



Minutes

Merton Heritage Forum

Tuesday 15 October 2019

Merton Heritage Centre, 2nd floor, Morden Library, Merton Civic Centre

Present:

Cllr Nick Draper (Chair), Cllr Geraldine Stanford, Cllr Dickie Wilkinson, Cllr Joan Henry, Cllr Najeeb Latif, John Davis (Friends of Canons Park, Tree Wardens); Hannah Shimko & Alison Plant (Canons Project)
 John Hawks (Merton Priory Trust, Wandle Industrial Museum),
 Nicholas Hart (Wandle Industrial Museum)
 Neville Squires (LNHS & ECSS), Tony Burton (MCGC&H),
 Norman Plastow (Wimbledon Society & Wimbledon Windmill)
 Alison Cousins (John Innes Society), Tony Scott (Merton Historical Society)
 Duncan Rabagliati (Wool Rd & Drax Avenue Conservation Area),
 Anthony Hopkins (LBM), Sarah Gould (Minutes), Jill Tyndale (LBM)

Apologies:

John Veale (John Innes Society) ; Cyril Maidment (Merton Priory Trust)
 Sandra Vogel & Joyce Bellamy (MCGC&H)

Item	Actions
<p>Minutes and Matters arising: Forum members had the opportunity to view minutes from the last meeting. There were no requests for amendments.</p> <p>Forum members sent their best wishes to John Veale (JIS) who was absent from the meeting due to health reasons.</p> <p>1. Canons Project. AP and HS gave an update on the Canons project. The tender process is going well. 5 tenders have been returned, including 4 for the landscaping aspects of the project and 1 for the project as a whole – these are all of a high quality. The project team is aiming to secure permission for programmes of work to start in February 2020, following Cabinet approval in January.</p> <p>The team are keen to progress a mini Canons arboretum.</p> <p>HS – the project has a website, Facebook, newsletter and Instagram accounts providing project updates and events information. She has also done project promotion at the Heritage Discovery Day and was involved in the recent</p>	

Mitcham Heritage Day. HS showed the group a short report produced following community archaeology in the area to the rear of Canons house.

A reminiscence project will be starting soon – this will be an intergenerational activity working with young people in Mitcham. They will be running reminiscence sessions with local people who grew up between the 1940s and 1960s. Clarion Futures are helping to spread the word and HS would be grateful if Forum members could also help to promote this initiative.

After Christmas the project will be running heritage sessions for children in Mitcham - trial sessions will be run with local teachers.

Tendering will be undertaken for interpretation work including community workshops. It is possible to follow project developments on social media, Twitter and via MVSC and MCGC&H.

ND thanked AP and HS for the information and praised the project for the variety of events on offer and for keeping people engaged.

2. Mitcham Heritage Day.

TB gave an update on the 2019 Mitcham Heritage Day. This was a very successful celebration of Mitcham's rich history and included more sites and organisations than previous events. For example Mitcham Golf Club was involved and visitors were given an insight into local personalities, including the first female golf professional. The Mary Tate almshouses were also open for the first time with an accompanying exhibition. The MH Day also celebrated 50 years of the Mitcham Conservation area, the 190th anniversary of the Tate almshouses and the 200th anniversary of the Parish church. There was a celebratory cricket match and 3 displays supplied by Merton Heritage Centre at the local church and Wandle Industrial Museum. Over 700 visitors took part in the day's events.

TSc and TB – the only complaint was that there was so much going on, it was tricky for visitors to see everything.

JH praised the event, which was most enjoyable. Idverde do need to do some work to improve access along some of the paths and paving in the area for future events.

3. Merton Memory Bank / Common Sense Projects

SG told the Forum about two new projects being run by Merton Heritage Service using funding from Winter Pressures funding.

The Merton Memory Bank project will offer support and activities for people living with dementia. Staff and local volunteers will be trained as Dementia friends and an area of the 2nd floor at Morden Library will be turned into a dementia-friendly space to host reminiscence sessions, themed craft activities and dementia cafes.

Resources will be available both for larger groups from local care homes and also for small family groups or individuals who want to access heritage resources. With input from stakeholders and service users, the project team will be creating a range of themed memory boxes featuring objects, photos and sensory material to trigger memories and stimulate discussion.

Forum members to assist HS in promoting the reminiscence project.

Staff will also be looking to record the reminiscences of people living with dementia to expand the material available in the heritage collection and to ensure that this group feel valued and included in our work.

The Common Sense project aims to make the Heritage Centre and its resources more accessible for people with special needs – particularly sight / hearing loss and to some extent adults with autism and learning difficulties. The project team will work with stakeholders, advisers, public health and service users to devise a sensory exhibition – allowing all visitors to the Heritage Centre to experience local heritage in a new way. Volunteers will also be devising and running descriptive tours, producing audioguides, and signed tours for the target groups. Touchscreens will also be installed and the team will produce assorted presentations that can be subtitled or available in community languages.

The nature of the library building is not ideal for people with autism. A flexible chill-out area will be available, complete with sensory material for anyone who is feeling overwhelmed and needs a quiet area in which to relax and feel safe. Heritage activity boxes will also be produced for loan to day centres, care homes and residential units, so adults with autism can engage in aspects of local heritage in a place with which they are already familiar and feel comfortable.

Staff will be trained in visual / hearing awareness, interpretation and autism support to assist service users. Initially both projects will be based at the Heritage Centre but as part of ongoing development, SG will look to create remote / loan services.

Project work will also involve outreach work and the creation of promotional materials in accessible formats, enabling our target audience, families and carers to make informed choices about service take-up and how to plan a visit to the Heritage Centre.

The main project funding runs to the end of March 2020 but by developing a core team of volunteers, SG plans to continue service delivery and development beyond that point.

ND – 1 in 3 people may develop dementia and it is also important to provide support for carers. This need not be difficult and there are great benefits to taking part in joyful activities. Autism is very complex and there is a role for the local community in supporting and engaging adults with autism.

4. Local List

JT told the group that the latest list has gone out to consultation and will hopefully be on the web next week. There have been a number of obstacles to its completion but hopefully any difficulties will soon be resolved.

A further query was raised regarding refurbishment of the Sunnyside sub station structure. LBM has established that this is owned by one of the electricity firms. They have agreed to paint but not refurbish it. Money is still needed for repair – DR's resident's group (£5K) and the Wimbledon Society have already offered financial support. The work needs to be costed.

SG asked Forum members to assist in raising awareness of the projects and the current volunteer recruitment drive.

Project Officer Dorian Knight can provide further information - Tel 020 8545 4038 or email dorian.knight@merton.gov.uk

JT and DR to liaise on taking this project forward

<p>ND asked JT to refer this back to the utility firm – JT is concerned about the likely response. DR and JT to liaise on this.</p> <p>JT = gave an update regarding damage to a section of Priory Wall situated in the garden of 29 Windsor Avenue.</p> <p>JH – the current resident has removed flint and stone from a large section of wall – there has been a failure to comply with LBM requests to cease.</p> <p>JT is trying to speak to Historic England about this but wants to be armed with precisely dated photos to document damage to the structure. The resident had been filling a skip with stonework and was instructed to halt removal of further stones and to retain the material already stowed. Unfortunately the skip was taken away before any further action could be taken.</p> <p>JH and David Luff can provide photos but these will not all have precise dates.</p> <p>ND – thanked JT, JH, David Luff and Cyril Maidment for raising awareness of this problem.</p> <p>JT – has opened an enforcement case and this matter may go to court.</p> <p>JH - it is important that the current property owner is dissuaded from further removal of historic stonework.</p> <p>ND – the owner may plead ignorance of the status of the wall.</p> <p>TB – ignorance is no defence. TB – a test case is looming.</p> <p>SG has requested updates from forum members re. aspects of work assigned to them in the action plan of the Heritage Strategy (due for revision in 2020.)</p> <p>SG thanked JH, TB, AP and colleagues for their submissions.</p> <p>AC – the John Innes Society wants to refurbish the bandstand on John Innes Park but has been told that this needs to go out to tender. Previously anything under £5-10K did not require tenders – AP & HS confirmed that all work is now subject to the tendering process.</p> <p>ND – sees this as a potential obstacle to progress. ND asked DW to seek an update.</p> <p>NP – Wimbledon & Putney Commons Conservators have received a £150K grant for general improvements to the Common – this includes some reorganisation and improvements – a meeting is scheduled for 16 October. A particular focus will be providing a green space for all.</p> <p>JH – The Chapter House has now completed its first season of opening to the public. (Sundays – April to October.) There have been several hundred visits to date, with increased learning opportunities and greater accessibility. The site will now be closed from November to March. The Priory Trust has been fortunate to secure a Community Infrastructure Levy grant of just over £40K to fund further development of the Chapter House as a venue for youth theatre and other projects. Paving and lighting has and will be improved.</p>	<p>JT, JH and ND to discuss this further and decide on next steps</p> <p>JT and SG to liaise re. Future Merton update on Strategy actions.</p> <p>DW and AC to liaise on this project</p>
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GSt – Paul McGarry has informed her that the necessary permissions for water / toilet connections have now been passed – this should make it easier to take forward other projects, including educational work.

NH – referred to issues around budget cuts and raised the issue of Lea Valley funding and the Wandle precept.

ND – there may be some budget reductions but this can only be done with the agreement of the Lea Valley representatives and changes will be negotiable.

NSqu – asked Forum members about the relationship between heritage and natural history. He referred to the importance of an oak tree at the junction of Church Lane and Langley Road, Merton Park – this pre-dates construction of the John Innes Estate. It is important to chart the impact of human activity on the environment – for example the use of woodland and pastures on Wimbledon Common. The work of Natural History societies is often cross-borough.

ND – This is an important topic to consider. GSt – we should also remember the historic importance of Mitcham Common and the local lavender industry.

TB – The Wandle Valley Forum has secured funding for a further three years to offer community grants of up to £1K each for 1- 2 year projects across its four boroughs.

The Cricket Green conservation area is 50 years old. MCGC&H are looking to engage with over 4000 households in the area on how this part of Merton should develop – they will be considering proposals for planning and green space.

NL – Future Merton and CAMRA are working together to safeguard local pubs, especially in the light of recent developments where former pubs have been converted into residential properties at an alarming rate – this constitutes a loss of public space and community hubs.

TSc queried the possibility of including ex-pubs in this project.

NL – A CAMRA list is being considered for feasibility.

ND – what if it is too costly to maintain a local pub – does it then close?

TB – any change of use should require planning consent.

JD – is concerned about local authority cuts in this respect. Meaningful enforcement is already tricky but could get worse – the communities should have a role in enforcing protection and safeguarding historic properties in their own area

JT – can face a number of problems with enforcement – this needs open communication channels.

ND – there are problems of financial loss and effect - there needs to be a combination of local lobbying and protection to support legal and safe development.

DW – Dorset Hall in Merton Park now has property guardians to afford greater protection from vandalism. DW also thanked SG and the John Innes Society

Forum members will be able to find more information on the WVF website in due course.

for providing historic images of the area for use at the recent 30th anniversary celebrations of the Merton Park Residents Association.

5. Merton Heritage Forum

AH – The Heritage Forum was founded in 2012 and was initially facilitated jointly by the Future Merton (Environment & Regeneration department) and Libraries & Heritage (Community & Housing). Over the past 4 – 5 years main responsibility has passed to the latter and a key driver has been to devise the Merton Heritage Strategy, monitoring actions, objectives and the delivery plan. The current strategy expires in 2020 and SG is working on a follow-up.

AH is conscious that the Heritage Forum is very council and officer-led – Forum members have been asked for input but this has not always been reflected in meetings and agendas. Capacity to support the forum has been depleted as the pressures on council resources have increased.

The Heritage Strategy provided opportunities for a different model of forum with greater community input but in practice the group has not expanded and increased in diversity to any great extent. It is now time to look for a different format, rather than council administered meetings – AH invited Forum members to suggest alternative methods for putting forward ideas and maintaining communication re. local heritage.

ND – The council is now facing even greater challenges as the financial package from central Government will be far less than in previous years. The Forum in its current format is now unsustainable – members need to judge how to take things forward - the council is no less engaged or passionate about heritage but there are problems with capacity, particularly as much of the work is falling to one officer. ND suggested non-council control of the Forum and greater external input into achieving heritage objectives.

NH – referred to the division of CADAP in 2012 and the importance of getting public views on council projects and planning initiatives. If the Forum has no direct council input and is member led, that element of consultation and expertise from members/ officers re. the treatment of heritage assets may be lost.

AH and ND pointed out that the Forum was never intended to take on the role of CADAP and that aspect of planning discussion had ceased some years ago, when the Heritage Forum became a separate entity from the Design & Review Group – this also coincided with the withdrawal of E & R responsibility for the Forum.

JH – was concerned about no council input or exchange – there is a need for people to get together via another means. Is this a cost saving, or a case of not staging the forum in council premises?

ND replied that he wants the voice for Merton's heritage to be led by Merton people. The Heritage Forum was designed to raise awareness of and support the protection of heritage assets.

JH – pointed out that a gathering of heritage providers and the exchange of views could really take place in any format and location.

TB – the purpose of this assembly is to 1. Champion heritage in Merton, 2. To hold the council to account and to provide the public / heritage providers with access to council representatives and information on the management of heritage assets. 3. Information exchange. Forum members need to decide what is needed.

JH – Asked if the Heritage Discovery Day would still be retained as this is a valuable opportunity for heritage providers to come together, network and promote their services to the wider public. SG and AH confirmed that there are no plans to alter the Discovery Day, which is now a key event on the local heritage calendar.

AH – The Forum in its current form offers some level of accountability but is purely advisory – it does not replace elected committees and council processes. There is value in information sharing but this could be done more economically – there is a need to look for a method that is less intensive from an officer perspective. There needs to be wider participation and value in discussion but less of an administrative burden. For example a half-yearly information exchange session could help in this respect.

There was agreement that an alternative to the Heritage Forum needs to be visible to the public and open to public participation.

JH said in light of suggestions to cease the current meetings and find an alternative means for discussing / addressing heritage issues, he would like to thank ND for his service as Chairman of the forum.

It was resolved that the Heritage Forum would be dissolved as a constituted group but is likely to continue as a community led forum of stakeholders. This community approach will not only ensure that the forum is more relevant to the interests of stakeholders but also maintains the ability for groups to network and share best practice. Interested community representatives who would be willing to organise future meetings are encouraged to discuss with ND, AH and SG. It was confirmed that this is the last Heritage Forum in its current structure.

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