Community spirit
How the council and the community are supporting our most vulnerable residents

Shop local, shop safe
Back the borough’s businesses
As the country takes its first slow steps towards recovery from the coronavirus wave, so too does the council and the people, families and businesses of this great borough. This pandemic has resulted in families being torn apart, children going without formal education, job losses and financial hardship. And it continues to take its toll. My heart goes out to those who have lost loved ones or have suffered.

Now begins the process of building back up again, and building back better. The response of us all – voluntary services, charities, workplaces, friends, neighbours and the council – in the face of Covid-19’s best efforts to wrong-foot our community, has been immense. We have so much good to build on: we’ve found new ways of working together and supporting each other through a time of crisis.

Make no mistake – the road to recovery will be long. The huge financial impact means the council will have to make some very difficult decisions in the near future in order to continue serving all the people of Merton as best we can, particularly those who are most vulnerable.

But we are already seeing improvements in the way our streets function, with more room for cyclists and pedestrians, making it safer for the borough’s children and improving the air quality. We are seeing better ways of working with our partners across the borough to make sure all our communities are heard. And we are seeing a determination that Merton continues to be a great place for families, with AFC Wimbledon on schedule to be back home for the autumn, and completion of Harris Wimbledon School a bit later in the year.

As ever, I want to give my thanks to you all for your spirit, resilience and patience. Together we can build back better this great borough we call home.

Councillor Stephen Alambritis
Leader of Merton Council

Councillor Stephen Alambritis has been appointed to serve on the board of London Sport for an initial term of three years. Merton council’s leader was one of seven new trustees to join London Sport over the summer. He was appointed by the organisation’s funding partner, London Councils.

The new recruits were selected to bring a wide range of experience and specialist knowledge to enhance London Sport’s connections with sporting groups and diverse communities across the capital.

Alongside Cllr Alambritis on the board is Sally Benatar, the South West Command Leader for the Metropolitan Police, which covers Merton.

Welcoming Cllr Alambritis and the other new trustees to the board, Jillian Moore, Chair of London Sport, said: “In light of the current situation, it is more important than ever that we are not spectators, and we continue to make the case for the value of physical activity and sport in London. I am confident that our new trustees will, alongside our existing board and the whole team at London Sport, play an important role in supporting these efforts, and helping achieve our vision of making London the most physically active city in the world.”
Walking and cycling
Promoting active and healthy travel

Working together
Partnership working to support communities

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proud to be a Fairtrade borough

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Marking Windrush Day

Once again, the council joined forces with the Merton West Indian Family Friends Association (WIFFA) in a successful bid to fund activities for Windrush Day. Due to the pandemic, events around the day in June to celebrate the achievements of the Black Caribbean community went virtual. School pupils and those at home were engaged with some creative fun activities including art, music, history and cooking.

Children were also encouraged to create kite-shaped artworks to put in their windows to pay tribute to the huge contribution members of the Black Caribbean community have made to frontline services. The council is continuing to work with WIFFA, Merton Heritage Centre and schools on the projects developed for Windrush Day.

More training opportunities for residents affected by Covid-19

Merton Council has successfully bid for funding from the Greater London Authority, totalling almost £360,000. This will be used to deliver more online and face to face adult education courses over the next two years.

More than 900 extra places on adult learning courses are being created and offered to residents who have been most disadvantaged by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Residents who have been furloughed or made redundant as a result of the pandemic will be able to update their skills or learn new ones as they seek alternative employment.

Those who have been shielding during lockdown with limited or no access to IT will also be able to sign up for courses on IT skills or digital training. Some of the funding will also be used to invest in computer equipment that can be loaned to residents who may not have the resources to access otherwise.

Some of the extra course places will benefit the residents in the east of the borough who were already on waiting lists to enrol for training in core subjects, including maths and English. There is a Learn English Together project, for residents whose first language is not English and tailored courses for people with a disability or a learning impairment.

Enrolment is open for many of the courses, which will begin later in September.

Don’t lose your right to vote

All residents are being contacted by post, email or SMS messaging to check if their electoral registration details are up to date. The annual canvass began in July and also encourages residents to register to vote, if they have not already done so. Residents are being asked to respond promptly to prevent the need for home visits from council staff. Elections for the Mayor of London and the London Assembly are due to take place in May.

Milestone for borough’s walking routes

Campaigners are celebrating the first footpath in Merton to be officially recognised as a Public Right of Way since 1974. The pathway, off Rockwood Avenue, runs to the borough boundary with Kingston in Blagdown Road. The council, which is keen to promote walking, has been working over the last decade to get evidence to secure Public Right of Way status for a number of footpaths across the borough. The pathway off Rockwood Avenue is the first to have progressed through the legal process involved.

All local authorities are required to maintain a list of Public Right of Ways to protect them from being built over, or closed by the freeholders of the land they cross. Merton’s map and definitive statement on the routes were last formally updated in 1974.
Have your say on proposals for emissions-based parking charges

Residents and visitors to Merton are being asked for their views on proposals for a new parking charging system, which aims to reduce pollution and improve the borough’s air quality.

A public consultation on the council’s proposals to introduce an emissions-based system for parking charges and residents’ permits will be launched this month.

The initiative aims to reduce harmful emissions by encouraging drivers to give up their vehicles and enjoy the health benefits of making more active journeys by bike and on foot. If a vehicle is required, this should produce as little pollution as possible.

Thousands of Londoners die a premature death each year from the toxic fumes from vehicles, which are especially bad for children’s health.

The proposals are part of the council’s air quality action plan and follows its Climate Change Emergency pledge to reduce carbon emissions.

Parking charges would be reduced or increased, depending on how much carbon dioxide, nitrogen oxide and harmful particle matter that a vehicle emits. This would be based on the Ultra-Low Emission model used by Transport for London, which charges for the use of older, more polluting diesel-fuelled vehicles.

In March, a report was submitted to the council’s cabinet, who approved the proposal for emission-based parking charges, subject to the results of this public consultation, which runs from 7 September until 19 October.

To sign up, visit www.keepbritaintidy.org
To request litter pickers, gloves or more information, please email environmental.development@merton.gov.uk

Students receive exam results

Thousands of students across Merton received their A Level, GCSE and other course results in August, the culmination of many months’ hard work from both them and their teachers during a tumultuous academic year.

With this summer’s exams cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the final marks for this year’s courses were based on teacher assessed grades, unless the moderated grade given by the exam board was higher.

Because of the way the grades have been determined, we are unable to report borough-wide results, but schools and colleges across the borough have had some great successes. Well done to all students, their teachers, and other school staff for their hard work in exceptionally difficult times.
One of the most damaging effects of the pandemic for local families has been its financial impact. For many, it is now a struggle to afford an adequate and nutritious diet.

However, Merton’s Community Fridge continues to offer fresh, healthy food. Each week, volunteers hand out free food parcels to eligible residents at Morden Baptist Church, Grasmere Avenue, on Thursday afternoons from 2–4pm.

Merton’s Community Fridge was conceived by Sustainable Merton, Merton’s leading environmental charity, before the Covid-19 crisis, to help find a long-term solution to food poverty and reduce food waste.

During the lockdown, part of the council’s emergency response was to provide food for hundreds of people, including residents unable to shop as they were required to shield. Sustainable Merton’s Community Champions, a 70-strong group of residents passionate about improving the environment, played a key role in establishing Merton’s Community Fridge. They worked tirelessly to get food to people and continue to keep the lifeline going. Thanks to the time they have given, in May and June alone, Sustainable Merton distributed over 1,700 kg of food and provided food assistance to almost 50 families.

During the lockdown, Merton Council, in partnership with Merton College and Sustainable Merton, led on the co-ordination of a rapidly-established network of local organisations working together to tackle the Covid-19 food crisis. A central food distribution hub was set up at Merton College, Morden, which has bulk storage facilities. Food was brought to the hub, staffed by Merton Council employees, by the London Food Alliance and came from surplus stock, donated by wholesalers, manufacturers, restaurants and supermarkets.

A range of groups distributed food, including Sustainable Merton, Wimbledon Foodbank, The Wimbledon Guild, the Dons Local Action Group, Kommunity Kitchen, the Salvation Army, Commonsides Development Trust, Friends in St Helier, the Polish Family Association, as well as Tooting and Mitcham Football Club.

If you want to volunteer, receive a food parcel, or donate fresh food, visit www.sustainablemerton.org or email communityfridge@sustainablemerton.org.

Help at hand for those impacted by Covid-19

The Covid-19 Merton Community Response Hub is still running and is offering support for vulnerable residents in Merton. Get in touch if you or someone you know needs help with the following:

- Delivery of shopping or basic supplies
- Advice on how to stay active
- Prescription or medication collection
- Support to stay independent at home
- Telephone befriending

The hub, which was set up in partnership with the council, is now jointly run by Merton Voluntary Service Council, Age UK Merton and Wimbledon Guild. For support, email help@mvsc.co.uk or call 020 8685 2272 on Mondays–Fridays between 10am–4pm.
Merton Council has written to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care asking him to reject proposals to downgrade St Helier Hospital by closing acute services, including the accident and emergency department and consultant-led maternity care.

The council’s Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel voted at their meeting on 21 July to ‘call in’ a decision by the NHS which chose Belmont in the south of Sutton as the preferred location for a specialist emergency hospital, instead of St Helier, which was the council’s preferred option. If the NHS decision is upheld, St Helier would be downgraded.

The council is challenging this on the grounds that this would mean moving vital health services further away from deprived areas, where health needs are greatest, and into a more affluent neighbourhood, where residents have much longer life expectancy due to their good health. The council warns this could lead to patients overwhelming emergency care at St George’s Hospital in Tooting, which is geographically closer to many Merton residents than Belmont, or deciding not to seek hospital treatment at all.

In the call-in letter to the Secretary of State, the council also argues that the impact of Covid-19 has not properly been taken into account and it is still too early to tell what effect the pandemic will have on planning future health services for the area. Last month the council leader wrote to the Chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission asking him to investigate the proposed decision to downgrade St Helier Hospital, because it believes that the effect of doing this would be to disadvantage the most deprived residents in the hospital catchment area. The leader is concerned that the full adverse impact on black and minority ethnic communities has not been properly taken into account.

The council is worried downgrading St Helier would reverse all its efforts to bridge the gap between residents who suffer poor health and those with a long life expectancy.

A similar proposal to downgrade services at St Helier was reversed by ministers following a call-in by Merton Council in 2005. Following that, plans were announced in 2010 for a £219m upgrade of St Helier, but the process opened up again after funding was withdrawn by the new Government in 2012.
LET’S GET BACK TO THE THINGS WE LOVE

LET’S GET TESTED

FEELING UNWELL? CALL 119
GET A FREE TEST NOW

merton.gov.uk/coronavirus
Merton's outbreak control plan

The council has published its local outbreak control plan to keep everyone in Merton safe. It focuses on how we will work to reduce the spread of Covid-19, especially in high risk settings and among vulnerable communities.

Covid Fit

We are encouraging everyone to be ‘Covid Fit’ to improve their health and reduce the risk of severe Covid-19. There are many lifestyle changes that you can make, such as eating healthily, being more active, decreasing your alcohol intake and stopping smoking. You can get more information and free support from One You Merton at www.oneyoumerton.org or by calling 020 8973 3545.

Getting your flu vaccine this year is also really important to help minimise your risk of ill health, as evidence suggests a double infection with coronavirus and flu can lead to more serious health complications. Many people are entitled to a free flu vaccine on the NHS, check to see if you’re eligible: nhs.uk/flu.

It is also important to look after our mental health during this time. Merton Uplift is a free service for anyone in Merton experiencing difficulties and symptoms related to stress, anxiety and depression and are offering assessment and treatment appointments via telephone or Skype. Contact Merton Uplift on 020 3513 3888 or visit their website at www.mertonuplift.nhs.uk. You can also access Good Thinking; a free digital resource which provides lots of tips and tools to help your mental health, visit www.good-thinking.uk

Get a free NHS test

Do not wait – as soon as you get any symptoms of Covid-19, apply for a test online by visiting www.gov.uk/coronavirus, or by calling 119 immediately. The main symptoms are a high temperature, a new continuous cough and a loss of or change to your sense of smell or taste.

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Merton Giving launched its fundraising response to the Covid-19 crisis on 19 March and its emergency fund was open for applications by 6 April. The fund opened with £150,000, thanks to £20,000 raised from the business community, and donations from Merton Council, Wimbledon Foundation and Clarion Futures, Clarion Housing Group’s charitable foundation, and Moat Housing. By the end of June, this swelled to £175,000, thanks to the generosity of supporters who backed the fundraising appeal.

It originated as Merton Giving, a charitable partnership between Merton Chamber of Commerce and Merton Voluntary Service Council, supported by Merton Council, which launched in 2018 to encourage local giving to help support charities.

With so many local charities facing a loss of income because of lockdown, Merton Giving rapidly set up the emergency fund to help the borough’s small, non-profit making groups adapt to the challenges the pandemic brought, and continue their work to support the residents who rely on them.

The dedicated initiative, with a big vision to promote local giving and address inequalities, is now more important than ever to ensure the borough’s vital community and voluntary groups survive.

In the three months up until the end of July, Merton Giving was able to distribute emergency funding totalling £170,730 to 64 local organisations. Groups which support Merton’s diverse BAME communities, and projects to support families and young people, residents with disabilities and those with mental health, drug or alcohol issues, were among the beneficiaries.

The fund also gave financial support to a range of groups who worked tirelessly to support those most vulnerable to the impacts of Covid-19. These included Friends in St Helier, which supported residents with providing meals, shopping and telephone calls, in addition to the Dons Local Action Group, which delivered food parcels and provided IT equipment for children who needed it for their schoolwork.

During the lockdown, Merton Giving supporters took on the #TwoPointSixChallenge, held instead of the London Marathon, to help support charities. Residents from across Merton ran, jogged, rowed, cycled and undertook a host of other physical challenges such as press ups, squats and golf skills to help boost the fund. The big community effort raised more than £8,300 for Merton Giving Coronavirus Fund.

Ivor Heller, AFC Wimbledon’s commercial director and steering committee member, shaved both his beard and his head for the cause.

A four-strong team from Merton Chamber of Commerce, including Caroline Cook, undertook a running and cycling challenge. Merton Giving steering committee member, Barry Causer, completed a 26km row and GP Mohan Sekeram ran the same distance. Inspired by the challenge, resident Usaama Kaweesa took on an individual fundraising challenge by running 30km over three days to celebrate his 30th birthday.

My Merton finds out more about Merton Giving’s ongoing work and its supporters.

find out more
www.mertonchamber.co.uk/connecting/merton-giving. To make donations, visit: justgiving.com/mvsc
Rebuilding the bridge

Construction of a new bridge at this historic crossing point over the River Wandle is set to begin later this year, enabling a key route through Merton to reopen, with enhanced cycle provision.

An artist’s impression of how a new bridge over the River Wandle could look, has been published. A planning application has been submitted to replace the bridge over Bishopsford Road in Mitcham, which had to be demolished for safety reasons after partially collapsing following heavy rainfall in June last year.

The planning application is due to go before the council’s planning committee next month. If planning permission is granted, a contractor to build the bridge will be appointed in the autumn with a provisional start date of November. The new bridge is expected to be built and open in the middle of next year.

The council wants to thank residents and businesses for their continued patience as work progresses. Replacing the bridge is particularly complex because it contributes to river flow and has a range of utilities running through its structure, including gas pipes and broadband cabling. The council had to work closely with gas, electricity, water and broadband providers, as well as the Environment Agency, to reduce the risk of flooding and to enhance ecology.

Due to the structural damage, the demolition work earlier this year had to be carried out by a specialist engineering company.

While work was underway on site, the council held an online survey, asking residents, businesses and community organisations for their initial feedback on design options for the new bridge. This received more than 250 responses, which have helped to shape the plans. Respondents to the survey highlighted encouraging cycling and walking as priorities within the new design. As a result of the consultation feedback, the new design shows the bridge being widened to include a cycle lane on the northbound side and a shared pavement and cycle lane going southbound.

The structure of the new bridge has been designed to carry modern transport, including lorries, across the river. When the last bridge was built, in the 18th century, it was mainly used by horses and carts, pedestrians and animals. The Mitcham Parish Boundary marker, dated 1882, from the bridge has been salvaged and will be replaced in the same place on the new bridge.

This location has been a crossing point over the River Wandle since the Middle Ages. It lies within the Wandle Valley historic conservation area and is also in an archaeological priority area. The new design will open up views from the bridge towards Ravensbury Park and help to promote biodiversity in the river and on its banks, which border Watermeads Nature Reserve.

Find out more
merton.gov.uk/bishopsfordbridge
Enjoying walking and cycling in Merton

Promoting sustainable ways of travel has been a long-term priority for Merton Council. With the need for everyone to travel safely to prevent the spread of Covid-19, an increasing number of journeys are being taken by foot and bike. *My Merton* looks at the council’s ongoing work to promote walking and cycling.

Many residents discovered the joys of cycling and walking more during the lockdown, when the roads had less traffic. With the ongoing need to avoid crowding on public transport and to maintain a safe social distance to control the spread of Covid-19, cycling and walking are increasingly more appealing ways to travel.

Not only is going on foot or by bike an efficient way to travel, especially for shorter journeys, which are the majority of those taken around the borough, it is also a great way to get fit and healthy.

The council published its *Active and Healthy Travel Plan in Response to Covid-19* in June, as part of work to help the borough recover safely from the impact of the pandemic and secure long-term environmental and health benefits. The key aim of the plan was to avoid a huge rise in car driving as businesses and facilities reopened, which could have led to gridlock and increased air pollution, due to the dangerous emissions which vehicles produce. Emergency works were carried out across the borough to introduce pop-up cycle lanes and widen pavements into road space to make walking safer, particularly in busy town centres and shopping areas. Further works included the creation of more cycle storage by stations and transport hubs.

The council also drew up longer-term plans to support a major shift towards roads being used for cycling and walking, which formed the basis of funding bids to the Department for Transport and Transport for London. Hundreds of residents and groups from across the borough contributed ideas to the plan, and the views expressed showed significant support for low-traffic streets.

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport, Councillor Martin Whelton, said: “We would like to thank all the residents, groups and organisations who contributed feedback on our transport plans. We received over 300 suggestions, which helped shape plans for our emergency works and funding bids to take account of unprecedented demand for walking and cycling.”

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**Funding priorities**

- To speedily build a strategic cycling network
- To speedily build town centres, so local journeys can be safely walked and cycled
- To reduce traffic on residential streets and create low-traffic routes

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*Feature* Active and healthy travel

Enjoying walking and cycling in Merton

Promoting sustainable ways of travel has been a long-term priority for Merton Council. With the need for everyone to travel safely to prevent the spread of Covid-19, an increasing number of journeys are being taken by foot and bike. *My Merton* looks at the council’s ongoing work to promote walking and cycling.
The council is encouraging more families to ditch the car and walk or cycle on their school runs. To support more active, healthy journeys, the council is looking to expand the School Streets programme and it has secured funding for 28 schemes across the borough. Roads in School Streets areas can only be used by cyclists or pedestrians at school dropping off and picking up times. Children and babies are particularly vulnerable to the harmful effects of pollution from the exhausts of cars and other vehicles, so it is of vital importance that air quality is improved around school gates.

Walking and cycling around the borough is also a great way to enjoy Merton’s attractions, including its parks and heritage gems. There is a wealth of cycling and walking routes throughout the borough that enable residents to travel away from congested main roads. One popular route for cyclists and walkers is the attractive 1.2km stretch between Raynes Park Recreation Ground and New Malden Railway Station. The green route, which provides a traffic-free journey between Merton and Kingston, has been described by national cycling charity Sustrans as a ‘jewel in the crown’ of the Go-Cycle network. The Wandle Trail, which follows the River Wandle, provides a great way to see some of the borough’s heritage attractions, including Morden Hall Park and Merton Abbey Mills.

Travelling around by foot or bike is also a great way for everyone to improve their general fitness and wellbeing. The Merton Mile, a signposted route around Figgles Marsh, offers a fun way for residents of all ages to enjoy a daily mile challenge. Cyclists can also check out the CycleStreets journey planner to find out about route options and see the amount of calories they could burn.

The Merton Walk 4Life programme offers regular, healthy, free guided walks through parks and open spaces, which are suitable for people of all abilities.

**Enjoying active and healthy journeys**

**Nervous about cycling?**
Try a free one-to-one cycling session for those who live, work or study in the borough. Adults can take part in group sessions on Saturdays, and bikes can be provided if needed. Find out more: [www.cyclinginstructor.com](http://www.cyclinginstructor.com)

**Top tips for safer cycling**
Cycling charity Bikeability has developed some online resources with tips on safe cycling. Find out more: [bikeability.org.uk/cycle-more](http://bikeability.org.uk/cycle-more)

Transport for London has launched online cycle skills courses, including one on how to cycle in a group with children: [tfl.gov.uk/modes/cycling/cycle-skills](http://tfl.gov.uk/modes/cycling/cycle-skills)

**Free bike maintenance**
The council’s partners, Dr Bike, are offering free maintenance sessions outside Wimbledon station throughout September. Find out more: [merton.gov.uk/cycling](http://merton.gov.uk/cycling)

**Safer cycling routes**
To find out about the borough’s cycle routes, from segregated lanes to Quietways routes through less busy roads, visit: [merton.gov.uk/cycling](http://merton.gov.uk/cycling)

**Try Before You Bike**
The council is working with Peddle My Wheels to offer pedal and electric bikes from £20 per month. There is also the option to buy bikes after trying them, with monthly payment options. Visit: [www.peddlemywheels.com/try-before-you-bike](http://www.peddlemywheels.com/try-before-you-bike)
EU citizens
Merton residents

Supporting our EU citizens to apply for settled status
merton.gov.uk/euss
Merton’s Adult Social Care team have been working on the front line helping vulnerable people throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. They have found new ways of working and use a range of technologies to keep people in touch with their families. They have also continued providing hands-on care and support in people’s homes or in residential settings. *My Merton* caught up with one of our front line staff, Shane Bungaroo.

Shane is a care co-ordinator at Meadowsweet Close, a registered care home for six people who have a learning disability, which is run by Merton Council. He told *My Merton*: “Working during Covid-19 was very daunting, as we were all aware of the risks posed by the disease.”

Merton Council followed Government guidelines and closed all of its homes and supported living accommodation to visitors early on, as the crisis unfolded, to protect residents from infection. This, along with restrictions on trips outside the home, was challenging for many people including those living at Meadowsweet. Residents also had to get used to staff wearing personal protective equipment at all times to keep them safe.

Shane said: “It was really hard for the residents, as all their routines and activities, which are so important to them, just suddenly stopped, and many couldn’t understand why. Also their family and friends couldn’t visit, which added to their sense of isolation.”

Along with staff across Adult Social Care, the Meadowsweet team have used different resources such as Skype, FaceTime and Zoom to enable residents to keep in touch with family and friends. As the local area gradually reopens, these methods of communicating will continue and staff are also finding new things to do with clients outside of the home to replace activities which can’t reopen or are still considered to be risky.

Shane stresses that, although his role includes supporting people’s physical care needs, it is also importantly about supporting them to be as active and independent as possible. He said: “It’s all about supporting people in their day to day activities to lead as independent life as possible – this can vary from helping with banking, visits to the shop or accompanying them on special trips. Our work is to support our residents and empower them to make their own decisions about where they would like to go and what they would like to eat. It is so wonderful to see the people we support blossom over the years with the help of staff and their families.”

For Shane, working for 18 years to provide care and support for Merton’s residents with learning disabilities has brought great rewards.

He said: “I have found it very rewarding work, as you feel like you really are making a difference to people’s lives. I have worked with adults with learning disabilities for many years and have built up good working relationships. As a support worker, you are by a resident’s side for all of life’s ups and downs, from attending funerals of their loved ones to joyous holidays. We have lots of memories to share.

“The pandemic did shine a light on the important role of care workers, and I hope this is not forgotten, but we can see from the results that we are doing good work.”

**find out more**

If you are interested in a career in adult social care, please visit: merton.gov.uk/jobs-and-careers/join-our-social-care-team
The past six months have been incredibly testing times for Merton’s businesses. The financial losses during lockdown and the challenges of reopening while observing the guidelines to keep everyone safe from the spread of Covid-19, have threatened the livelihoods of many residents across Merton.

Merton is a business-friendly council and has always recognised how important a vibrant local economy is to the success of the borough. This is why we launched our Shop local – shop safe campaign to support businesses as they reopened over the summer.

Merton has around 6,000 businesses of varying sizes, but more are small, independently-run enterprises, which now rely on local support more than ever. Many local businesses rapidly adapted to take orders online, during the lockdown, and delivered essential supplies and some welcome treats. This is great news for residents who might be housebound for medical reasons, as many businesses are continuing to offer online services.

The council has set up a Shop local – shop safe webpage to help promote Merton’s businesses and direct residents to the platforms on which many local businesses trade online. A great way to find out what some of your local favourite businesses and services are offering online is to visit: merton.gov.uk/shop-local

A huge benefit of everyone shopping locally and using local services is that more trips can be made by foot or bicycle. The council is working with residents to make it easier and safer for more people to cycle and walk around the borough. Emergency works were carried out across the borough to introduce pop-up cycle lanes and widen pavements to enable social distancing to be maintained, as businesses re-opened. Read more about the council’s ongoing sustainable transport plans on pages 12 and 13.

Safety in shops
Concerned about health and safety in shops? Contact Merton’s Regulatory Service Partnership RSP@merton.gov.uk and the team will investigate and advise the business.

Financial support
Merton has been praised by ministers for being in the top three London councils for getting support to businesses quickly. By the end of May local firms had received £27m. Merton later secured a further £1.3m from the Government, which has also now been distributed, with a priority on supporting businesses working with vulnerable people to help ‘bridge the gap’.

Guidance and support for businesses
Check out the council’s website for updates on business support by visiting: news.merton.gov.uk/covid19/#businesshelp

For Government business support, visit: www.gov.uk/coronavirus/business-support

For updated business community news, visit: www.mertonchamber.co.uk/covid19
Keeping customers and staff safe was a key priority for the council as businesses gradually reopened following the lockdown. The council has a duty to ensure businesses trade in the safest possible way to protect the health of residents.

Officers from the council’s Regulatory Services Partnership visited businesses and shopping areas across the borough to help them carry out risk assessments and get the right safety procedures in place, to control the spread of Covid-19 infections.

The advice given by the officers covered the implementation of one-way systems and queuing in shops in line with social distancing guidelines, hygiene and enhanced cleaning regimes, hand-cleaning facilities and equipment, such as plastic screens, visors and masks. In many premises there were also other factors to consider such as ventilation systems.

Robin Ramen, Food and Safety Team Manager, said: “We were extremely busy visiting businesses across the borough to give them advice and support on introducing the right safety measures and working practices to keep their staff and customers safe. It was important to the businesses’ success that customers felt confident that they were safe places to visit. It was also about protecting staff who could be spending seven or eight hours a day in premises.”

The team also worked with a lot of high-risk businesses whose work involves close personal contact, such as hairdressers and beauticians, to give specialist and tailored advice. In addition to visiting premises, officers also held online webinars via Merton Chamber of Commerce’sReach Out and Connect initiative to support businesses.

Paul Miloseki-Reid, Principal Trading Standards Officer, said: “We talked to a lot of business owners and staff about the Government advice. It was very challenging for lots of the smaller businesses who had to suddenly get to grips with stringent guidelines for safe ways of working. There was just so much for them to consider.”

Webinars were also held by the council to give comprehensive advice and help businesses comply with the specialist guidelines for sectors, including pubs and restaurants, nail bars, gyms and leisure services, offices and tradespeople who visit homes.

Paul said: “Our job is not just about enforcing regulations – we want to support businesses so they can be successful in these new times. It has been difficult, especially for smaller businesses, and so our message is: we are here to help. We want them to feel comfortable to come and talk to us to find solutions for any safe working issues.”

For information on webinars offered, visit: www.mertonchamber.co.uk/events.
Back to school

This month has seen the borough’s schools welcoming their pupils back for the start of a new school year. My Merton looks at the steps that are being taken to keep schools safe and happy for all their children.

For the majority of children and families, it will be the first time they have returned to school since lockdown began in March, and so, understandably, there will be a wide mix of emotions.

Some children will be hugely excited to be able to spend more time with their friends and to resume their studies, whereas others will feel anxiety and nervousness about the return to classroom routines. However, all schools have been working hard to put protective measures in place to minimise the risk of the spread of Covid-19.

From the beginning of the autumn term, school attendance will be compulsory once again.

It is now considered vital for all children to return to school to ensure there is no long-term impact on their education, personal development and wellbeing. Schools are a key point of contact for public health and safeguarding services, particularly for vulnerable children or those from less-well off neighbourhoods. And, of course, they are where we make friends and get on in life.

The safety of pupils, teachers and staff is paramount, which is why all schools have undertaken a risk assessment and introduced safety measures.

The Government has issued clear guidance on the measures that will be in place to create safer school environments. However, the guidance is not a ‘one-size-fits-all’ and each school will meet the needs of their circumstances and the communities they serve.

A key principle all schools must follow is that children and staff do not attend school if they have symptoms of Covid-19. In the event of a child or member of staff testing positive for Covid-19, schools will work closely with the borough’s health protection team. The team will work to swiftly establish who the infected person has been in close contact with and advise them to self-isolate for 14 days.

All schools are also required to minimise unnecessary contact and maintain social distancing where possible. In many schools ‘bubbles’ of children and staff have been created to reduce the interaction they have. Steps will also be taken to limit the sharing of rooms, communal areas, educational resources and equipment.

Families are now well versed in the importance of frequent hand washing and, as children return to school, the importance of doing this will be enhanced. Schools must now ensure that children clean their hands thoroughly and regularly throughout the day. To reduce the transmission of Covid-19, the ‘catch it, bin it, kill it’ message will be promoted, encouraging children to use tissues and then dispose of them carefully. All schools will have stringent cleaning regimes for frequently touched surfaces and any shared resources or equipment.

Schools will be aware some children will need extra support, as some may be returning following traumatic experiences during the lockdown. This could include bereavement or worries over the illness of a relative, or family conflict or financial concerns. Additional support will also be available to help children catch up with their studies and to help those who are struggling to get back into their school routines.

Back to school safely
Safer and healthier school journeys

Roads can get clogged up with traffic during school drop off and pick up times and, as people avoid public transport to reduce the transmission of Covid-19, there is concern that congestion could be worse in the autumn term.

The council is actively encouraging children and their families to walk, cycle or scoot to school, if they can. We want Merton to be a great place for families, and having fewer cars around the school gates will reduce dangerous pollution, making it safer and healthier for everyone. Youngsters are particularly vulnerable to exhaust fumes from cars and other vehicles. Travelling by bike and on foot to school is also a great way to encourage children to lead more active, healthier lives.

The council has a long term vision to expand its School Streets schemes, and is delighted to have secured funding to install 28 more for the new term. School Streets transform roads outside schools temporarily into pedestrian and cycling only zones at the times children are dropped off and picked up. The schemes create a more pleasant environment for everyone, while making sure residents and businesses can still use the road.

The council has been working with schools to install the schemes over the summer. Traffic restrictions will typically last for 45 minutes at the start and end of the school day, but will vary at different locations.

Non-registered vehicles entering a School Streets zone during the times of its closure to traffic will be identified by camera and issued with a fixed penalty notice. Access will be allowed for parents of children who need to be driven to school, as well as local residents, business and blue badge holders, if they have registered and been granted an exemption.

School Streets are being installed as a temporary measure, during which residents, parents and schools can submit their views to a statutory consultation. The council will monitor the impact of the schemes for between six and 12 months before deciding whether to make them permanent.

For more information on the council’s work to promote healthy and active journeys and the support available for people of all ages to enjoy safer cycling, see our feature on pages 12 and 13.

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Are you OK Merton?

Free wellbeing support

A free, confidential and anonymous online counselling service is now available for young people who are facing mental health or general wellbeing issues. Kooth offers online counselling and information for young people, aged from 11 to 25, who need support for themselves or advice to help a friend. find out more: kooth.com

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Let’s keep working together

A new community plan showcases partnership working in action across the borough before and during the emergency response to Covid-19.

The amazing way our community joined forces during the Covid-19 pandemic, to protect our most vulnerable residents, was a great illustration of what can be achieved by residents, businesses, voluntary groups and public services all working together.

Work began on the borough’s new community plan well before the pandemic. However, the local emergency response to Covid-19 showed the spirit and goals of the plan in action. The council and its partners provided support and resources for the community response, but the work of residents was vital to its success. The grassroots networks formed during the pandemic added to Merton’s thriving voluntary sector and partnership working, and it is planned to build upon this success.

The eight themes

Let’s Get Together sets out actions and ways of joint working on eight priorities. This includes identifying community venues, as well as residents and groups with the skills to help develop community activities. It describes how people and organisations can get involved in communal activities.

The eight themes are:
- Making a place where children and young people belong and thrive
- Encouraging children and young people to get involved and have their say
- Protecting and enhancing the environment
- Reducing carbon emissions to tackle climate change
- Enforcing action against anti-social behaviour
- Reducing violence
- Creating healthy workplaces
- Tackling diabetes and creating healthier communities

Let’s Get Together: A Community Plan for Merton 2020–2026, produced by The Merton Partnership, is due to be adopted, having been agreed by partners and can be viewed online.

The plan is full of inspirational examples of social activity, including residents who worked together to help others during lockdown and who have dedicated themselves to serving communities across the borough.

The Merton Partnership is a close-knit group including the council, public bodies, businesses, faith groups and voluntary services, which are at the heart of planning the borough’s community services. The development of the new plan was led by former Fire Brigade Borough Commander Darren Tulley and Police Chief Superintendent Sally Benatar. The plan sets out the Merton Partnership’s long-term aspirations for the borough and aims to inspire more communal activity to revitalise neighbourhoods and build strong social support networks. A number of best practice examples of community-led activities are showcased in the plan, including Merton Mutual Aid, Sustainable Merton’s Community Champions programme and the Dons Local Action Group, to help inform and inspire people to see what can be achieved when they get involved. The Community Plan informs funding decisions in relation to Merton Giving (Merton’s community giving fund) and the Neighbourhood Fund.

Evidence suggests a major link between stronger communities and improvements to daily lives, such as lower crime rates, better general wellbeing and fewer residents experiencing loneliness and isolation.

Senthil, an elder in the local Tamil community, who made food for the NHS, key workers and people in need
During the lockdown, an A Level student and football fans were among the thousands of volunteers who worked alongside the council, the NHS and the charity and voluntary sector to deliver food parcels and support the borough’s most vulnerable residents.

In the summer edition of My Merton, we reported on how Merton’s Community Response Hub was rapidly set up to mobilise a volunteer army to support those in need across the borough from day one of the lockdown. Merton Voluntary Service Council (MVSC), the umbrella body for voluntary and charity groups in the borough, set up the hub, backed by Merton Council, Healthwatch and Merton Clinical Commissioning Group and voluntary organisations. Volunteers were partnered with charities, including Age UK Merton, Wimbledon Guild, the Commonside Trust, Merton and Morden Guild and Friends In St Helier (FISH).

Volunteering was also coordinated with residents and groups who stepped up to lend a hand during the lockdown. These included inspirational Zak Dada, who on finding his A Levels cancelled, decided to use his time to help others. The 18-year-old founded Merton Mutual Aid, a grassroots network of nearly 3,000 people, which linked up volunteers with those in need under the banner ‘neighbours helping neighbours’. The network collaborated with other local groups, including Wimbledon Foodbank and the Dons Local Action Group to deliver food parcels and cooked dinners.

Even while fasting during the month-long Ramadan, Zak delivered meals to vulnerable residents, which were made by a range of chefs, including volunteers at the Shree Ghanapathy Temple in Wimbledon, the Old Wimbledonians Association and by elders from the Tamil community. Zak also supported the Dons Local Action Group’s campaign against digital poverty for children by contacting schools and groups for donations of laptops and tablets for more than 600 children who did not have an electronic learning device of their own.

The Dons Local Action Group was formed by a group of AFC Wimbledon fans with time on their hands when football matches were cancelled. Initially, they set up a couple of food collection stalls in Wimbledon and over the lockdown the group grew into a remarkable army of 1,400 volunteers, delivering 2,500 food parcels a week. The Dons Local Action Group, working with the AFC Wimbledon Foundation, quickly attracted supporters and members of other local sports clubs, including the Old Rutlishians Association, Tooting and Mitcham Football Club, Wimbledon Rugby Club and the Old Wimbledonians Association.

Xavier Wiggins from the Dons Local Action Group, said: “People across Merton pulled together – not just Wimbledon fans, we picked up plenty of others on the way. Some got involved because of our club, but it grew quickly as there are so many good people in the area. We’re a fan-owned football club soon to move into a fantastic stadium, and it’s right that we’re taking action at the heart of our community. “It wouldn’t have been possible without the generosity of the shoppers as well as donations from kind-hearted businesses.”

Let’s Get Together: A Community Plan for Merton 2020–2026 is on The Merton Partnership website for communities to view, update and enrich throughout its lifespan.

Inspirational case studies: Neighbours helping neighbours

Find out more mertonpartnership.org.uk
Together – We Recycle

Thank you for recycling is the theme of this year’s Recycle Week, which runs between 21–27 September. We would like to say a huge thank you to residents for continuing to recycle during the pandemic. We also want to thank the hard-working crews who have kept vital recycling and rubbish collection services running.

As residents spent more time at home during the Covid-19 pandemic, households have put out more recycling and rubbish for collection than usual. A typical month of lockdown has seen waste levels equivalent to December. We would like to thank residents for continuing to separate their rubbish and using the kerbside recycling service.

The council has worked hard with its partners, Veolia and Viridor, and has been able to maintain normal recycling and rubbish collection and street cleaning services during the epidemic.

As we continue to live alongside the coronavirus, here are some top tips to help minimise the amount you throw away and to keep you and our collection crews safe:

- Plan meals in advance and use up your leftovers. For delicious recipe ideas and top tips on how to store different types of foods to make them last longer, visit www.lovefoodhatewaste.com. For example, half used jars of sauce can be decanted into ice-cube trays and frozen to use individually to add flavour to meals.
- Try to reduce and reuse items whenever possible, but if you must throw things away, remember that plastic bottles, tubs, pots, glass bottles and jars, food and drink cans, foil, cartons, paper and card and food waste can all be recycled at the kerbside.
- Ensure that recycling is clean and dry and rubbish bags are securely tied to help prevent spills.
- Don’t put disposable paper masks into your paper and card recycling bin. Put masks – and disposable gloves – into your general waste and tie the bag securely.
- Plastic bottles for liquid soap, detergent and hand sanitiser can be recycled in your green recycling box (or communal recycling bin for flats).
- Protect yourself and your collection crews from Covid-19 by wiping the handles of your bins and recycling boxes when you put them out for collection. Wash your hands thoroughly before and after you touch the containers.
- For items which cannot be collected from the kerbside, for example crisp packets and bread bags, search for your local Terracycle drop-off location at terracycle.com
- Why not upcycle an old piece of furniture? Book a bulky waste collection for white goods or other larger items that you no longer want to keep. The Household Reuse and Recycling Centre at Garth Road, Morden, is open for essential use. Please check our website for the latest information before planning your visit.
- Make use of local sell or swap websites if you have items you no longer need.

Waste disposal for self-isolating households

It is vital that households who are self-isolating because of a confirmed or suspected case of coronavirus follow the Government’s advice, which states:

- Store personal waste, such as used tissues and disposable cleaning cloths in disposable rubbish bags.
- Place these bags into a second bag, tied securely and kept separate from other waste.
- These bags should be put aside for at least 72 hours before being put in your usual external general waste bin.
Since the start of the pandemic, even more people are visiting our parks. Regular walks have become an essential part of our daily lives, however, with larger numbers of people gathering in green spaces during good weather, we have seen an increase in people dropping their rubbish on the ground and fly-tipping by litter bins. We have launched a new borough-wide campaign to remind people to take their litter home with them, to keep our public spaces clean for everyone to enjoy. Discarded disposable masks and gloves are a particular blight on the environment, threatening wildlife as well as the health of our key workers, who are left to clear up the mess.

Please do not start bonfires for the disposal of your waste, as the smoke can be harmful for people with Covid-19 symptoms and also has a dramatic impact on local air quality. You are encouraged to use our garden waste collection service or create a compost heap to enrich your soil later in the year.

Also, please don’t inadvertently start a fire by putting gas bottles, hot barbecue coals, batteries or electrical items in your general rubbish bin. A number of gas bottles have passed through our waste disposal unit at the Beddington Energy Recovery Facility this summer, which can cause spikes in emissions and could cause damage to the state-of-the-art facility, which treats non-recyclable waste.

Batteries can be recycled from home in an untied plastic bag left on top of your bins or boxes or at most supermarkets. Hot barbecue coals should be covered with sand and left for two days to ensure they are completely cold before putting them in the general waste bin. Most retailers who sell gas bottles will allow you to return them once used. Batteries, electrical items and empty gas bottles can all be taken to the Household Reuse and Recycling Centre in Garth Road, Morden.

Residents who live in flats above shops or in properties with no outside storage space and use blue and purple bags for their rubbish and recycling will need to order more sacks when they run out of their current supply. Sacks will no longer be delivered to these properties, but can be ordered on our website: merton.gov.uk/recycling or by calling 020 8274 4902.
Exploring the borough’s heritage

Heritage Discovery Day

Merton has a wealth of heritage assets and a rich history to showcase, so take the opportunity to discover more about the borough this autumn.

Merton’s heritage service has been staging an annual Discovery Day since 2014. The largest event in the borough’s heritage calendar, it is designed to showcase Merton’s many museums, visitor attractions and community groups involved in celebrating our diverse heritage and preserving the historic environment.

There is always a great atmosphere at this event and 2019 saw the largest Discovery Day to date, featuring 30 different organisations. More than 2,500 people enjoyed a range of films, craft activities, stalls and talks, covering topics from African folk tales and Jamdani sari-making, to the borough’s Daffodil King, wartime experiences and arts and crafts.

This year’s event is scheduled for Saturday 26 September. Due to public health considerations, it will look and feel a little different, but heritage staff are keen to offer as wide-ranging a programme as possible. Plans to date include guided walks, outdoor stalls, film-screenings, displays and a series of quizzes, storytelling sessions and local history talks hosted online.

The programme may be subject to change, so for up to date information, visit: merton.gov.uk/heritage or the Merton Memories website: merton.gov.uk/memories. For the latest updates, visit: merton.gov.uk/heritage.

Exploring Mitcham’s heritage

Merton has many historic buildings and open spaces, and the area around Mitcham Cricket Green has an abundance of them. Mitcham Heritage Day, organised as usual by local civic society Mitcham Cricket Green Community & Heritage, will be held on Saturday 12 September.

The programme will depend on the social distancing guidelines in place at the time, and plans might change, right up to the last minute, so check the society’s website for updates.

However, everyone can enjoy Cricket Green’s heritage at any time by downloading Mitcham Cricket Green Community & Heritage’s free audio trail and map.

Put it on your phone and you’ll be guided around Mitcham Cricket Green and introduced to the history and heritage of the area – including stories told by local people themselves. The tour takes about an hour and includes gems such as Vestry Hall, Old Fire Station, Three Kings Pond, Mary Tate’s Almshouses, the world’s oldest cricket ground and a listed milestone you might easily pass unnoticed! Visit: www.mitchamcricketgreen.org.uk/free-audio-trail.

Check out for the latest updates, by visiting www.mitchamcricketgreen.org.uk.
Merton celebrates Black History Month

Black History Month is a key event in Merton’s calendar and is more poignant than ever this year.

The global response to the brutal, tragic and unnecessary death of George Floyd in the USA has highlighted the need to combat racism, to confront aspects of our history and to raise public awareness of black heritage and culture.

Merton Library & Heritage Service has been celebrating Black History Month for many years, staging events and activities to promote learning, understanding and the sharing of ideas. It is important that we recognise the contribution that Merton’s black community has made to the social, political, cultural and economic development of our borough. This has never been more evident than today, as NHS and key workers from our black communities are playing a vital role in saving lives and keeping the country going, despite being at higher risk from Covid-19. Some have already paid with their lives and this will make this year’s Black History Month all the more poignant.

Our programme for October 2020 may be subject to change, depending on public health guidance at the time, but heritage staff are keen to work with the local community to produce a varied programme of activities and events. These will range from online displays and local history talks, to film screenings, storytelling, craft activities, music, author events and heritage trails. We will also be staging a display to highlight the work and experiences of NHS and key workers in previous decades and during the current pandemic.

find out more for more information, contact: local.studies@merton.gov.uk. To get up to date details about our Black History Month programme, visit: merton.gov.uk/heritage

Left to right: Councillor Joe Abrams OBE, first black Mayor of Merton 1990; Eaton Swabey, Jamaican fast bowler of Mitcham Cricket Club c.1957–78; John Archer, London’s first black Mayor (Battersea, 1913); Calypso and ska singer Desmond Dekker, who is buried in Rowan Road cemetery
Hate crime awareness

All forms of hate crime are taken extremely seriously in Merton, and we want victims to know they are not alone, as there are a wide range of support services available.

This year’s Hate Crime Awareness Week runs from Saturday 10 October until Saturday 17 October and the key message is that Merton stands together against all hate crimes. The week is to feature a host of events, with Safer Merton working in close partnership with the police and community groups to raise awareness of what a hate crime is and encouraging more people to report them.

Check merton.gov.uk for more information on the events schedule.

A monthly Hate Crime Advice Surgery also takes place on the second Tuesday of each month, 12 noon–1pm. Residents can get support without having to book an appointment – call 020 8545 4146.

Empowering residents to beat the scammers

An increasing number of residents are being scammed – online, by telephone, through the post and on their doorstep. It is not uncommon for victims to lose large amounts of money and even, in some cases, their life savings or homes. People of all ages and from all walks of life can be targeted.

Merton Trading Standards officers are carrying out online educational talks to help empower residents to beat the scammers. The talks are very informal and people are encouraged to ask questions and join in discussions. The groups of participants can be of all sizes and the talks can be tailored to specific needs.

If you attend any coffee mornings or groups and would be interested in hosting a talk, contact: hannah.lumley@merton.gov.uk or 020 8545 4020.

Staying safe this autumn

As the nights draw in, some residents can feel more vulnerable to crime. My Merton shines a light on the support available to keep everyone safe.

Criminals can take advantage of long, dark nights to commit offences which bring misery to their victims. But residents can take some simple steps to reduce their risk of being targeted.

Tips to protect your home against burglaries include ensuring all your doors and windows are properly locked and keeping any valuables out of sight to anyone walking past your home. It is also a good idea to put an automatic timer on house lights, so it looks like someone is at home.

Joining or setting up a Neighbourhood Watch scheme is a great way to get together with your neighbours to help prevent burglary and protect vulnerable people in your area. Neighbourhood Watch is all about developing local knowledge, building community spirit and developing links with local policing teams. If you’d like to get involved, email nhw@merton.gov.uk to see if there a scheme in your area or to get support with setting one up.

Love shouldn’t hurt

If you or someone you know, is suffering from domestic abuse or sexual violence, remember the council is continuing to provide confidential help.

The council’s One Stop Shop help and advice for victims and survivors of all forms of domestic abuse can now be accessed online or by telephone. Domestic abuse can take many forms, including physical, sexual, psychological, emotional and financial abuse and impact on people from all walks of life. Residents can contact Merton Independent Domestic Violence Advisors, by calling 020 7801 1777. www.victimsupport.org.uk

For information on the Rape Crisis Live Chat Helpline, available for women and girls over the age of 16, visit: www.rapecrisis.org.uk.

Always call 999 if you are in danger.

As part of the ongoing support given to residents, the council is to run a 16 day social media campaign to raise awareness on the impact of domestic abuse and sexual violence. This is part of the international 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence annual campaign. merton.gov.uk/domesticviolence
Spotlight on...

Luna Cinema

Cinema nights under the stars

Wimbledon Park is to once again host film nights under the stars, as arrangements have been put in place to ensure audiences can observe social distancing.

The Luna Cinema big screen will be located near the lake in Wimbledon Park from Tuesday 29 September until Sunday 4 October.

Audiences will be able to enjoy a range of films in the open air, ranging from Rocketman and The Joker to feel good classics Grease and Dirty Dancing.

Luna Cinema is promising to provide an exceptional cinematic experience, updated to comply with all the guidelines to control the spread of Covid-19. Measures to keep audiences safe include set pitches spaced generously around the venue.

www.thelunacinema.com

Fireworks displays cancelled

For the first time in half a century, Merton Council will not be able to hold its popular Bonfire Night fireworks displays.

Due to the pandemic and concerns about the potential spread of Covid-19 in large crowds, the council has taken the difficult decision to cancel the displays, which were planned to take place in Morden Park and Wimbledon Park in November.

Merton Council has blazed the trail in local authority-run fireworks displays, since it held one of the very first events for Guy Fawkes Night in 1969. By 1972, there were two events, one in Morden Park and one in Wimbledon Park. These have both continued ever since to become among the biggest and most popular fireworks displays in London.

To be kept up to date with plans for next year’s shows and to join our mailing list, visit merton.gov.uk/fireworks

BookFest

Last Days of Summer festival of books

Wimbledon BookFest is to run a weekend of live events, in a bespoke open marquee on Wimbledon Common, over the weekend of Saturday 12 and Sunday 13 September.

The Last Days of Summer festival will feature a range of events showcasing bestselling authors and inspiring speakers for both adults and children. Matthew Syed has been confirmed as a keynote speaker. There will be a reduction on the number of people who can attend live events to ensure festival goers can have a safe and enjoyable experience. However, all events will also be digitally streamed. The alternative model for the annual festival 2020 has been developed with the festival’s partners including Merton Council, Wimbledon and Putney Commons and the Wimbledon Foundation.

BookFest’s Word Up education programme will run as usual in October and will feature ten events with authors filmed live and then digitally relayed to participating schools. To celebrate Black History Month, Wimbledon BookFest will donate a selection of books by black authors to the libraries in all state schools in Merton.

During lockdown, the festival’s organisers ran the Robert Graves Poetry Prize and its annual Young Writers’ Competition, which attracted a record amount of entries, from pupils from 53 schools.

Author Malorie Blackman with Madeleine Harding from Ursuline High School, key stage 4 story winner, at last year’s Young Writers prize giving

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@whatsoninmerton @whatsoninmerton @eventsinmerton

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www.thelunacinema.com
Love reading

As the evenings draw in, there is nothing more comforting than curling up and reading a book. This autumn brings a whole host of events to promote a love of reading at Merton’s award-winning libraries. Depending on the Government’s guidelines on social distancing to control the spread of Covid-19, library events may have to be held digitally rather than inside the buildings. So please check for updates on the following events:

**BBC Novels**

Merton Libraries have received funding from the BBC 100 Novels That Shaped the World project, which is to run throughout October. The event celebrates the 300th anniversary of Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, so our libraries will be exploring novels with adventure themes. Local artists are being commissioned to reach out to everyone in the borough to document the activities of Merton’s adventurous residents. There will also be free workshops and film screenings.

**Libraries Week:**

**Monday 5 until Saturday 10 October**

Libraries Week is an annual celebration of the nation’s much-loved libraries and the joys of reading. A host of free, fun activities are planned, inspired by books for both adults and children. Libraries will also be highlighting all the ways residents can access free reading resources, including books, magazines, eBooks and eAudiobooks.

**Family Learning Festival**

The Family Learning Festival, which is to run from Saturday 17 October until Sunday 1 November, aims to promote a love of learning in family life. Join Merton Libraries and our partners for a range of fun learning opportunities for the whole family.

To join our libraries and to get updates on events, visit: merton.gov.uk/libraries

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**Spotlight on... historical contributions**

**Black History Month**

In October, Merton Libraries will be celebrating Black History Month with book displays, story readings, craft activities and fun events to highlight the achievements and the contributions made by members of BAME communities to the country.
Have your garden waste collected from your home every two weeks for £77.50 per year from 1 April 2020. That’s just £2.98 per collection!

Visit merton.gov.uk/gardenwaste or call 020 8274 4902 for details and to sign up.
MERTON COUNCIL

We urgently need to find 30 more foster families.
Can you give a Merton child or young person a safe and secure home?

Call us today on 0800 073 0874 / 020 8545 4070
visit merton.gov.uk/fostering
email fostering@merton.gov.uk
Follow us on Facebook: Merton Fostering

At Merton we support our foster carers using an innovative approach called Mockingbird Family Model (MFM).

Foster for Merton and we can offer you:
✓ On-going comprehensive training
✓ 24 hour support, 365 days per year
✓ An allowance of up to £514 per week, per child

Find out more about Fostering with us from your home at one of our virtual Fostering Information Sessions

Our Foster Carers change children’s and young people’s lives – could you be one of them?
Tell us why you opened up a new café.

Despite the challenges, we decided to go ahead and open up on 6 July. We didn’t know if it would be the right time or if people would support us, but they did. We had planned to open in April and I had finished all the works to the building a few months before that. It was previously a really popular café called Tariro, which closed a year ago after being run by a friend for 16 years.

Why choose Morden?

I was born in Merton, I have lived here all my life and I am raising my family here. I am proud to be part of the business and whole community. Metronome is designed to be much more than a coffee shop, we want to provide an inspiring place for local people to meet, work and enjoy cultural events.

What were the challenges?

It has been very challenging. I ended up having to do three different business plans – one for the opening in April, one for a takeaway during lockdown and, finally, one for a socially-distanced coffee house. So, by July, we are just pleased to have been able to open.

John Merriman

Businessman John Merriman has run Crown Lane Studio in Morden for 14 years and in July, as the lockdown was eased, he took the brave step to open Metronome, a new coffee shop and events space, on the same site. John is also the chair of Merton Chamber of Commerce.

How does Merton Chamber of Commerce support businesses?

The chamber continues to offer great support for businesses because it has built up strong networks. It has worked for many years to really get to know Merton and its businesses. This was why it was able to respond immediately and offer direct support during the Covid-19 crisis. During lockdown, it ran online Reach out and Connect advice sessions focusing on specific topics. We had experts, local politicians and council officers presenting some really helpful sessions and these will continue for the foreseeable future.

What has the Covid-19 crisis shown you?

The importance of safety and feeling safe. Creativity and promoting the arts and culture in Merton has always been my passion, but this crisis has shown how much people need a safe place to be able to be creative. This is why I want Metronome to be like a home for creative people – an accessible place where everyone can tap into the world of music and arts.

Photo copyright: Luke Sherrington