

**If, following the coming Local Elections, your Party is in control of Merton Council, what new measures would your Party introduce to:**

**1. Open Space.**

Protect all the open spaces and green areas in the Borough, including back gardens, from built development and secure their better use?

*The development of Council's new planning rules, the Local Development Framework (LDF), provides Merton with a fantastic opportunity to promote and protect the Borough's open spaces (including trees in private gardens and open spaces).*

*Our representations to early LDF consultations sought to protect and develop open spaces. We pushed for a restriction on any developments close to any open space that were likely to result in an adverse effect on its use, management or enjoyment. We also sought the creation of new open spaces in areas that don't have many, and improvements to the quality of the existing open spaces in those areas.*

*We would also seek Council-backed information (leaflets to home owners) about tree preservation and management.*

*We support the campaign by Liberal Democrat MPs in Sutton to change the law governing planning applications for private gardens. Current legislation means that private gardens are classified as "brownfield" land - designating them as ripe for development. For more about the campaign, please see here: <http://www.tombrake.co.uk/pages/backgardens.html>*

**2. Conservation Areas.**

- a. Protect Conservation Areas from inappropriate development?
- b. Press for production of Management Plans and proposals for Conservation Areas?
- c. Consider designating Article 4 Directions in some Conservation Areas?

*Conservation Area management plans provide guidance through policy statements to assist in the preservation and enhancement of the conservation area. However, the Council's entire budget would have to be considered before we could put a figure on the budget for the preparation and implementation of management plans. We want to stress that we feel the local environment is absolutely crucial to residents. In terms of priorities, council tax payers' money should be spent on preserving and improving our local environment. It links into so many other areas – a green and clean environment is a happy one for residents. Conservation areas are critical to this and therefore, their improvement and management is a key issue for us.*

*We are certainly not opposed to the making of Article 4 Directions, and can see the benefits of them. In particular, we feel that Directions under Art 4(2) could have/should have been made in several of the borough's Conservation Areas.*

**3. Public Involvement.**

Ensure that members of the public are fully engaged prior to and during all pre-application discussions with developers on major new developments before a planning application is submitted?

*As part of a wider scheme to improve public involvement in local decision-making, Merton Liberal Democrats would look at ways of improving Community forums so that they can effectively hold the Council administration to account. For example, we would push for the agendas to be made less restrictive, with more time given over to question and answer sessions. We would seek the attendance of representatives of all major Council departments – both political representatives and Council officers. We would also seek to develop new ways to involve the public in Community Forums – by putting agendas and information online in advance, and inviting comments and discussion that could then be relayed to the meetings by an ‘active’ chairman. The same could be done with paper mailings sent out in advance of the meetings. Major new developments should be discussed by Community Forums. Our ward councillors would work to assist residents to feed their comments and complaints back to the Council (explaining how to influence planning and licensing decisions for example). We want to see an end to the culture of statutory consultations which are held simply because they have to be, but where the actual views of the public are just ignored.*

*Effectively responding to major planning applications can be highly complicated, technical and legalistic. Realistically, it is often only residents' associations and community groups that have the expertise and resources to fully involve their memberships in making effective representations to the authorities.*

*When the ‘Statement of Community Involvement’ was being put together, we pushed for additional requirements to automatically notify local residents' associations and community groups when certain types of planning applications were made. The Council's SCI only requires residents' associations to be notified where Listed Buildings or the character and appearance of Conservation Areas were affected, but not when planning applications related to "major developments" or to the placing of telecommunications masts and other equipment - we feel that the notification requirements should apply in those instances too. The SCI of the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham contains measures similar to those we proposed.*

*In addition, ward councillors would work to help and support individual residents to make valid representations on planning decisions, and we would consider putting together a ‘planning guidance’ pack for residents. Each ward with Liberal Democrat councillors could choose a ‘planning champion’ to be the point of contact for engaging with groups and individuals who find it difficult to engage with the planning system.*

*Again as part of a wider scheme of public involvement, we’d also like to see proper use of the provisions of the Sustainable Communities Act, which will also have an impact in a planning context. We also support the involvement of Community Forums in the s 106 process.*

#### **4. Natural Resources.**

Significantly reduce the amount of energy and water now being used in the Borough?

*The Planning and Energy Act 2008 requires local councils to set targets in their areas for on-site renewable energy, on-site low carbon electricity and energy efficiency standards in addition to national requirements. We would push to extend the ‘Merton rule’ to all development, and to increase this to a 20% requirement.*

*At a local level, practical action should be taken to reduce the amount of carbon we're pumping into the atmosphere - and there are lots of great examples in London of how this can be done.*

*For example, Islington council took a bold step by investing £3million of grants into visible measures - such as solar panels, wind turbines, biomass boilers and ground source heat pumps - to reduce carbon emissions.*

*Under the scheme residents, organisations and council teams are able to benefit from extra funding for capital projects that will achieve significant reductions in carbon emissions, either through generating renewable energy, or green transport. In addition, residents who pay their council tax were offered a £20 discount if they paid by direct debit - they can then choose to keep the discount or donate it back to the Fund. See for example, [http://www.islington.gov.uk/Environment/sustainability/sus\\_climate/fund.asp](http://www.islington.gov.uk/Environment/sustainability/sus_climate/fund.asp)*

*We are aware that Merton Council signed up to the 10-10 campaign, but it's not entirely clear what happened with this – it's difficult to find information on what the plan is to achieve it. The Council should be leading the way to promote these kinds of schemes to residents.*

*Lastly, the South London Waste Plan will determine where and how waste in this part of London will be dealt with in the future. We are pushing for the Waste Plan to contain proper proposals for reducing waste (including energy and water) - as this is the most important environmental action we can take. Furthermore, under the plan new waste plants are not supposed to have a negative impact on communities or the environment. Therefore, we argued for proper (and genuine) involvement of the local community in determining how a proposal will affect them and the place they live.*

*By providing strong leadership on this issue, Merton Council could encourage others to take part.*

## **5. Environmental Quality.**

- a. Improve facilities for pedestrians, cyclists and buses?
- b. Improve environmental quality of life in residential areas?
- c. Re-balance the pedestrian and vehicular space in Wimbledon Town Centre and reduce the impact of traffic?

*One of the main ways to improve the experience of pedestrians, buses and cyclists is to ensure a good traffic flow – this reduces air pollution and noise from queuing vehicles and speeds up bus journeys, encouraging use. We would aim to support the London Mayor in his efforts to co-ordinate road works, but there are issues we could take action on – for example, the phasing of traffic lights at certain junctions (eg the Hartfield Road/Kingston Road junction, where we successfully lobbied to get TfL engineers to investigate if it was causing tailbacks on Kingston Road).*

*We support the general de-cluttering of town centre areas – removing railings etc, and the attempts to make signage consistent. We have been active in supporting 20mph zones where residents want them, and in helping residents deal with other road safety measures. We watch the plans to re-design Wimbledon Station forecourt with interest as this will play a huge part in the look of Wimbledon town centre. We would seek to promote and increase local bike trips – planning rules must provide not only for cycle storage facilities, but we must also consider things like shower and changing facilities in council and public buildings, to make it easier to ride. The Merton Cycle Campaign Manifesto contains many good ideas that deserve further detailed consideration.*

*Air quality is an issue in parts of the borough, and we would support the re-introduction of monitors, so that we actually know where the problem spots are. As in question 1 above, we would seek to promote, protect and develop our open spaces and green corridors.*

*We would like to see more done to keep the streets clean and tidy. People should be encouraged to take responsibility for and pride in their area. One of the ways to do this is to promote the “street watch scheme” (which seems to have become dormant) that supports and encourages residents to report local problems that the Council can deal with*

*In conjunction with this, we’d like to investigate whether there could be a scheme where Council employees regularly ‘out and about’ on the streets are encouraged to report issues outside their immediate areas of responsibility.*

*But it’s not just the Council that has responsibilities here – other bodies such as utility and train companies also have a role to play. It can take months and months of badgering these companies to get them to take action. This is why we’re running campaigns like our “Messy train land” blog ([www.messytrainland.wordpress.com](http://www.messytrainland.wordpress.com)) to make it easier for people to get things cleared up where they live. We would work with the London Assembly and Mayor to try to set up a London-wide scheme for reporting such issues.*

## **6. Development Control.**

Introduce stronger/clearer development control policies following the approval of the Core Strategy?

*To judge the success of the Planning and Development Control system the Council must first develop some idea of what Merton should be like – a local plan that sets out a vision for Merton and its component areas.*

*The current drafts of the relevant documents for Merton look ‘off-the-shelf’, as if they are lifted straight from Government guidance; there are some good ideas, but no consistent guiding principles.*

*More specifically, we’d look at: the involvement of residents and community groups (and the ‘success’ of that involvement – this is a key criterion for us); the number of planning applications granted and the number refused; and how far developers complied with the conditions applied to their applications.*

## **7. Community Cultural/Leisure Facilities.**

- a. Secure the provision of a good-sized Civic Hall on Council land in the Town Centre?
- b. Protect and improve Community Centres and other cultural/leisure facilities?

*As in 2006, we feel that the Council should retain the freehold of key sites for the benefit of all of Merton’s residents.*

*Whilst we recognise that a Wimbledon civic hall would make a valuable contribution to Wimbledon’s communities, we don’t feel this should result in cuts to local services.*

*Plans put forward by the Conservative administration to provide a civic venue rely on money raised from the sale and development of the Hartfield Road car park (P3 site). As mentioned above, we see the sale of freehold of Council-owned sites as unfortunate, although any such development must be part of a ‘joined-up’ plan for Merton, and conditions should be put on the development to ensure it is sustainable, energy efficient etc.*