

## Wimbledon Community Forum 3 December 2014 Chair's Report

The meeting was held in Wimbledon Methodist Church, and chaired by Councillor James Holmes with assistance from John Hill, Head of Public Protection, Merton Council. More than 20 residents attended, as well as ten other Merton Councillors, and officers from the council and its partners. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

### **Updates from the previous meeting**

John Hill updated the meeting on the mini-Hollands project. Merton Council is still waiting to hear from Transport for London which projects they are still willing to support. An announcement is expected before Christmas so will be brought to the next meeting.

### **Stephen Hammond MP**

Stephen said he wanted to update the Forum on four areas of good news and two campaigns. The first area of good news was the improvement in the economy. In Wimbledon unemployment is now at an all time low of 1.3% with a 24% drop in youth unemployment. Wimbledon was seeing a lot of tech start ups coming to the area. Working together to create a vision for Wimbledon was important to help address issues like office space, the size of development and the impact of Crossrail 2.

On transport Stephen said he was delighted to see new trains on the district line after a long campaign and new signalling would be completed by 2018. Pressure on South West Trains has led to them ordering new rolling stock and as a result weekend trains would be longer from 2015. Stephen was also supporting the proposed extension of the tram to Sutton. Crossrail 2 development will also benefit the area but it was important residents were kept informed and protected. A public meeting with TfL is being planned for January 2015.

On education Stephen was pleased to see the continuing improvement in results in local secondary schools as a result of the introduction of 6<sup>th</sup> forums. Merton schools were now becoming a destination of choice. There remains huge pressure on primary school places but demand is being met by working together. Applications from Harris and Chapel St for new free schools were welcome but finding sites is a challenge.

On health Stephen said he welcomed the wider range of service being considered for the new Health Care Centre at the Nelson Hospital site. It was important that the public had an input into the types of services needed.

The two campaigns Stephen is working on are on Adult Education and Parks maintenance. It is important that adult education remains at Whatley Avenue and was a very important service for jobs, carers and those with mental health needs, and not just for the affluent as has been suggested. It was not clear who else could provide the service; South Thames College offers a very different environment.

On parks Stephen said he had no problem with contracting out services but it should not be through an organisation with no experience and with no control over the parks. There has

been no consultation with residents, friends groups or staff and awarding a 25 year contract was a huge risk.

In response to a question Stephen said that Chapel St has an extensive record of running schools including Benedict school in Merton. In response to points raised about adult education he said that the current building was fit for purpose, and that outreach work had been important in the recent award given to the team at Whatley Avenue. The other options would not save money and the current service is valued.

Information about the safeguarding process for Crossrail 2 is available from the website <http://crossrail2.co.uk/safeguarding/>. All homes within 200m of the safeguarding area had received a letter but this did not mean the land in question would necessarily be used. The Crest Dairy site was within the safeguarding area and this would affect any future planning applications for the site. The owners are aware of this issue following discussions with TfL.

### **The Nelson Health Centre**

Anit Chatrath presented to the meeting the latest plans for the Nelson Health Centre, a new health facility in the area which is on former site of the old Nelson Hospital. . A copy of the presentation is available from our website at <http://www.merton.gov.uk/community-living/communityforums/wimbledoncommunityforum.htm>.

Anit said that the work on the Nelson Health Centre was still on schedule for a spring 2015 opening. A video showing the planned facilities at the Nelson is also available to view on the Merton CCG website: <http://www.mertonccg.nhs.uk/Local-Services/the-nelson/Pages/default.aspx>

Asked about drop-in services Anit said that diagnostic services would still be accessed by GP referral, but it is hoped that there would be voluntary sector advice services using the facility that may have drop-in services but this is to be confirmed. Anit said the building it is hoped that the building would be open from 8am-8pm Monday to Friday and 8am to 2pm on Saturdays but opening times for different services would vary. These would be NHS services. There will be 44 parking spaces, the same as before the rebuild and there would be additional waiting zones and ambulance bays.

Asked about jobs Anit said that the two GP surgeries would be merging to improve efficiency but would not be looking to reduce staffing levels. All other posts will be new and are being advertised on NHS jobs website in the New Year. In addition they will be looking at recruiting operational posts and volunteering and work experience opportunities.

### **Future of Merton with Councillors David Williams and Stephen Alambritis**

James Holmes introduced this item as a new approach for community forums. As the current and previous leader of the Council, Stephen and David were in a unique position to offer their perspective on some of the key themes for Merton over the next 10-20 years.

#### **1. The future of our town centres.**

Stephen said that the town centres had been a key part of the election campaign and lots were happening in each town centre. In Mitcham the regeneration was underway and starting to attract new businesses like WH Smiths. In Morden the council is working with TfL and the Mayor of London to identify a major developer. In Colliers Wood the Connecting project is underway and hopefully we are close to finally seeing the tower redevelopment

going ahead. Raynes Park has been successful by bringing together residents and businesses to deliver small improvements.

For Wimbledon the big issue would be the impact of Crossrail 2 in 2030. This would see disruption during construction but would be worth it for the benefits it would bring. Another challenge was the pressure on office space. We have lost seven offices to permitted development. There will be competition from large redevelopment in Croydon and Kingston so it was important the town centre was competitive and not complacent. There were three community and three professional winners of the Future Wimbledon competition and these were now being brought together to use the best elements.

David said he agreed with Stephen about the importance of the town centres and the threat of competition. Each one faced different challenges. In Morden there are only a few landowners – TfL, Merton Council and a few insurance companies – so bringing them together now that the economy was recovering would be vital. Raynes Park has made the most progress but that now needs to be extended, as for example has been done to the smaller shopping areas like Grand Drive and Wimbledon Chase..

Wimbledon was transformed by the development of Centre Court and Victoria Crescent and Crossrail 2 could have a similar effect. A new station and new bridges could offer an opportunity to pedestrianize the town centre.

In response to questions Stephen said the council was looking to make land available for office development by selling the car park behind the theatre. The car park next to Morrison's is leased to them until 2019 but could be redeveloped after that. Stephen said that the policy on tall buildings was that they were not likely to be granted above the current limit of eight floors.

## 2. The future of local government

David said that he hoped the current boroughs would stay as they are and not merge. Structures should remain as local as possible but that should not stop cooperation between boroughs. Merging HR and legal functions has worked well. David said he would also like to see more powers returned to local government, as the current system is far too centralised. In particular control over business rates should be returned to stop the disconnect with local businesses.

Stephen said that following the interest in devolution generated by the Scottish Independence referendum he had joined with other London council leaders to push for devolution to the boroughs. As part of this they have put the South London Partnership on a statutory basis so it could bargain for collective powers without losing the identity of individual boroughs. Stephen felt that councils should receive more powers on housing, employment and infrastructure.

Asked about the risk to poorer areas of retaining business rates David said that there were mechanisms to mitigate against a 'Detroit' type situation. Retaining rates would encourage councils to support and develop businesses. Stephen said the current situation leaves the council as piggy in the middle and gave the example of the All England Lawn Tennis Club.

## 3. The future of our schools

Stephen said that meeting the duty to provide sufficient primary places has been a challenge with 2000 new places provided in 2010-14 and another 2000 being provided 2014-18. Expansion of secondary school places would be the next big challenge. Stephen is keen to support good providers with a local track record and this is why Harris is the preferred provider for a new secondary school. Results have been improving across the secondary schools and the introduction of 6<sup>th</sup> Forms has been an important factor.

David said that he saw introduction of sixth forms as a way of attracting better teachers who wanted to teach the full age range. More collaboration and federation between schools would help share resources and continue the improvement results. Politicians should trust professionals but should also challenge them on delivering the best outcomes. David would like to have seen a new primary school in the west of the borough to meet demand. The demand had not been anticipated due the big shift in demographics and the changes in the housing market from 2008.

In response to questions about secondary school places David said that there was already spare capacity within Merton and it was important to consider the end of the population bulge and the potential of over supply. Stephen said there would be a new secondary school with either Harris or Chapel St running it.

In summing up David said that the different parties had different ideas and priorities, which means they could offer a vision where without that it would be decided issue by issue. Stephen said that voting tended to divide where is working together collaboratively, as in Manchester, could get more done. The electoral mandate means the politicians are accountable for their policies. Whilst the cynicism towards politicians is understandable the link to elections is very important.

### **Soap box**

A resident raised an issue about a trip caused by raised manhole cover. Councillor Alambritis offered to speak with the resident outside of the meeting.

The proposal to outsource parks maintenance was raised. Despite previous failure of contracting out the cabinet had approved this without consultation. Councillor Andrew Judge responded that the proposal was to maintain the current level of service but use the joint procurement process with Sutton to meet the £250k savings still to find. Merton would still be responsible for governance and would still work with Friends groups. Councillor Judge also said that there would be no charges introduced for school and junior use of parks but adult sport is likely to be charged where possible.

In response to a point raised about contingency funding Councillor Alambritis responded that the current levels reflected government recommendations for financial prudence and were there for an emergency rather than for subsidising services.

A resident raised the issue of a new community hall in Wimbledon. There are no plans at present although a commercial venture is considering the use of the Morrison's car park once it becomes available in 2019. In response to a question about the sale of the theatre car park Councillor Judge said that the sale of the freehold offered the best value to the council and the best chance of getting a developer to deliver a project we wish to see. In response to a question about controlled parking Councillor Judge said that any changes to

A resident raised three highways issues: 20mph zone signage; the signals at Wimbledon Hill/Alexandra Road; and tree up lighters outside the station. John Hill offered to take these up with Highways colleagues.

John Hill provided some updates on local planning issues:

- Gap Road former Crest Dairy site – the owners have asked for pre-application advice
- Greyhound stadium on Plough Lane – an application has been received from AFC Wimbledon/Galliard Homes and this was going through the verification process. It will be put in the public domain in the next couple of weeks and will have a five week consultation period.
- AELTC – the application for a roof on Court 1 would be considered at the Planning Applications Committee on 11 December
- Wimbledon Bridge House – this would also be considered on 11 December
- 157 Arthur Road – the council is working with the architect to reinstate some of the listed features.

It was agreed to ask Crossrail to attend the next meeting.

**Dates of future meetings:**

Tuesday 17 March 2015 at 7.15pm, in Drake House, 44 St George's Road, Wimbledon, SW19 4ED

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