

## **Committee: Cabinet**

**Date: 18<sup>th</sup> January 2021**

Wards: all

**Subject: Six-week consultation on draft Borough Character Study and small sites guidance (draft supplementary planning documents to Merton's Local Plan)**

Lead officer: Director for Environment and Regeneration, Chris Lee

Lead member: Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency, Cllr Martin Whelton

Contact officer: Deputy FutureMerton Manager, Tara Butler

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### **Recommendations:**

- A. That Cabinet approve a six-week public consultation on the draft Borough Character Study and draft small sites guidance (both draft supplementary planning documents to Merton's Local Plan) to take place between February and March 2021
  - B. That approval of the consultation documents be delegated to the Director of Environment and Regeneration, Chris Lee, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency, Cllr Martin Whelton
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## **1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1. The purpose of the report is to seek Cabinet approval for six-week public consultation on Merton's draft Borough Character Study and draft Small Sites Toolkit as part of creating two new supplementary planning documents to Merton's Local Plan.

## **2 DETAILS**

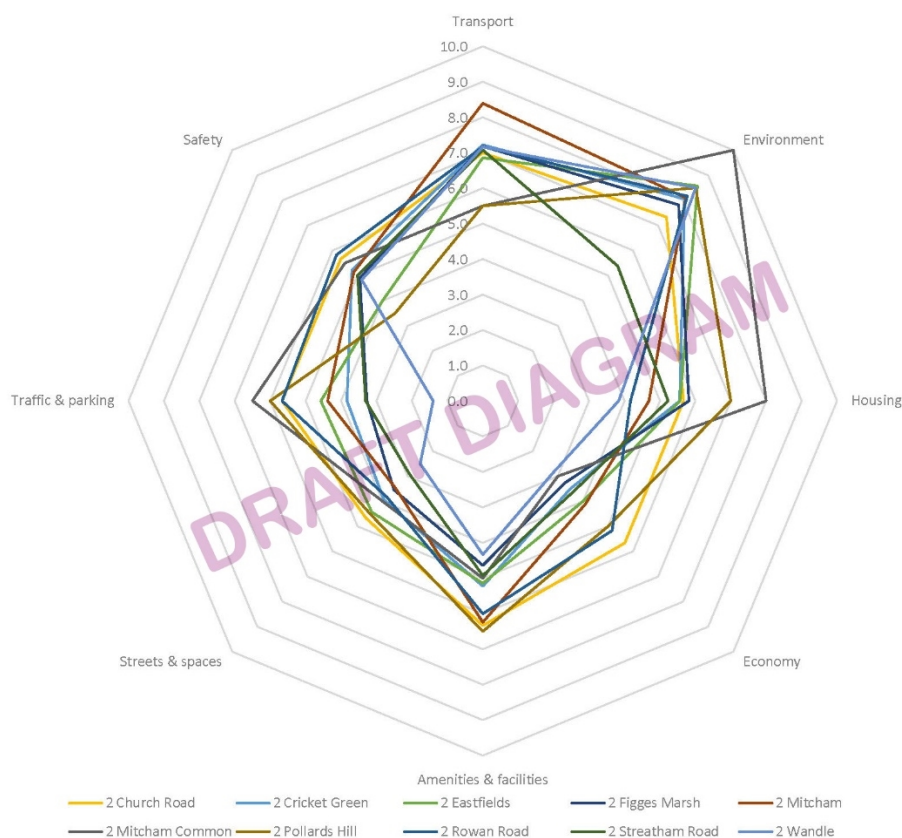
### **Borough character study**

- 2.1. The Borough Character Study was started in March 2020. Using funding from the GLA's Homebuilding Capacity Fund, Future Merton commissioned architects Allies and Morrison Urban Practitioners to undertake a borough wide Characterisation Study.
- 2.2. It is intended that the Characterisation Study will help support the Local Plan will assist with assessing future planning applications. The role of the study is to highlight Merton's unique socio-economic, environmental and physical character and give design guidance to future development to enhance the borough's existing built environment character.
- 2.3. The approach uses physical features and socio-economic and environmental characteristics to consider the borough character as five main neighbourhoods (Colliers Wood, Mitcham, Morden, Raynes Park and Wimbledon) with smaller areas of distinct character within them. The draft Borough Character Study sets out analysis on the character of each of the smaller areas, with guidance as to how new developments could either

repair, reinforce or reimagine the area. It is similar to the Borough Character Study that was carried out for about two thirds of Merton a few years ago

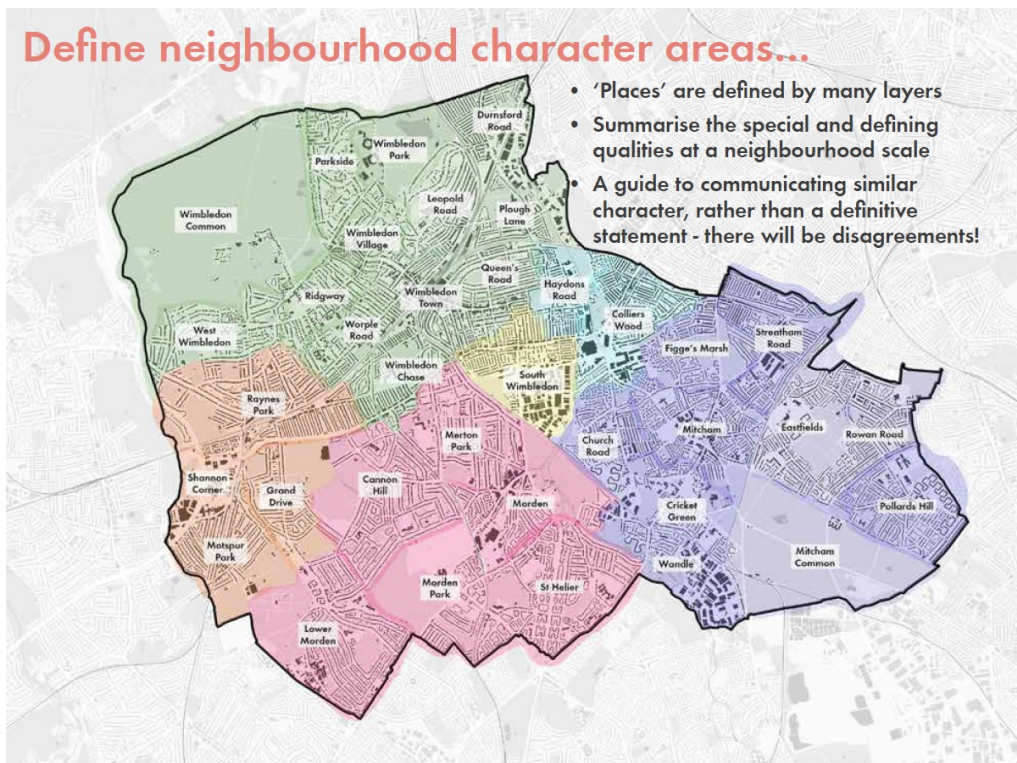
2.4. We have carried out extensive engagement with residents and other groups already as part of preparing the draft Borough Character Study. This included:

- A community network survey in July 2020 that engaged with a representative selection of community organisations that provide a space for local groups. This survey asked respondents to describe the role, use and reach that their venues had in their neighbourhoods.
- A 6 week online survey which took place between September and October 2020 that asked residents to comment on the perception of neighbourhood boundary lines. In addition, the survey also asked residents to rate their neighbourhoods on 8 topics: transport, environment, housing, economy, streets & spaces, traffic & parking and safety. This survey received 415 responses. Below is an example of how respondents rated Mitcham



- A virtual workshop with residents' groups and individual residents on 17<sup>th</sup> November 2020. Residents and community group representatives were invited to participate by sending an invitation to community groups and to people who wanted to. The workshop was used to discuss boundaries and neighbourhood character. The feedback from the workshop will be integrated into the Character Study.

## Define neighbourhood character areas...



- 'Places' are defined by many layers
- Summarise the special and defining qualities at a neighbourhood scale
- A guide to communicating similar character, rather than a definitive statement - there will be disagreements!

- 2.5. Feedback from residents has been used to improve the draft borough character study.
- 2.6. It is now intended to publish the whole draft borough character study for six weeks of borough-wide consultation in line with the procedures to create a supplementary planning document to Merton's Local Plan. Feedback from this second consultation would be used to further improve the draft Borough Character Study before presenting it to councillors for adoption.

### Small Sites Toolkit

- 2.7. Merton started preparing the Small Sites Toolkit in November 2019 using funding from the GLA's Homebuilding Capacity Fund. It is being developed in-house with the Future Merton team.
- 2.8. The Small Sites Toolkit will provide design guidance for development sites on sites up to 0.25 hectares.



- 2.9. Merton is characterised by small sites due to fragmented land ownership: lots of people own small amounts of land, such as houses with underused land, brownfield sites and undeveloped rooftops. High land and property prices means assembling a large site is expensive. Small sites have the potential to provide steady and incremental growth within the borough.
- 2.10. For the past 15 years around 90% of the planning applications Merton has received for new homes have been on small sites. Small sites are crucial to providing much-needed homes incrementally but can be challenging to design in established urban areas like Merton. Merton's draft small sites toolkit sets out architectural and urban design principles specifically to address the opportunities and challenges of delivering small sites to improve the design quality of small developments across the whole borough.
- 2.11. Feedback from the public engagement held in summer 2020 for the Housing Delivery Study (where over 2,000 residents responded) highlighted that 61% thought that homes should be built on underused small sites and that the top 3 priorities for future housing delivery are affordability (61%), quality of design (41%) and building sustainably (38%).
- 2.12. Other boroughs are undertaking similar exercises: Croydon adopted their 'Suburban Design Guide' that focussed on small site development in April 2019. Neighbouring and nearby boroughs, such as Kingston and Lewisham are currently developing Small Sites guidance also.
- 2.13. The Small Sites Toolkit consists of three tools to encourage applicants to have a design led approach. They are:
- **1. Design guidance:** structured on 5 main design principles.
    - Made in Merton (character and strategy)
    - High Quality Design (good design principles)
    - Putting People First (wellbeing)
    - Better Streets (public realm and street experience)
    - Economical and Sustainable (environment)
  - **2. Design Case Studies:** a catalogue of successful projects, in similar contexts to Merton, that respond well to specific small site obstructions (overlooking, backland sites etc.)
  - **3. Design and Access Statement Template:** A template to guide applicants to produce (and think about) projects more from a design perspective. The template asks a series of questions for applicants to answer and guides applications to provide visual justification for design decisions.

### 3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1. The alternative option for the Borough Character Study would have been to complete the Borough Character Study started in 2011. The 2011 Borough Character Study divided the borough into 36 neighbourhoods. Unfortunately, only about two thirds of the neighbourhoods were ever completed due to resource pressures and some of the information on the completed neighbourhoods is now out of date. In 2018 the council successfully bid for

GLA Homebuilding Capacity fund to carry out whole borough character study, using up-to-date information, feedback gathered from current residents, based on up-to-date planning policies and guidance. Information from the 2011 work was used to inform the 2021 Borough Character Study.

- 3.2. There are no reasonable alternative options for the small sites guidance other than not to carry out the work. This would mean a lack of planning guidance on small sites, which typify development in Merton. The relevant GLA Homebuilding Capacity Funding would have to be returned to the GLA if the project was not delivered.

## **4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED**

### **Engagement informing the draft documents**

- 4.1. Residents' engagement in July, September-October and November 2020 has already informed the drafting of Merton's emerging Borough Character Study; this is set out in paragraph 2.4 of the report above. Merton's Borough Plan Advisory Committee also received a presentation on the emerging Borough Character Study at their most recent meeting in November 2020

### **Future engagement proposed**

- 4.2. It is proposed to undertake six weeks of public consultation in preparing supplementary planning documents, with the consultation to take place from February to March 2021. The exact dates will be arranged to avoid substantially clashing with ongoing engagement on Merton's draft Local Plan and the South London Waste Plan, while progressing the projects in a timely manner.
- 4.3. Given the current Covid19 circumstances, engagement will continue to be online. The council will publicise the consultation via Instagram and other social media accounts, via the council's website, via emailing people and organisations on the council's Local Plan database. Public consultation will take place in line with Merton's adopted Statement of Community Involvement 2020 and the Coronavirus amendments to the planning regulations as set out in Section 7 of this report below.

## **5 TIMETABLE**

- 5.1. The draft timetable is as follows:
- 5.2. January 2021 – Councillors approve six weeks of public consultation on Merton's draft Borough Character Study and Merton's draft small sites guidance
- 5.3. February – March 2021: six weeks of public consultation takes place
- 5.4. April onwards: officers consider the consultation results and update the documents.
- 5.5. Next available Cabinet (probably June 2021): the updated Borough Character Study and small sites guidance recommended for adoption.

## **6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1. Funding for the consultancy for both of these projects comes from the GLA's Homebuilding Capacity Fund.
- 6.2. Funding for some elements of the public consultation will come from existing resources.

## **7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1. This report is based on the process for Supplementary Planning Documents is set out in Part 5 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 and augmented by the [The Town and Country Planning \(Local Planning\) \(England\) \(Coronavirus\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2020 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#) and the [Town and Country Planning \(Local Planning, Development Management Procedure, Listed Buildings etc.\) \(England\) \(Coronavirus\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2020 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)
- 7.2. The Borough Character study is being prepared as a supplementary planning document to Merton's Local Plan, including policy CS14 – Design, policies SPD1-D7 and the emerging local plan policies D5.1 to D5.5 and D5.8.

## **8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1. None for the purposes of this report.

## **9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1. None for the purposes of this report.

## **10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1. None for the purposes of this report.

## **11 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT**

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## **12 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 12.1.