

Wimbledon Community Forum 21 September 2016 Chair's Report

The meeting was held at the Mansel Road Community Centre, and chaired by Councillor James Holmes. Approximately 60 residents attended, as well as Merton Councillors, and officers from the council and its partners.

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, introducing the Wimbledon councillors present at the meeting as well as the TfL team and Council Leader, Councillor Stephen Alambritis.

Crossrail 2

Members of the TfL team talked residents through the updated options for Crossrail 2 and responded to previous feedback received.

Crossrail 2 is still at a relatively early stage with early design work being carried out using government funding. The goal is to start construction work in the early 2020s if given planning permission, with the railway opening in the early 2030s.

After residents voiced concern about loss of commercial units and scale of disruption in the original proposals, it was explained that TfL has looked at how to respond to these concerns and meet people's aspirations. Three alternative proposals are now being considered in addition to the original:

1. Take the tunnel south of Wimbledon to alleviate the impact on the town centre. There would be a station at Raynes Park and tunnel portals around New Malden and Motspur Park. This option would cost £2bn than the original proposal put forward. Some permanent infrastructure would still be needed in Wimbledon.
2. Create a new tunnel for South West trains that do not stop at Wimbledon but currently travel through it, allowing them to bypass the station entirely. This would free up space and create two new platforms for Crossrail 2 whilst also meaning quicker times for the trains bypassing Wimbledon. A new tunnel would need to be built first however, delaying the start date for Crossrail 2 work by around three years. It would also require District Line platforms being reduced from four to three, but the line needs four platforms. The cost of this option would be an extra £500m on the original proposal, due to the need for a new tunnel.
3. Rebuild District Line platforms on the north side of the railway, taking Waitrose, the Magistrate's Court and 111-131 residential properties on Alexander Road. Further property on Worple Road would also be required in this instance. South West trains' platforms and lines could then be moved to the existing District Line space, together with Crossrail 2. This option would have minimal impact on the District Line and would not impact the heart of Wimbledon Town Centre, but it would be a logistical challenge and would add six months to a year to the programme. The cost would be broadly cost neutral compared to the original proposals. Tram lines would be relocated to the streets. A benefit to this option is that wider District Line platforms could be built with the potential for mixed-use development above them, including residential properties to replace some of those taken for the build.

Joint consultation between TfL and Network Rail on a preferred option out of the four tabled is likely to take place this autumn. The consultation will invite feedback on the preferred option and will explain why the other three options were ruled out. In all current options two new railway tracks through to New Malden will be needed to allow for Crossrail 2 and South West trains to both run concurrently. The plans will increase the number of trains going into Central London by about 30 per hour.

Update from the Leader of the Council

The Boundary Commission has announced changes for Merton which would mean the borough would have five MPs instead of the existing two. Many wards would also be lost to neighbouring boroughs. Councillor Alambritis is working with the Conservative group leader, Councillor Moulton to express concerns to the commission about the proposed changes.

Cross-party concerns have also been expressed to Network Rail and TfL over Crossrail 2. Whilst the plans are welcomed, they should not be at any cost and councillors wish to ensure that Wimbledon Town Centre and Centre Court will be safeguarded and improved. Ambitions for an improved Morden Town Centre and Rediscover Mitcham also continue.

Consultation is taking place on council tax levels and council spending; Residents can take part in the consultation until 4 November by visiting www.merton.gov.uk/consultations.

The council is delighted with A-Level and GCSE results this year but there is a need to address increasing demand for secondary school places.

In response to a question about improving bus services and links between south and north Wimbledon, Councillor Alambritis said that the council is asking for more devolved powers on such issues so that it can have a greater say on matters such as bus routes and frequencies.

Merton has welcomed the return of AFC Wimbledon to Plough Lane. Galliard, the developers, will provide 9.3% affordable homes as part of the residential side of the development, which will help the council to exceed its overall affordable homes target of 40%.

In response to a concern that there are too many planning applications for tall buildings and tower blocks in Wimbledon, it was explained that the council cannot stop anyone from putting in any type of application. After submission, it is for the Planning Committee to decide. Councillor Holmes commented that if residents are unhappy about a planning application, they should speak to their local councillor about it.

Residents from South Wimbledon voiced several deep concerns about possible plans for a new secondary school in the area, namely: that a disability learning centre could be lost in the process; playing fields would be shared with a primary school; the new school would not be in the right location; and that there has been no consultation to date. Councillor Alambritis and Councillor Judge explained that more secondary schools are needed in the west of the borough and that there is high demand for one from parents in South Wimbledon. Merton's education officers, who have led the expansion of all primary schools so far, are working on proposals for a new secondary school and will only propose it is built

on land adequate for the purpose. Any plans for a new school have not yet been made public due to sensitive commercial negotiations over acquiring land, but once these are in place, public engagement will be carried out. Residents were assured that no learning centre would be closed before a replacement centre is built using capital budget that has already been set aside for such a purpose. Councillor Alambritis concluded that there is a statutory duty to provide school places, but that the council will do this by working with residents.

Planning update

James McGinlay, head of Sustainable Communities explained that the council has to work to national policy and the London Plan in respect to planning matters. However, it is trying to start a conversation with residents about the quality of planning in Wimbledon and what residents want the borough to look like.

In response to concerns about the height of new buildings being proposed and built in Wimbledon, James explained that the Mayor requires that Merton builds approximately 420 new homes a year; as there is not much land, inevitably this means there is somewhat of an increase in the height of buildings in order to meet the target.

The Wimbledon Masterplan is about providing quality buildings, transport, commerce, residential development and infrastructure, for example, the council would like to see two new bridges in Wimbledon in order to address transport issues. Public engagement will take place in November through a series of workshops which residents are encouraged to attend. These workshops have been delayed as the council did not feel it appropriate to consult on major changes when waiting on the Crossrail 2 plans.

Responding to concerns that South Wimbledon has been overlooked in the Masterplan and that it needs quality retail and an overarching planning policy, James said that a strategy is being launched to look at the nature of South Wimbledon and how to attract better retailers. The area is included in the Masterplan and will be discussed in the November workshops.

Soapbox

David Hall, the Chair of Trustees for the charity Wimbledon Community Association (WCA), informed residents that the association has launched a new website which hosts an online directory and search engine for community space for hire. Following the sale of the St George's Road centre in 2012 due to untenable maintenance costs the WCA found that there is continuing need for community space in and around Wimbledon. Rather than investing in new premises at this time, they developed a directory and search engine, both available free of charge on their brand new website, which is now live and can be used by venue providers to publicise their community space as well as by anyone interested in finding space for hire. A formal launch will take place later this year and the WCA is seeking to engage with local venue providers to build up the directory with more venues over the coming months. The site address is www.wimbledoncommunity.org.

Date of next meeting:

Tuesday 6 December 2016 at The Mansel Road Centre, Trinity United Reformed Church, Mansel Road, London SW19 4AA.

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