On track for success
BMX riders at the races

Merton Together
Supporting our community this winter
Since becoming Leader just a year ago, I’ve made it my priority to listen. That’s why this summer I launched Your Merton, the borough’s widest-reaching community-engagement programme ever.

It’s been great – and really helpful – to see so many responses. I’ve learnt more about your priorities, what you love about Merton, and how the pandemic has changed how you want to live. Thank you for taking part.

And now, because we’ve listened, we’re taking action on the things that matter to you the most.

We’ve heard you’re worried about the cost of living. So we have scrapped plans to increase parking charges. With rising energy bills, cuts to Universal Credit, and National Insurance costs set to rise, we don’t want to add to your already high household bills.

We’ve also heard that, although Merton is one of the lowest crime boroughs in London, you want more reassurance that you are safe on our streets. So we are investing more than £1m in our CCTV network.

We’ve heard you love our parks and green spaces, and are staying local more than ever before, but you want our streets to be more attractive. So we will spend an extra £1.4m next year tidying them up.

I know how much you value your local high streets and communities, so over the next few months you’ll hear more from us about what we are doing improve the things that are most important to you and your families.

Stay safe this winter and have a lovely Christmas!

Councillor Mark Allison
Leader of Merton Council

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The Leader of Merton Council, Councillor Mark Allison, writes for My Merton

Small Business Saturday

This Small Business Saturday, on 4 December, the Council Leader, Councillor Mark Allison, will be touring the borough to encourage people to support their local traders. There are more than 6,000 businesses in Merton, many of which are small businesses, family firms and local companies. During the pandemic, many of them were forced to close their premises due to the lockdowns, which happened during the busiest trading time of the year. Although some companies were able to set up online, this year our high streets need our support more than ever and Christmas shoppers are urged to help give the local economy a much-needed boost by buying gifts and festive food from local retailers. If you can, people are asked to consider buying an extra item or two and donating them to a local food bank. With the shopping done, there are plenty of local cafés, pubs and restaurants to choose from to enjoy a drink or a meal with family or friends.
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Plus your pullout Recycling News
Youth Justice Service praised by inspectors

Merton’s Youth Justice Service (YJS) and Youth Crime Prevention Executive Board were rated ‘Good’ overall with many ‘Outstanding’ areas in a report by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP).

Following fieldwork carried out in May 2021, which included a review of case files and phone and video conferencing with YJS staff, the service was found to be ‘Outstanding’ in seven out of 12 areas surveyed, with four deemed ‘Good’. Every aspect of how children are treated while they are in the courts system was rated ‘Outstanding’ and children and their families continued to receive support after sentencing.

HMIP reviewed three key frameworks of the partnership work and council’s service: the arrangements for organisational delivery of the service, which reflects how children are brought into the service; the quality of work that is done with children who are sentenced by the courts; and the overall quality of out-of-court disposal work, which measures how children and their families are helped after sentencing.

“There is a clear vision which is well communicated across the partnership, and the YJS Board is well attended,” inspectors said. “Board members advocate for YJS children,” they noted, “and have sufficient seniority to make decisions and commit resources from their own agencies.”

Council Tax Support

Lower income residents in the borough are set to be protected from increased Council Tax bills in the spring.

At its November meeting, the council’s Cabinet agreed to recommend to Council that the borough’s Council Tax Support Scheme should be extended for the financial year 2022/23, so that recipients are not left worse off if their bills go up in April.

Each year, the council has to decide whether to update the scheme so that low levels of Council Tax are maintained for some pensioners and those on low incomes.

Eligibility for Council Tax Support depends on factors including household income and those living with the person making the claim, including their children.

Libraries celebrate Black History Month

Noo Saro-Wiwa, author of Looking for Transwonderland: Travels in Nigeria, visited Wimbledon Library for one of a series of events organised by the libraries to celebrate Black History Month.

Air quality sensors

Innovative air quality and traffic sensors are being rolled out in town centres, near schools and on routes in and out of the borough.

The council is installing 68 air quality sensors – the highest number of Breathe London sensors of any borough in the capital, in partnership with the Greater London Authority and Imperial College. They will monitor in real time the effects of pollution in the air and how these levels are affected by motorists and other factors. They can also analyse pollutants that haven’t been monitored before, including fine dust.

If you’re planning a community event in the run-up to the festive season that you’d like to let everyone know about, you can list it free on the council’s online events diary. Simply submit the details via the form on our website.

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The air quality monitors will provide reliable data about air pollution in the borough and help the council to meet its target for air quality and aiming to be net-zero by 2030 and towards making Merton a net-zero borough by 2050.

For the first time, Vivacity traffic sensors will be installed alongside the air-quality monitors. The Vivacity traffic sensors will provide accurate data on road and pavement usage and monitor the use of motor vehicles, cyclists and how pedestrians use the town centres. No personal data is collected and the technology cannot be used for enforcement purposes.

Together, these sensors will provide an accurate picture of how motor vehicles affect air quality.
Plans for emissions-based charging system scrapped

Plans for an emissions-based charging system for parking in Merton, which would have seen a number of permit holders paying more, have been reversed. At their October meeting, the council’s Cabinet decided to retain the current pricing system, due to concerns around increasing pressures on residents’ cost of living, and in light of new information suggesting that the most polluting vehicles are already being taken off the road.

Car ownership in Merton has fallen by approximately 2,500 between 2017 and 2020, whilst the number of electric vehicles in the borough has increased by more than 70% over the last year alone, from 482 to 824.

Parking permit data shows that there has been a shift to less polluting vehicles as residents have replaced their old cars, with approximately 15% of residential permits moving into lower emissions bands in the last two years.

Although the emissions-based charging system is no longer proceeding, the council’s charging system for parking still incentivises less-polluting modes of transport by charging more in areas with better public transport connections and offering reduced permits for electric vehicles. The council remains committed to delivering its Air Quality Action Plan.

Rainbow crossing returns to Wimbledon

Wimbledon's rainbow crossing is back on The Broadway with more colours added to include representation for black and trans pride, as well as those living with, or have been lost to, HIV/AIDS.

The new design was unveiled ahead of Hate Crime Awareness Week, which focused on trans hate crime.

In 2019, Merton was one of the first councils in the country to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Pride by unveiling a multi-coloured crossing outside the New Wimbledon Theatre.

School places

If your child is due to start reception class in September 2022, the deadline to apply for a primary school place is 15 January. To maximise your chances of being offered a school place that you are happy with, our school admissions team recommend considering schools closest to where you live; checking each school’s entrance criteria carefully; attending open days; and using all six of your preferences on the application form.

Community forums

These are free meetings where you can discuss a range of issues, which will then be followed by relevant organisations. Meetings can be held online. Check the website for details:

- Wimbledon Community Forum
  1 December at 7.15pm
- Raynes Park Community Forum
  2 December at 7.15pm
- Mitcham Community Forum
  22 February at 7.15pm
- Morden Community Forum
  23 February at 7.15pm

Funding for free school meals

The council has guaranteed to continue funding school holiday supermarket vouchers for young people in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM), designating £600,000 to cover hundreds of children during the recent autumn half term, the Christmas holidays, the February half term and Easter break. Merton will fund FSM through the Household Support Grant programme, which has allocated the council £1.2 million to support those in need this winter.

Almost a quarter of secondary school pupils in Merton are eligible for FSM, and, following a recent cut to Universal Credit, there are concerns children could go hungry without provision of the £15-a-week supermarket vouchers. The Government’s COVID Support Grant, which helped cover the cost of free school meals and holiday activities, was wound up after the last round was insufficient for the summer holidays, leaving the council to cover some of the cost with £75,000 from our own monies.
**Keeping Merton informed**

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**Rogue landlord convicted and fined more than £33,000**

The council successfully prosecuted a rogue landlord and his associated limited company for letting unsafe properties and operating in a completely unlicensed manner, securing fines and costs in excess of £33,000.

Lavender Hill Magistrates’ Court heard the case against Pedro Reis Tenajas and London Corporate Relocation Ltd on 21 September. Neither Mr Tenajas nor his co-defendant attended.

In their absence, the court heard from the South London Legal Partnership how the defendants had failed to apply for the correct license to rent out a house in Braemar Avenue, Wimbledon Park, as a house in multiple occupation (HMO).

Further charges were made that they had failed to legally act as landlords, had not provided information to the property’s occupiers, and had not carried out the legally required fire safety measures for an HMO.

Magistrates found the case to be proven against Mr Tenajas and noted that the failings were extremely serious, and had potentially put lives at risk. They also said the company had been uncooperative and obstructive, and had provided no company accounts.

London Corporate Relocation Ltd was ordered to pay fines and costs amounting to £21,750 within 28 days, while Mr Tenajas was fined a total of £11,530 to pay within the same time span, with a collection order applied to him.

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**EU settled status**

A total of 48,890 applications have been made to the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) in Merton. The latest figures show that 44,990 applications were concluded by 30 June. Polish, Romanian and Italian nationals made the most applications.

Late applications may be accepted by the Home Office if there are reasonable grounds and each child must have their own application. If you or someone you know need support with an application, help is available from Citizens Advice Merton and Lambeth.

When required, EU, EEA and Swiss citizens and their family members must show their EU settled status digitally, rather than using their passport or identification card, via www.gov.uk/view-prove-immigration-status.

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**New Mitcham Bridge open**

The bridge over the River Wandle re-opened to traffic last month, cutting journey times for buses, cars and other traffic. The original bridge had to be demolished for safety reasons following its partial collapse after heavy rainfall. The rebuild was particularly complex, not only due to COVID-19, but because the bridge influences river flow and has a range of utilities running through its structure. The new single-span river crossing along the A217 is wider than the previous three-arch bridge and has fully segregated cycle lanes.

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**Best Business Awards**

The theme of this year’s Merton’s Best Business Awards, run by Merton Chamber of Commerce, is Survive, Revive and Thrive, recognising how difficult the last 18 months have been for businesses.

The awards were cancelled last year due to the pandemic, and have returned to help give the local economy a boost by celebrating how companies have shown flexibility and resilience, while providing excellent customer service.

The council is sponsoring the Climate Action Award, which recognises innovation from businesses to tackle climate change by reducing their carbon footprint and becoming more sustainable. The council will also be presenting a Kindness in the Community Award. The winners will be announced at an award ceremony at the All England Club in Wimbledon in December.

**Mind the service gap**

Reduced Northern Line services from Morden, South Wimbledon and Colliers Wood will be routed via the Charing Cross branch from 15 January until mid-May. The Bank branch will be closed between Kennington and Moorgate due to major construction work at Bank station to improve the interchange with Monument.

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*find out more* merton.gov.uk/EUSS

*find out more* www.mertonbestbusiness.co.uk

*find out more* merton.gov.uk/northern-line-closure
Dickie Guy, the legendary Wimbledon FC goalkeeper and AFC Wimbledon president, was honoured by Merton Council in September with the freedom of the borough. He was initially presented with the award at the Civic Centre in a special ceremony in front of his family and a full Council, receiving an accolade granted to just 23 other people including tennis players and Wimbledon championship winners Virginia Wade and Andy Murray. The ceremony was repeated on the pitch at Plough Lane on Saturday 18 September, ahead of AFC’s League One clash with Plymouth Argyle. The 72-year-old turned out for the Dons more than 600 times between 1967 and 1978, including 275 consecutive appearances. In 2004, Dickie was made president of AFC Wimbledon and played for a Wimbledon Old Boys team that year who took on a team representing their 1988 FA Cup Final rivals Liverpool at AFC’s then stadium Kingsmeadow in Kingston. Council Leader Councillor Mark Allison said: “The whole community around Merton and AFC Wimbledon knows how great a man Dickie Guy is.” Former Council Leader Councillor Stephen Alambritis said: “Freedom of the borough is the highest honour we can give and is bestowed on few people. It is awarded to people who have provided outstanding service in the borough. Dickie has stayed loyal to Wimbledon since his finest hour in 1975 in the FA Cup against Leeds, and stood shoulder to shoulder with fans when they launched AFC Wimbledon in 2002.”

**Football legend honoured**

Former Wimbledon FC goalkeeper and AFC Wimbledon president Dickie Guy received the freedom of Merton in two ceremonies in September.
Get ready for winter

Protect yourself and your loved ones from becoming ill this winter by having your COVID-19 vaccinations and a flu jab. Make twice-weekly testing part of your routine and keep going with the basic measures to keep everyone safe.

This winter both the flu virus and COVID-19 are circulating, but don’t worry, you can protect yourself and your loved ones by making sure you’re all fully vaccinated.

Here’s what you need to know about getting the flu and COVID-19 vaccines, including the booster jab.

**Flu**

More people are likely to get flu this winter, as fewer people will have built up natural immunity to it during the COVID-19 pandemic. This makes it harder for our bodies to fight off the virus.

**For parents**

If you’re a parent of a two- to three-year-old:

Your child is eligible for the flu vaccine nasal spray. Contact your GP or health visitor to make an appointment.

If you’re a parent of a primary or secondary school-aged child:

All school pupils up to Year 11 can get the free flu nasal spray vaccine. Your school will be in touch before the vaccination teams visit.

Flu and COVID-19 vaccines won’t be given during the same sessions.

**For adults**

If you’re 18 to 50 years old, you could be eligible for a free flu vaccine if you have certain health conditions. See [www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/flu-influenza-vaccine](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/flu-influenza-vaccine) for more information.

If you’re aged 50+, you’re also entitled to a free flu jab, and you can book this at many local pharmacies.

If you are not eligible for a free flu vaccine, you can also receive the vaccine privately from pharmacies for around £15 if you wish.

Find the full list of participating pharmacies here: [www.nhs.uk/service-search/pharmacy/pharmacy-nhs-flu-vaccine-service](http://www.nhs.uk/service-search/pharmacy/pharmacy-nhs-flu-vaccine-service)

**COVID-19 vaccine**

Since the start of the vaccine rollout, nearly 140,000 Merton residents have now had both doses of their COVID-19 vaccine.

If you have children aged 12 to 15:


If your children are aged 16 to 17:

Young people over 16 are eligible to receive one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. You can book online or visit your local walk-in clinic. If you will turn 18 within three months, you can also get a second dose.

If you’re aged 18 to 49:

If you’re aged 18+, you are eligible for two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine. Pop along to our walk-in clinics where we are offering the vaccine to anyone who missed their first dose. We currently have walk-in clinics at the Wilson Hospital, Nelson Heath Centre and Centre Court Shopping Centre. You can only have your second dose at least eight weeks after your first. Get your second dose at a walk-in clinic or book online today.

**Hands, face, space and ventilation**

The simplest measures can be the most effective at stopping the spread of COVID-19 and flu, as well as other illnesses that are more prevalent during the winter.

Washing your hands regularly and thoroughly is the first line of defence against contracting viruses.

Try to avoid touching your face, to prevent viruses entering your body via your eyes, nose or mouth.

Please wear face coverings inside enclosed public spaces, particularly when you come into contact with people who you don’t usually meet. As well as protecting yourself, this also helps those most at risk of becoming seriously ill with COVID-19 to feel safer and more able to continue with their daily activities.

As temperatures dip, our instinct is to turn up the heating and get cosy. However, reducing ventilation helps COVID-19 to spread. Put on an extra jumper and leave the window open to allow fresh air to circulate and carry away any COVID-19 particles, which could be inhaled by others in the room and infect them.
With COVID-19 cases currently higher than they were this time last year, regular testing remains an important way of tracking and controlling the spread of the virus.

**How to test if you don’t have symptoms:**
One in three people who have COVID-19 don’t display any symptoms; this is why we recommend everyone tests twice a week at home.

If you would like guidance on how to self-test, then help is at hand. We opened a new asymptomatic test site at the Wilson Hospital in October, replacing our previous site at the New Horizon Centre in Pollards Hill. Supervised testing is now available at the Wilson Hospital on Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm and tests should be booked in advance.

Residents without COVID-19 symptoms can receive assistance to take a test from any of our asymptomatic testing sites, including 18 Community Pharmacies across Merton and Centre Court Shopping Centre, as well as the Wilson Hospital. See [merton.gov.uk/communitytesting](http://merton.gov.uk/communitytesting)

If you are confident to take the test yourself, then you can collect up to two boxes of seven rapid tests to use twice a week at home from Merton libraries. You can also get home test kits from a number of participating pharmacies in the borough, although you now need to get a collect code. Before you go to the pharmacy, simply use this service to get a collect code and then show the code when you collect your tests. You can also get a collect code by calling 119 (free from landlines and mobiles). Lines are open from 7am to 11pm. You need to get a new collect code for each collection. [test-for-coronavirus.service.gov.uk/collect-lateral-flow-kits](http://test-for-coronavirus.service.gov.uk/collect-lateral-flow-kits)

All secondary school children are expected to test twice weekly during term time to keep themselves, school staff and their loved ones at home safe.

**How to test if you are showing symptoms**
If you have symptoms, even if you’ve been vaccinated, you must isolate and book a PCR test or call 119. Don’t forget, mild COVID symptoms for you could make others seriously ill.

COVID-19 symptoms can include:
- a high temperature
- a new, continuous cough
- a loss of, or change to, your sense of smell or taste.

It will remain a legal requirement this winter for anyone testing positive for coronavirus to self-isolate for 10 days, irrespective of their vaccination status or age, to stop the spread of the virus.

PCR testing kits are free and can be ordered online at [www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test](http://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test) or you can book to go to one of the two walk-through testing centres in Merton – at Merton College on London Road or in Elm Nursery Car Park.

To find out more about how and where to test for COVID-19 in Merton, visit: [merton.gov.uk/coronavirus/test](http://merton.gov.uk/coronavirus/test)

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**COVID-19 booster jabs**

**What is the COVID-19 booster jab?**
Although a double dose of COVID-19 vaccine provides protection against severe infection, its effectiveness may start to wane over time. The NHS will let you know when it’s your turn to have a booster dose.

**If you’re aged 50 to 64:**
You are eligible for a free COVID-19 booster (as well as the normal two doses of the vaccine). You can receive your COVID-19 booster six months after your second dose. The NHS will contact you when it’s your turn.

**If you’re over 65:**
If you haven’t had a COVID-19 booster invitation yet, and it’s been six months since you had your second dose, contact your GP or book your appointment online without an invitation or head to one of our walk-in clinics.

**If you’re under 50:**


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The Mayor of Merton, Councillor Michael Brunt, receiving his COVID-19 booster vaccination.
Spreading community spirit this festive season

As we move into the second winter of the pandemic, many of us are facing uncertain times, with high infection rates of COVID-19 and the cut to Universal Credit and soaring energy bills making it hard for many families to make ends meet. However, there is no shortage of community spirit in Merton, with plenty of support available to help those facing tough times.

Merton Community Hub

Advice on financial issues, practical help with tasks such as grocery shopping and collecting prescriptions, befriending for lonely or isolated people, and help to remain independent at home is just some of the support offered by the Merton Community Hub. Run by our voluntary-sector partners Age UK Merton, Wimbledon Guild and Merton Connected (previously MVSC), the hub provides direct support and links people to other organisations in the borough that can meet their needs. The Merton Community Hub is open Monday to Friday from 10am-4pm. Visit their website at mertoncommunityhub.org.uk, call 020 8066 4086 or email: help@mertoncommunityhub.org.uk

Dons Local Action Group

Set up by Wimbledon AFC at the start of the pandemic, the Dons Local Action Group aims to keep the community fed, connected and supported against poverty. Volunteers collect donations of food from customers outside supermarkets and use these to pack and deliver food parcels to vulnerable residents facing financial hardship. A significant amount of the food donated is passed on to other community organisations, including the Fresh Foodbank in Pollards Hill and the Polish Family Association, to distribute to families in need. The group, which is a registered charity, also runs a laptop donation scheme to benefit school children without online access at home and supports residents facing furniture poverty by collecting donations of good-quality essential home furniture, including sofas, desks, bed frames and white goods like fridge freezers. These are checked and then taken to new homes. The Dons Local Action Group distributes an average of £150,000 worth of food, furniture and laptops each month to vulnerable people in our communities. Find out more about the support available and volunteering opportunities: donslocalaction.org

This winter, if you have an urgent but non life-threatening medical need, please use NHS 111 online service, rather than going straight to an A&E department. The NHS 111 online service makes it easier for patients to get the treatment they need in the right place, by directing patients to urgent treatment centres, GPs, pharmacies and emergency dental services and, if needed, arrange a call from a healthcare professional.
Freelance Fridays

Are you working from home and in need of a change of scene? As part of the Merton Togethers Campaign, local business Wimbletech CIC are offering free day passes every Friday before Christmas for people living in Merton, who are looking for an alternative space to work in. Located above Wimbledon Library, Wimbletech has space for 100 people, super-fast wi-fi, private booths for Zoom calls and free tea and coffee. Membership is available for only £3 a day and benefits include 24/7 access to a members only hot-desking area. There is also a meeting and events space available for up to 50 people. This is free for local organisations running free community events in the evenings or weekends in the lead up to Christmas. Find out more www.wimbletech.com/work-hub/wimbletech

Food banks

When you are shopping for groceries, please consider buying a couple of extra items and donating them to your local food bank. No one in our community should have to face going hungry. If you have reached crisis point and need help, contact Wimbledon Foodbank. Visit their website, wimbledon.foodbank.org.uk or call 0808 2082138 for free (open Monday to Friday, 9am–5pm).

Community fridges

Fresh fruit and vegetables grown in Phipps Bridge Community Garden and Mitcham Community Orchard and Gardens are among the foods put into four community fridges and given to residents who are facing food poverty. Sustainable Merton has teamed up with Commonside Community Development Trust, the Polish Family Association and Wimbledon Guild to form Merton’s Community Fridge Network. As well as accepting donations of food and redistributing it to those in need, the network also runs food demonstrations of how to make tasty recipes from many cultures and provides information about nutrition. Find out more www.sustainblemerton.org

Hearts & Minds

The pandemic has taken a toll on many young people’s mental health. Hearts & Minds is the UK’s only peer-led charity and service for people under the age of 25 who are experiencing difficulties with their mental health. The charity is unique in that it is a national community run by young people who have first-hand experience of mental-health issues, rather than an organisation that’s led by statutory services, clinicians or larger mental health or youth groups. They provide weekly peer support sessions for people aged 14-25 who self-identify as struggling with their mental health, regardless of where they live or whether they have accessed services before. The sessions run from 5-7pm on Tuesday evenings in Merton Arts Space in Wimbledon Library. All the staff and volunteers are trained to provide occasional one-to-one mentoring and a comprehensive volunteering programme.

For more information on receiving support or becoming a volunteer, visit: www.heartsandminds.org.uk or email: info@heartsandminds.org.uk
How many times in the last few months have you wished you had a tool for a specific job, but balked at the price of buying one new, or even second-hand? If you’re a casual DIYer or gardener, or you fancy trying a new hobby or hosting a special event, you may need anything from a carpet cleaner or cordless drill to an acoustic guitar or HD projector.

Thankfully, help is at hand in the shape of the Morden Library of Things, a partnership between the library, Sustainable Merton and Merton Council. In 2019, the library received a £37,320 grant from Merton Council’s Neighbourhood Fund, which enabled staff to develop the equipment-borrowing scheme.

If you’re wondering how the library works, it couldn’t be simpler: sign up and pay a £1 membership fee and you’re ready to start borrowing; having browsed all the tools and gadgets online, just reserve the item you need; then collect your choice, use it and return it. The library has everything from tents and backpacks to steam cleaners, dehumidifiers and pressure washers, plus ice-cream makers, gazebos, PA systems, drills, extension cables, angle grinders, sewing machines, musical instruments, strimmers, power shears and even hedge trimmers and lawnmowers. Buying any of these new or second-hand is beyond many budgets, but you could borrow a pair of garden loppers for £2 a day or £8 per week; a pasta maker for only £3/day or £12 per week; a wallpaper stripper or waffle maker for £4/day or £16 per week; a paper shredder for £3/day; or a three-person tent for just £30 a week.

Using the library is cheaper and more convenient than buying, it cuts down on household clutter and waste, you get to meet your neighbours and become more involved in the community, and you’re being kinder to the environment by sharing things when you’re not using them.

Our library of things is inside the main Morden Library.

Elsewhere, borrowers from the Crystal Palace scheme have prevented 23 tonnes of waste going to landfill by borrowing rather than buying, and new libraries have now opened in Kentish Town and Hackney Wick.

For more information about the Library of Things and to sign up, visit www.libraryofthings.co.uk/morden.
Support your local businesses this Christmas

Shoppers are encouraged to support our local businesses this winter, after most of last year’s festive season was spent in lockdown. Many independent outlets relied on websites and deliveries during the pandemic, so you can shop with them online again this year. Enjoy a glass of mulled wine and a mince pie at your local café and leave positive reviews on social media to help family-run companies and small firms to attract new customers.

LIGHTING UP TOWN CENTRES

Festive lights will be switched on in town centres across the borough to add a bit of sparkle to your Christmas shopping. The main switch on will be in Mitcham Fair Green on 26 November, where a Christmas event will be held from 4pm. The council will also put up Christmas trees in our other main town centres – Morden, Colliers Wood and Raynes Park – ahead of Advent to mark the countdown to Christmas. Local business groups will be providing trees in Wimbledon and Wimbledon Village. Find out more merton.gov.uk/Christmas

SMALL BUSINESS SATURDAY

On Saturday 4 December, Merton will celebrate Small Business Saturday, an annual initiative inspired by the American shopping holiday just after Thanksgiving. Six thousand local businesses are crucial for maintaining the borough’s prosperity after another difficult year, so this event will help support retailers, small businesses and communities throughout Merton. The aim is to encourage residents to buy their Christmas shopping – everything from food and presents to trees and decorations – from independent businesses. By dining out and hosting Christmas parties and other festive events at local restaurants, rather than the bigger chains, independent outlets will receive a welcome financial boost this winter.

CHRISTMAS TREES

If you’re looking for a real Christmas tree this festive season, why not head to Pines and Needles in Wimbledon Park? Simply choose your perfect tree and take it away on the day or arrange to have it delivered to your door. For more information and to order your Christmas tree online, visit: www.pinesandneedles.com.
After an £8.5-million refurbishment and battling through the pandemic, the children’s institution is open for panto season

The children’s Polka Theatre on Wimbledon Broadway finally reopened in September in its new state-of-the-art premises with a performance and month-long run of RED, a play inspired by Little Red Riding Hood, that features wicked wolves and a dethroned queen.

This is the first show back on at the theatre after an £8.5-million refurbishment, of which Merton Council donated £95,000 from its Neighbourhood Fund in 2019.

A firm favourite in the borough since it opened in the former Holy Trinity Halls in 1979, the theatre has hosted works by writers such as Alan Ayckbourn, Philip Pullman and Malorie Blackman.

The theatre, which recently added veteran Oscar-winning actress Judi Dench to its board of patrons, has welcomed more than 3.5 million visitors over the last four decades, and more than 18,000 disadvantaged and disabled children attend tailored community and school initiatives every year.

The renovation, led by architects Foster Wilson Size, began in February 2019 after the theatre secured funds from bodies such as the council, a £2.5-million grant from the National Lottery through the Arts Council, and support from the Mayor of London’s Good Growth Fund, but had to delay its planned reopening in the summer of 2020 due to the pandemic.

The work has created a new early years theatre, rehearsal and development studios, and a creative learning studio aimed at children with sensory needs. There is also improved access throughout the whole complex. The building’s café and shop have also been updated, and venue space for private hire has been developed to provide sustainability to ensure the theatre’s longevity.

Lynette Shanbury, Polka’s Executive Director and Joint CEO, said: “This redevelopment has been over 15 years in the planning and it is extraordinary to finally be open at a time when people, particularly children, need creative outlets more than ever.

“Alongside two significantly improved theatre spaces, the new facilities for our audiences – free open-access indoor and outdoor play areas, a larger café, hireable spaces, and areas for school use – will ensure Polka continues as a vital community hub.

“We want to thank all our supporters and funders from the bottom of our hearts, because without their commitment and faith in this project, we would not have got to this point.”

Councillor Brenda Fraser, Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Skills, said: “We’re delighted that Polka Theatre can open its doors again and enchant thousands more local children.

“Merton’s theatres are some of our greatest cultural assets, and Polka has been entertaining our younger residents for more than 40 years. After such a difficult 18 months, it is brilliant to see it reopening with such a strong programme of events, including Cinderella returning for panto season!”

Find out more about what’s on at polkatheatre.com/whats-on
BMX bandits are go!

It was one of the stand-out Olympic sports with British athletes cleaning up on the track, and you can join in the action with Merton Saints

As the cold nights draw in, the halcyon days of the summer Olympics are behind us, but there is a part of a Merton field that remains forever Tokyo 2020, where Team GB picked up four medals, including two golds, across the BMX disciplines – racing, based on pure speed, and park, which consists of mind-blowing acrobatic tricks. These medals made it our most successful sport in the games, as every Contestant who made the journey to Japan picked up a gong.

At the BMX track in Mitcham Eastfields, home to Merton Saints, the racing successes of Bethany Shriever (gold) and Kye Whyte (silver) live long in the memory, and in September hundreds of competitors and supporters descended on the track for a regional meeting.

Clubs from local neighbours Brixton and Peckham – for whom Whyte rode – were joined by others from all over the south of England, taking part in the 100-plus races across the day. Under the eagle eye of Saints Club Secretary Catherine O’Brien and her team of local volunteer stewards, categories from the youngest – six years and under – up to grizzled veterans – 50+ – contributed to a grand day out.

The club celebrates its first decade this year, having been founded in 2011, and the track on Acacia Road was completed the following year, being built for the council by Clark & Kent Contractors in just nine weeks. The 340-metre track is U-shaped and lit with floodlights, and is one of the biggest to be found within the M25. It can host hundreds of spectators and is less than five minutes’ walk from Mitcham Eastfields station.

The Saints compete in competitions across the country, but stress that they are a “small, friendly community of riders, supporters and enthusiasts” for bicycle motocross (that’s BMX) racing. While some club riders have scaled the heights of European and World Championships, many just enjoy riding on the first-class facilities on offer at the track.

British Cycling-qualified coaches are on hand to help hone skills and new beginners are encouraged to come and try out the sport. The club provides all the necessary gear, from bikes to protective clothing and helmets, so you can find out if it’s for your children – or you! – before you commit to that investment. Club sessions cost £7 for non-members or £5 for members, and bike hire is just £2.

find out more and book sessions at www.mertonsaintsbmxclub.com

“BMX provides everyone of all ages and genders with the chance to really shine in a sport that’s exciting and different. We have seen that it can really increase kids’ confidence and that spills over into their everyday lives. It’s also a sport that parents and families can do together. You can quite literally learn to fly on a bike, and it can’t get better than that!”
Dorchie Cockerell, Club Chairman
Merton parks fly the flag

The borough’s parks have much to celebrate - new play equipment, TV fame and prestigious status for six of our green spaces.

Six popular green spaces are flying Green Flag Awards after being named as some of the best parks in the country. Abbey Recreation Ground, Colliers Wood Recreation Ground, Dundonald Recreation Ground, John Innes Park, South Park Gardens and Sir Joseph Hood Memorial Playing Field have all been recognised by Keep Britain Tidy. The environmental charity runs the Green Flag Award scheme, an international quality mark that celebrates its silver jubilee this year.

Acacia is cool

It’s official, Merton’s Acacia Adventure Playground is the coolest place to play in London! The London Play Awards, held in October at the Prince Charles Cinema in Soho, crowned Acacia the coolest place to play after young people submitted a short film of themselves enjoying their favourite areas and activities. You can check out the playground for yourself by visiting 230 Acacia Road, Mitcham CR4 1SD.

Killing Eve shoots new series in Wimbledon

The cast and crew of Killing Eve were on location at Wimbledon Park, filming scenes for the fourth series of the award-winning spy thriller, which is due to be screened next year.

New play equipment

If you live near Edenvale Open Space in Mitcham and have a pre-schooler, pop along to the play area and watch them have loads of fun climbing and balancing on the new equipment, whilst developing their imagination. Find your local playground on our website merton.gov.uk/LoveMerton.
So far, the council and Veolia have been able to minimise the impact of the national shortage of HGV drivers on recycling and rubbish collections in Merton. However, pressure on these services is likely to increase during the winter months as leaf-clearing and gritting place extra demand on driver numbers.

The council is working with Veolia on a daily basis to monitor the situation and to send out as many crews as possible. As a temporary measure, we have taken the decision to merge recycling and rubbish collections at some blocks of flats. This is a last resort to ensure that all bins will be emptied as usual and only affects residents who live in flats with communal bin areas. The number of available drivers fluctuates daily, and Veolia are running an HGV driver recruitment and training programme. Anyone interested in a new career as an HGV driver can find out more at: recruitment.great-careers.co.uk/veolia

The efforts of recycling and rubbish collection crews to keep essential services running were celebrated by residents. However, as restrictions have eased, although many residents have continued to support these essential workers, crews are reporting that they are being subjected to increasing levels of abuse as they empty bins, sweep streets or work at the Garth Road Household Reuse and Recycling Centre (HRRC). Veolia has launched a campaign called #StreetKind to highlight the importance of showing kindness and respect to crews as they carry out a difficult job, with #SiteKind specifically supporting those who work on site at the HRRC. The initiative, which is supported by the council, also encourages Veolia employees to report incidents of verbal or physical abuse so that action can be taken against the perpetrators.
### Houses and converted flats

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Collection Frequency</th>
<th>Yes/No</th>
<th>Optional Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Food waste</strong></td>
<td>Collected every week</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>All cooked and uncooked food, Dairy products: cheese and eggs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paper &amp; card</strong></td>
<td>Collected alternate weeks</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Newspapers and magazines, Card and cardboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plastics, glass, cans and cartons</strong></td>
<td>Collected alternate weeks</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Plastic bottles, Plastic pots, tubs, trays etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rubbish</strong></td>
<td>Collected every two weeks</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Non-recyclable rubbish, Dirty cardboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Textiles &amp; shoes</strong></td>
<td>Collected every week</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Clothes and linen, Shoes (tied together), Place in a tied plastic carrier bag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Batteries</strong></td>
<td>Collected every week</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Household batteries</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Line your indoor kitchen caddy with compostable liners or old newspaper (no plastic bags).**
- **Flatten down large cardboard boxes before putting them in the bin.**
- **Empty and rinse all containers. Squash plastic bottles. Remove film lids from plastic pots, tubs, trays etc.**
- **Only rubbish placed in this wheelie bin (with the lid closed) will be collected.**
- **Place in a tied plastic carrier bag next to or on top of your bins.**
- **Place in an untied plastic carrier bag.**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fruit and vegetable peelings</th>
<th>Tea bags &amp; coffee grounds</th>
<th>Meat and fish bones</th>
<th><strong>No thanks</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Plastic bags</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Packaging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Oil or liquids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toilet and kitchen roll tubes</td>
<td>Egg boxes</td>
<td>Junk mail and catalogues</td>
<td><strong>No thanks</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Paper face masks (place in your rubbish bin)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dirty cardboard (e.g. pizza boxes)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Shredded paper (unless placed in a paper bag or envelope)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tissues and paper towels</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Food and drink cartons (place in your recycling box)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glass jars and bottles</td>
<td>Cans, tins, aerosols and tin foil</td>
<td>Food and drinks cartons</td>
<td><strong>No thanks</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Plastic bags</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Plastic film</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Crisp packets</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hard plastics (toys etc)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Polystyrene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plastic bags and film</td>
<td>Polystyrene</td>
<td>Nappies (in a tied bag)</td>
<td><strong>No thanks</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Anything recyclable</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Electrical items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hazardous waste</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>DIY waste</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gas bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Batteries</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Communal flats**
*Collected every week*

- Food waste
- Recycling
- Rubbish

**No thanks**
- Duvets
- Pillows and cushions
- Curtains
- Car batteries
Wishing you an eco-friendly Christmas

The festive season can be costly for the environment as well as your pocket. Here are some tips on how to have a greener Christmas.

Reduce

- Before you start Christmas shopping, plan what gifts and food you will need to avoid buying too much. Choose festive treats with less packaging, which can be recycled.
- Consider buying an experience rather than a present, or create a homemade gift if you want to give something truly unique.
- Take inspiration from nature and make your own decorations from foliage like holly or mistletoe.

Reuse

- Eat up your leftovers – use them to create delicious new recipes. Find inspiration at www.lovefoodhatewaste.com. Most foods can be frozen if the use by date has not passed.
- This is the busiest time of the year for our collection crews, as well as Santa! Please avoid having a clear out in the days between Christmas and New Year. Why not use your time off to get creative instead and upcycle an old piece of furniture or give an old outfit a new look?
- Donate any unwanted gifts to charity shops. They may make a perfect present for someone else and raise money for good causes. Or give them away to someone in your community via an online service, such as Freegle ilovefreegle.org.

Recycle

- If you’re having your online Christmas shopping delivered, flatten and recycle the cardboard boxes in your blue-lidded wheelie bin.
- If you scrunch your wrapping paper and it stays in a ball, it can be recycled. Please remove ribbons and bows before putting it in your blue-lidded wheelie bin.

Recycling and rubbish collection days are not changing over the festive period, so please ensure that your bins are out by 6am on your usual collection day.

Make it a New Year’s resolution in 2022 to recycle more and waste less

Download the personalised collections calendar for your property from merton.gov.uk/recycling
Let's stop this rubbish

Merton Council is cracking down on people who dump rubbish in the borough, as it increases enforcement activity in hotspot areas.

Our recent residents’ survey of more than 1,000 people revealed that locals were most proud of the area’s green spaces and sense of community, but that they were concerned about an increase in littering and dumped rubbish. It negatively affected their perception of the borough and made them feel as if some people don’t take enough pride in the area.

This is why the council is targeting areas of the borough known for having rubbish left on the streets and green spaces. Anyone caught dumping rubbish will be issued with a fixed penalty notice of up to £400 and could face prosecution.

Did you know?

Putting your rubbish and recycling out on the street on the wrong day is also an offence. This is because bins, boxes and bags can block pavements, causing safety hazards as well as being unsightly for the rest of the community. Residents living in flats above shops must leave their rubbish and recycling at the front of their property on the correct day and time, with all materials placed in the bins or bags provided by us (no black bags).

To check your collection day, time and what goes in your bins, bags and recycling boxes, visit our website.

Need new containers or bags? You can request a standard wheelie bin, recycling box, bags or a food waste caddy on our website. merton.gov.uk/recycling

Take pride your borough

If you enjoy walking or socialising in Merton’s town centres and parks, please dispose of your rubbish responsibly. If bins are full, take waste home with you. Cats and dogs will investigate rubbish left next to full bins, but they could choke on discarded food or injure themselves on bottles, cans and dumped household waste. Loose rubbish could find its way into ponds and waterways, where it becomes a hazard for fish, ducks and aquatic mammals. These small animals can suffocate inside plastic bags or die from eating discarded plastic, so we ask that everyone who visits our town centres and uses the parks leaves no trace of their visit.

Litter and dumped rubbish takes time to clear and costs the council almost £1 million per year, money that could be used for vital services like social care for our most vulnerable residents.

We know that the majority of residents do not dump their rubbish or drop litter but, sadly, there is a small minority who think it is okay. You can report instances of dumped rubbish anonymously on our website. Visit: merton.gov.uk/LoveMerton

Eric loves a walk around town. He’s not a fan of cutting his paws on litter. Keep your streets clean. Bin your litter or take it home.

Poster competition winner

Congratulations to eight-year-old Lola, who is the winner of our anti-litter poster competition. Lola’s colourful design included children using playground equipment and a cheeky squirrel enjoying the clean park.

Lola, who attends Wimbledon Chase Primary School, won a family set of tickets for one of our popular fireworks’ displays.

We had a fantastic response to the competition for five- to 11-year-olds, which is part of our Love Merton Keep It Clean campaign, and would like to thank everyone who entered.

Look out for Lola’s winning design around the borough promoting our anti-litter message.

The winning poster design

The winner Lola with Councillor Natasha Irons, Cabinet Member for Local Environment and Green Spaces
Specialist support for young learners

The council is helping pupils with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) to fulfil their academic potential by creating more school places and expanding the specialist support available, both inside and outside mainstream schools.

Helping SEND children in mainstream schools

Some children and young people have learning difficulties or disabilities that require schools to make special provisions for their education. This could mean anything from having difficulty playing with other children or concentrating in class to being physically disadvantaged. Schools will regularly assess these pupils to check the support meets their needs.

School staff work with the special educational needs or disabilities co-ordinator (SENCo) to assess the child’s needs, to draw up a SEND support plan and this is reviewed with the child’s parents several times a year. This graduated approach keeps parents involved and can cover all stages of a child’s education, including at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, the transition to secondary school and the end of compulsory education at the age of 16 if needed.

If you feel that your child needs extra help at school, you can make an appointment to speak to the SENCo to discuss your concerns. This could include providing evidence of your child’s difficulty completing homework, unusual mood swings or behavioural issues at home, or even reports from their paediatrician. Your child’s teachers and the school’s SENCo will let you know if they share your concerns and what steps can be taken to address them.

Case study

The Sherwood School in Mitcham is a UNICEF Gold Rights Respecting School that promotes the rights of all children, including those with special educational needs or disabilities.

The school, in Castleton Road, has a strong focus on the arts, with music in particular supporting pupils’ wellbeing and helping them to discover new talents and learning behaviours.

The school’s SENCo, Maria Hughes, said: “We understand - and celebrate - that no two children are the same. We have created an inclusive teaching and learning environment that enables all pupils to feel confident, thrive and achieve their goals. Schools may provide an insight into each child’s development, but it is important to work collaboratively and we know that parents and carers are the experts when it comes to their children.”

During the last academic year, the school secured funding from the Speech, Language and Hearing Foundation that enabled them to appoint a qualified speech therapist and begin a speech and language project in their Early Years Foundation Stage. This work is being shared with families to help them improve their child’s communication skills at home.

Catch-up funding has helped the school to support pupils in Years 1 to 6 with the online resource, Nessy. This is a targeted intervention that supports reading and spelling, particularly for children with English as an additional language or for pupils who are dyslexic.

In 2019, the headteacher, Andriana Loizou-Samouel, joined the Merton Mental Health Trailblazer project, which highlights the importance of positive mental health and wellbeing in young people. The project strengthened the school’s partnerships with parents and carers, the NHS, School Nursing Service and CAMHS, and has even given families access to emotional-wellbeing practitioners during the pandemic and beyond.
The council will spend £1 million to create 80 new places at Melrose School for children with special educational needs and disabilities, including autistic spectrum disorder.

At September’s Cabinet meeting, it was agreed that Melrose School in Church Road, Mitcham, would expand onto an additional site in Whatley Avenue, Raynes Park, from September 2022. This will see the capacity of Melrose increase from 78 to 158 pupils.

The former adult education building in Whatley Avenue was temporarily used by the new secondary school, Harris Academy Wimbledon, before it moved to its permanent site in South Wimbledon in autumn 2020. As it has already been used as a school, the building can quickly be adapted to meet the needs of a significant number of pupils who need extra support with their learning. Melrose School is part of the Melbury College Federation. It already has wide experience of working effectively with vulnerable children including with medical needs and for pupils with autism spectrum disorder.

Although the council has expanded special schools in recent years, there is an urgent need to provide more school places in the borough for the increasing number of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities, especially children with autistic spectrum disorder, who need to be educated outside mainstream schools.

The plan to use Whatley Avenue to expand Melrose School has been supported by schools, residents and parents, who were all consulted on the proposals by the council.

£1 million in funding for more than 80 extra school places

The council is fast improving specialist services, including vital mental health support, for a growing number of pupils too sick to remain in secondary school.

Merton Medical Educational Services will move to more suitable premises at London Road, Mitcham, with Lavender Nursery also relocating to specialist nursery facilities at Lavender Steers Mead early in the new year.

Merton Medical Educational Services, which forms part of Melbury College, is a vital part of the borough’s mental health support network. Having outgrown its previous permanent home in Canterbury Road, the service was based in temporary premises in Worsfold House for the pandemic. However, this former office building is unsuitable and due to be demolished because of its age and poor condition, with the site earmarked for much-needed affordable housing.

By moving Merton Medical Education Services to London Road, we are able to ensure every child who needs it can have a high-quality education from a place built to serve the most disadvantaged in our community. Pupils have individual learning plans tailored to their needs, and Merton Medical Education Services works closely with the pupils’ mainstream school and medical professionals to ensure that each child receives the right support to continue with their education.
A young writers’ competition was held as part of this year’s Wimbledon BookFest, with entrants between four and 19 years old being asked to submit a work inspired by the theme ‘My Name Is…’. Young people from more than 72 schools took part, and the overall winner was Jonathan Esenga, a Year 9 pupil at Raynes Park High School.

Jonathan’s poem will be published in the 2021 Young Writers’ Anthology of Poems & Stories, and he was honoured at a prize-giving ceremony with author Michelle Paver. We caught up with Jonathan and asked him a few questions about his inspiration.

**How long did it take you to write the poem?**
I made a few notes across a few days, but when I wrote out the final piece and added finishing touches, it took me about an hour.

**Do you like studying and reading poetry?**
I mainly get my poetic inspiration from rap music. When I look at the meaning behind the lyrics and the flow of the song and the feeling it gives to the listener, I try to emulate that in whatever I create.

**Who are your favourite writers and poets?**
My favourite musician or writer is definitely UK rapper Dave. He is known for his exceptional wordplay, linking one thing to another in unimaginable ways, and he definitely inspires me when writing.

**You have a very impressive knowledge of current events – how do you keep up to date with everything that’s going on in the world?**
In lockdown, those monumental events were all we heard about over the course of the year, so they were impossible to miss. There’s obviously the news and social media that help with keeping up to date, and they helped me a lot when writing the poem.

**Would you like to carry on writing – is it something you could see yourself doing as part of a career?**
At this point in time, it is just a hobby of mine. However, I will definitely keep doing it and maybe take it more seriously in future.

**Who do you find inspirational, in your personal life, and in society in general?**
My family, one million percent! They’ve always inspired and motivated me to work extremely hard and go for every opportunity, in my personal life and career endeavours. They have always made me exercise my gifts and talents and keep working and pushing myself to become better, and that is something that will stay with me for life.

**What message would you have to other young people aspiring to write?**
It’s one of the best ways to express yourself freely. My message is mainly – express yourself! Once you take that first step of putting pen to paper, the rest is history.

Raynes Park High School student Jonathan Esenga won a young writers’ competition at this year’s Wimbledon BookFest with an epic poem
Another Merton youngster showed off his considerable talents over the autumn when he took second place in his age group at the British Chess Championships, beating off opposition from across the country on his way to silver.

Zain Patel, who is 11 and studies at King’s College Senior School in Wimbledon, was competing at the event in Milton Keynes over the weekend of 2–3 October, having spent two weeks over the summer playing online against other qualifiers to gain his place.

Zain was one of 15 players in the under-12 category who played off against each other, starting as 11th seed. He won three of the five games he played, drawing another and losing once to the tournament’s ultimate victor, Kenneth Hobson of Cowley.

Zain, who lives in Wimbledon, follows in the footsteps of stars of the national game, such as Nigel Short, Britain’s most famous grandmaster.

“I am really happy to have earned the runner-up trophy this year, but I am a bit disappointed that I wasn’t able to get the gold this time,” Zain told the Wimbledon Times. “Anyhow, I suppose there’s always next year – there won’t be any older kids to stand in my way then!”

My Name is 2020

My name is 2020,
I started many lives but ended plenty,
A prosperous year inside many prayers,
And all so determined this year would be theirs,
Yet tragedy struck and to a name that holds weight,
The shock of the passing of a basketball great,
Many thought murder and began to conspire,
Yet meanwhile Australia was struck by fire,
Firemen died, the whole world was stilled,
To honour the firefighters innocently killed,
In pure disbelief and the whole world stung,
Little did they know, the year was still young.

My name is said the worst year to be seen,
From issues of race to COVID-19,
The pandemic left nations with an enormous task,
But the world saw a saviour in the surgical mask,
Restrictions in place and rules were applied,
It was on Boris Johnson the UK relied,
Millions glued to the news when they heard,
The rules imposed on March 23rd,
From cities like London to Paris and Rome,
The whole world was told that they must stay at home,
With many in lockdown and death rates rising,
Many jobs lost but online businesses thriving,
The public told to lend a hand to a friend,
And follow the rules as they neared to the end.

My name is 2020,
With war being threatened and foes far from friendly,
All was paused including education,
To fight the real war of today’s generation,
The awkward conversation which we all avoid,
But was ignited by the death of George Floyd,
Many campaigned for the whole world to see,
A powerful message portrayed by the knee,
Yet in a cry for help not all saw good,
But simply a message misunderstood,
Statues of slave owners smashed to a tatter,
Their whole lives overshadowed by the screams BLACK LIVES MATTER,
The horrid disease remains in the system,
As the world continues to battle racism.

My name is 2020,
I’m sorry to everyone who may stand against me,
I assure you that this was not what I hoped,
So if it helps in any way I’m glad that you coped,
A historic time on which we all reflect,
And to all the key workers my utmost respect,
In my final few days I must say I’m relieved,
It’s my time to go as I stand here besieged,
The memories of my life will stay with you forever,
I hope that you have no regrets whatsoever,
My back has turned it is now I am done,
Goodbye and good luck for 2021.
As Merton continues its recovery from the pandemic, the council is faced with financial challenges and meeting the needs of the local community. A survey of the borough this summer revealed that residents were most proud of the area’s green spaces and sense of community, and maintaining these assets was important in the future. Equally important were the ongoing issues surrounding the extra traffic now that restrictions have eased, as well as the increase in littering and antisocial behaviour.

At the height of the pandemic, the periods of lockdown removed nearly 90% of the vehicles from the roads and highlighted the benefits of having less congestion. With fewer cars around, residents found walking and cycling to be much more pleasant experiences. In the future, the council will look to improve its traffic-management systems and parking provision. Residents were also particularly keen to see more cycle lanes and the pedestrianisation of the town centres.

Residents felt that littering was becoming more of a problem. It negatively affected their perception of the borough and made them feel as if the council and elements of the local community didn’t take enough pride in the area. A plan to address this problem, as well as the perceived increase in alcohol-related antisocial behaviour at night, were priorities for residents.

With thousands of local people forced to isolate during the pandemic, many more worrying about their personal finances after being placed on furlough or losing their jobs, and countless children being sent home from school, residents would like the council to oversee a recovery that focuses on developing community spirit in the borough. This includes promoting accessible traffic-free high streets that prioritise pedestrians and cycle access over vehicles. Creating a vibrant, regenerated, community-focused high street that
Residents would like the council to oversee a recovery that focuses on developing community spirit.

provides residents with enough space to socialise and becomes a source of pride in the local area was a top priority.

Maintaining the parks and green spaces must be central to the council’s future vision. These spaces should be safe and clean and support personal wellbeing by providing quiet outdoor areas where families can socialise and children can play. The parks played a particularly important role during the pandemic because they provided places where people could gather safely and they helped foster a sense of community at a difficult time. Residents would like the trend of maximising community events in the parks to continue. Well-maintained parks and outdoor spaces attract visitors and bring welcome investment into the area, and they also provide access to nature and support the borough’s commitment to tackling climate change.

The key findings to take from the survey are that residents wish to feel safe, included and connected. To deliver these objectives, Merton Council will aim to bring people together by building community spirit, maintaining the high streets and green spaces and providing safe, clean, traffic-free places where people can socialise. The council has already responded to some of your concerns, by agreeing extra money for new CCTV and street works, and to halt plans for parking charge increases. It will now work with residents to develop plans to improve and regenerate the borough, foster a sense of community pride, strengthen the local economy, improve the accessibility of services and tackle climate change – placing your views at the heart of decisions about the borough’s future.

Find out more

merton.gov.uk/YourMerton
A number of energy firms have collapsed due to the cost of natural gas quadrupling in the last few months, leaving many customers worried about what will happen if their energy supplier stops trading. If your supplier goes bust, you will automatically be moved to a new supplier. There won’t be any interruption to your fuel supply, but it can mean being placed on a higher tariff and paying more for your energy. The immediate issue people will face is that being on variable tariffs could – in a worst-case scenario – see their energy bills double. For low-income families and those claiming benefits, this could affect their ability to pay their energy bills.

In 2020, the average UK household spent around £1,300 on heating and power, but that looks set to rise significantly this year. There are some changes you can make around the home to reduce your bills this winter. The easiest thing you can do is turn your central heating thermostat down by a single degree. You’re unlikely to notice much difference between 22°C and 21°C, but you could save up to £100 per year.

Double glazing, good insulation and draught proofing all help to keep more heat in your home. Smart thermostats allow you to control the heating in each room, so you could keep the bedrooms cosy in the evening but have the heating off in the day or when you’re not at home.

More ways to help you cut the cost of your energy bills:
- Take shorter showers instead of baths a couple of times a week
- Wash full loads of clothes at 30°C instead of half loads at 40°C
- Wash the dishes in a bowl, rather than under running water
- Use draft excluders
- Buy more energy-efficient appliances
- Turn off appliances at the wall, rather than leaving them on standby
- Only boil the amount of water you need in the kettle
- Use energy-saver LED lightbulbs
- Open curtains during the day to benefit from any winter sun
- Use a hot water bottle
- Fill your freezer with essentials like bread, as full freezers use less energy than those that are half empty

Support

If your fuel bills are threatening to leave you cold, our public health team and their partners, Thinking Works, are supporting vulnerable people this winter. If you’re over 60, on a low income or have a long-term condition or disability, you could be eligible for a free carbon monoxide detector, two free LED bulbs, a water-saving showerhead, radiator reflector panels and specialist advice on lowering your energy bills. Call Thinking Works on 0800 118 2327 or visit www.thinkingworks.co.uk

Wimbledon Guild has small grants available for residents facing fuel poverty. Find out more and apply at www.wimbledonguild.co.uk
New leadership at the council

In July this year, Hannah Doody took over as Chief Executive of Merton Council. It’s a critical role for the borough, overseeing the delivery of more than 700 vital local services by almost 2,000 staff. Here, she talks about her role, and how the council is working with the community to shape Merton’s future.

As Chief Executive, Hannah Doody is accountable for the day-to-day delivery of hundreds of services to thousands of residents every day. From bins and recycling collections to social care, transport, roads and education, it’s her job to oversee the services that support daily life across Merton.

Hannah, who spent four years previously as the council’s Director of Community & Housing, reports to the council’s Cabinet of local councillors, which sets priorities for the area’s services. She leads a team of directors who run various services.

Her first priority has of course been the pandemic; the council is responsible for supporting thousands of vulnerable people who have been shielding, as well as coordinating local health and voluntary services.

“It is a real privilege to lead the dedicated staff at the council,” she said. “During the pandemic, I have seen the organisation support more than 7,000 vulnerable and at-risk residents; coordinate thousands of home-deliveries with our community partners; and deliver millions of pounds in financial support to local businesses and low-income families. In many ways, the pandemic has brought out the best in our communities.

“My role is very much to direct our overall delivery of services, delivering the priorities set by councillors and coordinating our various service departments to ensure the borough runs as smoothly as possible, while also preparing us for the future.”

As we all emerge from the pandemic back to a more normal routine, the council also needs to look to the future, and has recently been running Your Merton – a consultation which asked you about the impact of COVID-19 on your lives, and your ambitions for the future of the area.

Hannah said: “I’m proud that one of our first actions has been to run the biggest listening exercise in our borough’s history, and to say that we’ve had a really strong response.

“With limited funding, it is important that any council directs its resources at local priorities, and this will give us a platform to do that here in Merton. We want to build a real culture of listening to residents.

“There is so much to build on in Merton – we have incredibly strong relationships and partnerships across the community sector, and I look forward to helping deliver the Council’s ambitions over the next few years.”

Feedback and the community priorities from Your Merton are due to be published in January.
Almost all of us overindulge at Christmas and many of us approach the New Year with a view to cutting down on excess and shedding the extra pounds. It’s been another difficult year for Merton’s residents, where our health has taken centre stage, so limiting our alcohol intake, quitting smoking and eating less should be at the forefront of our minds in 2022, but we can also make positive changes in other areas of our lives. This could be a year where we aim to reduce our carbon footprint by recycling more or switching to an electric vehicle, or it could be that we take up a healthy hobby or become more involved in the community by volunteering at local events.

New Year’s resolutions

If you’re planning to make some lifestyle changes in 2022, there is plenty of inspiration and support to help you achieve your goals next year.

If 2022 is the year of the fitness fanatic, or even the casual exerciser, the gym is a good place to start. Canons Leisure Centre, next to the Cricket Green in Mitcham, has excellent health and fitness facilities including more than 100 cardiovascular and resistance machines in the gym. You can choose from more than 50 fitness classes in the main studio. The centre has a 25-metre pool, as well as a smaller 10.5-metre teaching pool and a water slide for the little ones. It’s also worth checking out state-of-the-art Morden Leisure Centre overlooking Morden Park. With a gym, two pools and a new café, the centre is the perfect place to start a new fitness routine.
Help the environment

If the priority next year is reducing your carbon footprint, you’ll be in good company. Everything from the weekly shop and commute to heating our homes and travelling abroad affects the amount of carbon dioxide we produce, and this has a direct effect on global warming. To reduce our impact on the environment, we can cut down on the amount of beef we eat (farming cattle is labour intensive), consume fish from sustainable sources and use recycled shopping bags. Taking public transport or cycling or walking to work is far kinder to the environment than driving a diesel or petrol car. As prices of electric cars fall, it could be worth investing in an electric or hybrid vehicle in 2022. Merton is leading the way with charging infrastructure in the capital, and you can find all the charging points in the borough here: merton.gov.uk/streets-parking-transport/electric-vehicle-charging-points. Around the home, you could turn the heating down a little this winter, take shorter showers instead of baths, and unplug electrical devices when they’re not being used.

Volunteering

Whatever you’re interested in, there is a volunteering opportunity for you. Our libraries, heritage service, Street Champions and Wimbledon Park Watersports Centre all run volunteering schemes that you can get involved in to meet new people and learn new skills.

Merton Connected is an organisation that supports the voluntary sector in the borough and delivers the charitable initiative, Merton Giving. It also co-ordinates a home-visits library service; helps people get the best out of their health and social-care services with Healthwatch Merton; and works alongside GPs to provide vital non-clinical services to support patients’ wellbeing.

find out more merton.gov.uk/volunteering

Learn a skill

There are plenty of adult education courses to choose from in Merton, whether you want to take up a new hobby or master new skills to advance your career, get back into employment or take up a new occupation. A range of providers offer classes for complete beginners and more advanced students in a variety of subjects, including English and maths, digital skills, languages and health and social care. There is also a good choice of leisure courses available, including drawing, painting, pottery and sculpture, sewing, upholstery, playing the guitar and photography.

Grab a book

If your aim is to read more, sign up for our award-winning library service. Membership includes access to our eLibrary of thousands of eBooks, eComics, eMagazines and eAudiobooks. merton.gov.uk/libraries
Could you be a foster carer?

Fostering children is one of the most rewarding vocations. If you’re over the age of 21, can legally work in the UK, have a spare bedroom and can demonstrate that you can keep children safe and provide them with a stable home life, then you’ve met all the main requirements for becoming a foster parent.

There is a national shortage of foster carers, and the situation has deteriorated during the pandemic because many families have been put under extra financial pressure through redundancies or being forced into the benefits system. The number of children referred to organisations like Barnardo’s went up from just over 14,000 to more than 19,000 between August 2020 and July 2021. This 36% rise has put more pressure on the UK’s care system, so now could be the perfect time to change a child’s life for the better.

To be a foster carer, you will need to live in Merton, or one of the neighbouring boroughs, have the time and energy to devote yourself to caring for a child who may be vulnerable, and have a good support network of friends and family, should you need help. There are plenty of other considerations of course: you and your partner or children – if you have them – will need to help the foster child feel welcome and comfortable in your home; you will need to balance caring with your job; and you will need to work closely with a wider team of social care professionals, teachers and birth parents.

The council supports its foster carers using the innovative Mockingbird Family Model, which is based on the idea of having an extended family. This has been shown to bring significant benefits to foster children and their carers. Foster parents have their own supervising social worker and can receive 24-hour support from a duty social worker if they have any concerns outside normal working hours. Merton’s Foster Carer Association also meets regularly to help its members find support and share their skills.

You will receive ongoing training and a generous fostering allowance of up to £514 per week for each child. This covers their clothing costs, as well as food, travel, pocket money and any special equipment they may need. You will receive a contribution towards repairing any wear and tear in your home and covering the increase in your monthly bills. You will also receive a £500 start-up grant, as well as money towards birthdays, religious festivals and holidays for the children.

We host two fostering information sessions each month. To find out more about these virtual sessions or becoming a foster parent in Merton, call 020 8545 4070 or visit merton.gov.uk/fostering
The Twelve Days of Christmas

One of the many traditions of the festive season is the singing of carols, including the ever popular Twelve Days of Christmas. In this edition of My Merton, we share an alternative take on this popular song...

A partridge in a pear tree: During the Victorian era, the landlord of the Dog & Partridge pub on Merton High Street gave each of his customers a large helping of boiled beef and carrots at Christmas. Any leftovers were given to the poor. Between 1881 and 1940, pearwood was used for many of the carved blocks made at Morris & Co. of Merton Abbey, to print lengths of intricately patterned fabric.

Two turtle-doves: The dovecot in the grounds of Canons House, off Madeira Road, is the oldest building in Mitcham.

Three French hens: During the 18th century, Merton was a place of sanctuary for many Huguenots – French Protestant refugees who fled religious persecution. By 1722, Huguenot Peter Mauvillain was employing many people at his calico printing works in Mitcham and Morden.

Four calling birds: In Georgian times, wealthy Merton households often kept caged finches and songbirds. By the 1930s, many local families kept a canary, budgerigar, a parrot or a Mynah bird.

Five gold rings: The famous jewellery firm Asprey was founded in Mitcham by William Asprey during the 1780s. The Asprey family had a house on Phipps Bridge Road.

Six geese a laying: For centuries, goose was the most popular choice for Christmas dinner. Open-fronted butchers’ shops across Merton were filled with plucked geese. Bakeries would use their large ovens to cook the birds for customers, who would collect them when returning from church services on Christmas morning.

Seven swans a swimming: The Swan Inn on London Road, Mitcham, stood opposite the entrance to Streatham Road and was a popular stopping point for horse-drawn delivery wagons during the 18th and 19th centuries.

Eight maids a milking: Owned by property developer John Innes, Morden Hall Farm was run by the White family, who owned several dairy shops in Merton and Wimbledon. They delivered milk five times per day, measuring out half or pint servings from a central brass churn on their horse-drawn carts.

Nine ladies dancing: Opened on Merton High Street in 1922, Wimbledon Palais once boasted the largest sprung floor in Europe. Previously a roller-skating rink and then a wartime airship factory, the vast dance hall later hosted live music, including a 1963 Beatles gig.

Ten lords a leaping: Many notable lords have made Merton their home. William Cecil, Baron Burghley, chief adviser to Elizabeth I, lived in Wimbledon. Naval hero Lord Horatio Nelson lived at Merton Place between 1801 and his death at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805.

Eleven pipers piping: During the early 1900s, the Suffragette drum and fife band marched through Wimbledon to promote votes for women. In the 1950s, the famous United States Air Force Band, popularised by bandleader Glenn Miller, performed in Morden Park.

Twelve drummers drumming: Military drums have traditionally played an important part in Merton’s annual Remembrance Day Parade.
Fears of a spike in domestic violence

Christmas is not the season of goodwill for everyone. If you or someone you know is experiencing abuse, there is support available.

When people spend more time at home together, there are more opportunities for domestic violence or abuse to occur. The national lockdowns during the coronavirus pandemic highlighted a problem that usually spikes over Christmas. The lockdowns forced people to spend more time with abusive partners and this resulted in a 61% increase in calls to domestic-abuse helplines, the majority of which (72%) were from women fearing for their safety. At Christmas, the same helplines usually see a 50% rise above the baseline level.

Contributing factors for increases in domestic violence are excessive alcohol consumption, and extra financial pressures, all of which can come to the surface at Christmas. The responsibility for this abuse will always be with the perpetrator and the abuse is not acceptable.

The abuse may take many forms – psychological, cohesive control, economic, sexual or physical – and it is essentially a pattern of behaviour exhibited by an abuser that is designed to control their partner, children or someone else close to them.

While many abusers apologise for their behaviour and can appear to have changed, most perpetrators re-offend and the abuse usually gets worse over time. The signs to look out for are jealousy or obsessive behaviour, controlling what you can do, where you go and who you can talk to, pressure to wear certain clothes, taking control of your money or mobile phone, sexual behaviour that makes you feel uncomfortable or you have not consented to, or you may feel fearful of your partner.

Each year the council supports the UN Women’s 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence campaign, which begins on 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and runs until 10 December.

If you are experiencing domestic abuse, support is available merton.gov.uk/domesticviolence

£1.2m CCTV upgrade

The award of a contract for a £1.2m upgrade of the borough’s CCTV network was approved by the council’s cabinet in October. This will modernise the system and further enhance the quality of the images.

The decision to upgrade Merton’s network of cameras is in line with other London boroughs, increasing safety and recording evidence of anti-social behaviour and environmental crime.

The borough currently has 212 public space cameras, which are monitored by seven full-time staff.

CCTV footage has frequently alerted the police to crimes taking place and helped them to catch and successfully prosecute the perpetrators. In just under five months from April to August this year, almost 2,000 incidents across the borough were captured on the current system.

The contract will see the successful bidder, Tyco, upgrade and maintain the system for four years, with an option to extend for a further 12 or 24 months. New cameras will also be installed to monitor the enforcement of school streets through Automatic Number Plate Recognition.

There are currently 150 public safety CCTV cameras in Merton that will need to be upgraded from analogue – essentially hard-copy tape storage – to high-definition digital quality. This will require the installation of fibre lines to transmit data from the cameras, which will run alongside a wireless system.

Neighbourhood Watch

Fear of crime can increase during dark winter evenings, but residents can help to make their street feel safer by setting up a Neighbourhood Watch. Living in a Neighbourhood Watch area can reduce crime and the fear of crime by encouraging improved home security, greater vigilance, accurate reporting of suspicious incidents to the police and by nurturing community spirit.

Visit mertonnhw.co.uk or email nhw@merton.gov.uk

Find out more
Blue Cross Merton Animal Hospital

Louise Newman, Practice Manager at the purpose-built Blue Cross Merton Animal Hospital, and her colleagues have just won Team of the Year at the internal Blue Cross awards. She tells us why the animal hospital plays such an important role in the community.

Can you tell us a bit more about the hospital’s history and day-to-day running?
Blue Cross Merton Animal Hospital was opened in 1999 by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother. The hospital carries out around 50 veterinary consultations and up to 10 operations every day, so our six consultation rooms, operating theatres, X-ray room and kennels are always busy. The operations vary from routine neutering to more complex fracture repairs. The type of animals we see most are cats, dogs, rabbits and guinea pigs.

How has the pandemic affected your work?
We closed the hospital at the height of the pandemic and moved our essential work to Victoria Hospital. The rest of the team worked from home and managed their appointments online. We’re now getting back up to speed and are on course to help around 6,000 local pets this year.

Are there any COVID-19 safety measures in place?
Many of our follow-up appointments are still being done remotely due to the pandemic. These video consultations are often more productive because the animals are at home in their normal environment, so they haven’t had to deal with the stress of being carted off to hospital. The consultations have been so successful that we’re looking to do more online appointments in the future.

What are the most common injuries the hospital deals with?
We see a lot of trauma injuries, mostly involving cats and dogs that have been hit by vehicles. We also treat a lot of cats that have fallen from apartment windows in hot weather. Cats like to sun themselves and still enjoy a breeze on window sills but they can instinctively try to catch birds or squirrels outside, and this can lead to a serious fall. They typically injure their legs and jaws as they hit the ground. It’s also quite common for cats to suffer from blocked bladders and urinary infections, both of which can damage their kidneys. With more cats in the area, their territories have been shrinking and this causes them so much stress that they develop bladder issues. The high sodium content in dried food and a lack of water also contribute to problems. This is a medical emergency for the animal, but a minor operation – usually passing a catheter into the bladder – is the quickest and safest cure.

How much does treatment cost?
If your postcode lies within the dedicated catchment area and you’re on full means-tested benefits (Universal Credit, Income Support, Jobseeker’s Allowance, ESA or Pension Credit), you will only have to pay a £10 registration fee each year to receive free veterinary care for up to two pets. You can also make a donation for every consultation. If you aren’t on full benefits, you should be entitled to subsidised care, which is about 30% cheaper than a typical vet, for as many pets as you like. Our system of care has been peer-reviewed by our vets to ensure that we offer every pet a high standard of care.

Do you work with any other animal-protection groups in the Merton area?
My team work alongside charities like Cats Protection Mitcham. As their main vet, we see their team once a week to assess if any of their animals need treatment.

find out more
www.bluecross.org.uk/merton-animal-hospital. To join the team or volunteer with the hospital, visit: volunteer.bluecross.org.uk
Real Christmas trees will be collected free of charge. After you have removed all the decorations, place your tree as close to the boundary of your property as possible, making sure it is visible from the kerbside without blocking access or the pavement.

All trees must be out by 6am on Monday 10 January, or they will not be collected. Alternatively, you can cut up your tree and put it in your garden waste wheelie bin if you are a subscriber to the service. Or you can take it to the Garth Road Household Reuse and Recycling Centre in Morden (SM4 4AX).

The Garth Road Household Reuse and Recycling Centre will be closed on Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year’s Day. On Christmas Eve, opening hours are 8am–midday. On all other days, opening hours are 8am–4pm. Advance booking via our website is essential for weekday visits: merton.gov.uk/recycling