

MERROW LIFE

The Newsletter of the



Spring 2025

MERROW RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

your community voice for over 50 years

Issue No 57

www.merrowresidents.org

Don't
forget

AGM

Monday

3rd March

at 8 pm

Chairman's Notes

- MRA hosted an entertaining Autumn Meeting with Michael Buerk and we will be hard pressed to match his stories - see the report overleaf - but we are already looking ahead to our next speaker which will be in October. In the meantime our AGM is on 3rd March.
- We are very grateful to MRA members Ian Anderson as the Voluntary Independent Examiner for our accounts and Tony Hills for once again setting out this issue of *Merrow Life*.
- The tubs outside the *Horse and Groom* should be planted out by *Edwin's Garden Centre* in the spring. We are grateful for their generosity and to Kate Dumbleton

and her team of volunteers for maintaining and watering the tubs. Extra volunteers are always welcome, those on the rota only need to water once or twice during the summer flowering period between June and August.

- I'm sure we all appreciate receiving the Bin Collection Calendar for 2025 that was printed in the January Issue of *Merrow Pages* and we thank Alex on your behalf for including it when we notified her that SCC/GBC were no longer distributing it to every household.
- We are always happy to hear from you if once or twice a year you could deliver a handful of copies of the autumn or spring issue of *Merrow Life* to members who live near you.

• MRA are still seeking some new faces on the Committee, to reduce our average age (!) and bring fresh ideas, so if you have any spare time and would like to help your Committee deliver what YOU OUR MEMBERS want, email us or have a word with a Committee member at the AGM as we would love to talk to you. Please read more about the upcoming changes to the committee overleaf, including my own position as Chairman.

• Please carry on reading these pages for more about local issues and we hope to see you at the AGM on 3rd March for updates!

Andrew Strawson

Chairman

chairman@merrowresidents.org



Planning Report

Developments in Merrow

Although it may appear that the MRA objects to a significant number of planning applications this is actually not the case. We scan all new applications from the list produced by GBC every week and only respond to those that have a significant impact on the neighbourhood or are raised with us by members. In all cases issues are raised constructively with a view towards mitigations, improvements and resolution.

There seems to be a lot going on in Merrow, especially around Horseshoe Lane East & West!

Local developer *Aspen Homes* is well under way constructing three houses in the garden of **26a Horseshoe Lane West**. The orchard has gone, the roads are in and footings are being dug. The main impact is increased pressure on the already stressed school time parking in HLW due to contractor's vehicles and mud on the road.

Both local Catholic Schools have planning applications in progress. We are awaiting the recommendation from the GBC Planning Officer on the planning application from **St Peter's School** in Horseshoe

Lane East to build a full size hockey pitch with floodlights, very close to houses in Horseshoe Lane East and Merrow Croft to which we have objected on specific local impacts including traffic, noise and lighting.

The planning application for redevelopment of the redundant caretaker's bungalow within the grounds of **St. Thomas of Canterbury School (24/P/01853)** has recently been published. The plan is to convert it into a pre-school nursery for around 30 children. We have emailed MRA members with details of the application and *Greencroft Residents Association* are representing the adjoining neighbours. For some the biggest issues will be yet more cars parking in the vicinity of the school and an exacerbated traffic nuisance due to staggered start and finish times. MRA has commented on the application as we are concerned that there is so little emphasis on the traffic implications of the proposal.

We commented in the Autumn edition of *Merrow Life* on the outline planning application for four houses at **176 Epsom Road** which went to the Planning Committee and was approved notwithstanding the objections from local residents. At an earlier stage we had objected to the number of houses in the original proposal and at the

safety aspects of access and egress from the site onto Epsom Road. The developer addressed the former concern by reducing the number of homes from six to four and Surrey County Council as the Highways Authority raised no objections so long as very specific conditions were included in any outline approval - which they were. Since that time we have met with residents of High Path Road to understand their concerns about the forthcoming detailed planning application for the four houses and their proximity to other houses in their road. We have written to the Planning Officer about this and are waiting for the detailed planning application which we shall review with care.

The planning application for the demolition of a house at **18 Trodds Lane** and its replacement with four houses - to which we had objected on a number of grounds including local distinctiveness, density, lay-out, scale, privacy, visual dominance, parking and access and egress from Trodds Lane - was rejected by GBC in November 2024 has now gone to appeal. We have read the grounds of the appeal and will be reinforcing our concerns in a letter to the appeal Inspector and we are now sounding out others who have objected to gather views and comments.

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Planning Report (concluded)

Developments outside Merrow

Wisley Airfield site

Since our report in the Autumn edition of *Merrow Life* the Judicial Review of the Inspector's decision to approve the *Taylor Wimpey* planning application of the **Wisley Airfield site** (Wisley New Town) was heard and dismissed by the High Court in London in December. A subsidiary planning application for land adjacent to the airfield has been approved by GBC and the third and last application related to the airfield is awaiting a decision. Effectively the development of the airfield may now go ahead with the construction of up to 2,000 homes.

This is a huge disappointment to all those who had worked so hard for over 10 years to prevent the development of the disused airfield. In 2014 plans were unveiled for a proposed new town on the green belt land of Wisley Airfield where between 2,000 and 2,250 new homes would be built. Those plans were rejected by Guildford Borough Council and a subsequent Appeal

to the Planning Inspectorate was also dismissed in June 2018.

The current plans for 1,700 homes were submitted to GBC in 2022 and were not decided by the Planning Committee in time and went to appeal for non-determination.

The Planning Committee did consider the application but after it had passed to the Inspector and would have refused the application had they been able to do so. This example is a clear demonstration that the appeal system can and does override not only the views of those who live in the locality but also those elected to make such democratic local decisions.

This should be seen in the context of the Labour Government initiative to change the current local authority structure and create more unitary authorities - there may be only two to cover the whole of Surrey. (see more below) If this comes about it could lead to a situation where all planning decisions are made at some distance from the development site which would weaken our influence on possible developments in our area - which is bad news for us all.

Gosden Hill

The owner and developer *Martin Grant Homes* held consultation meetings last year on its large scale development of 1800 homes at **Gosden Hill** on the border of Burpham and Merrow. We shall continue to lobby hard on traffic mitigation measures - for a 4 way junction with the A3 on the Gosden Hill site and for two slip roads onto the A3 on the A247 at Send Marsh/Garlick's Arch to be built in order to reduce the traffic congestion in the whole area and especially in Burpham and the outskirts of Merrow that will only get worse now that the Wisley airfield application has been approved, on top of the development already taking place at Garlick's Arch.

If you have any questions about any of these developments do come to the AGM on the 3rd March and talk to us. We are aiming to arrange a meeting on the 9th April on *Zoom* to update members on a number of local planning matters including Gosden Hill. We had such a meeting a couple of years ago which attracted a good level of Member support.

Keith Meldrum Vice Chairman



Snippets of Local News

- Surrey County Council's consultation on a new speed restriction in **Park Lane** has finished. MRA wrote in support of the proposed reduction of the speed limit from 50mph to 40mph, although some of the members who emailed us with their views indicated that they were happy with the status quo.
- Trodds Lane** is currently closed again, this time for 12 weeks for the replacement of the gas main.
- We still await the return of a full **Post Office** counter service at the Nisa store in

the Merrow parade. The most recent date given by the Post Office is in March. The shop already provides a Drop + Collect parcel service and can print off return labels from QR codes generated by retailers.

- Guildford Golf Club** has been the subject of critical comment recently as trees near to the 15th Green were being chopped down and burnt.

- A replacement bench has been ordered with money from Councillor Potter's SCC allowance to be placed in Kingfisher Drive at the bottom of **Merrow Street**, close to *Merrow Park surgery*. The previous bench was removed after it had been

vandalised. We look forward to it being installed shortly.

- The **Guildford E-bike Scheme** which was due to come to Merrow this spring by providing a marked bay on the wide footway at the Merrow shopping parade has been delayed because of issues with the ownership of the footway.

- Unnecessary loud noise and other problems continue at the **Merrow Depot**. The MRA is involved with regular meetings between SCC and local residents in the hope that some mitigation measures can be found.



The Future of Guildford Borough Council

National changes mean that local councils in Surrey could be abolished and replaced with fewer but larger local authorities under plans for a major redesign of local government.

The Government has published *The Devolution White Paper for England* with the aim of devolving more powers to approximately 30 unitary authorities each covering a population of at least 500,000 people, some headed by a directly elected regional mayor. This is a model already established in several areas in the country, but it will be extended to the rest of England and local powers enhanced.

As Surrey has a population of approximately 1.2M it is likely that its 11 boroughs and districts councils will be combined into two unitary authorities.

The White Paper states that "New unitary

councils must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks." A key contentious issue is how council funding will be managed across a bigger unitary authority as some local authorities are in debt, notably Woking locally.

The result is that Guildford Borough Council will be abolished, probably in 2026. Parish and Town Councils will remain, with Guildford itself likely to have a **Town Council**, but it will have only limited local powers and a changed relationship with its unitary authority.

The Government has suggested it could pass legislation to postpone the SCC elections due to be held in May 2025 because of the proposed devolution plans, in order to help councils manage the restructuring opportunity. The leader of Surrey County Council supports such a delay.

We will be inviting our local councillors to

the AGM and they may have been able to give us more up to date information about this reorganisation.



Merrow History Group

Our next meeting will be on *Wednesday 5th March* at 7.30-9pm in the upstairs meeting room at St John's Centre.

The main topic will be on the farms of Merrow. It will also be an opportunity to explain what we do, and have done, researching into the history of Merrow.

Future projects could be the changes to the Parish boundaries over the years.

Do come and give us a try. There is no charge for meetings although a voluntary donation of £4 is always welcome towards the hire of the room. A free biscuit may be available!

For information contact Ian Anderson on iana.anderson@btconnect.com or telephone 01483 570475



Committee Changes

Our Chairman is stepping down

Firstly may I say that it has been a privilege to serve as your Chairman for the past 6 years. However, my family and personal circumstances have changed and I cannot commit as much time as I have in the past to support the Committee in the way I would like to. I will therefore step down as Chairman at the AGM.

As Merrow does not have a Parish Council to represent us, the work of the *Merrow Residents' Association* is vital in ensuring that local interests are voiced and are taken into account when decisions are made that affect us in many ways. Especially significant are planning matters, which under the latest government proposals are now likely to increase Guildford's housing plan requirements significantly. Close links with our local Guildford and County Councillors help to ensure their support for local community work and funding for local projects. MRA also works hard to support the beautiful environment in and around Merrow.

Your Executive Committee remains strong, with 10 active members, but has experienced significant change and sad losses in the past couple of years and we need a period of rebuilding. We have lost the valued input of John Pitkin and Denise Hilton since the last AGM. Like me, Stephen Rudd is also stepping down from his officer post at the AGM, but as a sign of our continued support we will both stand for election as ordinary Committee members. Clare McVicker is reluctantly leaving the committee.

On the plus side, we have welcomed Kate Dumbleton back to the Committee and Richard Collins was recently welcomed to sit in on a committee meeting, and we obviously didn't frighten him off as he has since agreed to take over as our Webmaster.

All committees need new members from time to time to bring fresh ideas and energy. We are now putting out a loud call

for any new committee members to come forward and find out what we do behind the scenes. Please consider whether you can offer some limited time to support your local community. The Committee hold about half a dozen evening meetings a year (usually by Zoom) and you don't have to contribute to meetings until you feel able to. There is an opportunity that you might take on an officer role over time if you wish.

You are very welcome to approach any member of the committee for a chat or for any more information, either in person after the formal part of the AGM or by emailing secretary@merrowresidents.com

I would like to thank everyone on the committee who has supported me and the MRA so well over recent years and I look forward to the continuing success of the Association.

Andrew Strawson, Chairman 2019-2025

Goodbye and Thank You to Denise Hilton

After 17 years on the Committee Denise Hilton stepped down during the year. She was our eminently well qualified Treasurer from 2007- 2020, when she ran an efficient and tight ship. She also brought detailed local knowledge to her responses to planning applications, where she was assiduous in helping neighbours navigate the complexity of the regulations. She made a significant contribution to the MRA over very many years and we thank her for her contribution. She left us with these comments 'I will always have my heart in the community's best interests and be supportive of MRA and its continuing best endeavours.' We send her our very best wishes.

Introduction from Richard Collins our new MRA Webmaster

I am delighted to have joined the MRA Committee as Webmaster, stepping into the sizeable shoes of Dave Smith. I am Guildford born and bred, living in Merrow for the past 18 years in Swaynes Lane. I was lucky enough to go to the RGS in Guildford, especially so as it was the last year before it went private.

I work in a software technology division of Ipsos, one of the largest market research companies in the world, probably best known for political polling (Ipsos MORI). I am married to Kate, who is head teacher at Sandfield primary school in Guildford - we have been married for 30 years and we have a son James and daughter Natty, both now in their early 20s.

I love living in Merrow, enjoy cycling in the Surrey Hills, swimming in the Horizon gym and playing golf at Guildford GC. Kate is a member of Merrow Tennis Club, and I am about to join alongside her. I sing and play guitar in a 70's/80's/90's cover band called Belter. We play a mix of local private and public gigs - last year we played at the Alton Beer Festival, WestFest and Guilfest.

Why did I join the committee?

I have been attending MRA events since moving to Merrow and have always appreciated the work that the committee does on our behalf. I have had it in mind for some time to assist the committee once I started to have a little more time available, and now that the children are grown up and I am beginning to work four days a week I thought now would be the right time to put my name forward. I have now attended two committee meetings and the two things that strike me the most are:

1. The strong and passionate commitment of everyone on the committee to continue to speak up and provide a voice for Merrow residents on developments in the local area.
2. The current increasing threat and change for the worse from several new directions. The MRA will need to work even harder to protect the local area over the coming months and years, as the pressure for development grows. We will need an extremely solid committee to continue to provide that strong voice.

The committee has spaces for a few more new faces, so please have a think about joining us and really making a difference to our beautiful community. ❖

Highways Volunteers

Eleven very hardy members of the *Merrow Community Highways Volunteers* team braved the freezing cold morning air on 11th January to take advantage of the closure of Trodds Lane to through traffic.

Over ten bin bags of litter and rubbish were collected from the grass verges along the length of Trodds Lane. Three bin bags of litter were also collected from around the shops, Merrow Street car park and adjacent roads.

One large builders' bag was filled full of leaf litter and tree debris which was collected from around the benches opposite

the Horse and Groom. Photos may be seen at on the Merrow Community Highways Volunteers page of our website. ❖

Merrow Downs Volunteers

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 *Perfoliates Alexanders*. This year will mark the 12th year of pulling up these plants.

A work party will be formed in mid-May to dig up this year's offering before it has a chance to seed. If you want to take part, contact us on secretary@merrowresidents.org ❖

An Evening with Michael Buerk

Around 120 MRA members gathered at our Autumn Event in November to listen to an entertaining talk from MRA member Michael Buerk looking back on his long career as a journalist and newsreader.

His wide range of stories covered geography and history, war, the Ethiopian famine, Live Aid, politics and philosophy, and the truth behind his time in "I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here!" which he likened to a form of torture as he did not enjoy being starved and cut off from the rest of the world. He also shared funny but unreportable anecdotes involving politicians who shall remain nameless, which caused much laughter in the room. ❖

NOTICE of MEETING and AGENDA

**The 55th Annual General Meeting of Merrow Residents' Association
will be held on MONDAY 3rd MARCH 2025 at 8.00pm at St John's Centre
Chairman - Andrew Strawson**

1. **Apologies for absence**
2. **Minutes of the last AGM held on 4th April 2024** (available at the meeting, also on MRA's website, or email secretary@merrowresidents.org for a copy)
3. **Matters arising not covered elsewhere in Agenda**
4. **Chairman's Report** (see also *Merrow Life*)
5. **Planning Report - update** (see also *Merrow Life*)
6. **Financial Report**

Report and Adoption of Accounts (available at meeting or email the secretary for a copy)

Voluntary Independent Examiner: Appointment of Ian Anderson for 2025

7. Election of Officers

The Officers elected at the AGM in **2024** were:

- | | | |
|---|----------------------|---------------------------------|
| • | Chairman | Andrew Strawson |
| • | Vice Chairman | Keith Meldrum |
| • | Treasurer | Dave Smith |
| • | Secretary | Henriette Whitehead-van Prooije |
| • | Environment Officer | Stephen Rudd |
| • | Membership Secretary | Claire Rymell |
| • | Publicity Officer | Vacant |
| • | Webmaster | Dave Smith |

Andrew Strawson and Stephen Rudd are standing down from their officer posts.

The other Officers have all agreed to be nominated for election or re-election for 2025.

Richard Collins was co-opted during the year and is standing for election as Webmaster.

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

8. Election of Ordinary Members of the Executive Committee

The Ordinary Committee Members continuing in post for 2025 are: **Gordon Farquharson, Kate Dumbleton** and **Lorna Seymour** (for the 2nd year of their 3-year terms)

Sadly, **John Pitkin** died during the year. **Denise Hilton** resigned from the Committee during the year and **Clare McVicker** is not standing for re-election.

Andrew Strawson and **Stephen Rudd** have agreed to be nominated for election as Ordinary Committee Members.

Nominations are invited for three **Ordinary Member** posts; please notify the MRA Secretary as above.

9. Any Other Business

An opportunity for members to raise and discuss matters of local concern with the Committee.

Wine and nibbles will follow the formal part of the meeting (a small contribution towards the evening's expenses will be requested)

Subscription Renewal

If you haven't already paid your subscription for 2025 a renewal letter will be enclosed with this newsletter.