

### **From Cllr Neaverson to the Cabinet Member for Transport**

How is the Council supporting people who live and work in Merton to be able to rent, own or share an electric vehicle?

#### **Reply**

Merton will soon become the best-equipped area for on-street charging in Outer London.

Of the 90,000 households in the borough, an estimated 37,000 cannot access off-street electric vehicle (EV) charge points at home. Officers are finalising the roll-out of 530 lamp column charge points within the next six weeks, having reached the halfway mark on 30 March.

The project will triple the number of public charge points available to Merton residents from 259 at the start of January to 789. Once completed, 78,000 Merton homes will have at least one charge point within a two-minute walk of their home.

In addition to the current roll-out of lamp-column chargers, the Council is also in the process of bidding for LEVI (Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure) funding announced recently which will further increase EV charging infrastructure for our residents and businesses.

The Council's Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel have established an EV Charging Task Group which has met over the past three months and is due to report back to Cabinet a set of recommendations to shape the borough's EV charging strategy which officers will commence this spring.

We have also written to every large supermarket operator, retail park owner and petrol forecourt operators in the borough to encourage greater provision of rapid EV charging in these locations to support residents to charge cars as part of shopping trips and also to contribute to the borough's carbon reduction goals. The Council is also encouraging petrol station operators to convert sites to local EV charging hubs.

Merton also has a number of car-club operators in the borough including Enterprise and Zip-Car. Zip-Car already offer a number of EV vehicles to members in the borough. In discussion with ZipCar, we understand that they intend to have a fully electric fleet by 2025.

We want Merton to be one of the best places in London to own or drive an electric vehicle and we are making significant progress.

### **From Cllr Hall to the Cabinet Member for Sport and Heritage**

AELTC are making various claims about the feedback received on their plans, could the Cabinet Member please detail what agreements have been made between cabinet members, officers, and representatives of AELTC regarding the Club's

planning application for developing the former golf course regarding publicising and sharing the results of informal and formal consultations with residents?

**Reply**

Officers have been negotiating with the agent for the planning application around matters of planning judgement and potential heads of terms for a Section 106 legal agreement for planning obligations, but their views and recommendation have not been finalised and will not be confirmed until the report to the Planning Applications Committee has been completed, signed off and published for public consumption.

It is not a legal requirement of the national Development Management Procedure Order 2015 for details of informal consultations between applicants and the Council to be published on the planning register. All comments from statutory advisors and formal responses to them by applicants are displayed online at the Council's website. The analysis of these by the Planning Case Officer, together with all material planning considerations, will be published in the report to the Planning Applications Committee in due course.

**From Cllr Macauley to the Cabinet Member for Civic Pride**

What are the Council's plans to mark the Coronation of His Majesty King Charles?

**Reply**

The Coronation of King Charles III will be one of the country's biggest celebrations in decades – and we're working hard to ensure the borough can mark the occasion appropriately. We've taken an approach of enabling our communities to celebrate the way they want to and applied this across the key themes of Street Parties, Big Lunches, and the Big Help Out on Monday May 8.

For street parties - as with the Queen's Jubilee celebrations, we are again waiving the fees associated with street closures and supplying party packs to make it easy for people to hold street parties. We have more than 100 street parties booked, which is more than the Jubilee celebrations in 2022.

For Big Lunches – larger-scale events – we opted to use our resource to offer money to local community groups and organisations to help them run their own parties, in the way they want to. £350 grants are being awarded to all organisations holding a Big Lunch.

This has been a very popular offer. We have more than 40 Big Lunch events booked, ranging from 100 to 500 people per event. Successful applicants include Age UK Merton, Wimbledon & Putney Common Conservators, the Commonsides Trust and Morden Little League.

Our grants are helping to pay for things like speakers, food and gazebos, while the council is also providing tables and chairs for those events that require them, at no additional cost for residents.

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A big screen will also be installed for the weekend at Fair Green in Mitcham, as there are community events booked there for both Saturday and Sunday.

The Mayor is holding a special Big Lunch for our fantastic local charity contacts, and myself and the Leader will be attending another special Big Lunch for our community and voluntary partners, to be held at Merton College.

For the Big Help Out – the volunteering-themed day – we are running a ticketed volunteering event at Three Kings Piece in Mitcham, where residents can come along to help us plant wild flowers and share a bite to eat. We're also working with Merton Connected to support a sustained push to encourage even more residents to volunteer in their communities regularly.

And we're promoting our brilliant staff volunteering policy internally, which allows every colleague at the council to take two paid days off for community volunteering every year.

Finally, we will be making sure the borough looks the part. 150 Coronation lamp-post banners will be installed in our high streets, and our libraries and other central areas will be planted with flowers to mark the occasion.

### **From Cllr Mercer to the Cabinet Member for Civic Pride**

We are all enjoying the daffodils which are visible in lots of the Borough. We all love the green spaces in Merton and we know that bulbs are cheap when bought in bulk. Would the Council consider making an annual grant available to provide supporters of our parks (such as Friends groups) and residents groups with bulbs for planting each year?

### **Reply**

Thank you for your comments about the bulb drifts in Parks and Amenity Locations across Merton we are very pleased with the outcomes so far, which this year has totalled some 250,000 spring bulbs including standard Daffodil mixes seen primarily on Merton Amenity Grass Verges as well as more floristically diverse Bee and Butterfly Biodiversity Mixes which includes more Pollen and Nectar rich bulbs which you will see in Merton Park as part of a Pollinator Parks Program set to launch in 2023. Many of the flowers you see were planted by local volunteers, and I'd like to thank everyone who has given up their time and put on their gardening gloves to help to add colour to our greenspaces.

You are correct that bulk purchases are a cheaper way to add visual interest and colour and if suitable mixes chosen can also provide much needed early nectar sources for pollinating insects and this year we have been using a Machine Bulb Planting technique that sees circa 100-150 bulbs planted per square meter by machine and creates a much denser carpet of colour in spring. We will obviously continue to promote community bulb planting events for smaller area in tandem also.

The councils will soon re-launch its Ward Allocation Scheme April 2023- March 2026 with £15K allocated per ward that community groups can request funding for. This

year LBM Greenspaces have been working closely with colleagues in Planning to provide a catalogue of options that will include Machine Bulb Planting and Community Bulb Planting as priced options and the mixes that could be offered and the benefit they hold from colour and visual interest as well as more those richer in early nectar for foraging insects. Watch this space for the launch package that will go out to ward councillors and community groups alike.

### **From Cllr Barlow to the Cabinet Member for Transport**

Could the Cabinet Member for Transport please provide an update on the Council's plans for data collection in and around the proposed East Hillside Low Traffic Neighbourhood.

#### **Reply**

Council officers are finalising positions for the cameras, including those for the East Hillside area as a priority in the programme. Electrical connections are due this month. Officers have engaged local groups and have received some suggestions for further camera locations on the periphery of the neighbourhood. These locations are being assessed prior to the installation of sensors which we anticipate will be in the coming weeks (April - early May)

### **From Cllr MacArthur to the Cabinet Member for Civic Pride**

Following the recent opening of the Toynbee water fountain, could the Cabinet Member for Civic Pride please advise as to the administration's policy regarding the installation of further water fountains across the Borough and outline any specific plans they may have?

#### **Reply**

The Council is proud to have partnered with the Heritage of London Trust (HOLT) to restore the Victorian Toynbee Fountain, not only for its historic value, but as a working water bottle refill station.

The Council is in discussion with HOLT regarding restoration of the Hanbury Fountain as a future project.

Elsewhere in the borough, the Council has worked with Thames Water and the Mayor of London to install new water refill stations in Colliers Wood, Mitcham, Raynes Park, Morden and Wimbledon town centres.

The installation was carried out by Thames Water; under a programme led by the Mayor of London and co-ordinated by the FutureMerton team.

<https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/environment-and-climate-change/waste-and-recycling/single-use-plastic-bottles/drinking-fountains-london?ac-50764=160301>

The Mayor / Thames Water's programme has now ended. There isn't at present any new programme for installing water fountains. If there are any suggested locations; it may be suitable as a candidate project via Civic Pride – Investing in Neighbourhoods funding, and the next round will open in the autumn.

### **From Cllr Hayes to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Greenspaces and Climate Change**

What is the Council doing to increase the borough's tree canopy?

#### **Reply**

We know from a recent study that Merton's total tree canopy (including trees on private land) covers an area of 1,040 hectares) . This is equivalent to approximately 28% of the borough.

The major concentrations of canopy cover are in Wimbledon and Mitcham Commons and Morden Park. From the study we also know that of the total tree canopy:

- 26% consists of woodlands contained within parks and public open spaces (266.12ha).
- 1.5% consists of individual woodlands (15.2ha).
- 11.2% consists of street trees (116.7ha).
- 61.3% is in private gardens, cemeteries and institutional grounds (641.98)

But as you will see from (Figure 2 Map) showing tree canopy distribution and (Figure 3 Graph) showing % Tree Canopy cover in Merton by Ward shows that nearly all wards in Merton have a tree canopy cover below the London average of 21%

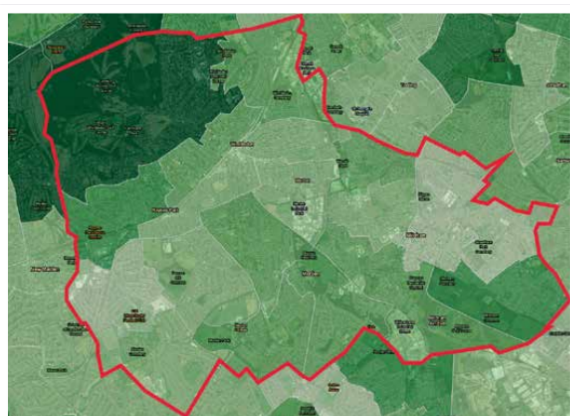


Figure 2 – Tree canopy cover distribution in Merton by Ward (pre-2022 Merton Ward boundary changes 2022). Darker green indicates more tree cover (Source UK Ward Canopy Cover Map. Forest Research)

## Councillors' Ordinary Priority Questions to Cabinet Members

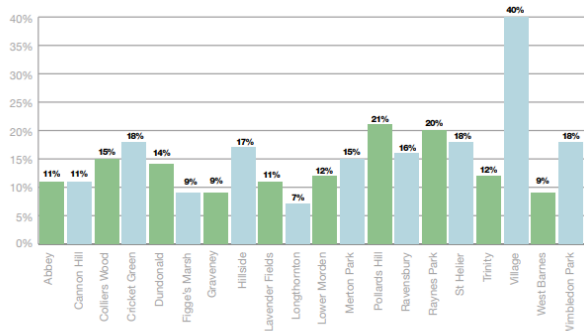


Figure 3 – Percentage tree canopy cover in Merton by ward (pre-2022 Merton Ward boundary changes 2022).  
(Source: UK Ward Canopy Cover Map. Forest Research)

The above knowledge and insight is helpful, but only goes so far. This is because we still need a much more detailed understanding about the composition of our urban forest and the value of its benefits, so that we can target effective improvements and benchmark our strategic progress. The Phase 2 of Merton's Tree Strategy which is currently in scoping phase will see a more detailed I-Tree survey of Merton's Urban Forest in both Council Owned and Private Land

This will all enable us to focus our tree planning resource towards areas of greater need. Councillors would have noted our 10,000 tree commitment in 2022-23 which has been funded from a mixture of council funded tree replacement and new planting as well as a variety of external funding initiative that the council's tree team has pursued including Urban Tree Challenge / Queens Green Canopy / Trees for Cities Urban Community Woodland Projects and Trees for Streets Street Tree Sponsorship program seeking targeted funding to expand our tree canopy in most needed wards. As well as the borough proactively managing its existing canopy and veteran trees.

### From Cllr Galea to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services

What plans does the Council have to further develop the Council's ED&I agenda/strategy and support managers and staff at all levels to develop, monitor and review public facing policies, strategies and procedures to enable inclusive and accessible services to the residents of Merton?

### Reply

Our new Council Plan, Building a Better Merton Together, includes a number of priorities that are aimed at improving inclusion and accessibility. These include:

- Launching a new Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy – including street safety, White Ribbon Accreditation, awareness campaigns and a new initiative for young women.
- Developing our support for Black businesses, including introducing a new Best Black Business Award in the Merton Business Awards.
- Developing our apprenticeship scheme to increase opportunities with a focus on disadvantaged young people.

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- Engaging with event companies to attract cultural events to the borough.
- Working with our communities to relaunch the LGBTQ+ forum.
- Celebrating the 75<sup>th</sup> Windrush anniversary in partnership with local groups and communities, for which planning is well advanced.

We have also committed to launching and delivering on a new Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy. Officers are preparing a draft of this strategy now, which will come to Cabinet in draft form in July. It will then be the subject of broad public consultation before a final version is recommended for adoption by Council later this year.

Alongside the new strategy we are also putting together a report that provides data on a range of council services and how these are experienced by people with protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010. This report will then be updated on an annual basis both with data for the most recent year available and with narrative explaining what we are doing to address any issues of accessibility highlighted by that data.

### **From Cllr Andrew Howard to the Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning**

Please can the Cabinet Member tell me how many children failed to return to school in Merton after the Covid19 lockdowns, excluding children who are receiving elective home education?

### **Reply**

Attendance is measured at various points in the school year. The data covering four half terms (up until Easter 2022) has been published and national comparators exist for this data set. Ofsted use the four half term data to judge attendance when they are inspecting schools. Rates of attendance in Merton have dropped during this period, as they have done nationally, demonstrating the impact of the pandemic as schools have moved back to normal expectations of attendance. Anxiety on the part of both children and their parents is affecting attendance levels. Merton continues to be above the national average for attendance and Merton's rate of Persistent Absence is also better than the national average. Improving attendance will be a significant priority for Merton in 2022/23, as it is nationally, and in line with newly issued guidance from the Government. Attendance is 2% below pre – pandemic levels and Persistence Absence is running at double the pre pandemic level based on 2 term data.

	Merton	National
Attendance	93.6%	92.7%
Absence	6.4%	7.3%
Persistent Absence	18.9%	22.0%

Date for 2 terms, Autumn 2021 and Spring 2022

Severe Absence is a new attendance category brought in as part of the Government's new approach to attendance. Merton Schools and the Local Authority have been working in partnership to support and challenge families to ensure the attendance of their children. There have been briefings for schools, governors, community champions.

Significant input from young inspectors told us many of the issues for young people that lead to severe absence. A key element of this is anxiety and mental health support. All Merton Schools have access to Mental Health in Schools Teams in Merton. We are working on drilling down of severe absence planning in Merton and are doing some baseline work which we intend to lead to a pilot with a couple of schools after Easter.

### **From Cllr Kaweesa to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services**

How is the Council continuing to support people through the cost of living crisis?

#### **Reply**

Since the council declared a cost of living emergency in July 2022, it has continued to work with its partners to identify and support people in need.

A Cost of Living Emergency Support Fund of £2million was agreed by Cabinet in September 2022. Cabinet agreed allocations for the first £1million, focusing on crisis support and addressing immediate challenges and an update on this first tranche of funding was presented to January Cabinet.

Ongoing mechanisms are in place for engaging with voluntary sector and other key partners, including the Community Response Steering Group made up of the Council and partners, sharing ideas and best practice, determining volunteering and neighbourhood support and oversight of local demand and emerging themes and its Fuel Poverty Subgroup, plus the Food Response Network.

A cross-council Cost of Living Working Group was also established in November 2022 which draws together and builds on the various strands of work being undertaken to address the cost of living crisis by sharing knowledge on the changing scale and nature of residents' cost of living needs, both short and long term. This working group has developed and overseen the implementation of the draft Cost of Living Strategy and Action Plan setting out activities, timescales and ownership. The group has also taken the lead on collating and considering proposals for the second tranche of the £2million Cost of Living Support Fund. Alongside the £2million Cost of Living Support Funding, the Cost of Living Working Group is also keeping track of other pots of funding we can potentially draw upon, to maximise our available resources, as well as developing an approach to encouraging businesses in Merton to become London Living Wage employers.

The Cost of Living Strategy and Action Plan 2023-2025 – A cross-council boroughwide approach to supporting people living in Merton, sets out a two-year



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plan to ensure the council is responding to the cost of living crisis in the most effective and collaborative way possible by identifying and fully utilising means of support and funding across different areas, and by identifying and responding to the real needs of our residents. The priorities and actions set out in the Action Plan will be aligned going forward with those set out in the new Council Plan and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.

Proposed allocations of the second tranche were considered and agreed at March Cabinet.

A portion of the second tranche of funding (just under £25,000) is set aside as contingency as different priorities emerge, such as additional winter pressures in 2023/4 and any potential gaps in other related funding streams for example at present we do not know whether the household support fund will continue beyond March 2024.

£154,113.33 is allocated from the second tranche to extend funding to the end of March 2025 for Sustainable Merton and partners to support the Community Fridge Network and £42,000 is allocated to the Wimbledon Dons and the Trussell Trust to help them meet additional need over winter 2023/24.

To support arrangements in the voluntary and community sector for delivering emergency assistance to residents, an additional £100,000 is set aside for a further round of funding in 2023/24.

Provision has been made for £40,000 to top up the Discretionary Housing Payment fund to cover the April 2023 to March 2024 period.

Funding of £150,000 will extend to half terms the Holiday Activities and Food Programme which provides food and activities across school holidays for children on free school meals.

The Council's Communications team is working with partners to develop a new combined Cost of Living Communications Campaign to promote cost of living advice and support to residents, particularly reaching those who are digitally excluded. The campaign, called 'Cost Of Living Action', features a refreshed [cost of living webpage](#) with signposted support organised by topic and community groups, plus a range of campaign resources. £35,000 of the second tranche of funding is allocated to the cost of living communications campaign.

Following a series of well-attended cost of living events for residents in Merton's libraries and the Civic Centre during the latter half of 2022 and early 2023, a schedule of events is being finalised for the remainder of 2023. £10,000 is allocated towards the cost of running this future programme of events.

Finally £199,621 of the tranche two funding has been earmarked to fund the continued operation of the Merton Community Hub from 1 June 2024 to end May 2025.

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