Physical Environment

7.14 The environmental quality of the public realm in the town centre is poor in many places. The landscaping of the Fair Green is in disrepair, as are the surfaces of many routes connecting it to surrounding neighbourhoods. This deters local residents from making the most of the existing public spaces in and around the town centre. Poor environmental quality in the area is also caused by the dominance of heavy traffic along London Road, Holborn Way and on the gyratory. The prominence of roads and vehicular traffic is at odds with the centre’s village character.

7.15 Many pedestrian routes are lined with blank, inactive frontages and/or are dominated by vehicular traffic. Staggered pedestrian crossings and safety barriers are found around the main roads leading through the town centre, which create a hostile pedestrian environment for the town centre users and movement barriers between different areas of Mitcham. Entrances to the town centre are particularly unwelcoming and are dominated by complicated pedestrian crossings, safety barriers and expanses of road surface. As a result, it is difficult for pedestrians to get to the town centre and thus there is no sense of arrival to Mitcham.

7.16 The Council has previously commissioned Urban Initiatives to prepare recommendations for the design of public spaces within and around the town centre, including recommendations on the selection of street materials and street furniture. The conclusions of their report seek to develop Mitcham as a distinctive place, with high quality public spaces. Development proposals for sites will therefore be expected to include proposals for the regeneration of the public domain, in accordance with the Urban Initiatives recommendations. The Council has also produced a Street Design Guide for use in the design and implementation of all new street works projects in the borough. This is due to be adopted by the Council in March 2006. Development will therefore also be required to be in accordance with this Guide.

7.17 Part of the physical decline of Mitcham’s streets and spaces may be due to the level of maintenance and repair, as well as the management and enforcement regime for the public spaces in the centre. It is acknowledged that this may, in part, be due to financial constraints faced by the Council. There is a need to achieve a step change in the improvement of maintenance, repair, management and enforcement of Mitcham’s streets and spaces if environmental benefits derived from the redevelopment of the town centre are not to be gradually eroded over a period of time. Development proposals will therefore be expected to contribute to ongoing management, maintenance and repair, as well as to providing enforcement against abuse, to ensure that the public domain is used as it should be, and is maintained to a high standard.

Historic Buildings and Spaces

7.18 Mitcham contains a number of attractive historic buildings and spaces (see Figure 2). The key statutory listed buildings in the town centre are the Clock Tower and Eagle House (Grade I). In addition there are a number of locally listed buildings in the town centre. These include Mitcham Library, the King’s Arms PH, the White Lion PH, St. Mark’s Primary School and St. Mark’s Church. In addition to this there are a number of other buildings in the town centre that, as groups, contribute positively to its character and townscape. This includes a number of groups around the Fair Green and along London Road (see para. 7.23). These buildings are shown on Plan 8.
7.19 Public open spaces in the area include historic spaces such as the Fair Green, Mitcham Common and Figge's Marsh (see *Plan 8*). These spaces play an important role in the quality of life and identity of Mitcham, and also represent an important regeneration and recreational asset for the area. There is clearly a demand for places of rest and catering in the town centre, which are not met by the existing facilities.

The street pattern is also an important element of historic character, being organic in form and based on the shape of the Fair Green and Three Kings Piece and streets leading away from and converging on the spaces. This character is particularly susceptible to inappropriate change due to the simplicity of its layout and it not being extensive in coverage.

7.20 Part of the area covered by this SPD also forms part of the Cricket Green Conservation Area (see *Plan 8*). This includes all the parts of Commonside East and Commonside West within the SPD area and extends to the edge of Fair Green. In the south, the Conservation Area abuts the edge of the SPD area. Any development proposal within or adjacent to the Conservation Area will have to pay special regard to the preservation or enhancement of its special character.

7.21 Conservation of these historic assets and enhancement of their urban setting should be a key element of any regeneration strategy for the area. Preservation of historic assets is best made through their continuous use and upkeep. New developments should embrace the unique opportunity in Mitcham to incorporate these historic assets, upgrade them and enhance their setting.
Local Distinctiveness

7.22 The recent relatively poor social and economic performance of Mitcham Town Centre, resulting in long periods of low development interest and especially low volumes of new, large scale development, has meant that the town has not experienced the pressures for change that other more successful areas have. Consequently this has enabled the retention and preservation of a number of notable buildings and spaces. This has allowed Mitcham Town Centre to retain a degree of distinctiveness and village character, compared with other centres in Merton. On the other hand, areas that have been redeveloped, have seen poor quality buildings, materials and spaces created as a result, with little reference to local distinctiveness.

7.23 The historic buildings and spaces in the area are a major asset. Together they significantly contribute to the local identity of Mitcham. However, it is not just this that defines the distinctive character that is Mitcham. The list below identifies the key components of character that define the distinctive character of Mitcham. These are elements that should either be retained or replicated in any regeneration proposals.

- **Urban Form:**
  The layout of streets and spaces are organic in arrangement and reflect the town’s village origins. This is particularly so of the area around Fair Green and the pond.

- **Urban Grain:**
  The size and shape of individual plots of land and the size and position of buildings built on them.

- **Building Scale and Appearance:**
  The size of buildings in terms of their height, the proportion and scale of their architectural features, the level of detailing and architectural style.

- **Key Spaces:**
  The Fair Green is the defining space of Mitcham and the Three Kings Pond to a similar extent.

- **Key Buildings:**
  The Clock Tower, King’s Arms and White Lion are the most important buildings in the town centre core. Also of importance in the core are 1-13 Fair Green Court, 8, 8a, 8b, 9 & 9a Upper Green West, 213-221 London Road and the café building on the Fair Green. Other buildings, outside the core, but within the study area include: 2-38 Upper Green West, 23-29 Commonside East (former Three Kings PH); 225-261 London Road; 224 London Road (Eagle House); 226 London Road (former education centre); 157 London Road (Library) and 159-173, 175-187 & 195-201 London Road. Some of these buildings are either statutorily or locally listed.

- This list identifies key buildings in the townscape and is not a comprehensive list of all listed buildings in the area, nor does it specifically include buildings that may have particular social or cultural significance.