

ITEM 7 COUNCILLORS' STRATEGIC THEME (SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES WITH A FOCUS ON LEISURE AND SPORT) QUESTIONS TO CABINET MEMBERS AND THE RESPONSES

1) From Councillor Fidelis Gadzama to the Leader of the Council

As a former football referee could he update me on how the council is promoting sporting activities for our young people over the summer months?

Reply

We are delivering the annual children's holiday programme Merton Active Plus including football camp, badminton, horse riding, tennis, multisports, etc. A range of activities for all. We are delivering a 3 year externally funded programme – Sports Blast in the east of the borough targeting 14-25 year olds and family activities – this is free to all who access it and is delivered with a range of partners. Tennis Blast took place just last weekend with two days of free tennis coaching at Wimbledon Park. The watersports and outdoor education centre offers a range of activities for all. The strategic themed report gives much greater detail and I would encourage you to look at the leisure and culture pages on the council's website for regular updates of all that is available and also read the recently published My Merton

Supplementary

Will the Leader join me in congratulating the English Women's Football Team on getting to the semi-final of the World Cup and providing such an excellent role model for our local young people?

Reply

I would like to remind everyone of the excellent role model Councillor Gadzama plays as a gold medal winner in the Sydney 2000 Olympics 4x400m. I do want to join him in congratulating the team on beating Germany 1-0 for a third place play off, an extra time penalty, after 120 minutes they had 40% possession, they had 18 shots on goal, they had 10 corners and they did us proud.

2) From Councillor David Simpson to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture:

Given the importance of sport and leisure for maintaining a healthy lifestyle, can the Cabinet Member explain why the transfer of responsibility for Merton's parks and open spaces to a third party organisation means that some of the borough's much valued facilities, such as bowling greens, are now under threat?

Reply

I like bowls. It's an intergenerational sport that demands the brain more than it does the body, and as such it can be practised from early youth through to extreme old

age. It is expensive to maintain, however, and in our busy capital it has lost popularity for reasons beyond politicians' control. Both Council and private clubs throughout the capital are reviewing whether, and how, they can keep their greens open.

Despite two years of the Council actively promoting bowls in the borough in 2013 and 2014, club membership in Merton has continued to decline overall. It is not cost-effective for Merton Council to be managing 6 separate bowling greens that support low numbers of bowlers when there is playing capacity at each and every club. Such threats pre-dated and are unrelated to the current service re-procurement exercise and discussions with the bowling clubs in relation to the future of their sport have been underway for more than 2.5 years. I have been chairing regular negotiating meetings with the clubs for the past 2.5 years – from long before the current service re-procurement exercise began – and our relationship is realistic and open.

The premise of the question is therefore incorrect. Proposals to out-source the parks and open spaces management are part and parcel of the budget savings exercise in Greenspaces, and experience elsewhere has demonstrated that external contractors can often deliver high quality services at a lesser cost overall through economies of scale : but outsourcing management does not predicate which sports we, as a Council, should or should not support. I want this Council to carry on supporting bowls as practically as it can for as long as it can.

Supplementary

Given the apparently exciting transformational and far reaching impact of the five borough proposals when will he get all members of the council to contribute to the process or at least hear an interim report or is it just to be a fait-a-complis next month?

Reply

We are not intending to close down all the bowling greens. We are intending, in consultation with the bowling clubs themselves, to reduce the number of bowling greens that we have because those bowling greens are massively underused and costing us a lot of money. When I was down on the Isle of Wight just recently, I met a bowling club captain who was telling me that his club has 120 members with a waiting list of 40. Our largest club, Merton Park, has 55 members, our second largest, Wimbledon Park, has 50 members, it goes down after that. Our smallest club has 15 members. The clubs themselves know they have a problem. We need to do things to make those clubs survive, in merger for instance, in working with other clubs. We are constantly looking for other ways to to make those clubs survive. One thing I hope will come out of the junior tournaments will be to get those children to become regular bowlers and getting their parents to bring money. I hope we can save those bowling clubs, keep things going and have a prosperous future. I fully intend to take up bowls when I am old enough, I will challenge you on one of those greens councillor.

3) From Councillor Stan Anderson to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

Could the Cabinet Member update us on progress in relation to replacing Morden Pool?

Reply

The project management company and lawyers have been appointed and the procurement of the design and technical team is imminent. Site surveys and investigations have been undertaken and some ecological surveys are underway. The project plan is still progressing well with a planning application being targeted for the end of this year with construction being on-site this time next year and looking to be in a position to have the doors open for 1st January 2018.

Supplementary

I look forward to the new leisure centre opening. As I walk around in my ward, I am constantly asked how the return to green space is going to be managed. Can the cabinet member explain?

Reply

Clearly we won't start doing anything until after the new centre is opened. We want to make sure that the people are currently using our leisure centre right up to the point where the new one is ready. Probably the next day after the new centre is opened, we will be looking to clear the old centre very thoroughly, which is a difficult job due to asbestos etc. We know how much it will cost, and intend to do it within budget. Once that is done, the site will be returned to parkland. It won't just be returned to grass, it will be done in consultation with local residents. We hope to have their active involvement. It will take a long time, but will be worth

4) From Councillor Janice Howard to the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration:

Can the Cabinet Member update me on progress with regard to the Wandle Valley Regional Park?

Reply

The Wandle Valley Regional Park Trust Board which oversees the work and development of the Regional Park, continues to meet on a regular basis, the most recent meeting of the Board of Trustees occurring on the 3rd June 2015.

Progress continues on a number of fronts including the Regional Park's governance arrangements, its funding and in the investment and development of the physical assets of, access to, and awareness of the Wandle Valley.

A number of investment projects are currently underway or have recently been completed within the river corridor, including within Merton borough. These include the Big Green Fund project, valued at over £1 million, which has delivered a number of improvements, principally access improvements to the riverside environment on the Merton-Sutton border in the Watermeads and Poulter Park area, completed in late May.

A number of funding bids have recently been submitted or are currently in the pipeline for the Wandle Valley, including a bid to Sport England for a health initiative aimed at increasing participation by those not currently actively engaged in sport or physical activity. This project is valued at £240,000 overall with match funding already secured from partners.

Other current work priorities at the present time include:

- Additional development of the WVRP website
- Installation of WVRP branding elements in Wandle Park
- New Regional Park "Gateways" in the Colliers Wood area and elsewhere within the river corridor
- Development of a new business plan & strategy document

Supplementary

Given the length of time the subsidy of the Lee Valley Park has been in place and the distance from LBM, what is the cabinet member doing to ensure our contribution is reduced or cancelled going forward?

Reply

I might invite Councillor Howard to access my 38 Degrees petition, 'Stop the Lee Valley Tax' because there is no moral case for residents in Merton or Wandsworth, Sutton or Croydon to be funding the Rolls Royce, Gold Plated park authority in North East London and actually out into the counties that very few residents actually visit. £1.2 million comes from residents in these four boroughs, how beneficial it would be if we could establish through primary legislation our own park authority. We desperately need the support of all the local MPS, the London Mayor and the government, but I think it is a just case and you were right to raise it.

5) From Councillor Laxmi Attawar to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

Could he update us on plans to replace Colliers Wood library?

Reply

Donald Hope Library is scheduled to close for redevelopment on 28 July 2015. In a new chapter for the much-loved library, the current 1970s building on High Street, Colliers Wood, will be replaced with a high quality building constructed from Portland stone, reflecting the stone used for the historically significant Charles Holden Colliers

Wood tube station. The new library will open in two years' time and will be spread over three floors. Visitors are set to benefit from more space given over to books, a coffee shop, community meeting rooms, special activity zones and a larger children's area. This has all been enabled through a deal with a developer and provides both significant value for money and real potential for savings whilst ensuring the sustainability of services in the Colliers Wood area.

During the closure period a temporary library will be open in MertonVision at the Guardian Centre, Clarendon Road, Colliers Wood. The temporary facilities will be open from 30 July 2015 and library users will be able to enjoy all the facilities provided in Donald Hope Library but in a slightly reduced format. The temporary facilities will maintain the same opening hours currently available at Donald Hope, and will be run within existing budgets.

Supplementary

I congratulate the cabinet member on ensuring local residents will have a brand new and affordable local library. Can he update us on arrangements for residents while the new library is being built.

Reply

Donald Hope Library is closing on 29th July and the temporary library is opening on 30th July. We don't close the old facility before opening the new one. We will be having a celebration on 1st August. I hope that fellow councillors represented by the library will attend. There will be a reduced service while the new library is being built, but it will cover all our needs in Colliers Wood. The really big celebration will come 18 months later when we open the new library that will be so much better and I hope to see you all there.

6) From Councillor Brian Lewis-Lavender to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture:

Please can the Cabinet Member provide the latest figures on the uptake of competitive sport among young people in Merton following the success of the 2012 London Olympics and Paralympics?

Reply

No national data is collected with regards to uptake of competitive sport for young people, however the Merton School Sports Partnership annual report notes a record number of schools entering the Primary Borough Athletics (28 in total), the introduction of new events for young people with competitions in Handball and Ultimate Frisbee. Merton's Leisure & Culture Development Team provide wider borough representative competitive opportunities in the London Mini Marathon and the London Youth Games which includes the Mini Games, delivered by the Merton School Sports Partnership. Local sports clubs, schools and individuals work with the team to enter as many events as possible as far as resources allow. This year's

finals concluded this last weekend, but as we went into the finals weekend Merton had already achieved:-

Judo	- Samuel Petgrav	- Gold
BMX (Junior Female)	- Mia Jacobs	- Gold
Kayak Slalom (Senior Female)	- Phoebe Walder	- Silver
BMX (Senior Male)	- Nico Satchell	- Bronze
Water Polo (U16 Female)	- Merton Team	- Silver
Water Polo (U19 Male)	- Merton Team	- Bronze
Schools:		
Best Football	- Bishop Gilpin	- Gold
Football Y5/6 Open	- Merton Team	- Gold
Mini Tennis	- Bishop Gilpin	- Gold
Badminton Y9 (Boys)	- Hall	- Silver

Supplementary

I am encouraged by the response to see that the number of schools entering the primary borough athletics was a record this year, I am not sure by how much it increased, 28 schools entered. It is also good to hear that Merton school children have won lots of medals in events, I congratulate them. However, I would like to ask the cabinet member what happened to the *Sophie Hoskins* Challenge Cup? This was an issue in 2012, and the winners announced in February 2014, and things have gone very quiet since then. Has this trophy been forgotten, or will it be resurrected as an encouragement to school children in the future?

Reply

I agree with you that what has been achieved has been fantastic. The Sophie Hoskins Challenge Cup has not been forgotten. It has been given as part of BMX, but there have been new arrangements around the track, so we have been moving from controlling it as a council to getting the sport to look after it. There has been some slippage, but I do expect it to be awarded and will come back to you about it.

7) From Councillor Russell Makin to the Leader of the Council

With the football season now over, would he join me in hoping that it will be one of AFC's last seasons outside of Merton?

Reply

I know AFC Wimbledon and their supporters very much hope that the club can return to their roots and origin in the borough. We welcome and support this ambition. The planning application for the redevelopment of the Greyhound stadium into a football ground and housing is due to be considered by the Planning Committee after the summer break. We wish AFC Wimbledon well both on and off the pitch and look forward to them returning to the borough one day soon.

Supplementary

Could the cabinet member update us on his efforts to get AFC Wimbledon back to Merton?

Reply

I want to remind everyone that the party leaders had an all party consensus on encouraging them back into the borough, whether they do is up to them and subject to normal planning process. The club is progressing well, but needs to ensure it gets everything right and is consulting with residents, the borough and other boroughs and the Environment Agency. I know that we all want the club to return to the borough.

8) From Councillor Daniel Holden to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health:

Can the Cabinet Member tell me how many people the council has signed up for its latest healthy living initiative, "Merton on the Move", as part of Public Health England's 'Everybody active, every day' campaign?

Reply

Merton on The Move was launched at Mitcham Carnival on the 13th June and aims to build collective growth in physical activity levels in the borough through encouraging, supporting and raising awareness of active travel (walking, running and cycling) and the role that it can have in good physical and mental health.

Increasing physical activity levels, and reducing inactivity, is an important component of Merton's Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2015-2018. Although only recently launched, Merton on The Move already has 81 users registered; 46 female and 35 male; 30 teams taking part including GP practices, MVSC, Age UK Merton, Merton CCG, Love Wimbledon and teams from Merton Council; and logged 1,078 activities by users, which equates to 3,200 miles of the way to the moon.

Future plans include engaging businesses through the Merton Chamber of Commerce, working with schools in Merton to support their staff and families to take part and perhaps councillors would join me in a team of elected members?

Supplementary

I welcome this initiative to improve public health. With the health gap between the east and west of the borough- how will these schemes be targeted to those who actually need it to improve their health rather than actually those who are normally not inclined to do physical activity.

Reply

The initiative is ensuring everyone gets involved, ie you don't have to have a smart phone to participate. It is across the board, this is not a competition, you don't have to be fit to take part, so everyone can be more active and help prevent some of the illnesses we are trying to focus on. I hope everyone here will encourage people in their wards to take part.

9) From Councillor Katy Neep to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

Given that it's Wimbledon fortnight, could the Cabinet member outline how the council is working to increase participation in tennis?

Reply

We continue to work with both the All England Lawn Tennis Club and the Lawn Tennis Association to increase tennis participation in the borough. We have the Tennis Blast annual event in Wimbledon Park linked to The Championships – two free days of tennis coaching and activities with some of the professionals from The Championships dropping in to show off their skills. We have holiday programmes and an annual all-year round coaching programme for youngsters. The Wimbledon Junior tennis Initiative visits a school in Merton every week of term time working with pupils and teachers to develop tennis and selects some of the most talented to join their tennis development programmes. Sports Blast includes the development of Family Tennis at St Mark's School, where we have just refurbished and floodlit the courts with LED lighting.

A women's only tennis Tuesdays takes place in Wimbledon Park getting women back into sport through tennis. We also have a good number of Tennis Clubs in the borough and 'Tennis for Free' at Tamworth Recreation Ground, and Joseph Hood in Morden. Merton does have a range of tennis opportunities borough-wide.

Supplementary

Given our work to increase participation in tennis, could the cabinet member update me on the new facilities available at Dundonald Recreation Ground.

Reply

The facilities effectively replace and renew those previously available as part of the school expansion. One visitor who has been lately is Roger Federer and his family. I would like to draw attention to the new tennis courts at St Marks through a £50,000 grant we received. It is part of a project to get young mothers back into exercise. It is a new project, I believe it will be very popular.