

Mitcham Community Forum 25 February 2021 Chair's Report

The meeting was held via Zoom, and chaired by Councillor David Chung. 10 residents and two councillors attended on Zoom with 72 additional views on YouTube. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained how the meeting would work.

London Assembly Update

Leonie Cooper, Assembly Member for Merton and Wandsworth, provided an update on the work of the London Assembly. It has been a difficult time for everyone with many families suffering from bereavement. Leonie paid tribute to staff in Merton, NHS, City Hall, Police and Fire Service in supporting residents who have been ill. In the second wave significant impact on police with up to 22% off sick or isolating. The roll out of vaccines has been a fantastic success and in SW London we are ahead of planned delivery.

Many businesses have been hit very hard. There has been lots of support from Government and local councils but we hope to see more from the Chancellor in the budget. As Chair of Economy Committee Leonie has been meeting with those affected and they are looking at how to build a recovery in London. This includes looking at the 15 minute neighbourhood concept as an option for London. As deputy chair of the Environment Committee Leonie and her colleagues have been looking at protecting and improving open spaces and looking into whether the improvements in Air Quality during the pandemic can be retained. Some of the traffic measures introduced have been controversial and even in a pandemic it is essential to keep residents informed and engaged. [Mayors Question Time](#) on the budget took place today over Zoom. The Mayors budget includes a 9.5% increase in the precept going to the police, the fire brigade and concessionary fares.

The pre-election period starts on 22 March. Many may wish to register for postal vote to avoid attending person. The Election is on 6 May and involves the Mayor, Assembly member for Merton and Wandsworth, and the Assembly top up list. Ged Curran is the new returning officer for Merton and Wandsworth.

Cllr Gretton asked about the impact of 30 years of planning decisions on Mitcham. Leonie raised concerns about the current proposals in parliament to reform planning, in particular the expansion of permitted development rights. If any residents have any issues for Leonie they can email to leonie.cooper@london.gov.uk

Wilson update

Sue Tappenden, project manager for the Well-Being part of Wilson gave an update on the project. South West London Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) had provided a statement saying that the CGG is working with NHS Property Services on options for development of a Mitcham health and wellbeing hub (including the Wilson site), but as yet there is no timetable for work to start. The CCG will engage with the community at the appropriate time. The CCG is hopeful there will be more developments to share over the coming months.

In 2019 there was a decision to use parts of the Wilson Hospital for a well-being space on an interim basis. Wilson Wellbeing Steering Group was set up to develop the project. Chaired by Diana Sterck, Steering Group members include representatives from local community organisations and local residents. The project started work late 2019 and all the Group's meeting minutes are available on the [MVSC website](#). The Group is working with the local community to identify services and gaps to support the expansion and delivery of wellbeing services and activities to support local residents. Unfortunately, COVID-19 has impacted greatly on progress and development work has been extremely difficult over the last year.

On a positive note, working with the CCG, NHS Property Services developed an improved and more flexible wellbeing space at The Wilson at the end of 2020 as part of their social prescribing initiative. The space is currently being used for the vaccine clinic. As restrictions lift and the vaccine programme changes, it is anticipated that the space will become available for use by the local community to deliver wellbeing services and activities. Space will be free of charge to hire for small organisations/group and available at a competitive rate for larger organisations. The social prescribing initiative is also developing a community garden at the Wilson for use by local residents.

Cllr Chung asked about publicity for the service. Sue said this was put on hold during COVID but they are developing a website with all the relevant information and a way of booking the space. It will also ask residents to suggest activities that will benefit the community.

A resident asked about the long term prospects, as residents are concerned. Sue said she understands the frustration and will ensure that the CCG are aware that there is still a high level of interest in future plans.

A resident asked about booking rooms at the Wilson and Sue said she could be [emailed](#) until the website is ready. A resident said there is also a community garden at the Canons. Sue has been talking with the Canons project team but the two sites will have very different offers.

Cllr Gretton asked how we could encourage young people to take up more outdoor activities. Sue said that the Wilson Wellbeing would not be limited to just the Wilson site and they would be looking to work with other partners and collaborators to support a wide range of projects and ideas.

Cllr Chung said that the Wilson is important to the health and wellbeing and can be a major factor in closing the gap between East and West of the borough.

Merton Character Study

Katherine Fox, Urban Designer, and Tara Butler, Programme Manager, gave a presentation on the Merton Character Study and Small Sites Toolkit currently being consulted on. The presentation is attached to this report.

Katherine said that the Character Study was not just based on the built environment but also has layers including people, history, natural environment, communities, socio-economic and environment. Neighbourhood areas were drawn from the views of residents.

In Morden environment and transport had scored highly. There is more detail for each ward, including potential growth.

Small sites are those less than 0.25 hectares and in Merton they have a critical role. In the last 15 years 62% of new homes were built on these small sites. The Small Sites Toolkit sets out the issues developers should consider including themes such as 'Made in Merton', 'Fit for Purpose', 'People First' and 'Economic and Sustainable'. The aim is to improve the quality of developments on small sites.

Both the [Character Study](#) and the [Small Sites Toolkit](#) consultations are open until 23 March 2021.

A resident asked about back garden developments and Tara explained that Merton generally does not accept applications on green space, but the guide provides guidance for those considering an application on a small site.

A question was asked about the future of the Burn Bullock and Cricket pavilion which is under threat from landlord and if Merton would consider a Compulsory Purchase Order. Tara said the guide should help improve any applications from the landlords by providing clear guidance on the quality. CPOs can only be down in particular circumstance so it would depend on the legal rights. Future Merton is happy to continue to engage with the club.

A resident asked of the tool kit and character study addresses accessibility, needs of intergenerational families, and secondary routes. Tara said these issues are covered in the new Local Plan.

A resident said there were distinctive community areas that had been included in the same neighbourhoods for example Phipps Bridge has been linked to Church Road. We would welcome feedback on these issues in the consultation.

A resident asked if the plans cover the need for affordable homes, Tara explained these documents cover the look of buildings, the Local Plan will address the need of affordable homes. Another resident said that planning decisions currently allow buildings that do not reflect current character and again this feedback to the consultation is helpful. This toolkit will address quality on small sites as this makes up the majority of development.

A resident asked if whether local churches were notified of plan-making consultations. If anybody or any organisation would like to be notified of public consultations on plan-making and planning guidance they are welcome to contact us and we will add them to the consultation database. We can't add or retain contact details without the person or organisation explicitly opting in. There are two main ways to do this:

- Complete the online survey "Subscribe to the Local Plan consultation database" available on Merton Council's Local Plan webpage here: [Local Plan \(merton.gov.uk\)](https://www.merton.gov.uk/local-plan)
- Register for email alerts about council-wide consultations (this will allow the user to select different council-wide areas of interest such as education, the environment, climate change matters, as well as plan-making) [Get involved in Merton](#)

Census 2021

Matthew Hopkins, Census Engagement Manager for the Office of National Statistics (ONS), gave a presentation on the 2021 Census. The presentation is attached to this report. Census day is 21 March 2021 and this will be a digital-first census with most households able to complete the form online. For those without digital access they will be able to request a paper copy and ONS field staff will visit households who have not completed their census form and can provide paper copies. Help will also be available online, through a call centre and locally from Merton Voluntary Service Council.

Rowan Site

James McGinlay, Head of Regeneration, gave an update from Merton Council and SW London CCG. The Rowan Park development including housing, park, community facility and health centre. The housing and park has been delivered. For the health centre Crest has approved the building, some funding from Merton. Changes to the design has been approved by planning. The CCG is working with GPs which has been slowed by pandemic. GPs have agreed the layout, but CCG is commissioning surveyors to report over the next couple of months to authorise value for money with in the NHS. The community facility is integral with the health centre but is the same size as previously planned. It will be about a year-long build and this could begin possibly in the summer.

Tara updated on Mitcham Bridge construction work is taking place, and we hope to finish late summer 2021.

Climate Change Action Plan

Katie Halter, Climate Change Officer gave a presentation on the Climate Change Action Plan. The presentation is attached to this report. The Climate Change Strategy was adopted in November 2020 and the deliver plan was adopted in February 2021. The Plan covers Merton Council's work to decarbonise and support it can give to others.

There has been a 40% reduction in Merton Council estate emissions since 2009. Merton Council took a number of actions in 2020 including switching to 100% renewable electricity; completing the roll out of LED street lights; spending £0.5m to decarbonise children's centres and community buildings; £400,000 from the Neighbourhood Fund being spent on a Warmer Homes Project; updating the Local Plan and campaigns such as Climate Champions in GP surgeries.

Plans in 2021 include new [community pledges](#), another round of [Solar Together](#), and new [Action Groups](#) to encourage community projects. You can register for [email updates](#) on this work.

A resident asked if there was help for voluntary, community, and faith groups. Katie said the team was happy to provide advice to groups and will be attending a meeting of the Faith and Belief Forum. The team is already in communication with Sustainable Merton, Merton Residents Transport Group and others and any groups are welcome to get involved.

COVID Update

Barry Causer, Head of Strategic Commissioning, Public Health, gave a presentation on the latest situation with COVID in Merton. The presentation is attached to this report and covered the latest statistics, the new Roadmap, and key updates.

Barry said that the 7-day case rate (per 100,000) was down to 132.3 from a peak of 1000 but this is still too high. We have seen a similar disproportionate impact on some BAME communities in wave 2 as we did in the first wave, and cases have been higher in the East of the borough compared to the West. The new national road map has a number of stages and each has at least 5 weeks between each stage, which will be used to assess the impact of the changes.

There had been an enhanced testing programme in Pollards Hill in response to a resident who was found to have the South African variant of COVID-19. Over 10,000 tests were circulated and so far no additional cases have been found. Cllr Draper said the whole council had contributed to an extraordinary achievement in Pollards Hill.

The vaccination programme is going well in South West London, now on priority groups 5 and 6. There are a number of barriers and some hesitancy to have the vaccines amongst some communities, so the NHS are holding webinars led by BAME clinicians to answer any questions from those living or working in Merton and are also working with local community and faith organisation to encourage take up. Recent studies have shown that the vaccine is likely to reduce transmission as well as reducing the impact of the virus on individuals.

To find out more you can sign-up for the [Council COVID newsletter](#), and if you would like to be more involved in supporting your community you can still join the [COVID Champions](#). There is also financial support available to local community groups through [Merton Giving](#).

Councillor Chung thanked residents for attending and closed the meeting.

Date of future meetings:

Wednesday 13 October 2021 at 7.15pm, Council Chamber, Merton Civic Centre.

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