

Morden Community Forum 24 February 2021 Chair's Report

The meeting was held via Zoom, and chaired by Councillor Nick Draper. Around 20 residents and eight councillors attended on Zoom with 55 additional views on YouTube. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained how the meeting would work.

London Assembly Update

Leonie Cooper, Assembly Member for Merton and Wandsworth, provided any update on the work of the London Assembly. Leonie apologised for being delayed due to a family bereavement and the chair agreed that in the circumstances there would be no questions to Leonie.

Leonie said it has been a difficult time everyone and for the Assembly's work as members are still having to work from home. The work of the Mayor and Assembly has included supporting the Everyone In programme, strategic coordination of the vaccine programme and Street Space projects. Leonie said she felt that it would have been preferable if more consultation with residents had taken place with the Street Space schemes. Leonie chairs the Economy Committee and they have been looking at 15 minute neighbourhoods as an option as part of the recovery plan.

Leonie was happy to respond to any residents questions by email to Leonie.Cooper@london.gov.uk

Census 2021

Matthew Hopkins, Census Engagement Manager for the Office of National Statistics (ONS), gave a presentation on the 2021 Census. The presentation is attached to this report. Census day is 21 March 2021 and this will be a digital-first census with most households able to complete the form online. For those without digital access they will be able to request a paper copy and ONS field staff will visit households who have not completed their census form and can provide paper copies. Help will also be available online, through a call centre and locally from Merton Voluntary Service Council.

Cllr Pearce asked that as older people will reluctant to open the door during the pandemic can the end date be pushed back? Matthew said that the current information is that there is no plan to extend but ONS are looking at the implications of the Governments roadmap. Everyone will get a letter including an invitation to request a paper form via the call centre.

A resident said that they thought census was being discontinued and Matthew replied that there will be reviewed after this one, and at the moment it is still the best overall picture of society.

Merton Character Study

Mark Warren, Urban Designer, and Tara Butler, Programme Manager, gave a presentation on the Merton Character Study and Small Sites Toolkit currently being consulted on. The presentation is attached to this report.

Tara said that there had recently been a report to the [Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel](#) on the More Morden regeneration programme that may be of interest to residents.

Mark said that the Character Study was not just based on the built environment but also has layers including people, history, natural environment, communities, socio-economic and environment. Neighbourhood areas were drawn from the views of residents. In Morden environment and transport had scored highly. There is more detail for each ward, including potential growth.

Small sites are those less than 0.25 hectares and in Merton they have a critical role. In the last 15 years 62% of new homes were built on these small sites. The Small Sites Toolkit sets out the issues developers should consider including themes such as 'Made in Merton', 'Fit for Purpose', 'People First' and 'Economic and Sustainable'. The aim is to improve the quality of developments on small sites.

Both the [Character Study](#) and the [Small Sites Toolkit](#) consultations are open until 23 March 2021.

A resident asked how people had been notified about the consultations. Tara said the information had been sent to the 3000 people on a database of those interested in planning policy, as well as information being posted on the Council [consultation database](#), and publicised on social media. To be get informed about future planning policy consultations you can email future.merton@merton.gov.uk.

Cllr Pearce asked about the pressure Merton is under to provide new homes and how we can protect existing open spaces and local character. Tara said that the role of planning policy is to set out what we want to see and to define what we mean by local character.

Cllr Southgate asked about the issue of back gardens in the Small Sites Toolkit and if the Planning for the Future white paper will help Merton protect them. Tara and Mark said the Toolkit should help improve the quality of any back garden development but it does not define if they should be permitted, any applications would still require permissions.

Cllr Wilkinson said that design guidance is welcome but how will it be communicated to developers and inform design from the outset. Tara said the toolkit will be used during any pre-application advice and be available on the planning website.

Cllr Alambritis asked about Merton's role as an infill borough. Tara explained that Merton's position between inner and outer London as well as fragmented ownership means that Merton has a comparatively high number of applications for small sites. In Merton 90% of applications were for small sites compared to only 50% in other parts of London.

A resident asked about the £300,000 made available from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) to support the Morden Town Centre Regeneration. Tara explained that CIL

funding comes from a levy on developers in the borough and can be spent on local infrastructure as directed by the Cabinet. The Morden project has been delayed by the COVID pandemic so the Cabinet agreed that the funding should be used to improve the public realm. Discussions will be held with local councillors but it would not be sensible to invest significantly in buildings that are expected to be part of the regeneration programme. Cllr Draper said he would be happy to receive any suggestions from residents to be considered by the Steering Group of councillors.

COVID Update

Barry Causer, Head of Strategic Commissioning, Public Health, gave a presentation on the latest situation with COVID in Merton. The presentation is attached to this report and covered the latest statistics, the new Roadmap, and key updates.

Barry said that the 7-day case rate (per 100,000) was down to 132.3 from a peak of 1000 but this is still too high. We have seen a similar disproportionate impact on some BAME communities in wave 2 as we did in the first wave, and cases have been higher in the East of the borough compared to the West. The new national road map has a number of stages and each has at least 5 weeks between each stage, which will be used to assess the impact of the changes.

There had been an enhanced testing programme in Pollards Hill in response to a resident who was found to have the South African variant of COVID-19. Over 10,000 tests were circulated and so far no additional cases have been found. Cllr Draper said the whole council had contributed to an extraordinary achievement in Pollards Hill.

The vaccination programme is going well in South West London, now on priority groups 5 and 6. There are a number of barriers and some hesitancy to have the vaccines amongst some communities, so the NHS are holding webinars led by BAME clinicians to answer any questions from those living or working in Merton and are also working with local community and faith organisation to encourage take up. Recent studies have shown that the vaccine is likely to reduce transmission as well as reducing the impact of the virus on individuals.

To find out more you can sign-up for the [Council COVID newsletter](#), and if you would like to be more involved in supporting your community you can still join the [COVID Champions](#). There is also financial support available to local community groups through [Merton Giving](#).

Councillor Draper thanked residents for attending and closed the meeting.

Date of future meetings:

Wednesday 13 October 2021 at 7.15pm, Council Chamber, Merton Civic Centre.

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