

From:
To: [Future Merton](#)
Cc:
Subject: Merton Local Plan - Main Modifications
Date: 16 March 2024 17:44:58
Attachments: [rxupJzQt0jaqdBpX.png](#)
[Merton Local Plan - Examination - Main Modifications - March 24.pdf](#)

Please find attached our representations on the Main Modifications proposed to the draft Local Plan following the Examination hearings.

Thanks

Secretary





MERTON LOCAL PLAN – Public Examination MAIN MODIFICATIONS

Submission from Mitcham Cricket Green Community & Heritage March 2024

1. Mitcham Cricket Green Community & Heritage takes an active interest in the future of the Cricket Green Conservation Area and its environs. We are the civic society for this part of Merton and part of the wider civic movement through membership of the national charity Civic Voice. We have been closely involved in the development of the Merton Local Plan and its evidence base and we made detailed representations in September 2021, January 2021, January 2019 and January 2018 on Merton Council's call for sites at Stage 1 of the Local Plan review; the draft Plan for consultation at Stage 2 and Stage 2a; and the submitted Plan at Stage 3. We contributed to the Public Examination, including participating in a number of the hearings.

2. While the opportunity to comment on the Main Modifications proposed to the Local Plan is welcome, it is made very difficult in the absence of any written outcome from the Inspectors of their consideration of the Plan. We are being asked to comment on the outcome of an examination process without sight of the rationale or justification for the changes proposed. The Plan is expected to be evidence based but the Main Modifications are missing this key evidence which precludes us from being able to consider them sound. We have invested an enormous amount of volunteer time into the Local Plan process and, despite this being the last meaningful opportunity to influence the Plan, we still do not know the Inspectors' views on the contribution we have made. Perversely, we will only be made aware of (a) the rationale for the Main Modifications and (b) the Inspector's views on our representations after the event.

3. Notwithstanding this imbalance in approach we offer the following views:

MM54 – We support the proposed modification. This clarifies the role of Mitcham in the hierarchy established in the London Plan and its role as a District Centre. The change needs to be consistently applied throughout the Plan with the deletion of all references to “*Mitcham Town Centre*” and associated changes relating to Policy TC13.5 and other Main Modifications, including MM274

MM59 – The proposed addition misnames the adopted supplementary planning document and should read [The Canons Conservation Management Plan](#). This document was adopted on 18/9/17 and yet still fails to appear on the part of Merton Council's [website](#) listing supplementary planning documents.

MM61 – We support the proposed modification, confirming Raleigh Gardens car park is not a suitable location for tall buildings.

MM62 – We do not support the proposed modification to the site allocation for Mitcham Gasworks. The indicative site capacity should remain as in the submitted plan as 200-

400 homes. It should not be identified as a location suitable for tall buildings. The proposed modification to 500-650 homes up to 10 storeys is the latest in a series of unjustified changes which have been made to this site allocation since the Plan was submitted:

- March 2022 – Merton Council modifies the site allocation in the submitted plan to support development of “*up to 9 storeys*” and consideration of impacts on “*existing character, heritage and townscape*” was dropped (OD4i). The site capacity of 200-400 homes was unchanged
- May 2022 - Merton Council modifies the site allocation again to support “*around 650 new homes*” “*of up to 10 storeys*” (LBM05). This was then backed up with a Statement of Common Ground with St William in June 2022 which was prepared in camera and without any other input. The result was a developer-led and not plan-led approach to the future of Mitcham Gasworks
- September 2022 - Merton Council modifies the site allocation for the third time in seven months to support a development of “*450-650 new homes*” “*of up to 9 storeys*” (LBM15)
- February 2024 – Proposed Main Modification (MM62) proposes a fourth change to the site allocation which supports “*500-650 new homes*” and “*an upper limit of around 33m (10 storeys)*”

The Main Modification is justified on the basis of an “*initial analysis of the site*”. Merton Council has confirmed in response to a Freedom of Information [request](#) that this “*initial analysis*” is the LBM19 Mitcham Gasworks Topic Paper provided to the Examination in September 2022.

It is a Government requirement that “*the preparation and review of all policies should be underpinned by relevant and up-to-date evidence*” (paragraph 31, NPPF) so they can be justified and found sound by the examination process (paragraph 35, NPPF).

It is self-evident this has not been the case with the site allocation for Mitcham Gasworks because:

- Topic Paper LBM19 on which the site allocation is based is a scant document which offers very limited analysis of the site’s capacity. The majority of the document is a description of other evidence (Merton’s Borough Character Study) and the pre-application process for a development which has subsequently been confirmed as unsuitable (see below). Topic Paper LBM19 is an entirely unsuitable basis on which to base such a significant decision about a site allocation which would change the entire character of Mitcham
- Professional planners in Merton Council and the Inspectors have come to continuously changing and dramatically different conclusions about the capacity of the site and the appropriateness of different heights – this constant change of views with no change of evidence defies credibility and fatally undermines public confidence in the whole process
- The unsuitability of the site for tall buildings has been demonstrated in practice via a planning application from a major national housebuilder which sought to construct 595 homes rising to nine storeys. Merton Council has confirmed that “*following a detailed review of the proposal, Officers are not satisfied with, predominantly, the following:*”
 - *Design*
 - *Parking provision and arrangement*
 - *Highways*
 - *General site layout and operational impact when the development is in full occupation*
 - *Quality of accommodation*
 - *Landscaping/Ecology*”

The failure of an experienced developer to bring forward an adequate scheme in relation to all these issues can be considered to provide significantly more robust evidence than a scant "initial analysis" when deciding what is appropriate for the site allocation

Additionally, there is other contradictory evidence which sits alongside Topic Paper LBM19 and confirms its lack of suitability of Mitcham Gasworks as a location for tall buildings, including:

- Townscape Analysis – This provides a few poorly executed images for highly selective locations around the site and cannot in all seriousness be considered a robust evidence base. The one image showing the scheme as it appears to those living next to it simply confirms how out of character it will be as an oversized bulk sitting in the heart of Mitcham Village
- Borough Character Study – This is a very limited document when it comes to assessing tall buildings for the Local Plan. It considers that the only heritage assets to matter are those which are designated and it uses a misleading "suitability heatmap" (page 139) to justify the selection of locations appropriate for tall buildings. This includes part of Mitcham Gasworks. Yet, the "key site allocations suitable for residential development" in the Local Plan is used as an input to the heatmap. The result is a circular argument where the evidence used to justify suitable locations for tall buildings in the Local Plan is itself justified by them being identified as suitable in the Local Plan. Take out the site allocations and the Borough Character Study shows the Mitcham Gasworks site as being of only moderate suitability which like so much of the rest of Merton is not appropriate for tall buildings.

We welcome the proposed modification to support use of a Design Guide or Design Code and especially welcome that this "should be based on effective community engagement and reflect local aspirations for the development of the area". However, this introduces a non-sequitur into the site allocation as a development of up to 650 homes rising to 10 storeys cannot meet local aspirations. There is clear evidence that local aspirations for the site have emphatically rejected this option, including in the Street Audit undertaken of local residents and the views of local ward councillors.

The results of the Street Audit could not be more emphatic:

MITCHAM GASWORKS – STREET AUDIT

99% residents living with 100m of Mitcham Gasworks reject plans for 10 storey tower blocks



A door-to-door Street Audit of residents living within 100m of Mitcham Gasworks has 99% signing up to say they are "extremely concerned" by plans for 10 storey tower blocks on the site.

295 people living in 173 homes near to Mitcham Gasworks have signed a letter to Merton councillors expressing concerns at the current plans put forward by housebuilders. Only 3 people from 2 properties did not sign and none of the people visited supported the plans.

Local residents "support the development of the site in a sensitive manner, consistent with the local area" and are asking Merton Council to change its Local Plan to require a different approach. This would allow up to 400 homes rising to a maximum of six storeys.

The Street Audit was conducted on the roads marked red on the map. The letter and full street-by-street results of the Street Audit are available [here](#).

This Street Audit was undertaken by local residents campaigning for sensitive redevelopment of Mitcham Gasworks to provide truly affordable homes and jobs in a development sympathetic to the character of Mitcham Village. Contact us to get involved:

mitchamgasworks@gmail.com
[@mitchamgasworks](https://twitter.com/mitchamgasworks)

July 2022

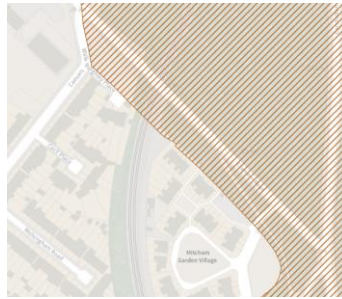
The methodology and results of this Street Audit have not been questioned by any representations on the Local Plan or at the Examination.

The site impacts on three wards represented by nine ward councillors and other than where they cannot speak publicly about the issue because of their role on the Planning Committee these councillors have all raised objections to the planning application for a more modest scheme than proposed in the modified site allocation. The local MP has also expressed serious reservations. We do not believe it possible to square the circle of Mitcham Gasworks being developed for 650 homes rising to ten storeys in a manner that will *"reflect local aspirations"*.

We conclude that the modification to the site allocation policy for Mitcham Gasworks lacks any credible evidence base. The non sequitur between the proposed height/capacity and the need to *"reflect local aspirations"* also means the site allocation policy is not *"clearly written and unambiguous, so it is evident how a decision maker should react to development proposals"* as required by national planning policy (paragraph 16, NPPF). We believe the modification results in a policy that is not sound.

MM353 – We have identified two further clarifications relating to Metropolitan Open Land

- MOL14 is misnamed as it extends to significant areas outside Mitcham Common, including Mitcham's registered Greens. The description of the physical boundaries to the west is inaccurate with, for example, areas of Metropolitan Open Land west of the A239 at Cranmer Road (extract below)



- MOL18 – The Wandle Valley MOL is not located in the Morden neighbourhood area as indicated in the Open Space appendix. As the Site Description now states *"The Wandle Valley MOL stretches across a large area of the borough, through the Mitcham, Morden, Colliers Wood and Wimbledon Neighbourhoods"*