



Merrow Residents' Association

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To:-

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England
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Consultation on Ward Boundaries for Guildford Borough

Submission to Boundary Commissioners: Boundary Review of Merrow Ward

Background

Merrow Ward is centred on the old village of Merrow, on the north-east border of Guildford Town. It is bounded to the north by the Guildford to Effingham Junction railway line, to the east by the National Trust estate of Clandon Park and the southern edge provides entry into the North Downs. A substantial area of Merrow, in the south-east, is comprised of two golf courses; Guildford Golf Club, the oldest golf club in Surrey, and Clandon Golf.

The main route between Guildford Town and Leatherhead (A246, Epsom Road), passes directly through Merrow and has a short-cut to the A25 as it heads to Dorking via a tight, narrow bend between St John's Church and the Horse and Groom inn. A Park & Ride facility has been provided on the Epsom Road, just to the east of the developed region of Merrow; this provides some alleviation of Guildford Town Centre traffic and congestion but does not help reduce traffic bound for Merrow itself, much of which is associated with local schools.

Merrow has a population of approximately 8,500 in 3500 households within an area of 441 hectares. There is a mix of housing types, including terraces and purpose-built flats but a predominance of detached properties. Over seventy percent of households own their accommodation either outright or with a mortgage. A council-owned estate was built in the 1950s (Bushy Hill) but since the 1980s many of these properties have passed into private ownership; social rented housing in the Ward now amounts to around 440 households. A further large estate (Merrow Park) of several hundred houses and flats was constructed in the mid-1980s between the Bushy Hill estate and Clandon Park.

There is a frequent bus service linking Merrow to Guildford Town Centre and out towards Leatherhead, some of the services looping around the two largest housing estates. The nearest rail station is just within walking distance of the western edge of Merrow but most residents would require transport - bicycle, bus or motorcar - to reach a station.

Merrow is served by three small retail centres: two of them are in close proximity to Merrow schools and one of these two lies opposite a doctor's surgery, leading to serious parking and traffic congestion problems during term-time. The third and largest retail centre lies on the main Epsom Road and includes a petrol station with grocery outlet, one restaurant and a pizza takeaway. There is a performing arts school and a collection of small industrial units

behind the shops plus an 80-lot allotment garden nearby. Parking availability for this concentration of activity is inadequate and this regularly leads to congestion and dangerous parking practices. It is understood that the performing arts school will be relocated to Woking within the next two years.

Merrow Park surgery has around 12,000 registered patients, significantly more than the population of Merrow, and so draws patients into the Ward. There is also a veterinary surgery in Epsom Road.

There are three churches in Merrow. St John's was originally built in the 12th Century whilst the Roman Catholic and Methodist churches were built more recently. A funeral director's premises is located in Epsom Road.

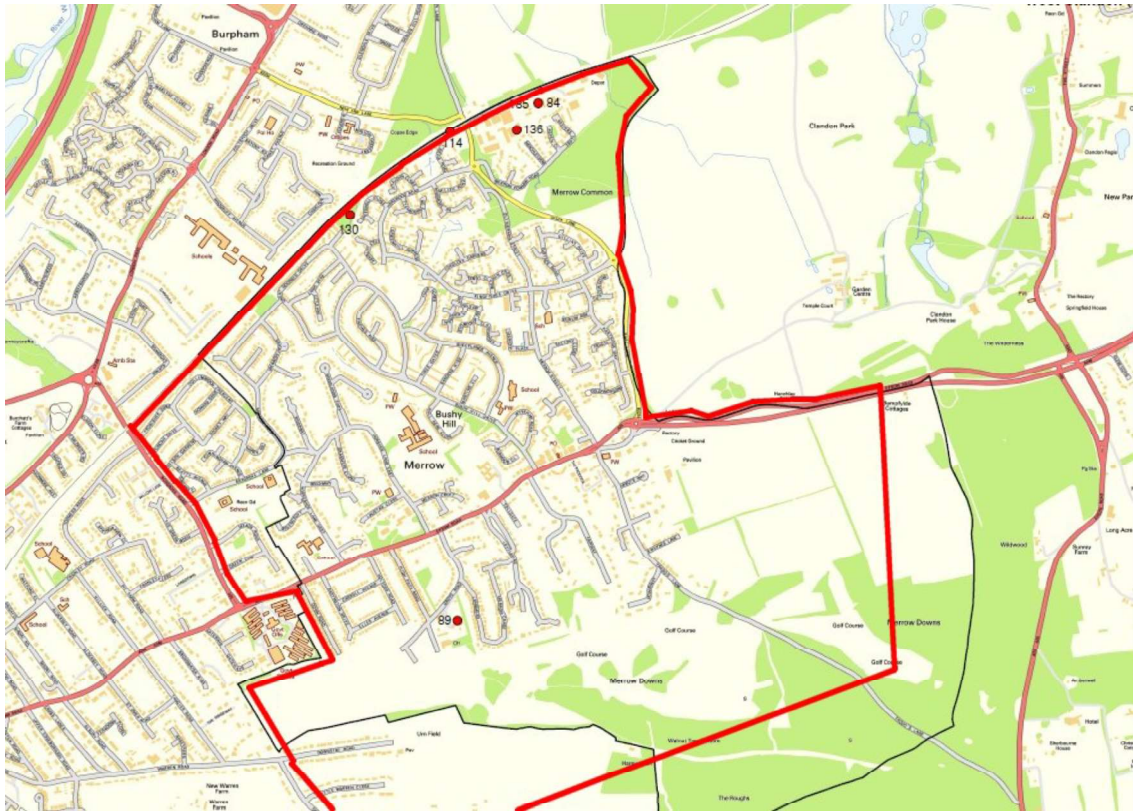
There are five schools located within Merrow, one being a large secondary faith school with 1270 pupils and there is a large comprehensive school of nearly 2000 pupils just over the Ward boundary in Burpham. Many pupils travel a considerable distance to these and other local schools by car or school-bus which causes serious congestion from both moving and parked vehicles during term-time. This problem has been exacerbated over the past decade by significant expansions of the schools without commensurate improvement to the road network or parking areas.

There is a small business park at the northeast corner of Merrow, comprising a mix of trade, light industrial and some office units. Adjacent to Merrow Business Park is a Surrey County Council depot, accommodating approximately 200 staff. Access to these sites is far from ideal, being located adjacent to a sharp bend in the road and a very narrow railway bridge.

There is one public house in Merrow, the Horse and Groom, that also serves food.

The existing ward is self sufficient as described above with the exception of a large retail food outlet- two of which are situated in Burpham.

The Merrow Residents' Association has been in existence for over 50 years and continues to provide a focus for Merrow on environmental, planning, historical and local issues and has an active membership of over 600 people. The current boundaries of the MRA can be found in the map below and a narrative description can be found on the MRA website here <https://merrowresidents.org.uk/merrow-residents-association-constitution-2>:- There is a small area within the MRA boundary that doesn't appear in the lower part of the map but where there are no homes.



Consultation

The MRA have consulted with the Cranleigh Road Residents' Association, the Boxgrove Gardens Management Committee and the Boxgrove Park Residents' Association all of which are in the Christchurch Ward.

Discussion

There has been some limited development in the existing Merrow ward in the last ten years- namely Greencroft, the garden of Tretower House, the old outdated care home now called Wellington Grove, land adjacent to Merrow Chase and the Old School in Down Road and Downs Drive. In addition there has been some limited infilling and conversion of gardens into new sites. All of this may have increased the number of homes in the existing Ward by 50 or so in the last 10 years. However there has been a significant development of the old Defra site on Epsom Road comprising 200 homes- now called Boxgrove Gardens in Christchurch ward.

There are no substantial sites for development in Merrow identified in the Guildford borough Local Plan: strategy and sites which covers the period 2015-2034.

However a large development is proposed between Burpham and West Clandon at Gosden Hill Farm this site having been taken out of the Green Belt in the Guildford Local Plan (Policy A25). No planning application has as yet been lodged for this site but the development does raise concerns for Merrow as it would increase traffic going through Merrow as the development will have approximately 1800 homes, two schools, a new Park and Ride and may also involve a new railway station on the London line.

It is clear from this chart that not only is the population per councillor in Merrow lower than the Guildford average but this will significantly worsen by 2026

Ward Electorate & Population

Ward Code	Ward Name	No of Councillors	Electorate 2020	Electorate / Councillor 2020	Variance from Guildford Av 2020	Electorate 2026	Electorate / Councillor 2026	Variance from Guildford Av 2026	2019 Est Population All Ages	2019 Residents / Councillor
E05007289	Burpham	2	4,323	2,162	0%	4532	2,266	-6%	5,993	2,997
E05007290	Christchurch	2	4,418	2,209	3%	4932	2,466	2%	5,989	2,995
E05007291	Clandon and Horsley	3	7,035	2,345	9%	7706	2,569	6%	8,978	2,993
E05007294	Holy Trinity	3	6,220	2,073	-4%	6548	2,183	-10%	8,599	2,866
E05007296	Merrow	3	6,182	2,061	-4%	6385	2,128	-12%	8,451	2,817
E05007305	Tillingbourne	2	4,485	2,243	4%	4672	2,336	-4%	5,705	2,853
Notes: Average Guildford Ward electorate 2020 = 2151 Projected average Guildford Ward electorate 2026 = 2422										

It is also clear that there has been a modest increase in the population in Guildford in recent years. This increase will be exacerbated by the new developments proposed in the Guildford borough Local Plan which allows for an increase of at least 10,678 new homes in the period up to 2034.

The area covered by the MRA- described above- is quite distinct being demarcated by the open park land to the East (Clandon Park), the railway line to the North, Merrow Downs to the South and the Boxgove Road (A25) to the West. In earlier days the parish of Merrow extended into Burpham and Christchurch. The area covered by the MRA includes all essential services except for a large supermarket- two of which can be found in Burpham.

It could be argued that since no large developments are proposed for Merrow in the next 15 years that there is no need for 3 ward councillors. As an Association we keep in close touch with our ward councillors who, we are advised, are not short of work. Indeed we believe the contrary to be the case judging by the number of ward issues that the MRA finds it necessary to discuss with them. In addition we are mindful of the development of Gosden Hill Farm that lies between Burpham and West Clandon that will have a material impact on Merrow in the next 10 to 15 years and on that basis we argue that the Merrow ward should retain the same number of councillors as it has now to look after our interests.

We have considered whether the Merrow Ward should be reduced in size but have discounted that option as we can find no reasonable and convincing argument to support it as the Merrow Ward has served its purpose very well over the last 10 years and since Merrow is a very discrete and well defined area we suggest that there is a strong argument for it to be expanded. It is clear to us that Merrow is now very separate from Burpham and also from the facilities in Christchurch.

The MRA are suggesting that the new ward boundary should follow the boundary of the Association's boundary but in addition that Boxgrove Gardens becomes part of the Merrow Ward. This would ensure that homes to the East of Boxgrove Road which are currently in an enclave would move into the Merrow Ward that currently are in Christchurch Ward although this suggestion is not supported by the Boxgrove Park Residents' Association. The MRA has reviewed its own boundaries from time to time and specifically has considered whether the Association should cover Boxgrove Gardens as it has no residents' association of its own. That discussion is ongoing with the Boxgrove Gardens Management Committee at this time.

Conclusion

We have considered and addressed the criteria of electoral equality, community identify and convenience for local government and have concluded that there are good and sound arguments for the Merrow Ward to be expanded as a result of this Boundary Review. On that basis we put forward the suggestion that the Merrow Ward boundary should be aligned with the Merrow Residents' Association boundary, with the inclusion of Boxgrove, and that in addition that consideration could be given to the addition of Boxgrove Gardens.

4th April 2021