

Raynes Park Community Forum 2 December 2021 Chair's Report

The meeting was held via Zoom, and chaired by Councillor Carl Quilliam with Chris Edge from the Raynes Park Association (RPA). 26 residents and two councillors attended on Zoom with 67 additional views on YouTube. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained how the meeting would work.

Open Forum

A resident had raised concern about changes in access to the library. A response from the Library Manager had been provided and was shared with the meeting:

From Monday 15 November we have started piloting new door access technology at Raynes Park, Colliers Wood, West Barnes and Pollards Hill libraries. The door access technology is in place from 9:30am – 1pm on weekdays and we are undertaking the pilot to ensure that we raise awareness amongst customers of the new technology as from next April in order to deliver agreed MTFS savings we will be reducing our security guard presence at these libraries and it will mean that customers will need to have a library card (or the library app) and their PIN number to access the building at certain times. There are no other changes to services proposed and we are piloting it now to ensure that the technology is fully working and to also have staff outside the library to assist customers into using the technology and to get them signed up as library members should they not be members.

The benefits of the new technology mean that we be able to extend opening hours but will need to balance this with the reduced security guard presence. We want to ensure that the new technology works well and is supported before we make the changes and extend our opening hours in April.

No reductions to library staff are proposed and it is only a reduction in the security service provision, which has been bolstered by the new technology in place. No other changes to service provision are proposed and the full service offering, including our events and activities programme, will remain in place.

Chris Larkman raised concern about staffing levels and that the toilets function as public toilets not just for library users. With a barrier to entry there was concern about future of service. Cllr Quilliam suggested someone from Libraries could come to a future meeting to update following the pilot.

A number of residents had raised issues about trees and the response from Council officers had confirmed that Rose Stepanek is the Tree officer, that the New Local plan includes a section on trees and that a new Tree Strategy is being developed.

A resident raised concerns about safety in the new Parklet and they felt there was a need for CCTV in the area. Cllr Crowe said he would ask the Safer Neighbourhood Team to see if they can increase patrols.

Introduction from the Raynes Park Champion

Jacque Denton, from Merton Council introduced herself to the Forum. Jacque works in Property Services and has taken the role of Raynes Park Champion. Jacque is happy to take up on queries on behalf of the forum and work closely with the RPA.

Station, Street Management & RP Improvements

Chris Larkman and Tony Edwards gave an update on local issues.

Mural on south side of Skew Arch and parklet: Chris was please that people have been using the space and hopefully coffee outlets are keen to set up. Still want to make the space larger so use of the space helps demonstrate the need for expansion. Paul McGarry had agreed these improvements would be welcome and feasible but is not sure what funding would be available.

Merton Council is still in negotiation with Network Rail to take on the land on south side of station.

Chris is still pursuing Workspace to enforce the parking restrictions on the six spaces in the Kiss and Ride area next to the station.

COVID Update

Barry Causer Public Health Lead for COVID Resilience, gave a presentation on the latest situation with COVID in Merton. The presentation is attached to this report and covered the latest statistics, and key updates.

The numbers of new infections is on an upward trend with 140 new cases per day in Merton. Merton is in the middle of the pack of South West London boroughs, and we need to remain cautious. There are higher numbers of young people, especially primary school age getting COVID, but there have been breakthrough infections into those people who have been double vaccinated, due to waning immunity levels.

There has been a limited impact of these infections on NHS Indicators, which is different to earlier stages of the pandemic e.g. admissions look stable and the death rate remains low, due to the success of the vaccination programme. Omicron is a new variation of concern, first sequenced in South Africa. The concerns are about transmission, severity and evading the vaccines. There are only small numbers in the UK so far but this will increase.

The COVID vaccination programme is our front line of defence and has four strands:

- Evergreen – 1st and 2nd dose vaccinations for those who have not had a vaccine yet
- Boosters – for those most vulnerable e.g. care home residents, those over 50, front-line health and care staff and those with underlying health conditions
- Third dose – for those immunosuppressed residents
- Single dose for 12-15 year olds in schools

Regular asymptomatic testing remains vital and Lateral Flow Tests are available from assisted test sites in Merton (Wilson Hospital and Centre Court shopping centre) and can be collected from libraries, and community pharmacists for home use. We are still providing webinars to help promote vaccinations and testing.

Better Health Merton is an overarching brand for services that support residents to improve their overall health. 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](#).

A resident asked about enforcing use of masks in shops, as shops are reluctant to enforce their use is Merton Council able support them. Barry said that the Business engagement team is working with local shops to give them advice and there is a COVID marshals team to help support enforcement. These are intelligence led so happy to take messages on where there are issues.

A resident asked about policing of masks on public transport. Barry said we work with TfL to highlight any issues. Merton is also working with Young Adult Community Champions to promote mask wearing.

A resident asked if the rise in cases could be just more testing and that numbers in hospital are more important. Barry said that as well as testing figures there are surveys that are part of national surveillance that are used to track the nature of the pandemic. Other important indicators used are from the NHS, for example numbers of admissions, numbers of people in ICU and the number of COVID-19 deaths.

Assembly Member Update

Leonie Cooper, Assembly Member for Merton and Wandsworth gave an update on the work of the London Assembly and City Hall. Moving out of current City Hall and moving to Newham docklands. The move has been disruptive but will hopefully be settled in early 2022.

Today was a police plenary so members could quiz MOL and Commissioner. There is a draft [Police and Crime plan](#) out for consultation which includes four main priorities:

- reducing and preventing violence
- better supporting victims
- increasing trust and confidence
- protecting people from being exploited or harmed

London Fire Brigade is changing its structure and changing how it plans responses and kit for use on tall buildings following the Grenfell review.

Transport for London now relies on fare income for its budget as it no longer receives a central government operational grant. London is the only area that pays Vehicle Excise Duty but does not receive anything back. Fare income still at only 70% of pre-pandemic. TfL still does not have a secure funding agreement from central government as the offer has just been for six months. Current deal runs out on 11 Dec and there still no idea of what government will offer. If there is no support from central government there will need to be some quite profound reductions in services. Crossrail still expected to start in 2022 but there is no prospect of Crossrail 2 progressing in the next decade.

A resident asked what is happening to the current city hall. Leonie replied that it is not listed and difficult to see what else it might be used for, so it is possible the owner may wish to knock it down and replace it.

A resident said that Crossrail 2 has left RP with a station that needs work and land is still being safeguarded. Raynes Park needs step-free access but this won't happen until CR2 is dropped. Leonie said that there is still the need for CR2 to relieve congestion on Northern line. Once Crossrail opens then perhaps people will see the benefit and that might give CR2 more impetus. Leonie would like them to reduce the number of safeguarded sites. Getting TfL and National Rail to cooperate can be challenging. NR tends to focus on current operational issues rather than planning for future. One of the casualties of the short term funding arrangements has been the station improvement programme. The train company will be responsible so pressure can be put on them and there can be innovative solutions to improve access.

A resident asked about the future of Wimbledon Police station. Leonie said the future of the station is secure due to the increase in police numbers, as both Mayor and central government have committed to more officers.

A resident said that they would like TfL to reduce the number of bus stands in Raynes Park but this was blocked due to a small increase in fuel costs for the buses. Leonie asked if the resident could please email her the details so she can raise this.

Leonie.cooper@london.gov.uk

Cllr Quilliam thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting

Date of next meeting:

Future meeting:

Tuesday 22 March 2022 at 7.15pm in Raynes Park Library, subject to COVID-19 restrictions:

Any issues or questions can be emailed to getinvolved@merton.gov.uk