

Planning Policy
London Borough of Merton
Civic Centre
London Road
Morden
SM4 5DX

1 February 2021

Dear Sir/Madam

REPRESENTATIONS TO STAGE 2A OF THE DRAFT MERTON LOCAL PLAN

On behalf of our client, Kingston Space Property (KSP), we write in response to the consultation on the New Local Plan for the London Borough of Merton.

With their partners, KSP has recently purchased c. 5.5ha of the 44ha Willow Lane Estate, so is now a significant landowner within this important Strategic Industrial Location (SIL).

KSP supports the general aims of the Plan to strengthen Merton's local economy throughout the Local Plan period. Given the site's location within the SIL, it has the potential to contribute towards delivering this strategic aim. Therefore, KSP welcomes the presumption in favour for development that raises the number and range of jobs as set out in draft policy EC7.1. KSP is also supportive of the Plan's aims to create the conditions for job growth that is appropriate to its location and harnessing growth to deliver clear benefits for residents and businesses.

Our representations to the Plan are made in context of considering the site for intensification for industrial B2/B8 purposes, to ensure there is a positive context for intensifying the site. Some clarification is also sought on a number of the draft policies.

Representations to the Local Plan

Protection and intensification of Strategic Industrial Locations (SILs)

Overall, KSP is supportive of the Local Plan's aims to protect and intensify industrial land within the borough. However, it is important to consider that not all industrial type uses will result in an increase in direct employment; but can be fundamental to indirectly supporting the strategic functions of the London economy, such as data centres or distribution hubs. Where such circumstances can be evidenced, we consider that there should be some flexibility written into this policy to reference indirect employment from certain types of uses, to ensure that industrial sites in Merton can contribute towards the aims of the draft London Plan policy E4.

Further, the supporting text to draft Policy EC7.1 notes that self-storage sites will not be promoted. This approach is not sound as it conflicts with the Draft London Plan policy E4, which states that SILs are suitable for storage uses.

Surrounding amenity

Draft policy EC7.1 notes that SILs will be protected for industrial and distribution uses that could operate 24-hours a day. This type of operator is exactly the type of tenant that KSP wishes to secure for its land holding at Willow Lane and therefore this acknowledgement is essential in order to attract tenants to the site and to ensure it can continue to the strategic aims of the Plan.

The Draft Plan also acknowledges in paragraph 7.1.12 that the Council wants to ensure established business sites can continue to safely accommodate modern business operations in an urban setting, without requiring restrictions being placed on the business to protect nearby local amenity, such as opening hours and vehicle movements. KSL is again supportive of this acknowledgement and its importance enabling the improvement of Willow Lane Industrial Estate.

However, paragraph 7.2.21 notes that proposals for new development or change of use will not be granted where there will be harm to the occupants of neighbouring buildings. This conflicts with the aims of Draft Policy EC7.2, which acknowledges that SILs should be able to operate 24/7. This paragraph should be amended to confirm that, in line with policy ED7.2 and paragraph 7.2.16, a more flexible approach will be taken in Strategic Industrial Locations where intensification is encouraged under the draft London Plan policy E4. A more flexible approach would have reference to the Agent of Change principle in Draft London Plan policy D13, where development should be designed to ensure that established noise and other nuisance-generating uses remain viable and can continue or grow without unreasonable restrictions being placed on them.

Improving the Highways network at Willow Lane

Draft Policy T6.9 encourages the provision of improved public transport connections and facilities. The supporting text to this policy acknowledges that the growth of the Willow Lane Estate is constrained by a two-way access from the south and a restricted single lane one-way from the north. KSP would like to work with the Council to address this to improve this for future occupiers and the existing estate.

Small and medium enterprises and SILs

Part 3(g) of draft Policy EC7.1 seeks to ensure that there is a strong supply of appropriate workspace for small businesses; however, this is not quantified nor applied to a particular type of development. Policy E2 of the draft London Plan notes that B Use Class business space should be provided in a range of types, uses and sizes to meet the needs of micro, small and medium enterprises, but also notes that the space should be fit for purpose having regard to the type of use and space. There are certain B2/B8 uses who will be unable to locate share facilities with smaller businesses for operational reasons. Whether draft EC7.1 is intended to be applied to all B2/B8 uses should be clarified, and flexibility should be added to the policy to acknowledge that not all B2/B8 spaces can be designed for multiple occupiers.

Further, policy EC7.2 notes that there is a requirement for shared workspace/flexible space in new developments, but it is not clear if this is required for industrial sites. If so, this space should not undermine the function of SILs to operate 24/7.

Planning obligations

KSP is supportive of ensuring that developments contribute towards local employment initiatives. However, Policy EC.4 as drafted requires 20% of jobs both in construction and in the end use employment to be secured for local residents. With regards to large industrial operations, this proportion of end use jobs may be difficult to achieve, particularly where the user has specific technical requirements that may not be available within the local workforce. Further, it does not take account of how London operates as a city, with people tending to live in one borough and work in another, or not live in London at all. This figure has not been appropriately justified within the supporting evidence base and should be reconsidered so as not to frustrate employment developments within the borough.

Summary

KSP is supportive of Merton updating the Local Plan to reflect step-change in growth across the borough. We support the general approach to the retention and intensification of SILs; however, would request that our comments are taken on board to ensure that the Plan is capable of being found sound at the next stage of the Local Plan process.

Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me. KSP would very much welcome engagement with Merton on its site ownership.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "SP Stocker".

SOPHIE STOCKER
SENIOR PLANNER