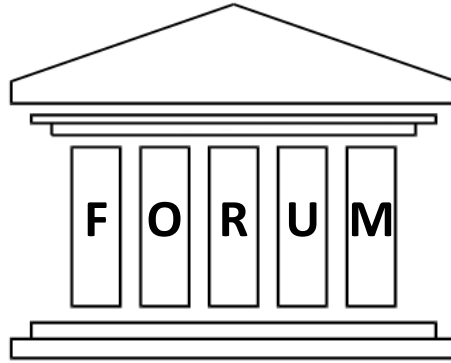


Merton Park Ward Residents' Association

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



Spring 2024

Issue 72



Excellent restoration work on St. Mary's Churchyard wall -well worth the wait!

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Letter from the Chairman:

As a resident of Merton Park Ward you have been represented on Merton Council by Independent councillors for the last 35 years. The impetus to “go independent” was due to party political predecessors who were unwilling to listen to local public opinion. A “relief road” was proposed that would have destroyed a number of the John Innes houses which give the north of the ward its distinctive character. Residents saw that the new road was not going to provide the expected relief and so they elected Independent councillors, the road was stopped, and the threatened destruction was averted.

Your new councillors found the job extremely interesting with opportunities to influence council decisions on common sense grounds without being held back by party politics. They have been supported by MPWRA, which I have been privileged to chair, for much of that 35 years. A series of very able councillors, who live in the ward, have been able to influence things for the better, spot potential problems in council decisions and try to head them off. I have been joined in supporting them by wonderful vice-chairs, officers and committee. Some, like me, have been there from the start but I am grateful that when vacancies arose, residents came forward, ready, willing and able.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my time in post but I am stepping down as Chairman at the July AGM and, true to MPWRA form, we have a volunteer to take over. Mariam Ali-Putergill is already on the committee and well known to us. The succession is, of course, subject to the democratic process at the AGM. Mariam has a young family and a job but feels taking over will fit well with her family and work patterns. She has a reputation locally for her energy and enthusiasm and I look forward to seeing MPWRA and its Independent councillors continuing as a respected and much loved institution in succeeding generations.

Hubert Child—Chairman / Tel: 0208 540 3087 / Email: hubertchild@hotmail.co.uk

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

Cllr. Edward Foley

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Cllr. Stephen Mercer

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Proposals for the Future Development of Morden Town Centre - David Merriman

The planning application to redevelop 18 - 22 Crown Lane Morden into a seven-storey hotel has continued to dominate MPWRA's attention over the last 12/18 months and detailed plans with over 100 supporting reports can be viewed on Merton's planning portal under ref: 23/P2711.

The latest draft of Merton's Local Plan was published in February. The consultation period concluded on 22nd March and some residents may already have responded to this. This draft document, of nearly 800 pages covers a wide range of policies across the whole borough. In terms of planning policies, Merton Park is embraced within the *Morden area*, which also includes Morden, Cannon Hill, St Helier, Morden Park and Lower Morden. The local plan has evolved in stages since the initial "call for sites" in 2017, through public consultations in 2018, 2019 and 2021, culminating in public hearings by planning inspectors in June and October 2022. This latest consultation is focused on the "Main Modifications" arising out of representations previously made to the inspectors.

Despite the re-naming of text within one small paragraph, from "intensifying residential development" to "optimising residential development", this still strikes to the heart of an intended policy for intensifying residential development within the town centre. This, and a newly defined core area in the centre of Morden "... as indicative location of tall building cluster where buildings of around 71m could be appropriate", further underline the degree of intensification since

71m is around 22 storeys high. For comparison, the Civic Centre is 16 storeys and elsewhere in the Morden Regeneration Zone the height guide is 39m.

Merton Council is required to meet housing targets issued by the London Mayor. These are currently 12,000 units before 2037/38, of which 2,000 units are to be provided within Morden town centre alone. The extent to which infrastructure and public services can cope with such intensification is unclear.

MPWRA has made strong representation to Merton for consideration by the planning inspectors. As we have said before, the association welcomes inward investment to Morden, but certainly not at any cost. The degree and density of development inferred by these policies, is, in the words of Cllr Stephen Mercer, "completely alien to the existing Character, Heritage and Townscape of the surrounding area".



Newly installed plaque at Dorset Hall

Progress on Step-Free Access to Morden Road Tram Stop - Edward Foley

Introduction: The quest for step-free access at the Morden Road Tram Stop has been a journey marked by determination and collaboration. Former councillor, Peter Southgate, initiated this endeavour, and in 2022 we convened at the site with Cllr Stephen Alambritis, the Merton Cabinet Member for Transport. Despite its significance, this project has faced challenges due to funding constraints and competing priorities within Transport for London (TfL).

The Challenge: Morden Road Tram Stop, a vital transportation hub, currently lacks easy step-free access. Passengers face an 800 metre walk up and over the bridge on Morden Road using steps to reach the platform—an inconvenience that affects accessibility for all passengers, particularly those who

cannot use the steps and who have to use the sloping path further on.

Behind the Scenes: Working behind the scenes with Peter Southgate we engaged key stakeholders, including Leonie Cooper, the London Assembly Member for Merton and Wandsworth, and Cllr Stephen Alambritis. Our mission: to apply pressure on TfL and advocate for step-free access.

Site Visits and Assessments: Our efforts bore fruit when TfL representatives visited the site. They witnessed firsthand the small but crucial piece of land that obstructs access to the platform direct from Dorset Road. This parcel, currently owned by the Army Cadet Hall, holds the key to improving accessibility for all passengers.

The Last Six Months and Future Decades - Stephen Mercer

What have I been doing for the last 6 months? You will recall that last autumn I submitted a report calling for improvement in the provision of public toilets. The council broadly accepted the report and in particular:

- Wrote to the Mayor of London strongly supporting the reintroduction of facilities at Morden station.
- Is in the process of relaunching the Community Toilet Scheme, hiring an officer to be responsible, starting slowly with publicly owned buildings such as libraries, medical centres, swimming pools etc.
- Are (I believe) arranging for a new toilet to be made available outside office hours at the Civic Centre, in the former Sound Lounge premises.

When the autumn edition of Forum was published I was running a petition in support of a toilet at Morden. We received 844 signatures and it was submitted to the Mayor of London for response. In response to this and other campaigns he has committed £3m per year for improved toilets on TFL; in addition he has stated that he recognises that the Northern line is particularly poorly served. However, to date no commitment has been made in relation to Morden. I have contacted the local Assembly Member, Leonie Cooper, and other candidates for Merton and Wandsworth, calling for their support; please consider doing the same if you agree that we need change.

At last a plaque was officially installed at Dorset Hall (*left*) and can be seen above the main door. It recognises the importance of Dorset Hall to the Suffragette movement and of Rose Lamartine Yates.

Recently my efforts have been looking to the future. The Merton Local Plan is about to be finalised and despite efforts by Cllr Foley, myself and previous

Future buildings in Morden town centre could tower over the Civic Centre



MPWRA councillors, the relevant parts will allow the erection of multiple buildings which will **tower over the Civic Centre!** The final draft of the Plan anticipates a cluster of buildings at the core which might extend **from 13-22 storeys**. The Plan acknowledges the need for tapering of building heights across the town centre but, if these sort of heights are permitted, even developments of only 5 or 6 storeys will be dwarfed by the buildings around them. Such destructive overdevelopment would completely change the character of the area and no high quality design expectations would be likely to produce an overall improvement.

The fight against such extremes starts with an application to build a 7 storey hotel at 18-22 Crown Lane/Windermere Avenue which will be heard imminently. However appealing the idea of a hotel might be, if approved, this could be the thin end of the wedge and lead to a disastrous bloated block of high rise buildings with inadequate infrastructure. Surely all residents of Morden and Merton Park are hoping instead for redevelopment that will set the example for excellent suburban rejuvenation? Please email me if you wish to add your voice in opposition.

Surveyors and Negotiations: In collaboration with Peter, we met with a team of surveyors. Their task was to assess the situation and determine the land required for step-free access. Engineers are crunching the numbers, calculating the precise area needed. Negotiations will follow, aiming to secure the necessary land.

Anticipating Updates: As we await news, drone photos provide a bird's-eye view of the area, highlighting the gap that must be bridged. The community eagerly anticipates an update, hopeful that soon the Morden Road Tram Stop will become more inclusive and accessible.

At our MPWRA meetings, I will continue to report on progress.



View from Dorset Road showing existing access to tram stop via Morden Road

News in Brief

- **Dorset Hall** –planning permission to re-furbish this into several self-contained flats has been rejected. A separate proposal to build additional flats on what was originally an area of stables has subsequently been withdrawn by the developer. We await further news of proposals for this site and historic building.
- **St Mary's Churchyard wall repairs**- the section of the wall that collapsed early last year has finally been rebuilt. The specialist stonemason made a very good job of it using the original bricks. Sadly, money could not be found to repair other sections in need of some repair but that are still standing.
- **The old storage area close to the Mostyn Road** end of Mostyn Gardens has now been cleared and planter boxes installed. Our thanks for this go to the Muslim Women of Morden ably led by Neaz Ahmed. We look forward to the next step in this project.
- **Daffodils**- once again we have seen a wonderful display thanks to residents' efforts. It is, however, disappointing when these are trodden on or even picked as they are there to be enjoyed by all. To ensure a similar display next year please deadhead the plants when they have died. Luckily we have been given a small further grant from the Ward Allocation Fund to plant more bulbs over the next few years.
- **Peel Road Car Park**- our thanks to Cllrs Mercer and Foley for their efforts resulting in an allocation of £390,000 from the council budget for much needed repairs.

Join us at Our Future Meetings - All Welcome

Next meeting Tuesday 7th May – 8pm Merton Park Primary School (Erridge Road)

Speaker tba Plus: Councillors' Reports and Q&A

Tea and coffee during break with biscuits and a chance to chat to your councillors and neighbours.

Tuesday 4th June – 8pm Merton Park Primary School (Erridge Road)

Speaker tba, Plus: Councillors' Reports and Q&A

Tuesday 2nd July AGM and Councillors' reports and Q&A.

August no meeting, summer break. Please see website and posters for more information.

Speakers at recent MPWRA meetings included:

- **Lucy Owen, Director of Housing and Sustainable Development**, London Borough of Merton talked about the Morden regeneration scheme and house building program. Regeneration of Morden is planned with council houses and affordable housing. This is a priority project although the timescale will be 5-10 years.
- **Sergeant Vince Green (& CSO Syed Rahman)** spoke briefly to explain the current focus of their investigations, namely, the increase in beggars in Morden Town Centre and drug issues in John Innes Park. Policing demonstrations often means they cannot be out and about locally as much as desired.
- **Barrie Causer Head of Strategic Commissioning Public Health Merton Council.** Barrie outlined the current major health issues affecting residents that include Norovirus, smoking and vaping, substance abuse and mental health. He mentioned the relatively low uptake of measles inoculation in particular where only 87% of five-year-olds have had one MMR vaccination that gives 95% protection against catching measles. Two MMR vaccinations provide 99% lifelong protection against mumps, measles, & rubella. Measles can be uncomfortable and sometimes serious, so parents are encouraged to avoid the unhelpful and incorrect information about the vaccine provided on some parts of social media.
- **Natalie Parsons, Dementia Friendly Community Co-ordinator of the Alzheimer's Society**, spoke about her role in developing greater understanding of Dementia and in promoting policies and practices to support those suffering from the condition and their families. She works at the Merton Memory Hub in Mitcham and the aim is to make Merton a dementia friendly borough.
- **Ulrike Hoeberg Head of Community Engagement, Wimbledon Foundation** who spoke about charity activities in Merton, assisted by Lauren Palmer. The charity undertakes a variety of activities to support the community helped by some funding direct from the Lawn Tennis Association. Other funding comes from a variety of sources including the re-sale of championship tickets when people leave the grounds early and from the sale of tennis balls used in championship matches. Plants used in the grounds during the championships are donated to various organisations at the end of the event and recently a large number of oak saplings from an oak tree in Wimbledon Park have been planted at various locations in Wandsworth and Merton.

MPWRA Officers

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

MPWRA Committee

Neaz Ahmed
Mariam Ali-Puttergill
Bryan Anderson
Greg Bryant
Ian Garbett
Ingrid Holtz
Stephen Johnson
Pauline Lightfoot

Contact MPWRA:

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