

CHE/P4477  
23 March 2012

Strategic Policy and Research  
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**For the attention of Ms Tara Butler**

Dear Ms Butler

**London Borough of Merton – Draft Sites and policies Development  
Plan Document and draft Proposals Map, Public Consultation  
January – March 2012**

Further to our representation on behalf of Workspace Group to the Site & Policies DPD – Call for Sites Consultation in September 2011, we wish to submit the following representation in relation to the draft Sites and Policies DPD.

As outlined in previous representations, Workspace Group owns and manages approximately 100 sites in and around London, and provides approximately 4,000 entrepreneurs and SME's with the commercial environment in which they can thrive. Accommodation is available in a vast range of sizes, down to as small as 500 sq ft, and is leased on flexible terms, allowing small businesses the opportunity to expand and contract without onerous property obligations.

**PART I - DRAFT DETAILED PLANNING POLICIES**

DM H2: Housing Mix

We support this policy aim to create socially mixed communities by providing a choice of housing sizes and types. Paragraph 2.24 states that housing mix will be applied having regard to relevant factors such as individual site circumstances, site location, identified local need, economics of provision such as financial viability and other planning contributions. This is considered to be a pragmatic approach, particularly in light of the Merton draft CIL and Mayors CIL contributions which will have a significant impact on affordable housing and viability of new developments. The housing mix which is referred to in paragraph 2.22 should be applied flexibly and should take into consideration the relevant factors as set out in paragraph 2.24.

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DM C1: Community Facilities

We support the policy aim to ensure the provision of sufficient, accessible well-designed community facilities within the Borough. The policy states that proposals for new development should ensure that facilities are provided in accessible locations and with good links to public transport. Given the nature of 'community facilities' this is an important consideration of any proposal and those sites identified within this DPD should ensure that accessibility is key.

DM C2: Education

The policy aim to ensure that there are sufficient school places of a suitable modern standard is supported. Subsection C) which states that 'Large development sites which will result in a substantial increased need for school places will need to incorporate provision for a new school on the proposed site' is unclear. There is no definition or clarification within the supporting text as to what is deemed to be a 'large development'. The text does state that a development which creates the need for 63 school places (30%) or more will be considered as having a 'substantial' increased need for school places. This does not take into account the level of school place vacancy within the area, which must be a consideration, nor does it take into account the sites overall suitability for a school use. Policy DM C1 lists a number of criteria which make the provision of community facilities acceptable within development proposals; such as accessibility, links to public transport, access and parking and considers the impact of the uses on the amenities of neighbouring residents and businesses. These criteria should equally be applied to the development of new schools/educational uses.

As an example there may be large mixed uses development sites which are proposing commercial and light industrial uses in tandem with residential uses may result in an increased demand for school places but there may be other factors such as lack of parking, poor access and egress which could not viably support an educational facility within the site.

The proposed Alternative Option set out in 3.11 whereby this policy could be incorporated into the community facilities policy would seem a common sense approach so that the same criteria are applied.

DM E1: Employment Areas in Merton

We recognise that the Council wish to resist the loss of employment land and maximise business opportunities within the Borough. This has been an objective which has been carried through from the Core Strategy. However we wish to make comment to subsection b) and f) within this policy.

Subsection b)

The Policy states in subsection b) that Council will support proposals in employment sites which provide:

- i) large (above 280sqm) offices and businesses (B1(a) use class) in town and local centres or in areas with good access to public transport (PTAL 4 and above) and within close proximity to additional services for employees and workers
- ii) small (below 280sqm) offices and businesses (B1(a) use class) throughout the borough.

As mentioned above Workspace is the leading provider of affordable business space for let to small and medium enterprises (SME's) in and around London. The Group owns and manages over 100 business centres within the M25, which offer serviced offices, office, studios, workshops, light industrial and storage space. The majority of the Group's sites comprise large properties, in

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accessible and prime locations, which provide small units (typically below 1,000sq.ft) available for rent by SME's on flexible short term leases.

As an example the Rainbow Industrial Estate is located within PTAL 4-5, however there are various site constraints in terms of the access and egress; the sites confined nature between railway lines; and proximity to neighbouring residential properties. As such this site and other similar sites would be expected to provide solely larger offices and businesses as proposed within Policy DM E1, however in reality this may not be practical despite the sites PTAL rating.

It is therefore considered that the policy should allow flexibility for proposals for smaller units on sites in locations with a higher PTAL and that an application should be assessed on its own merits and take into account other factors such as the sites constraints and the overall business plan and end-user which is being proposed (SME's, bespoke premises etc).

Subsection f)

With regards to the policy itself subsection f) states that proposals relating to employment sites will only be supported that:

'Provide research and development (B1(b) use class), light industrial (B1(c) use class), general industrial (B2 use class) and storage and distribution (B8 use class) in the designated industrial areas; Strategic Industrial Locations and Locally Significant Industrial Sites'.

The Rainbow Industrial Estate has been identified in Core Strategy Policy 12 as a Locally Significant Industrial Site and therefore the above subsection f) would be applicable to this site. However, the Delivery and Monitoring section of the Core Strategy Policy 12 states that for the Rainbow Industrial Estate that due to the specific characteristics of the site Policy CS12 may be delivered through the comprehensive plan-led redevelopment of the whole site. Proposals must be employment-led and may incorporate a greater mix of uses than B1(b), B1(c), B2 and B8, where this contributes to the site meeting Policy CS12 and the Objectives of Merton's Economic Development Strategy.

Whilst it is recognised that the Rainbow Industrial Estate has not been included within the Draft Site and Policies DPD as a proposals site due to its specific identification within the Core Strategy, it is considered that Policy DM E1 should reflect the adopted text of the Core Strategy Policy 12. This could be made clear within the Delivery and Monitoring section of DM E1 that there are Locally Significant Industrial Sites which can deliver a greater mix of uses than stipulated within subsection f).

DM E3: Protection of Scattered Employment Sites

We recognise the Councils need to resist the loss of scattered employment sites, and support the flexibility within this policy for alternative uses as set out in subsection a). It is however queried as to why the Council deem it necessary to actively market the site for at least 30 months. This is considered an exceptionally long period to allow a site to remain vacant. This does not seem to be an economically sustainable approach to ensuring maximisation of development potential within the borough. Nor does the period as suggested take into account changes in economic circumstances such as the recent recession.

As it currently stands this policy would neither comply with the draft NPPF which states that local planning authorities should apply the presumption in favour of sustainable development and seek to find solutions to overcome substantial planning objections where practical and consistent with the

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Framework, nor does it comply with PPS4 (EC2.1 (b)) which supports existing business sectors but states that policies should be flexible enough to accommodate sectors not anticipated in the plan and allow a quick response to changes in economic circumstances.

We suggest that this marketing period be reduced to a reasonable timeframe (for instance 1 year to 18 months) and allow for flexible planning in times of poor economic climate.

DM D1: Design considerations in all developments

We support the Council's expectation that new development should achieve high quality design and protect amenities within the Borough, however we raise a concern with paragraph 6.4 of this policy which states that the Council will seek a minimum garden area of 50sqm as a single usable plot for all new houses and 10sqm in the case of flats per habitable room. Whilst it is recognised that this amount of amenity space is a reflection of the Merton *New Residential Development SPG* (December 1999) it is considered that this is overly prescriptive and does not allow for developments to maximise their potential.

The SPG is an outdated document and it states within the Delivery and Monitoring subsection of the Core Strategy that the Council will be developing a new Design SPD to provide additional guidance on matters which includes the provision of amenity space. It is considered that the inclusion of these amenity space figures in the Site and Policies DPD is pre-emptive of a new, up-to-date Design SPD.

Whilst these amenity space provisions may remain aspirations of the Council it is considered that these minimums are not practical and/or feasible particularly within mixed use flatted residential developments where amenity is provided predominantly by balconies, roof terraces and communal gardens. The requirement for 10sqm per habitable room would not be deliverable or practical.

The Mayor's draft Housing SPD (December 2011) states that 'a minimum of 5sqm of private outdoor space should be provided for 1-2 person dwellings and an extra 1sqm should be provided for each additional occupant'. It is considered that Policy DM D1 should reflect the Mayor's standards, as should any new Design SPD.

DM D4: Urban Design and the Public Realm

We support the urban design principles set out in this policy.

DM EP1: Opportunities for decentralised energy networks

We support the policy aim to establish decentralised energy. The Council identifies Colliers Wood, Morden and Mitcham as areas for opportunity for the development of decentralised energy networks. What is unclear from this policy is whether there will be support for decentralised energy networks within other parts of the Borough which have not been specifically identified. It is considered that the policy should not be restricted to the three areas identified and should provide for alternative sites/areas within Merton to be developed for decentralised energy networks in the future where they are feasible and meet necessary planning standards.

DM F1: Support for flood risk management

The policy provides a table which identifies appropriate development within the various flood zones, this generally accords with PPS25. PPS25 also states that applications for minor development and change of use should not be subject to the Sequential and Exceptions test. They should therefore be excluded from the table set out in this policy.

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DM T1: Support for sustainable transport and active travel

The policy states that the council will secure improved public transport facilities and interchange opportunities through planning obligations. This policy should be amended to make reference to the Community Infrastructure Levy which will be the principle means by which developer contributions towards providing necessary infrastructure such as Sustainable Transport will be collected.

DM T3: Applying relevant car parking and servicing standards

We support the policies reference within subsection a) to the London Plan maximum standards for car parking, and agree that development should provide the level of car parking required to serve the site taking into account its PTAL and local circumstances.

**Part II - 3**

We recognise that the Rainbow Industrial Estate has not been included within the Site and Policies DPD as a result of its identification in the Merton Core Strategy Economic Development Policy 12 and within the supporting text, paragraph 20.16.

The Draft Sites and Policies DPD explains in Part II – 3 that,

*'some of the sites that were initially suggested for redevelopment to provide new uses have not progressed to this round of public consultation at this time for the following reasons:*

- *The site has been withdrawn by the person or organisation that originally suggested the site;*
- *The potential uses for the site are set out in other documents (e.g. Merton's Core Planning Strategy 2011) and redevelopment of the site is already in progress in conjunction with the local community through a planning brief;*
- *The site is already the subject of a live planning application;*
- *The site already has permission for its potential use so to allocate it for the same use would not provide any greater certainty or benefit than currently exists'.*

Whilst it is noted that the second bullet point can be applied to the Rainbow Industrial Estate it is considered that this point needs to be made clear within the adopted version of the Sites and Policies DPD.

It is therefore suggested that the explanatory text which is currently included within the draft document be carried over to the adopted version so that it is implicitly clear that there are sites within Merton which are suitable for redevelopment but have not been incorporated within the document for the reasons as outlined above.

Alternatively, it is suggested that reference be made to an appendices which includes a list of all sites specifically incorporated within the core strategy for further clarification.

Suggestion

Retain the list as currently written in draft version of the document within the adopted version of the DPD; or

Amend the second bullet point to read

- *The potential uses for the site are set out in other documents e.g. Merton's Core Planning Strategy 2011 (see appendix X for a list of sites) and redevelopment of the site is already in*

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*progress in conjunction with the local community through a planning brief;*

Incorporate an appendix which includes all of the sites identified within the core strategy e.g. Rainbow Industrial Estate, Gap Road etc.

I trust that the enclosed representations will assist with your formulation of the Merton Sites and Policies Development Plan Document and Draft proposals Map. We look forward to hearing your views in relation to the above in due course. In the meantime, we would be grateful for your confirmation that the above representations have been received and will be considered as part of the preparation of the Sites and Policies DPD.

Yours faithfully