

BOROUGH PLAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE
23 OCTOBER 2008

(7.15pm – 8.40pm)

PRESENT: Councillor Richard Chellew (in the Chair);
Councillors John Bowcott, David Dean (substitute for Jonathan Warne), Philip Jones, Ian Munn and Geraldine Stanford.

ALSO PRESENT: Council Officers
Chris James (Interim Spatial Policy Manager); and
M.J.Udall (Democratic Services)

Apologies for absence were received from: Councillor Jonathan Warne.

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Agenda Item 1)

No declarations were made.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3(a))

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Borough Plan Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on 12 June 2008 be signed as a correct record.

3 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES (Agenda Item 3(b))

Update on Heart of Merton Study (Minute 8, agenda pages 10/11)

A Member noted that Panel Members had not received the Heart of Merton Study referred to in Resolutions (1) & (2) on agenda page 8 (relating to the deferral of consideration of a proposal for a town centre designation for Colliers Wood).

Chris James (Interim Spatial Policy Manager) advised that the Heart of Merton Study had only just been completed in the week prior to this October meeting; and suggested that the matter be considered later in the meeting together with the timetable for the Local Development Framework and the possible need for additional Advisory Committee meetings (under Agenda item 5, Local Development Framework – Report on Overall Progress of the Core Strategy).

4 MERTON COUNCIL'S ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT 2007-08
(Agenda Item 4)

1. The Chairman indicated that it was proposed that he and the Vice-Chair go through the draft Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) in detail, but that this meeting was an opportunity for all Advisory Committee to raise issues.

2. There was extensive discussion regarding the housing targets included within the AMR, including the need to ensure that throughout the 2007/08 AMR reference was made to the current target of 370 homes per year rather than the previous target of 427. Chris James (Interim Spatial Policy Manager) confirmed that officers were presently working to the current target of 370; undertook to ensure that all references

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in the 2007/08 AMR referred to 370 target; and pointed out that Appendix 1 on agenda page 17 outlined feedback from the Government Office for London (GoL) on the 2006/07 AMR and so correctly quoted last year's target of 427.

3. Councillor David Dean referred to the housing target being easily met over the last few years. The Chairman suggested that whilst there had recently been a number of windfall housing development sites, meeting the housing target in future years might not be an easy task. Councillor Ian Munn referred to the discussion of this issue in the AMR on agenda pages 63 – 65, and the analysis of planning permissions granted and planning permissions actually completed; and the need to draw such figures together.

4. Councillor David Dean suggested that the housing target would easily be met in future years and requested that figures analysing whether or not this would be case, be submitted to the next Advisory Committee meeting.

5. Councillor Ian Munn referred to the need for Advisory Committee Members to see both the Housing and Economic Studies.

6. There was considerable discussion regarding employment issues, and the need to protect land designated for employment, from being developed for other purposes such as housing.

7. Councillor Philip Jones referred to the need for information on the amount of affordable housing being built, including whether the new (London Plan) target of 50% (previously 30%) for affordable housing was being met; noted that the affordable housing target in Chapter 6 of the draft AMR was shown as "XXX"; suggested that if housing targets were being met, this might assist in defending employment land from other uses; requested that more information be provided as to what percentage of affordable housing was being built in the east and west halves of the Borough, and how this related to Local Development Framework (LDF) targets.

8. There was discussion of the need for a mix of housing types, especially the provision of family housing as well as flats. Councillor David Dean suggested that this issue was not covered in the draft AMR. Officers advised that the AMR was an historic record and not a statement of aspiration. Councillor Philip Jones referred to current national policy supporting the provision of 1 & 2 bed flats making it difficult to refuse planning applications for flats, especially in areas where there was already a considerable amount of existing family housing.

9. Councillor Ian Munn noted that in the entry for Land at 7-13 Church Road, Mitcham on agenda page 96, the composition of on-site affordable housing was shown as "unknown", but he suggested this information should be available because planning permission had been granted on appeal and the development was now being built (as a mix of affordable housing and part ownership with the Housing

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Association).

10. Councillor Ian Munn referred to the housing prices on agenda page 48; and suggested that statistics be produced to show the differences between the east and west halves of the Borough, including median range figures for Mitcham and Morden. Councillor David Dean suggested that median, mean and average figures be produced.

11. The Chairman suggested that, whilst the draft AMR addressed core problems, the first two pages needed to be more hard hitting so as to highlight that there were areas of deprivation in Merton, although it was seen as a wealthy Borough; and referred to the differences in employment rates in the east and west halves of the Borough shown on agenda page 36.

12. Members noted that if they had any further comments on the AMR, then they should advise the Chairman, Vice-Chair and Chris James by e-mail.

13. Chris James confirmed that Recommendation (2) on agenda page 13 should be amended so as to end with the phrase "31 December 2008" and that the words following ("subject to final consideration of the Annual Monitoring Plan") should be deleted.

RESOLVED: That (1) the Advisory Committee notes the first draft of Merton Council's Annual Monitoring Report 2007-08; and.

(2) the Advisory Committee recommends Cabinet that the Director for Environment and Regeneration in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Traffic Management, the Chairman and Vice Chair of the Borough Plan Advisory Committee be given delegated authority by Cabinet to make any amendments required and agree Merton's Annual Monitoring Report for submission to the Secretary of State by 31 December 2008.

5 LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK – REPORT ON OVERALL
PROGRESS OF THE CORE STRATEGY (Agenda Item 6)

(a) Chris James (Interim Spatial Policy Manager) advised that since he had joined Merton in September, the timetable for the Local Development Framework (LDF) had been reviewed; and that the timetable shown on agenda page 175 envisaging public consultation starting in December 2009 no longer appeared feasible; and circulated a revised timetable envisaging public consultation starting in February 2009 and including the need for a further meeting of the Advisory Committee in December 2008 (to consider the Core Strategy).

(b) Chris James emphasised that the revised timetable was very tight and could be affected by GLA statements on how London Borough LDF's were to be considered, and whether the Government Office for London (GoL) were satisfied as to the legality

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of any new GLA proposals; and indicated that this might result in the submission of papers at the last minute to future meetings.

(c) Chris James indicated that the Core Strategy papers should be available by 18 November 2008 and Members agreed to check their diaries for a possible further meeting of the Advisory Committee on 9 December 2008.

(d) Councillor Ian Munn requested that both the Housing and Economic Studies, and the Heart of Merton Study be made available prior to any December meeting. Chris James undertook to do this and noted a request from Members that such papers be provided to Advisory Committee Councillors as soon as they were available (instead of waiting until agenda despatch).

(e) Reference was made to the Heart of Merton Study possibly being made available already to Ward Councillors, and the Chairman requested that in future Advisory Committee Members be sent such papers at the same time as Ward Councillors.

(f) Reference was made to the Core Strategy having been revised to make it a more strategic document and the use of the Core Strategy when considering planning applications; and Chris James confirmed that in this context, consideration would be given to seeking Legal advice as to the wording of the Core Strategy.

(g) There was extensive discussion as the circumstances leading to the Secretary of State removing 12 policies from Merton's Unitary Development Plan (as referred to on agenda page 26), and the increased timescale before the LDF was implemented and could replace some of the removed policies.

RESOLVED: That (1) a further meeting of the Advisory Committee be held, provisionally on 9 December 2008 (subject to Members checking their availability), to consider the Core Strategy; and

(2) subject to (1) above, the new timetable (as circulated at the meeting) for the production of the Core Strategy be noted.

6 WANDLE VALLEY REGIONAL PARK – PROGRESS REPORT
(Agenda Item 6)

1. Chris James (Interim Spatial Policy Manager) introduced this item, which included a copy of the draft report "Wandle Valley Regional Park (2008), A Vision for the Future".

2. Councillor Ian Munn

(a) noted that paragraph 2.1 (on agenda page 177) indicated that the final report "Wandle Valley Regional Park (2008), A Vision for the Future" was due to be published later in 2008;

(b) noted that the issues relating to Wandle Valley had been widely consulted upon as part of the Local Development Framework (LDF) process; and

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(c) indicated that he had assumed that Wandle Valley Vision would be separately consulted upon and the results fed back to this Advisory Committee.

3. Chris James confirmed that the Wandle Valley Vision Statement would be separately consulted upon.

4. Councillor Ian Munn

(i) indicated that the previous consultation on Wandle Valley ending in March 2007 had not involved Merton Councillors, apart from the Cabinet Member;

(ii) contended that therefore there had been no opportunity to discuss Wandle Valley issues in a public forum;

(iii) suggested that the Wandle Valley proposals needed to be published for formal public consultation so that he and others could comment;

(iv) suggested that the next Local Government Act should include a provision whereby local Boroughs didn't pay the Lea Valley Regional Park precept, but instead paid a Wandle Valley precept; and

(v) raised concerns on a number of other issues including funding and who would be appointed as directors of the body running the Wandle Valley Park.

5. The Chairman also referred to concerns about the funding strategy for Wandle Valley.

6. Councillor David Dean referred to the Act of Parliament setting up the Wimbledon and Putney Commons, and suggested that possibly a similar Act could be considered for the Wandle Valley.

7. It was noted that the report (in paragraph 2.5 on agenda page 178) indicated boundaries of the proposed Wandle Valley Regional Park hadn't been changed (and in particular "the initial mapping errors have not been amended in this draft"). Councillor Ian Munn referred to his question at the Council Meeting of 17 September 2008 asking if various areas would be included within the new Regional Park's boundaries, and the reply from Cabinet Member, Councillor David Simpson, indicating that Cricket Green, Cramner Green and Three Kings Piece were within the initial draft boundary (despite initial mapping problems); but that other areas would be considered as part of the consultation. Councillor Ian Munn suggested that the Cabinet Member's response implied the Cabinet Member believed there would be further consultation and Councillor Ian Munn requested confirmation whether this was the case.

8. Councillor Geraldine Stanford indicated that she had found the original consultation via the internet very difficult to respond to, and supported further consultation, and for such consultation to be not carried out just via the internet but to include the provision of hard copies of documents, questionnaires etc and presentations at various sites in the Borough. Councillor Ian Munn supported this

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request.

9. Councillor Philip Jones suggested that the text of the draft Wandle Valley report implied that consultation had already taken place; and noted that the draft report also didn't include author names or where it had emanated from.

10. Chris James explained that the Wandle Valley Steering Group included officers and Members.

11. Members agreed that the Advisory Committee wished to see appropriate consultation in Merton on the Wandle Valley proposals. (See resolutions below.)

12. The Chairman indicated that it would be helpful if Councillors Ian Munn and Geraldine Stanford could advise Chris James relating to their concerns regarding the Wandle Valley Regional Park's proposed boundaries. Councillor and Geraldine Stanford indicated that she had already provided comments to Liz Devlin in Chris James' team.

13. Councillor David Dean indicated that he would like further information regarding biodiversity in the Wandle Valley, including clarity on the objectives and specific proposals for biodiversity, and clarification on whether there would be more green space or just protection of the existing green space. Chris James undertook to give a written response on the latter.

RESOLVED: That (1) the Cabinet be advised that Advisory Committee wishes to see appropriate formal public consultation in Merton on the Wandle Valley proposals;

(2) the Advisory Committee strongly recommends that the possibility of removing the electricity pylons, that extend across the Wandle Valley area, be explored;

(3) the Advisory Committee requests the Cabinet Member to advise the Advisory Committee on the proposed governance and management arrangements for the Wandle Valley Regional Park, including financing; and

(4) the Advisory Committee recommends that consideration be given in the next Local Government Act to including a provision seeking to amend the Lea Valley Act so that the local Boroughs current precepts/contributions towards the Lea Valley Regional Park, instead be paid towards the proposed Wandle Valley Regional Park.
