



02. GOOD GROWTH STRATEGY

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Background

The challenges we face

Merton's local plan has been prepared in the context of the social, economic and environmental changes we face as a borough. Some of the key challenges and issues we need to address in our planning policies are outlined below.

Adapting to Merton's growing population and to social change: the number of people living in Merton is increasing and the makeup of the borough's population is changing. Key changes include an increasing number of children in the borough and a rapidly growing older population.

Identifying the long-term outcomes of the Covid19 pandemic, responding to changes in how we live, and how we access shops and services are key challenges for this Local Plan. We need to ensure development in the borough is sustainable. development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

The supply and cost of housing in the borough

Many people want to live in Merton but there is a limited supply of homes and prices are high. It is important to ensure that we help keep Merton's social mix and make sure that the borough does not become polarised between affluent and less well-off residents. We face the challenge of providing a diverse range of homes especially genuinely affordable homes and ensuring we support and encourage communities that are inclusive, sustainable and resilient.

Maintaining a successful economy and improving opportunities

Merton has a successful and diverse economy and it makes a significant contribution to London's economy, with its variety of businesses, shops, sports, recreation leisure and community activities. The Council aims to support and strengthen Merton's economy, its competitiveness and its recovery after the Covid19 pandemic. Although it is still too early to say what the long-term trends will be, we think Merton is in a good place if the trend towards home working, greater flexibility, more deliveries and different leisure time continues. We need to ensure that we fully support our residents and businesses to make the most of the opportunities to ensure sustainable growth.

Employment is the biggest factor affecting income inequality and so we need to get more people into work and help them to develop their careers in the long-term. This can be supported through a range of measures, including helping people into work or training and using links with businesses.

Growing inequalities

The success of our economy is not shared by all. The borough has deprived neighbourhoods, mainly in the east of the borough and pockets of deprivation in the west. There are significant income inequalities in the borough. The Council wants our communities to have access to affordable housing, jobs, skills, training and education, public transport and health and community facilities to help promote equality and inclusion, thus seeking that everyone can succeed and nobody gets left behind.

Achieving strong and resilient communities is a key challenge. Our health inequality gap is growing; this trend was known before the Covid –19 however, the pandemic has increased it and highlighted the issues across the UK. Residents suffering from poor health in Merton are concentrated in our deprived wards mainly in the east. Addressing these inequalities and improving Merton's health and wellbeing, both physical and mental, goes beyond improving access to medical facilities and includes a range of measures to improve our social and physical environment.

Prioritising walking, cycling and public transport

The links between obesity and air quality continue to be made, as such, we need to encourage initiatives that increase cycling and walking to tackle obesity and reduce air pollution. Transport emissions account for a significant proportion of Merton's NO₂ and PM₁₀ emissions. We need to encourage a shift to more sustainable form such as walking, cycling and ultra-low emission vehicles (such as electric).

Merton benefits in general with good public transport accessibility. The borough is well served by buses, tube, rails and the tram linking to neighbouring boroughs and to central London. However, some part of the borough is poorly served by public transport, with limited services and choice. We need to ensure that, with the projected rise in numbers of people living in, working in and visiting the borough, people can move around easily.

Road traffic can harm local air quality and through this, the health of those living in the area, especially those neighbourhoods with poor public transport service. We want to continue to promote travel that is easy, safe, healthy and active that does not harm our local environment or contribute to climate change.

Adapting to climate change

Climate change is already happening temperatures are rising, drought and wildfires are starting to occur more often, rainfall patterns are shifting, more flooding events, sea level is rising and greenhouse gas emissions increasing. We need to reduce the effects of climate change. The challenge for planning is, providing much needed homes and jobs in a way that does not have a detrimental impact to our environment or our economy. How we live, how and where we build new homes and the supported infrastructure will have a long lasting sustainable behavioural change.

Our response to this health crisis will shape how we will deal with a climate crisis in the next decades. Covid-19 pandemic will offer lessons and opportunities leading to environmental action. For instance, we will have a new baseline of what can be achieved.

Heritage and open space

Merton has many attractive and historic neighbourhoods (such as Mitcham and Wimbledon) and many parks and open spaces (ranging from local playgrounds and recreation parks, historic gardens, historic playing fields to Wimbledon Common). They contribute greatly to the attractiveness of the borough.

Maintaining the quality of the green and heritage environment whilst delivering the levels of forecast growth is a key challenge for Merton. However, good growth provides an opportunity to become more efficient and resilient, adapting to the consequences of environmental change created by human behaviour and mitigating the future impacts from proposed development. We need to make sure that the growth and change, respects the character, heritage and distinctiveness of Merton's landscape which, is valued by our communities.

Crime and safety

Merton is one of London's safest borough but have some of the same experiences of crime and disorder common with other London boroughs. The fear and the perception of crime with our residents is high with antisocial behaviour a major concern. The challenge we face is to make the borough a safer place using the tool such as Secured by Design approaches whilst, ensuring it keeps the vibrancy that makes it such an attractive place to live, work and visit.

Digital inclusion

Almost a third of Londoners are unhappy with their internet connection. The economic productivity of businesses is being severely hampered by poor broadband and slow speeds. Compared with other European countries, London managed average speeds of 26.29Mbps, compared with Bucharest at 81.18Mbps, Paris at 78.15Mbps and Vilnius at 60.14Mbps. Too many "not-spots" existed in London where there is exceptionally low or no broadband connectivity. Although many of these 'not spots' are in central London, Merton have 'not-spots' too. These can be found in our industrial area and Wimbledon town centre. Merton's economic productivity and competitiveness face a significant threat in the form of poor digital connectivity.

Providing the best start for young people

The age between 12 –24 is a crucial time for young people as they build foundations for a healthy adulthood. Making a successful transition to adulthood depends in large part to, access to work, housing and strong relationships. Studies have shown that experiencing social and economic disadvantage at this age has biological consequences, which can lead to poorer health outcomes eventually such as obesity.

Young people are growing up in a world where they feel under enormous pressure – many experience poor mental health, bullying, poverty and inequality and, uncertainty about their adult futures, more so during the pandemic and its recovery.

There is much more that needs to be done to create the structural conditions where young people can flourish. This must encompass all spheres of their lives; education, addressing poverty, health and income inequality and mental and physical health. This must happen for all young people regardless of their backgrounds, class, faith or culture. We must continue to put young people's voices at the heart of decision making and enable them to be part of the solution to reuniting communities in the aftermath of the covid-19 and in our future growth and development.

Good growth strategy

Merton will experience notable change, with predicted population growth, increase demand for affordable housing, employment and several issues highlighted following covid-19, although many were known before such as health and income inequalities.

The Council's aim is to create the conditions for growth, to provide the affordable homes, jobs and other facilities needed to support growth, while ensuring that growth delivers opportunities and benefits for our residents and businesses. This plan aims to deliver sustainable growth while continuing to preserve and enhance the features that make Merton such an attractive place to live, work and visit.

Merton is an attractive place for investment with its beautiful places, green settings and excellent public transport connections. We recognise, however, that there is limited land in the borough to accommodate this growth and so there is a need to use land more efficiently, to delivers the aims of this plan.

All development proposals in Merton, large or small, must accord with all relevant policies of this Local Plan and all other documents that make up Merton's Statutory Development Plan, to deliver the Council's vision and aims for the borough. The Council will look to support and help growth that delivers the development appropriate to its location and harnesses growth to deliver clear benefits for our residents and businesses. We will require developments to avoid harmful effects on amenity of existing and future occupiers and nearby properties, or where possible, to act appropriately to minimise potential negative impacts.

Key priorities for delivering growth include but are not limited to:

- Securing more homes as the priority, including genuinely affordable homes which meet the actual needs of our diverse communities.
- Moving towards being a low carbon borough, by minimising the demand for energy and promoting renewable and low carbon technologies.
- Supporting businesses and jobs creation by providing or keeping suitable premises to aid businesses staying or expanding within Merton.
- Supporting future jobs market by creating opportunities for training, apprenticeships or qualification opportunities for our residents.
- Ensuring we have the infrastructure and services to meet the needs of our growing number of residents, workers and visitors, such as transport, utilities, broadband, education and health.

- Exploring opportunities new and innovating ways to mitigate and reduce the impact of noise and air pollution for existing and future residents.
- Tackle health inequalities and promote healthy living.

Delivering growth

Growth will be direct in areas that have capacity for change, while protecting and enhancing the many great landscape, natural and built heritage assets and the distinctive established residential character found across the borough.

Making the most of our limited land

We will promote the most efficient use of land and buildings while also seeking to improve the quality of our environment, protect the amenity of occupiers, neighbours and meet planning aims. It is important that development delivers not only homes, but also employment space together with the services and facilities that are needed to support the development and create healthy and sustainable communities where, nobody gets left behind and everyone has a chance to succeed.

Density

The Council will encourage high quality developments with higher densities, where appropriate. We will deliver more homes that can appropriately be delivered by the efficient use of land and buildings, particularly in neighbourhoods with good accessible public transport. Neighbourhoods with good public transport accessibility such as Wimbledon, Morden, South Wimbledon and Colliers Wood will generally expect densities towards the higher end, considering all aspects of local character such as heritage assets, open spaces and setting, while having regard to the boroughs acute housing needs. Taller buildings are one form of high-density development that can be right in some locations, subject to excellent design, good public transport accessibility and consideration of the impact on the surrounding area. Good and thoughtful design can, increase density while protecting and enhancing the character of an area.

Mixed use developments

The provision of a suitable mix of uses, can contribute to successfully promoting future growth in Merton and importantly, make better use of our limited land. A mix of uses can:

- Increase the provision of much needed homes including those that are genuinely affordable.
- Promote healthy and active neighbourhoods that have a range of activities that are used throughout the day such as entertainment, culture and restaurants.
- Increasing safety and security.
- Reduce the need to travel, reducing the need for some journeys, helping to cut congestion in the borough and improve air quality.

The Council encourages the provision of a mix of uses in suitable locations, where appropriate. The Local Plan site allocations identifies several sites for mixed use development across the borough.

In certain circumstances it is may be more efficient to consider development sites which, are either adjacent or next to each as joint proposal, rather than as individual separate proposals. This approach could deliver more homes, open space or community facilities or more affordable employment space, training and apprenticeships could be secured through such an approach.

The Council will expect multi-site proposals to be planned in a coordinated manner and prove that there is a clear public benefit to this approach. They should have an agreed timeframe and means of delivery for the benefits, secured through a legal agreement.

20-minute neighbourhoods

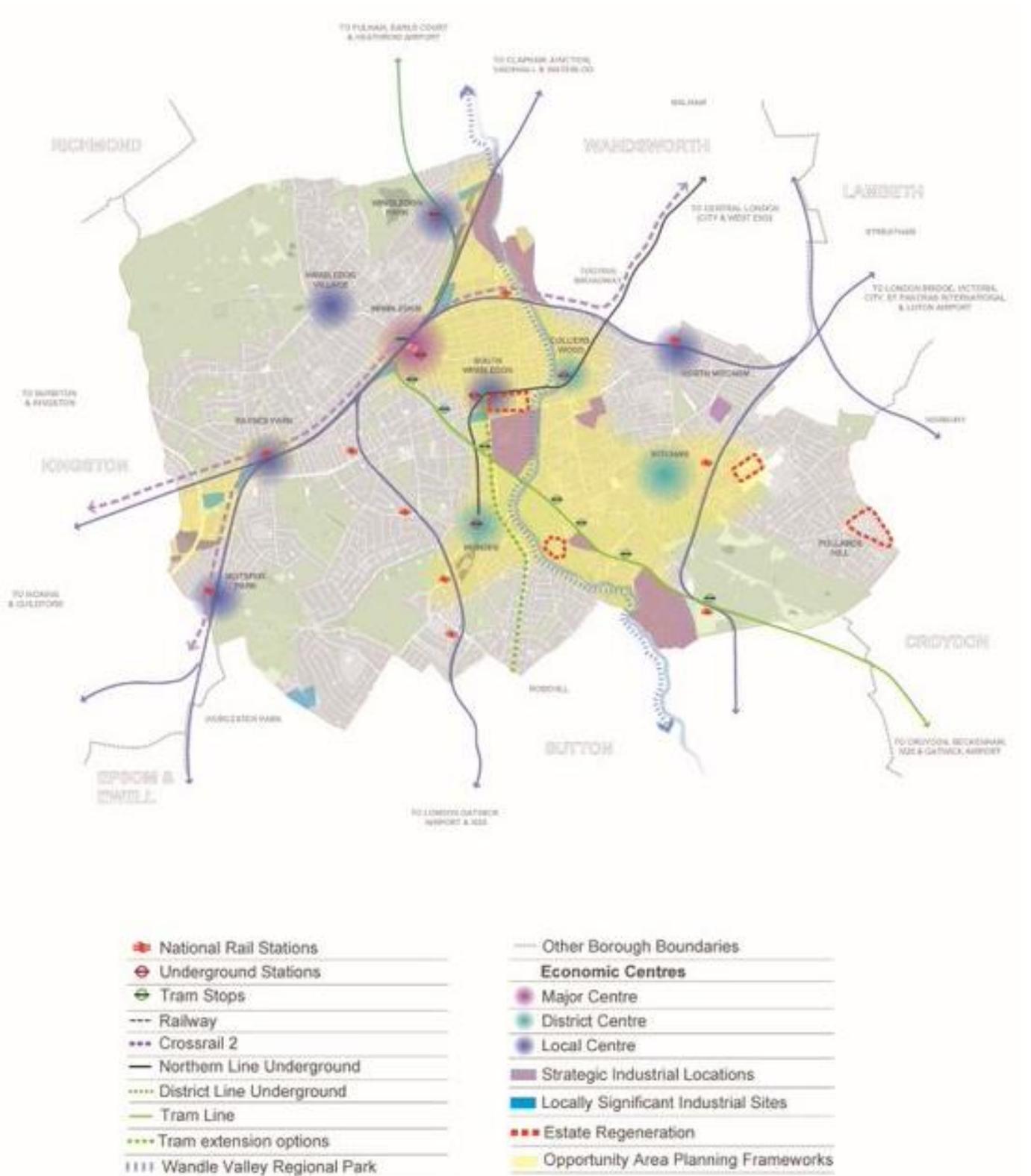
The covid-19 pandemic has changed the way we shop and live. During the pandemic apart from an increase of shopping online, people shopped locally more to access their daily needs, these patterns are expected to continue after the pandemic.

20-minute neighbourhoods are places where communities can access most of their daily needs within a 20-minute (about 800 metres) return walk from home. These neighbourhoods have a diverse housing options, access to safe cycling and walking routes and local public transport, local health facilities, parks and other infrastructure. The Council will seek to create 20 minutes neighbourhoods where, it is feasible. These will include some of our existing local centres such as North Mitcham, Raynes Park, Wimbledon Village and South Wimbledon and shopping parades such as Wimbledon Chase and Pollards Hill. We will start in areas where there are the foundations to create such neighbourhoods.

Good growth

The Council's overall spatial strategy is illustrated below on Key Diagram. This shows the broad locations of Merton's growth area namely the Wimbledon/Colliers Wood/South Wimbledon Opportunity Area (OA) and Morden town centre town centre.

Development will still take place outside of the OA and Morden town centre, although not at the same scale. Outside the growth areas smaller scale development and more incremental change will take place. The section below provides further detail on the parts of the borough where the most significant growth is expected to take place.



Key diagram

Growth areas

A considerable proportion of Merton's growth up to 2036 and beyond is expected to be delivered in the Opportunity Area (OA) and Morden town centre. The OA is designated in the London Plan. The town centres found in the OA are suitable for large-scale development and significant increases in jobs and homes as they have particularly good public transport and transport interchanges for example, Wimbledon town centre. The OA will contribute towards the continued success of London's national and international role, as well as providing opportunities to bring economic and social benefits across the borough. The London Plan ambition for our OA is provide 5000 new homes and 6000 new jobs over 10 years. Morden is expected to deliver circa 2000 new homes.

The key priorities for an OA are to:

- Maximise the delivery of affordable housing and create mixed and inclusive communities.
- Contribute to regeneration objectives by tackling inequalities and environmental, economic and social barriers that affect the lives of people in the area.
- Facilitates ambitious transport mode share targets.

Wimbledon

Wimbledon will continue to secure the development of high quality and attractive, development schemes. Creating a safe and healthy place providing a balanced mix of uses, delivering new homes including affordable, significant provision of offices and other employment opportunities, community facilities and business and retail which:

- Support and increases the borough's contribution to London's role as a world business, commercial, leisure and cultural centre.
- Provide the highest quality that preserves local amenity, enhance and conserve our heritage assets and character and appearance of place.
- Work with LoveWimbledon Business Improvement District and the Wimbledon Village Business Association to support the economic recovery, encourage business resilience and promote both local business and the area as a business location.

- Through town centre management initiatives, the Council will endeavour to ensure that the night-time economy is managed in a way that benefits residents, visitors and businesses.
- Maximise opportunities for walking, cycling and the use of public transport around Wimbledon and to other neighbourhoods.
- Improve community safety and reduce opportunities for crime and antisocial behaviour.
- Provide excellent public realm, with improved network of safe and attractive greener places and routes for pedestrians and cyclists that successfully links to neighbouring areas.
- Work with construction sites to minimise air quality and noise problems.
- Encourage travel behavioural changes by providing electric car charging points and more cycle parking facilities.
- Maintaining public space and greening of the street environment.
- Working with Network Rail and Transport for London, including on future plans for Crossrail2 to ensure it maximises the benefits for Wimbledon, Raynes Park, Wimbledon Chase and Motspur Park.

Colliers Wood

The town centre will grow providing a strong local economic base creating a direct benefit to existing community by creating a range of employment opportunities, providing affordable and flexible workspaces, promoting innovative ways of mixing homes with commercial uses and making the best use of space which, done with care, will deliver a place that is desirable to live and work in. Improving movement around the town centre is a key aim for the Council and improving the walking and cycling routes to nearby retail parks.

The Council will continue to work with partners and stakeholders including Transport for London, Environment Agency, utilities companies and community groups in creating and improving the character, establish its identity and create a thriving town centre.

We will continue to work in partnership with cultural, historical and heritage bodies and organisations to promote the history of Colliers Wood dating back to the 13th century historical links at Merton Priory and industrial heritage of William Morris and the Wandle Trail.

The Council expects developments in the area to contribute to:

- A mix of uses, including substantial new homes (including affordable), employment and community uses.
- Improve transport interchange accessibility and capacity.
- Improve pedestrian and cycle movement and routes, making walking and 'way-finding'
- Provide sustainable and safe design of the highest quality that respects the character and heritage assets in and near the town centre.
- Significant increase in the number of jobs provided in the area.
- Provide employment space for identified growth sectors and small to medium enterprises and start-ups and contribute towards training and apprenticeship opportunities.
- Encourage travel behavioural changes by providing electric car charging points and cycle parking facilities.

South Wimbledon

Through engagement with residents, businesses and community groups, the following key priorities for South Wimbledon have been identified in this new local centre. They include:

- South Wimbledon will be thriving thanks to the increased footfall enabled by the new homes at High Path estate and the improved public spaces along Merton High Street and Morden Road
- Promoting a thriving local centre which is a walkable neighbourhood or '20 minutes' neighbourhood'.
- Improving community safety through better street design.
- Greater opportunities for jobs and training.
- Supporting for local businesses and new enterprises.
- Promoting a strong local identity that is respectful to historic environment and the established character of the residential roads in and nearby the local centre.

- Better community facilities that are coordinated and tailored to community needs.
- Creating a more vibrant, attractive area that builds on its location between Colliers Wood and Wimbledon and its transport links.
- Enhanced connectivity and public realm, with more active frontages along Merton High Street.
- Creating new public spaces and greening of the street environment.
- Making more efficient and intensive use of land, taking opportunities to provide a mix of uses, including new homes and employment floor space.

Morden

The most meaningful change will have taken place in Morden town centre. Development within the Morden town centre must contribute to the Council's wider vision and objectives for this part of the borough. Our aspirations include:

- A balanced mix of uses, including housing and affordable housing, significant provision of offices and other employment opportunities, community facilities, and retail.
- An excellent public realm, with an improved network of safe and attractive places and routes for pedestrians and cyclists that successfully links to neighbouring areas and reduces the dominance of traffic in the area.
- Development of the highest quality, that is sympathetic to historic area which, preserves local amenity and looks to enhance and conserve the significance of heritage assets such as the character and appearance of conservation areas and National Trust Park.
- Improvements to the street environment, in particular the pedestrian environment to and around Morden Underground station.
- The provision of improved cycling facilities, particularly for visitors to the town centre.
- Maximising densities compatible with local context, sustainable design principles and public transport capacity.
- Improving community safety, including opportunities for crime and anti-social behaviour.

- Explore the development of a decentralised energy network.

Outside our growth areas

Raynes Park and West Barnes

Development in this neighbourhood should contribute to the Council's wider vision and objectives for this part of the borough. Our aspirations include:

- Promoting the local centre a thriving a walkable neighbourhood or '20 minutes' neighbourhood' with local services, which preserves local amenity.
- A balanced mix of uses, including housing and affordable housing, employment opportunities, community facilities, and retail.
- Improved community safety through better street design.
- Supporting local businesses and new enterprises.
- Improving walking and cycling between the town centre and surrounding streets separated by the railway bridge making the 20-minute neighbourhood accessible.
- An excellent public realm, with an improved network of safe and attractive places and routes for pedestrians and cyclists that successfully links to neighbouring areas, maximising densities compatible with local context, sustainable design principles and public transport capacity.
- The provision of improved cycling facilities for visitors and provide other suitable sustainable travel modes such as electric car charging points.
- Improving community safety, including opportunities for crime and anti-social behaviour.
- Creating new public space (s) and greening of the street environment.

Mitcham

This neighbourhood is a complex and varied picture. It is nestled between Tooting town centre (Wandsworth borough), Croydon town centre, Morden and Colliers Wood. The fore mentioned centres are made up of many high street brands ranging from clothes store to coffee houses. The town centre has limited choice.

The town centre is divided by a busy strategic road running through the centre which can at time make the centre appear split.

Outside the town centre it is predominately residential area with scattered neighbourhood shopping parades. It has many heritage and green assets, which contributes to the borough history.

However, it has to high levels of deprivation including health, income and significant housing challenges such as, overcrowding and the age of buildings means that much of the social housing needs improving. Development in this neighbourhood will need to aid in reducing and improving the deprivation levels. Our aspirations include:

- Making more efficient and intensive use of land, taking opportunities to provide a mix of uses, including new housing and employment floor space.
- Exploring opportunities for social housing estate regeneration. We will engage and work with housing providers in Mitcham. The Council's ambition is that regeneration will focus primarily on improving the quality of housing stock but also offers the potential to create an improved physical environment and enhanced connectivity as well as address several social and economic issues. This is a long-term aspiration which will continue outside this plan period.
- Improving community safety through better street design.
- Greater opportunities for jobs and training.
- Supporting for local businesses, new enterprises and start-ups.
- Improvements to the street environment and a better mix of market/retail offer.
- Greater legibility throughout the neighbourhood.
- Better community facilities, that are coordinated and tailored to community needs and improve and tackle the health and income inequalities in this neighbourhood.
- Improving local accessibility and interchange at the Mitcham stations (Eastfields and Mitcham Junction) with enhanced walking, cycling and bus routes to improve the town centre footfall.

Wimbledon Chase

Development in this area should contribute to the Council's wider vision and objectives for this part of the borough. Our aspirations include:

- Working with transport partners, such as Transport for London (TfL) and Network Rail to relieve congestion in Kingston Road and explore Wimbledon Station capacity upgrade.
- Promoting a thriving local centre which is a walkable neighbourhood or '20 minutes' neighbourhood'.
- Improving community safety through better street design.
- Supporting for local businesses and new enterprises.
- Promoting a strong local identity that is respectful to historic environment and the established character of the residential roads in and nearby the local centre.
- Creating a more vibrant, attractive area that builds on its location between Raynes Park and Wimbledon and its transport links.
- Enhanced connectivity and public realm, with more active frontages along Kingston Road.
- Making more efficient and intensive use of land, taking opportunities to provide a mix of uses, including new homes.

Wimbledon Village

The village will maintain its competitiveness without altering its unique character. Whilst development opportunities here are relatively limited, Wimbledon Village will continue to contribute to local economy with its mix of independent shops and cafes, retail and social venues, while respecting it's the character. The Council's aspiration for Wimbledon Village is:

- To explore greener transport opportunities such as electric charging points and cycling parking facilities.
- Prioritise and promoting walking and cycling to reduce pressure on car parking and improve accessibility.
- Play a key role as the borough cultural and historical tourist destination.