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Merton planning consultation - Response from Gaynor Pates

These are my comments as a resident of Merton, and as someone who has considered a range of premises to provide a social enterprise, called: Work Free – This is a flexible, drop-in style crèche, alongside a well-equipped place for parents to work, learn, network, develop business and ultimately contribute to the economy.

My specific comments mention Work Free where I believe this concept could fit within the development, regardless of who and how it is delivered in practice.

General comments:

Ref	Comment
Trend towards coworking	<p>Coworking, in essence, is the idea of sharing local workspace and facilities, as an alternative to commuting to an office, or working at home, or working in coffee shops. There is a global trend towards coworking, influenced in the UK by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • road and rail transport becoming more and more crowded and expensive • the nature of employment – freelance, flexible, hot-desking • health of workers - access to outdoor space, places to exercise, variety and flexibility <p>Has this trend been taken into account on evaluating the need for different types of building designs and uses?</p>
Childcare and flexibility	<p>There is a growing national issue around childcare costs and parent's – particularly mothers' - abilities to contribute to the workforce. There is a need for an alternative model to traditional daycare nurseries, where less financial commitment is needed, and timing, location and regulation of childcare is more flexible. Work Free is based on the idea that parents remain within the proximity of their children.</p> <p>Sadly, there seems to be few facilities currently where this idea would work well in Merton.</p>
Business landscape in Merton	<p>Merton is a creative hub – 25% of Merton's businesses are involved in the creative sector. It is important to have spaces that enable creative workers to create, to work, to network, to innovate, to showcase and to promote their work. More flexible,</p>

	<p>affordable and shared studio /workshop /collaboration space is needed to facilitate this.</p> <p>Also, there is an increasing level of entrepreneurial activity in Merton, as mentioned in the Employment and Economic Land Study 2010, which highlighted the need for business incubation space for early stage micro businesses.</p> <p>As someone who is starting up a business I would welcome this; the Generator Centre at Mitcham is a step in the right direction, but I believe there are more possibilities that need to be explored.</p>
<p>Planning and building design</p>	<p>I am no expert in planning, but as someone who has explored a range of business premises, I have observed that the social enterprise concept – a business with social objectives – is not currently accounted for within the planning and use class system. I have found that Council/community premises may be more flexible, supportive and affordable but fall short in terms of what I would need from them as a ‘social business tenant’, whilst commercial/business premises are too unaffordable and inflexible for a ‘social business tenant’. For example, having children on the premises is not allowed in the many vacant office spaces, whilst the poor design and facilities of a Council-run community venue could put off potential paying customers. There is also a disappointing lack of quality outdoor space, whether for children or adult use.</p> <p>I understand this is a complex problem, and other initiatives – perhaps in response to the Portas report – could help. I am happy to assist the Council to work towards exploring and making progress on this issue.</p> <p>Also, on building design for community use, whether school, health or leisure, I support the idea that buildings need to be designed with flexibility in mind, to allow more innovative and cost effective use of the space available. I have separately attached some slides – provided by education consultancy, Bryanston Square – which explain this concept in more detail. This way of thinking applies to any ‘new build’, and seems relevant to Site Proposals 17 and 49.</p>

I have specific comments on 18 of the Site Proposals:

Ref	Comment
01	Hartfield Road car park
	I agree with Wimbledon Music Civitas Group’s suggestion.

	Please see proposal 28 for my suggestions. I think this site, combined with site 28, could strengthen Merton's position as a creative hub, and offer the world's tourists that come to visit Wimbledon the world-class standard of entertainment that they expect.
06	Durnsford Road corner
	I would prefer to see a children's play area / public space for the nearby residents.
08	Leyton Road centre
	Good opportunity to provide outdoor space here for children. I would like to see a community function retained.
12	Queens Road car park
	I would support a small amount of live/work units / community / business use, including good use of the length of the site – which could be used for recreation, particularly for teenagers and children, eg running track, climbing walls, assault course. Noisy activities could be placed next to the railway, away from residents. If primary schools are under pressure now, we will need more facilities for our future teenagers to learn, socialise and exercise outside of school. Adjacent business developments could have a social focus, offering creative / teaching / workshop / studio / vocational training facilities, to supplement whatever teenagers are offered at school.
16	Wimbledon library
	There is an ideal opportunity to include the Work Free* concept within the new development proposals! It would be good to offer innovative social enterprises within this development due to its town centre location. The Portas Review published in December 2011 highlights the need for more social businesses on Britain's High Streets.
17	Worsfold House / Chapel Orchard
	Surely a school site, built with flexibility to accommodate community businesses and live/work units, would help to retain potential employment land, whilst safeguarding school places?
23	9 Amity Grove
	The outdoor space here seems to offer plenty of potential uses for children and families. This would be a good space for Work Free*, along with other community and business uses; development at this location has potential to add to the vibrancy and local use of Raynes Park, due to its proximity to other businesses, shops and transport links.
27	78 Kingston Road, Merton Hall
	Although I have passed this building many times, it is a shame that

	<p>I wasn't aware of the good features within this facility!</p> <p>I would like to see this retained for the community, perhaps with input from a social enterprise (I note that South Wimbledon Community Association take this over on 1 April), with a plan to renovate, refurbish and <u>promote</u> it, in line with the needs of local organisations and residents.</p> <p>The main hall and wooden floor seems to be a great local asset, which should be retained and used by a greater number of people.</p>
28	"P4" land adjoining Wimbledon Theatre
	<p>I support Wimbledon Music Civitas Group's suggestion and the mix of town centre uses suggested by the Council.</p> <p>I would not welcome the inclusion of large leisure 'chains'. Rather, it would be great to have an independent arts company / social enterprise / charity running a venue offering performance, exhibition, café, bar and function spaces. This could be used by the local community, and also – most importantly - for nationally showcasing all of Merton's creative industries, with guidance and involvement from the University of the Arts, the Business Improvement District and a range of creative organisations in Merton.</p>
31	Wimbledon community centre
	<p>I agree with the suggested uses, as this isn't the best place for a community centre.</p> <p>Although the renewed Wimbledon library site could replace some of these community facilities, it would be important to keep site 27 (Merton Hall) as a large hall with wooden floor, if we were to lose this traditional community hall.</p>
35	Mitcham fire station
	<p>This could be a great location for a community social / business venue, including some outdoor space for adults and children.</p> <p>A service like Work Free* could be a valuable resource for local working parents. This venue may present a good opportunity for providing studio and workshop spaces, in addition to office and child-friendly environments.</p>
36	Chaucer centre
	<p>It seems that there is good potential for mixed residential and community use at this site if managed well.</p> <p>I would have thought it prudent to safeguard this public / community / business space, as there seems to be a lot of housing around it.</p>
49	Wimbledon delivery office
	<p>I support the proposal for mixed office and residential.</p> <p>It would be good to include some versatile outdoor space within the plans.</p>
57 & 58	Morden station & Sainsbury's car park

	<p>I do <u>not</u> agree that this site should be purely residential, as suggested by TfL.</p> <p>I agree with the Council's preferred use, and the issues identified! These are important sites, which can significantly affect the future of Morden's development; the potential opportunities need thorough and open consideration.</p>
59	Corner Baltic Close
	As for 57 & 58 – I agree with the Council's suggestions and do not want to see this as a purely residential development.
62	Wimbledon YMCA
	<p>I agree with the suggested/preferred uses.</p> <p>I would like to add the Work Free* concept into the discussion: Parents, who want to work locally whilst their child is looked after, would add to the diverse mix of people who use the YMCA. I would encourage setting aside some safe outdoor space for children. I agree that some public social space would be welcomed, due to the amount of nearby housing and flats occupied by professionals and families.</p>
63	165-171 The Broadway
	<p>I agree with the preferred use.</p> <p>Once again I would like to put forward the Work Free* concept for consideration, particularly if outdoor space can be included within the redevelopment plans.</p>
*	<i>Work Free – a concept involving a flexible, drop-in style crèche, alongside a place for parents to work, learn, network and ultimately contribute to the economy.</i>

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.
Do get in touch if you would like to discuss any of my input.