

MERROW LIFE

The Newsletter of the



MERROW RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

your community voice for over 50 years

Spring 2024

Issue No 55

www.merrowresidents.org

Don't
forget

AGM
Monday
4th March
at 8 pm

Chairman's Notes

- Those of you who joined us for our lively *Autumn Meeting* will agree that we will be hard pressed to match Anne Milton's stories - see the report overleaf - but we are already looking ahead to our next speaker on 14th October 2024. In the meantime, we hope to see you at our AGM on 4th March.
- We are very grateful to Ian Anderson (a long-standing member) who has agreed to be the independent examiner for our accounts and to Tony Hills for once again setting out this issue of *Merrow Life*.
- The problems of noise continue unabated at the *Merrow Depot* caused by one company and we are waiting to hear when the GBC enforcement notice appeal will be heard in Court.
- We are delighted to be able to report that the temporary Tree Preservation Order on the beech trees adjacent to the *Guildford Golf Clubhouse* has now been made permanent.
- We wait to hear when the speed review in Park Lane will take place. We are promised that it will take place this year, but no firm date has been announced.

- A new speed restriction is now in place in Trodds Lane but it is a moot point as to whether it has reduced speeding at all as there is now no monitoring of speed in the road.
- We have noticed that extensive badger exclusion gates have been installed in the quarry at *Sunset Homes* in Merrow Street under licence from *Natural England* which may be a pre-cursor to some building activity permitted under planning permission granted in 2016.
- We understand that the Post Office has agreed that a counter service can operate from the *Nisa* store in the Merrow parade later in the spring. The shop already provides a Drop + Collect parcel service but the return of more Post Office facilities will be very welcome.
- *Merrow Lawn Tennis Club's* new court is now fully functional and its lights do not appear to be too much of a problem to neighbours.
- We are pleased to report that PC Freya Ingham has recently been designated as a *Neighbourhood Police Constable* for East Guildford. She can be contacted on Freya.Ingham@surrey.police.uk

- *Merrow Community Highways Volunteers* took advantage of the closure of Trodd's Lane while new 40 mph signs were being installed. A team of four volunteers led by Ian Anderson collected litter from grass banks all the way up the hill.
- Meanwhile another team of volunteers led by Clive and Virginia Eaton tidied up the area around the public bench opposite the *Horse & Groom*.
- Extra volunteers are always welcome on the rota for watering the tubs outside the *Horse & Groom* once or twice from June to August during the summer flowering period.
- MRA are still seeking some new faces on the Committee to reduce the average age (!) so if you have any spare time and would like to help your Committee deliver what YOU, OUR MEMBERS, want, please have a word with a Committee member at the AGM as we would love to talk to you.
- Please carry on reading these pages for more about local issues and come to the AGM on 4th March for updates!

Andrew Strawson
Chairman

chairman@merrowresidents.org ❖

Planning Report

Major Developments in Guildford

At long last the Planning Committee has approved the revised plans for the development of **North Street**, now called the Friary Quarter. The approved version included some comparatively minor but important reductions in some of the building heights, some redesign of the building frontages and the scheme facade together with some improvements to the bus station layout and facilities.

The developer St Edward has initiated discussions on delivery, starting with road works and the bus station. We are assured that these road works, planned to start towards the end of this year, should not interfere with current bus services. The developer has a great deal of work to do

submitting detailed plans to GBC to discharge the conditions laid down in the planning consent. The whole scheme is unlikely to be finished before 2031.

As most members will be aware the appeal of the planning application for the **Wisley Airfield** site (*Wisley New Town*) has now finished and we await the Inspector's report and decision. Those opposing the appeal have mounted a robust and well argued case for refusal as have the East and West Horsley Parish Councils and Ripley and Send Parish Councils.

We are disappointed that SCC have agreed with the developer that there is no need for the two new slip roads onto the A3 on the A247 at Send Marsh/*Garlick's Arch* so far as this application is concerned. We shall be continuing to lobby hard for these two slip roads to be built to

reduce the traffic congestion in the whole area and especially in Burpham and the outskirts of Merrow that will only get worse if the Wisley application were approved on top of the development now taking place at *Garlick's Arch*. To this should be added the additional traffic from Gosden Hill, if and when this large strategic site is developed.

One should note that although the appeal deals with the main site at the *Wisley Airfield* where Taylor Wimpey is the developer there are two subsidiary planning applications adjacent to the main site where it is proposed that 270 homes should be built but which are on hold until the result of the appeal is known.

We have commented on all three applications and raised concerns about the

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Planning Report

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infrastructure which needs to be updated and improved to accommodate the Increased traffic that the new strategic developments will spawn.

Martin Grant Homes, who are the owners of **Gosden Hill**, have announced that they will be holding 'extensive public consultation events' later this year before submitting a planning application for Gosden Hill, a strategic site earmarked for development under Guildford's Local Plan. So the MRA were pleased to meet with Martin Grant Homes and their project team on the 18th January. They presented their current plans for the site, including options for a southern access junction at the bottom of Merrow Lane, and for Merrow Lane itself. We had a constructive discussion around these proposals, with traffic and services provisions being raised as important considerations.

It was reassuring to hear that Martin Grant Homes is having ongoing conversations with stakeholders such as National Highways and Surrey County Council as the local highway authority, as well as with other residents' groups and councillors in the area. We agreed to consider the options proposed for Merrow Lane and the southern access junction, and look forward to continued future engagement with the team in the months and years to come.

There are numerous **brownfield sites** in Guildford that are being considered for development including the Cathedral site (now gone to appeal) the University of Law site on Portsmouth Road, plots of land close to the railway line and various surface car parks. Development of the *Wey-side Urban Village* at Slyfield is moving forward slowly.

The **Guildford Local Plan** was adopted in April 2019 and a decision must be taken by the Guildford Borough Council before April 2024 as to whether the plan should be reviewed. This will be a difficult decision as the plan which lasts for 15 years doesn't have to be reviewed but if it were to be reviewed the outcome is uncertain and there is no certainty whatsoever that the number of new homes that we are mandated to build would be reduced - it could be increased. Some are arguing that the plan should be reviewed as this would allow a policy on building height and density to be included.

We shall be watching this space very closely as the Council's decision could have a very significant impact on Merrow.

Developments in Merrow

The contested planning application for the demolition of a house and the erection of seven flats and an underground car park on the junction between **Holford Road** and Epsom Road has gone to appeal and will be determined by a Government Inspector as GBC were unable to determine the application within a time limit set by statute.

However, the planning committee is still entitled to consider the application and take a view on what decision they would have taken if they had been able to do so and they did this on 3rd January.

The meeting was very interesting since the planning officer submitted a very detailed and carefully worded report and recommended refusal on very specific grounds related to position, being out of character with other properties in the area, accessibility and impact on neighbouring properties and trees. One of the statutory consultees, SCC, as the County Highways Authority also recommended refusal on the grounds that there was no safe and suit-

able access to the proposed development. The details behind this SCC opinion didn't appear on the GBC website and were obtained by our very helpful ward councillor Jo Shaw. The MRA had submitted three letters of objection to the application which were referred to by the planning officer. We spoke at the planning committee meeting and were in the happy position of being able to support the recommendation of the planning officer to refuse - that must be a first! The planning committee unanimously voted to reject the proposal if they had been in a position to do so.

One interesting comment was that this development might have been appropriate in the town centre but was not appropriate in the suburbs such as Merrow. Hear, hear!

We are now preparing for the appeal hearing and do not yet know whether it will be in person, be dealt with remotely or in writing without a physical hearing but we expect the former. In any event the MRA will be putting forward our views to the Inspector both in writing and in person, if we have the opportunity to do so, based on our letters of objection, the planning officer's helpful report and the applicant's grounds for appeal which have yet to be published.

This is one more occasion when residents living close to a potential development site and MRA members have joined forces in objecting to a planning application and putting forward their objections to GBC both in numbers and with some force with considerable effect.

If you have any questions about any of these sites why not come to the AGM on the 4th March and talk to us? We would like that!

Keith Meldrum
Vice Chairman



Update on the Urnfield Site

Last year residents who share a love of Merrow Downs formed Merrow Downs Residents' Group (MDRG) to fight to minimise the potential damage to Merrow Downs from the proposed floodlit sports facilities at the Urnfield ground, with the objective to protect and enhance the special natural environment of Merrow Downs. This development was given planning permission by the Planning Inspectorate at Appeal, following refusal of the application by GBC planning committee. MRA had repeatedly voiced serious concerns over the impact of tall floodlights on Merrow Downs and beyond.

Over the last year MDRG scrutinised the material submitted by the developer and presented evidence for higher standards of landscaping, drainage and ecological management at this site, which lies within the Surrey Hills National Landscape (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty).

Last summer we mounted a legal chal-

lenge (Judicial Review) against the approval of several of these plans, as the developer had failed to follow planning procedures correctly. We had to turn ourselves pretty quickly from an informal group into a limited company in order to launch the Judicial Review as a group, instead of a single individual taking the sole risk.

The Judicial Review was uncontested by GBC, who recognised the errors made and so we "won" without having to go through court proceedings. With the developer having to re-apply to get certain conditions approved, this has presented an opportunity to push for improved planting schemes which should provide better wildlife corridors and screening from the floodlights. But construction cannot start until all of the 'pre commencement conditions' have been fulfilled by the developer, and the amount of badger activity (including setts) on and around the site has occupied much of our time over recent months, gathering evidence to ensure that this protected species is not harmed by the construction and in-

tensified use of the Urnfield site.

This fight to protect Merrow Downs has taken its toll, in time and money (we still have some residual legal costs), but two things have become apparent during this long battle between local residents and the developer:

- Better community engagement at the start of this project could have made the process a whole lot easier for the developer, and resulted in better outcomes for the local environment and its users
- One silver lining of this process has been getting to know some wonderful neighbours; new friendships have been born alongside a renewed sense of the value of our local natural environment and the urge to fight to protect it.

Merrow has some incredible residents and MDRG has been able to draw on highly specialist expertise in wildlife conservation, landscape architecture and sustainable drainage.

Katherine Atkinson
Merrow Downs Residents' Group



Environment Report

At this time of year my family and I enjoy winter walks at the weekend, and in common with many other residents of Merrow, we quite often begin and end these walks on the Merrow Downs, taking in the wonderful woodlands around the golf course and, if we are feeling a little more adventurous, Newlands Corner too.

During one such outing in January this year I was struck by how busy the car park was and how many people were doing the same as us. This made me reflect on how lucky we are to have such an amazing natural asset on our doorsteps delivering free health benefits to all of us, any time we wish to use it. But like all natural assets, we must care for it, use it sustainably and ensure it is safeguarded for future generations.

The Merrow Downs is an important chalk grassland supporting many rare plants and invertebrates, but as we have regularly reported, it is under threat from an invasive species of plant called *Perfoliatus Alexanders*. This year will mark the 11th year of pulling up these plants and in 2023 it took 16 people 3 hours to pull it all up, collecting about 24 black sacks of plants. A work party will be formed in mid-May to eradicate this year's offering before it has a chance to seed. If you want to take part, contact me on environment@merrowresidents.org

A crucial part of caring for a site like the Merrow Downs is understanding what is there and we are lucky to have local experts Gillian and Ken Elsom who conduct annual monitoring of the plants and butterflies. This year will be the ninth year they have completed butterfly transects and

they are now training up others to help them in their work. In 2023 a total of 2526 butterflies were recorded with 31 species (of 34 recorded over the previous 8 years). Ken and Gillian continue to monitor the chalk pit near the 15th tee with its rare plants. The Golf Club has very helpfully moved the 15th Tee so that golfers are no longer hitting over the pit and they have also left an unmown 1m border around the edge to allow kidney vetch and other wild flowers to grow.

We hope to continue working with the Golf Club for the mutual benefit of all users of the Merrow Downs.

Tyting Farm SANG Update

We reported last spring on the new SANG (Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace) to be opened as part of the re-development of the 40-hectare site of historic farmland Council-owned land at Tyting Farm on Halfpenny Lane. Its meadows and pond are being restored, new paths provided to connect Chantry Woods and St Martha's Hill, and a 50-tree heritage orchard and new hedges planted, creating new areas for wildlife.

Unfortunately, there are some delays due to construction of a new Thames Water pipeline being laid through the site which won't be completed until late 2025. This means that only half the SANG will now open this February (on the South side of the bridleway) once new signs and gates have been installed. Its nearest car park is St Martha's carpark on Halfpenny Lane. For more information see the Environment page of our website.

Stephen Rudd
Environment Officer

Philip Ross 1932-2023

Philip Ross, who was an Honorary Member of MRA, sadly has died aged 91. He lived in Merrow Park for 40 years with his wife Jean. Philip was the Voluntary Examiner of MRA accounts for over 15 years, always with an eye for detail. This was a natural progression when he retired, as he had joined the Westminster Bank (now Nat West) aged 17 as a clerk, finally becoming Financial Controller of the bank's premises division.

Philip joined the Territorial Army in the Pay Corps, where he rose to the rank of Major and became a very accomplished squash player and runner during those years. He enjoyed various outdoor activities, frequent holidays on Exmoor with his family and later, many trips to Venice with Jean, which they loved. Recently, Philip completed his Memoir and was meticulous about the details, as always. Our thoughts are with Jean and the family.

Guildford in Bloom

Whether you have a front garden, balcony, allotment or container, all residents, businesses and community groups can enter one of the categories in the annual Guildford in Bloom gardening competition. It aims to promote good horticultural practice, sustainability and increase wildlife. There is also a competition for schools to inspire children to get involved in gardening, learn how things grow and where food comes from. There is more information on the Guildford In Bloom website, although the 2024 dates are yet to be published.

Surrey Hills National Landscape Board

Regardless of your political persuasion, it's hard not to take your hat off to the post-War government that had the vision and courage in a time of hardship to create the National Health Service in 1948, followed by National Parks in 1949. Universal access to healthcare and protection of our most precious landscapes were considered priorities amongst the many pressures on a nation only just in recovery.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the landmark legislation that led to the designation of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (recently renamed National Landscapes). It took a few years to agree the boundaries of our protected landscapes, with the Surrey Hills being designated in 1958.

Many of those who campaigned for the conservation and protection of our finest landscapes back in the early days, such as the amazing Len Clark, who lived in Farncombe and died in 2019 aged 103, continued this role right into their later years with a passion that belied their age. We have much for which to thank them.

The Surrey Hills is, literally, Merrow's back garden. It's worth imagining, for a moment, what Merrow might have been like if the Surrey Hills had not been designated as a National Landscape (AONB as was). Perhaps we would have seen the A25 as a dual carriageway over Newlands Corner, with Trodds Lane as a much bigger arterial road. No doubt there would have been pressure to build more houses way beyond the current boundary of Merrow, over the golf courses and up towards the downs. Almost certainly the amount of beautiful green space we have access to, and the wildlife with which we share it, would have been diminished. Sometimes it's worth considering the counterfactual in order to remember and value what we already have.

This year the Surrey Hills Board is required by government to produce a new Management Plan for the whole area. It will need to be endorsed and then delivered by every district and borough council within the Surrey Hills, as well as a whole host of other people and organisations including landowners, farmers and conservation bodies.

The plan will need to address head on the challenges of climate change ... what might the Surrey Hills look and feel like in another 75 years, given various climate trajectories? How can we ensure not only that biodiversity and our natural world locally isn't damaged further, but is helped to recover and thrive? And how can we ensure that everyone gets the benefit of this incredible landscape on Merrow's doorstep, but without damaging it?

With the pressures on the Surrey Hills arguably greater than ever before, and the impact of climate change already being felt, I sometimes look to the early countryside campaigners for inspiration. Although in 2024 we haven't just come out of a global conflict, it feels as though the times require us to muster the same courage, ambition and foresight that led to the establishment of our protected landscapes all those years ago. I think we owe it to those who come after us.

Meantime, enjoy the amazing landscape on our doorstep. If you would like to know more you can find information at surreyhills.org.

Katherine Atkinson
Surrey Hills Chair and MRA member



NOTICE OF MEETING

YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED TO
**The 54th Annual General Meeting of
MERROW RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION**
on
MONDAY 4th March 2024 at 8pm
at St. Johns Centre or watch on Zoom
Full Agenda enclosed separately

An Evening with Anne Milton

Around 100 MRA members and friends gathered in October for our Autumn Event to listen to a most enlightening, entertaining and interesting talk from former Guildford MP and current MRA member, the Right Honourable Anne Milton. She began her talk by recognising the importance of the various residents' associations in Guildford, and was particularly pleased to be able to share her experience with the MRA.

Anne started the meat of her talk by explaining that she was going to deal with 50 important years of her life, beginning with her 25 years as a nurse in the NHS, and then her journey into politics, including being the MP for Guildford and holding various government offices of state. Anne explained that her time in the NHS and that of a housing officer in Hackney had brought home to her and helped her recognise the inequalities in our society. She explained that this was her inspiration to get involved in politics, initially focused on

her concerns about social injustice.

When deciding she wanted to be an MP, she realised she was very naive and first had to decide which party to join. By this time she was living in Reigate, and as a "middle-class girl" decided that the Conservative party was the right fit. First she became a local councillor and got onto the MP list in 2003, and after a while was selected to fight the Guildford seat. On 5th May 2005 she was elected an MP and recognised at that time that even a wealthy area like Guildford had, and still has, pockets of significant deprivation.

As an MP, she wanted to focus on special educational needs (SEN) and social housing. Her initial five years were spent when the Conservatives were in opposition, and she had shadow ministerial responsibilities, covering matters as diverse as gambling, and one of her passions, the health service. Her story moved on to 2010 when the coalition government came into power.

She noted that this was probably her best time in politics and she said "hats off to the Liberal Democrats for relinquishing some of their policies to the detriment of votes". She spent 2 1/2 years as a public health minister and joined the Whips Office. One of her most fascinating roles was that of Vice-Chamberlain of Her Majesty the Queen's household, where she had the pleasure of being on duty at 11 royal garden parties.

She became Deputy Chief Whip in 2015 which she said was an extraordinary role, part pastoral and part trade union official, looking after 300 MPs. She explained that her choice to move to the back benches occurred because she did not support some of the political direction initiated by Boris Johnson, particularly over the Brexit debate. She concluded by thanking the MRA for listening and opened the floor to questions. There were a number of interesting questions which she answered frankly, describing how business is really conducted in the House of Commons and letting us know her views on Boris Johnson. ❖

Boots Pharmacies in Merrow

We have been in discussion with our MP and our councillors about the closure of the Boots Pharmacy in Merrow Park and the dire impact that this has had on the cramped pharmacy in Boots Epsom Road. We have seen and heard all sorts of reassuring noises from the management of Boots about staffing, facilities and service to the public but at the time of writing very few of these aspirations have been realised. We feel for the hard-pressed diligent staff in Boots in Epsom Road, but also for their customers who now have to put up with very long queues. Another pharmacy is required to meet the needs of the public in Merrow - something that our MP is pursuing with the ICB (Integrated

Care Board) who are responsible for ensuring that sufficient facilities are available for residents. We are talking to one independent pharmacy who are seeking to open a new pharmacy in Burpham and we will do all we can to support their application.

Merrow History Group

Our 2024 sessions will start on Wednesday 21st February at 7.30-9pm in the upstairs meeting room at St John's Centre. "A Roman Road through Merrow? Archaeologists are looking for it." Come and hear more.

Our meetings give an opportunity to explain what we do, and have done, researching into the history of Merrow. It will be a chance for you

to ask questions such as 'Why is my house or road called what it is? What was here previously? What famous or infamous or interesting people lived nearby?'

We welcome those who just listen as well as others who want to do research.

Future projects may include the local tithe map or changes to the parish boundary over the years.

Do come and give us a try. There is no charge for meetings although a voluntary donation of £3 is always welcome towards the hire of the room and a free biscuit may be available! For information contact Ian Anderson on iana.anderson@btconnect.com or tel 01483 570475 ❖

Subscription Renewal

If you haven't already paid your subscription for 2024 a renewal letter will be enclosed with this newsletter.