

# **Merton Council Council**

**19 April 2023**

## **Supplementary agenda**

5 Public questions to cabinet members

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The questions and written responses will be circulated at the meeting.

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**From Ian Veacock**

**To the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development**

Can you confirm if a landlord allows 5 persons (or adult equivalent) in a dwelling (not being a HMO) passed in planning for 4 person that the property is statutorily overcrowded?

**Reply**

The rules on statutory overcrowding are set out in Part X of the Housing Act 1985. There are 2 standards, the space standard and the room standard. Whether or not a case is statutorily overcrowded will depend on a) how many bedrooms a property has and how large the bedrooms are in square feet, and b) the composition of the family occupying the properties, in particular their ages. As a result, whether or not someone is statutorily overcrowded will depend on the particular property and the specific number of occupants and their ages.

**Supplementary**

I have emailed this as well so that councillors and others can refer to it just in case they don't understand what I say because the reply seems to misunderstand the question that I wrote in so far as if a property has already being calculated for let's call it legal persons for the definition of part 10 of the housing relevant legislation, so if it's for four legal persons then that allowance for age and for the allowance of the habitable rooms and bedrooms has already been taken into account. So this question asks if this amount of persons is exceeded by the permission or direct act of a landlord, and I specifically five persons, would the property then be statutorily overcrowded. I concur that the amount of space and bedrooms actually appears to be irrelevant if the conditions have already been notified at a planning stage, consent stage or any other part of things. We used to have them in our rentbooks for Merton council, told you how many people you could put in your flat or other property without the council coming down and saying you're overcrowded. So the thing is, if that's already been taken into account the answer doesn't actually say yes or no, which given the facts I put forward I expected a yes or no answer.

**Reply**

Well it's a complex matter, thank you for your supplementary, but every case relies on its own facts. You can't say that because of planning permissions were originally given for a four bed house and then you have five beds therefore it's statutorily overcrowded because the judgement on that under the Housing Regulations, Housing Act is different to the plan, so you need to look at the individual property.

**From Alastair Stewart**

**To the Cabinet Member for Transport**

Would the Council review the position of the parking bays outside 16 Arterberry Road, where parked vehicles prevent those leaving the property from seeing up or down the road. Also outside 16 The Drive where vehicles going towards the Ridgway are forced onto the wrong side of the road.

**Reply**

This issue was raised and responded to in December 2022. At the time, sightlines were noted and it was commented that the resident could consider a mirror within their private property and possibly make a request for the neighbouring property to cut back some of the foliage that at the time was considered to add to the sightline problem.

With regards to removing the parking bays, this can be considered; however, this would be subject to Cabinet Member approval and a statutory consultation. The bays have been in place since 2013 and there is no record of any reported incidences or issues. Given that the bays are used by permit holder residents, it may be considered unreasonable to lose two spaces to accommodate one private off street parking space.

With regards to the parking bays near 16 The Drive and driving on the wrong side of the road, in majority of residential roads, the road is not wide enough to accommodate parking and two lanes of traffic. Invariably, in many roads motorists tend to travel almost in the middle of the road to navigate around parked vehicles and in this case, on approach to the bend, there are double yellow lines and passing gaps. Whilst traveling at 20mph or less, drivers should not have an issue. Again, this has not been raised as an issue previously and an assessment will be carried out. If there is a need to remove the parking bays, there would be a need for a statutory consultation and Cabinet Member approval.

**From G Higgins**

**To the Cabinet Member for Transport**

Are you for or against the planned ULEZ scheme being forced upon us Merton residents who did not VOTE for Khan.

**Reply**

Merton Council recognises the importance of tackling the challenges of toxic air pollution, the climate emergency, traffic congestion but thorough consideration should also be given to the cost of living crisis - and a generous scrappage scheme has been put in place. This aligns with Merton's objectives and policies as set out in our [Transport Strategy \(LIP3\)](#), [Air Quality Action Plan](#), and the [Climate Strategy and Action Plan](#).

Air Pollution in Merton, as with all of London still exceeds the objective levels for Nitrogen Dioxide along our busy main roads and in our Town Centres. This is reported every year as part of our statutory responsibilities and published on our website.

Traffic is responsible for around 60% of the toxic pollution in the borough. As a borough we are working to reduce pollution and protect the health of our residents, particularly those that are vulnerable including those with respiratory illness or children with developing lungs.

We are acutely aware that there is a cost of living crisis and this scheme may impact on some residents, which is why we have raised this concern with the GLA and lobbied for a scrappage scheme and support for those that this will affect the most.

**From Gillian Mantell**

**To the Cabinet Member for Transport**

How do you justify supporting ULEZ expansion when trackers show air quality's consistently Good despite schemes that coincidentally increase congestion (20mph/LTNs) & when ICL confirm it'll have 'negligible' effect and London Mayor prefers to slander your residents rather than addressing any of their 'legitimate concerns'?

**Reply**

The highest number of premature deaths attributable to air pollution are in outer London boroughs, which the ULEZ doesn't currently cover. The scientific evidence is

clear: exposure to air pollution has serious health effects. Despite recent improvements in air quality, every hospital, medical centre and care home across the capital is still located in areas that breach the WHO's guidelines for nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter. All people in Merton deserve to breathe clean air.

Air Pollution is measured, it is real, it is reported and all experts agree the health impacts.

We are also starting to see the health impacts of fine particles from vehicles, and we've started to monitor this across our borough.

Again, we understand the current cost of living crisis and its impact but London needs to take decisive action to tackle what is known as the most significant environmental risk to public health.

**From Marie-Andrée Francis**

**To the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care**

Last year Merton council engaged some consultants to review Day Opportunities for disabled people in Merton. Basically, Merton paid consultants to tell them what is wrong with the service when Service Users could have told them what improvements/changes are needed for FREE!!!

To-date, nothing has changed/improved? Waste of money?

**Reply**

The Council engaged Community Catalysts, through a competitive tender process which assessed both the quality, track record and value for money of bidders. The premise of the engagement was to provide additional expertise and capacity to the Day Opportunities Review Programme. This specifically included expertise in using alternative forms of communication with people for whom communication is a barrier to engaging with our services. Community Catalysts facilitate the largest stakeholder engagement exercise undertaken with people with Learning Disabilities in the borough. The exercise heard from almost 400 people across the borough, half of which were people with a Learning Disability or Autism, not all were current service users. This was very important to the exercise to ensure we heard a range of views from a variety of stakeholders and not just those who currently use day centres. This piece of work was called 'The Big Conversation' and the report from this exercise can be read here: [The Big Conversation: our engagement on services for people with learning disabilities 2021 | Merton Council](#)

Community Catalysts also undertook an objective review of the current provision of day opportunities for people with Learning Disabilities in Merton. This report was called 'the Big Explore'. The report was provided to officers in Adult Social Care to provide evidence of the gaps in current provision, the reach and range of current services and to set out some key future priorities for our model of Day Opportunities based on models and examples of good practice across the country. This work has directly informed the new framework for Day Opportunities which will be open to tender later this year. This commissioning work is intending to develop the range and diversity of day opportunities that are available to support people to meet their individual needs.

The work also directly supports our proposals for a new model of Day Centre estate, including the redevelopment of the JMC to be a bespoke, purpose-built centre to support people with disabilities, in particular, those with profound and complex disabilities.

A stakeholder reference group oversaw the work of Community Catalysts, and the outputs of this work were well received by this group. The Stakeholder Reference Group which is made up of people who use the services, carer representatives, representatives from Kids and Adults First, Social Care professionals and people who provide learning disability services has continued to meet. The meeting is presently held every six weeks as the intention is to co-produce the final Community Opportunities Model. The invitation to be part of the group will be reissued again. The Council believes this was a thorough, worthwhile and value for money piece of work that continues to directly influence the development of day opportunities in the borough.

**From Anna Horswell**

**To the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care**

Why are there no available places in residential homes Merton available? We are a family in Merton with three adults with learning disabilities and Autism and the only way to get a place is if a resident dies. Will you increase provision so my sons can have somewhere to live?

**Reply**

There are currently 88 beds in residential care homes, in Merton, that specialise in support for people with a Learning Disability. There are currently 17 vacancies across these homes. Our ambition is to support all Merton residents with a Learning Disability to live independent lives. The long-term trend we see is people looking for support in their own home through services such as supported living and the council is commissioning a Supported Living Framework to grow and develop this type of

service. We plan to expand and increase supported living, helping us to support more people to stay living in Merton. We recognise that for some people, often with more complex needs, a residential care setting is the right place to live and support they require.

Having available beds is only one consideration, however. It is more important to find the right placement, and this is an individual process matching needs with available and appropriate places, this may include looking to neighbouring boroughs for available capacity. For some groups the needs are very specific, complex, and unique and so it is not economically viable to commission the services as an individual borough and we will work with other neighbouring boroughs to develop and jointly commission these services.

**From Jane Dowek**

**To the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care**

What are the council processes for ensuring a safe discharge to home from local hospitals for frail elderly residents in the borough and how is the success, or otherwise, of this monitored by Council members?

**Reply**

Before a person is discharged from hospital, they will undergo a discharge assessment. This is an assessment that is carried out by the hospital staff, to ensure the patient/resident is ready to be discharge and that the necessary arrangements have been made for their ongoing care. The hospital will work with the local authority to assess what sort of ongoing support is required for the patient/resident to return home safely. This will include social care support and depending on the level of need each patient/resident has will determine what sort of care they receive when they are discharged.

The patient/resident may require a period of intensive support called "reablement" for a short period while they recuperate. Once they have had this period of support the patient/resident may then become independent and have no need for ongoing support. It could also be a case that a patient/resident may already be receiving support from carers at home and before they are discharged, it is recommended that an increase in the care calls is required for them to leave hospital safely. Another scenario is that they require a short period of time in a care home to recuperate or for further assessments to be carried out by the local authority.

Once the support required has been identified the hospital and the local authority discharge teams will work together closely. They will ensure the appropriate support is in place for the patient/resident before they are discharged home. When the



patient/resident has been discharged the local authority will then have 4 weeks to go and carry out another assessment to see how they are progressing and what sort of support they will need long term, if any.

The aim and the objective for any discharge and ongoing assessment is to always ensure the views and wishes of the residents are heard, eligible needs under the care act are met and the person remains at home as independently for as long as possible. The success of discharges is monitored by the local authority and our health partners on a regular basis. We are currently working on ensuring the data and the information we collect is improving for us to gain better intelligence and improve our services. Discharges are also monitored to ensure they are safe. Any unsafe discharges that the Local authority become aware of are reported to the hospital and investigated.

Successful discharge from hospital is the result of the whole system working together. We regularly review our involvement in discharge planning and it is part of the performance measurement of the department. This is regularly discussed and reported on through Cabinet Member and Leader briefings and is also subject to scrutiny by Council Members through Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the Health & Wellbeing Board.

**From Wendy Kane**

**To the Cabinet Member for Transport**

Why had Merton agreed to the ULEZ expansion? It is a tax on the working person. It will make minimum difference to air quality (TfL report). On a FOI request it has been confirmed that not one person has died of air pollution.

**Reply**

It is not true to say that not one person has died because of air pollution. The very sad case of Ella Adoo-Kissi-Debrah, a London child whose death was directly linked in a coroner's report to air pollution on the south circular, highlights the importance of cleaning up London's air.

It is estimated that around 4,000 Londoners every year die prematurely from toxic air, it's making us sick from cradle to the grave as kids grow up with stunted lungs and adults develop cancers and lung disease. If we sit back and do nothing to reduce air pollution, around 550,000 Londoners would develop diseases because of air pollution over the next 30 years and the cost to the NHS and the social care system could be upwards of £10.4 billion.

Air Pollution in Merton, as with all of London Boroughs, still exceeds the objective levels for Nitrogen Dioxide along our busy main roads and in our Town Centres. This is reported every year as part of our statutory responsibilities and published on our website.

The World Health Organization Guidelines were also significantly reduced for pollutant levels in 2021, if we were to apply these to our borough, we would see the whole of the borough as not compliant.

Air Pollution is measured, it is real, it is reported and all experts agree the health impacts.

We are also starting to see the health impacts of fine particles from vehicles, and we've started to monitor this across our borough.

Again, we understand the current cost of living crisis and its impact, but London needs to take decisive action to tackle what is known as the most significant environmental risk to public health.

### **From Dawn Page**

### **To the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development**

Does the Council have qualified surveyors/officers who can help tenants who are not receiving an adequate service from Clarion by determining the urgency and extent of necessary repairs in Clarion Homes and then ensure repairs are implemented to a satisfactory standard in a reasonable timescale?

### **Reply**

The Council has a Housing Enforcement team, which includes qualified Environmental Health Officers (who are registered with a professional body) who are trained to deal with complaints from private sector tenants regarding disrepair, and this includes housing association tenants.

The team can inspect properties and carry out Housing Health and Safety rating system assessments (HHSRS) under the Housing Act 2004. This assesses properties under 29 different types of hazard, and where present these are assessed as being category one or category two depending on the specific household that resides there. The Council can take enforcement action where a Landlord does not comply with formal notice with a schedule of remedial works, and the Council's Published Housing Enforcement Policy sets out the circumstances where this will happen.

## **Supplementary**

My question was asking if Clarion Housing have any chartered surveyors on their books and the response I got back is that they have got environmental health officer, I don't see that they are the same of two, so I'd like to know if they do have chartered surveyors on their books, because it doesn't seem to be that they have.

## **Reply**

I thank Dawn Page for that supplementary question, but council do not have surveyors that they employ. That work is the responsibility of Clarion. What the council have are backstock Environmental Health Officers so that if through the management of housing stock, significant disrepair should arise, for example through mould and damp, then the Council have the power to investigate that through their Environmental Health Officers and assess whether there are any hazards in the property. A Category 1 Hazard, possibly a hazard to life, or a Category 2 hazard, a lesser one, and take enforcement action against the housing association. But the primary responsibility is for the housing association.

**From Louise McLoughlin**

### **To the Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services**

Can you detail any requests received by officers to review the group staffing support provided to the political parties on the Council, since the last budget meeting?

## **Reply**

Since the budget council meeting on 1 March, the Chief Executive has received one request to review the level of staffing providing support to the Liberal Democrat Office which she has agreed to. The review will commence shortly.

**From Will Nicklin**

### **To the Cabinet Member for Transport**

Given that it's been discovered that from their inception to Oct 6th 2022, the council didn't have approval for the signage being used in the newly installed School Zone, will you be refunding any resident who was fined during this period?

## **Reply**

I understand that the signage that was used was in line with what was permitted within the regulations – however, as is the practice in many other boroughs, instead

of separate plates, all the signs were placed onto one back plate. The top part of the sign is considered as a campaign sign and although on the same plate, it does not detract from the main part of the sign that refers to pedestrian and cycle zone. The sign that has been approved by Department for Transport.

### **Supplementary**

Will you be refunding residents who were fined during the period that the signs were not approved by the Department of Transport, Cllr Alambritis makes no response to my original question of whether they will refund people. It is a yes or no answer, and if no, why not?

### **Reply**

I thank Will Nicklin for his original question and for his perseverance in getting through to us with his supplementary question. My understanding is that all our signs either continue to have or have had Department for Transport approval, and therefore we shall not be refunding anyone on that basis.

### **From Emanuela Riolo**

### **To the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change**

Why is my waste collection not regular and why the area is left in a mess upon collection?

### **Reply**

Residents on the road in question are serviced on a weekly basis as follows:

Communal Recycling – Wednesday  
Communal Food Waste – Wednesday  
Communal Residual Waste – Thursday

Every effort is made by the collection teams to collect each material on the prescribed day. There are occasions where access to the road has been restricted by parked vehicles which has resulted in collections having to be made either later the same day or the following day.

An inspection of the communal bin stores was undertaken by the supervisor for the collection service on Thursday 13 April 2023. His inspection revealed that some of the bins were less than fully utilised with bags of waste placed on top of them as well as waste on the floor. The materials on top of the bins were loaded into the bins and

collected. However, the loose materials left on the floor were not collected. Where the collection staff cause spillage of materials, they are required to clear it up. It should also be noted that both residents and managing agents have a responsibility for the cleanliness of the communal bin stores and maintenance of the bins to ensure that they can be moved freely and without obstruction to enable them to be collected.

## **From Dawn Spragg**

### **To the Cabinet Member for Transport**

Why are our Council / Elected Councillors not actively engaging with their electorate in a public consultation about ULEZ.

### **Reply**

Merton Council held a number of meetings with local residents during the public consultation regarding the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) proposals. Key concerns from residents and the Council alike, centred on a more generous scrappage scheme and one that had provisions for retrofitting non-compliant vehicles as well as full scrappage.

On 28 July 2022, the Council formally responded to the proposed expansion of the ULEZ in a document signed by both the Leader and myself as Cabinet Member for Transport. In our response we strongly urged TfL to give particular consideration to how the scrappage scheme and wider support measures could be extended to key workers as well as those on low to modest incomes who require a vehicle to perform essential work duties or those working shifts at unsociable hours. We also highlighted the importance of specific measures for charities, community organisations, and disabled drivers; many of whom have adapted vehicles.

Merton Council's communications department also publicised the ULEZ consultation and encouraged residents to feedback directly to the Mayor and TfL.

### **Supplementary**

Thank you for listening, you will see my question is reference to ULEZ, my question was, why are council and our elected councillors not actively engaging with their electorate in public consultation about ULEZ, the response that I received simply stated about a consultation. Now I have been actively engaged in information about ULEZ for over two years now, I was against the extension out to the North and South Circular, so I was actively looking out for information from Merton Council, so for somebody like me to not have been aware of a consultation, I find extremely surprising, so one of my questions, but I appreciate that it has to be one question but

it is all wrapped up in one question, how was the consultation publicised and how are you advising your constituents at this precise moment in time about ULEZ as this will currently occur on 29 August 2023, yet still the vast majority of your constituents now nothing about what is going to be happening on their streets. You have the ability to advise your constituents and this what we expect from you, this is why we voted for you, I received myMerton a couple of weeks ago, it's really funny, you could have had a full page spread in myMerton advising people. So how are you as our elected members engaging with the people who elected you to advise them about the ULEZ that will be coming and be inflicted on our borough on 29 August 2023

## **Reply**

I thank Dawn Spragg for her original question and the supplementary question within her statement, so as a council we consult fully with all residents on a whole host of issues, including cost of living, including the level of the council tax, including the finances but I need to remind Dawn and everyone here that ULEZ has all party support going from Boris Johnson to the Government, to the Liberal Democrats and to Labour and ULEZ is a.

Point of order from Cllr McLean: The Conservative Group do not support ULEZ expansion

I did not say the conservative group, I said that Boris Johnson and the Government are in favour of ULEZ. As the Mayor of London, Boris Johnson was working on ULEZ.

Now we do consult fully, we do consult fully with our resident on all issues, and certainly we've consulted fully with Dawn Spragg, who wrote to all of us on 1 March. I responded on 15 March, she wrote again on 20 March, I responded on 28 March, we are a council that fully consults with our residents and in my written answer, we have had public meetings and we have had a programme of information for our residents, but ULEZ is a TfL scheme, thank you very much.

**From Charles Mottram**

**To the Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services**

Reflecting on recent job adverts for Merton Council, specifically a "Labour Group Assistant" (£40k). Would the Leader of the council please provide details on roles and responsibilities of permanent and temporary staff employed in each political group, including total salary expenditure actual or expected, for; 2021-2022, 2022-2023 2023-2024?

## Reply

When the new Leader was elected in May 2022, he appointed a new Cabinet and has worked closely with the new Chief Executive to review our Corporate Management Structure and recruit so that we could bring in the talent to deliver on our ambitions and long-term strategy focused on nurturing civic pride, building a sustainable future, and creating a borough of sport. To meet these challenges, we also identified the need to review the existing support for the political leadership of the organisation. This has allowed us to ensure appropriate capacity in the office to support us to be as effective in our roles as possible and deliver on the promises we were elected on.

Following a review and consultation, we created the following structure in the Leader's Office which is currently being recruited to:

### Head of Leader's Office

Main responsibilities: To provide professional, high-level, strategic advice and leadership in support of the Leader and Cabinet in undertaking their roles and delivering their strategic priorities for Merton.

### Labour Group Assistant

Main responsibilities: To provide support to the Labour Group enabling its effective contribution to the work of the administration and Council, providing policy, communications and administrative support, and acting as a link between the Leader of the Council, Cabinet and wider Group.

### Cabinet Support Officer (x2)

Main responsibilities: To provide effective policy, research and administrative support to Cabinet Members in undertaking their roles and delivering the administration's strategic priorities for Merton.

### Leader's Caseworker

Main responsibilities: To provide effective management of the casework enquiries received by the Leader of the Council, ensuring timely and quality responses, and seeking to ensure the best outcome for residents'.

### Executive Assistant to the Leader

Main responsibilities: To provide high quality and effective administrative support to the Leader of the Council in undertaking their role, including effective diary management and preparation for meetings.

The structure supporting the minority groups are as follows:

Liberal Democrat:

Policy and Research Officer

Main responsibilities: To work closely with the Liberal Democrat Group Leader and Liberal Democrat Councillors on a wide range of issues, in order to support them with the discharge of their functions. To be responsible for the management of the Liberal Democrat Group Office.

Group Secretary

Main responsibilities: To provide administrative support to Councillors in the Liberal Democrat Group within the council.

Conservatives:

Policy and Research Officer

Main responsibilities: To work closely with the Conservative Group Leader and Conservative Members on a wide range of issues, in order to support them with the discharge of their functions.

Merton Park Ward Independent Residents

Group Secretary

To provide administrative support to the councillors in the Merton Park Ward Independent Residents Group within the Council.

The actual, forecasted, and budgeted spends for the political groups in the years requested are as follows:

Leader's Office/Labour Group

2021/22	£149,070 (Actual)
2022/23	£193,000 (Forecast)
2023/24	£285,859 (Budget)

Liberal Democrat

2021/22	£29,380 (Actual)
2022/23	£87,900 (Forecast)
2023/24	£102,508 (Budget)

Conservative

2021/22	£95,490 (Actual)
2022/23	£47,376 (Forecast)
2023/24	£49,934 (Budget)



Merton Park Ward Independent Residents

2021/22 £7340 (Actual)

2022/23 £5180 (Forecast)

2023/24 £5613 (Budget)

### **Supplementary**

Thank you Madame Mayor, my question is to the Member for Finance and Corporate Services, would it be possible to explain how the decision was made to over just three years nearly double Labour's allocation of tax-payers money, not including a £250,000 office refurbishment whilst failing to pay agency care staff a London Living Wage and closing critical services such as the Eastway Day Centre.

### **Reply**

Thank you Madame Mayor, thank you Mr Mottram for your supplementary. I'd start by saying that the council as I'm sure he'll be aware has taken the decision to become a living wage accredited borough which we recently succeeded in achieving and we will have a roadmap to ensure that we are paying not only all our staff, not only all our contractors but all care workers as well eventually a London Living Wage. In terms of his question about the Labour Councillor Office staff I would say to Mr Mottram Merton Council is a professional organisation, it's an organisation that delivers services to around 200,000 people in this borough, and in order for us to ensure that we are delivering for our residents and for the ambitions that this administration has, it is important that we have the staff that can enable us to do that and I would say to him it seems that there is actually cross party support on that principle in this chamber given that as we recently found out that the Liberal Democrats were despite their grandstanding, secretly lobbying for expansion of their own office staff, so I'm pleased that there is cross party support on that basis and I hope that that answers his question.

**From Ingrid Dickenson**

**To the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change**

Why has excessive tree pollarding 'during bird nesting season' been allowed to drastically reduce the leaf canopy of the river walk, leaving some stretches bare and ugly, exposing the industrial area. Some newly planted trees don't suit the natural environment. Why didn't Councillor Stringer answer residents inquiries regarding this?

## Reply

Thank you for your recent communication around the planned tree works along the Wandle Trail between Chaucer Way and Plough Lane which was part of a three-phase planned tree works program that was advertised on the council website and via signage on site.

The phases of work were comprised of the following;

- Phase 1: Monday 5th February – 17th February 2023 Which primarily focused on the high pollards of the Black Poplars / Willow Chaucer Way end.
- Phase 2: Wednesday 1st March – 11th March 2023 Which focused on pollards Plough Lane end and the viewing platform.
- Phase 3: 11th March – 27th March 2023 which focused on habitat creation including tree planting and minor tree pruning crown lifts and dead wooding

As a high footfall public right of way and designated cycle route, the council needs to carefully balance the health and safety of path users and night-time safety improving lamp column clearance as well as insurance liability for neighbouring industrial premises with the boroughs critically important tree canopy cover.

As you may be aware, the Willows and Black Poplars along this section of the Wandle Trail have been managed as high pollards and many of the pollards along this section of the trail date back as far as 2005. Following recent inspections by LBM Tree Officers on the trail, we have reduced the pollards back to earlier growing points and in a few cases with some of the Willows along the trail we have had to cut back to standing trunk monoliths where the structure of the crown was compromised and represented a potential safety hazard.

Additionally, staff have also supplemented this necessary maintenance work with the opportunity to introduce new tree species to the area, including conifers like Scott's Pine. In total, the team were able to plant 20 new heavy standard trees here. The introduction of the new tree species is important as this provides needed resiliency for our tree stock in future generations. The recent events of Ash-dieback are a good example of why diverse tree stock is important.

The council will also be carrying out imminently a range of habitat creation tasks along the Wandle Trail including loggaries / Habitat stacks and Hibernaculum's as well as siting 14 new nest boxes along the trail.

We will endeavour to continue to develop this important area and we continue to improve our public engagement and communication when undertaking larger tree projects.

**From Tony Burton**

**To the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change**

What progress has been made with delivering the "priority project" to close the "missing link" in the Wandle Trail at Earlsfield, when were consultants preparing a scoping study appointed, who was appointed, when will the study be completed and published, and what's the expected completion date for the project?

**Reply**

Council officers undertook a procurement exercise between February and April this year and have recently appointed consultants for the project. The Project Centre were the appointed consultants and initiation meetings and site visits were held on 14th April 2023.

The feasibility study will provide options for the delivery of the Earlsfield 'missing link' as well as the Groton Street / Ravensbury Terrace footbridge. The work will also involve engagement with the Environment Agency, Network Rail and both LBM and LBW.

The feasibility study is expected to be complete late summer 2023 where the council will be able to feedback the results to stakeholders.

**From Vruti Patel**

**To the Cabinet Member for Transport**

Dropped Kerb criteria changed in 2018, sets back in purchasing electric car because they can't have home charger installed due to not meeting current criteria but they would have met the criteria if applied in 2017. Can this be brought back to encourage more electric car use and reduce emissions.

**Reply**

The current vehicle crossover policy was reviewed in 2017/18 to address issues of properties where vehicles were parked on shorter depth frontages and were obstructing the footway. It was agreed that provision for short frontage should remain, but the minimum must meet the industry car average length at 4.30meters.

Whilst this means that some properties will not meet the criteria to apply for a dropped kerb, Merton Council is working hard to support people in Merton to be able to own, rent or share an electric vehicle.

Officers are finalising the roll-out of 530 lamp column charge points within the next six weeks, having reached the halfway mark on 30 March.

The project will triple the number of public charge points available to Merton residents from 259 at the start of January to 789. Once completed, 78,000 Merton homes will have at least one charge point within a two-minute walk of their home. In addition to the current roll-out of lamp-column chargers, the Council is also in the process of bidding for LEVI (Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure) funding announced recently which will further increase EV charging infrastructure for our residents and businesses.

The Council's Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel have established an EV Charging Task Group which has met over the past three months and is due to report back to Cabinet a set of recommendations to shape the borough's EV charging strategy which officers will commence this spring.

We have also written to every large supermarket operator, retail park owner and petrol forecourt operators in the borough to encourage greater provision of rapid EV charging in these locations to support residents to charge cars as part of shopping trips and also to contribute to the borough's carbon reduction goals. The Council is also encouraging petrol station operators to convert sites to local EV charging hubs.

We want Merton to be one of the best places in London to own or drive an electric vehicle and we are making significant progress.

**From James Wickham**

**To the Cabinet Member for Transport**

What does the Council intend to do in the upcoming months / years to enforce the law on illegal riding of bicycles / motorised scooters on pedestrian footpaths?

**Reply**

The local authority is not responsible for enforcement of riding a bike or a motorised scooter on the footway or footpath. This type of offence is enforced by the police.

**From Asif Naqvi**

**To the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development**

Cllr Eleanor Stringer said our council has carefully looked into mobile transmitter risks, including 5G and found no cause for concern. What was the evidence and process used in the investigation and was energy consumption of the infrastructure included within it?

**Reply**

The Council, like many local authorities relies on the research and information provided by the Government and Public Health England regarding 5G. The Council draws on the [advice and guidance provided by Public Health England \(PHE\) regarding the health and safety of mobile technologies including 5G](#).

Public Health England (PHE) takes the lead on public health matters associated with electromagnetic fields, or radio waves, and has a statutory duty to provide advice to Government on any health effects that may be caused by exposure to electromagnetic field emissions. PHE has published advice on exposure to radio waves at the following link: [www.gov.uk/government/collections/electromagnetic-fields#radio-waves](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/electromagnetic-fields#radio-waves)

Public Health England continues to monitor the health-related evidence applicable to radio waves, including in relation to base stations, and is committed to updating its advice as required. [PHE has recently composed a new study on 5G technologies \(Oct 2019\)](#). This concludes that when 5G is added to a network there is a slight increase to overall exposure of radio waves. However, it is advised that the overall exposure is expected to remain low and therefore should have no consequence for public health.

The energy consumption of the 5G network has not been included in the research linked above and isn't in the direct control of the local authority.

**From Loren Moyse**

**To the Cabinet Member for Transport**

Russell Rd (SW19) pavement and road surface are in poor condition. Why are these not prioritised for resurfacing? The road has high footfall/traffic including customers/deliveries for theatre, restaurant, pub, school, pre-school, Nursery, Evans Cycles plus householders. Lorries, articulated lorries and vans regularly use the road for deliveries to these venues.

## **Reply**

To determine roads for inclusion in our annual carriageway resurfacing and footway reconstruction programmes each year the council uses a robust prioritisation model. This model benchmarks and ranks all roads in the borough in comparison to each other and considers a range of criteria such as Engineers Assessment, Condition Survey results, Road Classification, Safety Inspector Priority, Reactive Maintenance Expenditure, Traffic Volumes, Population Density, Emergency, Bus and Cycle routes, Traffic Generators (schools & hospitals etc), Ward Deprivation and Complaints Received. The information used in this model is reviewed and updated annually at the time that the programmes are developed to ensure that the most current picture of the network is taken into account.

According to the current output from this model used to prepare the 2023/24 carriageway resurfacing and footway reconstruction programmes, Russell Road, SW19 carriageway is ranked 9th, and footway is ranked 160th indicating that both the carriageway and footway's condition are currently below average for the borough.

With the council's current levels of funding for planned maintenance, it only allows for 20 – 30 roads to be resurfaced and for 10 – 15 footways to be reconstructed per year. Therefore, it is proposed for Russell Road, SW19 (between The Broadway and Pelham Road) to form part of Merton Council's carriageway resurfacing programme for 2023/24. With regards to Russell Road footway, this is unlikely to form part of the Council's footway reconstruction programme over the next few years, however, this is subject to change as the model is reviewed annually and the possibility that footways deteriorate at different rates.

In the meantime, the Council will continue to inspect all adopted highways including Russell Road, SW19 as per Merton Council's safety inspection regime to ensure they are maintained in a safe condition.

**From Christine Goodair**

**To the Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services**

Please can you explain why you have spent over £200,000 on refurbishing Labour Councillors' office, whilst withdrawing vital funds for the Dementia Care Centre?

## **Reply**

Thank you for your question. With respect, I think the question conflates two separate issues. The decision to consult on the proposal to close Eastway Day Centre was based on service reasons and relates to a different budget (revenue)

from the one being used to carry out improvement works to the Civic Centre (capital), which include the modernisation of the offices used by support staff and Labour councillors. The Council wants to offer staff and councillors from all political parties a modern working environment which allows them to embrace new technology whilst working as efficiently as possible and these works are the pilot for that larger project. The offices currently occupied by councillors and their support team have not had any significant work done to them for over 10 years and were badly in need of updating.

**From Dr Pippa Maslin**

**To the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development**

How does AELTC's planning application 21/P2900 square with Merton Council's pledge that the borough will be carbon neutral by 2050?

**Reply**

Information on planning applications, including the AELTC's proposals: Reference 21/P2900, can be found on Merton Council's planning explorer website.

<https://planning.merton.gov.uk/Northgate/PlanningExplorerAA/GeneralSearch.aspx>

Planning application 21/P2900 has not yet been determined. When the planning application is presented to Planning Applications Committee for consideration, the case officer's report will contain the details of how it has been assessed against Merton's planning policies, including those designed to reduce carbon from new buildings.

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