6 Portrait

6.1 Merton is an outer London borough, situated in southwest London, in the heart of the Wandle Valley. Merton is predominantly residential in character (42% of the area) but with great variations in social mix and density of development from east to west and north to south.

6.2 Although it is one of the smallest London boroughs with an area of 37 square kilometres, it contains several distinct districts including Mitcham, Morden, Colliers Wood and Wimbledon, and some impressive open spaces including Mitcham and Wimbledon Commons. There are a number of smaller local centres scattered across the borough at Arthur Road, Motspur Park, North Mitcham, Raynes Park and Wimbledon Village that each have their own distinct character.

6.3 Due to its location, the borough has always benefited from its proximity and good connections to central London, while also being able to maintain a more suburban feel than some other inner London boroughs.

6.4 The most urban parts of the borough are located to the north, adjoining the border with Wandsworth. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, London's suburbs expanded around older village settlements at Mitcham, Merton Abbey, Morden and Wimbledon with the growth of the rail network to London.

6.5 The northern part of the borough are characterised by tightly packed streets of late Victorian or Edwardian terraced housing around North Mitcham, Colliers Wood and South Wimbledon, and larger detached or semi-detached homes around Wimbledon.

6.6 1930’s suburbia characterises large parts of the south and east of Merton: lower density semi-detached houses or short terraces with gardens, in tree lined roads with wide grass verges, which merges with neighbouring boroughs of Sutton and Croydon to the south.

6.7 Merton is one of the greenest boroughs in London, with extensive parks, green and wild spaces that offer recreation, relief, contrast and structure to the borough’s built environment. 18% of the borough’s area is open space, compared to a 10% London average. A significant part of the borough’s open space provision corresponds to Wimbledon and Mitcham Commons, which are extremely valuable for the borough in terms of biodiversity, nature conservation, and are a popular leisure attraction for residents and visitors from outside the borough.

6.8 The Wandle Valley runs through south London from Croydon to the mouth of the Wandle at the Thames in Wandsworth. It has long been the focus of industrial activity, which peaked in the nineteenth century, and still links modern business and industrial estates at Willow Lane, Morden Road and Durnsford Road with Merton's industrial heritage at Abbey Mills. The river,
and the Wandle Trail along its banks, acts as a green corridor for wildlife and offers walking, cycling and other recreational opportunities. Plans for a regional park are being drawn up to the southern end of the borough around Mitcham Common.

**Picture 1 Merton’s situation in London**

6.9 The borough is one of the safest in London, consistently in the top four lowest crime rates across the capital. Despite this, fear of crime remains high, as one of the main concerns for residents.

6.10 According to the 2001 Census, Merton had a total population of about 187,900 in 78,884 households and an average household size of 2.38 people.

6.11 The number of people living in Merton is expected to increase over the next 20 years by around 10% to about 205,000 in 2026 (GLA, PLP Low). However, over the past five years birth rates in Merton, and London-wide, have jumped, putting unexpected pressure on early years services. If this spike continues, it may create the need for more school places and eventually more homes and other supporting services to cope with a larger population.
6.12 Merton’s population is fairly youthful with around half in the 15-45 year old age group. There is a similar ethnic mix when compared with the rest of outer London: about three quarters of the population are from the White ethnic group, 11% from the Asian ethnic group and 8% from the Black ethnic group.

6.13 Though Merton is located in one of the most economically dynamic and richest regions in Europe, there is a great diversity and significant differences in the composition of communities throughout the borough. Multiple problems related to poor economic prospects, low education attainment, poor health and lower incomes are more frequent in eastern wards such as Figges Marsh, Cricket Green, Pollards Hill, Lavender Fields and St. Helier.

6.14 These socio-economic problems are compounded by environmental and infrastructure differences; there is more limited access to public transport and open spaces in eastern parts of Merton and the quality of shopping and leisure facilities are also relatively poor compared with western wards. These deprived areas extend into parts of neighbouring boroughs at Croydon, Lambeth and Sutton.

6.15 Merton is already working with its partners in government, the private sector and the voluntary sector to address these inequalities, including via initiatives through Merton’s Community Plan, and Merton’s Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plans. Regional actions, such as the opening of the new train station at Mitcham Eastfields and the creation of the Wandle Valley Regional Park, are also signs of progress towards regeneration of the area.

6.16 While parts of east Merton suffer from pockets of deprivation and poor public realm, a higher proportion of people in western wards are employed, more are working in higher skilled (and therefore higher earning) professions and that educational attainment is also higher in Wimbledon. More of the public realm in western parts of Merton is protected by conservation areas due to its historic significance.

6.17 The Wimbledon district attracts more visitors and commercial interest, in part due to the global recognition of the Wimbledon 'brand' through the All England Lawn Tennis Championships held annually at the grounds near Wimbledon Park.
7 Issues and Opportunities

7.1 From the policy drivers, previous consultation and portrait outlined above, it is clear the borough faces a number of challenges. The key issues that need to be addressed in the LDF to direct change are:

**Addressing inequality:**

7.2 The inequalities identified in Merton in terms of access to jobs and services, including housing choices, and learning opportunities, need to be reduced.

7.3 The challenge for the Core Strategy is to help encourage regeneration in Mitcham and Morden to ensure greater equality is achieved. Bringing together a joined up approach with physical regeneration and other measures outside of planning will help do this.

**Addressing the impacts of climate change:**

7.4 It is recognised that changes in lifestyle and the nature of development are necessary in order to combat the impacts of climate change. Predictions show that summers are likely to be drier and hotter with water shortages occurring more frequently. We are already feeling the effects of increased incidences of extreme weather conditions with flooding or drought affecting property and people and the consequent increase in energy and insurance bills.

7.5 The challenge for the Core Strategy will be to devise ways to ensure that the carbon footprint of existing and new development is reduced and to build new developments in a way that adapts to the inevitable changes to the climate. This will require a comprehensive approach which targets issues of flooding, waste, infrastructure, open space, design and transport.

**Ensuring competitive centres and economy:**

7.6 Prior to the recession, projections had indicated modest economic growth for the borough. Tackling the skills shortage and improving job opportunities is especially important for deprived areas including those in the east, as well as addressing unemployment and educational attainment.

7.7 Centres across the borough play a vital role in providing shops and services, catering for the needs of our residents, workers and visitors. While Morden and Mitcham are in need of regeneration, Wimbledon needs to maintain its status as the borough’s major centre. The issue is how to retain and attract spending in the local economy, where places are seen as destinations.
7.8 The challenge for the Core Strategy is maximising the value from existing employment sites and supporting existing and new businesses across the borough, bringing together a joined up approach with other measures beyond planning. We are also taking the opportunity to ensure the out-of-centre shopping at Colliers Wood is restructured to create a recognisable town centre.

7.9 Whilst at the current time the economic downturn is causing uncertainty, this underlines the need for a resilient local economy that is diverse and well positioned to compete with other areas.

7.10 The Core Strategy needs to be aware of the impact of the downturn, particularly in forming realistic expectations about what may happen in the short-term, but also to remain focused on setting a positive, long-term framework, to shape places and support regeneration. Future LDF documents can be produced to respond to market conditions within the framework set by the Core Strategy.

**Accommodating new development sustainably**

7.11 There are clear drivers from national and regional guidance to deliver sustainable communities. Sustainable development must be at the heart of processes and developments. The challenge for the Core Strategy is to take a balanced approach to bring together all the elements required for sustainable neighbourhoods across the borough that will improve the quality of life for residents, workers and visitors.

7.12 National and regional guidance directs higher density development to areas of highest public transport accessibility. There is a need to improve inclusive access and feelings of safety and security. Targets for new and affordable homes need to be met, within the constraints of protecting the existing quality and character of the boroughs suburban areas, the historic environment and the wealth of green spaces while providing the necessary services and infrastructure. New development must meet the highest design and environmental standards.

7.13 As an outer London borough, the car plays an important role but the road network is under pressure. It is important to ensure that facilities, services and jobs can be accessed locally to reduce car travel. A crucial element is improved connectivity; parts of the borough require improvements to public transport and facilities for pedestrians and cyclists to make local journeys easier. The challenge for the Core Strategy is to improve transport choices and reduce the dominance of the private car to deter growth in the levels of traffic congestion.

**Providing for Merton’s changing population:**

7.14 There are currently different models for population growth for Merton 2009-2031, leading to a difference of 23,000 households containing 43,000 residents. However these are being updated annually with changing development, birth rates and migration trends and the Census in 2011 will result in a similar starting point from which new projections will be reconciled.
7.15 Even if significant population growth is not forecast long-term for Merton, if a recent spike in London's birth rates continues, infrastructure will have to support more young people alongside an ageing and more ethnically diverse population.

7.16 In response to regional targets, the number of new homes will continue to increase, albeit with a reduction in the average household size, which will continue to put pressure on infrastructure and services. The issue for the Core Strategy is meeting the needs of the varied population and ensuring the necessary infrastructure is provided. It is a challenge that ranges from providing homes, for example for families and the elderly, to providing places, such as for younger people to go, to ensure the variety of the needs of the population are met. The opportunity is for the Core Strategy to set out a clear, forward thinking, infrastructure delivery plan.

7.17 Some of these issues are not unique to Merton and are being driven by wider factors. Addressing inequality, a growing school population and the impacts of climate change are the critical challenges for the borough where resources need to be focused to enable change.
8 Spatial Vision

8.1 The Core Strategy must set out an overall vision as to how the area and places within it should develop. The vision for Merton is intended to provide a long term guiding aspiration, painting the picture of a snapshot as to how the borough will be in 2030. It is recognised that some elements may not necessarily be achieved by this Core Strategy, but it is important to establish a clear picture of what we are working towards.

Vision for Merton in 2030

8.2 By 2030, Merton will have become a highly desirable destination, known for its high quality environment, thriving economy and transport links, with excellent services and facilities that fully support the needs and aspirations of local people whilst adapting to changing climates. Disparities between eastern and western parts of the borough have been reduced through targeted regeneration, and the eastern wards have become more economically and socially balanced in terms of health, education, access to services, income, skills and general living environment. Merton is now a cohesive borough giving residents, visitors and workers the opportunity to enjoy active, healthy, sustainable and diverse lifestyles.

8.3 The right balance between economic, residential and infrastructure development has been achieved in places where change has happened, namely Colliers Wood, Morden and Mitcham town centres; or where the existing valued character and the environment has been enhanced, namely Wimbledon town centre and Village, Arthur Road and Raynes Park.

8.4 Sustainable, diverse communities are found across the borough, thriving in socially mixed neighbourhoods anchored around social, commercial and recreational hubs, with opportunities for local people to prosper economically, where quality homes meet all needs. Merton is more inclusive, where diversity is promoted and the needs of all are met, including people from different age groups and abilities, and people of different religious, cultural, economic, sexual orientation and ethnic backgrounds.

8.5 Merton’s built environment has seen great improvement, through the regeneration of town centres and a reduction in the dominance of the car allowing pedestrians and cyclists to enjoy a quality environment that is safe, green and attractive. Areas outside the town centres have kept their suburban character and high quality urban environment by respecting its heritage, but also encouraging improvements in areas of lower quality design.

8.6 Merton has enhanced its status as one of the greenest and safest boroughs in London by drawing on the strengths of its iconic green spaces, such as Wimbledon and Mitcham Common, and by the creation of the Wandle Valley Regional Park which attracts visitors from
beyond the borough. This has enhanced the quality of Merton’s environment, increased accessibility to open spaces, and improved biodiversity, especially in the eastern areas of the borough, opening up Merton to wildlife, opportunities for sport, recreation and contact with nature. Improved public realm has been integrated within each neighbourhood, making the local area attractive and desirable for all, which local communities feel pride in and take ownership of its maintenance and development.

8.7 Merton’s residents and workers come to and enjoy the borough’s increased commercial offer, changing and making the town and local centres more viable and accessible than in the past. Vibrant centres attract visitors and there are plenty of reasons for passers-by to stop to use the mix of shops and services.

8.8 Some areas have become more specialised; for example Colliers Wood provides services for the growing population; and Morden and Mitcham have been regenerated to meet the needs of the local population that is attracted to the enhanced shopping and leisure facilities. Other local and town centres, such as Raynes Park, Arthur Road and North Mitcham continue to develop for the local community needs. Wimbledon provides outstanding shops and offices which are supported by a varied range of restaurants, bars and historical and cultural destinations. Wimbledon has increased its attractiveness for visitors from a wider metropolitan area and is well known internationally for now having successfully capitalised on its Olympics legacy and by building on its reputation as a world class tennis destination.

8.9 Merton has a more diversified economic base that, while supporting London’s growth, also minimises the borough’s dependency on central London and makes Merton’s economy more resilient to change. The development of the Wandle Valley, as a highly desirable destination for businesses and industries, has provided the local community with improved access to jobs and varied opportunities for employment. Start-up, small and medium companies have the right premises and business support to grow and thrive in the Wandle Valley and in Wimbledon Town Centre.

8.10 More people live and work in Merton, as opportunities for employment and training are available and used by local residents, benefiting especially the more economically deprived areas of the borough. Schools and further education training facilities are heavily used by the local community, which gives them the skills to access better jobs, better pay and to aspire to a higher quality of life.

8.11 Residents in Merton are proud to live in the borough and have had the opportunity to choose from a varied range of housing and different levels of affordability that include: family housing, housing in urban and suburban settings and smaller households. All homes are well designed, suitable for younger and older people, and there has been clear success to adapt all housing stock to tackle climate change and to provide local people with homes that can adapt to their needs as they change over time.

8.12 In 2030, you can find a wide range of infrastructure available to support the borough’s population. This includes utility services as well as a diverse range of health, education, sport/leisure/youth cultural, social care, community and emergency services facilities. A more
integrated approach is created towards infrastructure provision in areas once deficient that are now well provided for, often by locating infrastructure within town and local centres accessible to all.

8.13 Merton’s residents have benefited from greater transport choices and improved local facilities which encourage more sustainable transport behaviour. Residents and visitors choose to walk, cycle or use public transport rather than a private car. Local journeys have been made easier by an enhanced cycle and pedestrian network that is well designed, safe and secure, providing better connections to key strategic locations in the borough. Merton is also now more accessible to and from London and southwards towards Gatwick due to significant improvements in key public transport corridors.

8.14 Merton continues to lead the way forward for London in terms of tackling and adapting to climate change, especially in areas that have experienced significant regeneration and development and where significant investments in infrastructure have allowed for the implementation of low carbon technologies such as more efficient use of energy and intensive use of renewables. The success of Mitcham as a low carbon zone has enabled other areas within the borough to become greener and reduce their carbon emissions.

8.15 Addressing the challenge of climate change has been achieved through the promotion of low carbon lifestyles, implementation of efficiency measures, encouraging use of public transport, and providing commercial occupants and residents with information on climate change and how they can tackle it in their own homes and businesses.
9 Strategic Objectives and Spatial Principles

9.1 Our strategic objectives have been guided by the London Plan objectives, which are:

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.

9.2 Together they seek to equally contribute towards sustainable neighbourhoods across the borough.
Figure 1 Merton's Strategic Objectives

9.3 Each of the strategic objectives has a number of spatial principles which expand upon how they will be achieved within the borough.

1. **To promote social cohesion and tackle deprivation by reducing inequalities.**

   We will do this by:

   1. Improving access to services and facilities in areas of need;
   2. Promoting socially mixed sustainable, vibrant, safe and healthy communities, especially where there are areas of deprivation;

2. **To accommodate Merton's population change within its centres and residential areas, without encroaching on other spaces.**

   We will do this by:
9 Strategic Objectives and Spatial Principles

1. Delivering high density new homes and associated infrastructure and social facilities that respect and enhance the local character of the area, in places with good public transport access;
2. Supporting incremental growth in residential areas across the borough taking into account public transport accessibility, character and infrastructure;
3. Protecting areas of the borough for uses other than residential;
4. Meeting the varied needs of the local community and creating an attractive, thriving, safe and diversified borough.

3. To make Merton more prosperous with strong and diverse long term economic growth.

We will do this by:

1. Maximising opportunities for local employment and increasing the diversity of jobs and services available to local people.
2. Ensuring that Merton’s town centres (Wimbledon, Morden, Mitcham, Colliers Wood) its local centres (Arthur Road, Raynes Park, Wimbledon Village, Motspur Park, North Mitcham) and local shopping parades are attractive and accessible to local residents and workers;
3. Supporting the local economy and promoting a commercially viable, thriving mix of premises, including retail, business and industrial uses;
4. Offering a choice of opportunities for employment and local businesses focusing on Merton’s town centres and main employment areas along the Wandle Valley.

4. To make Merton a healthier and better place for people to live and work in or visit.

We will do this by:

1. Improving public health and well-being;
2. Improving access to jobs, services and facilities by meeting the specific needs of young people, older people and ethnic minorities;
3. Providing a choice and mix of housing to meet the needs of all sectors of the community;
4. Enhancing the learning environment to improve access to education and training;
5. Improving access to nature and leisure facilities including opportunities for sport and play;
6. Promoting cultural and heritage activities;
7. Creating safe and accessible places.

5. To make Merton an exemplary borough in mitigating and adapting to climate change and to make it a more attractive and green place.

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1 Subject to its designation post 2011 as a District Centre, in accordance with Chapter 13 ‘Centres - Policy 1’
We will do this by:

1. Taking a leading role in mitigating and adapting to the local, regional, national and global challenges of climate change as they affect Merton and encouraging development to achieve the lowest possible impact;
2. Applying the waste hierarchy where waste is minimised, re-used and recycled, and residual waste is disposed of sustainably in the right location using the most appropriate means;
3. Protecting and enhancing existing open spaces and the natural environment;
4. To provide the local community with a new regional park in the Wandle Valley;
5. Provide adequate habitats for biodiversity to flourish and expand.

6. To make Merton a well connected place where walking, cycling and public transport are the modes of choice when planning all journeys.

We will do this by:

1. Enhancing Merton's transport connections locally, regionally and nationally;
2. Developing improvements to the public highway that balance the needs of all road users;
3. Promoting road safety to encourage responsible behaviour by all users of the public highway;
4. Promoting smarter travel choices for people who live or work in and visit the borough.

7. To make Merton a well designed borough with an attractive urban and suburban environment.

We will do this by:

1. Respecting the built heritage and historic assets within the borough;
2. Applying high quality design standards to all new development;
3. Improving the public realm.
11 Strategic Objectives and Core Strategy Policies Matrix

11.1 The purpose of this table is to explain how the different policies relate to the strategic objectives identified for the Core Strategy and how they contribute to their delivery.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Objectives</th>
<th>1. To promote social cohesion and tackle deprivation by reducing inequalities</th>
<th>2. To accommodate Merton’s population change within its centres and residential areas, without encroaching on other spaces</th>
<th>3. To make Merton more prosperous with strong and diverse long term economic growth</th>
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<th>5. To make Merton an exemplary borough in mitigating and adapting to climate change and to make it a more attractive and green place</th>
<th>6. To make Merton a well connected place where walking, cycling and public transport are the modes of choice when planning all journeys</th>
<th>7. To make Merton a well designed borough with an attractive urban and suburban environment</th>
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## 11 Strategic Objectives and Core Strategy Policies Matrix

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<th>Housing Provision</th>
<th>Gypsies &amp; Travellers</th>
<th>Economic Development</th>
<th>Public Transport</th>
<th>Active Transport</th>
<th>Parking, Servicing and Delivery</th>
<th>Infrastructure</th>
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