POLICY HP.7: ACCOMMODATION FOR TRAVELLERS

PROPOSALS FOR TRAVELLERS’ SITES WILL BE ASSESSED HAVING REGARD TO THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA:

(i) THE EFFECTS ON THE AMENITY OF LOCAL RESIDENTS, PARTICULARLY IN RELATION TO NOISE;

(ii) TRAFFIC IMPLICATIONS, PARTICULARLY IN RELATION TO PROPOSALS FOR ACCOMMODATION FOR TRAVELLING SHOWPEOPLE;

(iii) THE VISUAL IMPACTS OF THE SCHEME AND ANY PROPOSALS TO MITIGATE THEM;

(iv) THE PROXIMITY TO SHOPS, SCHOOLS AND OTHER COMMUNITY FACILITIES.

Justification

3.62 Guidance in DoE Circular 1/94 ‘Gypsy Sites and Planning’, states that local authorities should make suitable locational and/or criteria based policies against which to decide planning applications. This policy supports equity aims of UDP. The Council has one travellers site at Weir Road for which a waiting list exists. Circular 1/94, RPG3 and PPG12 all require the assessment of accommodation needed to meet travellers needs in connection with any policy for their accommodation. Merton will be commissioning an assessment of travellers needs to establish the scope and extent of the need in the Borough.

HOUSING NEEDS

POLICY HN.1: AFFORDABLE HOUSING

ANY PROPOSAL FOR RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT OF 15 UNITS OR MORE ON A SUITABLE SITE WILL BE REQUIRED TO MAKE PROVISION FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING ON THAT SITE, AS PART OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT. AT LEAST 30% OF THE TOTAL NUMBER OF NEW DWELLINGS ON A RESIDENTIAL SITE THAT FALLS WITHIN THE ABOVE THRESHOLD WILL BE AFFORDABLE HOUSING.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING SHOULD MEET THE NEEDS OF HOUSEHOLDS ON A RANGE OF LOW AND MODERATE INCOMES WHO CANNOT AFFORD TO RENT OR BUY OPEN MARKET HOUSING.

Justification

3.63 PPG3 (March 2000) recommends that local planning authorities address the community’s need for affordable housing by negotiating with developers for the provision of affordable housing which contributes towards the creation of mixed and balanced communities. The Guidance requires local planning authorities to ensure that new housing developments help to secure a better social mix by avoiding the creation of large areas of housing for a particular social income group. The Guidance stresses that where an affordable housing requirement exists this should be provided as part of the proposed development and that failure to do so without exceptional circumstances could justify the refusal of planning permission. This Guidance reflects other guidance to promote sustainable neighbourhoods with a mix of uses and access to a range of facilities locally. Other Plan policies provide further guidance on these aims.
3.64 There is clear evidence that a large proportion of the Borough’s residents are unable to gain access into the private residential market or to secure good quality rented accommodation. This is identified by Merton’s Housing Needs Study undertaken in 1999 which indicate that 58% of the households in the Borough (44,018 households) would not be eligible for a new mortgage on a suitably sized property which would meet the requirements of the household. 65.6% of households in the Borough would have to pay more than 35% of their net household income on housing if they rented privately.

3.65 The Council’s 1999 Housing Needs Study, updated in 2001, identified that between 8,000 -10,850 additional affordable dwellings would be required over the Plan period to 2011 to meet needs in full. The Council recognises that it is neither desirable nor achievable to meet these needs in full, however need will exceed the Council’s anticipated future housing supply. Given this position the Council considers that every attempt should be made to maximise opportunities to enable part of this substantial identified need to be met. Lowering the threshold is considered to be an important contribution to this objective.

3.66 In accordance with Circular 6/98 the Council will have regard to all categories of affordable housing. Affordable housing is defined as social rented housing for households on low incomes and sub-market renting, part ownership or low-cost market housing for those on moderate incomes who are also unlikely to qualify for social rented housing. The Council will need to be satisfied that any proposal is realistically affordable by taking into account the most up to date income levels, house prices or rents and the proportion of household income spent on housing costs, in deciding on the types of affordable housing considered appropriate to a particular site. Circular 6/98 requires local plan policies on affordable housing to be ‘based on a good understanding of the needs of the area’ and include factors such as ‘the types of housing best suited to meeting these local needs’. Merton’s Housing Needs Study (1999) updated in 2001 identified the effectiveness of the four categories of housing considered as affordable, which are: low cost market priced housing; low cost subsidised housing; shared ownership housing and social rented housing. The Study identified that the first two categories were unable to address any housing needs in the Borough, whilst social rented housing was found to meet the great majority of housing needs in Merton. Shared ownership housing is only affordable to a very small number of those in need. Under present conditions low-cost market housing does little to meet even the needs of people on moderate incomes. However future Government or other initiatives could enable such housing to fall within the reach of some households. Therefore the potential from all forms of affordable housing will be considered provided they are affordable to households on low and moderate incomes.

3.67 The Study found that in the light of these findings an overall affordable housing target of 30% would be appropriate with the greatest preference for provision being for social rented housing. The Council will therefore seek to enter into agreements with developers to provide at least 30% affordable housing on sites which can accommodate 15 or more units. It should be noted that when determining whether this policy should apply to a particular development, the Council will have regard to the total number of units proposed or capable of being provided on a site, and not the net gain in units that would result from development. The Council will encourage the use of planning agreements to ensure that the affordable housing is permanently retained and available as affordable housing for successive occupiers as well as the initial occupier. Further guidance on how this housing will be provided in association with private housebuilders and Registered Social Landlords is set out in a Supplementary Planning Guidance Note on Affordable Housing.
3.68 There is a presumption that affordable housing should be provided on the site, as part of
the proposed development of a site, as indicated in PPG3. The circumstances where the
Council may be prepared to vary this presumption and accept this provision off-site from
the main development, are set out in circular 6/98 and are detailed in the Council's
Affordable Housing SPG. Where the affordable housing is to be provided off-site 42%
equivalent affordable housing shall be provided. The seeking of 42% is justified on the
basis that the developer is building two schemes - one on-site and the other off-site -
which will in total create more units than the original on-site development. The 42%
effectively represents the two 30% proportions for the on-site and off-site developments
together, built on the off-site development. In very rare exceptions the Council will accept
off-site financial contributions (commuted payments) which would provide for an
appropriate number of affordable units elsewhere in the Borough. Commuted payments
are regarded as a last resort as this does not immediately lead to the provision of
affordable housing. The Council will have regard to its Supplementary Planning Guidance
on Affordable Housing and the former LPAC Advice on commuted sums to ensure that
appropriate contributions are sought. Any such exception should contribute to the social
mix aims in PPG3.

3.69 Merton's 1999 Housing Needs Study indicated that 41.2% of all existing households in
need required one bedroom units, 22.7% required two bedroom units, 18.1% required
three bedroom units and 18% required 4+ bedroom units. However the existing stock of
housing generates a surplus of smaller units and new provision should reflect these
wider considerations as indicated in Policy HN.3.

3.70 Advice contained within relevant government guidance, in particular PPG3 and Circular
6/98, provides guidance on the factors to assess suitable sites for affordable housing
provision. The Council will have regard to this guidance in assessing development
proposals. It is the Council's view that most sites in the Borough considered to be
suitable for housing are likely to be suitable for affordable housing. Where the developer
contends that it would not be appropriate to provide affordable housing on a particular
site, it would be for the developer to demonstrate the justification that the site is not
suitable for affordable housing.

POLICY HN.2: PROVISION OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING FROM OTHER SOURCES

AFFORDABLE HOUSES ON SITES THAT CAN ACCOMMODATE LESS THAN 15 RESIDENTIAL
UNITS WILL BE PERMITTED AND THE PROVISION OF AN ELEMENT OF PERMANENT
AFFORDABLE HOUSING WILL BE SOUGHT THROUGH NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE DEVELOPER.

Justification

3.71 There is a limited supply of land within the Borough to meet housing need. Affordable
housing needs identified through the Housing Needs Study cannot be achieved through
sites of over 15 units alone. Where sites meet the threshold required in HN.1 they will
provide affordable housing units however the Council will seek through negotiations with
developers to encourage additional affordable units over and above this where suitable
opportunities occur.
3.72 The Council will adopt a flexible approach to the consideration of parking and density standards on sites located in accessible locations, within or adjacent to town centres. It is considered that these sites provide good opportunity for higher density schemes consistent with the principles of sustainable development. The Council will encourage residential developments involving Registered Social Landlords and/or itself as housing authority to meet the needs of those who are unable to gain access to the housing market.

**POLICY HN.3: DWELLING MIX**

**PROPOSALS FOR ALL RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT WILL BE REQUIRED TO PROVIDE A MIX OF HOUSING TYPES AND SIZES IN ORDER TO CREATE MIXED AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES, TO PROVIDE A CHOICE OF HOUSING AND TO MEET A VARIETY OF HOUSING NEEDS.**

**Justification**

3.73 PPG3 (2000) promotes socially mixed communities with a greater choice and better mix in the size, type and location of housing to represent the needs of the whole community.

3.74 The objective on which this Plan's housing policies are based is “to ensure that the housing stock in the Borough meets the needs of the community in terms of type, size, condition, affordability and location.” This objective should be considered along with the Council's Annual Housing Strategy statement to ensure that needs of the community are met. The Council has identified as housing issues the twin requirements of providing for single person households for the smaller “starter” type of unit and ensuring the continued presence in the Borough’s housing stock of family accommodation.

3.75 Planning consents granted for new residential development in recent years have been predominantly for small units. Furthermore, potential future completions likely to arise from unimplemented planning permissions will be predominantly for small units. Whilst the Council wishes to encourage smaller units of accommodation, especially those suitable for the single people household, it is similarly concerned to see the continued significant presence of family accommodation both in the Borough’s housing stock and in new build. This is particularly important to meet the requirements of large and extended families, especially in the north-eastern part of Merton, which has a higher than average concentration of such households. The Council will, therefore, encourage the provision of family accommodation on sites of sufficient size to establish their own residential identity. The policy will apply to those proposals for residential development identified on the proposals map falling within the identified size criterion, together with those unidentified sites that may come forward.

3.76 The former LPAC's work on Single Person Households and population projections has to be considered with the Council's Housing Needs Study. They identify a need for a wide range of unit sizes. Schemes should reflect the diversity of local needs and provide a mix of smaller and larger units.
3.77 Lifetime homes represent a sustainable and flexible approach to meeting the vast majority of general mobility needs. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation defines lifetime homes as homes “which are designed either to meet the changing needs occurring throughout one family’s lifetime .... or to meet the varying needs of numerous changes of [the] occupiers in the same home.” An advantageous feature of lifetime homes is their ability to offer choice thereby allowing the occupier whose mobility needs change, to remain in the lifetime home if they so desire rather than being forced out because their home is unsuitable in meeting their changing needs. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation further advise that lifetime homes are designed for people with moderate mobility difficulties and should accommodate the majority of adaptations with maximum ease at minimum cost. However these are not specifically designed with wheelchair users in mind or those with more severe mobility difficulties. Some purpose built specially designed wheelchair standard housing will still therefore be necessary. The Council will have regard to its Supplementary Guidance on New Residential Developments and the Accessible Environments SPG, in its assessment of planning applications concerning these developments.

3.78 Wheelchair housing is housing suitable for use by the 10% of people with disabilities who experience severe disabilities and are permanently confined to wheelchairs. It needs to be on one level and its principal feature, in addition to easy access, is its above average space standards in order to allow for full wheelchair manoeuvre throughout. In the case of units built to wheelchair standards, the Council’s aim is to achieve this in 10% of new dwellings overall; the 10% figure is however a guideline for negotiation only in respect of any particular site. The Council's Building Control Section is responsible for ensuring that relevant proposals include satisfactory access to and within buildings. However it is important that these considerations are also made at the planning application stage to avoid the risk of abortive planning applications when Building Control issues are subsequently dealt with.

POLICY HN.4: HOUSING FOR OLDER PEOPLE

Planning permission may be granted for housing specifically for older people after consideration of the following criteria:

(i) The topography of the area;

(ii) The proximity of the site to public transport facilities;

(iii) The environment (including safety and security); provision of a garden area and effect of traffic noise and fumes which will arise from the siting of the development;

(iv) The convenience of the site's location in relation to local shops, services and other community facilities (see also Policy C.2).
3.79 Whilst the Council encourages the provision of accommodation for older people as one alternative to institutional care, it is concerned to see that this accommodation meets the requirements of the client group. Merton's 1999 Housing Needs Study indicates that there is a demand for greater provision of accommodation for older people. Whilst it is recognised that few sites will be ideal in terms of all the factors identified in the policy, the Council will expect most if not all of the factors to be satisfied prior to giving planning approval to such schemes. The following are the reasons for each of the criteria listed:

(i) Topography
As residents will be elderly, the site should preferably be flat and not located so as to require residents to climb steep inclines when using any locally based essential services.

(ii) Proximity to Public Transport Facilities
Residents are more likely to be dependent on public transport than other, younger, purchasers of new homes. Developments should be located on or near public transport routes and near a recognised stop on such a route.

(iii) Environment
Elderly people frequently spend much of their time at home and therefore rely upon a pleasant and secure local environment. The provision of a garden area free from traffic fumes is fundamental in providing an acceptable standard of amenity.

(iv) Convenience
It is essential that residents have easy access from a site to shops, post offices, medical services, chemists and other community facilities such as parks and libraries.

3.80 Merton's Housing Needs Study undertaken in 1999 identified 2,231 “frail elderly” households which represents 26.1% of all special needs households in the Borough in total: 50.2% of all special needs households exclusively contain older people.

POLICY HN.5: RESIDENTIAL INSTITUTIONAL USES

PROPOSALS FOR THE CONSTRUCTION, OR CHANGE OF USE, OF A DWELLING TO A RESIDENTIAL INSTITUTION, SUCH AS A NURSING HOME, OLDER PERSONS' HOME OR GROUP HOME FOR PEOPLE WITH AN ILLNESS OR DISABILITY ARE LIKELY TO BE ACCEPTABLE, IN PRINCIPLE, IN RESIDENTIAL AREAS. THE SUITABILITY OF SUCH PROPOSALS WILL BE ASSESSED IN RELATION TO:

(i) THE SITE CHARACTERISTICS, INCLUDING THE QUALITY OF THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT;

(ii) IN THE CASE OF AN EXISTING PROPERTY, ITS SIZE SHOULD NOT BE LESS THAN 120M² (INTERNAL DIMENSIONS);

(iii) THE PROXIMITY TO LOCAL SHOPS, COMMUNITY AND HEALTH SERVICES;
(iv) THE PROVISION OF ADEQUATE CAR PARKING;
(v) THE PROXIMITY OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT SERVICES;
(vi) THE PROVISION OF A GARDEN AREA;
(vii) THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE ESTABLISHED CHARACTER OF THE EXISTING RESIDENTIAL AREA OR THE PREDOMINANCE OF FAMILY HOUSING IN THE WIDER AREA WOULD BE CHANGED.

Justification

3.81 Merton has an ageing population and this creates a continuing demand for a variety of accommodation types to meet the needs of older people, such as nursing homes and older persons' homes. Similarly, care in the community requires the provision of group homes for people with an illness or disability. These uses are considered to be appropriate in residential areas.

3.82 The only limitation on the provision of these residential uses will be where the site is considered to be unsuitable for institutional uses in terms of the external environment. Examples of inappropriate environments would be close to a busy railway line or heavily trafficked road, properties which do not have gardens of an adequate size or areas where the topography makes it difficult for pedestrians.

3.83 Residential institutional uses are also considered to be appropriate where large houses can no longer be retained as individual residences and sub-division to create flats is not practicable. This will particularly be the case where the house is of architectural or historic interest.

POLICY HN.6: ACCOMMODATION FOR HOMELESS PEOPLE

THE COUNCIL WILL SEEK TO SECURE SUITABLE PERMANENT ACCOMMODATION FOR THOSE PEOPLE IN THE BOROUGH WHO ARE HOMELESS, BUT WILL NOT NORMALLY GRANT PLANNING PERMISSION FOR A CHANGE FROM RESIDENTIAL TO BED AND BREAKFAST OR HOSTEL USE.

Justification

3.84 The total number of households accepted by the Council to be eligible unintentionally homeless and in primary need was 156 in 2002/3. The Council regards the use of bed and breakfast and other forms of temporary hostel-type accommodation as being a short-term measure to accommodate the most pressing housing need in the last resort. Such establishments generally provide a low standard of accommodation with small rooms, minimal recreation, cooking, washing and toilet facilities and are unacceptable for anything more than temporary use, particularly when children are to be accommodated.

3.85 In recent years Merton Council has placed few households in existing bed and breakfast establishments at any one time and efforts are being made to reduce this still further. Therefore it is considered unnecessary to provide for more temporary accommodation in the Borough.