



NOTICE OF MEETING and AGENDA
The 51st Annual General Meeting of
MERROW RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

will be held on
MONDAY 22nd March 2021 at 8 PM by Zoom
Chairman - Andrew Strawson

Please email secretary@merrowresidents.org to register in advance for the Zoom meeting link

1. Apologies for absence

2. Minutes of the last AGM held on 1st July 2020 by Zoom. (available at meeting)

3. Matters arising

4. Annual Report (see also *Merrow Life*)

5. Planning Report - update (see also *Merrow Life*)

6. Financial Report

Report and Adoption of Accounts (available at meeting)

Voluntary Independent Examiner: Appointment of Philip Ross for 2021

7. Election of Officers

The Officers elected for 2020 were:

- Vice Chairman Vacant
- Treasurer Dave Smith
- Secretary Henriette Whitehead-van Prooijje
- Environment Officer Stephen Rudd
- Membership Secretary Claire Rymell
- Publicity Officer Julia Ellis
- Webmaster Dave Smith

The Chairman, Andrew Strawson, continues in office for the 3rd year of his 3 year term.

The other Officers have all agreed to be nominated for re-election for 2021, except Julia Ellis who recently resigned from the Committee having moved out of Merrow.

Nominations for the **vacant posts of Vice Chairman** and **Publicity Officer**, together with the names and addresses of a Proposer and Seconder, should be sent to the MRA Secretary at 28 Trodds Lane Guildford GU1 2XR or emailed to secretary@merrowresidents.org at least 7 days before the meeting

8. Election of Ordinary Members of the Executive Committee

The Ordinary Committee members continuing in post for 2021 are: **Chris Holliday, Denise Hilton** and **John Pitkin** (for the 2nd year of their 3-year terms). Those being brought forward for re-election as Ordinary Committee Members are: **Gordon Farquharson, Lorna Seymour, Keith Meldrum**

Nominations are invited and should be notified to the MRA Secretary as above

9. Constitution Change

Notice is hereby given of a resolution to amend Section 5 of the MRA Constitution to increase the number of Ordinary members of the Executive Committee from 6 to 8 by amending the words 'not more than 6 Ordinary members' to 'not more than 8 Ordinary members' This proposal, if supported at the AGM, will provide headroom for the MRA to invite new ordinary members to join the Committee, which is otherwise full.

10. Any Other Business This will allow members to raise and discuss matters of local concern.

Subscription Renewal

If you haven't already paid your subscription for 2021 you will receive a renewal letter enclosed with this newsletter.

Merrow Life is published by Merrow Residents' Association for circulation to its members. Unless stated, the views expressed may not always represent the views of the Committee of the Association or those of individual members of the Committee. Any enquiries can be sent to secretary@merrowresidents.org or to 28 Trodds Lane Guildford GU1 2XR

MERROW LIFE

The Newsletter of the



MERROW RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

your community voice for over 50 years

Spring 2021

Issue No 49

www.merrowresidents.org.uk

Don't forget

AGM
Monday
22nd March
8 pm
online

Chairman's Notes

This exceptional year continues, with a general consensus that the third lockdown is more draining and demanding than the first. The sometimes bitter winter weather and flooding have not helped. However, we are all fortunate in Merrow to be surrounded by beautiful countryside and we have focused our MRA talks this year on local nature, covering Merrow Downs in October and Thames Basin heathlands in February, both held necessarily by Zoom.

We have deepened our relationship with the Guildford Environmental Forum (GEF) and their broad reservoir of expertise, enthusiasts and activities across a wide spectrum of environmental campaigns. Many of these issues are fundamental to addressing global warming issues and your committee believe that the local community can only benefit from partnering with GEF on these concerns.

One positive feature throughout the lockdown has been the willingness of people to help others. Neighbours have been looking out for neighbours. Our Coronavirus Volunteer team remains available to help those in need. The latest MRA initiative has been to start publishing details of the weekly *North Guildford Food Bank* requirements - read overleaf for the collection times at St John's Church.

Our other volunteering initiative, Merrow Community Highway Volunteers, has been restricted by lockdowns - but has still managed significant pathway clearance, cleaning and tidying - and is champing at the bit to do more.

Major planning and development changes continue to move ahead inexorably: strategic sites alongside the A3, major sites in central Guildford which are often piecemeal and poorly integrated into any overall plan, significant proposals from government for

streamlining (or in effect removing) planning controls, and local domestic and commercial development in Merrow. These keep us very busy and are covered elsewhere in this newsletter.

If you are interested in finding out more about any of our activities or in joining our volunteers, don't hesitate to email us at Secretary@merrowresidents.org. There is always opportunity to be involved.

Our AGM on 22nd March will again be held online, in line with most social events, work meetings and education in the 'new normal'. The Agenda is printed on the back page and there will be a chance to ask questions after the formal part of the evening. We can't offer wine and nibbles, but we do hope you can join us on Zoom.

Andrew Strawson
Chairman



Highways

Epsom Road Bus Corridor

As part of Surrey County Council's project called *Guildford Quality Bus Corridors* highway improvements are currently planned to improve the traffic flow along Epsom Road at Park Lane roundabout, and at its junction with Bushy Hill Drive.

The layout of the Bushy Hill junction will be altered to provide a larger area for traffic waiting to turn right into Bushy Hill Drive from Epsom Road. Its traffic lights will also be upgraded to detect late-running buses and change the lights in their favour where possible. These changes will help more traffic through the junction and reduce congestion caused by vehicles waiting to turn right that currently delays buses at peak times. The footway on the Bushy Hill Drive side of Epsom Road and the pedestrian refuge will be improved to accommodate mobility aids and pushchairs.

The westbound exit from the Park Lane round-

about onto Epsom Road heading into Guildford will have its traffic island reduced in size and the hatching in front of the island removed to create more room for traffic to merge into the single lane. This formalises what actually happens at peak times, where many drivers currently wait on the hatched area to merge into the single lane in order to clear the roundabout and allow other traffic on the congested roundabout to flow.

In addition to these works, the project covers options for a bus lane for all or part of the route between Merrow Park and Ride and the Epsom Road/Bushy Hill Drive junction on which there will be a consultation later this year.

Construction was originally expected to take place this spring or summer, working around the timing of other highway improvements and utility works planned in Guildford to avoid putting too much pressure on the town's road network at the same time.

This project also covered changes to the lay-out of bus stops, including the one at Levysdene last year. More information is on SCC's website

under *Guildford Major Transport* projects.

The Highways Customer Panel

SCC is asking for volunteers to join their Highways Customer Panel who they can contact around three times a year to answer questions on the Highways Service.

They will use these surveys to help their decision making and will report back on what they have done. Signing up is easily done from the Highways Customer Panel page on the SCC website.



Guildford Borough Council - Cost Savings

Members may have read that Guildford Borough Council are in active discussion with Waverley Borough Council as to whether certain functions can be shared among the two authorities.

This is part of a wide ranging discussion within Guildford Borough Council on cost savings which MRA will continue to monitor.



Planning - Developments in Guildford

We have attempted to update Members regularly on developments in Guildford related to the Local Plan adopted in 2019 and we shall continue to do so as there is a great deal of activity - much of it behind the scenes - as plans for development of specific sites are brought forward for discussion and determination. Unsurprisingly a mass of detailed documentation is necessary in support of any new planning application which takes both ages to compile and an equal age to digest. It must cover every conceivable issue and even touches on habitats for bats and badgers!

The planning appeal for the development of Michel Harper's Casino site in Guildford was withdrawn after two and half days - it was scheduled to last for nine days! The Inspector concluded that there were some fundamental design faults in the proposals which could not be overcome by tinkering with the plans. His concerns related to the management of flood and fire risk, compliance with fire regulations, egress from the building, a limitation on stairwells and failure to meet the concerns of the Environment Agency on flooding.

The *Guildford Residents' Association* (GRA) and the MRA welcome this decision as it is of critical importance that we get the development on this site absolutely right in addition to the forthcoming proposals for the development of North Street. To this must be added concerns about the future of the *Debenhams* site. It is absolutely clear that our Guildford Borough Councillors are as keen as we are to oversee the development of our town centre in a progressive, harmonious, attractive and coordinated manner.

Planning - Merrow

Urnfield Sports Field, Downside Road

The development of this long established sports field for schools, clubs and societies would much improve the existing facilities, and is welcomed in the main. The proposal includes the creation of a floodlit artificial hockey pitch with an all-weather running track.

MRA has objected, together with *Surrey Wildlife Trust, Campaign for the Protection of Rural England, the Guildford Environmental Forum* and most importantly representatives of the *Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty* (AONB), as the site on Merrow Downs is within this AONB. The main focus of objection is the planned erection of four 15m high floodlights around a new hockey pitch. The disturbance to neighbours is one consideration and we are most concerned about the height of the floodlights over this part of Merrow Downs - which would be visible across the AONB and also impact on the wildlife, particularly bats. Some mitigation is required for the application to be acceptable.

Over 600 comments, both in support and objecting, have been made since the application was submitted in May 2020. The application will be heard by the GBC Planning Committee but at the time of writing no date is set for this.

41 Down Road - Remedial School

The original application was approved in 2017 for two 2-bedroom flats and one 3-bedroom flat plus an additional three bedroom house. MRA originally lobbied hard for adequate off road car parking within this housing development. It is therefore disappointing that a retrospective application

We and others in the GRA have immersed ourselves in the detail of the plans that have been submitted for the development of the Slyfield site, now called the Weyside Urban Village. This development has been under discussion for more than a decade as it involves the re-positioning of the Thames Water sewage works, which in itself is a massive and complex undertaking. We are concerned about the density and height of the proposed development and note the reliance on public transport, which we understand, but question whether it is deliverable. Experts from the GRA are evaluating the infrastructure, road and traffic proposals that are critically important to ensure that the site doesn't become gridlocked at busy times of the day. Concerns have also been raised about the lack of consultation on the allotment proposals as a large proportion of the existing allotments will be lost.

Keith Meldrum ❖

Local Councillors

Deborah Seabrook, one of Merrow's three GBC Ward councillors, has set up monthly meetings with the MRA Executive Committee which are proving both useful and informative.

Graham Ellwood is no longer our local Surrey County Councillor. Until the SCC election on 6th May the interests of Guildford East are being looked after by Cllr Keith Taylor (County Councillor for Shere) who can be contacted on keith.taylor@surreycc.gov.uk The election for the Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner is also on 6th May. ❖

has been made to reduce the number of parking spaces from 7 to 6, the seventh being used for storing waste bins. More than twenty objections have been made, including one from MRA, as this would result in the number of car parking spaces being one less than GBC's parking standards guidance and adding to the already significant car parking congestion in Down Road. The application is due to be heard by GBC's Planning Committee on 3rd March when MRA has requested to speak against the application. ❖

Thames Basin Heathlands Talk

In February we were treated to a fascinating illustrated presentation by the Thames Basin Heaths Partnership about the Magic of Heathlands and the measures being taken to protect these fragile heathlands.

Heathland is rarer than rainforest and recently published research has shown that it is over 10,000 years old! As part of our cultural heritage, this landscape has supported families and communities for millennia and now it needs our help.



A ground-nesting nightjar

Merrow Community Highways Volunteers

Due to Covid activities have been limited, however in early December while restrictions allowed, six members of MRA spent a few hours sweeping leaves, removing weeds, picking up litter, and washing road signs around Merrow.

More recently we had a few days' notice that the A25 was going to be closed to traffic between Clandon Park gates and Clandon traffic lights and we thought this would be a good opportunity to pick the litter from the grass verges. We could not get immediate approval from Surrey Highways because the tree works were being carried out by outside contractors.

Undeterred, we managed to assemble seven local Community Highways Volunteers and met the contractors on the morning of 23 February to explain what we hoped to achieve. We were prepared to walk away if we couldn't get permission to work alongside them. Fortunately they were very friendly and cooperative and we managed to clear all the litter from both carriageways.

Many thanks to Andrew (our Chairman), Dave (our Treasurer and Webmaster), Clive, Virginia, Stuart, Ian and Shirley for all their hard work.

Photos showing *before and after* scenes are available on the Community page of our website merrowresidents.org.uk If you would like to become a volunteer member, please email communityhighways@merrowresidents.org ❖

The beautiful photos gave us close up views of a huge array of specially adapted animals that are not able to live anywhere else, including ground nesting birds such as nightjars.

The Partnership's warden team was created to mitigate the pressure of increasing numbers of humans (and their dogs!) living near it and they want everyone to connect with, respect and protect their local heathland. They encouraged us, and all heathland visitors, to keep to the main paths, keep dogs out of vegetation and be wildfire aware.

The evening ended with a lively question & answer session, and an open invitation to all Merrow residents to tour Whitmoor Common with one of the knowledgeable wardens as soon as Covid restrictions allow, contact stephen.rudd@naturallengland.org.uk

The presentation with its wonderful recording of the nightjar's churring can be watched again on the Environment page of MRA's website. ❖

MRA's Website

We try to keep our website merrowresidents.org.uk up to date and interesting, with both current content and articles relating to Merrow's recent and not so recent history.

We cover the community, environmental, planning matters and local issues. We would welcome any feedback, and any offers to help if you wish to become involved in maintaining it.

If your friends or neighbours are interested in joining MRA please let them know that there is a joining form link on our website. ❖

Food Bank

Across Guildford there are a frighteningly increasing number of families finding it difficult to keep hunger at bay as the pandemic hits earning power and job security. *The North Guildford Food Bank* operates out of St. Clare's Church in Park Barn and serves those in need in Merrow (from Bushy Hill Community Centre), Park Barn & Bellfields. "It has been an extremely busy time for us over the past 9 months, and we have had to be agile about amending our processes to carry on providing food throughout the pandemic.

Thanks to a huge team of very dedicated volunteers, and to generous donors, we have been able to continue seamlessly, and in fact have been able to be more generous in our parcels so that they last for closer to a week. Demand for parcels was huge at the beginning of lockdown when we were giving out more than three times our pre-Covid average. Since then, things have calmed down with other projects around the town now in place, so that in general we've been about twice as busy than usual. We have also increased a weekly spending from cash donations to £1,000 per week."

People in Merrow have actively supported the food bank for some time but it became apparent that was no handy collection point for donations locally. To make it more convenient to donate food, containers are now placed in St. John's Church Porch on Wednesdays and Sundays from 11am to 5pm. The Food Bank's requirements are updated weekly on MRA's website, on North Guildford Foodbank's Facebook page and also in *Sainsburys* foyer. ❖

History Repeats Itself ...

We were fascinated to unearth this report in St Johns Parish Newsletter of January 1919 relating to an earlier pandemic that affected children's education in Merrow. 'The schools broke up for Christmas holidays on Dec 20th. They will re-assemble on Tuesday 7th January 1919. The last term was rather broken on account of the influenza pandemic; but we hope that now *la grippe Espagnole* is subsiding, steady progress will be made in the New Year.

So much of the children's future depends on their education, that we hope all parents and those who have care of the children will do their best to keep them regular at their studies in whatever school they may be. Irregularity and slackness are sure roads to failure.' ❖



Erected at the original entrance to Merrow Infant School in 1901

Patrick Robson

We are very sad to report the death of Patrick Robson in October. He had been looked after by his wife Jean at home after a long and debilitating illness. He had been a very staunch supporter of MRA and was Chairman between 1995 and 1998, retiring from the Executive Committee in 2011.

This photograph was taken when Patrick was presented with a painting of St. John's Church to mark his retirement from the Committee and to thank him for all he had done on our behalf.

Graham Thorp, also a past Chairman of MRA, paid tribute to Patrick at his funeral. "I was indebted greatly to Patrick for his untiring efforts over local Planning applications and the 2003 Local Plan, and for how helpfully and positively he worked with me.

When I started out as Chair, he patiently elaborated on and explained the arcane arts of planners and developers to me in individual tuition sessions. He was utterly reliable and detailed in his work. He would give an admirably succinct summary - much appreciated! - to the Committee of the results of his extensive studies of whatever the current problems were. This would be lit up sometimes by a wry smile as he described the attempted manipulations of some developer or property owner and a glint would come into his eye as he proposed, always with excellent good sense, what the MRA's response should be! He was also keen to develop relations with the newly set up *East Guildford Residents' Association*.

He had a great sense of humour and always seemed glad to see you."

Jenny Jordan

It is also sad to report the death of Jenny Jordan in February.

Jenny was first elected to Guildford Borough Council in 1987 and represented Merrow and Burpham ward for eight years until 1995.

She then served on the Council for a second period of sixteen years from 2003 to 2019 as councillor for Merrow ward. During this time Jenny served as the Mayor of Guildford on two occasions, in 2008-09 and 2012-13. She also served on several scrutiny committees and the Licensing Committee.

She was a long time member of the MRA, and before her retirement had been a teacher at *George Abbot School* in Burpham and a Guide Leader. Jenny will be remembered in Merrow not only as one of our active and involved ward Councillors but also for her care and compassion for all those that asked for her help. ❖

