Chairman's Report 14th September 2026

As we move into the autumn, I would like to provide residents with an update on three significant matters affecting our parish and the surrounding area:

1. Proposed asylum accommodation centre at MOD Site A, Arncott.
2. Proposed watersports centre at Merton Borrow Pit.
3. Progress of the Merton Care Home development.

These issues have generated considerable interest and discussion within our community. The Parish Council's role is to ensure residents are informed, that decisions are considered on the basis of evidence, and that the interests of Merton are properly represented.

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1. Proposed Use of MOD Site A, Arncott

Residents have contacted Merton Parish Council regarding the Government's proposal to use MOD Site A, near Arncott and Piddington, as an asylum accommodation centre.

This is understandably an issue that has generated strong views across our area. Whilst individuals will hold differing opinions, it is important that discussions remain respectful and are based on verified information.

The Home Office planning application has now been published, providing significantly more detail regarding the proposal to accommodate approximately 1,250 male asylum seekers at the site. The site is a former military storage depot and is not currently used as a residential military facility.

The publication of the application represents an important step as it allows local communities, councils and statutory consultees to review the evidence and consider the likely impacts.

Key Concerns Raised Locally

Merton Parish Council continues to support calls for:

- Meaningful public consultation with affected communities.
- Greater transparency regarding site selection.
- Independent assessment of impacts on healthcare, policing, transport and local services.
- Consideration of whether the proposed scale is appropriate for the surrounding villages.

- Greater clarity regarding the future operation of the site.

These are practical questions that residents are entitled to have answered before any decision is reached.

Issues Identified Within the Planning Application

In correspondence to the Prime Minister, Calum Miller MP highlighted several concerns arising from the published application, including:

- No confirmed long-term foul drainage solution.
- Uncertainty regarding electricity supply arrangements.
- Potential flood risk concerns.
- Outstanding ecological and environmental surveys.
- Poor pedestrian, cycling and public transport connections.
- Concerns regarding the accuracy of certain submitted information.
- Questions surrounding value for money for taxpayers.

Calum Miller MP has argued that these issues raise fundamental concerns regarding the suitability of the proposal and has called for either the withdrawal of the application or an extension to the consultation period to allow proper scrutiny.

Learning from Piddington

Representatives of Merton Parish Council have attended meetings organised by residents in Piddington, the village closest to the proposed site.

The campaign known as The Village That Roared has attracted significant media attention nationally and internationally. Importantly, the campaign has consistently stated that its concerns focus on the democratic process, consultation, infrastructure and local impact rather than hostility towards asylum seekers.

The campaign demonstrates the importance of communities being fully informed and consulted when major developments are proposed.

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2. Merton Borrow Pit Watersports Centre

Residents may also be aware of the recently submitted planning application relating to Merton Borrow Pit, commonly known as Merton Lake.

Planning application **26/01931/F** seeks permission for the change of use of the lake to allow recreational activities including open water swimming, paddleboarding, kayaking, sailing, fishing and scuba diving, together with associated buildings, parking, storage and access improvements.

The application proposes the creation of a managed watersports facility with supporting infrastructure including changing facilities, equipment storage and a community hub for visitors and club users.

The Borrow Pit is a distinctive feature of our parish. Created during the construction of the M40, it has since developed into an established wildlife habitat and an important environmental asset within the local landscape.

Potential Community Benefits

Whilst the Parish Council will carefully consider all planning matters before reaching a formal position, it is important that any potential benefits are also recognised.

Should the development proceed successfully, potential benefits could include:

- Increased opportunities for healthy outdoor recreation for residents of all ages.
- Provision of organised and supervised water-based activities in a safe environment.
- Opportunities for local schools, youth groups and community organisations to access outdoor learning and sporting activities.
- Creation of local employment opportunities.
- Support for local businesses through increased visitor numbers.
- Improved use of a currently inaccessible site while maintaining managed public access.
- Opportunities for community events and local club activities.

These potential benefits will, of course, need to be balanced against considerations such as traffic, parking, environmental impact, biodiversity and the effect on neighbouring communities.

Residents are encouraged to review the application documents and submit comments directly to Cherwell District Council during the consultation period.

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3. Merton Care Home Development

The future of the former care home site continues to be of considerable interest to many residents.

The Parish Council remains engaged with developments concerning the site and recognises the importance of bringing vacant buildings and land back into productive and sustainable use wherever possible.

Residents have expressed a desire to see a sympathetic development that respects the character of the village whilst making a positive contribution to the local community.

Although development discussions continue and further details are awaited, the Parish Council will continue to monitor progress closely and ensure residents are kept informed as more information becomes available.

Potential Community Benefits

Should redevelopment of the care home site move forward successfully, there could be a number of important benefits for Merton and the wider area, including:

- Provision of much-needed accommodation for older residents.
- Allowing local people to remain closer to family, friends and established support networks.
- Creation of skilled and unskilled employment opportunities.
- Additional demand for local suppliers and services.
- Investment into an important village site.
- Increased economic activity within the local area.
- Potential opportunities for community engagement programmes involving residents, local groups and schools.
- Long-term preservation and productive use of a prominent site within the village.

The Parish Council recognises that any future proposal must strike an appropriate balance between community benefit, design quality, traffic considerations and the character of the parish.

When formal proposals or development timelines become available, residents will have the opportunity to review them and make their views known through the proper planning process.

Respectful Debate and Reliable Information

Finally, I would like to encourage residents to approach all of these issues in a constructive and respectful manner.

The discussions surrounding MOD Site A in particular have demonstrated how quickly information can spread through social media. Whilst social media can be a useful way of sharing information, it can also lead to misunderstandings where information is incomplete, unverified or taken out of context.

I therefore urge residents to:

- Check facts before sharing information.
- Use official sources wherever possible.
- Read original documents rather than relying solely on social media commentary.

- Respect differing opinions.
- Engage constructively with consultation processes.
- Help maintain the strong sense of community that makes Merton such a special place to live.

Reasonable people will have different views on each of these matters, and that is entirely healthy in a democratic society. What is important is that discussion remains based on evidence, respect and a shared desire to achieve the best outcomes for our community.

The Parish Council will continue to keep residents informed as these matters progress and will represent the interests of Merton in a balanced, constructive and evidence-based manner.

Cllr Duncan Marshall
Chairman, Merton Parish Council
Merton Parish Council