

MERROW RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION
MINUTES OF THE FIFTY-FIFTH ANNUAL MEETING
Held at St John's Centre on Monday 3rd of March 2025

The Chairman Andrew Strawson welcomed 100 members in the hall, Guildford Borough Councillors Joss Bigmore, Jo Shaw and Surrey County Councillor George Potter.

1. Apologies were received from: Julia Ellis, Yves de Contades, Tricia and Peter Tappin, Claudine and Stuart Letts, Carole Hartney, Kate and Tony Atkins, Bob Britt
2. Approval of AGM minutes from 2024: were proposed by Richard Collins and seconded by Cathy Atkinson. Approved unanimously.
3. Matters arising like Urnfield and Trodds Lane reduced speed were covered later in meeting.
4. The chairman summarised the activities in 2024, including the fascinating talk by Michael Buerk and thanked everyone for their support over the year. He advised that the Local Plan is to be updated (revised every 5 years). Local planning issues progress slowly including Gosden Hill Farm, St Peters and Urnfield playing fields, plus several housing development matters. There is uncertainty regarding Surrey becoming a unitary authority. GBC are installing a new bench at Merrow St/Kingfisher Drive intersection (SCC funded, MRA received a grant). MRA have applied for a grant from SCC for planters and benches outside Merrow shops. The History Group continues. The chairman thanked the Community Highways team who help keep Merrow clean, Edwins Garden Centre for plants, compost etc in planters outside the Horse and Groom, Kate Dumbleton and her team for watering the planters, Guildford in Bloom for their Silver award "Best Neighbourhood Project", Ian Anderson MRA's voluntary independent examiner, local councillors, committee members and officers Clare Rymell – who also distributes Merrow Life, Keith Meldrum, Henriette Whitehead-van Prooije – for deliveries, catering and organising everyone, Dave Smith – treasurer, webmaster, highways clearance.
5. Keith Meldrum– Andrew Strawson stepped down as Chairman at the meeting. The post is now vacant. Keith thanked him hugely for his 6 years of involvement. Andrew will continue as a committee member.
6. Keith outlined current planning applications: Holford Rd – refused on appeal, 176 Epsom Rd – awaits detailed planning application for 4 homes, 18 Trodds Lane – gone to appeal for 6 houses, St Thomas' School – traffic concerns for nursery school, St Peter's School – awaits recommendation from Planning Officer for floodlit hockey pitch, Gosden Hill – awaiting outline planning application from Martin Grant Homes.
Note: Zoom meeting for MRA members to discuss development on 9th April at 6pm, Wisley Airfield – Approved for 1800 homes on first of three adjacent sites,

Clandon Golf site – Onslow Estate is likely to request that the site is included in the revised Local Plan and push to develop the site. Major issue for whole country is the increased housing target. Locally GBC will be required to double the housing target from 562 to 1170 new houses per annum. 1170 figure comes from national government figures so new sites must be found. GBC currently achieves 650 new homes per year, higher than target. Risk is that building can go ahead without infrastructure, and Guildford Borough Council will have no say in the matter.

Unitary authority overview - George Potter. The Government has advised there is to be a new model of regional government with regional mayors governing approx. half a million people with responsibility for a unitary council for all services. Surrey has been accelerated as an area – i.e. before the next general election – due to high local debt. Surrey County Council election in May has been cancelled and there are weekly meetings between county and borough. Could be 2-3 councils for whole of Surrey – likely Guildford/Waverley and Woking/Surrey Heath but TBC. May 2026 elections of Unitary Councils. Uncertain whether we will have a mayor. No decision yet. It is unclear how debt will be handled as Woking has £2.2 billion debt (will be £3 billion by 2028). Who carries it? There will be a £40-£80 million cost to set everything up. This equates to an additional £20 on council tax for 40 years, to pay off the debt. Timeline:

- 20th March submit draft proposal to government.
- 9th May, submit final proposals to government.
- September, receive decision from government.

7. Financial report - this was available at the meeting presented by Dave Smith, examined by Ian Anderson. Approval proposed by Keith Meldrum and seconded by Clare Rymell. Approved unanimously. Ian Anderson asked to continue as voluntary independent examiner of the accounts. Proposed by Andrew Strawson and seconded by Richard Collins. Approved unanimously.

8. Elections; the following officers were proposed by Rob Graham and seconded by Jennifer Margrave and elected to the committee 2025/2026, unanimously

Chairman	Vacant
Vice chairman	Keith Meldrum
Treasurer	Dave Smith
Secretary	Henriette Whitehead-van Prooije
Membership Secretary	Claire Rymell
Webmaster	Richard Collins

Andrew Strawson, Stephen Rudd and Bruce Bennett were proposed as Committee members by Keith Meldrum, seconded by Henriette Whitehead van Prooije and approved unanimously.

9. AOB

- Urnfield - Cathy Atkinson, leader of Mellow Downs Residents' Group, thanked everyone for support over 5 years, especially Andrew Strawson, Keith Meldrum and Stephen Rudd. Most construction finished; now to confirm that site has been built as planned. Currently development is behind woodland, but when revealed the 8 floodlights will be very noticeable. Ongoing planning conditions should have prevented any use until all conditions are satisfied, however

Tormead school has been using the facility. Travel to/from the site will have an impact. There is a sensitive lighting plan which should be enforced by the GBC enforcement team. Cathy would like support to help create a lighting plan to help maintain dark skies.

- St Peter's School – several members were concerned with the planning application for a new full size hockey pitch concerning light pollution, noise, traffic and wildlife disturbance not only during the day but also at night. St Peter's have had virtually no contact with their neighbours which was felt to be an issue. The application is likely to go to the planning committee in April.
- Joss Bigmore and Jo Shaw are both members of the Planning Committee which is a quasi-judicial committee and therefore they may not pre-determine any planning application. They must remain neutral and make a judgement on the evidence.

10. The Chairman closed the meeting at c.9.30pm with thanks to all those who attended, contributed to and organised the meeting.