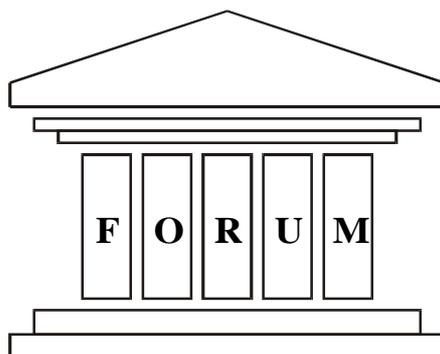


MERTON PARK WARD RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION



Spring 2008

Issue No 37

Merton Park Ward Residents Association (MPWRA) sponsors your Independent councillors as Merton Park Ward Independent Residents (MPWIR) on Merton Council

Karin Forbes (karin.forbes@merton.gov.uk) – 58 Mostyn Road SW19 3LN – 8540 3314
Peter Southgate (peter.southgate@merton.gov.uk) – 22 Dorset Road SW19 3HA – 8542 2053
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MPWIR COUNCILLOR IS MERTON'S NEW DEPUTY MAYOR

Many congratulations to Councillor Kryisia Williams who has been invited to be Deputy Mayor for the coming council year. I believe this is an honour for all our Independent Residents councillors, for MPWRA and indeed for Merton Park. Among the councillors whom MPWRA has sponsored over the past 18 years, Bridget Smith was Mayor of Merton and only recently Peter Southgate was Deputy Mayor.

It is gratifying that we have been given this privilege during periods of both Labour and Conservative administrations. Whilst they might not always want to say so, I like to think that the political parties hold Independents in friendly respect and understand that we judge all issues on their merits. Thus, they do not need to see us as a threat. Our councillors will continue to support fair and well thought out policies.

Hubert Child, Chairman

IN THIS ISSUE OF FORUM:

Councillors' allowances in Merton may be the third lowest in London, but that by itself does not justify an increase. Peter Southgate explains why **MPWIR said "no" to any increases in allowances for Merton councillors.**

The number of children under five in Merton is rising rapidly and there aren't enough primary school places for them all. Karin Forbes talks about the **potential expansion of Wimbledon Chase School.** She also tells us about the **exciting new proposals for a sixth form at Rutlish.**

Kryisia Williams reports that you now have another chance to help shape **Merton's Climate Change Strategy.** She also wants your views on controlled parking zones and the **potential extension of CPZ MP1.** Would you like us to hold a **street surgery** in your road? In this issue we answer some of the questions raised during our last surgery in Morden.

SIXTH FORMS IN MERTON SCHOOLS

In March the cabinet of Merton Council agreed that the four secondary schools in Merton without a sixth form should be allowed to develop sixth form provision. This would make the schools more attractive to parents and children as well as assist in raising standards. For Rutlish School the plan is to create a joint sixth form with Ricards Lodge, with up to 150 pupils in each year, on each site. Epsom College are also keen to be involved in the provision of Level 3 (A level) courses.

The full logistical details are still being worked out. Initially both schools would use temporary accommodation, funded, it is hoped, by a government grant. In the longer term they would build new accommodation, as "Building Schools for the Future" money comes on stream.

There will be a statutory formal consultation on the proposals. A further consultation exercise will be needed if there is to be a reduction in the numbers of 11-16 year olds, which seems likely given the limited space available on the two sites. The administration is aiming for the new sixth forms to start in 2009 but given the amount of work needed and the time for full consultations, 2010 is a more realistic date.

MPWIR fully supports these proposals to introduce sixth forms into Merton's secondary schools. As Vice-Chair of Governors as well as a ward councillor, I am especially excited about the prospects for Rutlish offering standards of education for boys to compete with anything available in Merton and neighbouring boroughs.

Cllr Karin Forbes

WIMBLEDON CHASE SCHOOL EXPANSION

At the end of March the Council submitted a proposal to the schools adjudicator to increase the September 2008 intake at Wimbledon Chase Primary School from 60 to 90 children. This was described as an "in-year variation" (i.e. it would only apply to the 2008 intake) and as an "emergency measure" because there are 140 children with SW19 and SW20 post codes who do not have a primary school place. **The schools adjudicator has turned the proposal down because it was not judged to be an emergency. However, that still leaves a large number of children without primary school provision.**

Merton's under-5 population is rising faster than that of almost any other London borough. Also, the location of schools in the borough increasingly does not match the need. This is particularly true of the Wimbledon Park area and will be made worse by the Plough Lane development. The

schools in that area are already very cramped and cannot be expanded.

The Council is very aware that there is a problem with the availability of primary school places and recognises (from the work they did looking for a site for St. Ann's) that there is nowhere to site a new-build school. It is therefore undertaking a major review, looking at the capacities of all primary schools in the borough.

Although the proposal put to the schools adjudicator was for one year only, the longer term plan could be to convert Wimbledon Chase permanently to a three-form entry school. This would involve extending the premises and require formal consultation. **We will be keeping a close watching eye on the developments at Wimbledon Chase on your behalf.**

Cllr Karin Forbes

SCHOOL GOVERNOR VACANCY AT MERTON PARK PRIMARY

Merton Park Primary School needs a new community governor. If you live or work locally, are willing to represent community interests and would be committed to the good governance and success of the school, the governing body would love to hear from you.

Training is provided for new governors. Please contact the Headteacher, Peter Steward on 020 8542 7128 or Stuart Sinclair, Chair of the Governing Body, on 020 8544 9421 for further information.

WHY MPWIR SAID 'NO' TO INCREASED COUNCILLOR ALLOWANCES

Like MPs, councillors are required to vote on their own allowances, a difficult task as they have to balance their own interests against those of the community they serve. After reading this, I hope you will conclude that we, your MPWIR councillors, made the right decision on your behalf.

Allowances were last reviewed nearly five years ago. The basic allowance was increased to £7,935 in October 2003 and has risen to £8,372 after indexing for inflation. Cabinet members and the Chairs of Planning, Licensing and Overview & Scrutiny receive double the basic through a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) in recognition of the extra work they undertake.

A case can be made for raising the basic allowance in order to attract a wider range of people into becoming councillors – particularly low earners whose incomes might suffer if they had to take time off from work for their council duties. In December 2006, London Councils, the body that represents all 33 London boroughs, commissioned an independent review which concluded that the basic allowance should be raised to £9,964 with substantially higher rates for cabinet members.

Implementing the recommendations in full would have increased the cost of allowances in Merton by 52%, at a time when the council was trying to make budget savings of more than £10m. Clearly this was a non-starter and a compromise scheme was developed which would have increased the basic allowance to £9,000 and that of cabinet members to £22,500. However, following discussions in various committees it became apparent that members of **both** major parties were

uneasy about voting themselves **any** increase at a time when cuts in services to vulnerable residents were being proposed.

We concluded that it would be morally indefensible to force councillors to vote on party lines. On such an issue every member should be free to make up his or her own mind without pressure from the party whips. We therefore supported a confidential survey of councillors' views. All three MPWIR councillors voted but unfortunately the Labour group boycotted the survey, instead committing their members to oppose any increase in allowances. Even so, of the 26 councillors who voted, a narrow majority favoured staying with the current basic allowance.

Despite this evidence, the cabinet persisted with a resolution to Council that would have increased the basic allowance to £9,000 and cabinet pay to £22,500. MPWIR felt this was untenable: the Council was limiting staff to an increase of less than 2.5%; it had frozen grants to the voluntary sector and imposed above inflation increases in charges for services, such as resident parking permits and adult education. We made it clear to the Conservative administration that we would vote against any increases in allowances. Rather than be defeated in the council chamber, the Conservatives chose to amend their own resolution to this effect.

We believe our decision was in the best interests of the residents of Merton.

Cllr Peter Southgate

SAVE OUR POST OFFICES!

During March it was hard to ignore the outcry engendered by Post Office proposals to close six branches in Merton, including one that many Merton Park residents rely on at 104 Kingston Road. Such was the level of concern expressed borough-wide that the Overview & Scrutiny Commission held two public meetings at which residents put their objections to the Post Office.

From the evidence we heard we were able to make a strong case to the Post Office to keep these branches open.

The Post Office is expected to publish its final decision in early May – there is no appeal. If closures affect Merton, it will not be for want of putting up a strong fight against them.

Cllr Peter Southgate

WANT TO GET MORE INVOLVED?

We need a new **Secretary**. It's an important role at the heart of our activities and of course the duties could be shared. Could you take over all or part of this vital work?

Contact: Hubert Child 020 8540 3087 email: mpwra@yahoo.co.uk

MAKING A DIFFERENCE – CLIMATE CHANGE

In January, Merton issued a draft Climate Change Strategy for Public Consultation, prior to Scrutiny by councillors and subsequent Cabinet approval. MPWRA members who attended a public consultation meeting told your MPWIR councillors that they thought the document was weak and ill-conceived. We also felt that the draft Strategy completely missed the opportunity for the Council to think innovatively and strategically about how Council and residents could work together to tackle climate change.

I put these views to the Regeneration and Public Realm Scrutiny Panel. They agreed with my proposal to recommend to Cabinet that the draft Strategy should be returned for substantial revision

and strengthening. As a result the Strategy is now to be re-written and put forward for re-consideration by Scrutiny and then by the Cabinet in June.

And here's another important difference MPWIR councillors have made. We proposed a resolution to Council to ensure that when the Climate Change Strategy is reconsidered, it will be decided by the whole Council, not just the Cabinet. This was unanimously accepted. **So you now have a further opportunity to influence Merton's strategy on this important issue. Do let us know what you would like to see in it.**

Cllr Krysia Williams

"NO" TO THIRD RUNWAY AT HEATHROW

At the request of MPWRA's Management Committee, we wrote to object to the proposed expansion of Heathrow with the addition of a third runway. Here are some of the points we made:

- Merton Park is currently affected by aircraft noise during the summer months, when flight paths are changed to accommodate seasonal traffic. More flights from a third runway could make this a year round pattern of operation.
- Merton's climate change strategy recognises the need for changes in travel modes to reduce CO2 emissions but more flights from Heathrow can only increase CO2 emissions.

- Growth projections for passenger numbers at Heathrow are based on an uncritical acceptance of growth in the City of London as a world financial centre, but this is unproven.
- Our residents support changes designed to achieve a more sustainable way of life for their children, including necessary changes to their patterns of travel.

Merton Council has also expressed its opposition to a third runway at Heathrow, as have all the London boroughs along the incoming flight path – Wandsworth, Hammersmith and Fulham, Richmond, Hounslow and Hillingdon.

Cllr Peter Southgate

CONTROLLED PARKING ZONE MP1

Merton Council is undertaking a review of CPZ MP1, in particular its extension to include Poplar Road running south of Erridge Road and the western section of Erridge Road. The majority of residents in these two sections are now in favour of controlled parking in their roads and so Councillors have supported their requests for this review.

Views on controlled parking are always mixed and the Council is duty-bound to consider the possible "knock-on" effects in adjacent roads not currently in the CPZ. Although there will be a formal consultation exercise in early June, the Council will be seeking earlier feedback from your MPWIR Councillors concerning the effectiveness of the

current CPZ and the potential impact of the extension.

Separately, following requests from residents, your Councillors have asked the Council to consider some shared bays at the north end of Sandbourne Avenue and some "20 minutes free" bays outside the shops in Merton Park Parade. **We would welcome your comments as soon as possible. On the proposal to include sections of Poplar Road and Erridge Road in the CPZ contact Krysia Williams. Any other comments about the effectiveness of the present CPZ, contact Karin Forbes.**

Cllr Krysia Williams

STREET SURGERY FEEDBACK - YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

On Saturday 15 March we called on homes in Morden Road, Morden Court Parade, Grosvenor Court and The Homefield (both in London Road) to say "hello" to residents and to find out whether they had issues we could help resolve. The majority of people we spoke to were happy with their situation and had no complaints, but inevitably we encountered a few problems. Here are some of them and our suggested solutions.

We never see a street sweeper and litter spoils the appearance of our road

Streets and pavements should be swept once a week. If you believe this is not happening, phone 020 8274 4902 or use the online complaints form on www.merton.gov.uk.

Fly tipping in Morden Court Parade is a problem, particularly near the footbridge leading to Abbotsbury Road

Fly tips on public land (e.g. footpaths) will normally be cleared in 48 hours – phone 020 8274 4902. Fly tips on privately owned land are more difficult to deal with, but if the owner refuses to clear them the council may do so and re-charge the cost.

Groups of youths congregate on the steps leading to the flats in Morden Court Parade and can seem quite menacing, even if they're not doing anything wrong

We have made the Merton Park Safer Neighbourhood Team aware of your concerns and they patrol the area regularly. But a lasting solution to this problem depends on giving the youths somewhere else to go and something to do. The council has now started spending more money on youth provision and we will ensure the funding goes where it is most needed.

I've been sent a bill for council tax even though I'm living on benefits

Everyone has to pay something towards their council tax, although the amount can be reduced by council tax benefit. But if you think the assessment of your council tax benefit or housing benefit is wrong and you want to challenge it, you should contact the Citizens Advice Bureau at 7 Crown Parade, Morden (020 8715 0707).

I'm not working and living on a very low income – could I claim benefits from the council?

You may be eligible for council tax benefit and housing benefit (if you pay rent). The council offers an advice service for new claimants and will even help you fill in the forms – phone 020 8545 4178 for an appointment.

Morden Road needs to be made safer to cross near the bus stops

Transport for London have agreed to install a pedestrian refuge as part of measures to improve safety in Morden Road.

Morden town centre is a mess, with so many street signs and pedestrian barriers

We are active members of the Morden Town Centre Improvement Partnership and are keen to make Morden a more welcoming place for residents and shoppers e.g. by removing unnecessary barriers. One idea is to pedestrianise London Road from Morden Underground station to the roundabout on Morden Road.

Are there any grants available to help towards the cost of insulation?

Currently the grants for cavity wall insulation and loft insulation are quite generous – the Energy Savings Trust (0800 512 012) provides free insulation for householders over 70, regardless of income. For those aged 65 – 70 years the same service is supplied by London Warm Zones (0800 587 2251). For benefit recipients grants of up to £6000 are available towards the cost of replacement central heating systems and insulation under the Coldbusters scheme (0800 358 6668).

If you weren't at home when we called as part of this street surgery and you would have liked to talk to us, please do phone or e-mail and tell us what your concerns are. **And if you would like us to hold a street surgery in your road, please get in touch – we plan to run more over the summer months.**

COULD YOU HELP TO DELIVER FORUM?

People are needed to deliver in Stanley Road, Camrose Close, Martin Way, Martin Grove and Old School Close. If you could deliver FORUM in one of these roads just twice a year, please email mpwra@yahoo.co.uk or contact Margaret Garrett on 8542 1378.

PARKING IN GRASMERE AND WINDERMERE AVENUES

In the last edition of Forum we asked for your views about the parking restrictions in Grasmere and Windermere Avenues. The response was unanimous, that the current restrictions work well and should not be changed. Thank you to everyone who took the trouble to reply.

MPWRA MEETINGS - ALL WELCOME

Monthly Meetings take place on the first **Tuesday** of each month at **8pm** at

MERTON PARK PRIMARY SCHOOL

Entrance from Erridge Road Playground Gate

Each meeting includes time for questions to your Ward Councillors

**Tuesday 3 June
at 8pm**

Sustainable Merton

**Tuesday 1 July
at 8pm**

AGM

Sutton and Merton PCT Plans

Dr Martyn Wake, Sutton and Merton PCT

Tuesday 5 August

NO MEETING

**Tuesday 2 September
at 8pm**

Community Involvement in Merton

Kate Martyn, Acting Stronger Communities Manager

**Tuesday 7 October
at 8pm**

Proposals for Putting Sixth Forms into Secondary Schools

Janet Martin, Head of Education, Merton Council

**Tuesday 4 November
at 8pm**

Recycling

Rachel Phelan, Principal Environmental Development Officer, Merton Council

**Tuesday 2 December
At 8pm**

**Councillors' Question Time
.....and mince pies**

MORDEN COMMUNITY FORUM

Come and find out what's going on in your area – questions welcome!
Wednesday 2 July at 7.15pm in the Council Chamber, Merton Civic Centre

Officers of Your Association

Chairman: Hubert Child 020 8540 3087
Vice Chairman: Graham Clark 020 8542 9101
Secretary: Vacant
Treasurer: Andrew Ashton 020 8543 6905

www.mpwra.co.uk

Your Committee

Jillian Ashton Fred Rayner
Desé Child John Sargeant
Edward Foley Judy Sargeant
Phillippa Foskett David Slocombe
Ian Garbett Bridget Smith
John Nelson-Jones Pauline Southgate
Jolanta Nowak Chris Stutt
Paul Wood