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1 Foreword from Councillor

Foreword to Merton’s draft Core Strategy - for public consultation September-October 2009

Merton Council is currently preparing a Local Development Framework (LDF). Once adopted and along with the Mayor’s London Plan, the LDF will form the new development plan for the borough; shaping Merton’s physical landscape for the next 15 years. The development of the LDF is therefore one of the single most critical tasks to be undertaken by a local authority such as Merton.

At the heart of the LDF lies the Core Strategy. It sets out the council’s spatial vision for the borough as well as the principles, strategic objectives and policies that will inform planning in Merton over the next decade and beyond.

The Core Strategy is substantial and very closely linked to the council’s long term aspirations for Merton as a great place to call home, where the council provides opportunity for individuals and families to prosper in south west London. It needs to be a robust strategy which takes into account the landscape of Merton today but, at the same time, is flexible enough to allow us to adapt and respond positively to the challenges of the Merton tomorrow.

Given what I have said above regarding its importance, it follows that the Core Strategy must, at every stage of its development, be very closely informed by the views of the people whose quality of life it seeks to improve. The council started a programme of consultation specifically on the Core Strategy as far back as 2005. I would like to thank all those who took the time and trouble to take part in those consultation exercises. The views expressed then, along with commissioned research studies and information provided by other organisations and agencies, have strongly helped shape the content of this latest iteration of the Strategy.

This consultation represents the last chance for you to influence the content of the Core Strategy. After the consultation exercise is concluded, it will be finalised and sent, in the spring of next year, to an independent Planning Inspector for examination.

Getting it to this stage of its development has taken a huge amount of effort by all those involved. So it should, given the weight that will be placed upon it over the ensuing years. Although it will ultimately be a council document, it is very much my intention that it also represents a strategy for the people of Merton.

I commend the Core Strategy to you and would ask that you please consider it with care. Your final thoughts on how it might be amended to make Merton’s future a great place to call home would be warmly welcomed.
Yours sincerely,

Councillor David Williams, Leader of Merton Council
2 Introduction and Purpose

2.1 The Local Development Framework (LDF) is a new form of development plan and will replace the Unitary Development Plan. It will however provide a wider spatial planning framework and will seek to provide guidance for Merton's Community Plan. The LDF should look forward 15 years and will set out strategies and policies for the development and use of land as well as broader spatial matters. It will consist of a number of separate documents setting out different types of planning guidance.

2.2 The Core Strategy is the key policy document in Merton’s LDF setting out the spatial strategy for the borough and the key elements of the planning framework. It brings together other strategies that cover Merton - such as the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy, Open Space Strategy and the NHS "Better healthcare, closer to home" strategy - to provide a co-ordinated long term spatial vision and means to deliver that vision.

2.3 The Core Strategy will be supported by other Development Plan Documents (DPDs), which will provide more guidance on specific details. All other policy documents have to be in line with Merton's Core Strategy. Some examples of other DPDs are Development Control Policies DPD and Morden Area Action Plan. A list of the documents Merton intends to produce can be found in the project plan for the LDF, known as Merton's Local Development Scheme, which is available on Merton Council's website via http://www.merton.gov.uk.

What do you think of Merton's draft Core Strategy?

2.4 You can help influence the final version of Merton’s draft Core Strategy from 7 September to 16 October 2009 by responding to the questionnaire, which is available online or in paper form. All comments must be received by 17:00 on Friday 16 October 2009.

2.5 Every effort has been made to produce these consultation documents as sustainably as possible. We are encouraging everyone who wishes to contribute to the draft Core Strategy - especially other government bodies - to submit their responses online via http://www.merton.gov.uk/planning to help save resources.

2.6 However if you do not have internet access, you can respond by post to the contact details below:

London Borough of Merton,
Spatial Planning Team,
13th floor Civic Centre,
London Road,
Morden SM4 5DX
2.7 If you would like one of the Spatial Planning Team to attend a community meeting to discuss the draft Core Strategy with you, or if you would like more copies of this document or the questionnaire, please contact us on 020 8545 3041 or by e-mail ldf@merton.gov.uk.

2.8 The deadline for responses is 5.00pm Friday 16 October 2009. We cannot accept any after this date. Please note that your responses will be publicly available but we will not display your contact details.
3 Consultation

3.1 Before starting to prepare the LDF, we considered what Merton’s communities had already told us through other recent public consultations – including those on the preparation of the Community Plan (2006-15). This helped to establish a starting point of community priorities and concerns that could be examined further through the LDF.

3.2 Community involvement on any document in Merton’s LDF is carried out in accordance with Merton’s Statement of Community Involvement. Several communities had been identified who had previously not responded well to planning-related consultations and their engagement has been actively sought. Since preparation began in 2005 there have been four stages of consultation on the Core Strategy:

- Options: February – April 2006
- Spatial Options: November 2006 – January 2007
- Preferred Options: June – July 2007

3.3 The results of all the previous consultations, government guidance and other evidence were used to feed into the preparation of this document.

3.4 This consultation document is the final opportunity to raise comments to influence the drafting of the Core Strategy. The document moves on from the Preferred Options to set out a full set of strategic policies, taking account of the latest guidance and evidence to emerge. In response to previous representations, this document articulates more clearly what the Core Strategy means for different parts of the borough, setting out dedicated sub-area policies. An enhanced vision has been set out for the long-term future of Merton.

3.5 Although much of the information that underpins the strategy and the objectives remain the same, they have been integrated and presented in a more coherent spatial approach. The strategic objectives to achieve this flow throughout the document, and there is a greater focus on how policies will be monitored and infrastructure delivered.

3.6 After this consultation, the Core Strategy will be finalised by the Council and then subject to a representations stage. Comments made then will be forwarded to the Planning Inspectorate who make an independent assessment with a Public Examination. Following their binding recommendations, the Council can adopt the Core Strategy.
4 Sustainability Appraisal

4.1 A Sustainability Appraisal (SA) has been undertaken at each stage in the preparation of the Core Strategy and has assisted in the shaping of the document. The findings of the Appraisal will ensure that the policies will facilitate sustainable development throughout Merton.

4.2 The SA is a method for checking that the policies in the plan have an acceptable impact in the social, environmental and economic development of Merton, while also identifying potential negative impacts and proposing mitigating measures for such impacts when alternatives are not viable.

4.3 The process of appraisal is intended to influence the development of the LDF as policies are developed, which justifies the need for a new SA to be carried out for each stage of the LDF production. The SA should inform the drafting of the issues and options for the development of a borough, influence the choice of the preferred strategy and shape the development of the policies that will try to implement the preferred strategy.

4.4 Detailed information on how the SA has influenced each one of the policies now proposed in this document has been included as part of each policy chapter and it is also detailed in the Pre-Representations Stage SA Report.
5 Key Drivers and Evidence Base

5.1 In preparing the Core Strategy the Council has had regard to the national and regional framework, with which local policies have to be in conformity. There are ambitions that are common to most, if not all, places in England and Wales - for example, reducing air, noise and light pollution; they are not repeated here.

National Context

5.2 National policies on planning matters are set out in various Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPGs) and Statements (PPSs) produced by Government, alongside companion guidance and best practice advice.

Regional Context

5.3 Merton’s LDF needs to be in general conformity with the London Plan, as the development plan for Merton is composed of both Merton’s LDF and the London Plan. Policies and guidance contained in both plans must be considered when determining planning applications and development proposals for Merton.

5.4 All references in this Core Strategy are to the London Plan Consolidated with Alterations since 2004 (published February 2008). A review of the adopted London Plan is now scheduled but may not be completed until 2011. Therefore the adopted Plan is still the 2008 version.

5.5 The London Plan’s six objectives are reflected in Merton’s Strategic Objectives in Chapter 9:

1. To accommodate London’s growth within its boundaries without encroaching on open spaces;
2. To make London a healthier and better city for people to live in;
3. To make London a more prosperous city with strong, and diverse long term economic growth;
4. To promote social inclusion and tackle deprivation and discrimination;
5. To improve London’s accessibility;
6. To make London an exemplary world city in mitigating and adapting to climate change and a more attractive, well-designed and green city.

5.6 The London Plan aims to increase London’s supply of housing by 30,500 additional homes per year (Policy 3A.1). The London Plan stipulates that 3,700 new homes are to be provided in Merton over the period 2007/08 to 2016/17. This translates to an annual monitoring target of 370 new homes. The London Plan encourages boroughs to exceed their targets subject to local circumstances and economic viability.

5.7 In addition, the London Plan sets a strategic target for affordable housing provision that 50% of provision should be affordable (Policy 3A.9). However, the Plan recognises that housing targets should be sensitive to the economic and social circumstances of London and Policy 9.
3A.10 states that in assessing schemes the individual circumstances of the site should be considered and targets be applied flexibly. More detailed guidance on Merton's affordable housing targets is set out in Chapter 26 ‘Housing - policies 13-15’.

5.8  London Plan Policies 2A. And 2A.9 supports a ‘polycentric’ approach to the development of the metropolitan area, prioritising town centres as appropriate locations for employment, housing, community and civic services and facilities. The London Plan’s town centre classification Designates Wimbledon as a major centre and Morden and Mitcham as district centres; Chapter 15 ‘Colliers Wood sub-area - Policy 2’ asks the Mayor to recognise and help plan for Colliers Wood as a town centre. Chapter 13 ‘Centres - Policy 1’ in the Core Strategy demonstrates how the borough’s centres will be promoted and developed for Wimbledon, Morden, Mitcham, Colliers Wood, and Raynes Park, and local centres such as Wimbledon Village and North Mitcham.

Sub-regional context: Merton in south west London

5.9  London Plan Policy 5E.1 outlines the strategic priorities for South West London. These priorities relate to strengthening economic ties with Central London and promoting the sub-region’s contribution to London’s world city role. These ambitions are supported in this Core Strategy. Particular priorities of relevance to Merton are:

1. Optimising the development of the Area for Intensification around South Wimbledon and Colliers Wood which seeks to provide a minimum of 1,300 homes between 2001 and 2026 alongside 2,000 jobs (this is further developed in London Plan Policy 5E.3);
2. Encouraging sensitive restructuring of some town centres to reflect changes in the office market and the need for a range of economic activities and housing;
3. Managing the reuse of surplus industrial land taking into account waste management requirements;
4. Creating a new regional park that integrates and contributes to the regeneration of the Wandle Valley Development Corridor;
5. Improving orbital movement by public transport, including Croydon Tramlink extensions, and improved access to Heathrow.

5.10 The Mayor’s sub-regional Development Framework for South London sets out the key strategic priorities for the sub-region, which are to plan for expected population and employment growth, enhance the quality of the natural and built environment within south London, and to have a more clear and defined strategy for the economic development of the whole of the region. This plan, although still relevant, is likely to be replaced with a more up-to-date implementation strategy to which Merton’s Core Strategy will have to be in general conformity with.

5.11 The sub-region includes 14% of London’s industrial land, including four Preferred Industrial Locations in Merton. These locations have been identified as part of London’s reservoir of strategic industrial capacity. Chapter 27 ‘Economic development - Policy 16’ in the Core Strategy demonstrates how these will be managed with an approach consistent with the London Plan. Together with the South London Joint Waste DPD, Chapter 24 ‘Waste management - Policy 11’ demonstrates how the borough will become self-sufficient in waste management.
The Outer London Commission was created in 2008 to advise the Mayor of London on the role of the London boroughs in supporting London's overall economy. Previously economic and development planning has focused on central London, with outer boroughs playing a supporting role. We are working with neighbouring boroughs via the South London Partnership to promote and strengthen south London’s internal economy, and its connections with other parts of London and the wider south east.

Local Context

The Merton Partnership brings together all the organisations that provide services or are involved in public life in the borough. To improve quality of life in Merton, Merton Partnership are working together to produce and deliver Merton’s Community Plan. The issues raised by residents, businesses and others in the borough in drawing up the Community Plan were used to inform the LDF to make sure both plans support each other.

Merton’s Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) is also known as Merton’s Community Plan and throughout this document will be referred to as the Community Plan.

The Community Plan is delivered through Merton Partnership, which has the following vision for the borough in 2019

"We want Merton to be a great place to live and call home, where citizens are also neighbours and take responsibility for improving their own lives and neighbourhoods"

This vision is delivered through the Community Plan’s five strategic themes:

- Sustainable communities and transport – covering housing, the environment, the economy and transport
- Safer and stronger communities
- Healthier communities
- Older people
- Children and young people

In addition, a number of cross-cutting themes were recognised including sustainability, celebrating diversity and promoting social cohesion, and the impact of culture and leisure. One of the main priorities for the LDF from the Community Plan is to tackle imbalances between different parts of Merton, which requires area based solutions towards improving quality of life.

The Local Area Agreement (LAA) is the delivery plan for the Community Plan. Merton’s second LAA covers a three-year period, from 2008-2011 and is refreshed annually. Merton’s LAA aims to narrow the inequalities between the east and the west of the borough.

In 2007 after listening to our resident’s and businesses, we developed the Mission for Merton. This resulted in the mission statement below, which links with the Community Plan vision:
"Our mission is to make Merton a great place to call home, where the council provides opportunity for individuals and families to prosper in south west London. We will enable local people to fulfil their ambition by providing educational opportunity and good value services in a safe and sustainable suburb.

The council will bind Merton’s distinct communities together with a common sense of belief in safe neighbourhoods, social progress and educational opportunity, bridging the gap between inequalities that exist in the borough."

5.20 Merton’s Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy 2005–10 aims to bridge the gap between disadvantaged areas and more affluent parts of the borough, improving the quality of life for all residents. It identified a number of wards and pockets of disadvantage, on the basis of a range of indices of deprivation, as Neighbourhood Renewal Areas. The development of Neighbourhood Action Plans refocuses mainstream funding to reshape core services, providing long-term solutions to meet residents needs. Furthermore with the addition of capital funding available for neighbourhood renewal projects, residents will also be able to see physical changes in their environment.

5.21 A wide range of other local research has informed the preparation of the Core Strategy. Some of these have been prepared in partnership with other stakeholders and take account of sub-regional issues. These are summarised alongside the relevant spatial policies.

The Credit Crunch and Regeneration

5.22 At the time of writing (summer 2009) the UK is currently in recession. It is widely recognised that the inability to secure credit has had implications way beyond financial services industry. A report published in January 2009 by the Communities and Local Government (Credit Crunch and Regeneration - impacts and implications) clearly illustrates that, although all aspects of regeneration are suffering, developments in marginal areas - economically and geographically - will be most affected.

5.23 The private housing sector has been worst hit, although the public sector is enjoying an unexpected bonus as prices for land, projects and developments fall, creating opportunities for provision of public sector housing and infrastructure.

5.24 Although it is recognised that place-making is a long term process, the uncertainty caused by the recession in terms of projections for new housing, economic development, social infrastructure needs and even population make it difficult to accurately plan for future need. The speed and severity of the recession means that even the most recent analysis is rapidly out of date.

5.25 Data forecasts may need to be revisited when the picture is clearer in order to accurately inform the LDF. The recession’s duration and recovery rate is unknown, which may affect the delivery of projects for the LDF (as set out in Section 30 ‘Infrastructure projects’).