

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 22nd June 2021

Wards: all

Subject: Adoption of Merton's borough character study and small sites toolkit as two 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

Recommendations:

- A. That Cabinet adopt Merton's Borough Character Study and Small Sites Toolkit as two supplementary planning documents to Merton's Local Plan.
-

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. In January 2021 Merton's Cabinet approved six weeks of public consultation on Merton's draft Borough Character Study and draft Small Sites Toolkit as part of creating two new supplementary planning documents (SPDs) to Merton's Local Plan.
- 1.2. Following consultation feedback both draft SPDs have been amended and Cabinet are recommended to adopt both as 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 Character Study.
- 2.2. Once adopted, Merton's Borough Character Study will help support the Local Plan and 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. It helps decision makers on planning applications to consider whether or not a proposed development would enhance, compliment or detract from the character of its surrounding area.
- 2.3. The approach uses physical features and socio-economic and environmental characteristics to consider the borough's character as six main neighbourhoods (Colliers Wood, Mitcham, Morden, Raynes Park, South Wimbledon and Wimbledon) with smaller areas of distinct character within them. The 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, re-examine or re-imagine the area and highlights potential growth opportunities. It is similar to the Borough Character Study that was carried out for about two thirds of Merton a few years ago.

- 2.4. Please note that there are some minor amendments to be added before it is adopted:
- (i) Neighbourhood areas plan to be added to appendix plans.
 - (ii) Merton Park diagram (p. 70) to be amended to reflect updated boundaries.

Small Sites Toolkit

- 2.5. Merton started preparing the Small Sites Toolkit in November 2019 using funding from the GLA's Homebuilding Capacity Fund.
- 2.6. The Small Sites Toolkit provides design guidance for development sites on sites up to 0.25 hectares.



- 2.7. 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 values and property prices means assembling a large site is expensive in Merton. Small sites have the potential to provide steady and incremental growth within the borough.
- 2.8. 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 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.
- 2.9. Other boroughs are undertaking similar exercises: Croydon adopted their 'Suburban Design Guide' that focussed on small site development in April 2019, whilst consultation on Lewisham's Small Sites SPD closed on 7 June

2021. Neighbouring and nearby boroughs, such as Kingston are currently developing Small Sites guidance also.

2.10. The Small Sites Toolkit consists of three tools to encourage applicants to have a design led approach. They are:

1. Design guidance: structured on four main design principles.

- Made in Merton
- Putting People First
- High Quality Design
- Economical and Sustainable

2. Design Case Studies: a catalogue of successful and exemplar projects on small sites 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.

2.11. Please note that there are some hyperlinks in the document (highlighted red) that are to be updated before final adoption.

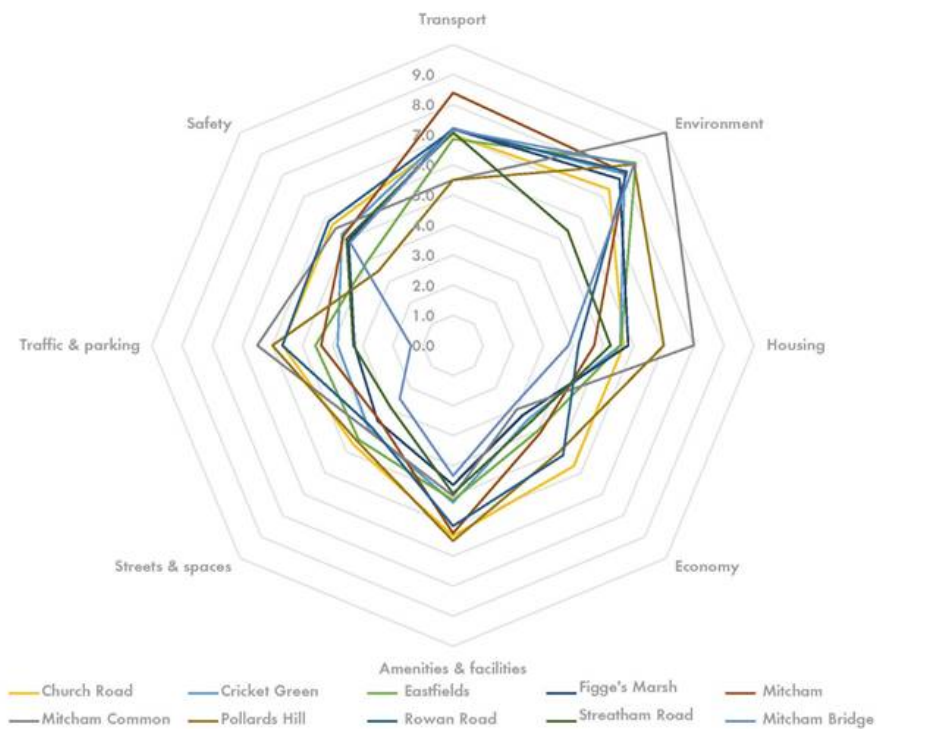
2.12. **Public consultation on the draft Borough Character Study and Small Sites toolkit SPDs**

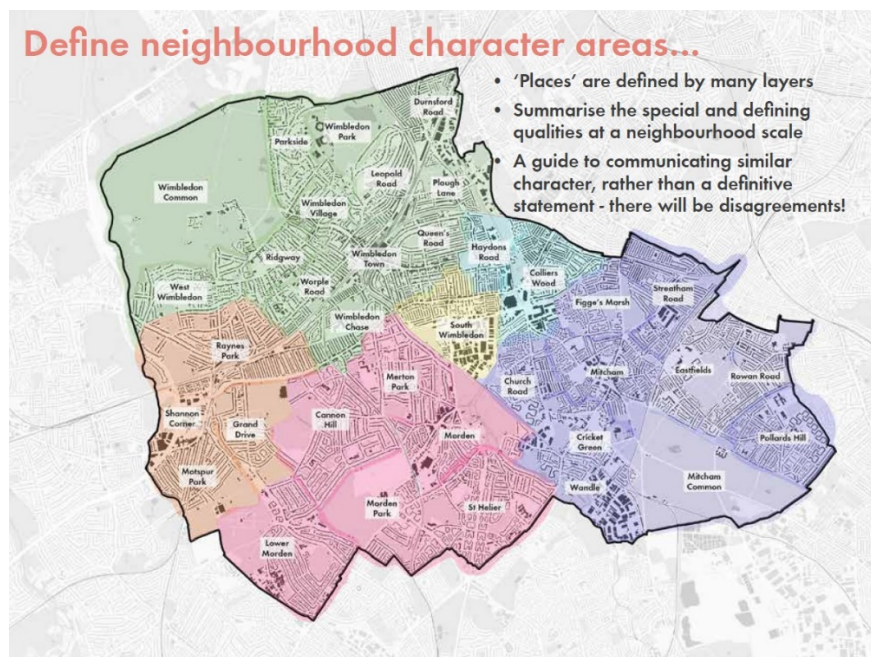
2.13. In January 2021 Cabinet approved six weeks of public consultation on both the draft Borough Character Study and the draft Small Sites toolkit. Prior to this, officers had conducted extensive public engagement which informed and shaped the draft documents

- **Summer 2020:** 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%). This information was used to inform the draft Small Sites Toolkit
- For the draft Borough Character Study,
 - **July 2020** 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.
 - **September-October 2020** - A 6 week online survey took place 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. The next page shows an example of how respondents rated Mitcham.

- **November 2020** - A virtual workshop with residents' groups and individual residents on 17th 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.



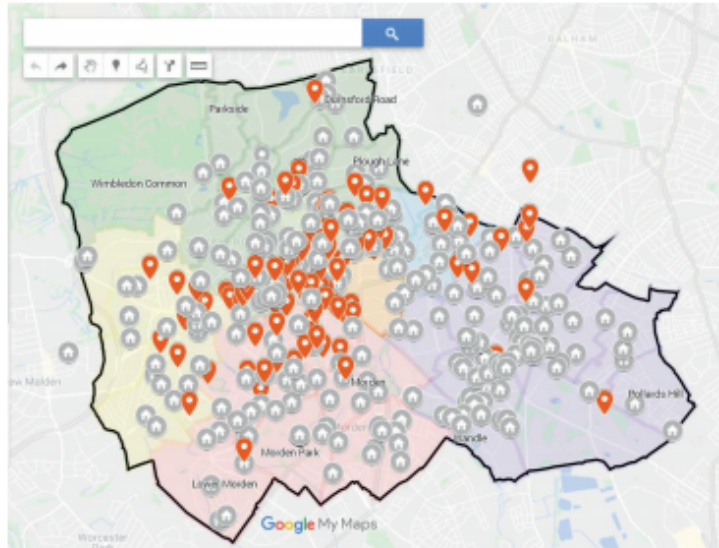


February – March 2021 – statutory public consultation on draft SPDs

- 2.14. Following Cabinet approval in January 2021, officers carried out six weeks of public consultation from 9th February to 23rd March 2021 on the draft Borough Character Study and on the draft Small Sites Toolkit in line with planning legislation for the creation of supplementary planning documents.
- 2.15. Due to Covid19 restrictions, engagement was carried out digitally on both documents. This included an online survey, information on the council's website, an online presentation at two community forums and a presentation to the Design Review Panel.
- 2.16. Formal written consultation emails were sent to local residents, businesses, residential groups and organisations, environmental stakeholders (e.g. Environment Agency) and other interested parties.
- 2.17. The consultation was featured in the My Merton e-newsletter which goes to circa 7,000 addresses. Emails were also sent to circa 700 stakeholders on Merton's Local Plan consultation database and circa 500 stakeholders on Merton Council's Consultation Database.
- 2.18. Future Merton presented the Borough Character Study to the Mitcham and Morden Community Forums on 25 March and 26 March 2021.
- 2.19. The consultation was also publicised via social media on the council's Facebook and Twitter accounts.
- 2.20. Over 100 responses were received to the formal consultation on the draft Borough Character Study SPD. A few more responses were received via the SurveyMonkey form (54) as opposed to email (51). The questionnaire on Survey Monkey asked for the participant's views on the sections of the SPD and some demographic characteristics. The feedback for each of the chapters is detailed in Appendix C to this report

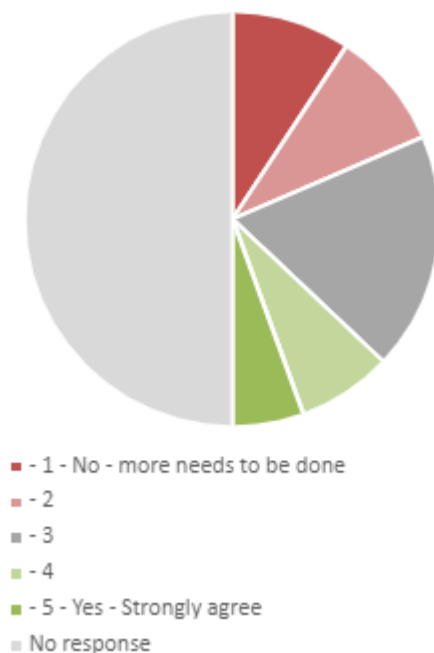
- 2.21. The map below (also in appendix C to this report) illustrates the geographical spread of responses to the online survey for the Borough Character Study. Three quarters of respondents were happy with the way the boundaries had been drawn, the red dots illustrate the clusters of respondents who wished the boundaries to be drawn differently. Their feedback has been used to amend the boundaries within the Character Study.

Neighbourhoods review



- 2.22. The graphs in Appendix C shows the scores that respondents gave for each of their neighbourhoods for Transport, Environment, Housing, Economy, Amenities & Facilities, Streets & Spaces, Traffic & Parking and Safety. Respondents were also asked what they thought was special about the character of their neighbourhood and what needed improving. The example graph below illustrates this for the South Wimbledon neighbourhood.

South Wimbledon - Do you agree with the contents of this chapter?



2.23. For Merton’s Small Sites Toolkit, the main users of this supplementary planning document will be homeowners, SME builders to raise the quality of small sites development in Merton. Therefore, as part of the consultation on 12th March a workshop was held with twelve built environment professionals that consisted of developers architects, landscape designers and environmental consultants who specialised in small sites. Feedback included strengthening the draft toolkit on matters relating to climate change, carbon saving and greening sites and feedback was used to improve the draft SPD.

2.24. On 24th March Merton’s Design Review Panel reviewed both the draft Small Sites Toolkit and the draft Borough Character Study.

(i) Borough Character Study

The panel was generally positive about this study and recognised it’s potential as a long-term document to raise the quality of design. The document was complemented for being well illustrated, however it was suggested that a summarising shortened version would be helpful. The consultant is currently developing an interactive online version that summarises the report.

(ii) Small Sites Toolkit

The Design Review Panel were particularly positive about the Small Sites Toolkit, that it was well put together and could be an important tool in raising design standards in Merton on small sites.

The notes of the Design Review Panel meeting are found on the council’s website here: <https://www.merton.gov.uk/assets/Documents/Design-Review->

- 2.25. All consultation responses were considered in revising the draft Borough Character Study and Small Sites Toolkit for adoption.

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

- 4.1. As set out in the body of this report.

5 TIMETABLE

- 5.1. As set out in the body of this report.

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 SPD and Small Sites Toolkit SPD are being prepared as two supplementary planning documents 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**
- Appendix 1 – Borough Character Study SPD for adoption
 - Appendix 2 – Small Sites Toolkit SPD for adoption
 - Appendix 3 – consultation report on draft Borough character study
 - Appendix 4 – consultation report on the draft Small Sites Toolkit
- 12 BACKGROUND PAPERS**
- 12.1. NPPF 2019 and draft 2021
- 12.2. Planning White Paper 2020
- 12.3. National Planning Policy Guidance
- 12.4. London Plan 2021
- 12.5. Merton’s Core Planning Strategy 2011; Merton’s sites and policies plan 2014; Merton’s emerging Local Plan 2021

This page is intentionally left blank