



Love Wimbledon

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Wimbledon

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Merton Council Parking Consultation

Love Wimbledon response to Overview and Scrutiny Commission

August 2019

Love Wimbledon BID is very disappointed to see the results of the consultation about parking charges reflecting only one change in response to the feedback received. The only amendment made for Wimbledon town centre is in fact a negative one!

Fundamentally, have no doubts that Love Wimbledon is very supportive of initiatives that are likely to improve air quality. We have been working closely with Sustainable Merton, Merton Council and Greater London Authority (GLA) to understand the issues and apply for funding and support air quality initiatives within the town. However, we do not believe the proposals outlined in this consultation will tackle air quality and certainly not give it the urgency that this issue requires.

It should also be questioned why there are no targets being placed within this strategy to measure the impact of this strategy on air quality.

1. Air Quality in Wimbledon Town Centre

There are 4 primary issues in Wimbledon that each have a dramatic impact on air quality.

- Through traffic - 60% of traffic in Wimbledon is through traffic, including lots of HGVs
- Buses - 10 bus routes serve the town and all except one route (no.93) emitting diesel fumes and NOx emissions. The 156 route has some new fleet, but others emit plumes of visible smoke
- Taxis - over 200 taxis consider Wimbledon as their home rank they are all diesel and regularly are parked up idling
- School term times - during school holidays the congestion in the town is markedly reduced

Addressing any one of these issues directly will have an immediate and significant impact on air quality. For example, changing no.93 bus route to hybrid immediately reduced NOx emissions by nearly 50% in Putney High Street.

We appreciate the need to work with partners on these and we would be very happy to lobby in partnership on these issues but Merton could take the initiative and create a Clean Air Zone in the town and do this now to be proactive on tackling through traffic.

2. Support our high streets and town centres

It is no secret that retail is in turmoil and retail patterns are changing dramatically year on year. In Merton, we are unfortunately out of control of decisions of national chains but must do what we can collectively, to support our local retail centres as much as possible. With recent closures in the town (HMV, Bathstore, Burger King, Maplin and Chimichanga) our vacancy rate is increasing by the month. Debenhams could be the next closure and changes to Tesco Metro announced on 5th August Merton Council has an obligation to consider any decisions taken that could further contribute to the demise of 'the high street'. Within the last 2 years we have had 43 retail shops close down. Retailers with a physical presence are already at a distinct disadvantage with significantly higher overheads, including

extraordinarily high business rates. Collectively we need to work much harder to ensure our town centres have compelling reasons to visit them. High parking charges do not provide any incentive for people to visit the town and Merton Council should consider the unwanted side effect of this initiative and how it plans to mitigate this.

3. Proposed Parking policy and current provision

The cost of parking in New Wimbledon Theatre car park is going to increase by 100%. This car park supports the smaller and independent shops along The Broadway during the day, where footfall is already low and the evening and cultural activities in the town after 6pm.

The report refers to cars circling to find parking. I would like to see the evidence that demonstrates this. Cars wait in Hartfield Road and Broadway car parks for an available space and you cannot circle around St George’s Road, Worple Road due to the traffic directional restrictions.

Quality of the council owned car parking is also very poor, not well lit, the surfaces are sub standard and overall are not well maintained. St George’s Road car park regularly attracts anti social activity, the pedestrian entrances are unsanitary and we have been lobbying for improvements to this facility for many years.

There are also proposals within this consultation with regards to reduced prices for season tickets for the car parks which are contradictory to the policy of wanting to reduce traffic in town.

Comparisons within the report are misleading. Wimbledon is one of the very few areas across London that has parking restrictions until 11pm. All restrictions in Westminster end at 6.30pm Monday to Friday and Saturday at 1.30pm except for coaches.

Parking costs on the street in Soho are £4.90 per hour. Wimbledon is being proposed as £4.50 per hour – are we comparing Wimbledon to these destinations?

Zone	Location	Sub-zones	Price per hour
A	Knightsbridge, Belgravia and Pimlico	A1, A2, A3, A4	£3.70
B	Bayswater and Maida Vale (Sth)	BC1, B2, B3, B4, B5, B6, B7, B10, B11	£2.90
C	Harrow Rd, Queen's Park and Maida Vale (Nth)	CB1, C1, C2	£1.70
D	Victoria, Westminster and Millbank	D1, D4	£2.50
E	Mayfair and St James	E1	£4.90
F	Hyde Park, Marylebone and Fitzrovia	F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6	£4.90 Pre-2015 Diesel vehicles £7.35
G	Soho, West End and Covent Garden	G1, G2	£4.90

Merton Council has produced evidence that increased parking costs reduces traffic thereby improving the pedestrian experience. This research is relevant to central London, within the congestion zone and is not related to our town with significant through traffic and polluting buses. It is also important to take into account the swathes of evidence about the need to have adequate and appropriately priced parking provision to drive the local retail economy and the recommendations from Local Government Association to adopt a ‘joined up thinking’ approach, indeed there is a 29 page strategy entitled Revitalising Town Centres that refers to taking a customer led approach to parking.

4. Further proposed increases in the recommendations

In the recommendations report 5.34 references a £2 flat fee between 6pm & 11pm, which is welcomed. However this is only in two of the town centre car parks that are the most unpopular due to the poor condition and accessibility of them both. In the original proposal these were cited as being made available free of charge – so this is a further detriment to the town from the original proposal.

5. Love Wimbledon proposals

Love Wimbledon BID is ready to work with Merton Council initiatives that are going to improve the town centre, including its air quality but we do not believe that this parking strategy will have the positive impact that we are all looking for. This is demonstrated by the lack of targets and clear measurable objectives in the paper.

- Love Wimbledon is ready to discuss a strategy on personal deliveries and last mile delivery opportunities.
- Let's be part of the change towards electric vehicle adoption by providing EV charging points in the public car parks and not just on residential streets and provide reduced rate parking if not free for EV vehicles.
- Let's consider providing additional 20 minute free bays (including freeing up those outside the station from food delivery bikes, which we have also been actively lobbying for) to allow for short stay convenience shopping, particularly supporting small independent businesses.
- Let's lobby the bus companies, TfL and GLA hard to change their policies, particularly as the extended ULEZ will not impact upon Merton and is likely to attract the older fleet of vehicles.
- Can we actively support our evening and night time economy and take the pressure off the on street parking bays in the residential areas by having a flat rate after 6pm across all Merton Council car parks in Wimbledon or reduce the evening hours of operation of the council owned car parks? 11pm is punitive and unreasonable for off street parking.
- Let's work with local businesses to encourage them to change their HGV fleet or travel outside of peak times.
- Actively and collectively promote an anti-idling campaign with 20mph streets across the borough reducing emissions by eliminating aggressive accelerating.

6. Summary

Love Wimbledon believes that raising parking charges by such a high percentage will have a detrimental impact on people's perceptions of visiting the town – pushing them out to retail parks and further incentivise online shopping. We do not believe this will impact at all on air quality in Wimbledon town centre.

How is Merton Council planning to demonstrate that by raising the parking charges there will be a dramatic impact on air quality that warrants this approach? If the air quality has not improved within a year will Merton Council commit to reverting to current charging policy?

What are the quantifiable measures that will be reported against?

If LBM are truly serious about changing air quality, then let's do that and not pretend that parking charges are going to have the required effect we all seek. We need flexible and intelligent tariffs to support business particularly at this time of challenge for town centres and high streets.

Previous communications at Cabinet meetings have indicated it is important to take radical decisions and nudges are needed to change behaviour. Nudges can indeed change behaviour, let's not make these nudges detrimental to our local economy and take positive radical decisions on the strategies that we know and have been proven to have a dramatic impact on our air quality.

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