

## **NWWRA 2023 AGM Chairman's report**

### **Introduction**

The NWWRA was founded in 1981 and this is our 41st AGM. We cover approximately 600 homes in an area largely bounded by Woodhayes Road and Copse Hill on one side, and the Common on the other side. Our principal objective is to continue to promote the amenities and character of the area, many parts of which are in conservation areas. We do this in conjunction with the Wimbledon Union of Residents Associations – we are one of more than 12 members and we keep in close contact with the Wimbledon Society, the Safer Neighbourhood Panel and the local police. We also provide advice and support to residents proposing or opposing developments in the area.

Turning to what we have been up to this year...

### **Planning**

It has been another relatively quiet year in our immediate area. Most planning applications are approved in some form or another, sometimes with amendments, but broadly if the application is within the planning rules, then planners have very little leeway. They will sometimes work with applicants on amendments to address objections before a decision is reached. Unless NWWRA are called on, we cannot always know that neighbours are concerned, so do get in touch if you have any worries.

We have commented on applications following requests from residents and there are a couple of adverse themes I would pull out from developments we have seen this year. One is the tendency for some owners and developers to push the envelope of planning approval beyond what was originally approved. Apart from being in breach of the agreed approvals, these developments cause undue stress to neighbours. I would therefore ask that neighbours are always fully consulted before any changes are made that may end up being overturned.

The other issue we are encountering is the demolition of houses in Conservation areas. We have a live case at the moment in Ernle Road, where neglect resulted in water ingress leading to the house becoming, allegedly, structurally unsound. On that basis the owners have applied for, and been granted, approval to demolish and rebuild the house. It would appear that benign or wilful neglect is now allowed by the planning department to get round planning regulations in conservation areas.

Unfortunately, planning enforcement appears to be under resourced and subsequent applications for retrospective approvals go through with little or no challenge.

One other item came up for consideration and that was an application for a 5G mast on Copse Hill which was not granted approval.

On the wider Wimbledon scene, we have the ongoing case of the AELTC application to build a new show court, 38 adjacent courts, and a substantial maintenance depot. There have been thousands of objections to the plans and, in fact, Merton Council is hearing the application this evening, and the planning office is recommending approval on the basis that all other benefits outweigh the harm resulting from the impact on Metropolitan Open Land. Either way, I expect the case will be called in for review by the Mayor of London and then subsequently by the Secretary of State.

More positively, the Council has allocated about £800,000 for improvements to the Village High Street with the aim of making it more pedestrian friendly by widening pavements whilst not reducing the number of parking places. The main changes will be seen in the section of the High Street between the Dog and Fox pub and the war memorial.

### **Trees**

Some interesting information : the Council has responsibility for approximately 31,500 council owned trees and a recent study has shown that Merton's tree canopy covers 1,040 hectares, amounting to about 28% of the borough compared to the average in London of 21%. 26% of Merton's tree canopy is in woodland and open spaces (mainly the Commons), and 61% is in private gardens and institutional grounds. In the Village ward, we have 40% coverage.

Earlier this year, Merton published its 2023-2029 tree strategy with an objective of planting an incremental 800 trees per year to increase the tree canopy by 10% by 2050. There are various initiatives we can take personally, including sponsoring street trees or a park memorial or celebration tree as well as notifying the council to replace fallen or dead trees.

### **Parking and Roads**

It has been encouraging to see that relations with the rugby club continue to be cordial and thanks go to Nick Higgins and the residents in Preston Road and Hood Road for continuing to engage with them.

### **E - bikes**

This topic came up last year and in December 2022 Merton and e-bike operator HumanForest agreed to expand e bikes into the Borough. The scheme offers 10 minutes freecycling per day and bikes are supposed to be parked in Virtual green bays to avoid obstructing pavements.

### **The committee**

Finally, I would like to take the opportunity to thank my fellow committee members for their support over the last year.

Stuart Ross, 26 October 2023