2.1 Introduction

Parks and open spaces are planned for, managed and maintained by a variety of agencies operating in a complex legislative and policy context. This section of the MOSS describes the National, Greater London and Merton’s open space policies and guidance and how they relate to the development and implementation of the MOSS.

2.2 National Policy and Strategies

Urban Green Spaces Task Force

Government concern over the decline of urban parks over the past 20 years led to the establishment of the Urban Green Spaces Task Force (UGSTF) in 2001. The UGSTF advises on proposals for improving the quality of urban parks, play areas and green spaces.

The UGSTF report ‘Green Spaces, Better Places’ (2002) recognised the increasing awareness of the value of good quality parks, and the benefits that parks and green spaces provide. These included:

- **Urban renaissance** – good quality parks contribute to regeneration and create a sense of place, which is vital to community spirit and attract visitors;
- **Health and Well being** – green spaces can play a role in promoting healthy lifestyles and preventing illness;
- **Social Inclusion, community development** – green spaces give people the chance to participate in design, management and care of local spaces, fostering local pride. They are places to socialise, and because access is free, provide an affordable alternative to other leisure activities;
- **Education and Lifelong Learning** – green spaces provide an outdoor classroom for schools, and provide work experience and learning opportunities in environmental management;
- **Environment and Ecology** – green spaces help counter pollution, provide wildlife corridors, serve as ‘lungs’ for towns and cities, absorb noise, and provide sustainable urban drainage solutions;
- **Heritage & Culture** – green spaces are part of the heritage and culture of local communities. They provide venues for local festivals and civic celebrations.

Green Spaces, Better Places recognised the serious challenges facing open spaces. Generally there has been a decline in quality, due to a lack of funding, loss of political support and status and a failure to meet the needs and expectations of communities.

The Report looked at ways of reversing the decline through methods such as establishing a strategic policy framework for open spaces, increasing funding (securing funding external to local authorities), establishing partnerships, and greater community involvement in parks and green spaces.
The UGSTF recommended that a typology of green space be adopted by the Government and its use promoted amongst local authorities. This would provide a consistent approach to assessing and strategically planning green space provision. The Report recognises that some green spaces may also be subject to various national or local policy designations and local green space hierarchies. The Government has accepted this recommendation and included this typology in the PPG17 companion guide (see below).

To assist the development of local green space networks local authorities should produce integrated green space strategies that can provide a vision and clear objectives for green spaces. Strategies should be used to enhance and protect existing green spaces; enhance design, improve management and care, and encourage higher standards and continuous review.

Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation (2002)

The Government produced a revised PPG17 in 2002 building on the work of the UGSTF. The Government reasons that open space can underpin people’s quality of life, and assists in delivering broader Government objectives, including:

- **Supporting urban renaissance** – networks of high quality open spaces, sports and recreational facilities help create urban environments that are attractive, clean and safe;
- **Promoting social inclusion and community cohesion** – well planned and maintained open spaces and good quality sports and recreational facilities play a major part in improving people’s sense of well being in the place they live. They act as a focal point for community activities;
- **Health and well being** – open spaces, sports and recreational facilities have a vital role to play in promoting healthy living and preventing illness;
- **Promoting sustainable development** – through ensuring that open space, sports and recreational facilities are easily accessible by walking and cycling and ensuring more intensive sports and recreational facilities are planned for locations well served by public transport.

PPG17 states that local authorities should:

- Carry out assessments of existing and future needs of the community for open space, sports and recreational facilities. Local Authorities need to cover differing needs of the population for open space and built sports and recreational facilities;
- Undertake audits of existing open space and facilities, use of existing facilities, access in terms of location and cost, and opportunities for new open space and facilities. Audits should consider quantitative and qualitative elements of open space, sports and recreational facilities;
- Standards should be set locally. Local authorities should use the information gained to set standards for the provision of open spaces and sports and recreational facilities in their areas. These standards should include quantitative elements, a qualitative component and accessibility. These standards will help redress deficiencies through the planning process, standards should be included in the local authority’s Development Plan;
- Adopt a strategic approach and plan positively for provision, enhancement and maintenance of open space.
The Government expects all local authorities to carry out needs assessments and audits of open space and recreational facilities in accordance with PPG17. To assist local authorities the Government has published a companion guide to PPG17 Assessing Needs and Opportunities: A Companion Guide to PPG17 which sets out an approach that Local Authorities can adopt to meet this requirement.

**Assessing Needs and Opportunities: A Companion Guide to PPG17.**

The Guide provides one way in which local assessments of need and audits of provision can be undertaken, it recognises that other approaches may be possible. Merton’s approach has been developed to be consistent with this approach.

The Guide includes a 5 Step process for accessing local needs. It provides a suggested framework for the implementation of policies and provision standards through the Development Control process.

Comprehensive local assessments will result in better planning policies, facilitate better evidence based decision-making as part of the development control process, make it easier to negotiate planning obligations and provide essential evidence to use at appeals. They could also identify areas of land that could be sold for development (if the assessment shows they are not needed). They will help identify priorities for enhancement of existing open spaces or sport and recreation facilities or provision of new ones, promote ‘joined up thinking’ in planning, design and management, and provide a means of monitoring progress. They are also important for funding applications.

The guide identifies 5 key attributes of open space these are:

1. Accessibility (if a particular open space is inaccessible it will be of limited value to those who may want to use it);
2. Quality (depends on the needs and expectations of users, and design management and maintenance);
3. Multi-functionality (many open spaces are used for a variety of purposes);
4. Primary Purpose (by identifying the open space’s primary purpose it is possible to take account of the variety of uses a site might have and brings clarity and consistency to planning, design and management policies);
5. Quantity (open space is often measured by amount of provision, but this doesn’t take account of other key factors).

Of the key attributes generally accessibility and quantity are delivered through planning, because they relate to location and use of land, but can be sustained through good management and maintenance. Quality, multi-functionality and primary purpose are delivered initially through design, but are sustained through good management and maintenance. The planning system can sometimes help by generating resources through planning conditions or legal agreements for developments.

The Guide and PPG17 recommend authorities use the typology of open space proposed by the Urban Green Spaces Taskforce, or a variation of it.

One of main reasons for carrying out a local assessment is to plan positively to ensure adequate provision of accessible, high quality green spaces, civic spaces and sports and recreation facilities that meet the needs of local communities.

Carrying out a local assessment enables planning authorities to consistently assess planning applications involving the redevelopment of an existing open space.
The guide includes a clear 5 step methodology (diagram 2 p.16) which is as follows:

1. **Identify Local Needs**: Review existing strategies, policies and provision standards, consult local communities and prepare a vision;

2. **Audit Local Provision**: Identify existing information, undertake audit, analyse audit;

3. **Set Provision Standards**: Quantity standards, Quality Standards, Accessibility standards, minimum acceptable size standards, site area multipliers, normalised costs, design standards;

4. **Apply Provision Standards**: Identify deficiencies in accessibility and quality, ascertain surpluses and deficiencies in quantity;

5. **Draft Policies**: Identify strategic options, evaluate strategic options, draft policy, and consult relevant stakeholders.


This Sport England Guide was developed to assist local authorities, consultants and others in producing robust local playing pitch strategies.

The Guide replaces earlier publications and is designed to simplify the production of a playing pitch strategy. It contains a revised methodology, which is an eight stage Playing Pitch Model (PPM - set out below).

- **Stage 1** – Identifying teams/team equivalents;
- **Stage 2** – Calculating home games per team per week;
- **Stage 3** – Assessing total home games per week;
- **Stage 4** – Establishing temporal demand for games;
- **Stage 5** – Defining Pitches Used/required on each day;
- **Stage 6** – Establishing pitches available;
- **Stage 7** – Assessing the findings;
- **Stage 8** – Identifying policy options and solutions.

Merton followed this revised methodology while carrying out the Playing Pitch Assessment Update. The results are presented in Appendix 1.
The Guide identifies some of the key benefits of producing a playing pitch strategy, which includes:

- Ensures a strategic approach to playing pitch provision;
- Evidence for capital funding;
- Basis to respond to new pitch requirements arising from new housing developments;
- A tool to protect sports pitches and facilities;
- Improve local authority asset management;
- Highlight where quality improvements are needed;
- Promote sports development.

There are number of resources designed to simplify the production of a strategy including:

- Spreadsheets to assist with the analysis of data from the assessment (PPM calculation spreadsheet & Team Generation Rate Calculator);
- Model survey forms (for clubs, schools, pitch providers);
- Site and pitch quality assessment questionnaires;
- Standard brief to engage specialist consultants.

### 2.3 Greater London Policy and Strategies

The Greater London Authority (GLA) London Plan (Feb 2004) sets out an integrated social, economic and environmental framework to develop London as a sustainable world city over the next 15 – 20 years. This plan will provide a London wide context for London boroughs to align their local planning policies.

The London Plan seeks to protect and promote open spaces and recognises that the value of these spaces will increase as London becomes more compact and intensive in its built form. The Plan includes policies to:

- **Encourage boroughs to prepare open space strategies.** Policy 3D.11: London boroughs should prepare Open Space Strategies to understand the supply and demand of open spaces and identify ways of protecting, creating and enhancing them;

- **Protecting strategically important open spaces such as Green Belt and MOL.** Policy 3D9: The Mayor and London boroughs should resist development on MOL unless it is clearly ancillary to the enjoyment of the open space;

- **Supporting the creation of networks of open spaces such as green chains.** Policy 3D10: Boroughs should identify, protect and develop Green Corridors and chains and protect local open spaces that are of value or have potential to be of value;

- **Ensuring everyone has equal access to facilities in open spaces.** Policy 3D10: In reviewing UDPs boroughs should use standards, as set out in the Open Space Hierarchy, to identify public open space deficiency. Assessments of local need should be used to refine the identification of priorities.

The draft London Plan sets out an Open Space Hierarchy (see below), to ensure that a range of open spaces of different size, type and function are accessible to all.
Table 2.1 London Open Space Hierarchy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open Space Categorisation</th>
<th>Size Guidelines</th>
<th>Distance from homes to open spaces</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regional Parks</td>
<td>400 hectares</td>
<td>3.2 to 8 km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan Parks</td>
<td>60 hectares</td>
<td>3.2 km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Parks</td>
<td>20 hectares</td>
<td>1.2 km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Parks, Open Spaces</td>
<td>2 hectares</td>
<td>400 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Open Spaces</td>
<td>Under 2 hectares</td>
<td>Less than 400 m</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Table 3D1 London Plan pg 146

Connecting with London’s Nature: The Mayor’s Biodiversity Strategy (July 2002) is linked closely to the London plan and aims to provide a London wide framework for maintaining London’s diversity of wildlife. It has two overall targets: no overall loss of wildlife habitats in London; and secondly, more open spaces are created and made accessible, so that all Londoners are within walking distance of a quality natural space. The Mayor’s Strategy has taken account of the local Biodiversity Action Plans, which have been published by local authorities in London. Merton is currently in the process of producing such an Action Plan.

Guide to Preparing Open Space Strategies (March 2004)

A previous version of the GLA Guide was used when WS Atkins undertook the Merton Open Space Study in 2002. Since that time Merton Council officers have provided input to GLA as the Draft Guide was developed. Merton’s strategy development approach has been consistent with that of the GLA.

The GLA Guide describes best practice for producing open space strategies, and provides a framework of what should be included in a strategy. This includes:

- An audit of all open space (including playing pitches);
- Assessments of local needs and value of existing open space;
- Protection by appropriate designation on UDP maps;
- Prioritisation of investment to address identified needs and deficiencies;
- Identification of opportunities for improving access to open spaces;
- Identification of opportunities for improving linkages between open spaces and the wider public realm.

Boroughs should set out a vision, aims and objectives and broad open space policies. The vision should be based on an understanding of the supply, distribution, quality, level of use, needs of communities and the wider borough, sub regional and the greater London context. The strategy should include an action plan, and should be subject to regular monitoring and review.
The GLA Guide defines open space as;

“All land use in London that is predominantly undeveloped other than by buildings or structures that are ancillary to the open space use. The definition covers the broad range of open space types in London whether in public or private ownership and whether public access is unrestricted, limited or restricted.” (Pg 4).

The Guide requires an Open Space Strategy to reflect the corporate aims of the Local authority. The GLA recognise that to be effective, the relationship between the open space strategy and other strategies be clearly defined. The link to the borough’s UDP is crucial as it provides the policy framework needed for implementing the land use aims and objectives of the Strategy and policies for protecting biodiversity, enhancing nature conservation, and the provision of open spaces and leisure and recreation facilities.

The Guide sets out a six stage approach to preparing a strategy which includes:

1. Preparation of Brief/scoping study;
2. Review and objectives setting;
3. Understanding the supply;
4. Understanding demands/needs;
5. Analysis and identification of objectives;

The Guide advises categorisation of open spaces according to the Draft London Plan Open Space Hierarchy (see above). This will enable a consistent approach across London to identifying open space deficiencies. The use of an open space typology to indicate the primary purpose of an open space is also suggested. This refers to the PPG17 typology (see table 3.1), but recommends that this be refined to reflect local circumstances.

User and non-user surveys are suggested to understand open space demand and needs. Standards of provision are described as useful tools for measuring existing provision and comparing provision both within individual boroughs and across local authority boundaries.

Stage 5 of the suggested approach 'analysis and identification of objectives' involves a number of essential tasks. These are: analysis of supply and demand; identification of themes; aims and objectives; identification of open spaces to be protected; identification of priority areas of deficiency; identification of opportunities for addressing deficiencies; and identification of priority open spaces for improvement.

**Mayor’s Biodiversity Strategy**

The Mayor’s Biodiversity Strategy sets out how London’s biodiversity can be protected and looked after. It also aims to make sure everyone can enjoy and learn about the natural world. The Biodiversity Strategy relies heavily on partnership working between many organisations to help carry out the proposals, including borough councils, community groups, businesses and conservation organisations, as well as the support of individual Londoners.
The Biodiversity Strategy sets out 14 policies, and 72 proposals to implement these policies, listing the main partners who are asked to take each proposal forward. It also provides an overview of London’s wildlife and the places where it is to be found. The Mayor and his associated bodies, such as Transport for London, have a crucial role to play. The Greater London Authority is well placed to provide strategic advice and act as a catalyst on issues relating to biodiversity in London. The other major partners in the implementation of the Strategy are the London borough councils, English Nature, the Environment Agency, and the London Wildlife Trust.

Another vital player is the London Biodiversity Partnership, a consortium of all the most important organisations working in biodiversity in London. The Partnership is drawing up a Biodiversity Action Plan for London which, when complete, will cover all important wildlife habitats and a number of priority species. The Mayor currently chairs the Partnership, and is leading on several habitats and species.

Policy 3D.12 Biodiversity and nature conservation (pg 148 London Plan):

The Mayor will work with partners to ensure a proactive approach to the protection, promotion and management of biodiversity in support of the Mayor's Biodiversity Strategy.

The planning of new development and regeneration should have regard to nature conservation and biodiversity, and opportunities should be taken to achieve positive gains for conservation through the form and design of development. Where appropriate, measures may include creating, enhancing and managing wildlife habitat and natural landscape.

Priority for habitat creation should be given to sites which assist in achieving the targets in Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs) and sites within or near to areas deficient in accessible wildlife sites.

Boroughs, in reviewing UDPs and in considering proposals for development should accord the highest protection to internationally designated and proposed sites (SSSIs) in accordance with government guidance and the Habitat Regulations 1994.

The Mayor will identify Sites of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation (SMIs), which, in addition to internationally and nationally designated sites, includes land of strategic importance for nature conservation and biodiversity across London. Boroughs should give strong protection to these sites in their UDPs. Boroughs should use the procedures adopted by the Mayor in his Biodiversity Strategy to identify sites of Borough or Local Importance for nature conservation and should accord them a level of protection commensurate with their borough or local significance.

The Mayor will and boroughs should resist development that would have a significant adverse impact on the population or conservation status of protected species or priority species identified in the London Biodiversity Action Plan and borough BAPs. Appropriate policies for their protection and enhancement and to achieve the targets set out in BAPs, should be included in UDPs.

Where development is proposed which would affect a site of importance for nature conservation, the approach should be to seek to avoid adverse impact on the nature conservation value of the site, and if that is not possible, to minimise such impact and seek mitigation of any residual impacts. Where exceptionally, development is to be permitted because the reasons for it are judged to outweigh significant harm to nature conservation, appropriate compensation should be sought.
2.4 L B Merton Policy and Strategic Framework

Merton Council’s Corporate Objectives

The London Borough of Merton’s vision is the overall strategic framework for the future of the Borough. The MOSS has taken a lead from these high level objectives during the development process. Table 2.2 below outlines the Vision.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education Merton</td>
<td>The achievement of standards of excellence in our schools and colleges and inclusive access to learning, the arts and sport.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe clean and green Merton</td>
<td>A safe and clean environment in our streets and open spaces to improve sustainability and provide a high quality of life for residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring Merton</td>
<td>Support for vulnerable children that provides positive life chances and support for vulnerable adults that meets their needs while maximising their independence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thriving Merton</td>
<td>Regeneration of town centres and neighbourhoods to provide an attractive environment in which to live, visit and work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equalities Merton</td>
<td>Full and equal access to learning, employment, services and cultural life and the celebration of diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective Merton</td>
<td>Strong corporate governance to deliver and sustain service improvements, and provide community leadership.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Merton’s Community Plan 2002 – 2004

Merton’s Community Plan presents the ‘top twenty’ issues as defined by the residents of Merton and defines the actions needed to address them. The Community Plan relies on the Council and key partners to implement the key priorities and argue for a greater share of resources.

The Top 20 issues are encompassed by four main themes illustrated in the table 2.3 below.