

Merton Park Ward Residents Association Meeting

Tuesday 7th October 2025 8pm Old Ruts Poplar Road

1.0 Welcome and introduction

The Chair Miriam Ali-Puttergill welcomed those attending and described the agenda for the meeting. Guest speakers would be Laura Howarth, Head teacher at Rutlish School and the Crown Lane Post Office campaigners. This would be followed by Reports and Question Time with Councillor Edward Foley and Councillor Stephen Mercer.

2.0 Speaker Laura Howarth, Head teacher at Rutlish School

Laura Howarth described how Rutlish School is now very full, with 1500 students and it is planned that year 7 will have 300 boys plus 300 girls at Ricard's Lodge. Based on information from the local authorities, 97% of the intake is Merton residents and all these students live within a mile and $\frac{3}{4}$ and so they are part of the local community. The school ensures that they treat the community in a respectful manner.

Laura noted that the school had had a very busy year and described recent achievements including the following.

Last year there was an Ofsted visit and the school was rated outstanding in all 5 categories.

In August the results of the GCSE's were the highest that the school has ever achieved. Also in A Levels the majority achieved the top 9-7 grades. Personal development is also given a high priority for both mental and physical health.

The school also has a distinction award for being an eco school. The pupils have helped plant daffodils in Mostyn Road in the past and is happy to volunteer to help on future local planting.

Surrey County Cricket Scholars will be at the school next year.

The school has won a grant of £ 50,000 from Wolfson that has enabled the DT machines to be upgraded. The food technology facilities have also been refurbished and there are 40 boys studying which is the highest attendance in Merton.

Students at Rutlish are very diverse with 83 languages spoken and the school has a two week diversity event.

The school is linked to the Old Rutlish Association and has a high rating for the number of sports at the school. There are very strong music and drama departments with the musical Oliver performed last year, where all performers for both the actors and orchestra were students.

The Duke of Edinburgh award scheme has over 60 participating students at Bronze level, 25 at Silver and 15 doing Gold. There is a close link with the University of Arts London. While the languages department ran over 65 trips last year. The school also has links with local history, with two former students being awarded the Victoria

Cross. Last week 240 students laid a wreath at the church to commemorate that the school was 130 years old.

Edward Foley thanked Laura for all the positive work between the school and Council to resolve any issues. In the question and answer session, Laura responded that:

- if anyone wished to help the school, then providing work experience for students or attending career days to describe how people had got their own jobs would be most valuable.
- There are plans to keep a joint 6th form with Ricards Lodge, since having a co-ed 6th form is very important
- The policy on mobile phones has been in place for many years. If a phone is not handed in then it will be taken away for the day. A second time it will be taken for a week. Students therefore spend time socialising rather than on their phones
- There are currently over 600 students going offsite to collect food. To minimize this, the school has just opened a sixth form café. Although there will still be students whose timetable involves going to and from Ricards Lodge
- The extent to which the traffic restrictions are a benefit or loss could be balanced for some schools, but the key benefit for Rutlish is that parents do not go up the one way road, which is then difficult to reverse back down

The Chair thanked Laura Howath for her interesting talk and encouraged residents to email Laura with any opportunities for the school to assist with local community activities including planting.

3.0 Crown Lane Post Office Campaigners

Lainey described the campaign to retain the Crown Lane Post Office, which had been led by the Grasmere Avenue WhatsApp Group. There are development plans to make Morden more sustainable, but these were at the cost of losing Londis, the long established post office, which acts as a community hub where the postmaster knows many local people and adds benefit to the community which goes beyond the traditional post office services.

The WhatsApp Group was mobilised in three core groups.

The Community Protest Group mobilised via social media platforms such as Next Door plus local Mums Networks. This enabled a petition to attract over 1,000 signatures. The Group also handed out flyers.

It is vital to understand the grounds for an appeal to understand the legislation that the Council has to abide by, since the grounds to object must be relevant, otherwise these objections will be ignored.

It is also important to get the Council and MPs involved and obtain local press coverage.

The Post Office is being retained for now, but the developer is likely to return to press to develop the area.

Gem described lessons learned including that:

- although many people can be upset, few are prepared to act, so it is very important to actually take action, otherwise it just becomes the same small group of people doing all the work, which can be exhausting.
- For researching the legislation, AI tools can be very useful.
- It is also important to realise that applications can be made discretely, so it is important to check the planning portal regularly, otherwise it may not be possible to react in time.
- It is also beneficial to start to mobilise on a pre-application for planning.
- It is important to create posters and photos for publicity at an early stage and add these to group chats to build momentum. It was hoped that it might be possible to obtain Article 4 protection for the post office.

The Chair congratulated them on a very successful campaign which was inspiring to hear and hoped that it would be possible to write a Forum article to describe these most effective campaigning approaches.

4.0 Councillor reports

Edward Foley reported activity on the following issues:

Lime bikes: Issues had been raised at the Council Scrutiny Meeting and within 48 hours a letter had been sent to Lime to resolve the issues. The Lime bikes are now more controlled as a result with one third of the bikes removed. Issues arose because it is possible to break the back lock of the bike and get a free ride. The noise as the broken bike is used is known as “Hackney bird song”. One morning Lime had needed to collect 48 bikes. Bikes can be reported on Fix My Street

Full Council: Edward had presented on how vital Police Stations are. The speech can be seen on Medici and was well received. It is hoped that future Council meetings can be on YouTube

AI: The Council has discussed AI and is trying to use AI to speed up processes, in particular Blue Badges and the assessment of Educational Needs,

Planning: The old Natwest sports ground is to be developed with 353 new homes and new sports facilities. Residents beside the playing fields are very upset by the proposals. While Sports England have complained about the loss of playing fields.

Remembrance Sunday Services 9th November at the Nelson and 10.30 at the Wimbledon War Memorial.

Armistice Day is Tuesday 11th November

Stephen Mercer reported that:

It is lovely to be able to see you again and speak to you in person. I am sorry that I was not able to make the last meeting. I understand that Mariam had the same problem and that there were some issues with reading out my report.

By way of a 1 minute reminder, over the summer I was working on

Trees – the sorry state of many of the newly planted ones

Transport – ebikes at Rutlish, the tram stop and school streets

Toilets

Meeting the **Morden town centre manager** and the meanwhile improvements

I also mentioned in my last report the changes to the Council **constitution**, making it more difficult for us to raise motions but easier for you to ask questions. Lastly I mentioned **politics** and the fact that Reform might have a part to play in next May's election.

Feel free to ask me more about any of those topics. However, please remember that a copy of my report and of Ed's is now held on the website with the minutes of the meeting. Thankyou to Chris Stutt who prepares them every month and to Ingrid Holtz who works with the website.

So now for a proper report!

Full Council – I shall leave Ed to cover the meeting. It was memorable for the special meeting after the main meeting, in which everyone was agreeing, but still arguing about it! There was a lot of posturing going on!

I attended the **Sustainable Communities panel** meeting and you might be interested in information we were given about the Council acting against rogue landlords. I think Merton are unique in the UK in what they have done. Not only have they imposed in parts of Mitcham a licensing system for landlords – so that every landlord has to be licensed – but in one case the landlord has failed to perform to the standards required and they have completely taken over the property and are managing it and collecting the rents. It appears that the law allows this but only in areas where there is a clear problem and they cannot impose the licensing scheme without a long consultation in the area affected, so no prospect of that in our area, at the moment.

Toilets –

At the moment I know no more about the toilets at Morden station other than what I have from the project manager. He told me that 'works are underway at Morden and due for completion late autumn 2025. We are building gender neutral and accessible toilets and access is from the ticket office, paid side. At the moment I can't take visitors to have a look as it is a tight work space and the contractors are working to a tight time frame.'

I have asked him if they are going to be ready to open before or after 19th November, which you may know is World Toilet Day. I haven't received an answer but I know

that a campaigning group of residents called More Loos for Merton will be taking photographs that day and putting them on social media – showing the toilets either open or closed!

The next Council meeting is on the same day, 19th November, so Ed and I have been considering how best to call for better toilet provision. We have decided to ask a formal question to the Cabinet member for this meeting. I have been assisting the More Loos for Merton group who have been contacting all the councillors asking for support for more funding; perhaps there will be some movement with these combined efforts.

Morden Town Centre Manager –

Since our last meeting, a new section of the Merton website has been opened, dedicated to Morden. It is called Remaking Morden – see [Remaking Morden | Merton Council](#) You can see that the Council is using this as a way of communicating ideas about the regeneration and what will be happening in the short term. I say ‘communicating’ but I did not know anything about this website until yesterday and only learnt about it after chasing the Town Centre Manager, Azra.

Daffodils –

It is planting time again and we have supported volunteers with ward funds for bulbs. This was all started by Jason Besant but is now being run by Rachel Tyler – who is due to say a few words herself this evening. (*Now rescheduled for the next meeting.*)

Mostyn Gardens –

Neaz and her team of volunteers, together with Merton Parks team, have done a great job of enhancing the former Gardeners Yard into a tranquil space. We are pushing the parks team to spend some money on the sunken garden next. The plants on the steps have been dead for ages. They have been removed to discover that the voids in the brickwork only extend down about 9”/25cm. This means that plants will always struggle. The Parks team have suggested putting capstones on instead of plants, and creating flowerbeds instead. I have some images of their thoughts. I would be grateful for the views of anyone in the meeting on the proposals.

Kendor Gardens –

I have been helping Fred Rayner putting a grant application together to use the old toilet block for something useful. (You may remember that there were proposals a few years ago to make it into a café, which did not work out.) Fred and his volunteers do not even have access to a water supply when they are working in the Gardens.

They have to carry water in. However, the application is for works to make the existing water supply available to them and make the toilet block useful for the volunteers. I am optimistic that this will be approved and it should make a big difference.

Planning –

I was asked by a resident in Cranleigh Road for help opposing an application by a neighbour. In most respects the application was for an ordinary extension to the side of a semi-detached house. However, the applicant wanted to extend at the back on both the ground floor and on the first floor.

While a first floor extension is not remarkable in areas where the housing is varied, for example with a selection of detached houses, it is not normal where houses are of uniform depth. Here are images of the back of the row of houses where I live - you can see lots of ground floor extensions but no first floor extensions.

Why does this matter? Well an obvious concern is the impact on daylight and the extent to which neighbours might become more overlooked. Here is an image showing how a property which is undeveloped could end up in a 'light tunnel' if both neighbours make 2 storey rear extensions.

You can also imagine how in a road such as mine – Grasmere Avenue – such extensions would be out of keeping with the existing built pattern of the housing. Cranleigh Road has similar uniformity to Grasmere Avenue, so the proposal was out of keeping with the existing.

I 'called-in' this application for consideration by the Planning Committee. I discussed it with MPWRA's planning team (Peter, David and Stephen) and we agreed that this needed to be raised but unfortunately would be difficult to win, due to a decision by the Planning Inspector a few years ago. The senior planning officer confirmed that this was a matter of subjective judgement of a planning issue and was appropriate for the Committee to consider; I spoke against the application in the meeting a couple of weeks ago.

Some councillors were quite dismissive of the arguments against and were questioning that this issue should have been brought before them in the first place. In that context it is not surprising that, despite the points I have raised above, the Committee decided by a substantial majority that the application should be approved.

Only 5 years ago an application to make this sort of extension 3 doors along from my house was rejected as being out of keeping with the neighbourhood. It seems now that we can expect to see many more such applications.

I hope that gives you an idea of what I have been working on. I would be happy to answer any questions.

5.0 Minutes of previous meeting

The Chair proposed that the Minutes of the previous meeting be accepted and this was unanimously agreed

6.0 Date of Next meeting

Tuesday 4th November 2025, online