Merton’s first Unitary Development Plan (UDP) was adopted in April 1996. Whilst the UDP lasts for a period of ten years, we are under a statutory obligation to review it within five years of its adoption. A new UDP has been prepared to ensure that it is up to date and reflects changes in the government’s planning policies and guidance.

This adopted UDP 2003 is the outcome of extensive research and consultation with our residents and other interested parties and has included preparation of monitoring and issues reports, Merton’s Sustainability Appraisal and a series of policy review papers.

A Draft UDP was on deposit for consultation during September and October 1999. The Council received 2500 objections and over 2000 representations of support for the plan, these responses were considered by the Council and changes included in a Second Deposit Draft of October 2000. Following public consultation a Public Inquiry was held between May and September 2001 at which a Government appointed Inspector assessed the draft Plan and considered objections and representations of support. The Inspector’s Report was published in July 2002. The Council considered all the findings of the Inspector and in June 2003 published Modifications to the Second Deposit UDP. Following consideration of responses the Council adopted the UDP on 31st October 2003.

The purpose of the UDP is to provide guidance as to how changes to the Borough’s physical environment should be directed and controlled, in the interests of meeting the needs of its residents. These needs can sometimes conflict with each other. I am confident that the policies in the Plan strike a balance between conflicting objectives, although some are given greater weight than others. In particular, emphasis is now on making our town centres more sustainable; maximising the re-use of brownfield sites to increase the provision of local facilities, such as housing; promoting sustainable transport; and minimising the threat to green spaces from development, to name but a few!

All the policies are, in any case, subject to the overriding requirement to conform to Government guidance which are in a constant state of evolution. The policies in this Plan therefore aim to reflect these new policies and strategies. Recently the Government has announced proposals to replace UDP’s with Local Development Frameworks (LDF) and to prepare these documents more quickly. The London Plan, prepared by the GLA, is due to be published early in 2004. Merton’s LDF will need to be prepared in conformity with this Plan.

Despite this never ending process, we are confident that the adopted UDP 2003 will provide us with a more effective up to date tool for protecting and enhancing Merton’s environment.

Councillors Russell Makin, and Su Assinen Cabinet Members for Transport and Planning; Regeneration and Cultural Services.