

Response from Merton Extinction Rebellion to Merton's Local Plan stage 2a February 2021

Good morning

We hope this email finds you well.

We as a group extinction rebellion Merton would like to respond to the local plan. We have not been able to provide a very detailed response as many of our members are in survival mode, just trying to get through this pandemic.

However we have read the other excellent work from Mitcham cricket green, The Mitcham society, the Wimbledon society, the Green party and The Merton residence transport group and we fully endorsed their excellent suggestions.

We also think that this isn't the time to be actually doing a local plan. We do not know what a post Covid world will look like. We worry that this obsession with building high tower blocks will lead to them not being occupied, as if working from home trends continue people will want more space and we wonder what the demand will be for these flats.

We are also extremely worried about the amount of trees that are felled in Merton. The council do not seem to care about our mature trees and just seem to take the easy option and just chop them down rather than look at ways that we can retain these trees. The recent example at Mitcham bridge where 16 groups including ours were against the felling of the trees and you completely ignored us and carried on with your ecocide.

The climate and ecological emergency should be top of everything that we do. We are in existential crisis where as a species we are heading for extinction.

RAYNES PARK 7: N3.4

Rethink objectives to prioritise Climate Change, improving air quality and mitigating flood plain risks, through immediate planting of street trees along Town Centre Coombe Lane and Kingston Road, creating biodiversity corridors.

Urgently need proposals for encouraging active travel, creating improved pedestrianised areas, safe cycling infrastructure and better links between the two shopping areas and between Raynes Park and Wimbledon Town Centres.

Prioritise:

- better enforcement/monitoring on SUDs & flood prevention measures
- more protection for existing trees and clearer policies on tree replacement
- more protection for MOL, SINC, green corridor, TPO's
- strengthening guidance on limiting height of buildings

C H. 1 5 - Infrastructure

Policy IN16 b), should require highways engineers to be included in the dialogue between service providers and developers because there is currently a disconnect between the needs of tree health, the limited locations for street trees due to random underground utilities and the intrusion of multiple feeder pillars and CCTV. Reference should be made to the Tree Strategy to inform final locations.

Item 16.1.13, requirement for installation of digital infrastructure and enabling works to not cause unacceptable damage to visual amenity for new development or environmentally sensitive features or locations should be extended borough-wide and for all locations. Currently feeder pillars disfigure many locations in an uncontrolled fashion.

CH. 16 – Places & Spaces in a Growing Borough

Policy LPD5.1

Item a), i) & iii), should specifically include retention and protection of existing trees in addition to the planting of new trees (rather than generalised ‘landscaping’)

Item v), should include significant and veteran trees as Merton heritage assets - ditto Policy D5.5 b) & c) and the use of TPO’s extended to cover all ‘Heritage’ trees in the borough and other significant trees in Conservation areas.

Item viii), requirement to avoid undermining design by variations, should include specific mention of trees planted in the ground. It is unsustainable and visually unacceptable to resort to trees being planted in pots due to existing underground utilities (their presence should be determined prior to the proposals stage and relocated to enable trees to be planted in the ground).

The document should make clear reference to the value of trees to the environment through their ecosystem benefits as well as their ‘amenity value’. It should require developments to result in a net increase in tree canopy cover. London Plan and council Tree Strategy should be specifically referenced.

It should be recognised that to increase tree canopy cover and be sustainable, the priority should be the retention and protection of existing trees. Existing trees are currently undervalued in the assessments made when considering planning applications and the notion, too regularly expressed, that existing trees can be ‘replaced’ is wrong as it takes many new trees to replace the ecosystem and amenity benefits of a mature tree and there is also the loss of tree canopy cover while new trees attain the size of the tree felled – i.e. there is no catch-up. (see C.8 Blue & Green)

Policy D5.2

Item g), tree planting, as part of changes to & enhancement of highways & the public realm, should be supported by highways engineers through including more trees and redirecting utilities to accommodate tree planting (included in the cost of development or road improvement works). In addition there is a solution to avoid cluttering streets with parking signs by the adoption of low level signs at the back of footpath. This would protect traditional locations for trees i.e. opposite or in line with party walls in residential streets.

Item j), the reference to the conversion of front gardens for vehicle parking, should be strengthened with the preparation of a strongly worded SPG for direction/guidance of residents and developers. The extent of paving (whether so called porous or not) should be limited to enable existing trees and soft landscape to be retained or planted with run off directed to soft areas, which in addition would help minimise run-off into the sewage system. Increased monitoring and planning enforcement would be essential in support.

Policy D5.3.27, landscape planning conditions require reinforcement to include a management plan and replacement of failures within 5 years to ensure tree and shrub planting establish for long-term benefit. This would improve sustainability, tree canopy cover and bio-diversity as well as the other benefits that greening the borough brings.

Item 5.3.28, regarding climate change should include the use of waste water for trees and other planting.

Policy D5.5, should include 'Heritage' trees to be retained, protected and celebrated (see Policy LPD5.1 v)

Chapter 17 Transport & Urban Mobility

Policy T6.8, item j)

Repurposing of kerb space', whilst recognising need for enabling all ability pavement use and access, needs to address current infrastructure taking precedence over traditional street tree locations, to detriment of tree planting rhythm eg, parking signs and payment meters, and CCTV cameras, which are currently permitted to take precedence over street trees (eg Hartfield Road). As part of climate emergency tree strategy, departments eg Highways, need to cooperate with Green spaces

We look forward to a greener and cleaner Merton.

Kind Regards

