

Agenda Item 8

RAYNES PARK COMMUNITY FORUM
25 APRIL 2023

(7.15 pm - 9.00 pm)

PRESENT Councillors Councillor Chessie Flack (in the Chair),

1 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS (Agenda Item 1)

The meeting was held in Raynes Park Library and chaired by Councillor Chessie Flack with Chris Edge from the Raynes Park Association (RPA). Around 30 residents and three councillors attended. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2 OPEN FORUM (Agenda Item 2)

A resident asked about parking by Zip cars, after several had been left for weeks before company was asked to move the cars and wanted to know if Zip cars were affected by controlled parking zones. FOLLOWING THE MEETING – [guidance to users](#) of Zip cars in Merton confirms that they can be left in Permit Holder bays.

A resident asked about poor quality telephone network in the town centre. Another resident said this was possibly due to lack of 5G masts in the area after planning applications were objected to.

A residents asked about theft on the Apostles including theft from cars, and parcels stolen from front doors. Cllr Stringer said there are lots of changes with the police with more officers on Safer Neighbourhood Teams and a new Superintendent in charge of community policing. Cllr Stringer will be raising with the police the need to address these issues and reminded residents they can [report crimes online](#). Residents can also feedback to their local Safer Neighbourhood team through their Ward Panels. Cllr Stringer also said that Merton Council is renovating its CCTV to install HD cameras and suitable broadband.

3 MERTON CENTRE FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING (Agenda Item 3)

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 according to the social model of disability. 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. MCIL has been working with other disability organisation in London and has been campaigning on national issues like the cost of living. 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 to identify the need for future services. There is the potential to work with young people in the future.

Pippa added that the benefits system is complex and often hostile so it can be vital to support people with the appeals process up to tribunal level. MCIL has a 100% success rate in getting people the benefits they are eligible for. The shortage of affordable housing is an issue as is the availability of accessible housing. MCIL is training up Access Champions to encourage better accessibility across the borough and volunteers are welcome. Pippa said that if residents know of anyone who is deaf and disabled and could use help please get in touch.

4 FRIENDS OF RAYNES PARK STATION (Agenda Item 4)

Elizabeth Lane provided an update on the communities attempt to improve Raynes Park Station. The Friends group has been officially registered and recognised by Network Rail (NR) and South Western Railway (SWR) after a year on developing the group. They now have a community licence agreement with NR to access the north side embankment to make improvements.

The group's volunteers have started clearing some of the undergrowth, ivy and brambles, and more volunteers are welcome. Once the area is cleared the group can start to look at planting options. They will need professional advice on how to maintain the embankment and will need funds for this. The group is looking at funding from the Civic Pride Fund and Department of Transport community rail funding. NR has offered volunteers from their staff as part of their community days.

The group will need a long-term solution for rubbish collection, green waste included. The group is usually on site on Tuesday mornings

The Friends group is also looking at creating wildflower garden on platform 4 if NR agree. They will also try to replace the bookshelves in the book swap project. SWR will hopefully offer a poster site for the Friends group. Elizabeth will be speaking with the Friends group at Hampton Court to get ideas.

A resident asked what progress is being made on the South Side embankment as the overgrown vegetation is obstructing the highway. Elizabeth said the group can raise this issue with NR and Cllr Flack said she can also raise with Merton Council.

5 GENERAL UPDATES (Agenda Item 5)

Chris Larkman and Tony Edwards from the Raynes Park Association gave an update on local issues.

Kiss and Ride – Stephen Hammond MP has been speaking with Workspace to encourage them to enforce the parking restrictions.

Land Transfer – the small piece of land on the south side will hopefully be transferred to Merton Council in the next month or so

Parklet – the Experimental Traffic Order has been reviewed and they have been successful it is likely to be renewed. Lime and Thyme will be looking after their parklet

Tree Strategy – the Tree Strategy will go for adoption by [Cabinet in June](#) and then it will be available on the council's website and Tony hopes it will give more power to Merton to enforce tree care.

Flooding – Thames Water's review is due to report in July. A small rain garden has been installed as a trial but there are plenty of good locations for additional rain gardens. Cllr Flack said the leak on Durham Road has had work on it and seems to be ok.

A resident asked about pollarding and if this will be included in the strategy. Tony said he expected this to be part of the strategy with guidance on managing trees. Cllr Flack said it was also worth [reporting problem trees](#) to the Council

6 PLANNING UPDATES (Agenda Item 6)

The Development Control team had provided an update that Kris Witherington shared.

- The Planning Applications Committee is due to consider a major planning application for residential development at Wimbledon Chase station next

Wednesday 25 April. The agenda is online which also includes a letter from the Cabinet Member to the Secretary of state regarding the LESSA site asking for the case to be expedited

- 23/P0455 (565 Kingston Road, PAG Batteries site) - Demolition of three single storey light industrial units to enable redevelopment to provide nine residential units; school (ages 9-13) with pupil capacity of 180; teaching college; workspace; community centre; amended access; and associated car parking. This application is under assessment
- 23/P0869/NEW (579-589 Kingston Road, former Manoplastics site) – Redevelopment of site to provide class E(G)(I) (office), CLASS E(G)(III) (light industrial) and class B8 (self-storage) uses, including use of part first floor for class E(G)(I) (office) and/or class B8 use (self-storage), in a building of up to six floors, provision of car and cycle parking, vehicle access, landscaping, plant and associated works. This has not yet been validated and will go 'Live' in the next 2 weeks

A resident asked if there was any news on the Aviva plans for the Pets at Home site on Bushey Road. FOLLOWING THE MEETING – the Development Control Team confirmed that the application (22/P3021) is still under assessment. It is possible that a decision may be taken under delegated powers, or it may progress to committee.

7 FUTURE ENGAGEMENT IN MERTON (Agenda Item 7)

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

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.

Cllr Stringer said that the administration wants to massively increase the ways we can hear from residents. In Raynes Park residents are welcome to continue with the current format for the forum but in other areas we will have more flexibility.

A resident asked how the selection for a Residents Panel would be representative. Kris explained that we can use address files to send out random invitations and can skew the numbers in different areas where the response rate is likely to be lower. The responses will then show how representative the Panel is demographically and if needed weighting can also be applied.

Tony Edwards asked about consulting businesses and Cllr Stringer said this was a fair challenge and an area where the Council could do more. The Council is working with Merton Chamber of Commerce to support engagement and is recruiting a town centre manager for Mitcham where the engagement is much lower than in Wimbledon and Raynes Park. Business groups can also be captured as part of the community group mapping. Cllr Stringer also said the Council will be investing in supporting culture on the high streets.

Chris Larkman said the benefit of the Forum was that it could focus on the town centre and this benefit should continue in some format but recognised that attendance was lower since COVID. Chris Edge asked that attendees could speak with their resident association and discuss whether they would like to keep the current format and what frequency they would like to see and report back to the RPA. Most attendees agreed they would like to keep the current format going and have at least two meetings a year in addition to Council events.

Tony said that he was concerned that with larger scale meetings a few voices could dominate but Kris said there are ways to manage the meeting to mitigate that risk.

A resident asked about promoting the Forum to new people, and Chris Edge said that resident associations play a key role in sharing the information, not just sending representatives.

Cllr Flack said that Raynes Park generally has a higher level of engagement and should be able to experiment and find a solution that is right for the local community.

8 DATE OF NEXT MEETING (Agenda Item 8)

Cllr Flack thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting

Date of next meeting:

Wednesday 28 June 2023, at 7.15pm in Raynes Park Library

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

Future Engagement in Merton

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Raynes Park Community Forum meeting
25 April 2023

**Kris Witherington, Engagement
and Consultation Manager**



Minute Item 7

Reasons for change

- Lessons from lockdown / Your Merton
 - Review of community forums
 - Analysis of approaches in other boroughs
- How We Work with Communities Programme

What are we proposing?

- Changes to face-to-face engagement
- Engaging with Civic Society
- Upgrading our digital offer
- Increasing our capacity

Face-to-face

- Community Forums too big and too small
- Higher profile events
- Support for more local activity
- Different arrangements in different areas to reflect local needs

Civic Society

- Building trust and communications
- Mapping coverage and reach
- Designated contact
- E-newsletter
- Annual meeting

Digital offer

- Hub / survey tool
- Mapping / dialogue functions
- Residents panel

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Increase in capacity

- Events Manager
- Community Development Officer
- FTE Engagement officer

Decision making process

- Overview and Scrutiny 25 January
- Community Forum meetings in Feb-April
- Recruitment and procurement begins
- Cabinet in June
- New structure in place for the autumn

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Any Questions?

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