news and information from your council

mymerton

ISSUE 85
SPRING 2021

Keep Merton Safe
Vaccinating the vulnerable

Your Merton
Have your say on the borough in our biggest ever community conversation

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One year on, Covid-19 has fundamentally changed our lives. Many people have had to cope with illness, bereavement and losing their livelihoods. As a volunteer at a food bank in Pollards Hill, I see first-hand how more people than ever are struggling to afford the basics.

Unfortunately, over Christmas I lost my father-in-law, Ram, who passed away with Covid. He came to London in the Windrush generation to work in the NHS, but he died alone and, for safety reasons, couldn’t even be dressed in his own clothes for his funeral. So this is personal.

That’s why the council is doing everything we can to support vulnerable people in our borough. Our staff work tirelessly alongside volunteers from community organisations to make sure help reaches those in need. Some of their stories are told through our Merton Together campaign. Our community spirit is what makes Merton such a great place and we want to harness it as we plan for the future.

So we have launched Your Merton, the biggest community conversation in Merton’s history. It is your chance to have your say on what the council’s priorities should be as we emerge from the pandemic and to let us have your insights on how we can meet the changing needs of our borough.

We will be counting the cost of Covid for some time. The Government has not fully reimbursed council for the money spent on the pandemic and, as our budget feature explains, we have been faced with tough choices, although we have been able to continue to protect low income households from increased bills.

Protecting each other is our priority as we plan for better days ahead. Testing is available across the borough, and the vaccination programme is well underway. Please make use of both – and do please continue to follow the guidelines and keep Merton safe.

Councillor Mark Allison
Leader of Merton Council

First councillor takes maternity leave

One of Merton Council’s cabinet members, Councillor Natasha Irons, has become the first councillor in the local authority’s history to take maternity leave from her role as an elected member.

Councillor Irons, who is Cabinet Member for Local Environment and Green Spaces, began her maternity leave in January, after she gave birth to her son. Councillor Mike Brunt is the first councillor to provide maternity cover, covering her portfolio on an interim basis.

This first-ever maternity arrangement is part of Merton Council’s commitment to be a great place for families. The maternity, paternity and adoption leave for councillors aims to encourage a wider range of people to stand as councillors in the future and to support existing councillors to remain as councillors if they want to start or add to their families.

The council’s policies were updated from February 2020, making it explicit that councillors have an entitlement to parental leave after giving birth or adopting a child.
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Ashley Bosah, first team co-manager, Tooting and Mitcham United FC

Plus your pullout guide to key council services

Cover photograph: Rosemarie Campbell receiving her Covid vaccination from clinical pharmacist Mohammed Hassan-Ally at the Wilson Hospital in Mitcham
Firm foundations for new Mitcham bridge

The construction of the new Bishopsford Road Bridge is well underway.

In February, the council’s contractor, Land & Water, installed temporary steel cofferdams either side of the River Wandle to prevent water from the river getting into the new bridge foundations.

There are a total of 12, piled foundations – six on either side of the single span bridge – which are 25 metres deep.

The new bridge will replace the previous three arch structure, which had to be demolished for safety reasons last year after partially collapsing in June 2019, following heavy rainfall.

Replacing the bridge is a particularly complex task because it influences river flow and has a range of utilities running through its structure. The council has been working closely with gas, electricity, water and broadband providers, as well as the Environment Agency, to reduce the risk of flooding. The river crossing, along the A217, will be wider than the previous bridge, to include a segregated cycle lane, wider pavement and a rain garden. It is expected to reopen later this year.

New rules as Brexit affects work, travel and business

On 1 January, the UK’s transition period with the EU came to an end, causing a number of rule changes around living, working, travelling and doing business in the UK and EU.

To help you work out how this might affect you, we’ve set up a Brexit Hub on our website, where you’ll find advice for businesses, charities and voluntary organisations, on travel and more. Visit our Brexit Hub at merton.gov.uk/brexit

Take action on climate change

Have you ever wanted to drive or support climate action in your local area, or develop a project to help tackle climate change?

Merton’s Climate Action Group is formed of four thematic sub-groups: Green Economy, Buildings and Energy, Transport, and Greening Merton. These sub-groups meet monthly to bring together networks of people to successfully develop and implement projects which reduce greenhouse gas emissions, making Merton a great place for families.

Find out more about the group and how to join it at: merton.gov.uk/climatechange

Library of Things

The Library of Things is now open in Morden Library, so you can borrow rather than buy and store items that you only need to use occasionally. Choose from a range of useful things, including DIY tools, a steam cleaner, a sewing machine or a lawnmower, from £1 a day. The council and environmental charity Sustainable Merton partnered with social enterprise the Library of Things to offer the service, which helps to protect the environment and saves you money.

By-election called

A by-election for St Helier Ward will take place on Thursday 6 May, following the resignation of Labour Councillor Kelly Braund. It will be on the same day as the elections for the Mayor of London and members of the London Assembly. If you are not already on the electoral roll, the deadline to register to vote is midnight on Monday 19 April. Residents can apply for a postal vote by 5pm on 20 April or a proxy vote by 5pm on 27 April. Voters must not visit a polling station if they have Covid symptoms, have tested positive for Covid or have been asked to self isolate. Arrangements will be in place for them to apply for an emergency proxy vote.

The council is working hard to make polling stations safe. Voters will be asked to social distance, wear a face covering and bring their own pen to mark their ballot paper.

Find out more: merton.gov.uk/voting
Creating car-free zones outside schools

The council has successfully bid for £390,000 from the Government, via Transport for London (TfL), for more Low Traffic Neighbourhood schemes, plus £120,500 to provide more cycle parking across the borough.

Low Traffic Neighbourhoods prevent the use of residential roads as rat runs by vehicles which should be using main roads. The road closures aim to prevent quiet streets from becoming clogged up with polluting and potentially dangerous traffic, creating a more pleasant environment for everyone.

Last September, the council began trialling five Low Traffic Neighbourhoods, plus 25 School Streets schemes, after securing funding from TfL. Due to the pandemic, experimental traffic management orders were used to implement the temporary schemes during the statutory consultation period. This gave residents, businesses and the council the opportunity to see the impact of the traffic reducing schemes over time before sharing their views.

Decisions on whether the schemes will be made permanent are due to be made in the spring. School Streets schemes permit the closure of roads around schools to traffic during school dropping-off and picking-up times. Merton is a great place for families and the zones create safe spaces for pupils and their parents to safely walk, cycle or scoot to school. Residents are being encouraged to have their say on the proposed new school streets in public consultations, which are currently running on each of the plans.

Every pupil offered a school place

There continues to be a high demand for places at Merton’s secondary schools. Data published by the Pan-London Admissions Board, which co-ordinates school offers, shows that more than 85% of pupils who applied for a place at one of Merton’s secondary schools in September received an offer from one of their top three preferences and 90% were offered a place at one of their preferred schools. The council was able to offer a school place to every Merton child whose family applied for one.

All secondary schools in Merton have been rated as Good or Outstanding by Ofsted. Merton is a great place for families and, in the autumn term, Harris Academy Wimbledon opened in its permanent home in South Wimbledon to help meet the increasing demand for school places in the centre of the borough.

Great fun for families

As we emerge from lockdown, look out for details of fun activities, including hiring outdoor sports courts, events in our parks and leisure centres reopening, in compliance with the latest Government guidelines.

Merton is a great place for families and we are looking forward to welcoming you back to some of our popular venues in a Covid-secure way.
EU Settlement Scheme deadline approaching fast

The UK’s transition period with the EU may now be over, but there is still time for EU, EEA or Swiss citizens to apply for the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS). The EUSS allows those who had previously been relying on the UK’s membership of the EU for their residency rights to secure settled or pre-settled status.

With settled or pre-settled status, you’ll retain your rights to:
- work in the UK
- use the NHS for free, if you can at the moment
- enrol in education or study in the UK
- access public funds, such as benefits and pensions, if you’re eligible for them
- travel in and out of the UK

You can apply to the EUSS at: [gov.uk/eussstatus]. Please make sure that you apply well in advance of the deadline on 30 June 2021.

If you’re struggling with an application, help is available locally from Citizens Advice Merton and Lambeth, and the Polish Family Association. For more information, visit: merton.gov.uk/EUSS

Making an entrance

Hundreds of plants and thousands of bulbs will bloom into a spectacular welcome for visitors to Cannizaro Park this spring. The Friends of Cannizaro Park and their team of volunteers have been restoring the entrance to the Grade II listed park in Wimbledon. The six-month project was part funded by the council and involved creating two new flower beds, planting trees and restoring hedgerows.

[Singing Happy Birthday]

A charity which leads arts and music projects in schools across the borough celebrates its 30th anniversary this year. Over the last three decades, Merton Music Foundation has reached thousands of Merton families through children’s music lessons, both in and after school; a bustling Music Centre with a variety of choirs, youth bands and orchestras; arts projects and exciting performance opportunities including the Wimbledon Tennis Championships, the Tower of London and their flagship Music is for Life concerts at the Royal Albert Hall.

During the pandemic, the foundation created an extensive new online offer, including music lessons, virtual recording projects and group rehearsals. They are planning an exciting range of innovative performance opportunities, both live and virtual, to celebrate their anniversary.

[Dr Bike]

Free bicycle maintenance sessions are being offered by the council’s partner, Dr Bike, if Government guidelines permit them to go ahead.

Wednesday 21 April from 10am until noon – outside Wimbledon Centre Court Shopping Centre by Tesco Express.

Thursday March 25 and Thursday 22 April from 2pm until 4pm at the Wandle Trail Junction with Colliers Wood High Street.

[Try Before You Bike]

The council has teamed up with Peddle My Wheels to offer trials of bikes for a monthly fee. Riders can choose from a range of cycles, including folding, electric and cargo bikes, which are delivered to their homes. Prices start from £10 for children and £20 for adults. Riders have the option to buy a bike after trying it out.

[EU Settlement Scheme]

singing happy birthday

merton.gov.uk/cycling

merton.gov.uk/eussstatus

find out more
www.mmf.org.uk

find out more
www.merton.gov.uk/euss

find out more
www.peddlemywheels.com/try-before-you-bike

find out more
www.cannizaropark.com

find out more
www.merton.gov.uk/cycling
Plans to improve air quality

The council has consulted on a draft Supplementary Planning Document to tackle air pollution from proposed developments in the borough. This new process helps developers, decision makers and residents to identify and mitigate air quality issues from demolition, construction and occupiers.

This document builds on the council’s Air Quality Action Plan and Local Plan and will apply to all proposed major developments, plus smaller schemes which may produce dust, smoke or other fumes, for example commercial kitchens. Merton is a designated air Quality Management Area for pollution and this is part of the council’s ongoing commitment to tackle poor air quality.

Discover our heritage

More people will be able to learn about the history of Merton after ambitious new plans to promote the borough’s heritage were agreed by the Cabinet.

The council’s heritage strategy, which runs from this year until 2025, aims to bring the borough’s past alive by preserving and sharing more of Merton’s diverse cultural heritage.

Plans to protect Merton’s heritage collections, run community projects and use technology to make more resources and activities available online, will be developed in partnership with a range of local organisations.

The council runs the Heritage and Local Studies Centre, which is on the second floor of Morden Library. The Heritage Service is responsible for the Merton Memories website merton.gov.uk/memories. This unique online archive illustrates life in Merton over the past 150 years. The website also features a growing collection of history and activity pages, designed to support learning and entertainment for young and old during the pandemic.

Holocaust Memorial Day

Be the Light in the Darkness was the theme of this year’s Holocaust Memorial Day, to remember the victims and survivors of genocide and take a stand against prejudice and hatred today.

For the first time, the council’s annual event was held virtually, to comply with lockdown restrictions. The civic event, which was live streamed, included contributions from the borough’s faith and belief forum, Wimbledon Synagogue, community leaders and politicians.

Holocaust Memorial Day on 27 January, commemorated the 76th anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau. Marking this day is part of the council’s commitment to continue to work together with our communities to promote tolerance and unity.

Community Forums

Discussions about a range of topics will be held at these free community forum meetings and issues raised will be followed up by the relevant organisations. Meetings may be held online, please check our website for details.

Wimbledon Community Forum
25 March at 7.15pm
Raynes Park Community Forum
30 March at 7.15pm

Find out more merton.gov.uk/communityforums

Connecting Merton

More than 400 vulnerable and isolated residents are being lent laptops and tablets to help them stay connected to the community and develop their digital skills. The Connecting Merton initiative was launched in January to bridge the gap for residents who don’t own any devices, so they can access critical services, shop online and connect with community support groups.

Merton Libraries are lending around 100 laptops every three months and recipients will be able to attend digital skills training sessions delivered by Merton Adult Learning. Connecting Merton is funded by the NHS Winter Pressures Fund.
Vaccinating the community

The Covid-19 vaccine rollout is well underway, with priority groups being offered their first dose. My Merton found out more about this huge logistical operation to get everyone in the borough vaccinated.

The UK was the first country in the world to approve Covid-19 vaccinations and Merton has been at the forefront of this exciting development. GPs in Merton started delivering Covid-19 vaccinations on 15 December 2020 at the Wilson Hospital in Mitcham. At the start of January 2021, they added a second vaccination centre at the Nelson Hospital in Raynes Park. Working long days and at weekends, GPs, nurses, pharmacists and hundreds of volunteers have pulled together to give thousands of jabs to the most vulnerable people in our community and they only had two weeks to start this vaccination programme from scratch. By 14 February, Merton GPs had offered the vaccine to all frontline health and care staff, residents in care homes for older adults and their carers, plus everyone aged 75 years and over living in Merton.

The NHS invites people for vaccination according to priority groups decided nationally. When you are invited, you will have the option of being vaccinated at the GP-led centres as well as other local community vaccination sites as they are set up. You will need two doses of the vaccine 12 weeks apart. Most people do decide to have their vaccination, but it is not too late if you have been offered it and didn’t want it at the time. You can still contact your GP or the national booking service online: www.nhs.uk/covid-vaccination or call 119 free of charge between 7am and 11pm, seven days a week. The Covid-19 vaccines are safe and effective and they will give you the best protection against Covid-19.

Since December 2020, Merton doctors, nurses and pharmacists have been talking to residents about the vaccine and answering their questions at over 28 community events. More than 720 people have attended these events so far and there has been a huge range of questions and concerns that our clinicians have been able to answer. No question is wrong and all concerns are listened to. Some of the points people have wanted to hear more about include:

- The time between the two vaccination doses
- The difference between the Pfizer/BioNTech and Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccines and if they can choose which vaccine they would like to have
- How protected you are after each dose
- The priority cohorts and how are we planning to encourage uptake within certain population groups, including ethnic minority and homeless communities
- The vaccines’ ingredients and what, if any, mild side effects there might be.

Many of the questions that people ask are answered on the NHS Merton website, where you can find out about the Covid-19 vaccination programme in Merton and details of upcoming community events on Covid-19 vaccination. Visit merton.swlondonccg.nhs.uk.

If you are involved in a community group who would like to organise an event with our community engagement team, please contact: mertonccg.getinvolved@swlondon.nhs.uk.
The Covid Community Champions and Young Adult Covid Community Champions are two groups of individuals living or working in Merton, who help keep Merton safe by sharing Covid-19 messaging, guidance and support with friends, family and other networks across the borough. Over the months, the two groups collectively have had over 170 sign-ups, who include carers, health care professionals, youth workers, students, teachers and volunteers across Merton, just to name a few. They have achieved a huge amount by sharing messages by phone, email, WhatsApp, and resharing our social media posts.

Being a member is a great way to feel connected to the community during times that may often feel isolating, whilst also gaining useful skills which you can use in other walks of life.

Both groups welcome new members, so if you live or work in Merton and would like to help keep Merton safe and informed about all things Covid, then please register your interest to receive information about upcoming sessions.

"I've learnt how to engage with a range of young people, which has helped me with my facilitating skills and adaptability"

Lurdes, Young Adult Covid Community Champion

"I am a Covid-19 Community Champion because I want to play my part in protecting friends and family, as well as clients and colleagues, and so help to keep Merton safe."

Marcella, Covid Community Champion

Become a champion

Anyone who lives or works in Merton can become a community champion. There are two groups in Merton, the Young Adults Covid Community Champions for those aged 18-30, and the Covid-19 Community Champions for people aged 30+. Each group reaches out to their peers. For more information about getting involved, visit our website: merton.gov.uk/covid19-champions
Testing times

Testing is a key part of tracking the spread of Covid-19 and preventing transmission of the virus. Getting a test is quick, easy and free. If you have symptoms of Coronavirus, or have tested positive, or if someone you live with has tested positive, you must self-isolate immediately.

Regular no symptom testing for Merton’s essential workers

Merton staff worked tirelessly over the Christmas period to set up the lateral flow or ‘rapid testing’ centre at Morden Assembly Hall in December. This huge effort, which is run entirely by Merton Council staff and volunteers, resulted in regular, free testing available for anyone living in the borough with no symptoms. A letter went out from Council Leader Councillor Mark Allison to all residents on this new testing option, but unfortunately, the Government then announced a third national lockdown. So while anyone without symptoms is welcome to come for a test, we are focusing on our ‘frontline’ workers, volunteers and carers.

A frontline worker is anyone who must leave home to go to work where they are mixing with others, such as health and social care workers, essential shop workers, taxi drivers, delivery drivers and tradesman.

Frontline workers can also get a test at one of the pharmacies in Merton, which are taking part in the scheme.

We would encourage these groups to get a lateral flow test (a rapid test) twice a week and please book a test in advance as we cannot accommodate walk-ins. Overall, we have had more than 15,000 bookings for lateral flow tests across community pharmacies and at Morden Assembly Hall, since beginning in December, with positivity rates hovering around the 1% mark, which is about normal for those who don’t show any symptoms.

We have plenty of capacity, and you will normally receive your result from the NHS within 30 minutes, but at busy times this may take up to 24 hours. So if you must leave home to go to work, then this testing is for you. As many as one in three people could be carrying the virus without showing any symptoms, so regular testing means you can continue your job safely and avoid passing the virus onto others. Book a test: merton.gov.uk/coronavirus/lateral-flow-test

Case study: Toby Podger-Taylor

Toby Podger-Taylor, a youth worker from Merton, recently had a rapid test at Morden Assembly Hall. He said: “As a youth worker, I often have to do sessions with young people face to face. This is essential work, as many vulnerable young people have lost out on services like youth clubs, that were crucial to their welfare, due to the lockdown restrictions. I took a rapid (lateral flow) test the day before going to see a young person, to get some extra reassurance that I wasn’t passing anything on to them. The test was quick and easy, and the staff at Morden Assembly Hall were very efficient. It really boosted my confidence in Merton’s effort to continue to stop the spread of Covid-19. I received my result in under half an hour, and, knowing that I was negative at that time meant that I went into work the next day feeling assured that I was not posing a danger to anyone I saw.”

Watch Toby’s journey on our Twitter feed @Merton_Council or the Merton Council Facebook page.

Got any Covid symptoms? Get tested!

It is important that if you have ANY of the following Covid symptoms:

- a new continuous cough
- high temperature
- change or loss of taste or smell

you should self-isolate immediately and book a PCR test. This is to ensure that whilst you are waiting to get tested, you do not put anyone else at potential risk. You can either book a test appointment at one of our testing centres or, if you are worried about leaving home, you can order a home testing kit, both via the gov.uk website: www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test.

If you are concerned about doing essential tasks whilst self-isolating or shielding, Merton’s Covid-19 Community Hub offers help and support. For more information, visit the MSVC website - www.msve.co.uk. If you are on a low income and you have been told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace, you may be entitled to financial support, which you can find out more about on our website - merton.gov.uk/coronavirus/residents.
Now, more than ever, it is important to look after our health and wellbeing. Covid-19 has affected us all and in many different ways – physically, emotionally, socially and psychologically. Better Health Merton is here for you – with tips and tools on how to improve your health and wellbeing.

Better Health Merton is a resource for people who live, work or are registered with a GP in Merton and provides self-care tips and tools for:

- eating healthily
- moving more
- stopping smoking
- managing diabetes
- getting your flu vaccination
- reducing alcohol consumption
- looking after your mental wellbeing

At this time of year, lots of us are thinking about what we can do for a boost. So, if there’s something you’d like to change in your life right now, like losing a bit of weight, getting active, sleeping better, improving your mood or quitting smoking, Better Health Merton has lots of free, easy ideas and support to help. Whether or not it is your first time making changes, getting started feels good, and taking simple steps can make us healthier, and more able to fight diseases in 2021.

**Looking after your mental wellbeing**

Over the last 12 months there have been many challenges to everyday life, which have forced us to adapt to change quite quickly. This, mixed with the uncertainty around the pandemic, may have meant your mood has been lower than usual, you might have had problems sleeping or felt more irritable or anxious than normal. If you haven’t been feeling yourself and would like support, Merton Uplift is a wellbeing Service which aims to empower people to meet their physical, social and emotional needs.

Merton Uplift can offer assistance with feelings of stress, lack of focus, anxiety, depression, poor sleep and much more. You can self-refer via telephone 020 3513 5888 or visit [www.mertonuplift.nhs.uk](http://www.mertonuplift.nhs.uk) or be referred via your GP or any health professional.

**Type 2 diabetes**

Type 2 diabetes is a common condition that causes the level of sugar (glucose) in the blood to become too high. Being overweight can increase your chances of developing the condition, but we can reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes by:

- eating more healthily
- losing weight
- getting more physically active

There has never been a better time to kick-start your health. Visit: merton.gov.uk/betterhealth
Marshalling our efforts to prevent Covid spreading

The council is working with residents and businesses to make sure they are following Government guidance to prevent the spread of Coronavirus.

Our Covid-19 marshals have been out and about in Merton since early December last year. They work seven days a week to help keep Merton safe by ensuring businesses and members of the public are complying with the current restrictions in place to control the transmission of Covid-19. This means they make sure close contact services such as gyms are (currently) to remain closed and businesses that can remain open are operating in a Covid-secure manner and in accordance with any other restrictions on their operation – so, for example, any non-essential retail can only operate on a click and collect basis.

They cover the whole borough, but are particularly active in Mitcham, Morden, Colliers Wood, Raynes Park and Wimbledon, the busier areas of the borough. The main issues noted by the marshals at the time of writing (February) are street drinking in the Merton Abbey Mills area, businesses allowing customers to sit indoors and wait for food orders and staff and customers not wearing face coverings. Alongside proactively patrolling the borough, the marshals also visit specific premises if complaints are received from the public.

Following requests by various supermarkets, in particular in the Wimbledon area, our marshals are supporting them to ask customers to wear a face covering at all times, unless they are exempt, and to adhere to social distancing guidelines when in the store.

If you are concerned about any business in the borough, you can email FoodandSafety@merton.gov.uk.

Material concerns

A community textile project is enabling residents to make a permanent and creative record of their experiences and thoughts during the Coronavirus pandemic. As part of the Loving Earth: A Legacy of Lockdown project, residents can submit a textile panel in any style, measuring 30cm by 30cm. Their creations will form part of a local exhibition in the spring 2021, before being taken abroad as part of the Loving Earth Project’s international exhibition and then return to form a lasting legacy in Merton.

Environmental charity Sustainable Merton teamed up with the Loving Earth Project to run the initiative, which is supported by the Merton Giving Fund – a charitable initiative from Merton Voluntary Service Council and Merton Chamber of Commerce, supported by the council. The Chief Executive of Sustainable Merton, Diana Sterck, said: “The funding enabled us to run free workshops to help children and adults get started on their panels. These are an alternative and creative way to display their love and concern for our environment. They enabled people to learn new skills, connect with others and provide a positive focus during this challenging time.”

>Email: info@sustainablenorton.org or visit sustainablemerton.org/loving-earth
Merton’s lockdown heroes

During the last year, people have been doing extraordinary things to help our community through the pandemic. Here we showcase some of the heroes.

Naomi Martin, Director of the Commonside Trust, immediately agreed to help in February, when the council was given just 48 hours to set up an enhanced testing programme in Pollards Hill after someone in the area tested positive for the South African variant of Covid-19. Thankfully, they made a full recovery, while Commonside’s building, the New Horizon Centre, was rapidly transformed into a base for the operation and Naomi’s team helped to run back up services, including checking home testing kits in and out and providing a rest area for volunteers. As a result, we were able to distribute over 10,000 tests in the community.

Naomi said: “We have all worked hard to ensure that, in providing the physical base for the operation. We are very pleased to have worked so well with our good partners at Merton Council for this vital work. Their logistical response has been second to none. I hope that people living and working in the Pollards Hill area are reassured as result of the enhanced testing services provided and that the operation will succeed in bringing right down the risks of the spread of the South African variant. We will continue to promote all public health messages and encourage all members of the community to stay safe and protect their loved ones.”

Thanks to Commonside, testing was a success, with no new South African variant cases discovered.

Hollymount heroes

Lockdown has been especially challenging for children at school, their parents and teachers. Sam Birnage, Headteacher at Hollymount Primary School in Raynes Park and his team have developed a virtual school hub, which includes assemblies, extra-curricular fun and interactive resources, as well as lessons.

Sam said: “Our vision at Hollymount is to ensure that we provide children with moments of wonderment and awe, and lifelong memories, which we are trying to continue to do, despite the challenges of the pandemic.”

Looking after children’s mental health and wellbeing has never been so important and the school is offering mindfulness sessions, personal social health education sessions and recently collaborated with a nearby school to hold a Disconnect To Reconnect Day, when they took a break from virtual learning to build new connections with children from Pelham Primary School. Families were offered an online mindfulness evening and workouts. Key worker parents received a free coffee, delivered by bike.

Sam, who hosted a hot chocolate and story evening for pupils online, said: “I am extremely proud of the staff and parents’ efforts to continue to provide education. The children have been incredibly resilient and optimistic, and staff have shown so much care and attention to detail in getting the best out of the children. It has been a real community effort from the children, the staff and the parents.”

Shining students

Here We Are Now has been the topic for pupils at Shine Saturday School. An emergency grant from Merton Giving has enabled tablets to be purchased so that classes can be taught online by the school, which has 57 pupils and seven staff in two virtual Zoom classrooms. The funding has paid for 50 devices, which are being used to read books, as well as keeping families connected and giving them access to online learning. Shine Saturday School is an initiative run by the Mitcham Town Community Trust and offers a variety of learning activities, which have attracted a record attendance of pupils.
Balancing the budget

Counting the cost of Covid

The Covid-19 pandemic has put unprecedented pressures on the council’s budget, which will have an impact on financial decisions about essential services for years to come.

Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, a year ago, the council has been working tirelessly to support our most vulnerable residents through one of the toughest times in living memory.

Our Merton Together campaign recognises the efforts of just some of the council staff, working in partnership with other public services and alongside volunteers from a range of community organisations, to help and protect residents who are most in need.

Our adult social care teams have supported around 7,000 vulnerable people and their carers, and young people have continued to receive free school meals. Merton was one of the most successful councils in the country at providing financial support to businesses who were struggling to get by. The council has worked closely with the NHS to provide testing facilities and support the vaccination effort. The council also ensured that statutory services, such as refuse collections, have continued without interruption and that parks and green spaces have remained open throughout the pandemic.

The council will continue to do whatever it takes to provide support to vulnerable residents and families who are relying on food banks to be able to eat.

So far, Covid-19 has cost the council £30.7m, and we have been reimbursed £21.4m, although we expect to receive more funding to cover some of our ongoing costs. Together with other London boroughs, we are doing everything we can to lobby the Government to reimburse the money so we can continue to balance our budget and keep vital services running in future years.
A guide to key council services
2021–2022

Your pullout and keep guide

merton.gov.uk
Parking permits
Buy, renew or change a permit.

Planning
Find and view planning applications, apply for planning permission and get planning advice.

Libraries
Renew items, download free ebooks and magazines, search for new releases and join the library.

Schools
Apply for a school place.

Council tax
Pay your bill, check your account, tell us you’ve moved and apply for discounts or exemptions.

Waste
Book a bulky waste collection or report a missed collection.

For a full list of online services go to merton.gov.uk/doitonline

Keeping in touch with the council
Subscribe to receive our email news. Be the first to hear about the latest news, events and services, plus emergency alerts and updates. Sign up: merton.gov.uk/newsletter

@Merton_Council
@mertoncouncil
@whatsoninmerton
youtube.com/mertoncouncil
The borough’s quarterly magazine My Merton is also available at merton.gov.uk/mymerton

Adoption (South West London Adoption)
- southlondonadoption.org.uk
- south@adoptionlondon.org.uk
- 0300 123 8085 or 020 7525 4491

Adult education
- merton.gov.uk/adulteducation

Adult social care
- merton.gov.uk/adult-social-care
- 020 8545 4388 9.30am–1.30pm

Benefits advice and local welfare
- merton.gov.uk/benefitsadvice
- welfarebenefits@merton.gov.uk
- 020 8274 4908

Blue Badge parking permits
- merton.gov.uk/bluebadge
- concessionarytravel@merton.gov.uk
- 020 8274 4990 11am–3pm

Bulky waste collections
- merton.gov.uk/bulky
- 020 8274 4902

Cemeteries
- merton.gov.uk/cemeteries
- 020 3876 8806

Childcare and early years
- merton.gov.uk/childcare
- fsd@merton.gov.uk
- 020 8274 5300

Children’s social care
- merton.gov.uk/childrensservices
- children@merton.gov.uk
- 020 8545 4226/7
- Out of hours contact: 020 8770 5000

Comments, compliments and complaints
- merton.gov.uk/complaints
- complaints@merton.gov.uk
- 020 8545 3060

Committees and meetings
- merton.gov.uk/committee
- democraticservices@merton.gov.uk
- 020 8545 3616

Conservation areas
- merton.gov.uk/conservation_areas
- conservation.areas@merton.gov.uk
- 020 8545 3657 or 3659

Council tax
- merton.gov.uk/counciltax
- local.taxation@merton.gov.uk
- 020 8274 4904

Council tax support
- merton.gov.uk/ctts
- housing.benefits@merton.gov.uk
- 020 8274 4903

Councillors
- merton.gov.uk/councillors
- Conservative Group: 020 8545 3396
- Labour Group: 020 8545 3424
- Liberal Democrats Group: 020 8545 4770. The office is staffed Tuesday–Thursday 8.30am–2.30pm
- Merton Park Ward Independent Residents Group: 020 8545 4026

Education welfare services
- merton.gov.uk/educationwelfare
- 020 8545 4021

Electoral services
- merton.gov.uk/voting
- 020 8274 4901

Emergency information
Information about emergencies and emergency plans affecting Merton residents or business. merton.gov.uk/emergency

Events
Find out about council events or, if you are running a community event, you can advertise it for free on the Merton Council online events calendar. merton.gov.uk/events
A guide to key council services

Fostering
- merton.gov.uk/fostering
- fostering@merton.gov.uk
- 0800 073 0874

Fly-tipping
Report fly-tipping on public roads and pavements using our online ‘report it’ function.
- merton.gov.uk/flytipping
- 020 8274 4902

Freedom of Information
- merton.gov.uk/foi
- foi@merton.gov.uk
- 020 8545 4634

Freedom Passes for disabled people
- merton.gov.uk/freedompasses
- concessionarytravel@merton.gov.uk
- 020 8274 4900 11am–3pm

Freedom Passes for older people
- londoncouncils.gov.uk/ freedom-pass
- 0300 330 1433 (local rate) open Monday to Sunday 8am–6pm

Garden waste collection service
- merton.gov.uk/gardenwaste
- 020 8274 4902

Graffiti removal
You can report graffiti online. Merton aims to remove graffiti from council property within five days and offensive, including racist, graffiti anywhere in the borough within 48 hours.
- merton.gov.uk/graffiti
- 020 8274 4902

Homelessness
Advice and guidance for those at risk of becoming homeless.
- merton.gov.uk/homelessness
- housingadvice@merton.gov.uk
- 020 8545 3636
- Out of hours contact: 020 8770 5000 5.30pm–9am

Housing benefit
- merton.gov.uk/housingbenefit
- housing.benefits@merton.gov.uk
- 020 8274 4903

Housing register
- merton.gov.uk/allocations
- registration@merton.gov.uk
- 020 8545 3305

Leisure
Hall hire, school holiday activities, sports pitches and sport recreation
- merton.gov.uk/leisure
- leisure@merton.gov.uk

Libraries
- merton.gov.uk/libraries
- library.enquiries@merton.gov.uk
- 0333 370 4700

Litter bins
Report a problem with a litter bin.
- merton.gov.uk/litter-bins
- 020 8274 4902

Local land charges searches
- merton.gov.uk/landcharges
- locallandcharges@merton.gov.uk
- 020 8545 3350

Local Studies and Heritage Centre
- merton.gov.uk/localstudies
- local.studies@merton.gov.uk
- 020 8545 3239
Morden Library
Merton Civic Centre
London Road
Morden SM4 5DX

MASCOT Telecare
Helps provide safety, security and wellbeing, enabling people to live independently in their homes. The service is available 24/7 and uses simple technology linked to our response centre.
- merton.gov.uk/mascot
- 020 8274 5940

Noise nuisance
- merton.gov.uk/noise
- noiseandnuisance@merton.gov.uk
- 020 8545 3025 9am–5pm
- Out of hours, 11pm–4am Friday and Saturday 020 8543 9750

Occupational therapy
The occupational therapy service provides a range of services to people with a permanent and substantial physical disability living in Merton.
- merton.gov.uk/occupationaltherapy
- ssotduty@merton.gov.uk
- 020 8545 4428 or 020 8545 4477 (9.30am–12.30pm)

Parking
Penalty Charge Notices, parking permits and car parks.
- merton.gov.uk/parking
- parking@merton.gov.uk
- 020 8545 4661 (11am–4pm penalty charge notices/10am–4pm permits)

Parks
- merton.gov.uk/parks
- 020 3876 8806, press option 7 for Merton parks

Planning
- merton.gov.uk/planning
- planning@merton.gov.uk
- 020 8545 3777 (1–3pm)

Pot holes
See roads and highways

Public health
- merton.gov.uk/publichealth

Register office
Contact the register office if you want to get married, have a civil ceremony or civil partnership, register a birth or death, name a baby or take part in a citizenship ceremony.
- merton.gov.uk/register
- register.office@merton.gov.uk
- 020 8274 5777
Morden Park House
Morden Park
London Road
Morden SM4 5QU
9am–4.30pm

*The information in this brochure is correct at the time of printing, but is liable to change.*
Roads and highways
merton.gov.uk/roads-highways-pavements
trafficandhighways@merton.gov.uk
020 8545 3700 (10am–5pm)

Rubbish and recycling
merton.gov.uk/recycling
merton.gov.uk/householdwaste
020 8274 4902

Schools admissions
merton.gov.uk/schools
020 8274 4906

Snow clearance
We take action, as far as reasonably practicable, to allow the safe movement of all highway users on important routes in the borough, and keep delays to a minimum. This work includes gritting and salting roads to reduce the risk of ice forming, as well as clearing roads and pavements of accumulated ice and snow. merton.gov.uk/wintermaintenance
trafficandhighways@merton.gov.uk
020 8545 3700

Street cleaning
merton.gov.uk/street-care-cleaning
020 8274 4902

Street lighting
merton.gov.uk/streetlighting
trafficandhighways@merton.gov.uk
020 8545 3700 10am–5pm

Trading standards
merton.gov.uk/tradingstandards
trading.standards@merton.gov.uk
020 8545 3025 9am–5pm

Tree preservation
A tree preservation order (TPO) is an order made by the council, intended to protect one or more trees or woodland if its removal would have a significant impact on the local environment and its enjoyment to the public. merton.gov.uk/tpo
planning@merton.gov.uk
020 8545 3777 or 3815 1–3pm

The information in this brochure is correct at the time of printing, but is liable to change.

Getting stuff done online
Want to get online but don’t have a computer?
Need help with using a computer?

If you’re a Merton library member, you can use the libraries’ computers and access the WiFi for free. Also, if you have your own tablet or laptop but struggle to get online, just visit your library and start surfing for free! Don’t worry if you’re not a library member, as registering is easy. Just pop along to your library and our staff and volunteers will be happy to help you.

Merton libraries also offer one-to-one IT support and a range of IT courses for beginners right the way through to the more advanced. To find out more or to book a place, either pop in or call the library and they will advise you when the next course is taking place.

Contact us:
Merton Libraries
0333 370 4700
Funding services

One of us like to see our bills go up, but the Government has not reimbursed councils like Merton for the full costs of Covid. The effect of the way the new funding is calculated means that the council can only realise the increased funding that Government has assumed for us by increasing council tax. As a result, most London boroughs and councils up and down the country will have to increase bills by up to 5%, which includes 3% for adult social care.

In Merton, council tax will rise by 4.99% in 2021/22, which is £1,340.72 for a Band D property. Your council tax will help to fund vital support for residents who are struggling the most during the pandemic.

The council is continuing to support residents on low incomes, as well as those who have become unemployed as a result of the pandemic. For the ninth year running, the council is extending the council tax support scheme. This means that, although council tax bills are increasing, if you receive council tax support and your circumstances stay the same, you will not have to pay more council tax. This will help to bridge the gap between residents on lower incomes and those who have been able to remain working in better paid employment.

Balancing the council’s budget in future years

Our business-like approach to managing the council’s budget has meant that, even now, after more than a decade of austerity and when we are facing an unprecedented budget deficit due to the pandemic, the council is still able to support residents when they need it.

However, the long term financial picture for the council remains uncertain due to three main factors:

- It is unclear how much more money the council will need to spend on the pandemic response. Demand for support looks set to increase, with the council taking a key role in supporting the creation of new employment opportunities, as well as continuing to protect the most vulnerable residents, as we gradually emerge from lockdown. In addition, the council is losing significant amounts of income that it relies on to fund vital services.

- The council is limited in the amount of longer term financial planning it can do because, last autumn, the Government cancelled the Comprehensive Spending Review, which sets out how much money it intends to allocate to public services during the next few years. Instead of a multi-year funding package, HM Treasury has only given local authorities a one year finance settlement, for 2021/22.

- There is also the continued impact of a reduction to grant funding for councils of 40% since 2010. This has left local authorities without enough money to cover the increasing need for services, in particular those supporting older people, those with disabilities, and children with additional needs.

In Merton, due to good management of your money, the council has been able to keep our most valued services running, but it will not be easy in the future – we need to find ways to fill a void of millions of pounds left by the Government’s austerity measures and the cost of the pandemic.
Great things happen when communities pull together

Inspiring stories of kindness, generosity, and compassion have been at the heart of the borough’s Merton Together campaign. *My Merton* finds out why it’s important for Merton to continue to pull together in this time of crisis and how our community is united, even when we are physically apart.

In 2020 our great borough came together in the face of Covid-19. Locals clapped for carers, checked on neighbours, shopped for relatives, donated to local charities, supported local businesses and cared for the vulnerable. In 2021, these incredible people, voluntary groups, charities and businesses, have continued these wonderful acts of community kindness to ensure local people in our borough are supported during these tough times, even when we are apart.

Meet the people working to bring

**Isaama Kaweosa**
@DonsLocalAction • 2021
A good day for fresh fruit and veg at the Dons Local Action stall. Thanks as always to the generosity of the good people of Mitcham.

**Age UK Merton**
@Ageukmerton • 2021
Thank you to the students from Merton College and Carshalton College for delivering festive packs to people across the borough. Kathy, who received a pack said: “THANKS so much for our lovely goodie bags. We certainly don’t feel forgotten at all. You’ve all been so good to us all”.

**MVSC Volunteering**
@VolunteerMerton • 2021
We love the inspiring story by St Raphael’s Hospice volunteers who have gone the extra mile to assist home-based patients. A great example of how they adapted by moving from face to face to telephone contact to keep patients’ spirits up.

Councillor Mark Allison:
Leader of Merton Council
@Merton_Council • 2021
I have been visiting some amazing voluntary groups across Merton. I joined Rob and Ella from Age UK Merton and delivered a festive pack, kindly made by students from Merton College and Carshalton College, to 96-year-old Norman in Mitcham.

**Sustainable Merton**
@SustainableMert • 2021
Congratulations to our team of Community Champions at Phipps Bridge Community Garden who harvested 748kg of produce in 2020. This is equivalent to 9,349 meals and worth £3,312!

**Merton Giving**
@Merton Giving • 2021
Thank you to the wonderful supportive team at Wimblecomm for your kind donation to our ‘Food for all’ and ‘Gift for all’ fundraising campaign. Your contribution will help to put a smile on people’s faces this festive season.

These inspiring stories all show why our borough is such a great place to live.
How can you be part of Merton Together?

We’re asking you, local people, to join us, to rally together in this time of crisis to help those who are vulnerable, isolated or have been hit the hardest by Covid-19 and keep Merton united, no matter what.

To get you started, we’ve put together a list of five things you can do to help, whether that’s simply making some phone calls to neighbours and friends or donating to a local charity of your choice.

Five ways you can help:
1 Volunteer some time with a local organisation to help those who are isolated.
2 Support vulnerable people by donating to a Merton charity.
3 Shop online with local businesses so that they can survive through this difficult time.
4 Care for your community – you could become a Covid-19 Community Champion, informing friends, family and networks of the latest Coronavirus guidance.
5 Buy a couple of extra tins of food when shopping and donate them to your local food bank.

Share your stories
If you, or someone you know, is going above and beyond the call of duty to help those in need, share your story with us! Use #MertonTogether on social media to tell us about what is happening in your community and we will share it on our platforms.

Join us:
Small, simple acts of kindness will keep our community strong and supported.
Be part of our Merton Together campaign today. For a full list of activities and links to local organisations and charities, visit: merton.gov.uk/Together
Join the discussion

The council is about to launch the biggest conversation it has ever held with residents to ask your views about living in Merton and your hopes for the future of our borough.

Our borough

Merton is a great place to live, and over the last decade our borough has changed for the better. There has been a significant improvement in school exam results, with all secondary schools in the borough now rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted. Demand for places has increased so much that more than 20 schools have been expanded to create an extra 4,500 places and a brand new secondary school has opened in South Wimbledon.

We have built fantastic community facilities, including a state-of-the-art leisure centre in Morden, which replaced the ageing Morden Park Pool, plus a brand new library building in Colliers Wood. An ambitious development at Plough Lane helped AFC Wimbledon to achieve their goal of returning home to the borough after three decades and provided hundreds of much needed new homes.

Merton is one of London’s greenest boroughs, with a multitude of parks and open spaces and it is also one of the best connected communities in the capital. The council has well-established, strong partnerships with voluntary organisations and community groups across the borough. Indeed, Merton’s greatest asset since the pandemic began has been our great community.

Our future

During the last year, Covid-19 has fundamentally changed all our lives and we want to understand what is most important to you as we look at a post pandemic future and what our priorities should be during the coming years. The council exists to improve lives and is committed to working with residents, partner organisations and businesses, to meet the changing needs of our borough, so we want to hear from you how the great community that has emerged in the pandemic can make Merton even better in future.

Your say

We are running our largest-ever community engagement in the council’s history to help understand what matters to you, and where we should prioritise our efforts in the coming years. We want to know what you want to hold onto from the past successes, and what you want to see more of in the future.

Your Merton will focus on the positive aspects of our community, and ask you about the benefits of living in Merton, as well as your future priorities.

This engagement aims to gather insights from residents, businesses and a range of partners to help us identify a set of priorities across five broad areas, alongside potential ideas and initiatives for action:

- Communities
- Environment
- Economy
- Partnerships and service
- Health, wellbeing and safety
How to take part:

- You can get involved in the Your Merton conversation on our dedicated website, which will have an interactive community heat map, allowing you to comment on specific places. There will also be the opportunity to answer questions on each of the themes.
- We will be running a series of workshops to make sure we reach groups who may not always take part in the council’s consultations. We want to hear as diverse a range of voices as possible to inform your vision for our future.
- We will also be holding a telephone survey of a random sample of residents. If you receive a call asking you to take part, please take the time to have your say.

Visit: merton.gov.uk/yourmerton
Let's stop this rubbish

**Question:** Which of the following are fly-tipping?

- If you put out a black bag of household waste on the street
- If you leave a sorted bag of recycling beside a recycling bank
- If you drop off a bag of donations outside a closed charity shop
- If you leave a bag of rubbish beside a litter bin
- If you dump a truckload of rubble or bulky items

**Answer:** All of the above are fly-tipping

Ranging from a single sack of rubbish, to an item of furniture or a truckload of rubble, fly-tips are classed as rubbish being dumped illegally on public land, including on the pavement or in a park. Fly-tipping is a criminal offence. Perpetrators face punishments ranging from a fine to imprisonment.

Merton is one of London’s greenest boroughs and a great place for families. We don’t want fly-tipping blighting our streets or people littering in our parks and green spaces, putting wildlife at risk of harm. It is not just the environment which is counting the cost of fly-tipping. Last year alone, the council had to collect around 15,000 fly-tips from across the borough, at an estimated cost of more than £850,000 – money which could have been spent on other vital services.

**It is everyone’s responsibility to stop this rubbish**

Please minimise the amount of waste you throw away, reuse items where possible and make sure you dispose of rubbish and recycling safely and responsibly.

You can download a bespoke collection calendar of recycling and rubbish collections for your property from our website, so you can check when your collections will be and which bins to put out at [merton.gov.uk/recycling](http://merton.gov.uk/recycling).

If you have a piece of furniture to get rid of, why not consider upcycling it instead. If you have large items to dispose of, take these to the Household Reuse and Recycling Centre in Garth Road, Morden.

Book a bulky waste collection for items such as furniture, an old carpet or electrical appliances.

Some retailers will take away an old item, such as a washing machine, when they deliver a new one to your home.

Be aware that you are still responsible for how your waste is disposed of, even if you have given it to someone else or paid them to take it away for you.

Last year, the council issued more than £10,000 of fines for fly-tipping. Report fly-tips and fly-tippers on our website: [merton.gov.uk/fly-tipping](http://merton.gov.uk/fly-tipping).

**Bank holiday collections**

Recycling and rubbish collections are currently scheduled to continue as normal over Easter and on the two May bank holidays. Check our website nearer the time.
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.

Egg-cellent ways to recycle at Easter

Choose chocolate eggs which have minimal packaging. When you’ve enjoyed your chocolate treats, recycle your cardboard boxes, together with Easter cards and their envelopes, in your blue-lidded wheelie bin. Scrunch up foil into a ball and recycle it in your purple or green box or communal recycling bin for residents in flats.

Order your blue and purple sacks online

If you live in a flat above a shop or in a property with no outside storage space and you’re running low on blue and purple sacks for your rubbish and recycling, you will need to order more on our website, as these will no longer be delivered automatically. Visit merton.gov.uk/recycling or call 020 8274 4902.

Recycle on the Go

Look out for some colourful new recycling bins in Wimbledon town centre, which will help make it easier to recycle while you are out and about.

In April, the council, together with two charities, Sustainable Merton and Hubbub, with support from local organisations including Love Wimbledon, are launching the #InTheLoop recycling trial.

This aims to boost recycling on the go, so that more plastic bottles and cans can be recycled, rather than ending up in the general waste.

Residents can have their say on the trial in this survey: merton.gov.uk/recycleonthego

Litterers unmasked

People who drop their face coverings and plastic gloves on the ground in our parks and on our streets are putting wildlife at risk, as well as the health of others. They also risk getting a £150 fine for littering.

Take your paper face masks and disposable gloves home, put them in your general rubbish and tie the bag securely.
Community heritage

A £4.4 million National Lottery funded project, led by the council in partnership with local groups, is revitalising one of Merton’s most historic buildings into a thriving community hub.

The restoration of one of the borough’s heritage gems is set to be completed this summer, when it is hoped that a series of celebratory events and activities can be held.

Building and landscaping work to refurbish Canons House and Grounds in Mitcham and transform it into a community hub has taken more than six years to plan and carry out. The £4.4 million project is funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund and The National Lottery Community Fund. Merton Council, which owns the site, is leading the renovations, with support from many community groups.

The Grade II* listed house dates from 1680, and retains many original features which are being restored, together with its 16th century dovecote, which is the oldest building in Merton. The historic obelisk is being restored and the area around it is being transformed into a new entrance for the grounds. The 1920s running track, formerly home to Mitcham Athletics Club and used for training by many famous athletes, including Dorothy Tyler, who won two silver medals in high jump at the 1936 and 1948 Olympics, has been resurfaced.

The walled garden has also been restored, with repairs to brickwork and a new planting scheme and there is a new community garden, which will be planted with fruit and vegetables. The original pond has been dredged and cleaned, while the area around it is replanted to create a spectacular wildlife haven.

A café with space to host events, public toilets and a new playground, will make it a great place for families to find out more about Canons House and Grounds, which has a fascinating history.

The Georgian house was owned by Cranmer family and their descendants, the Simpsons, until it was bought by the local authority in 1939. Past tenants of the house include well-known cricketer Charles Hoare.

Canons House will provide offices for local businesses, as well as becoming a community heritage centre, where a host of National Lottery funded community activities will continue until the end of 2022. There will also be volunteering opportunities, which will be advertised in the newsletter.

Sign up to our newsletter via [www.thecanonsmitcham.co.uk](http://www.thecanonsmitcham.co.uk) or follow us on Instagram @canons_mitcham

The new café will have an events space

The obelisk area is being transformed into a new entrance

The new play area was developed as the result of a series of workshops with designers Studio Hardie and local primary school pupils.
Make your census count

Help to create a snapshot of life in Merton on 21 March 2021.

All Merton residents can now contribute to the history of our borough by completing the 2021 census. Conducted every ten years, the census is a national survey of every home in the country. The results are used to plan and fund public services like education, transport and healthcare, helping to make Merton a great place for families and bridging the gap between the east and west of the borough.

The census will ultimately add to the historical record of our borough, providing fascinating insights into life in Merton in years gone by. When the full data is finally released in 2121, it will enable future generations to paint a vivid picture of the Merton population in 2021.

We can look forward to January 2022, when the National Archives will release records of the census completed in 1921 and we can discover more about life in Merton 100 years ago.

Census statistics

- The first census was taken in 1801 and the most recent was completed in 2011.
- The 2021 survey is a ground-breaking digital-first census.
- It only takes 10 minutes to fill in the census.
- Headline results will be available within 12 months.
- Personal information will be locked away until 2121.

Filling out your census

Every home has been sent a census form by the Office for National Statistics, which you can fill in online. Paper copies are available if required. The survey includes questions about your sex, age, work, health, education, household size and ethnicity. For the first time, there will be a question asking people whether they have served in the armed forces, as well as voluntary questions for those aged 16 and over on sexual orientation and gender identity. By law, you must complete the census. If you do not, or if you give false information, you could be fined up to £1,000. Operating in line with the Government’s latest Covid-19 guidance, field officers will be deployed across the country to contact those who have not responded and will offer help and advice if needed.

To complete your census, and find out how you can get help with filling it in, visit: census.gov.uk or call 0800 141 2021.
We urgently need to find more foster families. Can you give a Merton child or young person a safe and secure home?

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

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).
Looking for positive results

Pauline McCullough talks to *My Merton* about her dual roles to support her community during these testing times.

During the week, Pauline McCullough is one of the council’s social workers for adults, specialising in safeguarding. However, at the weekend, Pauline is a team leader carrying out rapid Covid-19 tests, at the Morden Assembly Hall, which opened as a Covid testing centre in January.

Pauline said: “It has been a great success. I stepped forward because I want to help my community. We have people from all walks of life volunteering here. It is so nice to see how the team take a real pride in the work that they are doing.”

Pauline leads a team of 16, who carry out the rapid Covid-19 lateral flow tests, which are for anyone who lives or works in Merton who does not have any Covid symptoms.

She said: “We know that one in three people can have Coronavirus but not show any symptoms, and that there are new variants around which are more transmissible. If you test negative, it will leave you more comfortable and confident to move around your local area. We are expecting that the milder weather and the easing of lockdown will bring more people through our doors this spring.”

The centre is open seven days a week and has capacity to carry out up to 800 lateral flow tests a day, which we encourage people to book in advance, on the council’s website. The team are kitted out in full personal protective equipment and are all tested for Covid before the start of every shift, which is run with military precision.

Pauline said: “The system is efficient and friendly. We try to put people at their ease, because, although it is not painful, the test can feel uncomfortable. People have said they feel safe coming here, as it is a properly socially distanced process, clinical and clean and they like our professionalism.”

The whole process can be done in under ten minutes and begins with registration onto the NHS system in the church hall next door. Each station is thoroughly cleaned after every person has swabbed their tonsils and nostrils. Results are normally available within half an hour, but at busy times, this may take up to 24 hours. Thankfully, because Merton is a great community and residents have abided by the lockdown rules, the weekly number of positive tests fell by more than 95% between January and March.

Pauline said: “We get quite sad when we get a positive test, as we know the result will change that person’s life, but we know that we are stopping that person mixing with others and potentially spreading the virus even further.”

To book a rapid Covid-19 lateral flow test, visit: [merton.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://merton.gov.uk/coronavirus)
community safety
A safe place

Joining forces to stay safe
The council works in partnership with a range of organisations to keep our community safe and to support victims of crime.

Caught on camera

Together, the council and the police are clamping down on crime and anti-social behaviour. The council is committed to ensuring that Merton remains one of London’s safest boroughs and our public protection surveillance camera system is one of the tools used to promote community safety.

The council’s experienced CCTV operators monitor the borough’s 210 close-circuit cameras from their control room 24 hours a day. 365 days a year and alert the police, via a two-way radio, if they spot any suspected criminal or anti-social behaviour.

The CCTV system plays a vital role in recording evidence for the police and council to use in investigations, which has led to the arrest and prosecution of offenders. In the last year, the CCTV operators recorded more than 100 items of footage of fly-tippers dumping rubbish, which were passed to the council’s environmental enforcement team. Investigations into the recorded incidents have resulted in fines being issued to offenders, and the seizure of vehicles involved in this criminal activity.

You can seek police assistance in a non-emergency by calling 101 and in an emergency by calling 999.
To report crime online, visit: www.met.police.uk/ro/report/ocr/af/how-to-report-a-crime
To find your ward Police Safer Neighbourhood Team, visit: www.met.police.uk

Support for abuse survivors

The council’s One Stop Shop is continuing to provide vital support for residents suffering from domestic abuse and sexual violence. Visit our website merton.gov.uk/domesticviolence.
To speak to a Merton Independent Domestic Violence Advisor, call 020 7801 1777. For information on the Rape Crisis Live Chat Helpline, visit: www.rapecrisis.org.uk. Call 999 if you are in danger.

Hate Crime Advice Surgery

Merton’s Hate Crime Advice Surgeries are a safe place for residents to get advice on all forms of hate crime and to report incidents anonymously. The surgeries are hosted by the council, in partnership with Tell MAMA. Representatives from the Inner Strength Network, the Polish Family Association and South London Tamil Welfare Group are also available during the surgeries, which are held by telephone on the second Tuesday of the month between noon and 1pm. Call 020 8545 4146. No appointment is needed. In an emergency, call 999.

Could you spot a scammer?
Scams are on the rise and fraudsters are finding new ways to target people with increasingly sophisticated tactics. You can stay one step ahead of the scammers by joining Merton Trading Standards for a free online talk to find out how to protect yourself and your loved ones. Choose from the following dates: 7 April, 12 noon–1pm; 15 April, 10–11am; 27 April, 7–8pm; 7 May, 10–11am; 11 May, 3–4pm; 20 May, 7–8pm; 7 June, 10–11am; 11 June, 12 noon–1pm; 15 June, 7–8pm and book your place by emailing: trading.standards@merton.gov.uk.
Cutting carbon together

Since declaring a climate emergency, it’s been one of the council’s top priorities to reduce carbon emissions, both within the organisation and in the borough as a whole. My Merton finds out how everyone can play their part in this effort.

As part of our Climate Strategy and Action Plan, we aim to make the council a net-zero carbon organisation by 2030, and to make Merton a net-zero carbon borough by 2050.

Reaching our net-zero carbon goals will require a huge effort from everyone in the borough. Throughout 2021, we’ll be encouraging everyone in Merton to join the effort to make the borough carbon neutral by taking steps to reduce their carbon footprint. Each month, we’ll be focussing on a different theme, looking at ways we can all tackle climate change. If you're inspired to make a difference, you can pledge to make one or more changes – some big, some small – to your routines and habits.

Here’s a taste of some of the themes, and the pledges that Merton residents have already made:

**January**

**Food and diet**

It takes a lot of energy and water to produce, package and transport the food we buy. Making a change to our diets and the way we buy food is a simple and effective way to decrease our individual carbon footprints. It can also save us money and improve our health and wellbeing.

Residents from all over the borough have been making pledges to eat more seasonal food, compost food waste, grow their own food, cut down on meat and dairy and eat more fruit, vegetables and other plant-based food, and more.

**February**

**Businesses and investment**

Both businesses and consumers have the opportunity to invest more sustainably and use their buying power to drive the transition to a low carbon economy. For businesses, reducing emissions is not only good for the planet, but can also help attract talent and customers, save money and boost productivity. Local business owners have been making pledges, such as carrying out a sustainability audit, developing green skills in their organisation and helping customers make sustainable decisions, whilst consumers have been pledging to support sustainable businesses and make greener investments.

**March**

**Green spaces**

By converting concrete into greenery, providing food, and creating suitable conditions, help wildlife living near you to thrive. Tree canopy covers nearly a quarter of Merton’s land, and the council has a tree-planting programme. Trees are not just beautiful, they can absorb a small part of the borough’s harmful emissions, as well as offering protection from extreme weather like heatwaves and floods. Across the borough, local people have been making pledges such as encouraging wildlife in their gardens, joining community planting projects and watering street trees.

Get involved You can explore each month’s theme, and make your own pledges at merton.gov.uk/ClimatePledges. Don’t worry if you’re not interested by the current month’s theme, you can still make pledges from previous themes at any time of the year.
How did you feel about getting such high-profile recognition for your work?
I felt really proud, it was a real honour. It was great for the club to get recognition for its work to give young people a positive future, by helping them to achieve their goals both on and off the pitch. Everyone at the club is very proud and 100 per cent behind the work it carries out in the community.

Tell us about how you help to develop young players in the club’s academy.
The academy delivers football training, as well as academic and vocational education programmes. We currently have 70 boys, under the age of 18, who are with us full time. A number have achieved great success and have secured places in national level football teams and professional clubs, such as Middlesbrough and Charlton. But it is not just about football – we also aim to increase young people’s exposure to career paths and interests they may not be aware of. We provide mentoring to guide and support the boys, to help motivate them into working hard to achieve their goals.

What are your plans to expand the educational offer at the academy?
We already do a lot of work to encourage the boys to go to university, and many have gone on to achieve degrees in business, finance, and psychology. We want to take that a step further by introducing a foundation degree. I found doing a foundation degree was a great stepping stone for me, and it helped me prepare for studying for my degree at university.

What do you find most rewarding?
Seeing the boys develop and find their calling, whether it is applying for university or going to play high-level football. Many of our young people arrive from challenging circumstances, so it is wonderful to see them discovering interests and passions in areas which were not even previously familiar to them.

How have you continued to train, teach, and support the boys during the pandemic?
We delivered the fitness and training online. But, more importantly, we continued to engage with them to boost their wellbeing and keep their hopes, motivation and drive up. Lots of young people saw their plans dashed, and so it was important to tell them that there is light at the end of the tunnel.