

Wimbledon Society Local Elections 2010 Questionnaire to the Leader of the Opposition and Leader of Labour Candidates, Cllr Stephen Alambritis

If, following the 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 Labour Group, in partnership with local people, successfully fought the Conservative council's attempts to lease part of Morden Park and Playing Fields to a commercial company even though local organisations had detailed plans to offer more diverse and accessible services in the park. We want to ensure that the council can never try to sell off our natural resources to commercial developers like this again and if elected we will guarantee that the wishes of local people will be respected and that local community groups interested in offering services in our parks are able to compete equally with commercial organisations. I will not be in the business of telling residents to "Get Over It" a term used by Cllr David Williams against those objecting to the GOALS Soccer plc application to concrete over Morden Park Playing Fields

In general, due to size, we do not believe that the gardens in Merton are amenable to back garden developments. I have rebuffed3 attempts for back garden developments in my own ward including the famous "Hobbit Houses" application. If elected we undertake a review of planning guidelines with the aim of ensuring inappropriate developments can be stopped.

2. Conservation Areas

- a. Protect Conservation Areas from inappropriate development?

We are aware that English Heritage has listed two of our conservation areas, Leopold Road and Merton Hall Road, as being at risk. We would particularly want to prioritise these areas for action. We would also seek to beef up the council's Conservation and Design Advisory Panel so that it has a more powerful role in protecting our conservation areas.

- b. Press for production of Management Plans and proposals for Conservation Areas?

Conservation areas are often seen as just being the concern of the council officer with responsibility for conservation when instead they should be of concern to the whole of the council and the impact on the area's character should be assed in everything the council does in the area. We would mainstream an understanding of conservation

area issues throughout the council so that all officers are aware of the need to take the character of the area into account when taking decisions, even if at first these decisions do not seem directly related to conservation. As above, we would want to prioritise those areas in most need for management plans and proposals but all conservation areas should have up to date and deliverable management plans.

c. Consider designating Article 4 Directions in some Conservation Areas?

We are aware that parts of the John Innes conservation area are already designated under Article 4. We will review the success of this in order to investigate, in partnership with local residents, whether this approach might benefit any other 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?

It is in everyone's interest to fully engage local people in potential development initiatives. As has recently been experienced by the council, not involving local residents can result in very high financial costs to the council where planning decisions have been overturned due to residents successfully appealing. We would therefore seek to actively engage residents and to ensure that pre-application discussions are fully informed by residents' views and concerns. In that regard I will appoint a Residents Pre Application Officer, who will liaise with residents each time pre planning discussions take place with developers. All latter discussions to be accessible in note form on the council's planning explorer. I am certainly not a follower of the dictum stated by Cllr David Williams that in planning applications eg Waitrose, "the views of residents are irrelevant". Yet another statement from the Tory Leader that is not in keeping with the position of Council Leader

4. Natural Resources

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

When in power, the Labour Group, then led by Cllr Andrew Judge, came up with the now nationally acclaimed "Merton Rule". This necessitated that new commercial developments sourced a minimum percentage of their energy requirements from sustainable sources. However, since the Tories took over the council Merton is no longer leading the way nationally on innovative approaches to conserving energy and water. If elected we would put Merton back at the forefront of natural resource conservation by working with the industry to investigate a combined heat and power plant for Merton.

5. Environmental Quality

- a. Improve facilities for pedestrians, cyclists and buses?

We very much support an extension to cycling facilities in the borough. We want the new London bike rental scheme to be implemented in Merton as soon as practical and would take all possible steps to facilitate this. We would seek ways of requiring all new developments to provide adequate cycle parking and would also look into the feasibility of allowing contra flow cycling on one way systems where this could be safely and practically delivered.

We would seek opportunities to work with developers via the planning process to increase the width of adjoining pavements where existing pavements are inadequate to pedestrian traffic density.

We also want to improve facilities for tube and rail commuters and will continue to campaign for Morden to be moved from Zone 4 to Zone 3 to reduce costs for local people.

- b. Improve environmental quality of life in residential areas?

We believe one of the biggest environmental nuisances for residents in Merton is litter and filth on the streets, particularly after the refuse and recycling collection. We have therefore pledged to increase street sweeping in residential areas from the current once a week to twice a week for those areas that need it. We will also ensure that roads are swept after the refuse collection so that detritus left on the street is picked up, and not continue with what is currently common practice, whereby the street sweepers often come immediately prior to the refuse collection.

- c. Rebalance the pedestrian and vehicular space in Wimbledon Town Centre and reduce the impact of traffic?

Wimbledon town centre has come to resemble one large car park in recent years, which, besides inconveniencing motorists stuck in traffic, reduces pedestrian's enjoyment of the town. We support the recent removal of superfluous guardrails but we believe that much more needs to be done to improve the pedestrian experience. We would investigate increased pedestrian rights of ways, the potential for wider pavements where practical, zero tolerance of obstructions to the pavement, and methods of redirecting traffic away from the town. However, this last action would have to be done in close consultation with residents and with a full understanding of potential knock on effects for residential areas.

6. Development Control

Introduce stronger/clearer development control policies following the approval of the core strategy?

We believe all development control policies and guidance should be agreed after rigorous consultation with residents. However, we would support clearer policies so that problems of interpretation are reduced and enforcement can be carried out in a timely fashion. To this end, we would seek to concentrate resources on enforcement so that development control policies are not just paper tigers but have some real clout to address inappropriate developments.

7. Community Cultural/Leisure Facilities

- a. Secure the provision of a good-sized Civic Hall on Council land in the town centre?

When previously in power the Labour Group, then led by Cllr Andrew Judge, initiated plans for a new Civic Hall for Wimbledon, on the site of the car park adjacent to Wimbledon theatre. We set aside capital funding and undertook detailed feasibility studies for a combined civic hall and performance space which could accommodate significant cultural events in partnership with Merton Music Foundation and Wimbledon School of Art, in addition to community events and celebrations. However, with the new Conservative administration these plans were effectively binned and the latest edition of Merton Council's Business Plan no longer includes the aim of having a new civic hall for Wimbledon.

The Labour Group continues to support the provision of a civic hall for Wimbledon and we would revisit our previous plans for a combined cultural and community space if elected.

- b. Protect and improve Community Centres and other cultural/leisure facilities?

A key policy we would like to bring forward is to allow local groups to take control of community assets such as community centres. This would allow local people to own and make decisions about the future of their community centres, without interference from the council. This would help groups to plan better for the future and to demonstrate a secure financial footing.

Summary Statement

If elected as Leader of the Council it will be my intention to engage with the Wimbledon Society on a regular basis and to use my business background to ensure a businesslike approach to our relationship

**CLLR STEPHEN ALAMBRITIS
Labour Group Leader**