

Conservative Candidates Response to Mitcham Cricket Green Community & Heritage

Group Questions to Candidates

First of all, we would like to thank you for giving us the opportunity to respond to your six questions regarding what we would do, if elected as your local councillors, for Cricket Green and the surrounding area. We have tried to answer these as fully as possible, but please do not hesitate to come back to us should you have any questions or wish to follow up on any of the points which have been made.

Question 1: What is your most important priority for improving the quality of life in Cricket Green?

There are many different factors that contribute to the overall quality of life, however we would regard getting a grip on planning being one of the most important. For us, this falls into the following two main categories:

- Respecting the requirements of the Conservation Area: Whilst Cricket Green has been afforded some additional protection through its designation as a Conservation Area, it is critical that the all future developments respect this. We would be active campaigners against proposed developments which would scar our environment. An inappropriate building or alteration to an existing building can be produced within a few weeks but can last for years. We would work to ensure that a higher bar was set for planning applications, ensuring that quality became the watch word. There is no excuse for the use of cheap materials or poor design. We would only support developments which therefore enhanced or maintained the unique character of the Cricket Green and the surrounding area.
- Tougher enforcement: Developers and unscrupulous individuals have often regarded Merton as a soft touch when it comes to enforcement of the planning rules. The Conservative election manifesto for 2014 ('Unlocking Merton's Potential', which is available at www.mertonconservatives.org) makes a commitment to strengthening planning enforcement and we will ensure that the benefits of these are rolled out to Cricket Green. Illegal use of premises for car sales etc would be stamped out. We will work to ensure that once a developer has promised to meet the high standards demanded of them that they do then carry out their promises in full.

Cricket Green is already a beautiful corner of Merton, but it needs the right support to ensure that this is maintained and improved. This is what we offer.

Question 2: Do you support the Cricket Green Charter and how will you use it in your work for Cricket Green?

We can confirm that we fully support the Cricket Green Charter. We have already covered much of how we would support the 'Character and context' section in our answer to question 1. In terms of the other sections, please see more detail below:

- 'Open Space': We fully support the principle that there should be no loss of open space. Conservative councillors elsewhere in Merton have been engaged in similar battles with the current Labour administration over the last four years and we would be equally protective of open land. The space should be there for all to enjoy and we therefore support the other points made in the Charter under this section. In terms of retaining and enhancing the character of Cricket Green Road in any future Birches Close or Brook House redevelopment, we would be happy to work with you, local residents and the developer to ensure that this is a key minimum requirement of any future development.

- 'Walking': Our 2014 election manifesto stresses how we will support schemes which increase the amount of walking and cycling undertaken by our residents. We will happily support any schemes which support this principle.
- 'Quality': As per our answer to question 1, 'quality' will be our key requirement for all new developments. We are fully supportive of this principle. Insensitive decisions by the Council, such as on Willow Lane, suggest that quality has often taken second place to expediency no matter how inappropriate the proposals and how much better they could have been if greater consideration had been given.
- 'Lighting': Whilst some areas of the borough have insufficient lighting, making pedestrians feel unsafe when it is dark, other areas have too much lighting causing issues with pollution. A wider study of the location and appropriateness of lighting in our borough is therefore required and we would ensure that Cricket Green was included in this. As for new lighting, if required, then we would insist that it was appropriate for the area both in terms of design of the infrastructure and strength of the beam.
- 'Affordability': A lack of affordable housing is a key issue both our area and the whole of London. That is why we have made an explicit manifesto commitment to support the development of new homes. As per our previous answers however, these homes should be designed in a way which respects and enhances the local area and does not detract from it.
- 'Activities': Creating and supporting a vibrant local community is essential for Cricket Green and the whole of Mitcham. We will support new business, shops and groups into the area through the use of business rates holidays, innovation zones etc. This will both increase visitor traffic and also boost local employment. In terms of the cultural offering, we would support the designation of the 'island site' and support the use by groups and social enterprises of a refurbished fire station.
- 'Canons House and Park Place': We will work with others to secure the necessary funding to restore Canons House and Park Place to their full glory. Conservative colleagues elsewhere in Merton have successfully worked with local resident groups in their area to achieve similar things and we will look to replicate this great work here.
- 'The island site': A cultural and leisure hub that seeks to enhance Cricket Green and Mitcham would be an excellent addition to the area. We would work with both council officers and local businesses and residents to deliver this exciting new feature to Mitcham.
- 'The development process': Our 2014 election manifesto clearly states that we would launch the creation of a list of 'Assets of Community Value'. This would provide the community with a head start on owning any assets on this list if they were to be sold for development at a later date. This could include pubs, libraries, halls etc. In terms of greater community involvement in running current assets, we also refer to this in our election manifesto. We do not believe that the Council (or councillors) have a monopoly on the best ideas for providing a service or a facility. If others can show us that they could do a better job without increasing the overall cost to the taxpayer, then a Conservative-run council would look favourably on such proposals.

Question 3: What will you do to minimise light pollution and maximise affordable public access to the new multi-use games area in the Canons' grounds?

If elected, we will seek an urgent meeting with both the Planning and Leisure departments at the Council and also Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL), the organisation which manages the Canons Leisure Centre on behalf of the Council to determine a way forward which seeks to address both the issues with light pollution and also affordable access to the new facilities. As you will be aware, planning permission was granted without these conditions being placed upon the application so we will have to work to try and find an alternative form of redress outside of current planning policy.

Question 4: Are you committed to protecting Mitcham Cricket Green Conservation Area and resisting all development which fails to enhance its special qualities?

Yes, we are. Through better use of the Council's planning policies we believe that this can be achieved. For those areas of the ward, and Mitcham as a whole, which falls outside of the Conservation Area we will also look at working with local residents to develop local neighbourhood plans to further finesse the Council's policies and ensure that only developments of the highest quality and which add to the local area are granted permission.

Question 5: Will you support a ban on lorries using Church Road by helping revoke its designation as a route for heavy goods vehicles (HGVs)?

We have absolute sympathy with those residents who live on Church Road and who have to suffer the inconvenience and unpleasantness of the lorries which use the road or park up overnight on Hallowfield Way to use the SITA site. It is our understanding that Church Road is a Transport for London road. If elected, we will proactively engage with our local London Assembly Member, Richard Tracey AM, to take the case to TfL and City Hall that the road needs to be improved with HGV traffic either removed or at least reduced. We are particularly keen to ensure that Hallowfield Way is not used as a lorry park and would at least seek this assurance in the short term whilst a longer term plan to reduce or remove HGV traffic altogether is put together for Church Road.

Question 6: What will you do to help secure a long term future for Mitcham Cricket Club and its pavilion?

We are absolutely committed to ensuring that cricket continues to be played on the Green and will work hard to ensure that the Club and pavilion survive, and thrive, well into the future. We will seek to garner third party support to help both the Club and the pavilion. In other parts of Merton, Conservative ward councillors have successfully worked with local residents groups to build new changing rooms, install nature walks and lay down new plants and trees. We will use this for the benefit of Cricket Green by accessing this experience and new sources of funding, working with the Club and yourselves at the same time.

We do hope that you have found these answers to be to your satisfaction and look forward to working with you should we be successful on election day.

Yours faithfully,

Andrew Hollingsworth, Barbara Mansfield and Carl Warner