

# MERROW LIFE

The Newsletter of the



Autumn 2024

## MERROW RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

*your community voice for over 50 years*

Issue No 56

[www.merrowresidents.org.uk](http://www.merrowresidents.org.uk)

Don't  
forget

Autumn  
Event  
on Monday  
4th November  
at 8pm at St John's Centre

### Chairman's Notes

Our usual smorgasbord of topics are covered in this issue of Merrow Life, ranging from committee activities on your behalf, reports on a variety of activities and local events, together with some reflections on living in Merrow and also poignant memories of previous committee members. We hope that you will find some subjects of interest. Your feedback or comments are always welcome, as are any suggestions for inclusion in future editions. More items are reported month by month on our website, [merrowresidents.org.uk](http://merrowresidents.org.uk) which is well worth a visit.

Merrow and Guildford planning issues keep on coming, as you will read in these pages. Some topics border on the controversial, with planning proposals that generate strongly

divergent views, and the extent of care and management of Merrow Downs by Guildford Borough Council and Guildford Golf Club. However, we aim to maintain a balanced view and reflect the concerns and issues we hear from our members. We are fortunate to have enjoyed good discussions and support from our local councillors. They have kept us informed on progress with a new speed restriction in Park Lane and on Surrey County Council's consideration of concerns about the traffic speed in Trodds Lane.

Many thanks are due to your committee members for all their efforts on behalf of the MRA and the local community.

Finally, don't forget the Autumn Event on Monday 4th November at 8pm at St John's Centre. Michael Buerk, a longtime member and supporter of MRA, will be in conversation

with local friends. More details on his talk are on the back page and please note this is a members only Autumn Event on this occasion as we are hoping it will be a popular evening, and also a good opportunity to encourage new members to join MRA.

This would increase our presence in Merrow and also add to the weight of our interactions with local councillors on your behalf. Anyone who lives in or has a business in Merrow can sign up and become a member of MRA on the Join Up page on [www.merrowresidents.org.uk](http://www.merrowresidents.org.uk) or use the QR code on the back page.

I look forward to welcoming you on 4th November.

**Andrew Strawson**  
Chairman

[chairman@merrowresidents.org](mailto:chairman@merrowresidents.org)



### Major Developments in Guildford

The development of **Gosden Hill** is now moving forward. At a recent neighbourhood meeting in Burpham we were asked for our views on the road infrastructure, the possible partial closure of Merrow Lane and a roundabout to link Gosden Hill, New Inn Lane and the road that links with Park Lane. The MRA responded in detail. We had a further meeting with *Martin Grant Homes* on the 2nd October when the developer described their plans in more detail. They are hoping to put their masterplan to Guildford Borough Council early next year for consideration and adoption in accordance with the Local Plan for Guildford that was adopted in 2019 - when Gosden Hill was removed from the Green Belt.

Martin Grant Homes will be holding two public exhibitions of their plans - on Saturday 19th October in Burpham Village Hall between 11am and 3pm and on Wednesday 30th October at West Clandon Village Hall between 4.00pm and 8pm. They are also planning a webinar on Wednesday 23rd October between 6.30pm and 8pm. You can find out more about the proposals and the consultation events on [gosdenhill.co.uk](http://gosdenhill.co.uk).

We continue to major on our concerns about infrastructure and traffic. We hold the view that

there should be a four-way junction with the A3 within the Gosden Hill site. This is important to ensure that traffic travelling Northwards from the site does not have to go through Burpham or into the outskirts of Merrow in order to join the A3. We appreciate that there is likely to be resistance from the Highways Authority to this suggestion. Therefore, if a four-way junction is not possible then the requirement laid down in the Transport Strategy at sub paragraph (1) of the Local Plan Policy A25 should be met in full. This means that a two-way junction with the southbound carriageway of the A3 should be constructed at the same time as the development of other elements of the development of the Gosden Hill site.

If any members have any views on what is proposed please do let the MRA know at [secretary@merrowresidents.org](mailto:secretary@merrowresidents.org). We would love to have your input.

An appeal has been launched to challenge the decision of a government inspector to approve the development of the **Wisley airfield site**. An initial hearing will take place in December. The MRA is not involved. However two planning applications which are physically linked to the appeal site have yet to be determined. One of these is being considered by the Planning Committee at

the time of writing this report. The MRA had objected to both of these two subsidiary applications because of their traffic implications.

Members will be aware that the Labour administration wishes to see a significant increase in the number of houses built in the next five years and to that end is revising the official guidance which is the foundation on which all developments are based. It looks likely that the **new government's proposed revised housing need calculation** would require Guildford to build around 8,000 more homes on top of the current target. That is almost double the current Local Plan figure of 562 new homes per annum, itself a huge uplift recently imposed in 2019 by the Local Plan.

A long overdue **town centre flood alleviation scheme** is currently being considered by Natural England, SCC and GBC - but don't hold your breath.

A planning application for the development of land at **Stag Hill** adjacent to the Cathedral for 124 homes was turned down by the Planning Committee and also lost on appeal.

A number of other sites in the town centre and owned by GBC are being considered for development.

**Keith Meldrum** Vice Chairman



## In support of Merrow's Dark Skies

It's the time of year when the transition between light and dark seems to make its presence more clearly felt. I'm certainly noticing the progress of the year through the advancing hour of dusk, and in a few weeks many of us will be dusting off the Christmas lights once again.

Earlier this year many Merrow residents will have been fortunate enough to witness something usually only observed by the residents of far more northerly latitudes – the aurora borealis, or Northern Lights. Whilst they were clearly visible from my bedroom window, a short walk on to Merrow Downs to watch them turned the show into an extravaganza. Away from street lights and house lights, and the glow of Guildford and beyond, we could see familiar constellations against a shimmering pink sky, curtains of red and green only enhanced by the technological capabilities of the mobile phone camera. I watched my teenage kids witnessing and enjoying something that was genuinely 'awesome'.

Because that's the evocation of a truly dark sky. If you've been lucky enough to travel to places that are bereft of domestic or industrial lighting, you'll know that feeling of wonder as you stare up and realise that, 99% of the time, we can only see a tiny fraction of what's out and up there. It's perhaps no coincidence that, when you look up, your jaw naturally drops.

We live in a crowded part of a crowded island. From Merrow Downs on a clear night you can clearly see the lights of London and the glow from all of the conurbations between here and there. But look south, instead of north east, and the sky mellows, giving you a dark backdrop to view planetary alignments and lunar phases. People much more expert than me on matters to do with astronomy tell me that you don't need an expensive telescope to view the moon or our planetary near neighbours – a decent pair of binoculars is more than adequate.

The House of Lords Science and Technology Committee published a report in 2023 on what they called "The Neglected Pollutants". It is about the impact on human health of noise and artificial light. Whilst there has been quite a bit of research on noise impacts, the science on artificial light is much less advanced and has relied for many years on citizen science and ill-defined measures. The report calls for better

understanding of light pollution because the scientific evidence that does exist has shown that artificial light can damage human health by affecting our circadian rhythms, our sleep and possibly our mood.

Without that understanding and evidence base, we are in danger of sleep walking into a world where we continue to light up every last patch of dark sky, with unknown negative impacts on humans and on wildlife.

Merrow's dark skies are under huge threat, especially from new developments that include floodlights. Readers of Merrow Life will be aware of the planning applications over the years that have had artificial lighting at the heart of the controversy and this trend continues, particularly in relation to sports developments, and especially where schools are concerned.

It seems that virtually every school in Guildford now needs a floodlit playing space, most of which are available for hire to other groups during the evenings. Guildford Borough Council has not identified this lack of capacity (we already have access to incredible floodlit facilities), yet planners seem unable to say "No", as if sport trumps everything, as if exercise cannot be undertaken after dark, and as if the demand for floodlit sports facilities in Guildford is infinite.

Whilst the economic challenges facing schools are acknowledged, and floodlit facilities clearly have income-generating potential, this misses the wider point about human health, and the impact of excessive lighting on all residents. Merrow is an area where schools snuggle in close amongst homes and small businesses. The Surrey Hills National Landscape is on our doorstep.

Once upon a time humans did not take much care about what was tossed into the ocean. Now we do. The same goes for light "pollution". Lights not only shine where they are pointed, they reflect from ground surfaces and they create sky glow, and so the impact is far reaching, including upwards.

I believe we should treasure Merrow's remaining dark skies, and we should think very hard before filling in the last patches of awe and wonder.

**Kathy Atkinson**

*Independent Chair of Surrey Hills Board*



### John Pitkin

### MRA Committee Member 2020-2024

We are very sad to report that one of our Committee members John Pitkin died earlier this year. John's death is a bitter loss and he will be sorely missed. He was always such a wonderful member of the Committee, always willing to help out with all our activities, from planning applications to open meetings, from planting out trees at St John's, to pulling up invasive Perfoliate Alexander plants on Merrow Down, to providing wise advice at committee meetings, often with a glass of wine in hand, and always helpful, constructive and imaginative in all his proposals, suggestions and recommendations.

We have lost a great friend and helper, who worked so hard as a force for positive good within the community. We were represented at his very well attended funeral and learnt much more about his full and interesting life. He leaves a very big gap in Merrow and in the MRA.

**Andrew Strawson** *Chairman*



## Guildford Golf Club's Downland Restoration Report

The 3rd year of our Downland restoration project commenced in September 2024. This initiative is part of our ongoing commitment to environmental sustainability, preservation and restoration of our local natural heritage. This project has come from lengthy discussions with our local tree officer and his colleagues who have backed this plan, citing it as well planned, well thought out and necessary for our Downland restoration.

### The purpose:

Our Downland area, and many countryside have been in decline

through the years. It is home to various important native plant, insect and animal species. Restoration efforts will focus on re-establishing native vegetation and habitats, which are crucial for supporting local wildlife.

Special attention will be given to protecting and encouraging the growth of endangered species that rely on our Downland.

### The planned works:

The initial works will to some appear aggressive and pointless; far from it. The weed species that have established themselves in between holes 4 and 5, Gorse, Silver Birch, Turkey Oak etc are not native to Downland areas. To restore this area to native Downland we need to remove this material. We will take extra care around the mature trees in this area to make sure they are unaffected by this process.

Once removed the area, where needed, will be scraped back to the natural soil removing leaf litter, weed seed bed and debris. Once clean we will then use seeds from our local long rough to seed this area. The idea behind this is that the seeds are from our Downland rather than being imported so established plants here will continue to thrive on our course. The next step will be to 'weigh down' the seeded areas with a light sand/soil dressing (similar to our local soil) to prevent wash out in any poor weather. The seeding process may be repeated in late Spring or early Summer to gather any Spring flowering plants' seeds also.

Any remedial weed killing needed in Spring and Summer will be spot treated with a selective weedkiller rather than complete 'blanket' coverage. Any compostable material generated by this project will be relocated to our new recycling area for future use in course construction projects or club garden flower beds and any non reusable materials will be disposed of in the most environmental way.

**Tom May** *Club Secretary Guildford Golf Club*



## PLANNING IN MERROW

**St Peter's Catholic School** in *Horseshoe Lane East* has submitted a planning application to build a full size hockey pitch with floodlights very close to houses in *Horseshoe Lane East* and *Marrow Croft*.

The MRA has been very involved with this application, which includes a two storey extension to provide a drama studio, hospitality space, PE classroom and changing facilities, construction of an all-weather sports pitch together with the installation of eight 15m high floodlights and 3-5m high perimeter fencing, the relocation of an existing netball court and an extension to the car parking area.

Issues have been raised over the use of the new sports facilities being extended to external clubs on seven days a week, both in term time and during school holidays. Particular concerns relate to light intrusion, noise disturbance, traffic safety, parking overflow, flood risk, and specific impacts on wildlife. MRA has been in close communication with local neighbours, primarily in *Horseshoe Lane East* and *Marrow Croft*, who will be most directly impacted by the proposed development. Whilst we support school development of new sports facilities, the all-weather pitch feels out of proportion for a quiet residential area on the outskirts of Guildford and 15m high floodlighting seems too high for a suburban school facility. We have submitted several letters of objection, further detailing the different aspects of the proposal which remain incomplete or inappropriate. There is no doubt that immediate neighbours will suffer a loss of local amenity if the issues we have raised are not properly addressed within the planning process.

At the time of writing, this application is currently awaiting a recommendation from the responsible GBC planning officer. If that recommenda-

tion is for approval, then the application will be decided by the Planning Committee because of the number of letters of objection that were received.

The application for the proposed development at **Westthorpe** on the corner of *Halford Road* and *Epsom Road* to demolish the house and erect seven apartments was reported in last Autumn's *Marrow Life*. That application was withdrawn and replaced with a very similar one with all the earlier contentious features. The applicant then appealed for non-determination as GBC had not dealt with the application within the set timescale. The MRA had objected and spoke against the application when it was finally considered and rejected by the Planning Committee - even though the opinion of the committee had no bearing on the outcome as the application had already gone to appeal. In September the Planning Inspector supported our objections and dismissed the appeal, taking the view that the development would be particularly prominent, incongruous and overbearing, adversely affecting the appearance and character of the area and falling significantly short of the requirements of achieving good design. This was a welcome outcome, but we were surprised that the Inspector was not concerned about the road safety aspects of the proposed development on the corner of a very busy road.

The planning application for six houses at **176 Epsom Road** has now been amended and consent is now being sought for four houses. The MRA is considering a response.

We are exceedingly grateful to our ward councillors for the support that they give to the MRA, especially on planning matters.

**Keith Meldrum**      *Vice Chairman*



## Merrow Community Highways Volunteers

The footpath connecting Hareward Road (by the bus stop between Fitzjohn Close and Ringmore Drive) and the open space to the south towards Kingfisher Drive had become badly overgrown since we last cleared it a couple of years ago. A group of our volunteers armed with garden tools and gloves cleared this footpath over the summer and filled two large builders bags of green waste. (For photos see [merrowresidents.org.uk/merrow-community-highways-volunteers](http://merrowresidents.org.uk/merrow-community-highways-volunteers))

If you want to be added to our email list of occasional helpers, then please email [communityhighways@merrowresidents.org](mailto:communityhighways@merrowresidents.org)



## The Guildford E-bike Scheme is coming to Merrow

Guildford's brand new e-bike hire scheme is being funded by Surrey County Council and Guildford Borough Council, in association with the University of Surrey, and is designed to provide a flexible, healthy and affordable travel option for people living, working or visiting Guildford.

The pilot scheme is being rolled out across Guildford this autumn, starting with 200 *Beryl* electric bikes and 46 docking stations/bays initially linking the University of Surrey's Stag Hill and Manor Park campuses with Guildford town centre. In spring 2025 the full complement of 300 bikes will be available from 56 locations. Bikes are required to be returned to any one of the locations that will be located at travel hubs, shopping centres, education & leisure facilities and places of interest. Two bays are proposed in Merrow - at the Epsom Road shopping parade outside Boots and at the Collingwood Crescent shopping parade in Boxgrove.

The cost of a single journey will consist of a £1 unlock fee then 16p per minute. A 24-hour day pass costs £16. Alternatively, bundles of minutes for multiple journeys can be bought upfront which will save on unlock fees - the cost of 50 minutes is £8, 100 for £16, 200 for £32 and 300 for £48. The *Beryl* app will be used to release and pay for the E-bikes.

A map of locations can be found on [guildfordebikes.commonplace.is](http://guildfordebikes.commonplace.is) and more details about the cost can be found on [beryl.cc/scheme/guildford](http://beryl.cc/scheme/guildford) If you have any questions or comments regarding the project, contact [guildfordebikes@surreycc.gov.uk](mailto:guildfordebikes@surreycc.gov.uk)



### Kay Craven

#### MRA Committee Member 1982-1994

I was very sad to learn in September that Kathryn Craven (also known as Kay) had died after a short illness. She had lived in Merrow for very many years before retiring with her husband Peter to Yorkshire from where she retained her interest in the Merrow community.

Kathryn was a stalwart of Merrow, coming to the area to raise her young family in the 70s, using local schools, and moving to several houses in the heart of the village, from where she witnessed the many significant changes that occurred especially in the '70s and '80s. She had a wonderful warm and kind personality, was hard working, and always ready to support others, for many years being an active member of Care for Guildford and participating in several local organisations and St John's Church. She was unassuming, generous hearted, and a pleasure and privilege to know.

Notably she was an active member of MRA and was elected as its Secretary in 1982. She held that role when I joined the committee in 1988 and she guided me through our responsibilities, topics of concern and the mechanics of the committee. The scope and complexity of the role was developing and the style of committee and members meetings was changing. Kathryn was always professional, efficient, tactful, thorough, and concise, her minute taking could be relied upon to be accurate, truthful, and easy to follow.

Kathryn retired as Secretary of MRA in September 1994 after 12 years in that role. The Association gave her a wonderful and well deserved send off at the AGM and presented her with a beautiful water colour of St John's Church by local artist Jenny Kiser, which she treasured. We were sorry to see her leave, but her loyalty to and interest in Merrow never waned.

**Catherine Smith**  
*Committee Member 1988-2002*



## Merrow History Group

Earlier this year **The Horse and Groom's** timber framed east wall was repaired after severe death watch beetle damage had been found. This prompted Ian Anderson to look into the history of the pub for us and his article is now on the History pages of our website.

If you are also interested in the history of Merrow, Ian runs a local history group that meets up occasionally and their next meeting is on Wednesday 20th November at St John's Centre at 7pm. Those who want to listen are welcome to go along as well as others who want to carry out their own research. Their future projects may include changes to the parish boundary over the years or an update on the Roman Road search.

For more information contact Ian on [iana.anderson@btconnect.com](mailto:iana.anderson@btconnect.com) or 01483 570475. In order to tempt you to attend, he may provide biscuits! ❖

Please tell your neighbours, friends and especially newcomers to Merrow that anyone who lives or works in Merrow can become a member of MRA for a small subscription. They can join via the link on the JOIN US page of our website [merrowresidents.org.uk](http://merrowresidents.org.uk) or use this QR code —



MERROW RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

## AUTUMN EVENT

Monday 4th November at 8pm at St. John's Centre, Epsom Rd

~  
**MRA member MICHAEL BUERK will share his perspectives on the world today with reflections from his long career as a journalist and BBC News presenter.**

**Michael reported from South Africa at the end of apartheid, and on the Ethiopian famine in 1984 which led to Live Aid.  
He currently presents Radio 4's Moral Maze.**

~  
**We are expecting this to be a popular evening and we are limiting seats to members only on this occasion.**

**His talk will be followed by wine and nibbles.**  
(a small contribution towards the evening's expenses will be requested)

## Enhancing our Environment Flower Tubs Award

You will be delighted to know that the MRA recently received a **Guildford in Bloom Silver Award** in the **Best Neighbourhood** category for the three flower tubs outside *The Horse and Groom*. The tall displays of thunbergia (black eyed Susan) and mixed colours of the geraniums have been admired and given enjoyment to Merrow's residents.

They were planted up by *Edwins Garden Centre* in Clandon Park and then watered and looked after by Kate Dumbleton and her team of Magdalena, Peter, Caroline, Michelle, Ian and Lorna who were kept busy during the summer.

The award was received in person by Kate and Magdalena. Very many thanks to Kate, to Edwin's and also to *The Horse and Groom* for the water supply. The Autumn planting will continue giving pleasure during the darker, colder months. ❖

DIARY  
NOTE

## AGM

**on Monday  
3rd March 2025  
at St John's Centre**

Don't  
Forget

## Autumn Meeting

**on Monday  
4th November at 8pm  
at St John's Centre**

## MRA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 2024-2025

|                      |                                                                                           |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Chairman             | Andrew Strawson                                                                           |
| Vice-Chairman        | Keith Meldrum                                                                             |
| Hon. Treasurer       | Dave Smith                                                                                |
| Environment Officer  | Stephen Rudd                                                                              |
| Membership Secretary | Claire Rymell                                                                             |
| Hon. Secretary       | Henriette Whitehead-van Prooije                                                           |
| Webmaster            | Dave Smith                                                                                |
| Publicity Officer    | Vacant                                                                                    |
| Committee Members    | Gordon Farquharson,<br>Denise Hilton, Lorna Seymour,<br>Kate Dumbleton and Clare McVicker |

For more information on MRA's activities see [merrowresidents.org.uk](http://merrowresidents.org.uk)

## Subscriptions

If you haven't paid your annual subscription for 2024 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](mailto:secretary@merrowresidents.org) and include your full name and address.