

7a: ST Councillor Questions

From Councillor Laxmi Attawar to the Cabinet member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency

Can the Cabinet member give an update on Lower traffic Neighbourhoods in Merton, and the benefits to improving air quality?

Reply

An update on the Council's active travel measures, including Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs), was presented to the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 19th January 2021.

<https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/documents/s36456/Active%20Travel%20SCSP%2019%20Jan%2021.pdf>

Merton has a number of pre-existing Low Traffic Neighbourhoods which have been successful and welcomed by residents. These include:

- **South Wimbledon:**
Hamilton, Hardy, Nelson, Victory, Trafalgar Hotham, Norman, Grove, Laburnum, Leyton and Milner Roads.
- **Colliers Wood:**
East and West of the High Street are all no-through traffic neighbourhoods.
- **Mitcham:**
Lewis Road, Love Lane, Mitcham Park, Sandy Lane, Tamworth Park St Georges Rd and Ashbourne Rd.

As part of the Council's active travel response to Covid-19, we secured funding to roll out further LTNs.

New LTNs have been introduced under experimental orders and the consultation on these schemes are live. The locations are:

- Commonside East
- Links Rd
- Seeley Rd
- Sandy Lane
- Botsford Rd

In December 2021, we secured additional funding and are currently consulting with residents to introduce further LTNs in:

- Merton Park
- Haydon Park
- Raynes Park.

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Low Traffic Neighbourhoods are also part of the Council's response to the Climate Emergency. LTNs create more space for people to participate in active travel such as walking, cycling and scooting. With fewer people driving and opting for active travel choices, carbon emissions are reduced, helping to mitigate against climate change.

Whilst primarily a road-safety intervention, there are secondary benefits to quieter streets including less noise, improved air quality and creating a safer environment for people to walk and cycle in their local area.

A low traffic neighbourhood (LTN) is a residential area, bordered by main roads (the places where buses, lorries, non-local traffic should be), where "through" traffic is discouraged or removed. Strategic road closures (like bollards or planters) prevent through traffic. Every street is still accessible to residents by vehicle.

There are many ways to design a low traffic neighbourhood, but the main principle is that every resident can drive onto their street, get deliveries etc., but it's harder or impossible to drive straight through from one main road to the next.

The aims of LTNs include:

- deterring traffic from diverting from congested main roads to residential streets as rat runs
- making it safer for pedestrians to social distance, for instance by walking in the street where pavements are narrower than the recommended two metres
- encouraging people to use bikes where possible by reducing traffic that many find intimidating and off-putting for cycle journeys, especially short, local trips
- encouraging people to walk for short journeys such as local shopping trips rather than taking the car
- securing gains made during lockdown, such as cleaner air, neighbourliness and reduced noise
- reducing traffic on residential streets, creating low-traffic corridors across Merton so more people can walk and cycle as part of their daily routine.

Evidence from Waltham Forest who introduced several LTNs saw that around 15 percent of non-local traffic from LTNs disappeared entirely as the drivers adjust their routes and behaviours. This led to a reported 90% reduction in household exposure to nitrogen dioxide after Waltham Forest Council installed over 40 filters in residential areas. LTNs also minimise the growing propensity for in-car navigation systems to divert traffic away from main roads.

<https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/media/3843/lcc021-low-traffic-neighbourhoods-intro-v8.pdf>

Research also indicates that annually, up to 10,000 early deaths across Greater London are attributed to poor air quality. Reducing the dominance of cars in our residential areas counters this trend.

<https://www.merton.gov.uk/assets/Documents/Merton%20AQAP%2020182023.pdf>

From Cllr Nick McLean to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health:

Does the Cabinet Member agree with me that two air quality monitoring stations in the borough is insufficient, and if so does the Cabinet Member accept that the council needs to improve air quality monitoring in the borough?

Reply

In recent years Merton has reviewed and increased air pollution monitoring in the borough, we have an established diffusion tube network covering 50 key locations. In addition we have been monitoring at schools in areas that have poor air quality. We also actively support citizen science monitoring with various community groups.

The two automated air quality monitoring stations are a part of this regime and also link into the strategic London air network. We have secured funding for an additional automated site through section 106 and we will be looking to install this in the near future. (Plough Lane area)

In addition we are working on a smarter cities programme over the next 2 years to look at capturing data on transport and travel activities in and through the borough and link this new low cost real-time air quality sensors that will further enhance our understanding of pollution in the borough. This will include pollutants that we need more information on, such as particulate matter.

Councillor Nick Draper to Cabinet Member for Finance

Following the news that Merton Council has invested the highest proportion of council budget into solar energy since 2015, can the Cabinet member outline the business-case analysis behind their investment in sustainable energy schemes.

Reply

The business case for the installation of the solar panels was based around three areas of payback –

- Central government Feed In Tariffs (FIT) income, which provides a secured cost per kWh of generated electricity over 20 or 25 years, even where that electricity is used on site.
- Utility savings created by solar panels generating free electricity for the site. Any excess power not used on site is exported to the national grid, and a section of the utility savings being diverted to the corporate budgets for providing a return on investment.

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- Schools agreed to sign up to Power Purchase Agreements (PPA), by which the council issues a bill for renewable power used on site. Schools will NOT be charged for electricity which is exported to grid, only for solar generated power they actually use on site. The p/kWh rate for this is always lower than the rate they would pay for this electricity via the Corporate Electricity contract, thus providing a saving for schools and a return on investment for the council. It was agreed that schools would receive a period of free electricity from the panels before the PPAs were implemented.

Overall payback on the systems varies between 10 and 12 years depending on the FIT rate secured at the time of install and the cost of the system installed, with both seen to drop over the lifespan of the project.

From Cllr Anthony Fairclough to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment and Green Spaces

I note in the Strategic Theme report "Councillors are encouraged to drive changes to encourage carbon reduction in their areas of responsibility and within their wards, promote the main themes within the climate strategy, and use available funding to support projects that align with the objectives of the climate change policy and co-benefits". Could the Cabinet member list some ways that he feels Councillors could do this?

Reply

When the Climate Delivery Plan was adopted in January, I was delighted to hear how committed Cabinet colleagues were to tackling climate change.

Merton's Climate Strategy and Action Plan sets out actions that apply to every individual, business and organisation in Merton. Councillors have an influential role to champion these actions through their discussions within their ward, and through their responsibilities to the Council.

Councillors can attend and encourage residents and businesses to participate in the Climate Action Group, set up to foster community-led action to reduce carbon emissions. The next meeting, on the 24th February will be about creating a green and circular economy.

Councillors can champion borough initiatives that are likely to reduce emissions, such the air quality action plan and school streets programme.

Councillors can also support funding of carbon emission reduction such as ward allocation and bids to the Neighbourhood Fund that reduce emissions. Last year, the Neighbourhood Fund provided around £400,000 to climate emergency related projects across the borough.

From Cllr Najeeb Latif to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment and Green Spaces:

Looking at the latest available data, why has the target for fly tip removal been missed in the months of September, October and November 2020?

Reply

In line with the National trend, we have been responding to a sustained increase in the volume of fly-tipped waste incidents across the borough. The regularity of waste deposited is becoming a common form of anti-social behaviour, which is damaging to the overall image of our Public Realm. In recent months we have seen a 35% increase above target in the number of reported incidents. This increase is outside of the control of our service provider who are tasked in the removal of these fly-tips, creating additional pressure on the service.

In terms of the rectification period of 24hrs which I acknowledge has been missed in September - November, it is important to highlight that additional data analysis is required to fully understand the actual level of performance being achieved and any mitigating circumstances leading to a missed response time. An example of this is when the crews identify Hazardous material within the fly-tip which then needs to be cleared by a specialist contractor. At present, we do not have the design solution within the software to re-assign tasks and as such the task remains open until such time the fly tip is removed. In this example our service providers crew may have been at the location within the allotted time frame, however, the fly-tip was not removed until such time that the specialist contractor was informed and on site. This is equally the same for larger industrial fly-tips which following a site inspection and assessment that a specialist vehicle needs to be deployed with the appropriate lifting equipment to rectify the reported issue.

We are working hard with our contractor to ensure the service standard is met.

From Councillor Aidan Mundy to the Cabinet member for Local Environment and Green Spaces

Was there any interruption to waste collections in Merton over the Christmas period?

Reply

I am pleased to advise that that our service provider, Veolia, deployed a full waste collection service over the Christmas period.

Following our agreed schedule, the service did not operate on Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's day. The Christmas collection schedule can be challenging due to the increased volume of waste being generated by our households, but Veolia has successfully deployed the necessary additional resource required in order to ensure that the disruption from the revised collection schedule and day change was kept to a minimum, taking into account the loss of 3 Bank Holidays.

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I believe it is important to note the continued professionalism demonstrated by both our waste collection and street cleansing crews in delivering these critical front-line services during these unprecedented time. I would like to place on record our appreciation to our front-line workers for their continued commitment in delivering the service.

From Cllr Jenifer Gould to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency

Following the cross-party Climate Emergency declaration made in July 2019, could the Cabinet Member please outline specific action that has been taken to mitigate the negative effects of climate change and detail the resulting benefits to the environment?

Reply

Following the declaration of a climate emergency in July 2019, we worked with residents who volunteered their time as part of Merton's Climate Emergency Working Group to help shape Merton's Climate Strategy and Action Plan, which was adopted in November 2020. We'd like to thank everybody who volunteered their time and skills to participate in the Climate Emergency Working Group and to everybody who fed back to the consultations on the climate strategy and action plan. [Climate change \(merton.gov.uk\)](https://www.merton.gov.uk/climate-change)

The next step from the climate strategy and action plan is the implementation of the Climate Delivery Plan – year 1 which sets out the council's climate change priority actions for 2021, and was approved by Cabinet in January.

We are delighted that so many residents volunteered their time to participate in the Climate Action Group Launch that took place on 27th Jan 2021. The group will be meeting regularly this year to develop community-led projects to reduce greenhouse gas emissions which are outside the scope of the council's control and will help us reach our 2050 net zero carbon target.

We've worked with other boroughs to develop planning policies on climate change that are consistent with our carbon reduction targets, for new developments in Merton's new Local Plan, and the public consultation has just closed.

We have submitted a bid of around £0.5 million for the Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund to reduce carbon emissions from our children's centres and community buildings. This should also help to reduce energy bills for the occupiers as well as reduce emissions.

A successful bid to the Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery Scheme boosted funding to create warmer homes for those in need through the installation of energy saving measures which also reduce carbon emissions.

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We are working closely with London Councils and other London boroughs on the Covid19 green recovery, leading regional discussions on supporting London's Green New Deal to double the size of the green economy. This may lead to the development of cross borough working to reduce the low carbon skills gap.

The council has also moved over to a green energy provider which means we are now purchasing electricity sourced wholly from renewable energy.

The covid transport strategy has accelerated the implementation of 26 school streets 4 low traffic neighbourhoods and improvements to a number of cycle lanes, which help to reduce car use and support active travel.

The Council has already implemented revised parking charges in Jan 2020 to reduce carbon and improve air quality and we are advancing our plans to refine this and introduce emissions based charging in 2021.

We have initiated a number of campaigns to support greener behaviour amongst our partners and Merton residents. One example is supporting GP practices to have climate champions more sustainable workplaces.

Another is to encourage residents to participate in the London Mayor's "Solar Together" help to buy scheme, which opens to new registrations from 15th February.

If you would like to find out how you can help tackle the +95% of carbon emissions in Merton that our outside the council's control, the Council will be highlighting some of the steps you can take to reduce your carbon footprint as part of our climate change communications campaign throughout 2021. The campaign will be focussing on a different theme each month (February's theme is green business and investments) and you can find out more on our website [Climate change pledges \(merton.gov.uk\)](https://www.merton.gov.uk/climate-change-pledges)

From Cllr Daniel Holden to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency

Can the Cabinet Member for the climate emergency confirm that trees are important?

Reply

Yes trees are important and we are thankful that Merton is already one of the greenest boroughs in London with one of if not the largest tree canopy cover.

Merton's Urban Forest Canopy is between **20.5 % and 24%** of the land surface of the borough. Green Infrastructure of all types – trees and other natural surfaces and cover – are nearly **50% of the surface of the borough** but less than one third of this is in Local Government control. Merton has approximately 17,626 trees on council owned land.

In addition to trees, over 8Ha of land has been made into publicly accessible green space (from previously private land / private playing fields)

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- Rowan Park
- Brenley Park
- Morley Park

We have also created rain-gardens out of what was tarmac at Eastfields with more planned (the next being in South Wimbledon)

We have also added more street trees to the public realm in Colliers Wood (piazza, Priory Road, Baltic Close), Mitcham Fair Green, Morden Court Parade, Plough Lane and soon at Harris Academy High Path. More trees have been planted at Morden Park as part of the Leisure Centre project and the former pool site has been returned to greenspace. We are also creating a new park in High Path as part of the regeneration which will also see an uplift in the number of trees and greenspace.

This year and next we are investing an additional £100k in total in additional tree planting and maintenance through our Community Infrastructure Levy showing that we are committed to increasing the tree stock.

From Councillor Stan Anderson to the Cabinet member for Culture, Leisure and Skills; Cabinet Member for Performance, Recovery and the Local Economy

Can the Cabinet member explain how the council's work in Adult Education provision is important in the borough's recovery?

Reply

Cabinet agreed new strategic priorities for its Adult Learning Service in January 2020. The priorities showed foresight that the service would need to be adaptable to support residents to improve their economic, social and health outcomes. The strategic priorities also demonstrate ambition that has been built upon since the move to a commissioning model of service in 2016. The service is now financially sustainable with an offer that more adequately meets the skills requirements of residents. The quality of the provision has also improved significantly, as recognised via the November 2019 Ofsted inspection and its 'Good' rating.

This work has been further intensified by the Covid-19 pandemic and the service is playing a critical role in providing educational opportunities for residents who need to reskill for the future job market. As part of this the service has been in receipt of almost £550,000 of additional funding to help support residents by providing new training opportunities and delivering them in a variety of different ways to ensure they are delivered safely. Equipment loaning and digital skills training is an essential part of the provision to help people improve their life chances and live independently in a post Covid-19 environment.

Cabinet are in the process of approving the award of the new main services contract for adult learning and this contract will form a significant part of the boroughs core adult learning offer going forward. This, coupled with the rich list of providers already

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engaged, means that residents will continue to have access to high quality adult learning provision that caters to changing demand.

From Cllr David Dean to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency:

Can the cabinet member assure me that planning permissions which include conditions on tree planting are actually implemented?

Reply

In assessing any planning application with potential tree planting, every effort is made in the first instance to ensure that the planting is possible, appropriate and realistic before being agreed. Every effort is made to ensure such tree planting occurs and the success of such measures is demonstrated in numerous developments throughout the Borough where full landscaping schemes are implemented in their entirety. It is accepted that there can be rare occasions where unforeseen technical circumstances may limit the choices about where trees may be planted, such as the discovery of underground services that may make planting inappropriate in that exact location.

However, such cases are not the norm and there are often negotiations about alternative options depending on the characteristics of the development site. If it is considered developers are intentionally attempting to circumvent the requirement to plant trees, then the planning enforcement team can be utilised to secure compliance.

From Councillor Ben Butler to the Cabinet member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency

Would the Cabinet member provide further information on what steps are being taken to grow more trees in the borough?

Reply

The borough's urban forest canopy currently covers approximately a quarter of our surface land. Even with one of the largest number of trees of any London borough we are committed to increased tree planting. We are currently delivering the annual Highways tree planting programme and have increased the number of trees being planted by 40%. These trees locations include new locations requiring tree pit excavation and will further support improvements in canopy cover in the future. We have also developed a new reporting function on the website that enables residents to request to have a tree planted in a location. This helps the Greenspaces team to better plan and further develop tree planting where it can benefit our communities most.

In 2020, we were successful in applying for funding through the Urban Tree Challenge which will see the planting of 800 trees in Morden Park and 400 trees in Pollards Hill Recreation Ground. Our tree officers also work closely with our key stakeholders, supporting the further planting of trees in Morden Park which was undertaken by the Friends of the Earth and the Tree Wardens. We are equally focussed on extending

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woodland and greenspace infrastructure by encouraging natural regeneration of existing woodland areas, a viable and important means of increasing tree stock and canopy cover while improving local habitats with wildlife benefits.

The forthcoming challenge is to expand the importance of trees in not only public spaces, but to also encourage the promotion of trees in our private lives, using the large spaces available to residents to further contribute to our urban forest.