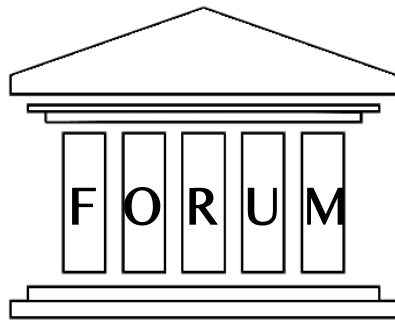


# Merton Park Ward Residents' Association

for the residents of: Morden | Merton Park | Wimbledon Chase



Spring 2020

Issue 64

## Letter from the Chairman:

Currently Merton Park, like all the UK, is in "lockdown" because of the deadly virus, COVID-19. We are all urged to "stay home" to avoid contacts which could infect us with the virus or spread it. Outside activity is limited to trips for food shopping, one form of exercise per day, or for key workers to go to work. I know that many of you are keeping things going successfully by working from home.

Sadly, we have had to cancel our monthly meetings until further notice to comply with the Government's "Social Distancing" policy.

For 30 years, we have delivered FORUM to every door in the Ward, but this is not currently possible and so this Spring 2020 edition is the first ever electronic-only version which will go out as an email alert and will also be available on our website; [mertonpark.org.uk](http://mertonpark.org.uk)

If you have neighbours who don't have computers, but might like to see FORUM it would be very kind if you could print one off for them.

In this issue Councillor Peter Southgate explains the huge amount of community effort that is going on in Merton Park. I would just like to add a mention of some local efforts to support our NHS and care services. Chris Stutt, Secretary MPWRA, goes daily to her rowing club in Putney where they pack sets of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) for NHS staff looking after COVID-19 patients. Others have joined the "scrubhub" initiative, sewing scrubs (washable outer garments) for GP surgeries and others, including the Nelson Health Centre, and for care staff. Of course, many of our neighbours are selflessly staffing the NHS, care homes and all the essential services across London and beyond.

While we have this valiant effort, we also know that there have been many deaths from COVID-19 and some of us will be mourning the loss of loved ones. Our sympathy goes out to all in that sad position.

Peter also describes the Merton Park campaign to stop the Boundary Commission from breaking up our Ward and its community. Your response has been fantastic, as you will read in his article. We want to say thank you to you all. This level of support surely cannot be dismissed – we await the Commission's decision on its consultation.

Sadly COVID-19 has of course moved things on, and we want to thank you, too, for the way you are helping your neighbours and the NHS, care services and, indeed, all essential services.

You can be proud of yourselves.

Stay well,

Hubert Child—Chairman

Tel: 020 8540 3087 | Email: [hubertchild@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:hubertchild@hotmail.co.uk)

Contact your local **Independent Ward Councillors** (pictured left -right)

**Cllr. Peter Southgate - Leader MPWIR**

[peter.southgate@merton.gov.uk](mailto:peter.southgate@merton.gov.uk) / 020 8542 2053

**Cllr. Edward Foley**

[edward.foley@merton.gov.uk](mailto:edward.foley@merton.gov.uk) / 020 8542 5824

**Cllr. Dickie Wilkinson**

[dickie.wilkinson@merton.gov.uk](mailto:dickie.wilkinson@merton.gov.uk) / 07905 103 686



# COVID-19 WHAT'S MERTON PARK DOING?

Not for nothing is Merton Park recognised by the council as having the highest levels of “social capital” in any of Merton’s 20 wards. Put simply, we have the strongest and most effective community spirit.

Now the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic has put that community spirit to the test as never before. It has not been found wanting. Neighbours have reached out to help neighbours, making sure that no one is left in isolation. The most effective responses have been at road level, where people know and trust their near neighbours.



In Daybrook Road, Fred and Megan Rayner leafleted all the houses in the road with offers of help from a group of four residents working together. In return, they received further offers of help from 40 residents in a road of 94 houses!

Elsewhere, in Rothesay, Sandringham and Chatsworth Avenue for example, residents have used WhatsApp groups to establish who is able to offer help, and who is self-isolating and needs help with shopping and collecting prescriptions.

Where would we be without social media? Liz Brown (Wessex Avenue) noticed many individual offers of help posted on Nextdoor, but without an obvious link to those who might need help. So she contacted all those posting to put onto a single list details of what they could offer, making it easier for

those in need of help to search for someone near them. No fewer than 109 volunteers agreed to be on the list, not just from Merton Park but also Hillcross and Raynes Park – a great achievement and a valuable asset to the community. Liz has now encouraged volunteers to register with Merton Voluntary Services Council (MVSC) to ensure proper safeguarding measures are in place for them all.

In parallel, Merton Mutual Aid (MMA) was set up as a grass roots movement to co-ordinate volunteers keen to help their neighbours, and Dom Kelly (Tybenham Road) is MMA’s co-ordinator for Merton Park Ward. We have been helping Dom to map where the volunteers are in the 68 roads that make up the Ward, and found seven where we do not know if volunteers are in place or not.

They are Camrose Close, Crown Road, Harland Close, Hatherleigh Close, Morden Court, Queen Elizabeth Gardens, Queens Road +Place, and Woodville Road. If you live in one of these roads and know residents volunteering to help each other, please tell us. Alternatively, if you need some help please contact us and we will try to match you to your nearest volunteer.



MMA is working on a proposal to deliver blood test kits to residents who fear they may have contracted the virus. This would enable them to check their blood oxygen levels at home and discuss the results with their GP over the phone. It saves the GP from having to make a home visit, and while it is still being planned, it could help to identify those who are infected at an earlier stage, thus potentially saving lives.

With all sports activities cancelled for the time being, the Old Ruts clubhouse in Poplar Road has repurposed itself as a centre for the assembly and distribution of food boxes made up from food donated by shoppers at Morrisons, Sainsbury and local restaurants. Working with the Dons Local Action Group (fans of AFC Wimbledon), they had delivered 1650 food boxes to vulnerable residents across Merton by 10<sup>th</sup> April, and with their network of 150 volunteers continue to offer help where needed.

Also in urgent need of donations of food (especially instant mash and UHT milk) is the Wimbledon Food Bank run by the Trussell Trust at the Elim Church in Kingston Road (opposite the fire station). It is actively championed by Claire Jauffret of Sheridan Road, who will collect donations for the food bank (check on Nextdoor for more details).

We know Merton Park is a resourceful community, and we expect there is more volunteer activity taking place than we have covered here. If so, do please write and tell us about it, and let us know how we can best support you.

**Cllr Peter Southgate**



## TIME ON YOUR HANDS? Part 1

Merton Heritage Service has been busy creating a number of online resources designed to offer some light-hearted fun and learning opportunities during the current lockdown. The first of these are now available via the Merton Memories website. <https://photoarchive.merton.gov.uk/activities>

Activities include quizzes, word searches and access to heritage trails via the '121 travel app.'

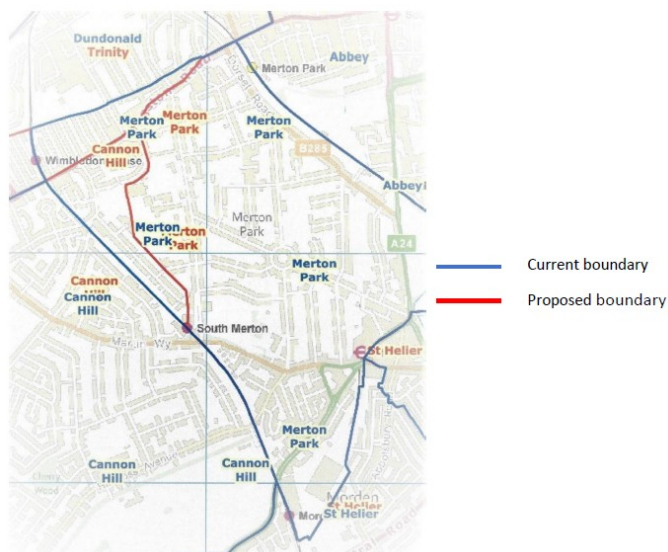
More material will be added in the coming weeks.



Watery Lane, Merton Park

## SAVING MERTON PARK WARD

It may seem like a lifetime ago now, but it is in fact just a month since the Boundary Commission's consultation to redraw ward boundaries in Merton concluded. By the closing date a total of 284 residents had submitted their objections to proposals to remove 1900 electors from Merton Park Ward and reduce it from three councillors to two on Merton council. A formidable demonstration of resistance to this unpopular and ill-considered proposal – we have to hope the Boundary Commission means it when it says "the more public views we hear, the more informed our decisions will be in making our final recommendations"



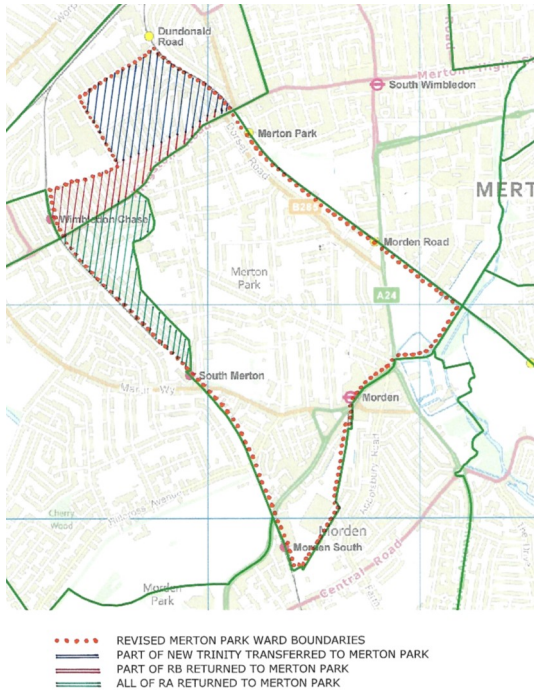
But how did we get to this point? The Boundary Commission is responsible for ensuring electoral equality – in other words, the number of voters represented by each councillor should be the same across all wards in Merton. Electorates have changed in size since the last review in 2002, and Merton Park Ward is more than 10% below the average, along with eight other Merton wards.

To complicate matters, Merton has agreed to reduce from 60 to 57 councillors under gentle encouragement from the Boundary Commission, yet in order to be future proof it must anticipate an increase in the electorate from 151,605 in 2019 to 162,915 in 2025. That means an increase from 2527 to 2858 electors per councillor. Based on its present boundaries, Merton Park Ward is 14% below its 2025 target (or 888 electors short).

So, we accepted the case for our boundaries to be revised to bring in more electors. What we did not expect was to be cut down in size to become a 2-member ward instead of 3-member, and losing c. 1900 electors.

(Continued on page 4)

The Boundary Commission appears to have been influenced in its proposals by a submission from the Conservatives that “the Merton Park community is very focussed on the core historic area and its appearance”, and from the LibDems that reducing the boundaries “creates a better alignment of the revised Merton Park Ward and the natural ‘Merton Park’ identity”



We utterly reject this narrow perception of Merton Park Ward and what it stands for. In the joint MPWRA/ MPWIR submission ([which you can read in full here](#)) we demonstrate how the Boundary Commission has failed to understand Merton Park Ward and its community.

- The sense of community extends across the whole Ward, and is not confined to its historic centre around St Mary’s church
  - MPWRA has 469 member households drawn from right across the Ward
  - MPWIR councillors have represented the Ward continuously ever since MPWRA was formed 30 years ago
  - The John Innes Society, the parish church and many sports and social clubs draw members from across the Ward, yet some would be cut off by the boundary changes
  - Social capital - Merton Park Ward is the highest scoring of Merton’s 20 wards on this statistical measure of its effectiveness as a community.
  - Current ward boundaries follow historic parish boundaries and include most of the John Innes Estate, the first Garden Suburb.
- New boundaries are inferior to current boundaries
  - Instead of enveloping the community they split it apart e.g. Watery Lane and Manor Gardens at the heart of the Conservation Area would be moved to Cannon Hill Ward.
  - Not clear or easy to follow e.g. railway embankment between Wimbledon Chase and South Merton replaced by access track behind rear gardens in Aylward Road
  - Homes and local businesses on either side of Kingston Road are interdependent, yet those on the north side would be hived off into Trinity Ward.
  - The Ward is unique in Merton for having Independent Resident councillors who are not tied to or sponsored by any national political party
  - The councillors have an unusually active programme of engagement with residents through MPWRA, including monthly meetings, a bi-annual newsletter (FORUM) distributed to every household in the Ward, email alerts and website ([www.mertonpark.org.uk](http://www.mertonpark.org.uk))
  - Two councillors could not maintain this range of activities in addition to regular casework and committee roles in council. Merton Park Ward needs three councillors.

To justify the retention of three councillors we propose to expand Merton Park Ward north across Kingston Road to include the “John Innes (Wilton Crescent) Conservation Area”, which is currently in Dundonald Ward. This reunites the two parts of the Garden Suburb as it was originally envisaged by John Innes, and takes the boundary of the Ward up to Dundonald Road.

This would put the projected electorate for 2025 within 2% of the target to achieve electoral equality.

So, we’ve made our case and we now have to wait patiently for the Boundary Commission to respond with its final recommendations for Merton Park Ward.

The date originally given for publication was 2<sup>nd</sup> June, but because of the effects of the COVID – 19 pandemic, it remains to be seen whether revised plans can be completed by then.

**Cllr Peter Southgate**

# SAVING MERTON PARK WARD - YOUR RESPONSES

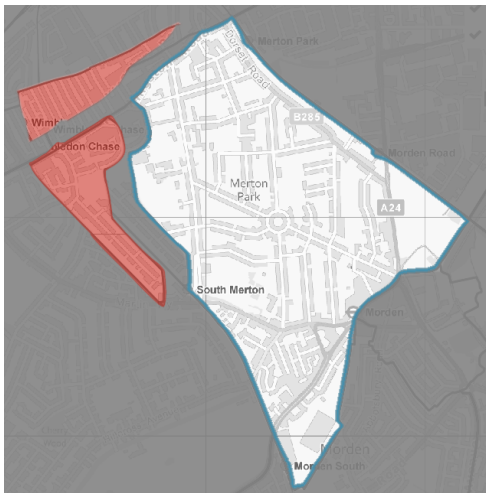
The Boundary Commission's proposals for the reorganisation of ward boundaries in Merton were based on just 29 submissions covering the whole borough. (<http://www.lgbce.org.uk/media/have-your-say-on-new-political-map-of-merton>) For instance, adopting Kingston Road as the northern boundary for Merton Park Ward was based on one (inaccurate) suggestion.

So when we realised we had a fight on our hands to save our Ward as we know it, we figured that if we could muster double the number of objections ie. around 60, the Boundary Commission would have to sit up and take notice.

At first, objections were slow to come in. We leafleted all the roads proposed by the Boundary Commission for expulsion from the Ward in late January, but by the time of the MPWRA meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> February we were only aware of c.50 objections. However, that meeting, attended by 99 residents, proved to be the turning point in the campaign, and with a letter to all MPWRA members in mid-February, the objections started to flood in. By 2<sup>nd</sup> March, the closing date originally set by the Boundary Commission, we were forecasting around 200 objections, and could no longer keep pace with thanking every respondent individually.

We had to wait until the Boundary Commission published all the redacted submissions on its website in early April to complete the count. The total surpassed all our expectations – 296 submissions, 284 for keeping Merton Park as a 3-member Ward and 12 accepting a 2-member Ward. This represents 78% of 378 submissions in total for all Merton wards made to the Boundary Commission. Moreover every submission from Merton Park Ward reflected an individual point of view – there were no template letters.

What prompted this outpouring? Your responses express an almost palpable sense of shock that unelected bureaucrats at the Boundary Commission can propose dismembering such a close-knit community with so little regard for the consequences:



***“What might seem like a trivial change to those inventing and enforcing such changes is actually quite an upsetting and discombobulating change for those residents affected.”***



In contrast to the scant evidence for the Boundary Commission proposals, Merton Park residents have spent years of their lives contributing to the community they value so highly:

***“The Ward needs to remain as one fully integrated and active community within its existing boundary. To attempt to redraw the boundary would fracture the cohesiveness and community bonding across the Ward, a bonding that has taken decades of loyal hard work by councillors and volunteers to develop, and which could be so readily undermined by any arbitrary redrawing of boundary lines.”***

Individual submissions chronicle all the ways in which these community bonds operate, a different list for everyone:

***“We also share many communal activities; MPWRA, the annual pantomime, church hall activities including Pilates, Zumba, child ballet classes, our school and John Innes bridge club, to name those that spring instantly to mind.”***

Other submissions detail the historical roots of the Ward, and show how the present boundaries closely follow the original parish boundaries; they include the John Innes estate and his creation of the first garden suburb. Against such well respected boundaries, the reductions now proposed would pitch exiled residents into wards with which they feel no affinity:

(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 5)

***"I greatly value the work of the John Innes Society and MPWRA. By contrast I have absolutely no ties whatsoever with Cannon Hill Ward. Moving my address to that Ward would be disastrous for the community bonds and social ties that have been so important to me over the last 17 years."***

***"There is minimal connection to Trinity Ward in Kingston Road, the connection is to Merton Park Ward and to attempt to remove it seems unthinking and made seemingly in ignorance of the area itself."***

With the reduction in boundaries would go the option of voting for MPWIR candidates in local elections for some 1900 electors who would find themselves exiled to Trinity or Cannon Hill Wards. Having Independent councillors is unique to Merton Park Ward in Merton, and their independence from party politics is highly valued:

***"The three councillors' non partisan views on local issues mean that their actions always represent the best interests of the local residents and not a political party."***

***"I believe that having independent representation with no party political axe to grind is vital to healthy democracy in Merton."***

In its technical guidance, the Boundary Commission claims to be "sensitive to the fact that political groups may seek to obtain electoral advantage" from a review. Nevertheless, some infer political influence from the proposal to remove one Independent member from Merton Park Ward, a ward where the main political parties have not held a seat for 30 years:

***The proposed changes appear to have no logical sense. They appear completely random, unless you are a conspiracy theorist and see that the changes will affect the most independent ward in the borough, and one that has irritated the major political parties for many years. I believe the term is gerrymandering.***

Whatever the true motives of the Boundary Commission in proposing Merton Park Ward for reduction to a 2-member ward, the inclusion of additional electors from Dundonald Ward north of Kingston Road would justify retention as a 3-member ward. Moreover, it would re-unite the two parts of the John Innes Conservation Area, a fitting legacy to his vision in creating the first garden suburb:

***We are part of the John Innes Conservation Area which is only split by Kingston Road, we should be kept together – you only have to see from all the architecture and the holly bushes how they are part of the same area.***

## **Conclusion**

I have read all 296 of your submissions to the Boundary Commission in order to compile this report. It has been a time consuming but rewarding experience which I have found to be both inspiring and humbling. Inspiring, because of the passion expressed in your deep attachment to Merton Park Ward, and humbling, because of the trust invested in us as your councillors. We have a lot to live up to!

The Boundary Commission undertakes to read all your submissions before reaching their final conclusions. Let us hope they are true to their word, and recognise the force of your arguments for Merton Park Ward to remain as you know it now, a 3-member ward, within its existing boundaries.

Thank you for all the time and effort you have put into your submissions. Taken together, they amount to a compelling tribute to the strength of our community bonds in Merton Park Ward. You can read them all (suitably redacted) at:

<https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/greater-london/greater-london/merton>

**Cllr Peter Southgate**



## **TIME ON YOUR HANDS? Part 2**

Check on the progress of the peregrine falcons now nesting on the roof of the Civic Centre, as they have done every year since 2015.

You can watch them live on YouTube:

<https://www.merton.gov.uk/peregrine-falcons-webcam>

# COVID-19 SCAMS ALERT

Sadly, some criminals are exploiting current circumstances to con people into parting with their cash, and their targets are not just the vulnerable. Amongst all the information and message sharing it is very easy to be duped into believing a message is genuine

For example, the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) has **not** yet been launched and it is unclear how HMRC will contact people. Some people have been contacted by email and others by post, while others still await contact. However, HMRC is very clear that it will never send a link nor ask you for any personal information. *You may only apply by going onto the HMRC website.* Any other method is a scam.

Similarly, The Government has sent only one text message to the public regarding new rules about staying at home to prevent the spread of COVID-19. *Any others claiming to be from UK Government are false.* The same applies to unsolicited COVID-19 messages offering tests at home. They may appear genuine, but are not. Any contact asking for personal details or financial transactions is a scam.

The top text message in both images is genuine **but** the bottom text is a scam text “spoofed” to look like it has come from Gov.UK and hence it appears with the genuine one. You should never click on links from unknown sources.

If in doubt, please check out a legitimate known website, ask for help from a trusted neighbour or friend. Any legitimate volunteer or organisation will not mind you checking up on them!

Cllr Dickie Wilkinson

## “...EVERY CHALLENGE COMES WITH RAINBOWS...” \*



I am sure you have noticed all of the lovely rainbow images dotted throughout this newsletter. Drawings of rainbows have been widely adopted as a visual window display of thanks to NHS workers, carers and other key workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

These are courtesy of children who attend [The Holistic Fitness Studios](#), (a Martial Arts school in Wimbledon) and were done as part of a window display for another local business, Turners Property on London Road (opposite the Civic Centre on the edge of Merton Park Ward).

The display was produced by your very own Independent Councillor, Dickie Wilkinson, as he works freelance for both businesses, though rest assured that, to comply with social distancing, the display was produced at night while he was alone in the office and the images were sent in by email or phone.

Do take a look at the finished window display if you go past Turners' office on your daily exercise route or visit their website [turnersproperty.com](http://turnersproperty.com) to see photos.

\*“Life throws challenges and every challenge comes with rainbows and lights to conquer it.” — Amit Ray,

Not yet a member of MPWRA? - Join at: [www.mertonpark.org.uk](http://www.mertonpark.org.uk) or email [mpwra@mertonpark.org.uk](mailto:mpwra@mertonpark.org.uk)

### MPWRA Officers

Chairman:	Hubert Child	020 8540 3087
Vice Chairman:	Bryan Anderson	
Secretary:	Christine Stutt	020 8543 6843
Treasurer:	Fred Rayner	

### MPWRA Committee

Ingrid Holtz	Krysia Williams	Greg Bryant
Graham Clark	Stephen Mercer	Pauline Southgate
Pauline Lightfoot	David Merriman	Jolanta Nowak
Ian Garbett		

### Contact MPWRA:

Website: [www.mertonpark.org.uk](http://www.mertonpark.org.uk)  
Email: [mpwra@mertonpark.org.uk](mailto:mpwra@mertonpark.org.uk)  
Telephone: 0208 540 3087