

Minutes of Merton Park Ward Residents' Association Open Committee Meeting

7th May 2019

1. Hubert Child, Chairman, opened the meeting and passed on apologies from Chris Stutt, Stephen Mercer, Phillipa. Foskett, Fred Rayner and John Harding.
2. The Chairman sought confirmation that the minutes of the previous meeting were correct before signing these. There were no matters arising but a small amendment to the agenda for the current meeting was raised. The agenda referred to the date of the next meeting as Wednesday 4th June when it should have read **Tuesday** 4th June. This was duly noted.
3. The Chairman introduced three guest speakers from Cranleigh Tennis Club who were keen to talk about the club during its 90th anniversary year. The speakers were: Chairperson, Christine Roe; Historian, Peter McCandless; Vice Chairperson, James Edwards.

Christine Roe spoke first, outlining the aims of the club and indicating the wide range of ages of current members- from 3 years to 82 years! Membership has doubled in the last 5 years and the balance of players to social members has changed so that players are now in the majority. 40% of members are women.

Peter Mc Candless then spoke about the history of the club. In 1926 the Northern Line was extended to Morden which triggered a building boom in Morden and Merton Park, with many new houses and roads under construction in the area. Tennis was also becoming increasingly popular during this time and the emergence of the Lawn Tennis Association at Wimbledon as a major centre of the tennis world meant that many people living in Merton Park wanted to play tennis too. Founding a new tennis club, therefore, seemed a good business proposition. The club was founded in 1929 on the site of a former brickworks. The club house and courts were built for a wealthy private landowner, Harry Copp, by a firm of builders who were busy in the area as part of the local housing boom. In 1959 the club was passed to Surrey County Council and in 1972 control was passed to Merton Borough Council.

The club survived the Great Depression of the 1930s and also World War Two while other local clubs did not. Why? Probably a combination of factors including luck, its capacity to adapt to changing circumstances and also to the wide range of activities on offer (the last two likely to be closely linked).

In 1974 the club house was destroyed by a fire which, unfortunately, also destroyed the historical records of the club. A tough time for the club ensued with many members leaving the club. There was, however, a determination to re-build the clubhouse and after many meetings and much fund-raising a new club house was opened in 1977, despite membership having dwindled to just 17 members. Luckily the new clubhouse then triggered a re-bounce in both funds and membership. In the 1980s new courts were built on a base of

porous macadam and shale. Peter has written a booklet about the history of the club; copies of this were on sale at the meeting for £3.

Christine Roe then presented some key facts about the club and emphasised that the club prides itself on being a **community** club. There is a wide range of activities on offer including Pilates, Darts, Keep Fit, Ballet and also a pop-up Montessori nursery (Little Hands) during term times. The main activity, however, is tennis and the club is fortunate that Grant Fellows (who was awarded the Surrey Coach of the Year 2016) was appointed as Head Coach in 2013. He is a well-known and experienced coach and has introduced some successful initiatives. These include “I Play 30” for young people with moderate and severe learning difficulties from local schools and colleges. Another of his initiatives is the new Tennis Academy in partnership with Rutlish Secondary School. The club also works with Poplar and Merton Park Primary Schools and South Thames College as well as providing coaching for Ewell Castle School sixth form tennis scholars.

The club caters for those keen on competitive tennis and consistently enters teams in the Surrey tennis leagues with much success. Amongst its strong players are two juniors aged 14 and 12 respectively, siblings Kate and Nathan. They play competitively at county and regional level and both represent the county of Surrey. In 2018 Kate entered her first National Finals.

To meet its commitment to being a community club it also takes pains to balance the competitive element with “fun” activities and events such as “Tennis through the ages” and “Coffee, tea and cake for neighbours”. In this, its 90th anniversary year, it will be holding an anniversary party on Saturday 6th July that will provide a BBQ as well as a children’s entertainer (Mouse Anthony)

The committee members are all volunteers and they enlist the support of other members to help out with tasks such as leaf clearing in Autumn. This is a vital task given the number of trees in the immediate vicinity of the club! Bar staff are the only people who are paid for the work they do for the club.

James Edwards finished the presentation by speaking about forthcoming events at the club, two of which are referred to above. Other forthcoming events are an open day on Saturday 11th May with free coaching for adults and children followed the next day by an open afternoon for adults for free social play. September will see the Club and also the Junior Club championship finals. Talking about future aims of the club James said that the current 440 membership is good for small club but there is room for more and they are seeking to find new members, perhaps from a little further afield. While the re-built club house has lasted quite well it now needs some renovation, although a possible target for the club’s centenary would be a new club house and some astro turf.

Questions from the floor were then invited:

Do club players go on to the national circuit? Yes, Kate and Nathan attend a tennis academy in Morden and play on the circuit.

Are there links to Wimbledon LTA? Some but loose rather than formal.

Will the quest to expand membership be viable given parking restrictions around the club? Possibly, although the club has 15 spaces on site and the area is very well served by public transport. Membership for those under 30 years of age is only £130 p.a. which compares very favourably with other local clubs. This strategy of discounting fees for younger players is deliberate, while not universally popular with members (some have queried why no discount for members of retirement age...) James pointed out that the fairly new artificial clay courts, made of baked red sand, are easier on joints making them attractive to players of more mature age. The club is well used in the evenings and at weekends but has spare capacity on weekdays so the hope is to recruit more members interested in playing at these particular times. The courts are also floodlit until 10pm and their all-weather nature provides the potential for quite intensive use. In an effort to recruit more members the club provides “taster” sessions whereby people can play on three occasions after which they would need to pay i.e. join the club.

The Chairman then thanked our guests for their interesting presentations before the meeting adjourned for coffee.

4. **PC John Weatherhead** presented his police liaison report. He apologised for his absence at previous meetings. There has been much pressure and a transfer of personnel has added to this.

Burglaries: PC Weatherhead was contacted by Janet (Bamber) about the “epidemic of burglaries” in Merton Park and so he went to see her at her home to reassure her. It transpired that she had been the victim of an attempted break-in but had not reported it. PC Weatherhead confirmed that there had been a “spike” of burglaries in March with 14 reported, some of which were commercial and others residential. The figures for previous months were 9 in January and 3 in February. In April following the “spike” the number fell back to only 2 and so far in May only 1 has been reported. PC Weatherhead hopes that this figure for May will not increase. To put this in perspective PC Weatherhead said that a Morden resident had contacted the police in March about a spate of 9-13 burglaries in the South Wimbledon area. PC Weatherhead researched further and found that Raynes Park had been similarly affected so it appears that the whole borough had been hard hit over one particular weekend. The good news is that a suspect has been arrested (in Warwickshire!) as his car had been identified via CCCTV. The implication is that he was responsible for the increase in burglaries over that period and so the fall in subsequent months was a result of his being out of action. PC Weatherhead emphasised the importance of reporting any burglaries or attempted burglaries so that police can identify any patterns and clues to the identity of the perpetrators. He also repeated a previous offer that residents

can request a free house safety check where the police will identify weak spots and offer advice.

Catalytic convertors: There has been a spate of burglaries of these recently, notably from the LIDL and Sainsbury car parks. The cars involved were mainly a certain model of Toyota because the convertors are so easy and quick to extract from them. They sell for £800-£1000 each so are an attractive target. The police have two facial recognitions of the suspects and PC Weatherhead will distribute details when he is in a position to do so. Hopefully this will bring in some clues about the suspects that can be followed up.

Ramadam: This is underway at present and Eid will be on June 5th. The mosque will be open between 8am-3pm that day and about 13 000 people are expected to attend. The whole area will be extremely busy during those hours.

Dog attacks: A dog attack in the Glebe Field was reported during which one dog was injured necessitating the attention of a vet that cost £700 - £800. Despite this the owner of the dog that was attacked would not pursue the case because she was afraid of reprisals. Someone needs to be brave enough to stand up and be counted if this happens again because the owner of the attacking dog does not use a lead and the dog has attacked other dogs in the past. Next time the dog could attack a child and so this is a very serious matter.

Questions to PC Weatherhead

Burglaries – do the police recommend any particular brand and model of CCCTV? PC Weatherhead said that the police cannot make such a recommendation because of possible implications of being bribed to do so. He did mention, however, that you can buy ones that are linked to mobile phones via wi-fi. These send pictures direct to the phone. He also said that the police have been able to use CCCTV images successfully to apprehend suspects. Councillor Edward Foley said that he had purchased a system called “Swan” that holds data for about one month. It was not too expensive and the images are of good definition.

What is the policy on dogs in parks? The onus is on the owner to keep the dog under control and it is possible to convict an owner if they do not (someone was convicted a couple of years ago).

Neighbourhood Watch- PC Weatherhead said that if an area does not have this scheme assistance to set one up can be provided. This assists with the admin involved in the set-up so making the process easier and quicker.

Councillor Peter Southgate then gave his report.

Policing- The Borough Commander, Sally Benatar, had attended the recent council meeting and it had been helpful. She explained that as a result of re-organisation she now had to consider Wandsworth and Merton together as a

single unit. While the future of Wimbledon Police Station is still in question she said that, should the current internal review decide that only one shared police station across the two boroughs is a better way forward, then Wimbledon Police Station is better placed than Mitcham, So, it seems that there may yet be hope to keep the police station in Wimbledon. We will not be consulted under the review but views will be canvassed about where there should be a manned counter. The Borough Commander also reported on the impact of the recent "Extinction Rebellion" protests in Central London. These were a real strain on the police in London as a whole, with holidays being cancelled for police officers etc. Resources had been very stretched.

Travellers- The previous cumbersome procedures to evict travellers from council land have been replaced by a new injunction giving the local authority the power to seize assets of the people encroaching on the land. Because of this the issue has been much reduced and the clear up costs have also been significantly reduced. Responding to the question of whether this would "displace" the problem to privately owned land, Councillor Southgate responded that if it does then private landowners can also take out a similar injunction.

Proposed closure of John Innes path in winter- It has been proposed that this path be permanently closed during winter months Monday-Friday inclusive. It will be open at weekends. We need information regarding the likely impact of this- who uses the path and when etc. There is a suspicion that the motivation for this proposal is for convenience to Rutlish School rather than concerns for the safety and security of users of the path. Councillor Edward Foley commented that he believed the proposal stems from problems with Sodexo, the School's contractor. Sodexo lack the manpower to patrol and lock the path after dark. There has been a number of issues with Sodexo that have upset local residents. For example, windows are not closed at the end of the school day (the manpower issue again) and so alarms are set off repeatedly through the night. Lights are also left on in the school all night. Councillor Foley, therefore, believes the problem originates from Sodexo rather than the school. It is unclear whether Rutlish will simply decide to close the path as proposed or whether it will consult before making a decision. The contractual position needs to be clarified. It appears that the Chair of Governors at Rutlish is very keen to close the path. Councillor Foley also attended a meeting with **Id Verdi** regarding the proposal to introduce charges for use of the tennis courts in John Innes Gardens and Dundonald Park. A fee of £8 per hour is proposed with courts being booked on-line that will provide a pin number to open the gates to the courts. A season ticket could be available for more frequent users. This gave rise to some discussion at the meeting about how easy it would be to enforce this and to possible alternatives. Apparently, Holland Park charges (or at least used to charge) £50 p.a. to use the courts for a year. Players would be asked to play for only one hour at a time if other people were waiting to use a court.

Extension of the tram to Sutton- Results of the consultation have recently been published with an email sent to respondents on 25th April. The main findings are:

The most popular option (65%) is extending from Sutton to South Wimbledon
The next most popular (55%) is extending from Sutton to Colliers Wood
The least favoured option (49%) is extending from Sutton to Wimbledon

Of the two alternative modes of transport 81% favour the Tram with only 40% favouring Rapid Bus Transit. The cost of each of these runs to millions of pounds and the Sutton extension is currently unfunded.....

Councillor Edward Foley then presented his report. The issue of school admissions is still ongoing.... The new post office near the Nelson Medical Centre was formally opened by Councillor Foley recently. He reported being quite surprised to be asked to officiate at the opening but was very pleased to do so and the ceremony was very nice. The post office will be a welcome addition to the borough and it offers a wide range of convenient services. Councillor Foley ended his brief report by saying that the next AGM of the Council will be on Wednesday 15th May and this will also see the Mayor making ceremony. The mayor elect is Conservative, despite the Council being held by Labour which may appear rather unusual. He then said that he had been surprised but delighted to be asked to be Deputy Mayor. He is excited at the prospect of this although he recognises the workload that is likely to be involved. The attendees congratulated Councillor Foley with a warm round of applause on his appointment to this important role.

Dickie Wilkinson- concluded the Councillors' reports with his own report. The Boundary Review has now decided that the number of councillors for the borough will definitely be reduced by 3 to a new total of 57. The physical boundaries of the wards will be reviewed and some will change. He thinks it unlikely Merton Park will change because there are currently other wards that are more significantly "over or under represented".

Forum is currently in print and will be distributed in about two weeks.

Funding for local improvements - tomorrow (Wednesday 8th May) an email will be sent with a link to a survey about how to spend the funds allocated for local improvement. The funds are limited to £15 000 per ward over 3 years and the money is only available for expenditure on some very specific improvements; details are in the survey.

Merton Heritage Day- This will be held on Saturday 11th May from 12:30pm to 4:40pm at Morden Library. There is a number of things to celebrate this year such as Cranleigh Tennis Club's 90th Anniversary, MPWRA's 30th Anniversary and Merton Heritage Centre's 25th Anniversary.

Feedback from Council Meetings – Council meetings take place on Wednesdays and we moved our MPWRA meetings back to Tuesdays to avoid clashing with these. At these meetings ideas are presented and councillors are asked to vote on these. They are not told in advance what will be proposed so have to consider the proposals very quickly on the night before voting. Some of the proposals appear to be politically motivated.

Councillor Wilkinson gave a recent example of a proposal to ask Band H council tax payers to pay a voluntary tax with the proceeds earmarked for Education projects. Band H includes the largest/most expensive properties, with a presumption that such taxpayers are wealthy and so are able and willing to make such a donation. Our three Independent Councillors voted against this largely on the grounds that the proposal was far too vague but other considerations also influenced their vote, such as existing charitable giving. The audience was then asked to indicate by a show of hands whether they would welcome feedback from these council meetings at the subsequent MPWRA meeting. This would enable attendees to know what had been proposed and how councillors had voted. The response from the audience to this suggestion was favourable.

Before the formal conclusion to the meeting Pauline Southgate mentioned the archaeological dig taking place at the Canons Project, Mitcham from 24th-26th May. Various school pupils will be taking part and members of the public may also attend.

The Chairman then concluded the meeting by reminding the audience that there will not be a visiting speaker at the next MPWRA meeting on 4th June. There will an open forum instead where residents can raise issues.