

## **Committee: Cabinet**

**Date: 18 July 2022**

Wards: all

## **Subject: Merton as a sporting borough**

Lead officer: Director of Environment and Regeneration, Adrian Ash

Lead member: Cabinet Member for sport and heritage, Caroline Cooper-Marbiah

Contact officer: Francis McParland, Leisure Services Manager

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### **Recommendations:**

Members endorse the progress towards delivering the council's priority to invest in Merton as the 'Borough of Sport'.

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## **1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1. This report sets out our approach towards delivering our ambition to be a Borough of Sport. It sets out what we are doing ourselves and with our partners to improve sporting facilities and encourage participation in sport. We want to build on Merton's sporting heritage and see the benefits to health and wellbeing of increasing opportunities for physical and social activities.
- 1.2. In recognition of the importance of sport to Merton, Cllr Caroline Cooper-Marbiah has been appointed to a new Cabinet role for Sport and Heritage. The Lead Member responsibilities include promoting active lifestyles by leveraging functions across all council policy areas, seeking business opportunities in heritage and tourism and developing partnerships with sporting bodies.
- 1.3. Although this report focusses on activity through sports, in addition to this we are supporting residents to be more active by supporting all types of physical activity: active travel, walking (functional and leisure), dance, outdoor activity e.g. gardening, group exercise, strength and balance for older people and active play for children and young people (and adults). An example of this is the #MertonCan campaign to 'Try 22 in 2022' which promotes a range of opportunities of where people can become more active.

## **2 DETAILS**

### **Sports in Merton and Merton's sporting heritage – what we have now**

- 2.1. In the widest context, the council plays a pivotal role in supporting and delivering healthy outcomes for our residents. A primary enabler is the provision of high-quality multi-use local parks and green spaces that support local sports, both formally and informally. In addition, the council delivers

indoor sporting facilities through our network of leisure centres and community halls to enable a wide array of sport and physical activity to be undertaken, delivering on healthier outcomes by tackling physical inactivity.

2.2. Merton has a rich heritage of sporting activities. The best known internationally is the tennis championship and Olympic venue at the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club. However, Merton also has:

- One of the oldest continuously played cricket grounds in the world at Mitcham Cricket Green, Mitcham
- The running track restored at The Canons House and Grounds, Mitcham, 100 years after it first opened
- AFC Wimbledon football stadium, Plough Lane which opened in November 2020 (the former Wimbledon football club was previously located further along Plough Lane)
- A wealth of longstanding community clubs and organisations, such as Tooting and Mitcham, Little League, Old Rutlishians, Old Wimbledonians, Raynes Park Vale, Old Emanuel's, Hercules Wimbledon A.C., Motspur Park C.C. and Mitcham C.C.
- Three Leisure Centres, each in Morden, Mitcham and Wimbledon, providing a huge variety of sporting opportunities.

2.3. We have a fabulous number and range of successful sporting facilities in Merton. [Merton's Playing Pitch Strategy 2019](#) and [Merton's Indoor Sports Study 2020](#) consider the supply, quality, quantity, and future demand the wide range of sports in the borough. In Merton, on average, you are no further than 250m from the nearest park or playing field, which is amongst the top 5 most accessible in London.

Sport	Current activities
Football	149 football teams in Merton (men's, women's, boys, girls and mini soccer) play on 104 grass pitches. Two thirds of the pitches are owned by the council or on community school or Academy school sites.
Cricket	39 cricket pitches of which about half are local authority owned; 13 formal cricket clubs are based in Merton, totalling 96 teams.
Rugby	There are 46 grass rugby pitches in Merton; a third of which are owned by the local authority. 11 community rugby union clubs are based in Merton hosting 84 teams (adults and juniors).
Hockey	There are 8 pitches suitable for hockey in Merton, of which 7 are of a size and quality suitable for competitive hockey. All pitches are on school sites. Four hockey clubs operate in Merton, supporting 45 hockey teams (adults and juniors)
Tennis	There are a total of 69 courts at 15 parks tennis venues in the borough.

Bowls	There are 4 bowling greens in Merton. A great deal of development and outreach work is happening at these courts, with schools being regularly invited for taster sessions.
Athletics	There is one full-size athletics track in the borough, located at Wimbledon Park. There are three England Athletics clubs in the borough, Wimbledon Windmillers, Morden Runners and Hercules Wimbledon.  It is estimated that the track is used for approximately 1,958 visits per month by the local community
Water sports	The Watersport centre at Wimbledon Park provide water-based activities for all, including, Sailing; Kayaking; Canoeing; Power Boating; and Paddle Sports. They cater for beginners up to people wishing to obtain a Skippers qualification. They have a thriving disability sailing club.
Swimming pools	Overall, there are 16 pools at 12 sites across the borough, of these 63% provide community access (pay and play and sports club/community associations).
Health and fitness studios	Overall, there are 19 health and fitness facilities in Merton. Health and fitness facilities include fitness suites and studios. There is a significant amount of fitness provision in Merton. The council, through GLL provides 29% of the overall supply of fitness stations in the borough.
Squash	There are 16 squash courts in total (8 normal and 8 glass backed) across 4 sites in the borough, 2 are public pay and play accessible squash courts at Canons Leisure Centre
Golf	There are golf courses at Mitcham and Wimbledon Commons and Wimbledon Park and a driving range and adventure golf in Raynes Park
Gymnastics	There are 2 gymnastics clubs in Merton; the Sutton School of Gymnastics who have a dedicated facility in Mitcham and the Merton Gymnastics Club who hire facilities at Canons Leisure Centre.
BMX Track	We have a BMX track in Mitcham which is home to Merton Saints BMX club at 340 metres, it is one of longest BMX tracks in the London area.

### **INFORMAL SPORT**

- 2.4. There are also other forms of informal sports participation such as touch rugby, football training, Personal Training, Beach Volleyball and 11 outdoor gyms.
- 2.5. We are working with Street Table Tennis on a London-wide outdoor table tennis competition running throughout the summer and using outdoor tables in Wimbledon, Colliers Wood and Mitcham.

- 2.6. With over 30% of Merton made up of parks and open green spaces, we have a significant local opportunity for sports and active lifestyles. Our residents also have access to less typical sporting activities than are usually found in an urban area, such as the council's sailing, windsurfing and other Watersports activities on Wimbledon Park Lake, the beach volleyball sand court also in Wimbledon Park and horse riding at Deen City Farm, near Sir Joseph Hood and Wimbledon Stables.
- 2.7. We want to maximise the amount of high quality, accessible and affordable sporting provision for residents and ensure greater equity of access (see also Section 8 to this report)

### **WORKING WITH OUR PARTNERS**

- 2.8. Many of the sporting activities in Merton are delivered by our partners. As set out in Merton's Playing Pitch Strategy, many sporting activities and assets are owned or managed by charities, schools or commercially.
- 2.9. We have a wide range of partners across the borough: from Little League to AFC Wimbledon.
- 2.10. Recent activities undertaken with our partners include:
- Visits to both Tooting and Mitcham United and AFC Wimbledon to see the activities and the challenges facing some of our local football clubs
  - Meeting with the All England Lawn Tennis Club to consider how we can work together in local sports provision. The council and AELTC have worked together to install the Canons Big Tennis Screen outside Canons House, increasing access to see the Wimbledon Championships across the whole borough.
- 2.11. **Merton School Sports Partnership (MSSP)** have been working with Merton schools to increase physical activity levels for a long time. They have Physical Education (PE) coordinators in most Merton schools and deliver training and professional development, to ensure they empower staff who can then inspire students to be active, with innovative professional development and Specialist Sports Provision.
- 2.12. During the pandemic when most pupils were at home, the MSSP created fun content on YouTube to keep pupils active whilst they were at home and can still be used now ('Home PE with MSSP Daily Challenge'). They also organise sporting competitions inter-school and leagues (e/g/ football league). Other programmes include sports leadership and top up swimming sessions, working with our leisure centre operator Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL) to provide reduced priced access.
- 2.13. The Merton Public Health team commission MSSP to support schools to achieve the Healthy Schools London (HSL) Award programme and increase the number of schools taking part in an Active/Daily Mile in school.
- 2.14. Currently, 50 schools in Merton have registered for the HSL programme, 18 have achieved Bronze, 9 Silver and 3 schools have achieved Gold awards. Around 29 primary schools in Merton participate in the Daily/Active Mile. MSSP also undertake an annual audit of PE and sports in schools to award their sports mark.

- 2.15. The All England Lawn Tennis Club (AELTC) has a local commitment to support their local community through their work in our schools, known as the **Wimbledon Junior Tennis initiative**. The Head Coach and his team have been offering free tennis coaching in Merton primary schools since 2002. Students aged from nursery upwards are taught the skills they need to play tennis.
- 2.16. The children are not the only ones to benefit from high-quality coaching. The class teachers are shown how to deliver the sport their school and tailor it to their pupils' needs. Children are signposted to their local tennis clubs and given information about how to continue to play outside of school. Children who display the most potential may also be invited to receive free top-class coaching at the AELTC as part of their search for the next Wimbledon tennis stars.

### **CURRENT ACTIVITY**

- 2.17. Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL) manage our Leisure Centres, they ensure pricing will not be a barrier to anyone wanting to improve their health and fitness. They also work with partners across the borough, such as the current very popular over 60s fitness activities in Libraries.
- 2.18. Morden Leisure Centre has just been awarded Excellent in a recent QUEST independent measure of the facility's performance. This ensures continuous improvement and good practice.
- 2.19. Merton Swim School, run by GLL is amongst the highest performing schools across the GLL estate. 4391 children participated in swim school in April 2022 in our Leisure Centres. Numbers will increase even more once more swimming teachers have been recruited.
- 2.20. Officers are working with the Wimbledon Club to work up a vision of a field sports hub at Raynes Park Sports Ground. This will see investment in the pitches and buildings and create an amenity fit for purpose for the next 25 years.
- 2.21. Officers are also working closely with the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) to secure significant funding which will see the installation of an online booking system, gate access systems to manage free and affordable access for all residents and refurbishment of tennis courts that are unplayable or in the poorest condition – priorities by the lowest sociodemographic areas and to maximise participation growth.

### **INFRASTRUCTURE AND INVESTMENT**

- 2.22. As set out in Merton's Playing Pitch Strategy 2019, we have a significant amount of sporting infrastructure in Merton, about a half is owned by the council and community schools or academies.
- 2.23. The Indoor Sports Facilities Needs Assessment (Feb 2020) states that there is insufficient supply to meet the current Merton demand for sports halls and we are exporting 46.8% of demand to other boroughs. This is in part due to the fact that the majority of existing sports halls (83%) are on education

sites; whilst some of these are available for community use (club), most are not, and even those that do facilitate community use are only available for limited hours.

- 2.24. A new sports hall would have a huge variety of uses from Martial Arts, gymnastics to various ball sports.
- 2.25. The council has invested significantly in its own infrastructure in the past five years and is continuing to do so.
- 2.26. As mentioned in the body of this report, a substantial amount of sporting activity in Merton is owned and managed outside the council.
- 2.27. The council's recent investment in its assets and local sporting activities totals over £10million in the past five years, including over £1.3million confirmed in the current programme. These projects included:
  - 2.27.1 Opening Morden Leisure Centre in 2019, including the diving pool (part funded by Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy).
  - 2.27.2 Upgrading the Multi Use Sports Areas (MUSA) by investing £200,000 from Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy at the popular Haydon's Road Rec and Colliers Wood Rec due later in 2022.
  - 2.27.3 Figge's Marsh Junior Parkrun, opened in 2022 - funded by c£3,500 from Merton's Neighbourhood Fund
  - 2.27.4 Interactive adventure running track at Cranmer Primary School, which Merton' Ward Allocation Scheme part funded c£10,000.
  - 2.27.5 Drainage and other works to improve the playability of council owned sports fields such as Sir Joseph Hood, Wimbledon Park and Joseph Hood Recreation ground. The drainage investment at Sir Joseph Hood and Joseph Hood Rec is £175,000 allocated from Strategic CIL in 2020/21 to be delivered in 2022 onwards. Improvements to Wimbledon Park have been funded by a successful bid to the Environment Agency for £204,440.
  - 2.27.6 Resurfacing of Wimbledon Park Athletics Track booked in for October 2022 including match-funding from English Athletics and Hercules Athletics club. The council has committed £60,000 capital and the other partners have committed £30,000 in total.
  - 2.27.7 Table tennis tables installed in many parks and open spaces in 2022 including Colliers Wood Rec and Figge's Marsh – funded by Merton's Neighbourhood Fund, Merton's Ward Allocation Scheme and Section 106 funding from developers (£50,000).
  - 2.27.8 Investment in Watersports fleet and buildings from 2025 onwards (£10,000 Merton capital for 2025/26 and future bids beyond the current capital programme).
  - 2.27.9 New hockey / community pitch at Harris Academy, Morden, with a contribution of £135,000 from Merton's strategic community infrastructure levy.
  - 2.27.10 Resurfacing tennis courts across the borough (2022 onwards) There are 67 tennis courts in our borough parks. We are looking at c40 courts

being refurbished, including investment in fencing, gate and the court surface. We are working with the Lawn Tennis Association on a funding bid to help support the works.

- 2.27.11 We already have £150,000 in the 2022/23 capital programme for tennis court refurbishment work at Wimbledon Park. The funding from the LTA will significantly add to this pot and enable borough wide improvements.
- 2.27.12 Refurbishing paddling pools (2022 onwards) LBM have 6 Paddling Pools in its parks and open spaces, which is quite unique in London. We will be investing £270,000 Merton capital in refurbishment of the existing Paddling Pool and Splash Pad infrastructure this year. The Greenspaces Team are already in the process of refurbishing paddling pools at Colliers Wood Rec, King Georges Park and Sir Joseph Hood Memorial Playing Fields which will be open ahead of this year's Paddling Pool season which runs from 23<sup>rd</sup> July – 4<sup>th</sup> September, after which time the remaining pools at Rowen Rec, Morden Park and Joseph Hood Rec will receive a full refurbishment. LBM have secured the usual refresh of the Rowan Rec., Morden Park and Joseph Hood so all 6 pools will be open this season.
- 2.27.13 Refresh Splash Pads (2022 onwards) Currently we have two Splash Pads in its Parks and opens spaces. We have recently upgraded the Wimbledon Park Splash Pad ahead of its opening on the 24<sup>th</sup> June 2022 which saw a new dosing system and pump to extend the working life of this very popular Splash Pad. We will also be upgrading the water tanks at the Tamworth Splash Pad which will be ready for opening on the 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2022. The total investment is £226,000 from Merton's strategic community infrastructure levy.

### **3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 3.1. None for the purposes of this report.

### **4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED**

- 4.1. As well as the project specific promotions set out in the report, including installing the big screen at Canons Housing and Grounds, Mitcham so people can watch the Wimbledon Championships, we are undertaking other activities to make it easier for our residents to be involved in sports and be active.
- 4.2. This includes sending a Summer Activities Booklet to all households in July to set out the offer in Merton for residents and their families to enjoy activities in Merton during the summer months.
- 4.3. In the longer term, we will also be building on the success of the London Youth Games and how to increase participation for 2023.

### **5 TIMETABLE**

- 5.1. None for the purposes of this report.

### **6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS**

6.1. As set out within the body of this report.

## **7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**

7.1. None for the purposes of this report.

## **8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS**

### How active is Merton?

8.1. In general, Merton's residents lead more active lives than the London and national average.

8.2. At first glance Merton performs well, with activity levels performing well against London and England averages:

- 67% of adults are active enough to benefit their health compared to 65% in London.
- 20% of adults in Merton are classed as inactive (not taking part in 30 mins of activity per week, in bouts of 3 x 10 mins), compared to 24% in London.
- 50% of children and young people in Merton are active enough to benefit their health, compared to 46% in London.

8.3. However, looking a little closer this means that c33,000 adults in Merton are inactive and c10,000 children and young people are not active for 1 hour per day; missing out on the mental, physical and social benefits but also not developing physical literacy and a lifelong love for being active.

8.4. Biggest gain will be moving those inactive residents to being active, rather than moderately active residents to very active. Keep message simple - move more and sit less.

### 8.5. Equity lens

- We become less active as we age, impact of frailty and functional decline.
- White groups are more active than B.A.M.E groups
- Disabled people are less active than non-disabled people.
- Women and girls are less active than men and boys.
- Residents in areas of deprivation are less active.

8.6. We are undertaking projects either directly or with our partners to address this issue. Some case studies are set out below.

### Case Studies

8.7. Our public health team has supported Merton Mencap to access £9,840 from London Sport to develop new creative methods to connect with their service users during the COVID-19 pandemic and developed an on-line sports programme to remain as active and independent as possible and these were accessible on demand. Activity still continues and the project was shortlisted in the 2021 London Sports Awards. More details can be accessed at [London Sport Awards 2021 nominees: Tech and Digital Award -](#)



[Merton Mencap | London Sport Media Centre](#) and at [Merton Mencap TV - YouTube](#).

- 8.8. Our public health team has worked with Merton Connected on approaches to invest £25k from London Sport who wanted to increase activity levels of inactive groups through their Satellite Clubs programme. This resulted in a number of small grants including the following groups (with the focussed audience for increasing activity in brackets where applicable):
- South London Tamil Welfare Group –(Tamil Girls)
  - Somali Community Association - (Somali girls)
  - May Project Garden – (unaccompanied minors)
  - South London Refugee Association – (asylum seeker young people)
  - Chabad Lubavitch Jewish Association
  - Inner Strength Network – (young people living in domestic violence refuge/ who have been subjects of and/or witness to domestic abuse.)
  - Ashdon Jazz Academy- (vulnerable young women)
  - Unique Talent – (young men at risk of gang involvement)
  - Tooting & Mitcham Community Sports Club -
  - Merton Vision – (young people who are registered blind or have significant visual impairment).
- 8.9. Wimbledon Guild (funded by Public Health) run a coaching programme '**Merton Moves**' focused on older people and physical activity (although participants can be 50+). Physical activity is vital for older people, supporting them to remain independent but we know nationally older people are less likely to do sport or exercise than younger people and may face barriers to participation including people's incorrect assumptions around older people and physical activity. Merton Moves challenges these assumptions and encourages older people to get active by taking a 6-week pledge to start a physical activity. A coach then works with them for the six weeks and helps support them to find the right exercise class or sport for them near to where they live and then encourages them to attend. Exercise options include Pilates, walking tennis, Tai Chi and gardening.
- 8.10. There have been 149 participants to date and 109 of these have to date completed the pledge, with more still to finish. Follow up discussions have also found the majority of clients are continuing with their new physical activity after the 6 week period has ended. More information is available at [Merton Moves \(wimbledonguild.co.uk\)](#)
- 8.11. During and after the pandemic, the council's Neighbourhood Fund supported a similar programme called "Move More Mitcham" which provided free drop-in exercise classes at Vestry Hall, Mitcham. The classes were run by Don't Tone Alone and included circuits, Enerchi (gentle exercise and movement) and BoxFit.

## **9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1. As set out within the body of this report.

## **10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

10.1. None for the purposes of this report.

**11 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT**

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**12 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

12.1. [Merton Playing Pitch Strategy 2019](#)

12.2. [Merton Indoor Sports Facility Study 2020](#)

12.3. [Merton Infrastructure Needs Assessment 2021](#)