

Agenda Item 8

WIMBLEDON COMMUNITY FORUM
9 OCTOBER 2024

(7.15 pm - 9.00 pm)

PRESENT Councillors Councillor Susie Hicks (in the Chair),

1 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS (Agenda Item 1)

The meeting was held at the Mansel Road Centre and chaired by Councillor Susie Hicks. 25 residents and 2 councillors attended. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained how the meeting would work.

2 LONDON ASSEMBLY UPDATE (Agenda Item 2)

Leonie Cooper Assembly Member for Merton and Wandsworth gave an update on the work of the London Assembly and the Mayor of London. Leonie said it has been a busy time at the Assembly. Recently saw the second report on Grenfell and reports on a number of major developments.

The main local issue recently that Leonie has been working on with local residents was the AELTC planning application as it was considered by the Deputy Mayor, Jules Pipe. After the application had gone to Merton and Wandsworth planning committees who made different decisions it was always likely to be called and considered by the Mayor of London but the timing was impacted by the two pre-election periods in May and July. As a result, the planning hearing took place on 27 September.

Leonie said she was extremely unhappy about the result, as she said this is not the right scheme in the right place. Whilst the Deputy Mayor had agreed there would be substantial harm to the Metropolitan Open Land, he had also agreed that this harm would be outweighed by the benefits and in Leonie's view these benefits were unrealistic and insufficient. Leonie said there would be a huge impact from the works over eight years, including large numbers of truck movements. It seems that the Secretary of State would not be calling in the application so there are no further steps in the planning process, any other actions would need alternative legal steps. As Leonie is the Labour lead on Environment and Energy she felt extremely disappointed by the negative impact on the park.

Police committee this morning discussed public order policing.

A resident asked about the officer's report and questioned the conclusion that was reached about prioritising the tennis tournament over the local environment. Leonie

agreed and has long been campaigning for biodiversity and other environmental considerations. Planning policy and decisions often looks for balance between competing interests as well as what might be appealed to the Planning Inspectorate. The officers report said the balance was in favour of the benefits but Leonie strongly disagreed with this analysis.

A resident asked about the Springfield planning application which was considered by the Deputy Mayor on 8 October. Leonie said she had voted against this scheme, as a member of Wandsworth's Planning Applications Committee, due to impact on the environment including the Metropolitan Open Land. The Deputy Mayor had agreed with officers' arguments that the land was previously developed and as a result the application was approved subject to a Section 106 agreement.

If residents had any questions on these or any other issues they are welcome to contact [Leonie](#).

3 WARM AND WELL PROJECT (Agenda Item 3)

Jonathan Green from [Wimbledon Guild](#) introduced the [Warm and Well](#) project. The Guild provides a wide range of activities and services for people aged 18+. They have an office in Wimbledon on Worple Road and a new office in Morden, on Crown Parade near to the Civic Centre. Many referrals to the services are by word of mouth so Jon hopes attendees will be encouraged to pass on the details to family, friends and neighbours. There are fitness and exercises classes, discussion and social groups, a wellbeing service for the over 50s, and a welfare grants programme.

The Warm and Well project focuses on energy and helping with the impact of the cost-of-living crisis. They offer free home energy assessments, and support residents with debts and arrears. The project also helps residents identify and avoid scams, including joining the priority needs register. In some circumstances they can also provide fuel vouchers. Jon said he was confident that everybody in the room could make at least two changes to help with their energy costs.

Jon thanked donors and supporters, including London Borough of Merton and said the more than 200 volunteers at the Guild who were so essential to the delivery of all the services.

A resident asked about the Guild charitable shop in Mitcham closing and Jonathan said he did not know why it closed but would be happy to find out.

If residents have any other questions or would like to request any of the services, they can [contact Jon](#).

4 HILLSIDE SAFER NEIGHBOURHOOD PANEL (Agenda Item 4)

Melanie from Safer Neighbourhood Panel for Hillside gave an update on the work of the Panel. There are 21 Panels in Merton, and they are the conduit between residents and the Safer Neighbourhood Policing teams. The Met Police are very keen to improve communications with the public and Panels are a key element in this. Hillside residents have highlighted local priorities for the Safer Neighbourhood Team. Melanie wanted to encourage residents to join their local panel or make sure they feed their views into the panel. If any Hillside resident would like to raise anything with, or contribute to, the Hillside Safer Neighbourhood Panel, they should email the Chair, [James Markham](#).

5 WIMBLEDON PARK UPDATE (Agenda Item 5)

Christopher Coombe from the Wimbledon Society and Susan Cusack from the Save Wimbledon Park group gave an update on the AELTC planning application to develop the former Wimbledon Park golf course following the Deputy Mayor of London's decision.

Christopher said he was disappointed that there were no representatives of the Merton Cabinet or senior officers to address the issue. The GLA said this was one of the largest and most complex applications they have had.

Susan spoke at the GLA hearing about the environmental impact of the application. Approving the application is in stark contrast to the council's wider concern and approach to the environment. Susan said issues raised included the impact on flood risk of the works and that the benefits of the development were not proven so as a result there was no special consideration

Christopher said there are three remedies remaining. Firstly, whilst the planning process has reached a conclusion it could be legally challenged through a Judicial Review, either by the local community or by Wandsworth Council. Judicial Review are costly so will need considerable funding. The second remedy relates to the covenant on the land dating from its sale in 1993. London Borough of Merton has written to AELTC reminding them of the need to address the covenant. The third potential remedy is that if London Borough of Merton does not enforce the covenant, then because Merton holds the benefit of the covenant on public trust, the public could seek to enforce it.

In response Leonie said that Wandsworth has previously challenged the government through Judicial Review, for example over Heathrow expansion. Leonie has written to the Leader of the council to ask if they plan to take legal action but understands Leader does not plan to do so. Others may raise this issue at the next Council meeting.

A resident thanked all those who have campaigned against the AELTC application. They felt that the paucity of evidence of benefit at the hearing was shocking so wanted to ask if this could be challenged. They were also disappointed that elected Labour officials have not protected local rights. Christopher said he was also shocked at the quality of the evidence; the group would be pouring over the report and record of the hearing. Any legal action could include challenging the benefits, but this will take some time and resources to consider.

A resident asked if it was possible to get more detail on the way AELTC calculated their figures. They also asked that, if the land was brought in 1993 on the basis it was non-commercial, what would be the value now, especially if it can be developed after all. Susan agreed with this point.

A resident said that they felt that money and power is dictating the outcome. Christopher said he believed in the rule of law.

A resident said if the Secretary of State, Angela Rayner, could be challenged to call in the application on the basis of the government's green agenda and then if we can influence the government now it will avoid opening the floodgates to similar applications.

Cllr Jil Hall said she was also disappointed that London Borough of Merton had approved the application and has been raising the covenant at Council meetings.

A resident asked about changes to tennis coaching in Wimbledon Park. They had been told that independent tennis coaches using the courts have been informed that they must finish by April 2025 so that a single provider, Emma Wells Tennis, will use all the courts on 12 different sites in Merton. Cllr Hall said she is raising this with the Council.

A resident said that one of the benefits cited by the AELTC included funding to the LTA for improvements for tennis in London, but that process is not clear. Money received by the LTA from Wimbledon is spent wherever the LTA chooses so we cannot be certain it will be invested locally.

A resident said they felt London Borough of Merton had previously sold land at below market value and expects this will need to go to Judicial Review so would like to know about the timing of this. Christopher said there would be six weeks from final decision to submit legal papers and the final decision is when the section 106 is agreed, which will probably not be for some time. The group is getting some pro bono advice from barristers as this case is complicated by the planning process, the covenant and the public trust. The group has not sought any cash donations yet but may have to in the future.

A resident asked if it would be worth submitted a complaint to Local Government Ombudsmen about the covenant. Leonie said not on the planning consideration or probably not the 1993 covenant as the LGO would only look at maladministration.

A resident asked about the likely cost of a Judicial Review. Christopher said that the Day v Shropshire case cost a large sum of money but we have not tried to cost the different legal options yet.

Cllr Hicks said she will report back the strength of feeling at the Council meeting in November. Christopher proposed sending a motion to council on behalf of the Community Forum. The motion reads:

"Re: Wimbledon Park 21/P2900

This meeting of the Wimbledon Community Forum urges the London Borough of Merton to,

1. involve the Wimbledon community in the negotiation of community benefit, in the section 106 agreement,
2. acknowledge that it holds the benefit of the 1993 covenant on trust for the local community, and
3. enforce the 1993 covenants for the benefit of the community".

The forum voted unanimously in favour of sending this motion to the council.

6 OPEN FORUM (Agenda Item 6)

Peter Walker raised the previous motion submitted by the Community Forum in relation to the roads named after those involved in the slave trade. Following the motion there was an online consultation in 2023 with more than 800 responses and 88% agreed some form of acknowledgement should be displayed but no action has yet been taken. There are also several houses and sites that resulted directly from the slave trade but there is no acknowledgement. Cllr Hall suggested that Peter submit public question for November Council meeting. A resident on one of the roads concerned said Liverpool have addressed this issue sensitively and many residents would welcome the approach the council had proposed to acknowledge the history of the road names. A resident commented that the majority of people in favour of contextualisation supported the use of QR codes on signs, and this is being looked at by the Council.

A resident asked that with Lloyds Bank moving out of St Georges House, does that mean work will start on redevelopment. Cllr Hicks said some tenants are being

moved out so it is possible that work will begin before the planning permission expires in 2025.

7 DATE OF NEXT MEETING (Agenda Item 7)

Cllr Hicks thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.

The next meeting will be at 7.15pm on Wednesday 6 March 2025 and will be held at Wimbledon Guild, Guild House, 30/32 Worple Road, Wimbledon SW19 4EF