

From Cllr Charles to the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care

Following the recent announcements on the New Hospital Programme, what can the Council do to safeguard the future of St Helier Hospital for all the local people who rely on it?

Reply

The Council continues to work to ensure that any investment in NHS services for the future, provides the maximum benefit for Merton residents. Whilst we welcome any investment in the NHS, the business case and integrated impact assessment on which the Future Hospitals funding decision is made was developed before the Covid 19 pandemic, an event which has significantly impacted on the NHS as a whole and further exacerbated and deepened the health inequalities that existed in our communities, prior to the pandemic. It is therefore vital that any future configuration of services ensures that Merton residents have equity of access to their south west London neighbours. We are concerned that the situation of the proposed new site will significantly alter the attendance pattern of Merton residents and put further pressure on other SWL hospitals. As has been announced, the Council has commissioned an independent review and assessment of the outline business case and integrated impact assessment

The Council also recognises that, irrespective of the configuration of services, St Helier Hospital remains an integral part of the operating model for the NHS trust into the future. The new hospital build will not be completed for at least 7 years and recent media stories have highlighted the state of total disrepair that St Helier is in. We will therefore continue to lobby NHS organisations and decision makers to ensure that adequate capital investment is made to provide St Helier with existing buildings that are fit for a 21st century healthcare system. In order for St Helier to operate effectively it must receive adequate capital investment to provide a safe, fit for purpose estate.

Supplementary

Thank you Madame Mayor, and thank you to my colleague, Cllr McCabe, the Cabinet Member for your answer. I'd like to ask a supplementary which is, does the Cabinet Member believe that St Helier Hospital is currently providing Merton residents with an environment that is fit for a 21st century health care system. Thank you.

Reply

Thank you Madame Mayor, and I can I thank my colleague, Cllr Charles for her original question and her supplementary. I think the answer, in one word, is 'no'. I visited St Helier Hospital some months ago and I was appalled at the state of

disrepair. There is an article on the ITN News website which details the state of disrepair there and I think probably the most shocking thing was when you walk into the reception of the maternity unit, there is, what I can only describe as a contraption, made of tarpaulin hanging down from the ceiling above the receptionist and it's got a pipe coming out the pointy bit at the bottom into which rain water falls and goes into a bucket. That's just one of many things that are wrong, and I think the problem has been that over the years there have been so many efforts to reorganise and close down bits of the hospital that the people who are responsible for its maintenance have probably thought what you and I would, what's the point of spending money on this place? Well the point is that our residents deserve better and they need to do better and now that this proposed new hospital in Belmont has been delayed again and won't be built until at least 2030, it's time they got their money out and started providing decent healthcare, the staff there are fantastic, they deliver services in the worst possible environment and yet they really care about their patients and deliver extraordinary care.

From Cllr Simon McGrath to the Cabinet Member for Sport and Heritage

Would the Cabinet Member please state what consultation there has been - and when - with local and national athletics organisations about the proposed new Running Track in Morden Park?

Reply

Officers have met with England Athletics in April to have initial discussions regarding the potential for a new track at Morden Park. During the course of the meeting, we discussed local and regional suitability, the potential types of tracks that are being installed, as some now include covered areas for 'warm-up and warm down' and training to accommodate unseasonable weather. We are due to carry out borough wide strategic facilities review of the sporting facilities to have updated information of the local need and facilities available to support our sporting ambitions, Morden Park will be a major part of this review. Following this, we will continue discussions with governing bodies and other key stakeholders.

Supplementary

Thank you very much Madame Mayor, thank you to the Cabinet Member for the reply. You'll recall that in March we passed a budget that included a capital spending figure of \$2.75million for the running track. Does the Cabinet Member agree with me that it would have been better to find out whether there was a need for a running track before we put it in the budget.

Reply

Thank you very much to Cllr McGrath for his original question and for his supplementary question. The proposed track is still in its early stage, and we have yet to do a feasibility study. Well you can see the attraction of having a track that will be right in the centre of the borough and it will increase accessibility for everyone else and that's what we're trying to do, but as I say, it's still yet in its early stages and we're looking into that. Thank you.

From Cllr Michael Paterson to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development

When the Labour administration forced the unpopular Local Plan through council, with the assistance of the Liberal Democrats, a major reason given by the administration was that it would provide a five-year housing land supply that would prevent overdevelopment such as at the Burlington Road site.

The Local Plan was due to be adopted in Spring 2022, however, this has not happened, and the council still cannot demonstrate a five year housing land supply. This led to the Wimbledon Chase site being given permission as the council would not be able to defend a refusal. When does the Cabinet Member expect the Local Plan to be approved by the Planning Inspectorate?

Reply

The date of the Inspector's report into the Local Plan will be at the discretion of the Planning Inspectors appointed by the Secretary of State. The council has participated fully with the appointed Planning Inspectors since we submitted the plan to them in December 2021, undertaken site visits with the Inspectors, supported the Inspectors chairing a total of five weeks of public hearings during 2022 in Merton's council chamber and responded comprehensively to their questions. We are hopeful that the Inspectors will provide a positive report in due course, thus allowing us to adopt Merton's new Local Plan.

Councillor Paterson complains of the draft Local Plan, which begs the question what exactly he would put in its place?

Undoubtedly, we face a housing crisis and need to build a lot more homes to meet the immense demand.

Councillor Paterson complains that the Council cannot demonstrate a five year housing land supply as recently required by the National Planning Policy Framework of Conservative Governments. I sympathise, but it is very difficult to find more appropriate sites in Merton. This question is an opportunity for us all. Answers please on the back of an envelope! Perhaps Cllr Paterson can write to tell us which

sites he thinks we have overlooked that can accommodate the hundreds, nay thousands of good quality, well designed homes situated in sustainable neighbourhoods that Merton residents undoubtedly need?

Supplementary

Thank you Madame Mayor, thank you for the Cabinet Member's answer. We Conservatives have repeatedly put the case for a local plan that local residents have confidence in and not the one forced through by Labour and the Liberal Democrats which has led to inappropriate development across Merton and in particular in Burlington Road and St George's East. Why is the Cabinet Member so keen on building mega towers, particularly in Mitcham and Colliers Wood and yet so slow despite the fine words that we heard earlier to redevelop Morden town centre.

Reply

I thank Cllr Paterson for his supplementary question, his consideration is simply wrong. We are not keen on building massive towers as such, we have a local plan that has been widely consulted upon and has gone through a detailed examination by government inspectors and there have been supplementary issues raised during the whole examination. Those have been answered, and we await the government inspector's response to our question. I am never clear whether the Conservatives are in favour of building any housing anywhere, or whether they will simply object to every application that comes forward. I would remind this Council that Michael Gove himself has called Britain's housing system, 'broken', saying we desperately need more homes to bring ownership within reach of many more people, but the management of mortgage rates has put paid to any chance of that and so has, in many cases across the country, objections by conservatives to the building of new homes locally. And the consequences of that is that home ownership is going backwards in the country and housing consultants expect another 580,000 people are likely to find themselves homeless. And so this an awful prospect for young people and young families in particular who desperately need a change of government. Thank you.

From Cllr Akyigyina to the Cabinet Member for Civic Pride

It was fantastic to be able to attend Mitcham Carnival in June – back for the first time since 2019. How successful was the carnival, and how will be incorporating learnings from this year to make next year even better?

Reply

I'd like to thank everyone who made the carnival a success, from organisers Andy Butcher and Charlie Shakespeare, to the many volunteers who performed, ran stalls and marshalled the event.

The carnival was met with an overwhelmingly positive response from the community, a testament to its success in fostering unity and promoting local culture. The event was marked by enthusiastic participation, robust turnout of over 5,000 people, and a palpable sense of shared enjoyment. The successful execution of the carnival is particularly noteworthy, given its smooth progression with negligible incidents. This further underscores the commitment and professionalism of all involved in its planning and conduct, ensuring a safe and harmonious environment throughout the festivities

Various council officers were in attendance to provide information and assist people, and to advertise a feedback consultation. A great way of improving next year's show will be to consider the feedback from this, and from the responses to the broader consultation being run by Future Merton about residents' ideas for Mitcham Town Centre.

Supplementary

Thank you very much Madame Mayor, I'd like to thank the Cabinet Member for her response and I'd like to ask here what other events and projects are the council supporting to build on our great community spirit in Mitcham?

Reply

Thank you very much Madame Mayor and I'd like to thank Cllr Akyigyina for her continued commitment to Mitcham and its community and her many many hours of volunteering including helping to make the carnival a great success and please can I reiterate my thanks to everyone who was part of that. Many people on this side of the chamber, but also from the other side and beyond. If I'm allowed to single out somebody, Cllr Martin Whelton was there very very early in the morning helping us set up and Cllr Matthew Willis was there all day in the blazing sunshine with a very very hard job managing people coming in through the main gates. So thank you to everybody.

But there's lots else going on in Mitcham over the coming months, including many community events. At the Cannons there's an arts festival which is opening from this weekend and running throughout August, there's Tennis which you can watch on the big screen, Tennis isn't just for Wimbledon, come down to the Cannons lawn, there's a sustainable fair going on on 29th July. All of these are things that we as a council are supporting and working with the community. And we've appointed a town centre

manager and we're appointing a market manager to try and breathe even more new life into what is a thriving community and make it really live up to its promise.

From Cllr John Oliver to the Cabinet Member for Sport and Heritage

Would the Cabinet Member please update Council on the outcome of meetings she has had with Wimbledon Tennis and Dean Jeeves to discuss the Junior Golf Programme?

Reply

Last year Officers met to discuss possible alternatives that we could assist with in aiding the Wimbledon Park Junior Golf Academy to find local alternative locations to undertake coaching. The goal was to identify potential venues to continue their commendable work of providing golf lessons to young enthusiasts.

However, finding an adequate space that met with their approval proved challenging due to the extensive area required for golfing activities to ensure safety. As an alternative, we proposed the track area in Wimbledon Park and also recommended initiating a dialogue with Mitcham Golf Club so that a full golfing programme maybe offered.

The Academy expressed their gratitude for our efforts, but they are currently exploring opportunities outside the borough. We remain open and willing to continue these discussions and to collaboratively explore other options within an alternative location to support their programme.

Supplementary

Thank you Madame Mayor, I hope you can hear me. Thank you to the Cabinet Member for her answer to my original question. And my supplementary is, you state in your cabinet paper that you've had consultations with 100 local groups with respect to sport that have helped shape your plans, can you share with us what plans you have for golf, particularly junior golf.

Reply

Thank you very much Madame Mayor. Thank you for your original question and your supplementary question. I can assure you that we want to increase the offer that we have in the borough for sport. Your original question was about Dean Jeeves, and we did work with him to try to offer him an alternative as my response said. But it was not to his liking and he decided to look elsewhere. We are still available and willing to work with him and we are, as I said wanting to increase the number of sporting activities and options in the borough, in terms of golf specifically, I

won't be able to tell you exactly what that will look like but I can assure you that we will looking to make sure that where the opportunities are we will make sure that that is available for everyone to take part.

From Cllr Nick McLean to the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green spaces and Climate Change

The grass verges in much of the borough are currently in an appalling state and are completely overgrown. Please can the Cabinet Member tell me how frequently the grass verges should be cut and how often the gullies should be cleared?

Reply

The councils verges are scheduled to be cut on a monthly cycle between March and October so 8 cuts per year. Service contractors from Idverde UK have been working hard during late May and June to catch up with the verge grass cutting.

Some early season staffing and machinery issues combined with a very wet spring and very warm early summer meant the rate of grass growth impacted the service heavily and were playing catch up, which is now in a much stronger position for the remains of the season

It is also worth noting that there are a number of wards including Canon Hill and Morden Park where a high volume of community bulb planting has been delivered in the last few years via the councils ward Allocation Scheme. Bulbs particularly in narrow verges does mean that grass cutting in these areas cannot happen until late May early June, but in these cases ward councillors tend to be aware of this impact at the bidding stage, but we are aware not all councillors and residents will always be aware of these issues.

In respect to the query about gully clearance, this would depend on the definition of gully. If the query is in reference to channel clearance, these are cleaned as part of the routine street cleansing operations. The frequency of cleansing is scheduled on an output basis and depends on the land type, footfall of the street in question and demand. Frequencies range from fortnightly in low footfall, low requirement residential areas, to weekly, twice weekly and daily in some high footfall areas such as Town Centres.

Some channels are hard to access due to parking and for this reason, the Council has a schedule of deep cleans, which involve a soft road closure (not an official road closure and relies on residents complying with the request to move their cars). The deep cleans take place over two days with a different side of the road being done each of the two days. The deep cleans are scheduled to take place every week in a different road across the Borough.

If the query relates to drainage gully systems, there is a schedule of routine gully cleaning as shown below:

- Scheduled routine borough-wide Gully (Non-priority): Minimum of once every two years
- Town Centres with high footfall: Minimum of three (3) times per year
- High risk (flooding) areas: Minimum of once per year, with additional cleans scheduled following Met Office flood warnings prior to weather events
- In addition to this, our Service Provider attends ad-hoc gully cleaning requests as made by members of the public and Client Officers (as requested during routine monthly inspections).

Supplementary

Thank you Madame Mayor and I thank the Cabinet Member for the response. However the grass verges not where the bulb planting is, are a complete mess and the gutters and gullies are frankly a disgrace, this has been the case every summer, and not simply this year, so I would ask the Cabinet Member to meet me in Cannon Hill so that we can walk around and inspect the ward, I expect it's going to be the same in Lower Morden and also in West Barnes, thank you.

Reply

Thank you Madame Mayor, and thank you Cllr McLean for your question and your supplementary. I am always happy to visit you in Cannon Hill, as I have been to your ward with your ward colleague on a couple of occasions. However, I would like to just reiterate in the response that you received, we have caught up with our grass cutting, it took a little time to catch up with it, and there were a lot of bulb planting occasions in your ward and that meant that we couldn't get in there early to cut down those daffodils, we wanted to let them grow and we also are adopting more wild ways in our borough, so we are changing the way we manage our grass verges and things like that so that we can manage biodiversity. But I am always happy to come and speak to you and meet with you in Cannon Hill.

From Cllr Williscroft to the Cabinet for Civic Pride

I was pleased that our local armed forces community were able to mark Armed Forces Week with two events at the Civic Centre in June, and to see the Council recommit itself to the Armed Forces Covenant. How is the Council supporting serving personnel, reservists, veterans, and military families?

Reply

Merton is proud to support our armed forces community and to be the location of [Haig Housing](#)'s original, and largest, housing estates for veterans.

Merton Council is committed to supporting the armed forces community and first signed the Armed Forces Covenant in 2013 as a promise to recognise the unique sacrifices that the armed forces make to support the nation and ensure that no member of the armed forces community should face disadvantage compared to other citizens.

The council reaffirmed its commitment in June 2023 by re-signing the Armed Forces Covenant at a special event at the Civic Centre in Morden attended by senior representatives of the armed forces and local partner organisations.

We make sure our commitment is reflected in the services that we deliver, and we are now asking our suppliers to make the same commitment when they deliver services for us. Additionally, in recognition of the disadvantages that members of the armed forces community can experience, as part of the development of our new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for the borough we are exploring ways in which the risk of disadvantage occurring can be reduced.

Further detail is available online at <https://www.merton.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/armed-forces>

The Council has a specific Armed Forces Quota on its Housing Register which gives priority for rehousing for those serving or leaving the armed services for a period of up to 5 years.

Supplementary

Thank you Madame Mayor and thank you to the Cabinet Member for her original answer. I'm interested to hear more about how our new Equality Diversity and Inclusion strategy is proposing to support veterans and whether other disadvantaged groups will be included.

Reply

I'd like to thank Cllr Williscroft, not just for his question but for his support work with veterans. Cllr Denis Pearce has for many years been a fierce advocate for veterans rights, and in his absence due to illness, James has stepped up with an equal passion. At Cabinet this coming Monday, we are going to propose starting a consultation on our new Equalities Diversity and Inclusion strategy and one of our proposals there is that alongside the nine groups named in the Equalities Act 2010, that we as a council explore how we can support other groups that experience barriers and challenges. So this will include for example, considering the impact on

them whenever we are undertaking an equality and impact assessment. So these groups and characteristics are: Care Experienced Young People, as previously discussed in this chamber, One Parent Households, those from low socio-economic status and armed forces veterans. So we really look forward to the responses to this consultation on our strategy.

From Cllr Reiss to the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care

Could the Cabinet Member please set out what action the council is taking to address women's health issues?

Reply

The Council continues to work closely with partners across Merton to improve the health and wellbeing of women in Merton, including:

- Awareness raising and uptake of breast and cervical screening programmes, with a focus on inequalities, through the Community Champions network, supporting cervical screening prevention week (June 2023), the development of a comprehensive action plan to increase uptake of breast cancer screening and making the case for a breast cancer screening site in Merton – including lobbying the NHS directly on this issue.
- Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) can have a long-lasting impact on mental and physical health and tackling VAWG is a key priority of the Council and Community Safety Partnership. Services are provided for women who are victims of domestic violence and abuse, sexual abuse, forced marriage, violence committed in the name of "honour" and other crimes listed as VAWG. The Council is White Ribbon accredited, with an action plan in place and the campaign is also promoted to staff encouraging them to sign up to become White Ribbon Ambassadors and Champions.
- The Council have signed the Menopause Pledge and have a menopause policy and guidance for staff, have a specific sickness absence category for the menopause, a dedicated menopause page with information, help and support, menopause awareness training for staff and managers, menopause cafes where staff can come together to discuss their experiences and support via occupational health and the Employee Assistance Programme. The Council is also raising awareness of the Menopause pledge with businesses and partners across Merton, including how to support women in the workplace through a series of Business Masterclasses.
- Perinatal mental health - supporting women's mental health during the perinatal period (during pregnancy until 1 to 2 years after birth) is led by the health visiting service. As part of their routine practice health visitors talk to women about their mental health and wellbeing at the mandated 6-to-8-week visit. There is also a specialist perinatal mental health visitor who supports

mothers with higher needs and provides support and training to other staff about perinatal mental health.

- In Merton, women make up an estimated 60% of those who are frail and in 2020/21 women made up nearly 57% of Merton residents aged 65+ admitted in an emergency to hospital for a fall. As part of an approach to 'active ageing', the Council have commissioned a 'Get up and Go' service delivering a number of activity classes in East Merton and Morden with a focus on strength and balance and Wimbledon Guild's 'Merton Moves' programme, which provides a one-to-one coaching programme for older people supporting them to take up physical activity.
- A workshop on Improving Women's Health and Wellbeing was delivered in March 2023, as part of International Womens Day, setting out the life course approach to women's health, the importance of fairness, equity and inclusion and the benefits of co-production in the design and delivery of services and taking a whole system approach to women's health.
- Nationally around 60% of informal carers are women and there are a total of 8,335 informal carers in Merton that are women. The Council commissions Carers Support Merton to provide support and advice to carers and other organisations are funded to support specialist groups of carers, such as the Alzheimer's Society for people with dementia.
- Access to contraception in Merton is via GPs, pharmacies and the integrated sexual health (ISH) service. The Council complement the ICB funded GP contraception offer, by commissioning long-acting reversible contraception (LARC) from 9 GP practices and emergency hormonal contraception service (EHC) for 13-24 year olds from 9 community pharmacies, with EHC available for other age groups via ISH and GPs.

Supplementary

Thank you Madame Mayor and thank you to Cllr McCabe for the initial answer to my question. Good to see a list of initiatives being provided, half of which were down to Liberal Democrat action and us pushing for action, so thank you for confirming that. I do think there is an area that is missed out, and that is immunisations. We had a report last month. Merton is frankly appalling in this respect, we have a target of 85% for flu jabs, we only get 67%, it's going down year on year on year. It's not good enough. It's particularly bad amongst the Black African Caribbean community and I just don't think we're doing enough in that respect. I'm sure you'd agree with me that this is an important area for us to address, but I'm interested to know what we're going to do to improve the situation.

Reply

Thank you Madame Mayor, and I'd like to thank Cllr Reiss for his original question and his supplementary. I think the Liberal Democrats form the view that they are running the authority and that everything that happens in Merton is as a direct consequence of them sending out notes to their supporters saying 'we've done this and we've done that'. The reality is that much of what we do in this field, there is common ground and there isn't an argument and certainly I would draw your attention to the fact that in my reply it said, 'including', we couldn't possibly cover all the areas in an answer, we'd be here all night. Yes of course that's an important issue, it's something that we will be taking up with our colleagues in Health and I think that the reality is that if you ask people from Health whether they hear from me about issues that affect the people of Merton, they will tell you they hear from me far too often, because I'm in their faces saying that this isn't good enough for the people of Merton. And I'm glad that when we do that, that we are joined by your colleagues who also work and contribute to the health field.

From Cllr Skeete to the Cabinet for Sport and Heritage

It's fantastic news that we have embarked on one of the largest tennis court refurbishments in the country – how are we making sure these courts are accessible for everyone to get active and use them?

Reply

Working in partnership with the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA), we are undertaking an extensive refurbishment scheme for tennis courts located within 11 parks throughout our borough.

This collaboration between Merton Council and the LTA has already seen substantial progress, with our valued public park tennis courts across the borough being rejuvenated. An investment nearing £1 million pounds is being channelled into this project, the aim of which is to enhance the tennis facilities for our residents, supporting our Borough of Sport ambitions.

The refurbishment, which is already halfway to completion, will offer top-notch facilities for our local community. In addition to this, we have also introduced 'pickleball courts' at three key locations in Mitcham, Morden, and Wimbledon. Once this project concludes, we will have 16 of these new dedicated courts across the borough, thereby broadening the spectrum of sporting opportunities for individuals of all abilities and mobility levels.

We will work with our Communications team to further publicise the courts to ensure as many people as possible are aware as they are completed.

Supplementary

Thank you Madame Mayor, I would like to ask the Cabinet Member, it is great that we will broaden the spectrum of sporting opportunities for everyone. But in a cost of living crisis, how can we encourage residents to get active without any cost of them.

Reply

Thank you very much Madame Mayor and thank you to Cllr Skeete for her original question and her supplementary question. One of the main reasons for the Borough of Sport is to provide free sporting activities for people under 16 and people above 65 and older. So we are making sure that that happens. We have invested money in working along with the LTA into tennis courts and so people will have free tennis lessons there. Those courts that had free lessons will continue to have free lessons there and people just need to book their free classes. We have this summer, kids swimming for free in all of our leisure centres right across the borough. Also just remember that we had the funding granted to BMX track in Mitcham and also the Mitcham Cricket Club, so that is also the Borough of Sport investing. We also secured funding for 23 schools in Merton to put up sporting activities and also to make their facilities available for people. We are also looking to have park runs in Morden and in Mitcham, so those will all be free and we will also have Park Run in Wimbledon, so we have those free activities across the borough and can I also say that we have up to 450 free classes a month in our libraries. All seven of our libraries have classes in there that people can book, all free of charge. And whilst I am here, can I also just congratulate our team, the London Youth Games, when we started this Merton was at 29, and we ended up this year at the 11th place, so we've moved up and we've won the most improved borough. So that's being active and also encouraging people to also be active and it's all free of charge. We have Sean McGuinness who is our organiser who did a brilliant job in organising this for us. And so we are working to make sure that people have free physical activity and sporting activity.

This page is intentionally left blank