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From Cllr Laxmi Attawar to the Cabinet Member for Education

Can she update us on progress in delivering a new secondary school in South Wimbledon which many Colliers Wood parents are looking forward to?

Reply

The council has made excellent progress in delivering the complicated project to provide a secondary school that is so much needed but, as I will explain, some targeted opposition is making matters difficult.

The council's main role has been to ensure there is a clear site for the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) to build the permanent school. There are three main site components and all are on timescale to deliver a clear site as required for early 2019 so that ESFA can build the new school for September 2020 after two years in the temporary home of Whatley Avenue.

The risk to the project is to ensure the Elim Church move from the High Path site on time. We have obtained planning permission for a scheme at Merton Hall that received the highest 'green' rating from the independent design review panel, and we have received tenders from contractors to enable us to start the works shortly.

Unfortunately, however, there have been recent applications and challenges to our proposal which seem to be timed to disrupt the plans agreed by Cabinet in July 2016. The council is ensuring we receive the best possible advice to ensure this does not delay the opening of the school.

The council has recently received the secondary school admissions applications which just underlines how much we need the school to open in September 2018. We have received 268 additional resident admissions applications compared to last year and 209 of this extra (and 1187 in total) have requested a Merton School as a first preference. Parents are now aware of the excellent progress our secondary schools have made but if we don't open the new school for September 2018 we simply will not have sufficient secondary school places for our residents.

From Councillor Daniel Holden to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing:

What is an acceptable timeframe for utility companies to undertake necessary repairs in Merton?

Reply

Utility repairs are categorised under two scenarios based on the severity of the situation.

The first is 2 Hours, these are emergency repairs that require action within 2 hours or will be made safe by the London Borough of Merton and recharged to utility companies.

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The second is 28 days. These are repairs that are required to start the guarantee period of their works. These are followed up on a 28 day basis and a raised every 28 days to the utility until the works are complete or have to be escalated due to the situation deteriorating.

There are no powers to enforce a utility to carry out works in a particular timescale though we do encourage the shortest possible.

From Cllr Russell Makin to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

What work has been done to address issues raised in relation to Connect House in the Willow Lane business park?

Reply

Officers are taking a proactive approach in seeking to address the issues at Connect House. Officers have visited the site over the last couple of weeks regarding a range of issues including allegations of a rat infestation, litter and poor quality accommodation. Officers have just concluded inspecting the units and Connect House and have applied the Housing Act 2004 Health, Housing Safety Rating System to determine what hazards, if any, exist. Officers are able to confirm that no category 1 Hazards were identified. Notwithstanding this officers continue to discuss matters with the London Fire Service and the managing agents of the dwelling on options to improve the housing conditions for those households living in Connect House.

From Councillor Suzanne Grocott to the Cabinet Member for Street Cleanliness and Parking:

How much is currently allocated in the budget for pavement cleaning in Merton, and how does this compare to the previous 5 years?

Reply

The budget allocation for the street cleaning service (excluding disposal) in previous years is outlined below:

2016/17 = £3,386k
2015/16 = £3,528k
2014/15 = £3,536k
2013/14 = £3,494k

There is no comparable cost as the street cleaning service is contained within the overall contract cost of £6.5m (again excluding disposal).

From Cllr Pauline Cowper to the Leader of the Council

Can the Leader update me on the future of Wimbledon and Mitcham police stations?

Reply

As announced on 01 November, as part of the MOPAC response to their consultation document – Public Access Strategy – the decision, made by the Police and MOPAC, has been made to sell Wimbledon Police Station and retain Mitcham due to the government’s decision to cut an additional £400m from the Met Police budget, bringing the cuts to £1billion. Wimbledon’s 24/7 front counter service will close and the 24/7 service will move to Mitcham with Mitcham station set to undergo investment to bring teams in to work from this building in due course. This transfer is expected to happen by the end of the year.

The Police and MOPAC will work through the timelines for this process consulting and/or updating the borough as appropriate. The full process of decanting all of the back office functions to Mitcham will take some time.

From Councillor Brian Lewis-Lavender to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing:

Following huge opposition by the residents of West Barnes to parking charges at Sir Joseph Hood Memorial Playing Fields (including a petition with 1,400 signatures presented at the Council Meeting on 12th July 2017), people living nearby are both puzzled and angry that the park gates are now being opened at 6.15am thus allowing commuters to park and preventing local park users with cars from parking there. Can the Cabinet Member please explain the logic behind his decision? Is he seeking to punish residents for opposing the administration’s proposals?

Reply

QUESTION TO BE ANSWERED BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY AND CULTURE

The recent pay-and-display car parking proposals of the Council formed part of an initiative of the Council to introduce formal controls to address a number of misuses of the parking opportunities offered within its public parks. Commuter parking issues were principal amongst these, most especially at Sir Joseph Hood Memorial Playing Fields.

The Council noted the petition submitted by local residents in response to its consultation proposals and decided not to proceed with these as a consequence. The effect of this is that the Council has no formal means to enforce parking controls that the petitioners evidently did not want.

With the parking control initiative at this venue having now been concluded and the overall measures agreed, access to this park has now reverted to the standard opening times, that is, the park is fully accessible by 08.00 hours.

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This, of course, has potentially exposed the park to the commuter parking burdens that the Council's proposals were mainly designed to address.

From Councillor Peter Southgate to the Cabinet member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

The new London Plan sets an overall target of 66,000 new homes every year, compared to the current target of 49,000 homes (an increase of 35%). Merton would see the highest increase of all the London boroughs, with its target more than trebling from 411 to 1328 new homes each year (an increase of 223%). How does the administration propose to respond to the Mayor's new target for Merton?

Reply

The Mayor of London's highly ambitious housing targets for Merton are a draft based on the government's overall housing target for London and the GLA's assessment of land and housing capacity for Merton (GLA Strategic Housing Land Assessment).

We will continue to work with the Mayor of London and his officers towards to assess the capacity and deliverability of the GLA assumptions.

There is a considerable need for new homes in London, however we are keen that the final London Plan (due to be adopted in 2019) sets a target for Merton's share of London's new homes that is both ambitious, but deliverable.

Part of our response will be based on the current consultations underway in the review of Merton's Local Plan. We encourage all Merton residents and councillors to respond to our 'Call for Sites' to suggest suitable sites for new housing and development. This evidence will bring greater clarity and certainty on housing growth options and our targets. Please respond to our Local Plan review at www.merton.gov.uk/newlocalplan

From Cllr Mike Brunt to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

Can the cabinet member update council about progress on the regeneration of High Path, Eastfields and Ravensbury?

Reply

Clarion Housing Group has submitted three outline planning applications to Merton Council.

These are now available online:

- 17/P1717 Outline planning application for Eastfields Estate
- 17/P1721 Outline planning application for High Path Estate
- 17/P1718 Outline planning application for Ravensbury Estate

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These are now available to view and make comments on Merton's Planning Explorer by visiting www.merton.gov.uk/planning-and-buildings. Click the green button 'find a planning application' and type in the planning application number (e.g. for Eastfields: 17/P1717). At the bottom of this page, the "related documents" link lists all the planning application information. We have also set up a dedicated webpage to explain how to consult:
<http://www2.merton.gov.uk/environment/designandconservation/design/estates-regeneration.htm>

This consultation has been extended to be more than the usual 21 days; please provide any comments by Monday 18th December 2017. Please be aware that the legal letters and the Planning Explorer may say different dates (as they are based on the statutory timeline) but the deadline is 18 December 2017.

Representations can be made via the website as above or by emailing planning.representations@merton.gov.uk or by writing to: London Borough of Merton, Civic Centre, London Road, Morden SM4 5DX.

Residents within and around the three estates are receiving written notification between 18th and 21st November 2017 and the site notices are currently being put up around the three estates.

A printed copy of the outline planning application is available to view by appointment at Clarion's office: The Grange, 1 Central Road, Morden, SM4 5PQ. Please contact Clarion Housing Group's regeneration team on 020 3784 5951 or email mertonregen@clarionhg.com to book an appointment.

In addition to the planning applications, the Council's Estates Local Plan has concluded its final consultation following the successful public enquiry in June 2017 and the Planning Inspector's proposed amendments. The Estates Local Plan is intended to be presented to Full Council for adoption in February 2018.

From Councillor David Dean to the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture:

Why has the Dundonald Pavilion hall not been open to booking for the last year and why are the toilets still closed, when this Labour administration promised a new pavilion would mean bringing back the toilets?

Reply

The pavilion at Dundonald Rec has been in continuous use for the past 14 months since it was handed over to the Council upon its practical completion.

The downstairs changing rooms have been used by sports groups, mainly football and cricket teams, and the upstairs community room by a children's breakfast club and an after-school club since September 2016.

The community room was not initially made available for casual hirers due to some operational snagging issues with the new building, but these were resolved by

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September of this year and the room has been available for general hire since that time.

The toilets at this park are operated in line with the general policy that applies across the Greenspaces service and that applied in Dundonald Rec prior to the provision of the new pavilion: specifically, that they are opened for pre-booked activities and events and when a staff member is posted on site and not at other times. Toilets in open spaces are inevitably and regrettably the subject of abuse and vandalism, and are a focus of anti-social behaviour when unsupervised.

From Cllr Agatha Akyigyna to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing

What impact has the new Fair Green bus lane had on Mitcham since its introduction in August?

Reply

It's only been two months since the bus lane in Mitcham has been operational so it it's too early to quantify the impact with any precision.

Generally there has been positive, anecdotal feedback on the street in terms of the look and feel of Mitcham Fair Green and some businesses in London Road have reported increases in footfall and activity in the former pedestrianised area.

The roadworks and expansion of the Fair Green westwards is still ongoing until January 2018. We will fully evaluate the project 12 months on from completion.