1.0 Introduction & Adoption Statement

1.1 This document has been produced in accordance with the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004 regarding the preparation of Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD). The Council’s Unitary Development Plan Policy LD.3: Planning Briefs, states that the Council will prepare planning frameworks for sites proposed for development, either in response to developers’ interest or to promote appropriate development.

1.2 In accordance with the above, this Brief is a Supplementary Planning Document to the Merton Unitary Development Plan (UDP), (Adopted October 2003). This Brief was adopted as such by the Council’s Cabinet on 16th January 2006. The purpose of this Brief is to provide a framework to promote and guide the future regeneration and redevelopment of Mitcham town centre. Plan 1 shows the area covered by this SPD.

1.3 The UDP is currently planned to be replaced by the new Local Development Framework (LDF) as part of the new planning regime created by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. When the LDF is adopted, this SPD will be reviewed to ensure it is in accordance with the policies in the LDF.

1.4 Any person or organisation aggrieved by this SPD may apply to the high court for permission to apply for judicial review of the decision to adopt the SPD. It should be noted that any such application must be made no later than three months after the date on which this SPD was adopted.

Plan 1 Boundary of SPD Area and Town Centre Core

2.0 Conformity with Statement of Community Involvement

2.1 At the time public consultation was undertaken on this SPD, the Merton Statement of Community Involvement was in the process of being prepared. Thus, the consultation was undertaken according to the provisions of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004, and Planning Policy Statement 12 – Local Development Frameworks. This primarily consisted of a 4-6 week consultation period, a formal press notice and the Urban Design Brief being available on the Council website and at the Civic Centre and local libraries.

2.2 Following this, the Draft Statement of Community Involvement was published in May 2005. This included the proposed process of community involvement concerning the preparation of SPDs. This was further amended and submitted to the Government for approval in September 2005. The production of this SPD adheres to all the minimum statutory requirements listed in the table on pages 24-25 and also the majority of the additional means of engagement also listed in the table. This SPDs statement of consultation outlines in detail the consultation undertaken and can be found at Appendix B. This should read in conjunction with the Council’s Draft Statement of Community Involvement.
3.0 Background

3.1 Mitcham town centre has been in gradual decline for many years. This has become particularly apparent over the past ten years, with an increasing number of shop vacancies and a reduction in the quality and quantity of the retail offer. In addition, poor accessibility compared to other centres, the changing nature of the retailing industry and a deteriorating physical environment has compounded the problem. Many of the premises are small, older or of poor design and not suited to modern retailing.

3.2 To help address the decline the Council has engaged in a number of initiatives to promote the regeneration of the town centre including pedestrianisation, guidance on development sites, guidance on public realm improvements and designation as an Urban Village to promote sustainable living and working patterns. These initiatives have met with limited success and as a result of the scale of decline, the Council has more recently sought a more proactive and comprehensive approach, actively seeking developer interest to achieve regeneration of the town centre.

3.3 This approach has proved successful with two development consortia now actively interested in comprehensive regeneration of the town centre. In addition, Asda have purchased a significant land holding in the town centre centred on the existing Somerfield foodstore, with the intention of providing a new anchor store and impetus for regeneration. The Council recognises that the development of Mitcham town centre needs to be undertaken in partnership with the private sector, however no development can succeed without the close involvement of the Council.

3.4 As a result the Council realised it needed guidance on a comprehensive regeneration of the town centre to guide developers proposals and ensure a co-ordinated high quality development that benefits the residents of Mitcham. Previous guidance either did not address the ‘whole picture’ or was out of date in terms of renewed developer interest and recent planning policy guidance. To this end, consultants Space Syntax Ltd. were appointed by the Council in November 2004 to produce an Urban Design Brief for Mitcham town centre. The Brief was completed in February 2005 and subject to an extensive public consultation during the following March and April. The guidance and proposals contained in the Brief, amended as a result of the public consultation, form the basis of this Supplementary Planning Document. Details of the consultation process can be found in the Statement of Consultation at Appendix B.

4.0 Site Context & Description

4.1 Mitcham is located in the east of the borough, primarily surrounded by suburban residential areas, with Mitcham Common reaching to the edge of the town centre from the south-east. The town is centred on a crossroads, London Road running north-south, Western Road north-west to Colliers Wood and Commonside East and West opening out into Mitcham Common. The area encompassed by this Brief extends from Figge’s Marsh in the north to the telephone exchange in the south, and from Field Gate Lane and Sadler Close in the west to Mitcham Common in the east.

4.2 Commercial and retail uses are generally located in a linear form along London Road stretching almost from Figge’s Marsh in the north to Cricket Green in the south. The pedestrianisation of the central part of London Road and associated by-pass of Holborn Way and gyratory, in conjunction with the commercial decline of the town centre has seen this commercial area polarise into three separate elements, each suffering the effects of traffic congestion, pedestrian severance due to the road layout and commercial decline due to surrounding retail developments.

4.3 The town centre lies within the wards of Figges Marsh, Cricket Green and Lavender Fields. The total population for the three wards based on figures from the 2001 census is 29,602 however not all of this population would be within walking distance of the town centre.

4.4 It is in the eastern part of the borough where the level of deprivation is higher than the rest of the borough. In contrast with other, more prosperous town centres in South London, Mitcham’s catchment area contains a large number of Merton’s most socially and economically deprived households. The town centre itself is surrounded by the three large Council housing estates of Glebe Court, Sadler Close and Armfield Crescent, with a number of other estates in the wider catchment area.

4.5 Figges Marsh exceeds the average income support claim rate for London and average household income is below £20,000 for all three wards. The unemployment rate in all three wards also exceeds 4.25% which is higher than the borough average of 3.26%. Depetration is further illustrated by the Index of Deprivation which was updated in 2004. Figges Marsh and Cricket Green are at the top of the ODPM deprivation tables for the borough and amongst the top 20 deprived wards in the country.

4.6 Although public transport is provided by means of a generally good network of bus routes to the surrounding area and beyond, the town centre is poorly served by public transport in comparison to other centres as a whole, sitting within an area surrounded by railway, tube and tram lines but not actually directly served by any one of them. Poor public transport restricts access to jobs and can exacerbate social exclusion. The land is generally flat and the town centre surrounded by residential streets, making it well suited for cycling.

4.7 The townscapes focus of the town centre is the triangular open space of Fair Green, the original village green. The central part of the town centre is focussed around the Fair Green and Somerfield foodstore immediately to its north. To the south of the gyratory there are a concentration of retail units with the Tesco foodstore as its focus (recently reopened as a Tesco Metro). To the north of the central area, either side of London Road, are parades of smaller retail units.
The character of the town centre is defined primarily by its street pattern, urban layout, the Fair Green, a range of buildings adhering to the traditional village grain and a number of buildings of architectural merit. However, whilst there are a good number of existing buildings contributing in this sense and architecturally, many of these are either in poor condition or are unsuitable to modern retailing needs. There are also a significant number of larger, more modern buildings that are of poor quality and appearance, which significantly undermine the traditional character of the town centre. Poor maintenance, design and quality of materials also contribute to a tired and unattractive public realm. Thus the townscape quality of Mitcham is fragile and guidance is needed to ensure that this local distinctiveness is not inappropriately lost through redevelopment.

Redevelopment of the heart of Mitcham is key to the strategic objective of a Thriving Merton, part of the Council’s overall vision “Merton - a great place to live, work and learn”. The Council’s Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy has shown that the east of the borough displays higher unemployment, lower educational attainment, higher levels of social housing, and lower levels of life expectancy than the west of the borough.

Central to addressing the challenges raised in the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy is to enhance Mitcham’s unique character by keeping the best whilst improving the rest. The Council’s aim is to achieve redevelopment in Mitcham town centre that will provide a good District Centre serving the town and surrounding areas with larger and better shops, more retail choice, better transport connections, environmental improvements and improved accommodation for a range of other community services. The Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy vision for Mitcham is “A district town centre providing quality shopping, quality housing, a quality environment, good transport links and improving community facilities”.

Over the last ten years shopping provision in Mitcham has declined in quality and quantity. This is mainly because of the lack of good retail outlets. Vacant and charity shops make up around 11% of the shops in the town centre whilst non-retail uses, such as offices are taking prime retail spaces rather than locating above shops. Modern retailing needs a range of unit sizes in different sizes, the larger of which are not currently available in Mitcham Town Centre.

At the same time Mitcham Fair Green provides the opportunity to develop around it a cafe and restaurant uses that would help enhancing the area. The Council’s aim is to provide better shopping and a wider choice whilst maintaining Mitcham’s unique character. To achieve better shopping any redevelopment proposal will need to contain a mix of shop unit sizes and a mix of type of uses that will add to the uniqueness of Mitcham. The Fair Green and new community facilities will provide an important focus for a regenerated Mitcham.

New accommodation for community uses has the potential to be a multi-purpose hall (meeting venue, cinema club, theatre etc.), an employment resource centre, training facilities, enterprise centre, town centre management offices, health and fitness facilities and facilities for people with disabilities. The Council welcomes the commitment of Asda in buying part of the town centre with the intention of providing the anchor store for the redevelopment proposals.

The Council aims to ensure that a developed town centre is safe and secure and will make use of all appropriate methods to achieve this, including mixed uses, natural surveillance, secure building design, integrated policing, clear signage and good and adequate lighting for public spaces and routes. CCTV will cover all areas of the town centre.

Mitcham suffers from a high level of congestion caused primarily by a high volume of through traffic. Public transport is limited to bus services. Cycle facilities are limited and pedestrian access is made difficult by the congestion and road layout. All these circumstances have contributed to the decline of the vitality and viability of the town centre. Car ownership levels in the surrounding residential areas are low, so local residents can experience significant problems accessing the town centre and beyond. Likewise there are access difficulties to the town centre from beyond the surrounding area.

The Council is committed to improving transport to Mitcham town centre. The Council’s Transport aim is “To propose a range of sustainable, accessible integrated transport measures that better meet the needs of all users, promotes social inclusion and increases safety for all users, whilst enhancing the vitality and viability for Mitcham town centre”.

Key priorities for improving public transport are:
• Improving public transport integration and accessibility for all through new and enhanced transport facilities.
• Improve pedestrian links to and within the town centre.
• Improve cycle parking and cycle links between the adjoining residential areas and the town centre and the London Cycle Network.
• Provision of adequate parking and servicing facilities according to Council standards, notably for short-term parking, people with disabilities and other forms of transport such as motorcyclists.
• Achieve improvements to the road network that, where possible, reduce congestion improve journey times for buses and provide other transport, pedestrian, economic, environmental and safety benefits.

6.0 Policy Context

6.1 The policy context to the guidance in this document is summarised in this section, which covers the various policy areas and refers to the relevant policies. A detailed analysis of the most relevant policies is given in Appendix A to this SPD.

Government Planning Guidance

6.2 Planning Policy Guidance and Statements set out the Government’s national policies on different aspects of land use planning. The Guidance and Statements most relevant to the regeneration of Mitcham are listed referred to below. These are expanded on in detail in Appendix A.

• PPS 1: Delivering Sustainable Development (January 2005)
• PPG 3: Housing (March 2000)
• PPG 3: Housing Update – Supporting the Delivery of New Housing (January 2005)
• PPG 4: Industrial, Commercial Development and Small Firms (March 2001)
• PPS 6: Planning for Town Centres (March 2005)
• PPS 12: Local Development Frameworks (September 2004)
• PPG 13: Transport (October 2002)
• PPG 15: Planning and the Historic Environment (September 1994)

The London Plan

6.3 The London Plan is produced by the Greater London Authority and is the statutory planning document for London as a whole and forms part of the Development Plan for the borough. It is a strategic plan setting out an integrated social, economic and environmental framework for the future of London. It was adopted in February 2004 and consists of policies for the spatial development of the city. A number of policies in the Plan are relevant to the regeneration of Mitcham town centre.

6.4 These policies are Introduction Policy I; Broad Development Strategy Policies 2A.5*, 2A.6*; Thematic Policies 3A.1*, 3A.2*, 3A.4, 3A.7*, 3A.8*, 3A.15*, 3B.11, 3B.12, 3C.1, 3C.2*, 3C.3, 3C.13, 3C.17, 3C.18*, 3C.19, 3C.20, 3C.21, 3D.1*, 3D.2, 3D.3, 3D.9; Crosscutting Policies 4A.1, 4A.2, 4A.7, 4A.8, 4A.9, 4A.10, 4A.11, 4A.13, 4B.1*, 4B.2*, 4B.3*, 4B.4, 4B.5, 4B.6*, 4B.7, 4B.8, 4B.9, 4B.10, 4B.11; Sub-regional Policy 5E.1; and Implementation Policy 6A.4. Policies marked with an asterisk are particularly relevant to the successful regeneration of Mitcham and are expanded on in detail in Appendix A.

Merton Unitary Development Plan

6.5 The Merton Unitary Development Plan (UDP) is the statutory planning document for the borough as a whole. It is part of the Development Plan for the Borough. It was adopted in October 2003 and contains policies for the development and other use of land for the borough. Its purpose is to guide development in the borough by setting out policies and proposals against which planning applications and development proposals will be assessed. A number of policies in the UDP are relevant to the regeneration of Mitcham town centre.