

Strategic Theme Questions to Cabinet Members

From Cllr Neaverson to the Cabinet Member for Transport

Further to the welcome announcement in December of a partnership between Merton Council and Human Forest to provide residents with access to e-bikes in the borough, can the Cabinet Member update on when the service will launch, and how many e-bikes and bays will be provided across the borough?

Reply

The Council completed its contract with Human Forest in December 2022 in its first step to introduce bike hire and e-bike hire to Merton residents. We are also in ongoing discussions with Lime to introduce a similar scheme, providing greater micro-mobility options for the borough.

Council officers are working with Human Forest to identify suitable docking locations across Merton whilst seeking to minimise the impact on pedestrians using our footways.

Priority locations such as near transport hubs, shopping centres, shopping parades, key public buildings such as leisure centres, education centres are all being assessed where pavement width allows. Where the footway width is not sufficient, officers are also assessing where road-space can be utilised to support bike docking locations.

In some instances, this may include appropriating car parking bays for bike hire. Some of these spaces are within Controlled Parking Zones which require a statutory consultation and traffic orders to amend some CPZs and enable the roll-out. It is envisaged that the first batch of on-pavement locations would be in place by mid-March 2023.

Officers are working with Human Forest to agree the launch date which is dependent on having a critical number of docking locations; which in turn influences the number of bikes available to residents across the borough.

From Cllr Flack to the Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning

Would the Cabinet Member confirm how many school streets within the borough had Breathe London and Vivacity monitors, or any other type of air quality monitor, installed before the school street was implemented and how many of these still have them in place now the school street is up and running?

Reply from the Cabinet Member for Transport

The majority of Merton's school streets were implemented during 2020 in the pandemic, as a result of funding made available at that time to deliver this project.

The concept of school's streets is to improve safety and prevent the largescale congestion we all see during the school runs. In terms of pollution around the schools, it is clear that if the traffic is taken away during peak periods, it removes the congestion and vehicle idling we regularly see around schools.

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During 2019 the Council's Air Quality Team worked hard to map pollution at all of our schools and highlight schools to focus on as part of our Air Quality Action Plan. This exercise used diffusion tubes which is successful in monitoring monthly averages and compliance with the annual objectives for Nitrogen Dioxide, but unfortunately does not capture the peaks and troughs in pollution we see around school hours.

In 2021 the Council secured additional funding from the South London Partnership Innovate project to work on the rollout of new low-cost real-time monitoring which also captures data on PM2.5s (fine particles). This monitoring covers nearly 70 locations in the borough and includes 15 schools, many of which are school streets. Unfortunately, neither the technology nor funding was available to do a full before and after emissions analysis of the school streets. Direct analysis will be difficult during this period due to the impact on schools during Covid 19.

Officers are in the process of reviewing the considerable data for 2022 including the breathe London data, this work will provide an excellent foundation for preparing our new Air Quality Action Plan this year, as well as assessing the impact of the proposed ULEZ expansion.

All of this data will be presented as part of our statutory duty to produce an annual status report on air quality in the spring.

As the Innovate project is coming to an end, officers are currently reviewing the need for continuing much of this work to help determine the effectiveness of our measures to reduce air pollution.

From Cllr Kirby to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change

Can the Cabinet Member update on progress towards our plans to reach net zero?

Reply

Merton's Climate Strategy and Action Plan was adopted in November 2020. Since then, Cabinet has published annual Climate Delivery Plans which set out what happens in the year and actions for the next year, to ensure that we are transparent and consistent about progress we are making to be a net zero borough by 2050 and a net zero council by 2030. The Council has awarded £4million to assist, most recently an additional £2million in June 2022 and is using this money to help residents and businesses save costs and reach net zero. Climate action is being embedded in all procurements and decisions we make and there is a strong crossover with the Cost-of-Living emergency. Merton's Climate Delivery Plan for Year 3 will be considered by Cabinet at its meeting in February 2023 and details our progress towards net zero. Recent progress includes:

- Developing and implementing mechanisms to enforce Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards in the private rented sector, helping private sector tenants with their energy bills

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- Supporting Merton's response to the Cost-of-Living emergency by helping fuel poor households access retrofit funding through the Mayor's Warmer Homes programme. This includes using Merton's Carbon Offset Fund to top up existing national and regional funding streams to maximise the impact of this retrofit.
- Developing new planning policies that go further than national policy and the London Plan to ensure that new development in Merton is compatible with Merton's carbon reduction targets and to reduce the need for further expensive retrofit;
- Boosting the Council's capacity to act ourselves and help our residents and businesses, including on buildings retrofit, climate engagement and a climate building surveyor to decarbonise the Council's buildings and schools
- Delivering a range of climate engagement activities including the Canons Summer Fair in June 2022, World Car Free Day activities in September 2022, and Merton's Schools Climate Conference in November 2022;
- Launching Merton's new Schools Climate Network and Charter;
- Continuing to support community-led climate action in Merton, primarily through the roll-out of three Climate Action Group projects funded through NCIL: Merton Garden Streets 2022, Energy Matters, and the Wheel;
- Securing £750,000 external funding to deliver 500+ EV charging points in Merton;
- Working with other local authorities and pan-London groups to identify opportunities for a green recovery from Covid through London Councils' seven programmes on climate change and the London Recovery Board's Green New Deal mission. This includes working with the South London Partnership to bid for funding, share best practice and deliver collaborative projects across several themes including green jobs and skills, waste reduction and retrofit
- Developing Phase 1 of Merton's Tree Strategy for the management of Council-owned trees;
- Securing £12,000 to work with University College London and The Wheel to help boost businesses and minimise their waste, focussing on Morden town centre high street;
- Embedding low carbon as a factor in all Council procurement processes so that we are influencing our supply chain to reduce their carbon footprint when we work with them.
- Developing Merton's Draft Climate Engagement Strategy;
- Surveying Merton's operational buildings and community schools to inform Merton's estate decarbonisation plans and future funding bids;

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- Continuing the decarbonisation of Merton's pensions investments;
- Developing and delivering green skills training opportunities and programmes for Merton's residents through Merton's Towards Employment team, Merton's Adult Education programme, and partnership projects with the South London Partnership; and

Re-launching the Environment & Climate sub-group of Merton's Sustainable Communities and Transport Partnership, including the Council, housing associations, local community groups and the Chamber of Commerce to progress discussions with partners across the four key themes of Merton's Climate Strategy & Action Plan: Buildings & Energy, Transport, Green Economy and Greening Merton.

From Cllr Holden to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change:

What action has the council taken to help reduce surface flooding occurrences since the summer of 2021?

Reply

The Council has worked very hard both on its own and with partners and other risk management organisations to help reduce flood risk from all sources and in particular, the occurrence of surface flooding incidents in Merton. This includes:

- Undertaking the high risk gully cleaning programme each winter to ensure the borough's own road highway drains and gullies are clear and unblocked. This includes an in-depth clean of gullies (total of 8953 gullies cleaned this winter) and pipework in higher risk areas, measuring the level of silt within the gully to accurately forecast future cleaning cycles and mapping the results to inform where defects are;
- Collaborative working with Thames Water on their sewer network across the areas of greatest surface water flooding risk in Merton and supporting Thames Water to use the council's planned road closures to remove over 21 tonnes of silt from the Thames Water sewer network in Raynes Park centre;
- Upgrades to the Raynes Park bridge pump station;
- Collaborative drainage surface water modelling and mapping of the West Merton area to refine flood risk maps and to help support flood alleviation schemes and unlock central government funding;
- Installed 4G sensors which monitor silt and water levels in gullies in high risk locations and issue alerts when full;

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- CCTV surveys of over 3km of drains and sewers across Merton to ensure pipework, sewers and culverts are free of defects and where they have found issues we have undertaken physical repairs such as installing new pipework, pipe lining or removing tree roots for example. We completed major works in Raynes Park town centre on Coombe Lane reconfiguring, installing new upsized and repairing historic drainage pipes runs;
- Developing the Raynes Park Flood Alleviation project with partners Thames Water, Network Rail and the Environment Agency to reduce flooding to homes, businesses and infrastructure in the area; this includes securing financial contributions from partner organisations;
- Invited the Thames Region Flood & Coastal Committee elected members and the Environment Agency to Merton and have shown them delivered schemes and planned projects in the borough such as Raynes Park with the aim of gaining additional Flood Defense Grant in Aid (FDGiA) funding for flood alleviation;
- Installing SuDS rain gardens on Wimbledon Hill Road, Wimbledon Chase and on The Path, South Wimbledon. We have designed a new SUDS rain garden which is programmed for construction in Raynes Park town centre in February 2023. Rain gardens are a type of SuDS or Green Infrastructure measures to help slow down and attenuate the flow of water into the underground sewer system as well as making the streetscene more attractive and having biodiversity, air quality and water quality benefits;
- Undertaking specialist independent flood risk investigations into the areas that significantly flooded in summer 2021 (known as Section 19 reports), to identify the sources and actions that can be taken to ensure the risk is minimized of it happening again. We undertook an online borough wide flood survey to ensure that residents and businesses had an opportunity to feed into this investigation and to capture all flooding incidents during summer 2021. The reports will soon be published in spring following detailed review by Thames Water and the Environment Agency;
- We successfully bid for and secured Thames Water Surface Water Management funding to aid the design and construction of a new pocket park in Kenilworth Green/Home Park Rd in Wimbledon Park;
- Completed the Wimbledon Park Lake Reservoir Safety Project to ensure the category A reservoir is compliant with national safety standards and to help better protect homes and businesses in Merton and Wandsworth from reservoir flooding. The major improvement scheme improved the Lake and dam by construction a new lake toepath, new spillways, capping and provided a new emergency drain down as well as delivering other benefits such as Eel Passes.
<https://www.merton.gov.uk/leisure-recreation-and-culture/parks-and-open->

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[spaces/parks-and-recreation-grounds/wimbledon/wimbledon-park/wimbledon-park-lake-project](#)

- Successfully securing £204,000 from the Environment Agency and DEFRA to deculvert and restore the previously culverted Wimbledon Park Brook, reducing flood risk to residential properties and the park and maximising biodiversity potential and natural flood risk management. Having visited the site in January 2023 with councillors from other parts of the wider Thames Region flood committee, the Environment Agency and Thames Water are nominating this project for the Institute of Civil Engineers [Chris Binnie Medal](#), an award for work which has benefited society by improving the sustainability of water;
- Clearance of ditches and watercourses across the borough in December and January 2023, as well as working with Mitcham Common Conservators to maintain the ditches around the Common and elsewhere to ensure water can run through;
- Undertaking highway drainage soakaway chamber clearance and maintenance;
- Ensured the culverts and watercourses in Motspur Park, around Sir Joseph Hood are cleared of tree roots and are running clear to the Beverley Brook;
- Merton actively fed into the Pan-London Summer 2021 independent flood review by led by an expert panel;
- Inputted via workshops and provided consultation responses to Thames Water's 25 year Drainage & Wastewater Management Plan (DWMP) to ensure Merton receives significant capital investment with regards to sewerage infrastructure upgrades.

From Cllr Braithwaite to the Cabinet Member for Transport

Does the Cabinet member believe that the decision to remove the provision of road safety training at schools is compatible with the target of increasing active travel within the borough?

Reply

The Council is committed to improving road safety and active travel through a range of initiatives delivered through TfL funding, Merton capital funding and community infrastructure levy.

The saving discussed at the Overview and Scrutiny Commission on 25 January relates to a reduction of the Council's revenue funding in the team but does not seek to stop the service. Officers are working to maintain the service through alternative funding sources including via TfL funding, income from school streets ANPR cameras, increased income in the FutureMerton Team and through greater collaboration with Public Health and its resources.

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The Council will continue to provide road safety training in schools, supplemented by online road safety learning as part of the TfL STARS accreditation of Merton's schools. [About STARS \(tfl.gov.uk\)](https://tfl.gov.uk/about-stars)

The Council will also be preparing a new walking and cycling strategy in 2023 to promote active travel and enhance cycling and walking infrastructure.

From Cllr Skeete to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change

How many trees will the Council be planting this year?

Reply

Trees are an invaluable contributor to improving the quality of our local environment. The contributions of trees to wellbeing, clean air and community pride are well known. Because of their importance, we are ambitiously planning on planting 10,000 trees during this municipal year.

A list of some of the successful programmes that have and are being delivered are;

- Urban Tree Challenge (NEW Parks and Highway Tree Planting)
- Trees for Cities (Urban Woodland Project Cranmer Green)
- Trees for Streets Street Tree Sponsorship Project and associated additional funding from Mayor or London Cool Space Project
- Queens Green Canopy commemorative trees
- Inter Faith Week Planting
- London Road Playing Field Growing Together Orchard Planting
- Grow Back Greener funded project at Mostyn Gardens
- Trust for Conservation Volunteers I Dig Trees planting events with Friends of parks groups including Abbey Recreation Ground and Friends of Wimbledon Park

All funding secured for these schemes includes an element of tree aftercare for three years, ensuring that these new trees for the borough have every opportunity of success to establish themselves.

Additional Council funding for the planting of trees is delivered through our annual street and park tree budgets along with tree planting funds associated with planning agreements linked to developments.

Our soon-to-be finalised Tree Strategy will further support the importance of tree planting and there will be a number of tree policies to support this important activity.

From Cllr Willis to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services

The 'Barrier Review April 2015' (which identified 199 barriers to access and audited 91 in detail) was undertaken by Transport Initiatives paid for by Merton Council. In

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the spirit of value for money, can it be confirmed how many of these barriers have since been addressed?

Reply from the Cabinet Member for Transport

Given the time that has passed since the review, and the change in officers since then, it is not possible to provide a detailed account of the progress without reassessing 91 sites across the borough.

Officers are aware of a significant amount of guard-rail removal that has been undertaken in town centres between 2015-2020, particularly where major improvements to the public realm and streetscape have been delivered. For example removing guard-rails to reduce severance on the A24 London Road in Morden (in partnership with TFL) and though improved pedestrian crossings in Mitcham town centre, Wimbledon town centre, Figge's Marsh junction and Colliers Wood town centre.

The Council has also replaced a number of fire-gate barriers with trees and bollards to promote cycling / filtered permeability on residential streets whilst limiting through traffic. Examples include many streets north of Merton High Street, Milner Rd, Mitcham Park, and Havelock Rd.

There remain a number of pedestrian guard rails in the vicinity of schools, for the obvious road safety and protection that they provide immediately in front of school gates.

The Council is aware of the desire for further guard rail removal on laneways where they are perceived as a barrier to cycling. In trials in Mitcham in 2015, we found that when guard rails were removed from pedestrian routes, there was an increase in moped and motorbikes using some paths causing nuisance to local residents. The Council has to strike an appropriate balance between the need for guard-rails to protect pedestrian laneways from vehicular use and promoting active travel. This remains a growing risk with the increase of delivery mopeds serving residents in the borough.

The cabinet member has agreed that on a case-by-case basis the council is willing to remove more barriers on a trial basis subject to resources. Officers are happy to meet with the councillor to discuss any locations in his ward.

From Cllr Howard to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change:

How are locations for green sacks left on the streets chosen and what is the pickup frequency specified in the contract?

Reply

Following our early concerns raised within last years' Service Improvement Notice, which included the placement and collection of street sweeper sack, our service

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provider has undertaken a full review of the street cleansing service and implemented new fixed locations for the placement of sacks.

Our manual beat sweepers have been directed to fill at least 4 sacks before depositing them at these agreed collection locations. To support this, each beat sweeper is provided with maps which clearly define the agreed location from which the mobile response crews will collect from by the end of the working day. If a location is missed our service provide is required to undertake the missed collection within 24 hours.

The location of these approved collection points has been designed to ensure that each location is easily accessible by the collection crew and as such are located at the junctions where roads intersect which mitigates the need for crews to drive into side roads searching for any sweeper sacks which may have been left.

From Cllr Dollimore to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change

What progress has there been in improving the waste collection service for residents?

Reply

Our waste collection service continues to get better and is a priority service that is relied on by our residents. Over the last 12 months we have seen a sustainable improvement in the waste and recycling collections with 95% of reported missed collections resolved within the required performance standard.

I am pleased to report that feedback from our recent resident engagement surveys in 2022 shows that 63% of residents are satisfied with our waste and recycling collection compared to 48% in 2019.

We continue to work closely with our service provider and have introduced an evening economy collection service to our main town centres and smaller local shopping parades. This ensures that all waste presented after the business hours is collected during the evening. On average, this service is collecting between 5 – 8 tonnes of waste per night which otherwise would be left out ready for the street cleansing service to clear the following morning.

I am pleased to report that this service will be expanded to provide a twice weekly evening collection of domestic waste from flats above shops households.

In addition to this our Public Space Team are in the process of finalising a pilot to introduce community mobile recycling collections which is designed to provide a localised collection point for recycling for those residents unable to access our facility at Garth Road.

To ensure these enhancements to our service are sustainable, Officers are working on a new minimum service requirements as part of a new waste and recycling collection service. Recommendations on how this is delivered will be presented for

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Cabinet consideration in February and will take into account the feedback from the resident consultation conducted at the end of last year.