Chapter 3 • Living and Working in Merton

LIVING AND WORKING IN MERTON

URBAN VILLAGES

3.1 The aim of Urban Village policy is that within Merton’s urban area, small mixed communities would be safeguarded and developed, with attractive housing, work, shopping and other facilities within walking distance. This will assist in enabling a close knit community to live and work together whilst still having public transport access to the Metropolis. The policy will be applied both to existing areas (central Mitcham) and new development. Urban Village policy reflects the objectives behind the former LPAC’s Sustainable Residential Quality policy initiative which advocates adopting an innovative approach to neighbourhood design integrating location, housing mix, higher residential densities and reduced car parking requirements.

3.2 Urban Village policies will safeguard and improve Merton’s traditional village communities, provide a focus for a variety of sustainability initiatives, give an attractive form to substantial new housing and mixed use development, and provide locations where those who wish to do so can develop a more sustainable lifestyle. Urban Villages also provide a location for integrating sustainable transport, waste management, Agenda 21 objectives, Healthy Cities initiatives and other programmes. The Urban Village policies aim for a substantial change in 25 years time when the next generation will inherit the villages. Urban Villages would then be capable of supporting sustainable lifestyles, would foster social inclusion, and make it easier and cheaper to reach the basic facilities and jobs people need.

POLICY U.1: URBAN VILLAGE DESIGNATION

IN THE DESIGNATED URBAN VILLAGE AREA (MITCHAM TOWN CENTRE) SHOWN ON THE PROPOSALS MAP THE COUNCIL WILL SAFEGUARD AND PROMOTE DEVELOPMENT WITH THE FOLLOWING URBAN VILLAGE CHARACTERISTICS:

(i) MIXED USES;
(ii) MIXED TENURE AND DWELLING TYPES, INCLUDING AFFORDABLE HOUSING;
(iii) WALKABILITY AND COMPACTNESS;
(iv) COMMUNITY FACILITIES;
(v) LOCAL EMPLOYMENT AND SHOPPING;
(vi) GOOD ACCESSIBILITY TO THE VILLAGE CENTRE BY FOOT;
(vii) GOOD ACCESSIBILITY TO EXISTING AND FUTURE PUBLIC TRANSPORT FACILITIES.
3.3 In the designated area of Mitcham town centre a small mixed community will be encouraged with attractive housing, work, shopping and other facilities close by. The Urban Village area should extend to approximately 600m - 800m walking distance from the village centre. Urban village centres should be of an appropriate scale with high public transport accessibility and a mix of uses (See Chapter 5).

3.4 This designation will be reviewed and additions may be made as appropriate. In some future locations part of the Urban Village policy objectives may not be achievable - eg employment, but sustainable transport objectives may still be reached. The achievement of sustainability and quality objectives will be monitored together with social and lifestyle changes in order to assess the effectiveness of policies to assist in review, to consider further designation, and to mitigate any adverse effects. Urban Villages will assist in achieving Agenda 21 objectives, by integrating sustainable transport, waste management, Healthy City initiatives and other programmes locally.

POLICY U.2: MIXED USES IN URBAN VILLAGES (SEE ALSO POLICIES MI1-MI3)

PROPOSALS FOR NEW DEVELOPMENT OR CHANGE OF USE WILL BE EXPECTED TO EITHER RETAIN OR PROVIDE A MIX OF USES THAT INCLUDE ONE OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING:

(i) Neighbourhood facilities and services such as primary healthcare and education

(ii) Other village centre related uses, subject to town centre policies in the plan

(iii) Multiple use facilities

(iv) Employment uses, including live-work units and telecommuting facilities

(v) Residential uses on upper floors

THE PROPOSAL WILL BE ASSESSED AGAINST THE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT GUIDELINES PREPARED FOR URBAN VILLAGES.

Justification

3.5 There is a need for a mix and variety of uses within the Urban Village and its centre. A mix of uses and the introduction of new facilities is important to provide for uses not located elsewhere in the Urban Village. A variety of uses will give a fuller range of local services, avoiding the need to travel long distances. The Council wishes to encourage diversification of uses in centres, multi-purpose linked visits, and the provision of facilities which promote social inclusion. Within the context of its service delivery strategy the Council will therefore encourage Council and Council-influenced services, including voluntary sector, education, social services and health facilities to locate in the Urban Village centres, in order to provide accessible facilities. New development also provides significant opportunities to meet residents' needs for a range of facilities.
3.6 Mixed use development will enable the vitality of the Urban Village Centre to be supported by encouraging social and leisure activities outside normal shopping hours. In large schemes a mix of uses will be sought to provide diversity of uses, to support vitality and viability and so that no one use will dominate to the detriment of the character of the Urban Village.

3.7 PPG6 provides further guidance on diversity in centres and PPG3 provides guidance on promoting mixed use and creating mixed communities.

3.8 In order to maintain and improve the mix of uses the existing mix of uses will be assessed and targets will be set. Each sector of the Urban Village and its centre will be considered, so that a good mix at an appropriate scale is achieved in each part of the village. The achievement on individual sites will be continuously monitored in order to meet the required range of uses within the Plan period over all sectors of the Urban Village. Whilst some conversion of residential uses to business use will be encouraged to improve the mix of uses in village centres, the Council will seek to maintain and improve an element of residential use sufficient to secure overlooking of central spaces in vulnerable areas for improved security, out of hours activity and local customers for shops.

3.9 In order to reduce commuting, the Council will assess travel to work patterns and the nature and location of jobs. New Community Enterprises will be encouraged particularly in village centres. It is particularly important to safeguard local industrial employment since these jobs are hard to replace and industrial employees tend to travel short distances. A programme of environmental improvement and amelioration of adverse conditions for existing employment sites will therefore be initiated.

3.10 A high quality environment is needed to attract pedestrians, decrease car dependence, maintain standards in a high density environment, and reduce the need to travel to alternative attractions. It is the Council’s intention to prepare Supplementary Planning Guidance for urban village areas, starting with Mitcham Urban Village (the only one designated in Merton so far) supported by the preparation of development briefs for specific development sites. The SPG and briefs will be used to assess development proposals. The Council will support the Mitcham Partnership Board whose activities will include developing and implementing programmes to remove eyesores, raise standards of design and maintenance of the public domain including street furniture and the provision of pocket parks. The provision and improvement of pedestrian and cycle infrastructure will be accorded priority. The Mitcham Partnership Board comprising mainly representatives from the local business community, public and voluntary/community sectors will be the principal consultative body regarding policies and proposals affecting Mitcham Urban Village. The Mitcham Area Forum will be the main consultative body with regard to the resident population’s interests outside the urban village area. London-wide bodies such as the Mayor/GLA its agencies and the Metropolitan Police are also Council consultees.

**POLICY U.3: SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT IN URBAN VILLAGES**

In order to achieve sustainable transport, development proposals in urban villages will be expected to provide or contribute to the following:
(i) TRAFFIC CALMING MEASURES

(ii) PEDESTRIANISATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS

(iii) SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL AND LINKS TO THE VILLAGE CENTRE

(iv) THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPROVEMENT OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT TO CENTRAL LONDON AND OF INTERMEDIATE MODES SUCH AS TRAMLINKS AND BUS PRIORITY MEASURES

(v) NETWORK OF CYCLE LANES AND FOOTWAYS

(vi) CAR PARKING IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE COUNCIL’S ADOPTED LOCATIONAL/DENSITY/PARKING MATRIX

THE LEVEL OF PROVISION OR CONTRIBUTION WILL DEPEND ON THE SCALE AND TYPE OF DEVELOPMENT AND ON THE TRAFFIC AND HIGHWAY IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSAL.

Justification

3.11 The Council has adopted sustainability objectives and targets which form the basis for assessing all planning and transportation policies. The Council’s Supplementary Planning Guidance Note for Sustainable Development provides further guidance on this subject. Regarding sustainable transport, PPG6 requires major travel generators to be located in centres, PPG13 seeks to reduce car use and encourage other travel modes, and PPG24 seeks to reduce pollution. Good practice is outlined in the DETR Good Practice Guide for Sustainable Development (1998). Urban Villages will be in the forefront of Borough sustainability policies and they are intended to provide attractive areas for those who wish to live a sustainable lifestyle. In the context of Borough policies, Urban Village policies therefore need to provide particularly good sustainable transport alternatives, to give higher priority to sustainable modes, and to avoid encouraging car use where there is an alternative mode. There is a strong emphasis on cycling and walking, since it is intended to encourage a mix of uses nearby, rather than large specialist areas (retailing or industry for example), which require a long journey. This will allow those with lower mobility or access to cars to have access to a fuller range of facilities. The Government’s Sustainable Development Strategy particularly recognises the importance of these social and equity issues.

3.12 The Council will, throughout the Borough’s town centres, introduce measures aimed at traffic reduction, and in particular within a short distance of the Urban Village centres it will encourage walking and cycling and discourage car journeys where a sustainable mode is more appropriate than a short car journey. These will be the areas where a good quality sustainable lifestyle can be adopted. They are also the areas where higher density high quality housing development will be encouraged, which will support good facilities in the adjacent village centre. The Council will therefore reallocate highway space from casual kerbside parking and through traffic to sustainable transport uses: by incentives and regulation it will encourage sustainable modes for local journeys to the village centre. The Council will also promote public transport access to metropolitan facilities outside the Urban Village for non-car owners.
3.13 The Borough pedestrian and cycling networks will be increased within Urban Village areas. A dense network of cycle lanes and footways focusing on Urban Village centres will be promoted, by reallocating road space and other means. The initial network, created at an early stage, will be improved to high quality standards, including facilities for benches and cycling parking at destinations, and provision for high quality servicing and maintenance, graffiti removal and landscaping.

3.14 To reduce the amount of land used for cars and to use Council and other land efficiently, the Council will review its parking provision in the light of changed priorities. After review therefore, any excess parking will be reallocated for sustainable transport and development for appropriate mixed uses.

POLICY U.4: RESIDENTIAL USES

WITHIN AN URBAN VILLAGE THE PLAN’S HOUSING POLICIES WILL APPLY WITH THE ADDITION OF THE FOLLOWING:

(i) A MINIMUM DENSITY OF 210 HABITABLE ROOMS PER HECTARE AND A MAXIMUM DENSITY DETERMINED BY THE DESIGN CRITERIA SET OUT IN THE PLAN AND SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE AND RELATED TO THE DISTANCE OF THE DEVELOPMENT FROM THE CENTRE OF THE VILLAGE;

(ii) INCREASED ACCOMMODATION IN LOWER DENSITY AREAS ADJACENT TO VILLAGE CENTRES WILL BE ACCEPTABLE EITHER THROUGH NEW DEVELOPMENTS OR BY EXTENSIONS TO EXISTING BUILDINGS.

Justification

3.15 The Urban Villages will be the focus for achieving high quality residential areas at higher densities adjacent to attractive centres that can be reached without a car. The Council supports the principles embodied in the Sustainable Residential Quality initiative promoted by the former LPAC (1997) as provided for in revised policy HP.4. In existing areas this will involve increasing densities for new development and allowing adaptation and extension of existing buildings in the areas immediately around village centres where this is to acceptable standards. To achieve an overall increase in environmental quality such development must be accompanied by enhanced standards of design, materials and hard and soft landscaping. New small scale “Urban Villages” in existing suburban areas will make existing suburban areas more suitable for sustainable living patterns and will reduce the need to travel. They will contribute to housing needs and the ‘Urban Renaissance’, as indicated in LPAC research and DETR guidance. To achieve an appropriate Urban Village mix affordable housing should be on site wherever possible, particularly since large residential would be involved. In order to meet the Urban Village objectives of community development and partnership, the formation of self-management and community ownership bodies to continue good management after construction will be encouraged.