



This Questionnaire is being sent to the Leader of each party contesting the Merton Council election in May 2018.

14 February 2018

Answers will be summarised, published and put up on the Society website.

Response from the Conservative Party

March 2018

If, following the coming Local Elections, your party is in control of Merton Council, or is working in an agreement with another Party:

1. How will you protect all the open spaces, parks and green areas in the Borough, including back gardens, from built development, and improve their character? Will you bring in a 'Tree Years' Policy that requires enough new trees to match the age of trees lost by development?

2. How will you protect Conservation Areas from inappropriate development?

Will you consider introducing Article 4 Directions in some Conservation areas? Will you introduce positive enhancement and management plans in these areas? Will you increase the resources and staffing of the overstretched Development Control and Enforcement Team?

Merton Conservatives will ensure that residents are more empowered in relation to development decisions and the protection of existing spaces. We will make sure communities are supported with Neighbourhood Plans to guide development and give communities more control over development in their area, including how money raised from development is spent in the local area.

We will support residents in identifying and protecting Assets of Community Value, and in using Article 4 Directions where appropriate to protect those community assets from development.

Decisions around planning, development, and the ongoing management and associated protections of areas such as open and green spaces and conservation areas will always be made in such a way as to ensure the engagement and consent of communities through consultation and representation, from individual residents, communities and organisations within the community such as the Wimbledon Society.

3. How will you significantly reduce the amount of energy and water now being used in the Borough?

Merton Conservatives will support water minimisation technologies and energy efficiency measures in new developments. We will work in partnership with Thames Water and UK Power Networks to promote and provide resources to residents to encourage more sustainable living.

Encouragement to utilise renewable energy solutions in the form of solar photovoltaic (solar PV), heat pumps, and ground source would help in reducing energy used in the borough. Use of water meters, water harvesting systems and grey water recycling would help reduce water usage, and grid -tied solar powered street lighting could reduce energy consumption by up to 80% per annum.

Solar PV on residential and commercial buildings could reduce energy consumption by up to 50% per annum on average. On business, industrial and retail parks, both solar PV and wind turbines could be implemented to reduce energy consumption, while water harvesting can provide welfare facility flushing, irrigation, cleaning, storage for fire suppression and firefighting, cooling works etc.

The take up of electric vehicles could provide possibilities to power residential homes and small businesses by being the source of energy when parked or when being charged. Solar PV (integrated in to canopies) and wind energy in large open spaces such as carparks could be used as energy centres to supplement the grid in reducing energy consumption when powering infrastructure, amenities and E vehicle charging.

4. Will you press developers of significant developments to have creative pre-application discussions with the public before they submit their planning applications?

Will you publish all pre-app discussions between developers and planning officers as they happen?

As outlined in relation to questions 1 and 2 above, Merton Conservatives will always seek to ensure that residents and community groups are actively involved in discussions, applications and decisions around planning, and part of that would need to include accountability to and transparency with residents and their communities.

5. How will you improve facilities for pedestrians, for cyclists and for buses?

How will you re-balance the pedestrian and vehicular spaces in the Town Centre, and improve its character and safety? Will you introduce more 20 mph zones, with proper enforcement, and if so, where?

We will make reducing traffic congestion and cutting air pollution a priority. Plans include the introduction of a Merton-coordinated school run sharing system, the reinvigoration of 'walking buses' in the borough, and tendering for a hopper bus service to reduce the number of vehicles on our roads. We have always been supportive of measures to improve safety, for example by creating new pedestrian crossings or supporting 20 mph zones wherever possible, as they have a demonstrable benefit to increasing road safety for all road users. Merton Conservatives have a track record of working with and on behalf of residents on these issues.

6. Will you use the Council's own Hartfield Road site to facilitate the provision of a new Civic Hall?

Merton Conservatives is supportive of the aspiration to provide a new concert/civic hall in Wimbledon, helping to promote the borough as a destination of culture and leisure. Any particular use of this public land would need to be financially viable and provide a return to the council.

7. If Council-owned sites are to be developed, will you ensure that this is done by Leasehold sale, retaining the Freehold?

In any such developments, Merton Conservatives would always prioritise ensuring that community assets remain in the hands of the community; that developments are only carried forward where they will demonstrably benefit the community; and that development provides the best value for money possible in the short term and into the future.

8. What will you do to improve the links between Social Services and the NHS?

Merton faces growing demand for Adult Social Care (ASC) services, such as day centres, meals on wheels and home care. We will use the ASC precept to protect those services and work with national government to ensure sufficient funding to support the most vulnerable in our community.

We would focus particularly on preventative and awareness-raising measures which help ensure the health and wellbeing of residents, such as the existing campaign to promote better awareness of diabetes. That focus would be strengthened by building even further on our many strong working partnerships in health and social services, including with the borough's Health and Wellbeing Board and the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). Through those partnerships we would wish to take steps to address and eradicate health inequalities that exist between different parts of the borough.

We recognise St Helier as a vital part of our community and will ensure that it gets the investment it needs to address key issues to make our local hospital even better. Merton Conservatives plan to develop and launch Merton Healthnet, an online information portal to help residents improve their own health.

9. Crossrail2: Will you press for all tunneling operations to be driven from the Thames end, to lessen the disruption to Wimbledon Town Centre and rail services?

Merton Conservatives recognise that Crossrail 2 could bring many opportunities to improve our local area, but are clear that plans for Crossrail 2 need to work for the local community and cannot be at the expense of our town centres. We will fight to ensure that Crossrail 2 does not damage our area, and brings as little disruption as possible to residents and businesses. We will do everything we can to ensure residents are engaged in decisions about Crossrail 2 and that their voices are heard.

10. Will you adopt a firm Policy to resist all buildings over 6 storeys in Wimbledon Town centre? Do you support the Society's planning strategy for Wimbledon Town Centre?

As outlined above in relation to questions 1,2 and 4, Merton Conservatives will make sure that all residents, community groups, local businesses and others are empowered and engaged within the planning process and in planning decisions. We already have an existing track record of supporting communities in protecting themselves from inappropriate developments, for example where a development would be detrimental to the existing character of a location.

11. Where would you envisage the siting of the numbers of new homes, required under the new London Plan, on both large and small sites and what is your attitude to small sites and infill? How will you explain to the public where all the new housing is to be located, and what effect it will have on local character?

Merton Conservatives have a clear and ambitious plan to create new homes, especially the affordable homes that make it easier for young people to get on the housing ladder. We will also make sure that people in the rental sector feel safe and secure in their home, and will crack down on rogue landlords. This programme can't be at the detriment of existing communities and their character, and we have outlined in response to other questions how we will ensure residents' and communities' voices are heard as part of this process, including to protect existing communities and the assets they hold from inappropriate development

12. What is your policy on buildings that are not being refurbished remaining empty and unoccupied, in excess of 1 year?

Merton Conservatives would seek to contact the owners of empty and unfurnished property in the first instance to assess why the property cant be returned to habitable use. We would support a higher council tax bill for these properties if they are left unoccupied. We do not support the idea of appropriating property from private ownership.

13. Will you consider re-introducing the Committee system into the Council in place of the current 'Cabinet Member' system?

Both systems have their benefits and drawbacks, and each has their supporters and opponents – making the argument a finely balanced one – but we would always welcome the views of residents and community groups in ensuring a healthy system of local democracy that best engages and represents all interested parties.

14 How would you implement improvements to the existing street cleaning and to the discouragement of the use of plastic bottles and take-away coffee cups which cannot be re-cycled?

Merton Conservatives will reintroduce weekly street cleaning, retain the weekly bin collection, and crack down on littering and fly tipping, for example through an increased use of mobile CCTV cameras and the enforcement of fines or prosecutions for littering, graffiti and fly tipping. Any money received through those fines and prosecutions would also be channelled towards cleaning up the borough.

We will provide local leadership to help reduce the use of plastics, for example by reducing the use of plastic cups, cutlery and packaging within Council facilities and by encouraging local coffee shops to follow suit.

15. Is there anything else that you would like to comment on?

Merton Conservatives believe in listening to and involving the community, and we would wish to work with civic groups and charities in making Merton an even better place to live, work and play in.