

## Wimbledon Community Forum 22 March 2023 Chair's Report

The meeting was held at the Arts Space in Wimbledon Library and chaired by Councillor Susie Hicks. Twenty residents and three councillors attended with 55 additional views on YouTube. Due to technical issues the recording of the meeting had poor sound quality. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained how the meeting would work.

### **Open Forum**

Kris Witherington, Engagement and Consultation Manager at Merton Council, gave an update on acknowledging the history of streets named after those involved in the Atlantic Slave Trade, as previously discussed at the Forum. Kris said that the Council planned to start a consultation shortly on the different options for acknowledging this history and this would be available from the Council's [consultation hub](#). Peter Walker said he was disappointed that the consultation was targeted at residents on the relevant roads and that he had also identified church is named after Lord Burghley who also was involved in the slave trade. Peter offered to run a slave walk on Saturday 1 April at 11am. Cllr Stringer said that the consultation had been raised and discussed at the Joint Consultative Committee for BME organisations on 21 March and she had asked organisations to promote the survey to their communities. The Council was clear it wanted hear from all interested stakeholders.

David Hall from [Wimbledon Community Association](#) said that the organisation was looking for new volunteer trustees and has also been recruiting new member of staff.

A resident asked about the status of Merton Council's Health Walks, as they are no longer being organised the walks and wanted to know if they will be taking place in the future. Kris said he had asked for an update from officers but understood the future operation was under review. In the meantime, residents may be interested in [Walk and Talk](#), a volunteer led programme of walks supported by Merton Council.

### **Police Update**

Sgt James Peppitt gave an update on local policing. Sgt Peppitt said that across the borough crimes were down 12% compared to year on year, anti-social behaviour (ASB) was down 9%, violence against women and girls was down 17%. Under changes being made to borough policing there will now be a superintendent for each borough, and the one for Merton one starts this month. The borough will also be getting more PCSOs so should not be carrying many vacancies across the Safer Neighbourhood Teams.

Sgt Peppitt said that the teams were working on a new Confidence plan and have found that residents often do not know what Ward teams are doing so improving communications is an important element. For example, all officers are being encouraged to use social media and they are working on improving ward panels as they currently have small reach. This will include offering virtual participation. They are also introducing positive activity operations such as leaflet drops and meeting up with residents.

They are also providing more training for officers, for example on catalytic converter marking. There have been issues in town centre ASB on street drinking and aggressive begging and arrests have been made. The teams also supported an operation by the robbery team to execute warrants and have been executing warrants related to drug dealing and burglary during night shifts. Local teams also stopped plans for a large group of young people to meet up on Wimbledon Common.

Cllr McGrath said that London Assembly Members had asked the Commissioner about closing police stations and Commissioner said he is still reviewing options but committed to plan to have officers 20-minute walk away.

A resident asked how they could find the virtual ward surveys and Sgt Peppitt said these would usually be promoted on Twitter, Nextdoor, through leafleting, and e-mails to database. Another resident asked what the results were and Sgt Peppitt said the teams were working out how best to feedback to residents but will be sharing them with their mailing lists.

A resident asked about some problems in South Park Gardens with young people getting over fence after the park has closed and leaving broken glass behind. Sgt Peppitt said the team was aware of this issue and often will cover in late turn patrols.

A resident asked about drinking in town centre and if this is this feedback to Merton Council. Sgt Peppitt said that there is a Street Drinkers Working Group with monthly meetings involving the police, the council and other services. Craig Hurring from Love Wimbledon also said they have a monthly meeting with licensees to go through CCTV footage and share information.

Cllr Stringer said that the Council's Cabinet has agreed to become a fully responsible drinking borough, with a Public Space Protection Order extended borough wide. This gives the police additional powers to enforce ASB associated with street drinking. The Council is also leading on dedicated work with the most extreme drinking issues, targeting 20 most prolific drinkers with a multi-agency approach.

## **Love Wimbledon**

Craig Hurring, Chief Executive of [Love Wimbledon](#) gave an update on the Business Improvement District. On Monday afternoon, at the Time and Leisure Food and Culture Awards, there were four winners from Wimbledon - the Polka Theatre, Diba, The Alex pub and New Wimbledon Theatre. Several businesses also received Highly Commended awards. On Tuesday there was a Business Masterclass in conjunction with Merton Chamber of Commerce, focused on recruitment, retention, and employee wellbeing. These events are then made available as a [Podcast](#).

Craig said that the Flight Centre is relocating its corporate headquarters to 120 Broadway from the beginning of April, bringing around 200 employees to Wimbledon. A virtual golfing experience, The Golf Groove, is opening in Centre Court in April, and a climbing centre, Boardroom Climbing, is opening in May. Third Space, a health club is opening in the autumn and lots of other new businesses are coming into Centre Court over the coming months.

On 1 April, the BID is celebrating 10 years of its market on the Piazza, with the Mayor of Merton visiting. They are also looking to have a special Coronation market in May, and looking to build a pocket park using old benches from Wimbledon Hill as a way to commemorate the coronation in May.

A resident said that pedestrian accessibility in Wimbledon is difficult, and the green man at crossings not long enough for some residents. Craig said he could raise this with Merton Council on behalf of businesses. They are also investing green measures including sustainability audits for businesses and have previously trialled the introduction of cargo bikes for businesses. Cllr Hicks suggested raising and issues with the traffic lights with ward councillors. Cllr Stringer said that Merton Council will be investing cycling infrastructure in Wimbledon.

A resident asked about what could be done to address the number of empty shops in Wimbledon. Craig said that Love Wimbledon cannot control what businesses the landlord puts in but can create a vision for the town centre to persuade developers and landlords which businesses will work. Love Wimbledon has provided data to Romulus and Hermes, both major local landlords to help them attract the right types of business, but it can be hard to reach landowners when they are part of a large property portfolio, like a pension fund. Love Wimbledon can also dress an empty shop with the landlord's permission. If approached Love Wimbledon can also help businesses find premises by linking them with landlords. Whilst vacancy rates are considerably lower than national averages, some properties have been empty for a long time. Craig was also happy to hear ideas for what residents would like in the town centre.

A resident thanked Love Wimbledon for their work but said Hartfield Walk was looking in need to paint and cleaning. Craig said Love Wimbledon will be doing some additional work including painting, planting, CCTV, security lights, and a new tenant would be arriving following a tender process in April. A resident said that the cycle parking not big enough for adult bikes, and Craig said he would investigate this. Craig said he has asked for the cages around the trees to be removed. Craig said new street trees have been planted in Wimbledon in the area near the Polka Theatre, which he and Cllr Stringer had fed back to the Council following a previous Forum.

A resident said they were disappointed that Merton Council has given permission to redevelop St Georges House East. Cllr Hicks said this will have a huge impact and that following Merton approval, it also went to Mayor of London and Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities who decided not to call it in. The site is currently owned by pension fund so still possible the development will not be viable. Cllr McLean also said he did not support the plans and it would be devastating for town centre due to its height.

### **Merton Centre for Independent Living**

Estifanos Habtesellasie (Vice Chair) and Pippa Maslin (Case Worker) from the [Merton Centre for Independent Living](#) highlighted the work of the organisation. A Deaf and Disabled People's Organisation's model means that services are run by deaf and disabled people for deaf and disabled people. There is an important role to play in supporting deaf and disabled people to live independently. COVID had a significant impact on disabled people, and this is still ongoing. They have three main areas of work: providing information/advice; challenging discrimination; and achieving change locally.

They have five caseworkers for the information/advice service. Councillors can signpost deaf and disabled people and residents can contact MCIL themselves. Caseworkers help service users with a raft of issues, from benefits applications to Care Act Assessments (which include a financial assessment), and from concessionary travel applications to housing problems (like unsuitable accommodation due to lack of accessible housing).

MCIL have received extra funding from Civic Pride fund for their information/advice service. They are also piloting an advocacy service. MCIL have met with the developers of Centre Court to discuss their plans and accessibility. They are also trying to build a productive relationship with Merton Council on a range of issues and are working with other disability groups to challenge national policy. MCIL hosts a monthly craftivism and chat session (craft + activism = craftivism). MCIL is working on a strategic review. There is the potential to work with young people in the future. It is hoped that MCIL will have a Policy and Campaigns Manager in place in the near future.

A resident had said a recent experience of temporarily being a wheelchair user had found the experience horrendous. They said others, including councillors, should try that experience for themselves. Pippa said that MCIL was considering asking Cllrs to do this an exercise. MCIL has Access Champions and is supporting Scrutiny Review of public toilets.

A resident asked if MCIL has a befriending service and Pippa said they did not have the capacity at the moment, but it could be part of their strategic review. They usually signpost to [Wimbledon Guild](#) who have a befriending service.

Cllr Stringer thanked MCIL for their work and said she has raised the need for Changing Places toilets with Centre Court and Merton Civic Centre facilities team.

## **Future Engagement**

Kris Witherington, Engagement and Consultation Manager at Merton Council, gave a presentation on proposals to improve resident engagement across Merton. The presentation is attached to this report.

Kris said that the changes were focused on the work of the corporate engagement team rather than work done by many services with specific audiences and service users. The team had learnt a lot from changing approaches during COVID and from the feedback from residents on the Community Forums in 2022. They had identified three areas where improvements needed to be made and how this would be resourced through increased capacity.

The first area was face-to-face engagement, including the Community Forums. Kris said the current approach was not working as well as it should be, and instead the plan is to hold two events in each area per year. One would be a large-scale question-time event involving local services leaders, including the Leader of the Council, and the second would be more of a workshop format for residents to work together rather than a presentation and question approach. The Engagement team would also support local arrangements, working with local groups and councillors ensuring that solutions are right for each area rather than a one-size fits all approach.

The second area to improve is engagement with Civic Society, meaning resident groups, both formal organisations and informal arrangements like WhatsApp groups. The Engagement will look to map what work is taking place, offer a point of contact, provide an e-newsletter and host an annual event that brings these groups together.

The third area was the way residents can engage with the council digitally. Currently the Council has an online consultation hub and design tool for online survey but there are new tools available like mapping, discussion boards and an online resident's panel.

These changes will be delivered by recruiting a new Events Officer post to manage the meetings, a Community Development Officer to work with the Civic Society and an Engagement Officer to work on digital engagement and support departmental consultations.

Iain Simpson from the Wimbledon Society said there were a lot of resident groups working in Wimbledon that varied hugely in scale and the Society would welcome the chance to get involved in engaging with these groups. Dick Bower from Friends of Wimbledon Town Centre also said the group would like to share these plans with their members and said that there is a low level of awareness of the existence of the Forums, what they are and when they take place, and this may be contributing to the low attendance rate.

Cllr Hicks thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.

**Date of next meeting:**

7.15pm Wednesday 14 June 2023, venue to be confirmed

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