' businesses (self-employed). There has been help for businesses including Small Business Rate Relief, Leisure/Retail Rate Relief and the Business Retention Scheme (Furlough). Additionally applications for a Discretionary Grants fund are being assessed by a panel involving Diana, Merton Voluntary Service Council and Merton Council. The applications have highlighted the huge variety of businesses and the difficulties they have faced. These grants will be critical for these businesses. Some sectors are still not able to trade, creative industry and events, and are desperate, including those in their supply chains. Other businesses have been able to continue to trade and are even thriving.

The Chamber response has included 'Reach out and Connect', 21 webinars on Zoom, with 535 attendees, helping to explain grant/relief schemes and government guidance. This has included advice on reopening requirements supported by Merton Council's Regulatory Services. The Chamber has also held Business leader forums, bringing together larger businesses like Close Brothers, and New Wimbledon Theatre. The Chamber is also supporting businesses to prepare for Brexit in 2021.

Quite a few businesses have fallen through the gaps in support because they are too big for the rate relief or not in targeted sectors. The Chamber has worked with MPs and London government to lobby Government. We have also worked closely with London Chamber of Commerce who are able to get information quickly from Government.

The Chamber has updated its [website](#) after each government briefing to keep businesses up to date and has also worked with businesses to adapt, for example producing food for NHS staff, or making masks and PPE supplies.

Merton Giving has adapted to respond to COVID-19, helping charitable organisations cope with the challenge. Merton Giving receives funds from Merton Council, Wimbledon Foundation, MOAT and Clarion Housing as well as local businesses who have helped fundraise.

In response to a question about the discretionary grants including a criteria for closing East/West gap Diana said we are still considering applications. Key criteria is fixed property costs but applicants have also set out how they are employing or supporting economy in East of the borough. Cllr Alambritis that this criteria is more relevant to charitable businesses.

A resident asked about the 'Eat out to help out' scheme and Diana said that Love Wimbledon is focusing on this in Wimbledon, whilst the Chamber will be promoting across the rest of the borough. The Chamber will continue to promote shop local messages.

4 IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON MERTON (Agenda Item 4)

Barry Causer, Public Health, Merton Council gave a presentation on the impact of the COVID-19 on the health of residents in Merton. The presentation is attached to this report.

To date there have been 995 positive tests in Merton, 25th of the 32 boroughs in London per 100,000. There have been 204 deaths, with a significant number of additional deaths in March and April, many non-COVID. The additional non-COVID deaths may be due to some under reporting in care homes and other places and

indirect deaths due to not accessing healthcare when they needed it. Number of deaths is now in line with the same time period in 2019.

COVID-19 has not been evenly distributed with a higher death rate in East of borough than the west and higher incidence for BAME residents and those in high risk occupations.

Outbreak control

There is now low infection rates in London but we need to prepare for new clusters. Local authorities are working with the NHS and the national contact tracing scheme to track patterns. Merton Council is also making contact with high risk settings and working with them. Testing is essential to this so very important residents understand where to [get a test](#) if they show symptoms or have in been in contact with someone who has COVID-19. We are also preparing for the autumn/winter as there will be additional risks associated with flu and cold season.

There are community actions that can help prevent the spread:

- Handwashing, face-coverings, social distancing, testing.
- Be aware of potential fraud
- Use GP and other services
- Get COVID-19 fit – stop smoking, lose weight, get fitter
- Manage long-term conditions
- Flu jabs
- Support for mental health

5 WIMBLEDON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING GROUP (Agenda Item 5)

Lynne Gordon and Suzanne Grocott gave a presentation on the work of the Wimbledon Neighbourhood Planning Group (WNPG). The presentation is attached to the report.

Change in Wimbledon was fairly rapid, and it has been identified as an area of opportunity in London Plan. We also need to consider impact of climate emergency and impact of online retail on the High Street. Neighbourhood Planning is about empowering the local community and working out what local people want in their area. Neighbourhood Planning allows the community to set policies on building type, design, public safety, sustainability, green spaces, and heritage. By bringing together different interest groups we can support growth and make sure best of Wimbledon is retained.

The WNPG is now looking to be designated as a Neighbourhood Forum. This needs to define the boundary of the area, build a network of community and organisational representatives. The area proposed is a larger Wimbledon area from the Wandle to

the Common, from Merton Park to Wimbledon Park. We are having conversations with groups in this area, about if they want to be included. We need the community to become members which is free to do so and can be done [online](#).

Tony Edwards gave a Raynes Park perspective. He said initial discussions have been taken place to discuss options and if there is support for a Neighbourhood Plan in Raynes Park. A plan could help bring the community together and prepare for Crossrail Rail 2. We will need to be clear with the community what can be achieved. We hope to progress once lockdown has finished.

6 STATION, STREET MANAGEMENT & RP IMPROVEMENTS (Agenda Item 6)

Chris Larkman said that thanks to Stephen Hammond MP the RPA now has a helpful contact at Network Rail (NR). They did clear the overgrowth but we still chasing NR over embankment on the north side. On the Southside the portion of land being transferred to Merton Council to make more room for pedestrians is still not completed and we need update from Paul McGarry. The front of the station needs investment as well, including removing old scaffolding and the fence on platform 1.

On the Rainbow estate there have been improvements to the road leading to the estate including six parking spaces to pick up and drop off at the station, but there are currently no parking restrictions in place. Chris is trying to bring NR, Rainbow and Merton Council together to sort this out.

We are still trying to fix a location for the Farmers market as it may need permission from NR rather than Merton Council.

Tony Edwards said the RPA has submitted to CIL funding for some of the remaining elements of the RP Enhancement plan.

Cllr Alambritis said he was happy for Council to get involved to help push landowners.

7 PLANNING UPDATE (Agenda Item 7)

No update was available.

8 FLAT CONVERSIONS (Agenda Item 8)

Chris Larkman said that in the Apostles a number of flat conversions have been permitted. Apostles Residents Association has produced a report on development in the area and submitted to Merton Council for consideration in the new local plan.

9 DATE OF NEXT MEETING (Agenda Item 9)

Councillor Crowe thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.

Future meetings:

17 September 2020; 3 December 2020; 30 March 2021, all at 7.15pm in Raynes Park Library, subject to COVID-19 restrictions.

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