

Wimbledon Community Forum 6 December 2016 Chair's Report

The meeting was held at the Mansel Road Community Centre, and chaired by Councillor James Holmes. Approximately 40 residents attended, as well as seven other Merton Councillors, and officers from the council and its partners. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, introducing the councillors present at the meeting.

Wimbledon Masterplan

Paul McGarry, Head of Future Merton at Merton Council, updated the meeting on the development of a Masterplan for Wimbledon. Paul thanked the Friends of Wimbledon Town Centre and Create Streets for their recent survey which is a very useful backdrop and test-of-opinion at the start of the masterplan. Over 700 residents completed the survey and the top five findings were:

- Historic buildings are popular with seven out of ten people wanting to protect The Old Town Hall (1st), Wimbledon Fire Station (2nd) and the Prince of Wales pub (3rd) from demolition.
- Towers are not welcome in Wimbledon. Nine out of ten of those who responded do not want to see any buildings of 15 storeys or above.
- Buildings should be 7 storeys or less in Wimbledon Town Centre and The Broadway according to nine out of ten people. Over half would prefer to limit it to 4 storeys or less.
- People appreciate traditional architecture. Eight out of ten would like to see a traditional urban town centre with tightly packed streets, public spaces and traditional urban buildings.
- The town centre could be improved with 'more diverse shops' stated six out of ten people. Better traffic management, better designed buildings and more parking were also raised by a good number.

Paul said there was a lot of overlap with the Council's views.

The next stage in developing the Masterplan would be a workshop on 18 January at Merton Art Space. The workshop will be used to explore:

- Built Character
- Heritage
- Public Spaces
- Traffic & Transport

To register, visit <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/future-wimbledon-masterplan-workshop-tickets-30582543210>. The event will be ticketed to monitor capacity of the venue but if there is more demand, the workshop will be re-run later. Attendees will be asked to do some homework, with people asked to bring along images for an interactive exercise:

- 4 images of buildings / spaces that you love in Wimbledon
- 4 images of buildings / spaces that you dislike in Wimbledon
- 4 images of buildings / spaces, from other places, that illustrate the quality of what you would like to see in Wimbledon.

Following the workshop, Paul will work with councillors and community groups to establish a steering group for the Masterplan. Paul will update the next forum meeting on this.

In response to questions Paul said that the workshop will be a good opportunity to see if there is a public consensus and this will influence the outcome. Following the workshops a first draft of the Masterplan will be developed for the spring and a consultation will take place in summer (timing is indicative at this stage). A revised version will be ready in the autumn with a final version agreed in Spring 2018.

In response to Crossrail 2; Paul explained that Future Merton work closely with CR2, but with the delays to Crossrail 2's consultation, he didn't want to delay the council's masterplan work. The focus will be on areas other than the station and then when more detail is available from TfL in the summer this can be incorporated in the masterplan. The designs put forward as part of the Future Wimbledon competition will be explored in the workshops and the winning entry will be involved in the next stage. This will also include exploring the town's heritage. There is a map on the Council website that sets out the suggested boundaries of the plan www.merton.gov.uk/futurewimbledon. This area was chosen to reflect where there is greatest interest in development. Residents raised concerns about protecting the character of the area prior to the masterplan being adopted. Paul responded that the Council can't predict what applications are submitted or by whom and in some cases applications that have been rejected by the council have been overturned on appeal.

Current planning applications will not be affected by the Masterplan but there are existing planning policies on height, design and townscape. There is still an important role for residents and local communities to influence and improve planning applications. In response to South Wimbledon being part of the masterplan, there are not sufficient resources to develop a specific plan for every area of the borough and different areas have different development pressures.

The Polka Theatre has received Arts Council funding to extend the theatre and following public consultation in September has submitted a planning application Ref. 16/P4619.

Borough Character Study

Future Merton has started the Wimbledon Town chapter of the borough character study and would welcome involvement from residents in the New Year. The recent PlaceCheck exercise with Rob Cowan will feed into the study. For more information please see www.merton.gov.uk/bcs

Shopfront Design Guidance

We are consulting on our new Shopfront Design Guidance. This will help in determining planning applications but also advise shop owners on how to design or improve their shop fronts. www.merton.gov.uk/shopfrontsspd

Merton Community Fund

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) now replaces s106 and is a tax levied for each meter squared of new development that the Council collects to fund community infrastructure. 15% of CIL spend is to be decided by the local community. We want to know your priorities for up to £500,000 borough-wide, from streets, parks, community facilities. For more information please see www.merton.gov.uk/cil

Future of South Wimbledon

Paul McGarry highlighted some of the current regeneration plans for South Wimbledon. The plans for regeneration of the High Path Estate are being consulted on by Circle Housing. There is a consultation workshop on Weds 7 December 5-9pm at Elim Church on High Path. Work is underway with TfL on traffic modelling to improve the function / congestion / air quality and the pedestrian environment at the junction by South Wimbledon station. This is a 2 year project, initially collecting data, modelling the traffic and then exploring potential solutions. Councillor Katy Neep and our business support officer are drumming up support for the council's shopfront improvement grants and are looking to set up a business group for South Wimbledon to help improve the shops on Merton High St / Kingston Rd.

The Chair opened up this item to debate from residents. The following issues were raised by residents:

- There is a difficulty in engaging local businesses, and many look run down. Shopkeepers need to take pride in the location. Councillor Neep responded that many small businesses have responded well to the council's approach and Mark Holmes would be following up on this.
- A more proactive approach is needed to create a vision for the area. Paul responded that the area is covered by existing strategic planning policies
- The Kingston Road pinch point also needs to be examined. Paul explained that the initial traffic modelling will begin at South Wimbledon but will cover Kingston Road and other feeder roads to South Wimbledon junction..
- The impact of the new school on pollution
- There is concern about the loss of commercial space to residential units and this is difficult to prevent under current government 'prior approval planning rules' e.g automatic planning permissions for certain developments that are now beyond the control of the council. This is also impacting on the design of the new homes.
- Some landlords are not making sufficient provision for rubbish
- South Wimbledon tube station is looking dilapidated. Paul responded that the building is listed and the empty retail unit is expected to be filled soon by a new retail unit – currently in planning.
- There must be opportunities for pop-ups in empty properties. Paul explained that his team is trying to broker opportunities for businesses to use empty shops.
- Local diversity has been good in encouraging a wider range of local businesses
- High rise development without character is being built and more needs to be done to take into account the importance of design
- Litter problem needs more bins, enforcement and education
- More needs to be done to ask residents what they want.

Councillor Martin Whelton, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing, thanked residents for their contribution and a worthwhile discussion. In Wimbledon the Masterplan presented an opportunity to set design preferences and balance the interests of residents and businesses. The process will actively engage the community so the council can listen to residents. In South Wimbledon the regeneration of High Path will have a huge impact and the public enquiry will no doubt cover the debate about building height. Councillor Whelton said he is happy to have an open discussion with local residents groups.

Councillor James Holmes agreed to present a motion to the next Council meeting on behalf of the Community Forum. Following discussion the following wording was agreed by the meeting:

“This Council agrees to work proactively and in a meaningful way with residents in South Wimbledon to develop it into a vibrant and thriving community, that is culturally and economically progressive, and which respects its rich heritage.”

New secondary school in South Wimbledon

Tom Procter, Head of Contracts & School Organisation at Merton Council, gave a presentation on proposals for a new secondary school in South Wimbledon. A copy of the presentation can be found at <http://www.merton.gov.uk/community-living/communityforums/wimbledoncommunityforum.htm>. Tom explained that no ideal site for a secondary school has been found and that the Council felt this site offered the best option.

In response to questions about consultation Tom explained that Harris Academy will hold a statutory consultation about the principles of the new school in February 2017 and there will be consultations on the planning application, likely to be in autumn 2017. In response to points made about transport access Tom said that more work needed to be done but safe access for school children will be ensured and it would not be appropriate for the school to be directly accessible from Mertantun Way as it stands.

In response to suggestions that Mitcham had more appropriate sites for a secondary school Tom explained that schools in this area are smaller and one existing Mitcham school is expanding with potential for two more if there is demand - putting a new school in that area would have a negative impact on those schools. Putting the school in South Wimbledon better matched the aspirations of parents for a local school.

Tom explained that whilst the new school was at its temporary site in Whately Avenue for two years they would be making use of Joseph Hood Recreation Ground and that would include refurbishing the tennis courts. Once the school moves to High Path the council would facilitate use of local playing fields, the nearest of which is Nursery Playing Fields which is currently leased by the Council and would need to be shared with Rutlish School.

Residents were concerned that the new facility to replace High Path Resource Centre would not be suitable. Tom replied that the head of the Resource Centre is working with service users and is happy with the plans for the new facilities.

Councillor Katy Neep, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, acknowledged that this was a difficult site with many challenges but was the only option that met the immediate need for a secondary school to open in September 2018. Harris is familiar with running schools in confined spaces and with the Council will ensure safety of pupils is taken very seriously. Councillor Neep has already spoken with many residents and is happy to discuss any on-going issues. Councillor Holmes encouraged residents to continue to raise issues of concern with councillors.

Soapbox

A resident raised concerns about litter and leaf fall in Plough Lane and Haydons Road.

Date of next meeting:

Wednesday 22 March 2017 at the Mansel Road Centre, Trinity United Reformed Church,
Mansel Road, London SW19 4AA.

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