

Local Councillors

The three new GBC Councillors for Merrow elected in May are **Joss Bigmore**, **Yves de Contades** and **Joanne Shaw**. MRA has already established good working relationships with them through regular meetings, as well as maintaining our ongoing contact with George Potter our County Councillor.

The Liberal Democrat Councillors hold joint monthly drop in surgeries at Merrow Methodist Church on Saturdays at 2:30pm and the next ones are on 21st October, 18th November and 9th December. ❖

Enhancing our Environment

You will be delighted to know that MRA recently received a *Guildford in Bloom* silver award - for the second year running - for the attractive tubs with their tall displays of sweet peas outside the *Horse and Groom* which were planted by *Edwins Garden Centre* in Clandon Park and watered and looked after by **Kate Dumbleton** and her team. The award was received in person by Kate and a number of her team. Very many thanks to Kate and to Edwin's.

Merrow Community Highways Volunteers were pretty active in June. The two public benches opposite the *Horse & Groom* were given a late Spring cleaning. Several wheel barrow loads of weeds, leaves and general debris were cleared from around the benches and the general area. At the same time, the **Rayner** family cleared loads of overhanging tree branches from the Trodds Lane footpath near Abbots Way. Three large builders' bags full of vegetation were collected. Photos can be viewed on the Community page of our website. ❖



MERROW RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

AUTUMN EVENT

Monday 16th October at 8pm at St. John's Centre, Epsom Rd

~
"What it's *really* like being an MP, Whip and Minister"
by Rt. Hon. Anne Milton

~
Anne was MP for Guildford from 2005 - 2019 and held various Government posts including Minister for Education, Minister for Public Health, Minister for Women and Deputy Chief Whip. She previously worked as an NHS nurse. Anne can now speak more freely about her political life than when she was in office, so come along with some interesting questions!
Anne's talk will be followed by wine and nibbles.

~
A FREE COMMUNITY EVENT - ALL WELCOME

(a small contribution towards the evening's expenses will be requested)



DIARY NOTE

AGM

on Monday
4th March 2024
at St John's Centre

Don't Forget

Autumn Meeting

on Monday
16th October at 8pm
at St John's Centre

MRA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 2023-2024

Chairman	Andrew Strawson
Vice-Chairman	Vacant
Hon. Treasurer	Dave Smith
Environment Officer	Stephen Rudd
Membership Secretary	Claire Rymell
Hon. Secretary	Henriette Whitehead-van Prooijje
Webmaster	Dave Smith
Publicity Officer	Vacant
Committee Members	Keith Meldrum, Gordon Farquharson, Denise Hilton, Chris Holliday, Lorna Seymour, John Pitkin and Clare McVicker

For more information on MRA's activities see merrowresidents.org

Subscriptions

If you haven't paid your annual subscription for 2023 you will have received a reminder letter with this newsletter. Preferably pay by bank transfer Sort Code **30-93-74 A/c 01511541** with your surname, initials and postcode as the reference to identify you on our bank statement or by enclosing a cheque to 'Merrow Residents' Association' **MRA Treasurer, 6 Swaynes Lane, Guildford GU1 2XX.**

To receive emails from MRA of events/local issues contact secretary@merrowresidents.org and include your full name and address.

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



Autumn 2023

MERROW RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

your community voice for over 50 years

Issue No 54

www.merrowresidents.org.uk

Don't forget

Autumn Event
on Monday
16th October at
St John's Centre

Chairman's Notes

Walking around Merrow and along the Epsom Road over the summer has provided some encouraging signs. The cricket, golf and tennis clubs are all busy and thriving, with *Merrow Lawn Tennis Club* celebrating its centenary year. The fitness centre has been taken over, and completely refitted and re-opened for business by *Horizon Leisure*. *Merrow Highways Community Volunteers* have been keeping the trees and pavements in good order, inspired and encouraged by **Dave** and **Shirley Smith**. The *Horse and Groom* has smartened itself up and brightened its external appearance considerably. *Edwins Garden Centre*, and the MRA watering team led by **Kate Dumbleton**, have once again kept up a very good show of plants in the tubs.

Continuing down to the shopping parade, it is great to see that the empty premises have now reopened and again providing services and contact for the community. *Italia Conti* has reinvented its frontage and we have gained a very pleasant coffee shop, *The Cottage at Tattums*. The new *Nisa* convenience store has opened next door and we are very pleased to hear that agreement has been reached for it to have a Post Office counter installed in the new year. The *Debra* charity shop is once again back in operation.

Major Developments in Guildford

Where does one start? There is so much happening on the development front outside Merrow that it is quite difficult to keep up to date.

A revised planning application for the development of **North Street** has now been submitted by *St Edward*, the developer, and is now out for public consultation following a quite useful remote presentation of the amendments to be made to the earlier planning application that was refused by the planning committee.

The tallest building of thirteen floors has now been reduced by two floors and there have been some modifications to the architecture of

In the centre we have the behemoth of *BP* and *M&S* - perhaps not the most beautiful feature on our horizon - but certainly one of the most useful and convenient. At one end we have *Ashuka*, which continues to provide excellent Indian meals, and the barbers next door, while at the other end we have the benefit of our local dry cleaners, bookending our shopping parade. As with all local facilities, not just those mentioned, it is important to make use of them whenever you can - and recognise and follow the old adage 'use it or lose it'. They cannot survive without our local custom.

The same thought also applies to Boxgrove's shops, now brought into the Merrow Ward following the recent Electoral Commission boundary changes, formalised earlier this year (and now also within the MRA boundary too, which was revised to continue to match the ward boundary). The Electoral Commission changes resulted in the demise of some neighbouring wards, but slightly enlarged Merrow Ward to provide the population increase necessary to maintain Merrow's GBC councillor numbers at three. So now we have a mix of shopping facilities in both the southeast and the northwest of Merrow - with several other local convenience stores scattered in between.

Perennial issues in Merrow require continuous surveillance and many are covered in this edition of *Merrow Life*:

- * Inappropriate, overambitious, and sometimes plainly unsafe local developments
- * Protection and maintenance of the natural environment especially Merrow Downs and the Surrey Hills AONB
- * GBC strategic developments, along the A3 and in the centre of town, to ensure adequate infrastructure and facilities
- * Support for those in need, in the current cost of living pressure cooker
- * The state of local roads, footpaths and hedgerows

If there is anything on this list that especially resonates for you, do get in touch with us for more details.

Our *Autumn Event* is on 16th October and we are delighted to welcome back the **Rt. Hon. Anne Milton** to enlighten us on what life is really like as an MP, now that she can talk more freely about her time as Guildford MP, deputy Chief Whip and Minister. We hope to see many of you in person at this annual community evening - full details are on the back page.

Do remind your neighbours that anyone who lives in or has a business in Merrow can also become a member of MRA by using the link on www.merrowresidents.org

Andrew Strawson
Chairman

chairman@merrowresidents.org ❖

enough, the site is too cramped and the amount of public space on the site is still too small.

All of this underlines our concerns that we have been putting forward for some time that the issue of height and density of buildings in the town centre should have been addressed at the time that the detailed policies for the Local Plan were drafted three or so years ago.

It is hoped that this omission will be rectified by the new Borough Council although nothing has materialised to date.

The planning application for the **Wisley Airfield** site went to appeal since it wasn't determined within the statutory time limit, with

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Major Developments in Guildford

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the first day's hearing in Guildford in September. The appeal is likely to sit on twenty-four days up to the end of November and has attracted a great deal of public interest.

We are concerned that there is no overall infrastructure strategy to absorb all the traffic that that would be generated from the three developments at Garlick's Arch, Gosden Hill and Wisley Airfield. No single authority seems to be in a position to forward plan for that eventuality.

Although we have no details as yet, *Martin Grant Homes* are moving forward with consultations on their plans for **Gosden Hill** which is the site on the outskirts of Burpham alongside the A3 where up to 1,800 homes, schools and a new *Park and Ride* could be built. Meetings should take place this autumn with which the MRA expects to be involved. Our concerns relate to infrastructure and the

traffic impact on Merrow in addition to the implications arising from a suggestion that there may be a new railway station - although hold your breath on this!

Plans for the development of the **Weyside Urban Village** (WUV) (the old Slyfield site) are coming in thick and fast as are the plans for the relocation of the Thames Water sewage works and also for the *Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space* (SANG) at Burpham Court Farm - which is owned by GBC - where the public will be able to exercise and walk their dogs. The WUV is a 41-hectare brownfield regeneration scheme that will deliver 1,500 homes, as well as 2,000 square metres of community space and 6,500 square metres of employment space.

It may be helpful to know a little about the financial situation at the WUV, which is very convoluted. In 2020 the

Council committed £335 million to fund the site assembly and infrastructure construction to enable the development of the site, intended to be fully recovered from the sale of ten land plots to housing developers and secured grant funding from *Homes England* and *Enterprise M3 LEP*. The capital budget has now been increased to £359 million.

Full Council approval was based on financial modelling information demonstrating that the project would at least break even after undertaking activities such as securing planning consents and funding, to ensure that the project had greater or equal value to the receipts received.

However, it has now become apparent that the sale of the building plots may not cover the capital investment, but it is hoped that that any deficit will be offset through other intangibles.

Keith Meldrum



PLANNING IN MERROW

Aspen Homes, the developers of the Tretower site in Merrow Street, have submitted a planning application for three new houses in the garden of the large white semi-detached houses **25/25a Horseshoe Lane West**. Many local residents have submitted objections or comments on the application. Concerns are mostly related to increased traffic on the already congested roads at school times, and the potential threat to trees bordering the Green at Greencroft (in spite of the TPOs). As the previous planning application for four houses was approved, it is likely the current three house proposal will be approved. As with other local developments by *Aspen Homes*, the firm has been in regular direct dialogue with the closest neighbours.

St. Thomas of Canterbury School has applied to the Department for Education for permission to dispose of its playing field in Greencroft. If permission is granted and the land is sold for development, residents of Greencroft have highlighted the impact this might have, as the site adjoins the 25/25a Horseshoe Lane West development above, potentially leading to major densification in the area. It is hoped that there would be effective planning oversight of such planning applications where sites could be potentially linked.

No report would be complete without mention of the

Urnfield site. The planning application was refused by the Planning Committee but approved on appeal to allow *Tormead School* to develop it into a multidisciplinary games facility. The MRA is concerned about the lighting of the hockey pitch and the impact that this would have on the Merrow Downs, which is part of the Surrey Hills AONB, and on wildlife. Our concerns were put to one side by the Appeal Inspector who concluded that any harm from the massive lights on thirteen metre columns was offset by the value of the facility to the school and the community.

The MRA is linked with the *Merrow Downs Residents' Group* who are an action group specifically formed to resist the development and to monitor the extent to which the conditions laid down by the inspector are met. The group became increasingly concerned at the lack of transparency in the way that the application to discharge the planning conditions was being assessed and implemented. So much so that the Group initiated a successful Judicial Review in the High Court of Guildford Borough Council's actions in discharging some planning conditions. This will lead to these implementing conditions being quashed in the High Court although the conditions will be discharged once again in due course - hopefully after all the representations from the Group have been properly considered. We expect that work on the Urnfield site will have started by the time you

read this report. All of this underlines the critical importance of transparency and accountability in the way that our planning department operates.

The proposed development at **Westthorpe** on the corner of Halford Road and Epsom Road was covered in the last edition of *Merrow Life*. That earlier controversial application was withdrawn and has now been replaced with a new and very similar application with all the earlier contentious features. The MRA submitted a letter of objection. Surrey County Council have raised concerns about vehicular access and visibility and that the site must have sufficient space for the parking of vehicles and for vehicles to turn so that they can leave in a forward gear. Over 100 letters of objection have been recorded so far. The application has yet to be determined.

The proposed development at **176 Epsom Road** which was also covered in the last edition of *Merrow Life*, and to which MRA objected has also not been determined. There has been some ongoing and inconclusive discussion between the applicant and Surrey County Council about vehicle access onto Epsom Road which makes interesting and unsurprising reading as the entrance to the site is narrow and Epsom Road is a fairly busy highway as we all know!



Merrow Depot

The serious and intrusive noise nuisance has continued at the Merrow depot and many detailed reports by members along with noise recordings have been submitted to both Guildford Borough Council and Surrey County Council. Legal proceedings have now been instituted by GBC so no further report would be appropriate at this time except to say that our new Borough Ward Councillors are involved and are being extremely helpful, as is our County Councillor.



Volunteers Needed

MRA would welcome volunteers - to help setting out the chairs at St John's Centre on the evening of the *Autumn Event* or at the next AGM; to deliver a few envelopes to members who live near you once or twice a year; to join the 2024 summer rota for watering the tubs by the *Horse and Groom*; or for anyone with an interest in environment, transport or planning who is happy to assist us in these areas. Contact us at secretary@merrowresidents.org



Park Lane Speed concerns

Some members have been concerned for some time about traffic speed in Park Lane and this was raised at our AGM earlier this year. We first raised this concern with **Councillor George Potter** well over a year ago but money is tight and although George supports the need for a formal speed review by Surrey County Council in Park Lane he has not yet been able to tell us when money for this review might become available.

In the meantime residents have produced a petition about the speed in Park Lane that members might consider supporting. You can scan this QR code with a mobile phone camera to access the link.



Short Updates

* We continue to raise Member's concerns about the poor bus service in Merrow but we have little positive to report.

* GBC have promised us a replacement bench at the bottom of Merrow Street - hopefully it will be in position before the end of the year.

* Following the SCC consultation we wait to hear when the new speed restrictions will be in place in Trodds Lane

* We are also waiting to hear if, and when, the Temporary Tree Preservation Orders on the beech trees on Merrow Downs in front of the Golf Clubhouse will become permanent.

* The installation of the planned cycle lanes along London Road has been revised and there will now be no day time road closures, which had been the main concern for those who drive to or through Burpham.

* Changes have recently been made to the use of the *Slyfield Recycling Centre*. There is now a weekly free allowance of DIY waste per household, details are on SCC's waste and recycling webpage.



Cost of Living issues

We know that many local residents are facing continued increases in their bills, including their weekly shopping, and as we enter the colder months, we want to highlight a few things to our members. There are a number of local initiatives designed to try and support residents and work together as a community. Surrey County Council's Community *Wellbeing Team* hold occasional free drop-in advice sessions including at the Merrow Methodist Church on Bushy Hill Drive.

We also want to remind members of the many warm hubs across Surrey that offer a free warm space to local residents to spend time in, including at the *Merrow Methodist Church*. A full list can be found on the Surrey County Council website, search for Warm Hubs. Information about some of these activities and regular updating posts can be found on our *Facebook* page. To follow us search

Carbon Reduction locally

You are probably aware that the *Zero Carbon's* two year stay at the bottom of North Street is coming to an end.

It's been an amazing time and a huge amount has been achieved by the voluntary contributions of many people. MRA originally supported *Guildford Environmental Forum* (GEF) with posters and other natural world material.

In the context of energy and carbon footprint 2050 targets, MRA, through **Gordon Farquharson**, has been very active supporting *Zero's Green Your Home Zone*.

This initiative has primarily involved preparation of display material, delivery of lectures around carbon reduction technologies, including the use of solar energy and application of heat pumps, and setting up roundtable discussion forums with local individuals who have reduced the carbon footprint of their homes. Interestingly, a number of fellow Merrow residents have contributed to this part of *Zero's* work.

In addition to it's intellectual and technical support, MRA would encourage those interested to support the current crowdfunding initiative. You can find information about this on the *Zero Carbon Guildford* website. MRA will con-

Surrey Hills Yew Tree Conservation Project

Most of Britain's best-known ancient yews are in churchyards, it is much more unusual to find ancient yew groves in a woodland situation. The one near Newlands Corner, on either side of Trodd's Lane, ranks highly due to the number of ancient trees and their appearance.

Ancient yew trees are individuals, each one having grown into its own unique and magnificent form. Branches which snap and sag down, and trunks which split and fall, live on and sprout new growth towards the light in a different direction from which the fallen parts now point.

Records have been kept of measurements of some churchyard trees for several centuries and it has been the study of these records which has enabled people to assess the age of yew trees. (Old yews generally become hollow making it impossible to use annual growth rings to age them.) The ancient yew tree grove at

Facebook for Merrow Residents' Association or use the link on the Community page of our website.

If you have any ideas about how we can support local residents with the rise in the cost of living let us know. More specifically, we would like to create a community larder or pantry, where locals in need can pick up dry store items or canned goods. If you would be happy to help with this or have any other related ideas, please do let us know.

For children, the *Community Wellbeing Play Rangers* run sessions at Bushy Hill Park every other Monday during the school term, including on 16th October and 6th November from 3.30pm to 5.30pm come rain or shine. This is a free play service aimed at children 5-12 years old, but children of all ages are welcome. More information can be found at guildford.gov.uk/playrangers.



tinue to support this important local charity and we look forward to *Zero* finding a new home in the town centre.

You might be interested to hear about the carbon reduction journey started within our local community asset, *St John's Centre*.

An operation and maintenance team support the management of St John Centre, which is financially independent of the church itself. Maintenance is a continuous process and is essential to ensure the Centre continues to attract local organisations, businesses and health services (including NHS clinics) to use it. This team has a Net-Zero plan that principally involves energy efficiency measures, insulation improvement, and transitioning the remaining gas fired heating to electricity over time.

The work started last year with energy consumption reduction, and recently in August 2023 the smaller hall, *Merrow Hall*, has been converted from gas to reverse cycle heat-pump. For the techies amongst you, the installation uses R32 refrigerant that has zero ozone depletion effect and LOW global warming potential (a GWP of 675).

Gordon Farquharson

MRA Committee Member

Zero Carbon Guildford volunteer



Newlands Corner includes trees known to be at least 1,000 years old.

The grove has unfortunately been showing signs of dieback and deterioration. A recent report found that the causes include compaction of the soil around their roots from footfall. As a result, a new boardwalk has been hand built out of locally grown timber, with the aim of both protecting these wonderful trees and giving people the opportunity to visit them without trampling the soil around them. It is hoped these measures will allow the soil and roots to recover, helping to safeguard the future of these incredibly important ancient trees.

The boardwalk gives direct access to three of the trees and encourages visitors to stick to the main paths, and so protect the yews and many other trees in the vicinity. New noticeboards have been erected nearby to provide information about the importance of protecting the yews, their vital role in the local ecosystem and to help us understand their place in history.

