10 Open Space

Open Space

Overall objective

10.1 To protect and enhance Merton’s sports pitches, nature conservation areas, allotments, green chains, open spaces and recreational facilities.

Key Issues

10.2 Open space is defined as all publicly accessible open space, whether public or privately owned.

- **Protection of green assets required:** Merton contains sites recognised as having ecological protection, such as Sites of Specific Scientific Interest, Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation and Local Nature Reserves, all of which should be afforded high levels of protection through the planning system. Similarly, the borough contains Green Corridors between sites that allow for the movement of species and are increasingly recognised as being important in the context of adapting to climate change given their cooling nature.

- **Merton Open Space Strategy** - Planning Policy Guidance note 17 is the current government planning policy document providing policy advice on open space, sport and recreation.

- MOSS findings reveal the following key open space issues in Merton:
  - improving the range and quality of open spaces;
  - providing a variety of open space balanced across the borough;
  - protecting open space from inappropriate development;
  - ensuring open space experiences are relevant to all sections of the community;
  - improving the safety and security of open spaces.

- **River Wandle:** the South London Partnership has established the Wandle Forum to promote the value of river and co-ordinate the activities of interest groups along its length.

- **Strategic Parks Project:** EDAW consultants on behalf of the GLA carried out the London Strategic Parks Project, published May 2006. It identified Regional and Metropolitan Park deficiencies and included the Wandle Valley as one of its 4 pilot studies. Merton will need to work with other boroughs to assist in overcoming these deficiencies and take this forward through the emerging LDF.

Contextual Indicators

**Contextual Indicator 9a (Core Output Indicator 4c): Amount of eligible open spaces managed to Green Flag Award standard**

10.3 **Performance:** 148 hectares or 22% of the total amount of open space in Merton (In total, Merton has 677ha of open space)
10.4 As with all Core Output Indicators, the above indicator is set by Government guidance. Below is an extract from the section of the guidance that relates to the above indicator

“‘Eligible’ open space means areas that are managed to Green Flag Award scheme standards, i.e. they do not have to have the award itself.

The award is a marker of good quality in the management and maintenance of green spaces and can be awarded to any freely accessible public park or green space that meets the standard. This can include town parks, country parks, formal gardens, nature reserves, local nature reserves, cemetery and crematoria, water parks, open spaces, millennium greens, sites of special scientific interest and woodlands.

Sites need not be in local authority or public ownership but there should not be any charges made, or undue restrictions, on entry to the park or green space. Independent verification of whether a space has reached the standard is made through the award of the Green Flag or Green Pennant Awards are made on an annual basis.”

10.5 Merton currently has a large amount of open spaces managed to Green Flag Award standard, and will be looking to increase this amount in the future.

Contextual Indicator 9b: Percentage of residents satisfied with parks, playgrounds and open spaces:

10.6 Assessment of policy: L6 Public Open Space

10.7 Target: Increase proportion of residents who rate parks, playgrounds and open spaces as good or excellent.

10.8 Performance: MOSS revealed that a number of residents wished to see improvements in the range and quality of open spaces across the borough and to ensure that open space experiences were relevant to all members of the community. The Merton Annual Residents Survey found the following:

- 2002/03 findings: 48%; London 2003 average: 47%
- 2003/04 findings: 50%; London 2004 average: 48%
- 2004/05 findings: 47%; London 2005 average: 46%
- 2005/06 findings: 52%; London 2006 average: 58%
- 2006/07 findings: 60%; London 2007 average: 60%

10.9 Merton residents are generally satisfied with parks and open space in the borough, with just over 60% of residents in 2006/07 rating parks, playgrounds and open spaces in Merton as good or excellent.

Source: LB Merton Annual residents survey
10 Open Space

Contextual Indicator 9c: Visual and landscape quality of individual open spaces

10.10 **Assessment of policy:** L7: Recreational open space; L8 Open space deficiency

10.11 **Target:** Improve conditions of parks and open spaces by 2015 (Source: Merton Community Plans 2005-2015 Framework Document) and improve on the findings of the MOSS.

10.12 **Performance:** Merton Open Space Study 2005 revealed three parks classified as ‘poor’ and 13 as ‘fair’. The MOSS and subsequent LDF consultations have revealed that quality of open spaces in Merton is an issue. Despite being rich in open space supply and comfortably exceeding the National Playing Field Association’s target, residents think that some of Merton’s open spaces are of poor quality and want to see improvements and more facilities.

*Source: Merton Open Space Study (to be completed every 5 years)*

Contextual Indicator 9d: Amenity and facilities within parks and open spaces managed by Merton Council

10.13 **Assessment of policy:** L1 Informal Recreation

10.14 **Target:**

- 2006: complete Park Management Plans for all flagship parks
- 2007: complete Park Management Plans for all elite sports sites
- 2008: complete Park Management Plans for all amenity parks and open spaces

10.15 **Performance:** MOSS revealed that the quality of facilities is generally deteriorating through lack of maintenance. MOSS also revealed that some of Merton’s parks do not provide a typical range of facilities when compared to the LPAC Open Space Hierarchy used as a benchmark for Merton’s results in the MOSS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Current Situation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John Innes Park and Recreation Ground</td>
<td>Completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir Joseph Hood Memorial Playing Fields</td>
<td>Completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Park Gardens</td>
<td>Completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ravensbury Park</td>
<td>Completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannon Hill Common</td>
<td>Completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannizaro Park</td>
<td>Completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wimbledon Park</td>
<td>Completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holland Gardens</td>
<td>Completed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Site | Current Situation
--- | ---
Morden Park | Completed
The Canons | Completed
Wandle Park | Not Completed yet
Mitcham Town Greens | Completed
3 Kings Piece and Pond | Completed

*Source: LB Merton, Leisure and Culture*

**Contextual Indicator 9e: Areas deficient in local Parks**

10.16 **Assessment of policy:** L8 open space deficiencies

10.17 **Target:** Four wards or fewer to have large areas outside the catchment area of any park.

10.18 **Performance:** MOSS identified 7 wards as having large areas outside the pedestrian catchments of any park. Areas deficient in local and small parks are generally on the west side of Merton; however these areas are closer to Wimbledon Common and include a number of private open spaces in the form of playing fields, some of which provide informal access.

10.19 Policies in Merton’s emerging LDF aim to continue to identify areas that are deficient in publicly accessible open space. Further research is required to update the evidence provided in the UDP.

*Source: Merton Open space study (to be completed every 5 years)*

**Contextual Indicator 9f: Percentage of population in Merton that has access to three types of facility from swimming pool, sports hall, health and fitness facilities, grass or synthetic turf pitch or golf course of which one is Quality Assured**

10.20 **Assessment of policy:** L11 Protection of Existing Facilities and Land; L12 Provision of New Facilities

10.21 **Target:** Monitor trend over time - Increase percentage of Merton’s population with access to three types of facility from swimming pool, sports hall, health and fitness facilities, grass or synthetic turf pitch or gold course of which one is Quality Assured (CPA Indicator: Choice and Opportunity Indicator)

10.22 **Performance:** 49% (this figure has not changed from the previous years review). Merton is currently performing relatively well in this area and will be looking to improve performance in the future.
10  Open Space

Source: Sport England Active Places Power database

Contextual Indicator 9g: Total number of allotment spaces across the borough.

10.23  Assessment of policy: L.10 Allotments

10.24  Target: Maintain existing number of allotment spaces

10.25  Performance: Total plots 1364. Total in use 1161

Source: LB Merton, Leisure and Culture

Policy Indicator 9.i: Private and public open land to be used for informal recreation, providing it does not adversely affect the environment.

10.26  Assessment of policies: L.1 Informal Recreation

10.27  Target: Trend - increase the number of planning applications each year that create informal recreational spaces

10.28  Performance:

- 2004/05: 3 applications
- 2005/06: 1 application
- 2006/07: 1 application

10.29  Merton will be looking to enhance and improve access to private and public open land through emerging LDF policies in order to make open spaces be more accessible and meet the needs of the wider community.

Source: London Development Database

Policy Indicator 9.ii: Improve leisure walking and cycling routes across the Borough.

10.30  Assessment of policies: L.2 Policy for Walking Routes, WC.1 Increasing Walking, WC.4 Cycle Routes

10.31  Target: 80% footpaths and rights of way being easy to use by members of the public

10.32  Performance: the percentage of total length of footpaths and other rights of way which were easy to use by members of the public

- 2003/04: 100% (audited)
- 2004/05: 83.33% (unaudited)
- 2006/07: 89.1% (unaudited)
Merton has met its target and will be looking to maintain this good performance and where possible increase it to enable the borough to exceed its target. Ensuring footpaths and other rights of way in Merton are accessible and easy to use is key in delivering the wider MOSS objective of increasing the access of parks and open spaces in the borough.

Source: Best Value Performance Indicator 178

Policy Indicator 9iii: Any development permitted on urban green space or public open space must be sensitive, ancillary to the open space use and retain and enhance open space facilities through redevelopment of a small part of the site

Assessment of policies: L.7 Recreational Open Space

Target: all planning decisions permitting development on urban green space or public open space must fully adhere to policy L7: the retention and enhancement sport and recreational facilities on site through redevelopment of part of the site (enabling development)

Performance: In 2006/07 there were no applications

The benefit of this policy is that it allows the improvement and enhancement of existing open space facilities, addressing the issue of open space quality, which we know from the MOSS study findings is an issue in Merton. The policy is however controversial in that it allows for the development of part of an open space. The policy is currently under review as part of the preparation of Merton’s LDF.

Source: LB Merton, Planning MVM

Policy Indicator 9.iv: Level of contribution provided towards open space through planning contributions


Target: Monitor trend - Increased planning contributions towards open space

Performance: Planning applications resulting in a planning obligation providing an open space contribution:

- In 2004/05: 10 applications
- In 2005/06: 28 applications
- In 2006/07: 1 application (part of Harland School)

The figures show that Merton secured a lower level of open space contributions from planning applications in 2006/07 than in the previous recording year.
Policy Indicator 9.vNumber of children’s play facilities provided in association with new housing developments in areas deficient in the provision of children’s play facilities


10.43 Target: Increase facilities and improve quality of play spaces where appropriate

10.44 Performance:

- 2004/05: 3 applications
- 2005/06: 3 applications
- 2006/07: 0 applications

10.45 There are currently few areas of the borough where there is no play space within 800m of a home. However the emerging standards in Draft Play Space Strategy will reduce this. The standard proposed is 800 metres for play space suitable for 12 year olds and above and 400 metres for play spaces for children younger than 12 years. The Council has adopted a Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document in July 2006 which looks to either provide play space or a financial contribution to improving the quality of existing play spaces.

10.46 In 2006/07 Merton has carried out major refurbishment in play spaces at the following locations:

- King Georges Playing Field – Phase 2
- Armfield Crescent – Phase 2
- Colliers Wood Recreation Ground
- Moreton Green

Policy Indicator 9.vi: Number of allotments developed

10.47 Assessment of policy: L.10 Allotments

10.48 Target: number of applications that affect an allotment

10.49 Performance: 2006/07 = no applications

10.50 This is a new indicator to look at the number of allotments that are developed on in the borough. This will compliment and monitor the aspiration set out in the Merton Allotment Strategy 2007 – 2010, which has the objective 4A to protect existing allotment supply through effective planning policy and enforcement.

Source: LB Merton, Leisure Services Dept
Policy Indicator 9.vii: Percentage of residents satisfied with leisure and sports facilities in Merton


10.52 Target: Increase the proportion of residents who rate leisure and sports facilities as good or excellent

10.53 Performance:

- Merton 2006 findings: 39%; London 2006 average: 41%
- Merton 2005 findings: 35%; London 2005 average: 42%
- Merton 2004 findings: 41%; London 2004 average: 37%
- Merton 2003 findings: 36%; London 2003 average: 34%
- Merton 2002 findings: 33%; London 2002 average: 37%


Arts, culture and entertainment facilities

Policy Indicator viii: Number of cinemas, theatres and public libraries in Merton

10.54 Assessment of policies: L.15 Protection of Facilities, L.16 Protection of Public Houses

10.55 Target: No loss of entertainment facilities

10.56 Performance: 100%

- Number of cinemas in Merton – 1 cinema
- Number of theatres in Merton – 4 theatres
- Number of public libraries in Merton - 8 libraries
- The number of public houses in Merton – 39 pubs/bars in Merton

Source: LB Merton 2005 shopping survey

Policies not used in 2006/07

- L3: Water environments
- L4: River Wandle
- L5: Urban Green Space
- L6: Public Open Space (This policy is in part monitored by the appeals analysis)
Appeals Analysis

10.57 The UDP policies relevant to this chapter in the Annual Monitoring Report featured very infrequently in Appeal decisions. Only 2 policies were cited in appeals between 2002 and 2005 (L8: Open Space Deficiencies and L6: Public Open Space) and both resulted in appeal dismissals. No UDP policies relevant to this chapter were cited in appeal decisions in the 2006/07 recording year.

Conclusion

10.58 Policies in this section are overall performing well. Only two policies within this topic area appear in any appeal cases since 2002 and those that were mentioned resulted in the appeal being dismissed indicating the strength and extent to which the policies are robust.

10.59 The policies are supported by relatively up to date evidence largely in the form of the Merton Open Space Study (published in 2005). This study was the first borough-wide comprehensive qualitative and quantitative assessment of open space and leisure facilities in the Borough, however further work now needs to be undertaken to determine the areas that are deficient in publicly accessible open space. Equally work carried out for the emerging Play Strategy has identified a large area of the west of the borough that is deficient in play space for the over twelve’s.

10.60 The Merton Sport, Health and Physical Activity Strategy document was published in 2006 and is being considered in the policy development of the LDF.

10.61 The Open Space chapter in the pending Supplementary Planning Document on S106 contributions provides guidance to developers on contributions for open space and children’s play facilities, which should have helped improve developer contributions to improve existing open space and develop new open spaces in the Borough. However the contributions and/or improvements in the 2006/2007 do not appear to have benefited from this document. Due to the potential for annual fluctuations in development that could provide contributions this will need to be looked at again in 2007-2008.
Figure 10.1 Merton’s Open Spaces