DESIGN GUIDE

ST. HELIER ESTATE
Area covered by the St. Helier Design Guide
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INTRODUCTION

In September 1991 the London Borough of Merton considered the possibility of designating as a Conservation Area the part of the St. Helier Estate located within the Borough. It was decided that the designation of the area was not justified at the present time. However, because of the area’s special character and history it was decided to produce a Design Guide to highlight the main architectural features, with a view to encouraging residents to retain and where appropriate restore the original detailing of the houses.

Residents and owners have a role to play in preserving the character of the area. The “permitted development rights” which householders enjoy allow many changes to be made to houses without formal planning permission. These alterations may be small in scale but can be prominent and have a large impact in an area that has a uniform character such as the St. Helier Estate. Sensitive alterations and careful maintenance will help preserve the character of the area and retain the values of the properties.

This Design Guide covers the area shown on the plan. It is primarily advisory, with no legal status, but indicates what is likely to be the Council’s response when Planning Applications are submitted for development in the area. It is hoped that residents will find the Guide of interest and take into account its recommendations when considering alterations and improvements to properties on the Estate.

HISTORY OF THE ESTATE

It was during 1926 and 1927, after the opening of the southern extension of the northern line, that the London County Council acquired, mainly by compulsory purchase, 825 acres of land for the building of a housing estate the within the two urban district councils of Carshalton and Merton and Morden.

The building of the estate, which straddles the boundary between the London Boroughs of Merton and Sutton, largely took place between 1929 and 1935.
The estate was given the name of St. Helier to commemorate the services of Lady St. Helier, Alderman of the London County Council from 1910 to 1927, who worked to improve the overcrowded conditions in Central London.

One of the largest London County Council housing estates, the layout was influenced by the "Garden City" ideas of Ebenezer Howard. Particular care was taken to preserve many of the existing trees and field boundaries, and the layout was designed to allow for the introduction of grass and shrubs.

A distinctive feature of the estate is the naming of the roads, these were named after monastic settlements in Britain to commemorate the fact that Morden was, until the dissolution of the Monasteries, in the possession of Westminster Abbey and Merton was once the site of an important Priory. Further information is available from the Borough's Libraries.

DESCRIPTION OF THE ESTATE

The St. Helier Estate was intended to be self-contained with its own schools, churches, shops and public houses; in 1939 the St. Helier Hospital, designed by Saxon Snell was also opened. By the end of the thirties there were 9,068 houses and flats.

The limited number of house types have resulted in a unity of built form. The houses are generally two-storey terraces constructed of brick with slate, tile or pantile roofs. They are characterised by recurring architectural features such as door canopies and wooden detailing around the shared entrances. The flats are arranged in two storey blocks with central passageways with semi-circular arched entrances leading to the rear doors and gardens. The front garden boundaries are characterised by flowering trees and shrubs, privet hedges and wooden picket gates.

The distinctive character of the area arises from the amount of open space, 130 acres in total, and the formal layout, comprising groups of houses closely related to landscaped areas. These vary from chamfered corner sites, small lawns at the heads of cul-de-sacs through to village greens and the major linear spaces along the broad avenues.
FRONT GARDEN AREAS AND CORNER SITES

The front gardens, and the open corner sites, are particularly important in contributing to the character of the estate, as together with mature trees that line the roads they create an almost rural character. Rear gardens contribute to the open spaces and also the ecological value of the area.

DESIGN GUIDANCE

Front Boundaries

Where hedges remain they should be retained and trimmed. Where they have been removed or replaced consideration should be given to reinstating them. The erection of walls and fences over one metre high will require planning permission.

Car Parking and Garages

The use of front gardens, corner sites or spaces between the buildings for the provision of garages will generally require the Council’s permission. Charges are also levied for the construction of crossovers to the footpath, which require the Council’s permission on certain primary roads.

Recommended front garden layout to accommodate parking space.
Applications will be considered on their merits with regard to individual circumstances and the space available. Where the removal of the front boundary is necessary, consideration should be given to installing timber gates across the opening. The materials for surfacing should be selected with care to ensure that they complement the building. The use of block paving or setts is often more appropriate than a uniform concrete or bitumen surface. It should always be possible to retain some soft landscaped area with trees and shrubs adjacent to the actual houses or front boundaries even if parking is to be provided within the curtilage of the property.

Many garages have already been constructed without proper consideration for the design of the existing houses, or built of inappropriate materials. Where it is necessary to replace or build a garage, attention should be given to its relationship with adjacent buildings, and materials should be used that match or complement them, pre-cast concrete garages should generally be avoided. Flat roofed garages can look out of place; pitched roof forms are far more appropriate. Although garages do not usually require planning permission, you will require Building Regulations Approval, for more information you should contact the Council’s Development Department.

Unsympathetic alterations have spoilt the facade on the right.
ROOFS

Original roofs consisted of natural slate, pantiles or plain tiles. Brick chimneys project through the roof with red or buff terracotta chimney pots. Rainwater gutters and downpipes were originally cast-iron.

DESIGN GUIDANCE

Roof forms and Coverings
The retention of the original roof forms and coverings is desirable and the use of materials or treatments which replace or disfigure the traditional coverings, such as the introduction of concrete tiles, synthetic 'slates' of composite material or plastic, should be avoided.

Loft Conversions
There is little scope for loft conversions, due to the shallow roof pitches. If, however modifications are necessary, the Council's advice should be sought; large projections beyond the roof slope should be avoided. Minor alterations such as the incorporation of sympathetically designed dormer windows, complementary to the design of the house blend in far better with the area's character. These should be restricted to the rear roof pitches. Front dormer windows do require planning permission, and all loft conversions require Building Regulations Approval.

Re-Roofing
If re-roofing works are to be carried out, existing sound tiles or slates should if possible be salvaged and re-used. This should help reduce the cost of the work. If this is not possible a material should be selected that is compatible with the other houses within the terrace, some materials, particularly heavy concrete tiles can also affect the structure of the roof. If possible the terrace should be re-roofed as a whole, to enable a uniform appearance to be maintained.

Chimneys
Chimney stacks should also be retained, even if the flues are not used. Pots on disused chimneys can be capped with lead, slate or a ridge tile. Care must be taken to allow ventilation whilst minimising the penetration of water.
Flashings

Flashings should be in lead, and should be installed by an experienced contractor; sand and cement flashings around chimney stacks should be avoided.

Gutters and External Pipework

Cast-iron is generally more durable than plastic and should be considered when gutters and down-pipes are replaced; other materials that are available include powder-coated aluminium, which look very similar to cast-iron and can be cheaper. If plastics are used they should be in black. Consideration should be given to using cast-iron or aluminium on more prominent elevations and plastics on rear or secondary elevations.

The installation of additional pipework on the front elevation should be avoided.

Traditional style pitched roof dormer: Pitched roof with slate or tile to match main roof.
BRICKWORK

There are a number of different coloured bricks used in the construction of the houses, some also have decorative, coloured brick patterns. Other features include semi-circular arches over recessed porch entrances and projecting, decorative courses.

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Existing Brickwork

The brickwork of the houses is attractive and should not be painted, rendered, pebble-dashed or clad in stone or reconstituted stone. A number of houses on the estate have already been altered by the application of different materials. As well as being out of character with the area and increasing the amount of maintenance required, the application of paint layers or other covering can reduce the value of the houses and make them more difficult to sell.

Paint Removal

It is possible to remove paintwork from original brickwork, but this should only be undertaken by a specialist contractor with a proven expertise in this field. Sand blasting is not recommended as it is likely to damage the face of the bricks.

Rendered Brickwork

If the brickwork has been rendered, pebble-dashed or covered in stone cladding there is no real possibility of restoring the original finish. Consideration in these cases should be given to rendering the facade with a smooth finish, and to paint it a colour that matches the adjacent brickwork. Stone cladding can also be removed; it will not generally be possible to restore the brickwork to its original condition, however it can be rendered and painted in a similar manner.

Re-Pointing

Careless, or unnecessary, repointing can spoil the appearance of the original brickwork. The old pointing has weathered to blend in with the bricks, and unless badly deteriorated, to a point where repointing is
essential, should not be removed. If it does become necessary to repoint it should be undertaken by an experienced contractor. Weather-struck pointing (see diagram) as usually employed by most builders is not really appropriate.

Examples of brickwork pointing

Inappropriate alterations: the character of the house on the right has been completely changed by unsympathetic alterations
DOORS & WINDOWS

The windows comprise small paned sashes on the ground floor and casements on the first floor. This represents the typical London County Council arrangement at that time. Some houses have boldly projecting bay windows. The houses have either recessed porches or projecting canopies over the front doors. The original doors are reminiscent of the cottage vernacular style with close boarded, or plain lower panels and small paned glazed upper panels.

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Renovation and Restoration

The original windows and doors, where surviving, are generally well made and seldom deteriorate if well maintained. Renovation is preferable to replacement. Sills or bottom rails, which may have perished due to exposure to the weather, can be cut out and replaced with new matching pieces joined to the existing in a traditional way.

Replacement Windows and Doors

Where windows or doors have deteriorated to a point that replacement is essential then consideration should be given to new units made to the original design. Generally it is difficult to obtain a suitable standard pattern from commercial stockists, however, occasionally a standard window or door can be found which can be reasonably easily modified to fit in with the existing house design. The Council can assist with advice on suitable suppliers.

When replacing the front door, again the replacement should, if possible, be of a similar style to fit in with the decorative woodwork around the entrance porches or door canopies.

Modern replacement windows and doors of different styles, patterns or materials do not blend well with the existing architectural style and should be avoided.
Double Glazing

If the existing windows are draughty and you are considering the installation of double-glazing, care should be taken when selecting a suitable replacement, to ensure that the character of the houses are preserved. Some manufacturers do provide double glazed sashes and casements which can be used as an alternative. Materials that should be used are timber, and in some cases white pvc, provided they are of a compatible style, aluminium replacement windows should be avoided. The Council can assist with advice on suitable suppliers. An alternative solution is to fit secondary glazing to the insides of the existing windows, this avoids altering the appearance of the elevations whilst achieving the required improved standards. Any divisions can follow the glazing bars of the existing windows.

If proposing to install double-glazing, care must be taken to provide of opening windows to ensure adequate ventilation is maintained.

Doors and windows: the door on the left is inappropriate for the style of the house.
'Storm Porches'

‘Storm Porches’ which close in the existing recessed porches, or new front porches have already been installed to a number of properties in the area. These are often constructed from unsympathetic materials and often appear out of character with the house. The addition of porches or bay windows on to the fronts of the houses will often require planning permission, and will always require Building Regulations Approval. A successful porch or bay window can be achieved with sensitive design, using traditional materials and incorporating a pitched roof. The closing in of recessed porches, if essential, should be in the form of a glazed screen which should be designed with care. Glazing bars and frame should be of timber and the screen should be set back slightly from the building frontage.

Care must be taken to avoid damage to the surrounding timber mouldings and/or brickwork. Removal of the existing door canopies will be resisted.

New Door and Window Openings

New door and window openings, will not normally require the Council’s permission. However, they should where possible be carefully designed to copy the original details, and the sizes should be of a scale appropriate to the whole house.

Side extensions: Appropriate and inappropriate designs
SIDE AND REAR EXTENSIONS

There is scope for extending the houses, although this will depend on the location of the house in relation to the surrounding properties and the space available.

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Extensions

Side and rear extensions should be sympathetically designed. They should be subordinate to the main house, generally single storey with a pitched roof. They should not rise above eaves level. Flat roofed extensions should be avoided; pitched roofs are more suitable visually and also less likely to give long term maintenance problems. All new extensions should respect the original design of the house in terms of window style, proportions, building materials and details.

Conservatories

Conservatories or verandahs should be lightweight, constructed of painted timber with plain, untinted glazing. They should be of a scale appropriate to the style of the house.

Planning Advice

Extensions that are above a certain size will require Planning Permission and will be assessed on their particular merits, taking into consideration their affect upon the amenities of adjoining residents, and whether or not they complement the existing building, and whether they have any impact upon the appearance of the area. All extensions require Building Regulations Approval.

If you are considering extending your property you should consult The London Borough of Merton’s published guidelines on residential extensions. These are available from the Morden Civic Centre and local libraries. Alternatively you should contact the Development Control Section of the Council’s Development Department on 081 545 3114 or 3621.
Appropriate extension: sympathetic design subservient to original house

Inappropriate extension: inappropriate dominant form

Front extensions: appropriate and inappropriate designs
NEW DEVELOPMENT

Demolition of existing housing and redevelopment of the resultant site is likely to be unsatisfactory in view of the uniformity of the area. Planning Applications for new buildings will be carefully scrutinised to ensure that new development blends in with its surroundings, in terms of scale, massing and materials used.

All new development will be expected to meet Merton Council’s published guidelines for development and commitment to ensuring that the needs of people with disabilities are met.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT

The installation of satellite dishes on the elevations of the houses can have a harmful effect on both your own as well as your neighbours houses.

Television aerials, satellite dishes and other telecommunications equipment should, whenever possible, be sited on the rear of property and mounted below eaves level. In some situations planning permission will be required for the installation of a satellite dish.

CONCLUSION

The Council is committed to preserving and enhancing the areas of the estate that they control, with a view to an overall improvement of the area. A greater appreciation of the character of the St. Helier Estate and the distinctive visual appearance of the houses by all owners and residents will help achieve this objective. The gradual improvement in the houses that have been insensitively treated in the past and the maintenance of those that have largely survived in their original form, will be to the benefit of the community as a whole.
FURTHER INFORMATION

If you have any plans to alter your property, and are in any doubt as to whether Planning Permission is required, or you would like some further information, regarding the contents of this brochure, then please do not hesitate to contact the Development Department of the Council at the following Address.

Environmental Services Department
London Borough of Merton
Merton Civic Centre
London Road
Morden
Surrey SM4 5DX

Telephone: 081 545 3055
081 545 3114 or
081 545 3621

Most alterations to buildings require Building Regulations Approval further information can be obtained by ringing 081 545 3969.

Council tenants wishing to undertake alterations or improvements to houses in Council ownership will require the Council’s permission, further information can be obtained by contacting the District Housing Manager of the Council’s Housing and Social Services Department.
Telephone 081 640 3431 ext 200

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