Local Development Framework

MOSS Refresh (work in progress)

Statement of Initial Findings

July 2010

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1. Introduction

The following summary sets out details of the preparation of Merton’s Open Space Study (MOSS) Refresh. The original 2005 MOSS provided an assessment of community needs. It included an open space audit and playing pitch assessment both of which were undertaken in 2004. The study looked at:

- Addressing different needs and expectations of living, working and recreational environments;
- Providing a greater awareness of the value of open space to the overall quality of life in the borough; and
- Ensuring the quality of open space being given as much importance as the quantity when assessing provision.

The Refresh will update the 2005 study by providing a current audit of our facilities and consider existing and predicted demand as based on demographic and population predictions. This is an interim statement setting out the progress of this refresh work and the emerging findings. This statement should not be interpreted as final conclusions or recommendations as further work is being and needs to be undertaken. The following may therefore be subject to change.

2. Background

The purpose of this refresh is to provide an up to date assessment of the spatial distribution of our green spaces, sport and leisure facilities. The study is both a qualitative and quantitative audit and analysis of the supply of, and demand for, open space and outdoor sports provision in the Borough. It is being prepared in accordance with the requirements of PPG17: Planning for open space, sport and recreation (2002), which requires Councils to undertake robust assessments of existing and future needs of the communities for open space, sports and recreational facilities.

3. Scope of the Study

The scope of this work is to determine the role that particular areas of open space play in a hierarchy of provision. The aim is to produce an assessment of the extent of provision and to distinguish the principal functions (typology) of the space, for example, differentiating between formal public open spaces (parks and gardens or village greens) and informal open spaces.

The MOSS 2005 was concerned with publicly owned open space. The refresh will include publicly accessible private land to provide a comprehensive study of the facilities and space across Merton.

The study has been divided into categories as follows:

- All publicly accessible open space and green corridors;
- Public parks;
- Natural/semi natural green space;
- Amenity green space;
- Provision for children and young people;
- Allotments;
- Cemeteries, churchyards and other burial grounds;
- Playing pitches; and
- Leisure facilities.

It does not include:

- Privately owned gardens;
- Open space that is deemed to be unusable for leisure or recreation. For example where size or access is restrictive, such as road;
- Reserves; or
- Rivers and waterways.
The MOSS 2005 set out a vision, outcomes sought, guiding principles and an Action and Implementation Plan to manage our open space network. This refresh has the following objectives:

i. Refresh the previous audit of 2004 of existing provision of different types of open space;

ii. Refresh assessment of supply for open space provision to ensure that there is adequate provision of accessible, high quality green spaces, civic spaces and sport and recreation facilities to meet the needs of local communities and visitors;

iii. Use the findings as evidence base to support policies of the Local Development Framework; and

iv. Use results to determine whether any demographic and population changes will lead to increased demand and identify steps to prepare for that demand.

4. Work carried out to date and next steps:

All green space has been mapped under the categories identified.

All qualitative site assessment has been completed and mapped under the defined categories.

A partial review of supply and analysis of:

- Accessibility;
- Any deficiency by location and need;
- Future need in terms of the demographic links and future supply issues that may arise; and
- Funding streams.

The next steps are to formalise the findings and prepare the document for approval by the relevant departments.

5. Emerging findings to date

Please note that these findings are provisional and may be subject to change.

Merton’s population of 187,900 resides in 78,884 households with an average household size of 2.38 people (2001 Census). By 2026 the number of people living in Merton is expected to increase by 5.74% to about 198,700. (GLA, PLP Low).

The type of sport activity and the level of participation generally vary according to the age of sports users. This study will consider the age clusters existing across the borough, how they relate to existing sports provision, and whether they meet resident’s requirements.

5.1. Provision for children and young people

Within our 67 parks and open spaces there are 42 equipped play areas maintained by Merton’s Greenspaces Team and a further 10 play provision sites. 3 of the sites are in neighbouring boroughs but are used by Merton residents due to their close proximity. The refresh includes 24 sites of shared private amenity space that are semi-public. For example open space in the grounds of blocks of flats and spaces accessible to local residents for recreational and informal use. There are other private and semi-private amenity spaces across the borough but these have not been included because of limited accessibility.

Currently 37 of our formal playgrounds have some play equipment suitable for under 5s, 36 have some equipment suitable for under 12s and 13 have facilities for over 12s. 10 play areas are located on housing estates managed by the Council.

All of the boroughs wards have at least 1 playground.

The majority of these are located in Cricket Green and St Helier. Dundonald, Graveney, Hillside and West Barnes only have 1 play space each.
There is less provision for play in the west of the borough, particularly in the wards of Raynes Park, Hillside, West Barnes, Cannon Hill and Merton Park.

5.2. Allotments

An assessment of all allotments within the borough was undertaken to establish their location and levels of usage. In brief, there are 23 allotment sites, 17 of which are maintained by the Council or National Trust, 2 which are maintained by allotment associations and 4 which are privately owned and managed.

Allotments within the borough are in high demand, with recent figures stating that Council maintained allotment plots are 100% occupied. All sites have waiting lists, several of which have an indicative waiting period exceeding 2 years.

5.3. Cemeteries, churchyards and other burial grounds

There are 10 sites identified within the borough, which are cemeteries and/or churchyards. Whilst these areas are not usually associated with recreational open space, they are an important area for quiet reflection and welcome break within the built environment.

Assessment work on existing and future burial plot capacity within the borough is underway.

5.4. Playing Pitches

WS Atkins carried out a Play Pitch Assessment in 2004 as part of the evidence to support the MOSS 2005. WS Atkins have also prepared a Play Pitch Assessment in July 2010. The purpose of this report was to provide a targeted update of the 2004 playing field assessment, in order to produce an up-to-date picture of the supply and demand for playing fields within Merton.

It comprises an updated analysis of the existing provision of sports pitches within the Borough including the quantity, quality and accessibility of existing provision and consideration of future needs through assessing changes in demand.

The 2010 WS Atkins report was prepared to support a planning application but incorporates pitch information for the whole borough.

Further desktop research has taken place and we are incorporating additional pitch analysis including pitches within neighbouring boroughs that are used by Merton residents as well as pitches on educational establishments which are publicly accessible.

Overall levels of participation in sport in Merton are slightly higher than in England and London. The number of people participating in 3 x 30 minutes of moderate intensity sport per week increased between Active Places Sport 1(APS1) and APS2 where it stabilised through APS3. (Sport England)

Overall level of participation is strongly influenced by demographic, ethnic and socio-economic factors in the Borough. Men are more likely to take part in regular sport, as are younger age groups and those within less deprived areas.

Merton has a relatively high number of pitches per population but the spatial distribution is uneven, with a significant proportion located towards the north and west of the borough.

5.5. Leisure Facilities

The refresh includes an assessment of swimming pools, indoor sports halls, leisure centres, indoor tennis centres, ice rinks and golf courses. It will also identify community centres and school indoor facilities that are available for community use.

5.6. Other publicly accessible open space

All sites across the borough have been mapped and further research is currently being carried out on green corridors, natural/semi natural spaces, amenity space and public parks.