

MERRIOTT

VILLAGE PLAN

March 2014



FOREWORD

The first meeting of the Village Plan Steering Group, including Parish Councillors but independent of the Parish Council, to develop a Merriott Village Plan, was held in December 2004. The Group developed and published the Plan with the approval of the Parish Council in January 2007.

The details of the extensive consultations in the village leading to the conclusions and recommendations were set out in the Plan. Since then a good many changes have occurred in the village, though some of the original wishes have still not been achieved. In 2011 the Village Plan Steering Group reassembled with some change of membership to take stock of progress on the Plan and to assess whether residents had new priorities. This gave rise to a revised list of aims for the future.

The Village Plan Steering Group re-affirmed its original Vision Statement, which was

‘We want to enhance and develop Merriott as an economically active and socially inclusive community; proud of its past and hopeful for the future. We want Merriott to be a living village with high quality local facilities and services, where people are happy to live in a safe and pleasant environment.’

PLAN PURPOSE

A Village Plan is intended as a statement of the future of a community as determined by the residents for the next 10 to 20 years. Its purpose is to guide central Government, Local Authorities and other Agencies with resources, to those changes in the built environment, the general environment and the services, which the residents wish to see, or in some cases do not wish to see, so that the quality of life in the community is improved. The Plan 2014 has been presented to the Parish Council and has its support and commendation. It is a Plan for action. The 2007 version had a very positive effect on the village facilities. It is hoped that this version will be similarly successful and that those, including the relevant Local Authorities, who can influence the quality of life and services to the community, will take note and further the wishes of the village residents.

THE VILLAGE OF MERRIOTT

Merriott, which is understood to be the largest village in South Somerset, existed in Roman times and is mentioned in the Domesday Book. Its main street is an old Roman road which joins the Fosse Way about 1 mile to the NW. Its name was originally Maergaet meaning 'Boundary Gate' and at one time it had the nickname 'Little Ireland' because of the number of Irish labourers who lived in the village and worked on the building of the railways and in the flax mill. Merriott lies 2 miles north of Crewkerne and extends over 3 miles from NE to SW and 2 miles from east to west at the widest point. In area it extends to over 2700 acres and has a number of farms within its boundary. In the centre of the village is an open green space of 20 acres. The highest land is Egwood hill at 250 feet. Gould's Brook, which rises in Crewkerne, flows through the village and into the river Parrett within the parish. The Parrett Trail and a Cycle Route also go through the village.

Maps 1 and 2 of the village are included to show the general layout of properties, the relationship to Crewkerne (about 2 miles south) and the green spaces at the core of the dwellings. The 'core' is equivalent to the development area as defined in the South Somerset Local Plan adopted in 2006.

Since the publication of the Village Plan in 2007 there has been only a small increase in the number of people and properties in the core.

The village has retained a number of essential local services including a garage, petrol station, butcher, 3 general stores, post office, fish and chip shop, pottery and 2 public

houses. Since 2007 the toiletry shop has become a prescription pharmacy. One plant nursery has sadly closed with the loss of several jobs. More general services including doctors are currently available in Crewkerne but it is expected that a new surgery will be constructed in Merriott in the near future. There is a Pre-School and a First school, a church, a chapel, a village hall and tithe barn, a sports ground with a new Pavilion and bowling green, squash courts and a social club. The village Information Centre opened but subsequently closed because its location was needed by a new owner. Secondary education is provided in Crewkerne and further afield. Whilst there are some bus services from the village to Crewkerne, Yeovil, Ilminster and Taunton, residents are very dependent on private cars and volunteer drivers for getting to work, college, shops, train services, health and leisure facilities.

HOW DID WE UPDATE THE PLAN?

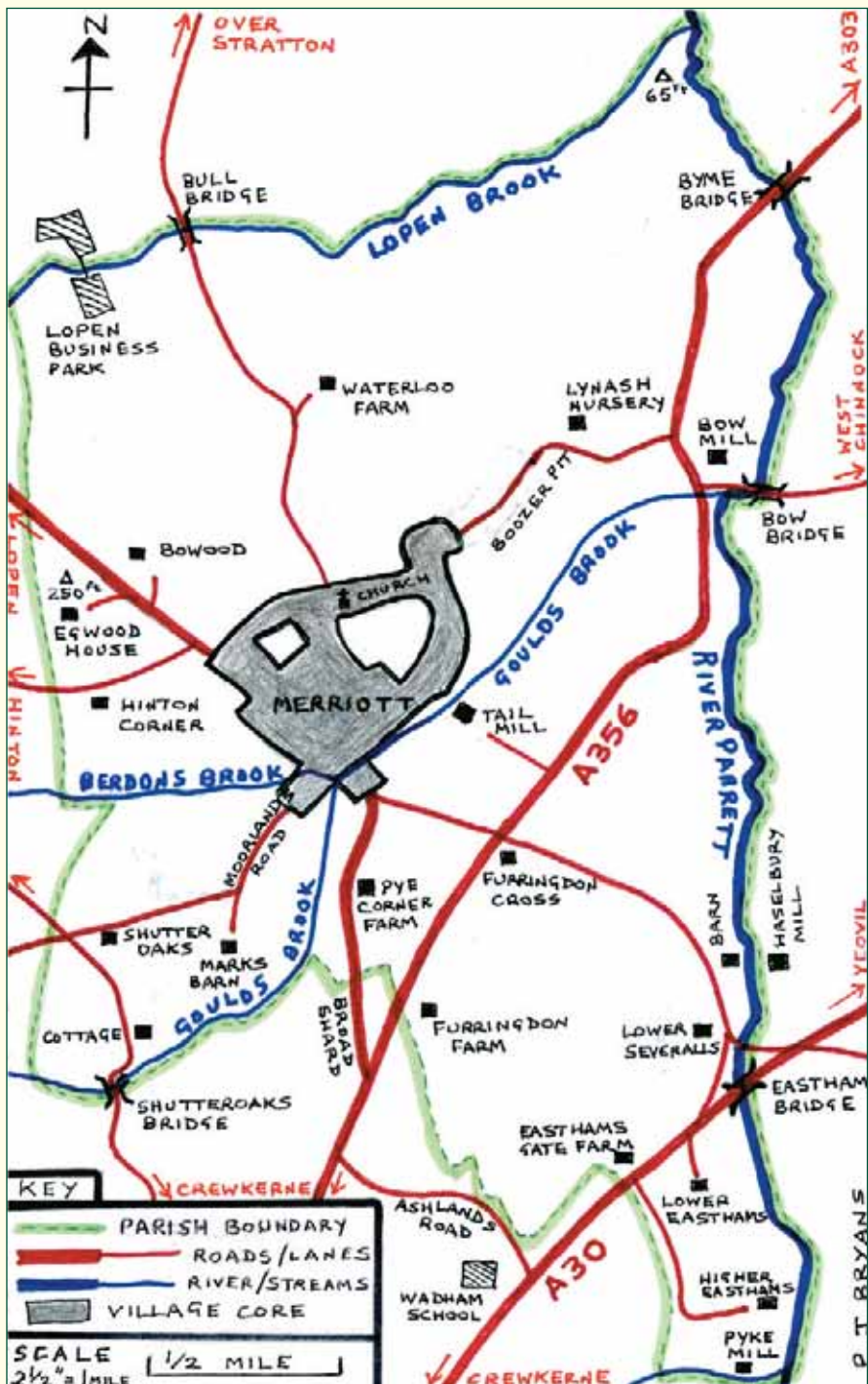
Using the Plan of 2007, the Steering Group assessed those objectives in it which had been achieved, as well as those which are outstanding. A questionnaire was designed setting out these two sets of objectives. The questionnaire went to all dwellings in the village asking residents to score their priorities for outstanding objectives and seeking views on new objectives. The response was disappointing, in that only 15% of households returned a completed questionnaire. However the results, together with the views of the Parish Council, have been used to write this Plan.

A second questionnaire, specifically dealing with housing and the likely level of development in future was circulated in late 2013. This time the response was also about 15% and the views expressed are as presented in this Plan.

One member of our Group took views from parents, and from staff of the Pre-School and First School to inform the section on Young People and Education. Contact was also made with businesses in the village to elicit the needs to support existing businesses and to encourage new businesses.

The layout of this Plan is largely the same as the 2007 Plan. However because of concerns about any further expansion of the village the section originally called Housing has been retitled Housing and Development. The Parish Council, at its meeting in February 2014, approved the Plan.







Map 1 The Parish of Merriott

Map 1 The Parish of Merriott

The Parish lies 2 miles north west of Crewkerne and 7 miles west of Yeovil, in the area of South Somerset District Council. It extends for about 2 miles from east to west and 3 miles north to south. The majority of the housing is found in the village 'core', which coincides with the Development Area in the South Somerset Local Plan adopted in 2006 as shown in map 2. The land around the 'core' is pleasant rolling, partly wooded, farmland.



	Merriott Village Plan Update 2012	WIN £50 In our prize draw
<p>We Need Your Help! Please read this and take part by answering and returning this Short Questionnaire</p> <p>The Merriott Village Plan appeared in 2007 setting out the changes which you, the residents, wished to see in the following years. The Plan has been read by many people, including Local Government - Parish, District and County Councils, the Primary Care Trust, Schools, Pharmacist and other potential funders. Many of the desired changes have happened or are in progress, as set out in this leaflet.</p> <p>Residents should be in no doubt, a Village Plan, with strong backing from villagers does bring resources and new activities to our community.</p> <p>Over the page you will see more projects which have been achieved to date (headings are from the existing Plan) alongside questions related to other concerns which were highlighted in the 2006 survey.</p>		
<p>Please tell us what you would like in your community</p>		<p>Look what has been achieved in 5 years!</p> <p>Business and employment *The Post Office has been saved. Thanks to our garage and Spar shop</p> <p>Shops and Shopping *With your support Village shops and businesses remain open</p> <p>*New Pharmacy now open in Merriott</p> <p>Communications *The Village website has been established with information on clubs, events, church etc. www.merriottvillage.org.uk *The Merriott Messenger is delivered, free, to you 11 times a year.</p> <p>Health *A planning application has been submitted for a GP surgery. *Prescriptions can now be Delivered direct from the pharmacy.</p> <p>Young People and education *Local head teachers have been made aware of Merriott Village Plan Results. *The playground has been refurbished *Breakfast club now running at Merriott School *Adult computer classes</p>
<p>This questionnaire was compiled by the Merriott Village Plan Implementation Group:- John Bowman 74077, Ann Lawrence 78461, Cathy Herriman 76918, Bob Hicks 76406, Mary Paull 74958, Peter Bryans 78182.</p> <p>If you need more copies of the questionnaire for your household, or need assistance to complete this copy, please contact us directly or via the Merriott Messenger.</p>		

HERITAGE AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

BACKGROUND

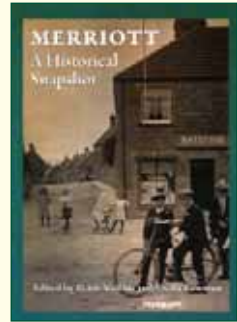
Merriott has a main road (Broadway) on the western side of the village, which is a very busy thoroughfare. From this road there is a circular route around the older part where most of the houses are of local hamstone. There are two conservation areas and a substantial number of listed properties. Many cottages have been extended by incorporating the adjacent property. There are several modern estates. Most of the streets are served by a pavement. Many properties have no associated garage or parking area leading to a large amount of resident street parking.

OBJECTIVES IN 2007

- Support and improve the buildings the village values highly.
- Draw up a list of priority improvements to the public amenities of the built environment.
- Aim to improve and maintain the cleanliness of the village.
- Consider the possibilities of improving the conservation areas and green spaces.
- Investigate the feasibility of utilising empty buildings for affordable housing or workspace.
- Oppose the placement of any phone masts.

CHANGES SINCE 2007

- There has been very little new building since 2007 nor much redevelopment of derelict buildings. However planning approval has been granted on two sites with derelict business and farm buildings to be used for the construction of about 76 dwellings, being a combination of both converted old buildings and completely new houses.
- The Village Lengthsman continues to maintain verges and to remove litter. A group of volunteers has refurbished a length of roadside garden in Broadway which has enhanced the look of a key site.
- Several new benches have been installed around the village.
- The village was donated an area of woodland in memory of a long time resident, which was then transferred to the County Council. For a few years the wood was occupied illegally by travellers who have now moved on. The village, along with two adjacent villages, is acquiring the wood for the benefit of residents.
- There has been little activity in respect of enhancing the village entrances, or the conversion of road signs in conservation areas to green based signs or in drawing up a list of improvements to public amenities.
- The waste disposal company under the auspices of the County Council now collect weekly a range of paper, plastic, cardboard, metal and glass waste for recycling. There are also arrangements for collecting green waste for composting. Unfortunately the County Council have introduced entrance and deposit charges at the nearest Waste Recycling Centre in Crewkerne which has led to an increase of fly-tipping in country lanes around the village as reported by the Parish Lengthsman.



FUTURE AIMS

1. Re-use of derelict buildings

There is still concern about empty and derelict buildings in the village core which need to be restored, renovated and brought back into use for housing and for business. Developers should be encouraged to use these sites in preference to any green field sites in the parish.

2. Enhancement of the green spaces within and around the village built environment

There is strong support for the enhancement of the open green space in the centre of the main village urban area as an enhancement to the core of the residential area.

3. Improvement in the range of waste products collected for recycling and the charging policy at Crewkerne Recycling Centre

The County Council should be pressed to expand the range of plastic which is collected weekly and to provide a fair policy of charging at all Waste Recycling Centres so that Crewkerne is not discriminated against Yeovil and Chard.

4. Signage at the entrance to the Parish Boundaries

The current Parish boundaries are not signed on some roads and existing signs need to be improved. The opportunity should be taken to sign not only the entrance to the parish but also directions to useful facilities within the village (see also Business and Employment).

5. Green backed road signs in conservation areas

The Highway Authority should be pressed to replace existing road signs in conservation areas with green backed signs.





GETTING AROUND THE VILLAGE

BACKGROUND

Merriott is a busy village with a main route, Broadway, connecting Yeovil and Crewkerne to villages along the A303, Ilminster and Taunton.

This carries a lot of through traffic which is in part controlled by calming chicanes and two mini roundabouts. Driver frustration is often apparent. Some of the other roads/lanes in the village are narrow and winding.

Street parking is widespread leading to sight line problems for drivers and to hazards for pedestrians, particularly the disabled and elderly. Whilst the roads mostly have pavements, at least on one side, there are some important stretches without.

OBJECTIVES IN 2007

- Make it easier and safer for all to get around the village by car, cycle and on foot, whilst improving the appearance of the village
- Seek to achieve higher safety standards on village roads by enforcing existing speed restrictions and a new 20mph speed limit by the school

CHANGES SINCE 2007

- County highways have installed drop kerbs at several sites on pavements around the village.
- A community speedwatch group has been established and is fully operational. A mobile Police camera van has also been present occasionally in the village.
- There is a facility for an illuminated speed sign to be installed on Broadway.
- A marked unloading bay has been laid down alongside the Co-op.
- There has been a marked deterioration in the standards of footpath and highway maintenance including a reduced frequency in drain and culvert clearing.

FUTURE AIMS

1. Build a pavement (footway) along Church Street from Newchester Cross to the School and on Shiremoor Hill

The lack of pavements (footways) is still considered to be an important impediment to getting about the village safely on foot especially for children getting to school and for residents accessing the recreation ground, bowling green and village hall. (See also the Section on Young People and Education).

2. Examine the possibilities for making it safer for pedestrians walking along the road from the Co-op to Merriottsford

Whilst a white line 'pavement' has been painted on the road over the bridge at Merriottsford, it is still dangerous to walk there because the 2 lane road is narrow and the traffic is moving quite fast. Further examination should be made to see if a footpath could be created beside the road with a footbridge over Gould's Brook. Consideration might also be given to installing pinch points at each end of the bridge together with a priority one direction system.

3. Establish a 20mph speed limit around the school

This was an aim in 2007 but has still not been achieved. The school uses a hall across the road from the main building and getting the children across safely would be made easier with a 20mph limit. It would also benefit children at the start and end of the school day.

4. Improve road and footpath maintenance

- Repair or resurface the many areas of roads and pavements which are potholed or are breaking up.
- Improve frequency of drain and culvert maintenance to reduce related damage to roads, pavements and footpaths, as well as the risk of flooding into adjacent dwellings.
- Improve the maintenance of footpaths and in particular the cutting back of encroaching vegetation by the appropriate authorities and the Parish Lengthsman. This applies especially to the pavement from Merriott to Broadshard which is being used more frequently by pedestrians as the public service transport disappears.
- Establish a village footpath group to conduct a regular annual survey of the state of footpaths, pavements and parish rights of way.



HOUSING AND DEVELOPMENT

BACKGROUND



The 890 properties in Merriott are a mix of detached houses, farms, bungalows, semi-detached and terraced houses, and flats. Much of the housing is constructed of hamstone though modern properties are of reconstituted stone, brick or rendered. Quite a lot of houses are listed and date from the 17th and 18th centuries, and a few even earlier. Many houses were built in the centre of the village in the last 50 years and there is some modern sheltered housing. The majority (80%) of properties are owner occupied and there are a significant number of Housing Association properties (11%). About 5% are privately owned and rented.

OBJECTIVES IN 2007

- Ensure that Merriott only has limited housing development.
- Make known the need for affordable and sheltered housing to the District Council.
- Make known the problems of traffic vibration, light pollution, and noise to the appropriate Authorities and press for possible remediation.
- Examine the causes of flooding to some properties and see if measures can be taken to reduce this hazard.

CHANGES SINCE 2007

- Housing development since 2007 has been very limited. There have been a few new, mainly detached, houses built and these are on sites within the core of the village.



WHAT IS YOUR OPINION?
Parish Council Housing & Development Questionnaire

The Parish Council and the Village Plan Group are revising the 2007 Village Plan. Future Housing & Development within Merriott is an important element of the Plan so that South Somerset District Council Planning and Policy (and others) know what future development we wish within our village.
Please read this statement by the Parish Council.

The Parish Council is eager to retain a rural village community that does not extend beyond the current village boundaries nor lose green spaces and gardens around and within the village.

There are already four development sites within the village:-

Tail Mill (formerly Merriott Plastics); Moorlands Farm,
Broadway Farm (started October 2013); and Scotts Nurseries

These now have developers who have planning permission or who are interested in providing, in some instances, in excess of a hundred mixed properties to provide starter homes, social, family, retirement & small business properties.

These developments will be supported by the Parish Council as long as the essential finances to support the required infrastructures are made available. This includes additional school places, roads, transport and recreation and also the support of businesses within the village.

All planning applications will be considered by the Parish Council, taking these projects and requirements into consideration.

1) Do you agree with this policy? Please tick your preference..... Yes No
If you answer NO tell us below what building you would like to see in your village.
.....

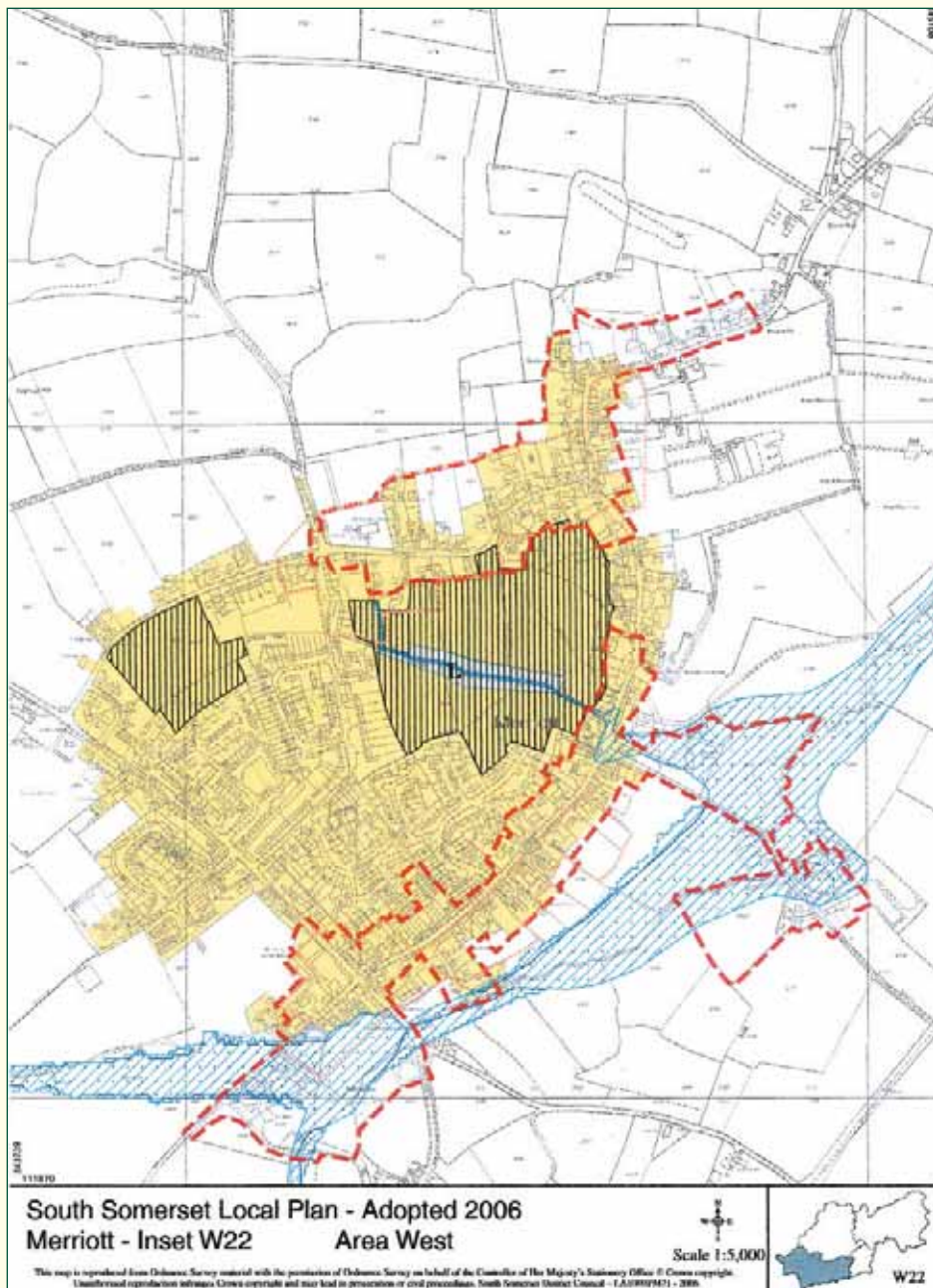
2) Currently there are 890 houses within the Parish Boundary.
What % increase in housing do you think is acceptable for Merriott to continue as a rural village?
Please tick your preference.....0% 5% 10% 15% 20% 25% more than 25%

3) How important are the green areas around and within the village?
Please tick your preference..... Not important Important Vary Important

4) Should the green areas be a) retained or b) built on?
Please tick your preference..... (a) Retained (b) Built on

Please complete this questionnaire and return it as soon as possible via the collecting boxes at Osborne's Broadway, Merriott Pharmacy and the Post Office. Thank you.





Map 2 The Merriott Village 'Core'

- Over the same time planning permission for close to 100 properties has been given. These are a mix of new detached and semi-detached houses, as well as refurbishment of old farm and industrial buildings to provide smaller dwellings. The majority are on two sites (Tail Mill and Moorlands Farm) within the core of the village.
- Whilst the District Council have been made aware of the need for affordable and sheltered housing, few if any such dwellings have yet been built.
- There are three sites in the village, close to the core, where further significant housing development may occur and on which developers have expressed interest. These are the former Scotts Nursery, land adjacent to Beadon Lane (beyond the boundary of development as designated in 2006) and land at Newchester Cross (designated as a 'No development area' in 2006).
- Progress on reducing vibration, light pollution and noise has been negligible. The risk of flooding to a few properties remains. However the need to ensure regular culvert and drain clearance has been highlighted.

FUTURE AIMS

1. Limited further development beyond that already approved

In response to a recent housing questionnaire, residents overwhelmingly indicated that any further housing development should be very limited. The majority (83%) favoured either no development or a 10% increase in the housing stock, over and above that already approved, at most. The village currently has about 890 houses and nearly an additional 100 have been approved but not built.

POLICIES



Map 2
The Merriott Village 'Core'

This shows the development area of the village which is termed the 'core' in map 1 and in other sections of this document. The vertically striped areas are open spaces. Residents are overwhelmingly in favour of seeing any development confined to the core of the village and to retaining the larger of the two open spaces as a green space at the heart of the village.

The map also shows two conservation areas and flood zones. There is also an area of local wildlife and geological importance along the middle of the larger open space.

2. The Parish Council has stated its stance on future planning applications

The Parish Council, bearing in mind the considerations above and the views of residents, has decided that it will support applications for additional housing, provided;

- it is a balanced mix of starter, social, family and retirement properties;
- it is on land within the core of the village, but not on the open space in the middle of the village, and is not a spread into surrounding countryside;
- it is associated with any necessary additional infrastructure changes to the school, roads, transport, recreation and also supports businesses within the village.

3. Improvement of communal village facilities

It has to be recognised that additional housing will place extreme pressure on important village amenities including the health services, the Pre-School and First School, community halls, and sports facilities, which are already inadequate for the current population. Aims in other sections of this Plan make the same point. Planners and developers need to recognise that if requests for further development are made they need to be accompanied by substantial improvements to the communal village facilities. Otherwise further requests for development should be rejected.

4. Retain the character and identity of the village

In order to retain the character and separate nature of the community, the Parish Council and residents are keen to ensure that new development takes place in the core of the community and does not spread into the surrounding countryside. 85% of residents, who responded to the Housing questionnaire, wanted the green areas in and around the village core retained. Plans for new development already approved meet this objective. It is important that any new approvals also meet this criterion.

5. Retain the open space at the heart of the village

The village has a valuable open space within the main housing and shopping centre and it is deemed important by the Parish Council and the residents that this remains an open space and is not developed.



TRANSPORT AND TRAFFIC

BACKGROUND

Merriott has a range of retail and leisure services but a large proportion of the population has to travel out of the village for a broader range of these services, as well as for work, healthcare and education.

The nearest train station is in Crewkerne. There are public bus services to and from Crewkerne, Yeovil, Chard and Taunton as well as a NIPPY bus. There is also Community Voluntary Service (CVS) transport.

The amount and speed of traffic on the main thoroughfare (Broadway) through the village gives rise to concern even though traffic calming measures have been in place for at least 10 years.

OBJECTIVES IN 2007

- Aim to achieve improvements in timing, length of journey and frequency of bus services to and from the village, especially to Crewkerne and Yeovil: aim to have direct bus services between Merriott and Crewkerne and Yeovil rather than countryside tours.
- Aim to provide a "link bus" service to Crewkerne station.
- Improve driving behaviour in Broadway, by requesting a flashing speed sign supported by periodic 'high profile' police enforcement.

CHANGES SINCE 2007

- Following withdrawals of County Council subsidies the public bus service to and from Merriott has shrunk to the stage where it does not meet the needs of the village.
- The demand for CVS and Merriott Drivers services has grown especially for access to Yeovil Hospital and other Health services. Merriott Drivers are now doing 50 to 60 journeys per month taking residents to doctors and hospitals in Crewkerne and Yeovil.
- A community speedwatch group has been established and is fully operational and has been supported by further action by the police (see Getting around the Village and Community Safety).

FUTURE AIMS

1. Aim to get a regular hourly transport service between Merriott and Crewkerne

There appears to be very little hope that publicly funded transport will improve markedly in the foreseeable future and may even shrink further. However the importance of a regular service (hourly) between Merriott and Crewkerne needs to be highlighted and made known to those with the power to effect change. For the foreseeable future this service should also include the two main doctors' surgeries in Crewkerne.

2. Aim to increase the availability of Volunteer Transport Services

The demise of the public bus services has led to an increase in the use of Crewkerne Voluntary Transport Service and Merriott Drivers. A possible way forward would be for a Transport Group to explore how far some of the existing schemes could be extended or enhanced to meet these increasing needs.

3. Aim to have several of the pinchpoints replaced by speed platforms

The pinchpoints which were installed many years ago to reduce traffic speed on Broadway still cause accidents and encourage drivers to speed to get through the gap before the priority oncoming vehicles. Raised speed platforms have been shown to be more effective in other locations in the South Somerset District and further afield. Representations should be made to the County and Highway Authorities for these changes.

4. Seek the installation of Pedestrian Crossings at the Petrol Station, the Recreation Ground and the Co-op

Crossing the road at several important points in the village is hazardous for children, the disabled and the elderly. Representations should be made to the County and Highway Authorities for the installation of pedestrian crossings at one or up to 3 locations on Broadway.



BUSINESS AND EMPLOYMENT

BACKGROUND

Most of the businesses in Merriott are small and employ few people. There were about 400 jobs in the village including many self-employed. Most businesses were expected to grow at the time of the 2007 Plan. Apart from the shops, farms and a plant nursery, there is a variety of enterprises involved in building trades, design and craft work as well as support services for the finance and internet sectors. The majority of employed persons travel out of the village for work, though the 2001 census said that 25% of residents work from home which is well above the national average.

OBJECTIVES IN 2007

- Prepare a comprehensive list of village businesses for publication of a village directory.
- Take steps to ensure the survival of Post Office services in the village.
- Survey the needs of local businesses for premises and services.

CHANGES SINCE 2007

- One of the two largest employers, in the village, the plastics moulding business, has moved its premises to Crewkerne and the other, a plant nursery, has ceased to trade. Between them the two businesses employed about 70 people. This change has been a major setback to work in the village. However the unemployment rate in South Somerset District Council area in late 2013 was 3.5%, which was less than half the national average, so alternative employment opportunities have been available albeit out of the village and involving further travel to work.
- The Village Post Office has moved its premises and is now part of the petrol station cum village store and the range of services available has been reduced, which is not helpful for local businesses.
- Attempts to produce a comprehensive list of businesses in the village together with a directory have not succeeded, nor has any effort to survey the needs of local businesses for premises and services.

FUTURE AIMS

1. Set up a local business action group

In order to promote business, enterprise and employment in the village there is a need to encourage existing local businesses to get together to improve the business 'environment' and the opportunities for new entrepreneurs.

2. Encourage the development of small business units in the village

The lack of small business units in the village has already caused new business to look elsewhere for suitable premises and has taken employment out of the immediate vicinity. Developers of brown field sites in the village should be encouraged to include a few small business units in their plans.

3. Encourage the installation of fast broadband in the village

Fast broadband is essential for many new businesses and its absence locally is a major deterrent to business start-ups.

4. Develop a business centric web site

The existing village website contains little business news. There is no constraint to extending the site to provide promotion for local businesses.

5. Encourage the Parish Council to be supportive of business development in the village

When considering planning development in the village the Parish Council need to be mindful of the need for local employment and to be encouraging to new businesses in the village.

6. Improve signage and directions to businesses in the village

The signage to local businesses should be improved as part of the general improvement to what is available locally.

7. Produce a trade directory of all shops, tradespeople and services in the village.

As a means of furthering several of the aims above, it would be sensible as a first step to have a clear list of current village business activities.



SHOPS AND SHOPPING

BACKGROUND

Merriott has a variety of shops, including two small self service general provisions stores, one of which also serves as a Post Office with a limited range of services. There is a butcher's shop which also sells groceries and newspapers, a fish and chip shop, a petrol station and garage, and two public houses serving food. There is a pottery and a chimney and fireplace shop. Fair trade groceries are on offer, and greengroceries can be obtained from local farms and market gardens. A wider range of shops are available in Crewkerne, 2 miles away, and this now includes Co-op, Lidl and Waitrose supermarkets. Accessing these facilities by public or volunteer transport is not easy though Waitrose, Tesco and Sainsbury offer shopping on-line and will deliver from further afield.

OBJECTIVES IN 2007

- Ensure that the existing shops and Post Office are supported and retained.
- Extend the range of shop services to include a bakery, a coffee/ tea shop, a barbers/hairdressers and a hardware shop.

CHANGES SINCE 2007

- A major development was the change in 2010 of the Toiletry shop into a full prescription Pharmacy with an associated delivery service for medicines. In spite of attempts by the Post Office to close local services, these have largely been retained. A limited supply of home baked bread is now delivered to order.
- Unfortunately the village has lost its two retail plant nurseries, though one of them continues as a wholesale grower and supplier. This has led to some reduction in employment in the village.



FUTURE AIMS

1. Increase the range of shopping services

The residents would still wish to have the following services available in the village;

- a Bakery shop possibly coupled with a Tea/Coffee shop which would act as a convening point for the community
- a Barber/Hairdresser
- a Hardware store
- full Post Office services to avoid the need to travel for licences etc.

2. Increase awareness to residents of the need to use services to keep them

Whilst many residents take advantage of shopping when they are at work in nearby towns they also need to realise that support for local services is essential to maintain them. 'Use them or lose them' is the slogan.

COMMUNICATIONS

BACKGROUND

Communication in the village takes various forms: Notices on boards and in shop windows and in the two village publications, the Merriott Messenger, now published every month except January, and the Church magazine, 'The Link', published monthly. Much news as in most villages travels by word of mouth.

OBJECTIVES IN 2007

- To improve communication throughout the village.
- To encourage village participation in existing activities, and to promote new and revived activities.
- To support and promote local businesses.
- To retain traditional methods (paper through letter boxes) and to work with the Parish Council to introduce the use of internet/email.



CHANGES SINCE 2007

- The Merriott Information Centre which opened in 2006 had a large window to display notices held tourist and local information and was a useful meeting point between residents and the police, the Member of Parliament and representatives of local government. It closed a few years later because the building was no longer available. No alternative suitable venue has yet been found though it is still needed.
- The Merriott Messenger has had considerable support from local businesses and is now produced 11 months per year, has increased in size and makes full use of colour to enhance the presentation. It provides a means of advertising widely village events, businesses and services.
- A Merriott Village website has been established and carries the Parish Council meeting agendas and minutes. It also has news of village activities and of Church services and events.
- A range of information about the village is available on the site but its use is increasing slowly. Newcomers and prospective residents to the village find the site and the Messenger useful in getting 'a feel for the community'.

FUTURE AIMS

1. The Re-establishment of the Merriott Information Centre

This could take the form of a combined tea/coffee shop and news centre. Such a facility

would act as a valuable social focus for the community. This could also be a point of contact for the Parish Clerk and Council.

2. Improve the village noticeboards

There is a need to increase the number of notice boards and to increase the size of the existing boards. The shortage of space causes untidy and overcrowded boards which hinder the dissemination of news.

3. Improve awareness of the village website

The village website needs to gain support as a means of communicating village activities and especially for announcing events at short notice. Flyposting is illegal and should be discouraged.

4. Explore the possibility of using Social Media as a means of communicating urgent village information

Social Media is proving popular as a means of popular and rapid communication in other communities. Its possibilities for use in Merriott should be examined.



HEALTH

BACKGROUND

Merriott residents are served mainly by two GP practices in Crewkerne, and by practices in South Petherton and Stoke-sub-Hamdon. Hospital services are provided by the NHS Trusts in Taunton and Yeovil. The satellite hospitals in Chard, Crewkerne, Wincanton and South Petherton provide out patient care, minor accident unit (Chard) and some inpatient care, mainly for the elderly. The Health Visitor's clinic is now only available in Crewkerne. There are two residential homes and sheltered housing for the elderly in the village and district nurses support some of the healthcare needs of the residents. Private care companies provide domiciliary visits for the elderly and others with health care needs. Merriott has a team of 'First Responders' who attend health emergencies.

OBJECTIVES IN 2007

- Seek to establish a GP practice in the village.
- Seek to have dispensing services provided to the village either by a dispensary associated with the new GP practice, and existing retailer, or as a collection and delivery service from a dispensary service in Crewkerne.
- Consider the inclusion of healthcare services in the Village School.

CHANGES SINCE 2007

- The 2007 Plan stimulated the establishment of the Merriott Pharmacy in 2010 which provides a full medicine service, including prescription pick-up and delivery service. This has been a great benefit to the village.
- Health Authorities have approved the establishment of a GP practice in the village. A site has been found and planning approval granted for construction. It is hoped that development will start very soon.
- Public transport to Crewkerne, Yeovil and Taunton for medical appointments is almost non-existent. Merriott Drivers, a volunteer Driver service for appointments has been established in Merriott and is in much demand.

- A new NHS dental practice has been established on the outskirts of Crewkerne, close to Merriott.
- The weekly Health Visitor Clinic in the village has ceased due to staff shortages.

FUTURE AIMS

1. Continue to press to have a GP practice developed in the village

Planning permission has been granted for the construction of a surgery on Moorlands Farm. The community need to vigorously press for this development to proceed urgently.

2. Re-establish a weekly Health Visitor Baby Clinic in the village

This was an important facility in the village and with the paucity of public transport should be re-established.

3. Promote and support the Merriott Volunteer Drivers service, the First Responders and the Crewkerne Voluntary Transport scheme

These are valuable services to the community and need to be supported as public transport is so poor.



YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION

BACKGROUND

In 2007 9.4% of the population was 7 years old or less, 8.5% were aged 8 to 15 and a further 6.6% were 16 to 24. The majority of those in education attended Merriott First School, or Maiden Beech or Wadham Schools in Crewkerne. A few attended independent schools and a few (less than 1%) attended colleges in Yeovil and Taunton or went to University and other forms of Further Education.

OBJECTIVES IN 2007

- Communicate the results of the survey used to prepare the 2007 Plan to the Head Teachers of local schools.
- Improve the play areas on the Recreation Ground.

CHANGES SINCE 2007

- Attempts were made to establish a Cadet Force in the village but this failed for lack of support. Cubs, Brownies, Guides and Scouts meet in the village.
- The Village School and the Pre-School continue to be close to their maximum capacity so that any increase of children in the village will require some school expansion. The existing site of the First School and Pre-School is already fully occupied so that a new site as well as new buildings will be required. Classes in both the Pre-School and the First School are already of mixed year groups because of shortage of space. The arguments in favour of a new larger First School and Pre-School already exist.
- The First and Pre-School facilities are also short of a large enough meeting hall which would also be used as a general village facility, because the Village Hall and the Tithe barn are too small and overused for the needs of the village.

- The play areas on the Recreation Ground have been substantially improved. However there is need for additional and a wider range of sports facilities.

FUTURE AIMS

1. Develop the case for a larger Village School and Pre-School together with a new Community Hall

The Village First School and the Pre-School are close to full. There is also parental concern that mixed age classes have to be in the same room, in part because of a shortage of space. There are existing plan approvals for new housing in the village which will increase the number of properties and the population by at least 10%. Any further new housing approval will increase the enlargement still further. The children associated with these changes cannot be accommodated in the existing Pre-School and First School facilities. Public transport to Crewkerne and neighbouring villages is inadequate for taking children to schools out of the village.

The Pre-School building is 8 years from needing replacement. The First School building cannot be expanded on its existing site and already has a lack of parking space for vehicles for parents to drop off and pick up their children safely.

The First School also lacks a suitable meeting hall.

There is a strong case for developing plans on a new site for a new Pre-School and new First School together with a Community Hall. The Community Hall could also be used as a village facility and help to foster community spirit between different age groups. In the meantime efforts should be made to improve the parking facilities adjacent to the First School.

2. Develop new pavements to enable children to walk to school in greater safety

The road from Newchester Cross along Church Street towards the school is not able to be negotiated safely by pedestrians, especially children. There is also a stretch of Shiremoor Hill without a pavement. Efforts should be made to have pavements installed in both places. (See also the section on Getting Around the Village).

3. Develop new youth facilities especially for older children

This was an Aim in the earlier Plan but attempts to start a Cadet Force and a Youth Club have not been successful. This does not mean that further efforts should not be made. Currently there seems to be a desire for a combined youth club and drop-in Centre for children and parents. Such a development depends on parents taking action, a suitable venue and some funding. Funds for starting such a venture may be available.

4. Make toilet facilities for children available at all times at the new pavilion

For children using the Recreation Ground, apart from activities associated with new pavilion, it will be very desirable for toilet facilities to be available at all times. Such facilities are planned on completion of the new pavilion.

5. Find a new area for sports, especially for cricket, tennis, basketball, a Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) and a skate park

The Recreation Ground is too small for the demands of the village for football, cricket and tennis. Additional space needs to be found to develop pitches and courts for these sports. In addition or alternatively the development of a MUGA and a skate park could be considered on any new recreation ground. (See also the section on Leisure and Amenity).

6. Consider whether the current Middle School system of education is appropriate

There is some parental concern that the middle school system, which applies locally, is inappropriate when juxtaposed to schools, such as Stanchester, operating a secondary system. This issue should be explored more fully with parents and education providers.



COMMUNITY SAFETY

BACKGROUND IN 2007

Merriott was served by a Police Constable based at Crewkerne who covered a very wide area. The Constable was supported by two Police Community Support Officers also based at Crewkerne.

The majority of the population felt secure in the village with some concerns over traffic. Some adults had concerns about safety at night. It was considered desirable to see more police on the beat in the village, an expansion of the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme and improved lighting.

OBJECTIVES IN 2007

- Maintain a regular police presence in the village
- Expand Neighbourhood Watch
- Inform residents of crime prevention methods
- Improve road and pedestrian safety
- Improve street and footpath lighting



CHANGES SINCE 2007

- With the cuts in the police force there has been a reduction in the police presence although crime does not appear to have increased significantly.
- The Parish Council has drawn up an Emergency Plan identifying places of refuge in the village. This would only be enacted should the emergency services be unable to attend through national or local circumstances.
- CCTV has been installed at the recreation ground to improve security and the safety of residents when using the facility.
- A Speedwatch group has been set up. This is operated by volunteers from the community. Seven sites have been identified and risk assessed around the village and regular sessions take place when weather conditions and availability of volunteers allow. This is already having a positive impact on speeding in the village.

FUTURE AIMS

1. Improve pedestrian safety by improving existing pavements and building new ones

The lack of pavements between Newchester Cross and the School and on Shiremoor Hill, as well as the lack of drop kerbs at key points makes the village much less safe for pedestrians and the less able to get around. Aims for improvements have been outlined in the section on Getting Around the Village.

2. Support efforts to reduce traffic speeds in the village

Speedwatch will continue and are continually assessing sites around the village that will benefit from their presence. They have requested flashing electronic speed limit reminder signs at the entry to the village from Lopen and at Pye Corner coming from Crewkerne. The Parish Council is assessing feasibility and cost of these devices.

Highways and Somerset County Council are being pressured by the Parish Council to revisit the traffic calming in Broadway. It is considered that raised platforms instead of pinch points would be an improvement and would help the access to the Moorlands Farm re-development.

3. Improve pedestrian access around the village

Four sites around the village that would benefit with dropped kerbs have been identified by the Parish Council. This should allow safer movement around Merriott for the disabled and families with pushchairs. Some monies are available. The remainder is being requested from the County Council.

Church Street leading down to Broadway, and the bridge at Merriottsford have been identified as areas where pedestrian safety is compromised. Solutions are being discussed and costed with Highways and the County Council.

4. Make improvements to various safety aspects of the Recreation Ground

CCTV will be extended to cover the pavilion as soon as the facility is available.

The Parking area at the recreation ground will be extended to ease the parking issues experienced when sports events are taking place. There will always be some road parking necessary at these times.

LEISURE AND AMENITY

BACKGROUND IN 2007

The village had at least 20 activities covering a range of sports and interests including scouts, guides, majorettes, youth and senior football, tennis, squash, cricket, flat green and short mat bowls, skittles, pub quizzes, a book club and a walking group. A recreation ground, owned by the Parish Council provided football pitches, cricket pitch and tennis courts. The bowling club is located at the recreation ground. Plans were in hand to improve facilities at the ground and the bowling club. The Village Hall is suitable for a wide range of activities including badminton, short mat bowls, meetings and social events. The Tithe Barn can also be used for badminton, meetings and other events.

The Social Club provided for family social occasions, entertainment, pool and skittles. The Swan and Kings Head pubs provided quizzes, skittles, darts and meals. There is also a squash club, model aeroplane club and a gun club in the village.

OBJECTIVES IN 2007

- Aim for improvements to the Recreation Ground, including the provision of additional football pitches and parking.
- Improve awareness of existing village activities and advertise the interest expressed in new activities.
- Take steps to conserve and enhance village green spaces and the Mark Wallis Parish Wood.
- Encourage the development of whole village events including a firework night, a street fair and a Summer fete.
- Provide allotments in the village.

CHANGES SINCE 2007

- Significant changes have been made at the Recreation Ground. The play area has been extended and relocated. A path has been laid around the field to enable easier access to all parts. Additional parking has been provided. The Bowls Club have a new pavilion and have improved the green and garden areas. A new Community Pavilion is being built and will be available early in 2014.
- Improvements have been made to the Village Hall which now provides a venue for brownies, guides and rangers; a short mat bowls club, dog training, badminton and majorettes. The Hall is also used for bingo, bazaars, social events and parties. The Tithe Barn has also been improved and continues to be used for meetings, events, badminton etc.
- Allotments have been provided since 2010 and are operated by the Merriott Allotment Association. A gardening club is now established in the village.
- The Parish Church now operates a successful Tuesday morning coffee shop and acts as a venue for classical concerts.

- The Social Club, Swan and Kings Head have all improved their facilities. Both the Swan and Kings Head provide meals and the Swan also provides accommodation. A table tennis club and a Zumba fitness club are held in the Social Club. Regular music events are held at the Kings Head and Social Club. Both the Swan and Social Club show sports on TV.
- An unauthorised occupation of the Mark Wallis wood by travellers caused damage to the flora and fauna of the area. Access to the wood was severely restricted.
- A street party to celebrate the Queens Diamond Jubilee took place in 2012. There has not however been a return to regular village events such as a street fair or firework party. A Summer Fair and a Christmas Fair are held by the Church and supported by other village organisations.
- Other activities that continue to be available including a squash club, gun club, walking club, and an open group which has social meetings, speakers and visits. There is still general satisfaction about the range of activities available in the village. Venues available for hire or for holding events have been improved.

FUTURE AIMS

1. There is a need for further expansion of facilities for football and to reduce the conflicts between the pitch needs for football and cricket

Further pitches are needed for football and to enable the conflicts of pitch needs for football and cricket to be resolved. The new Community Pavilion will be available for hire. It also provides an opportunity for further development of the sports that use the recreation field particularly football, cricket and tennis.

2. The path and parking areas adjacent and on the Recreation Ground need to be regularly maintained along with disabled access to the events and clubs on the field.

3. Facilities within the village will only continue to be available and improved if they are adequately used

There is a need to improve awareness of what is available and to encourage participation and responsibility for upkeep and maintenance.

4. A Multi Use Games Area would be a valuable addition to the range of village leisure facilities



THE FUTURE - CONCLUSIONS

1. Merriott is a large village, with a range of basic services including shops, garage, Post Office, First School and Pre-School, places of worship and public houses. It has a pharmacy and planning approval for a surgery. There are two village halls, a Recreation Ground with a new pavilion and playground, a social club and a squash court. Employment in the village has declined but unemployment in the surrounding District is half the national average.

2. The village has not grown much over the last 7 years but planning approval has been granted for nearly 100 new houses which, when built, will expand the community by about 10%. This in itself is likely to cause difficulties in relation to school facilities, health, leisure and transport and will test the limits of sustainability. Any development, without associated

- infrastructure improvements, beyond the 10% in house numbers for which planning approval has been given, is unsustainable and likely to lead to the destruction of the village community.
3. There is strong support for the retention of the green space in the core of the village as a community asset. There is also strong support for keeping the green spaces around the core.
 4. There is strong antipathy to further housing of any sort outside the core of the village, especially as there are brownfield sites in the core in need of development, and which can accommodate all the new housing and business units the village can stand without major new infrastructure. Any development, beyond that already approved **must** be associated with a new surgery, a new Pre-School, First School and Community Hall. There is also a need for more leisure facilities in the form of a youth club/drop-in centre, sports pitches especially cricket, tennis and basketball, a MUGA and a skate park. Housing alone will not provide a viable community.
 5. There is a need to develop business premises in the village, especially small units for small companies. Businesses have already left the village because of the lack of such buildings. Fast broadband is a high priority for new village businesses.
 6. Taking into account the considerations outlined above, the Parish Council has agreed that it will support applications for additional housing, provided;
 - **it is a balanced mix of starter, social, family and retirement properties;**
 - **it is on land within the core of the village, but not on the open space in the middle of the village, and is not a spread into surrounding countryside;**
 - **it is associated with any necessary additional infrastructure changes to the school, roads, transport, recreation and also supports businesses within the village.**
 7. Public transport is almost non-existent so the community has to rely on local and volunteer facilities or private transport. This needs to be recognised by all those who are considering any changes to the village, and especially those with planning responsibilities.
 8. There are many small improvements, without any large scale development, which can and need to be made to the village, and which would enhance the community well-being. Many of these are identified in the several sections of this Plan.
 9. The community ask that all those in authority for services and development take account of its wishes. In particular the residents wish all concerned to be aware that the village is at the limit of sustainability.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Members of the Village Plan Update Steering Group

Ann Lawrence and John Bowman (co Chairs), Peter Bryans, Cathy Herriman, Rev Bob Hicks, Katherine Nolan, Mary Paull, and Ashley Wallis (Parish Council Chair).

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Sketches around Merriott by Beryl Virgin