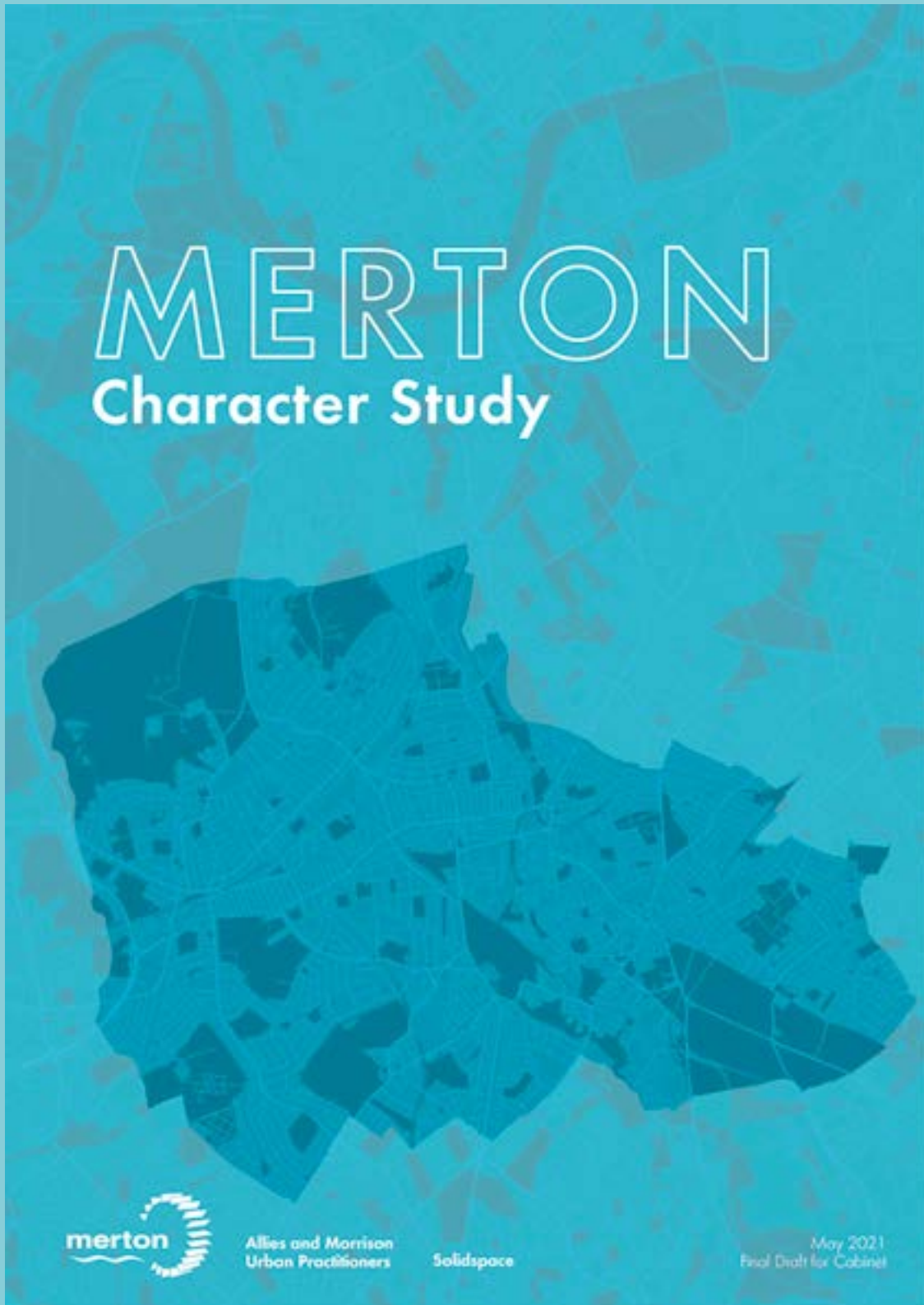


MERTON COUNCIL
FUTURE MERTON



CONSULTATION REPORT

CHARACTER STUDY SPD

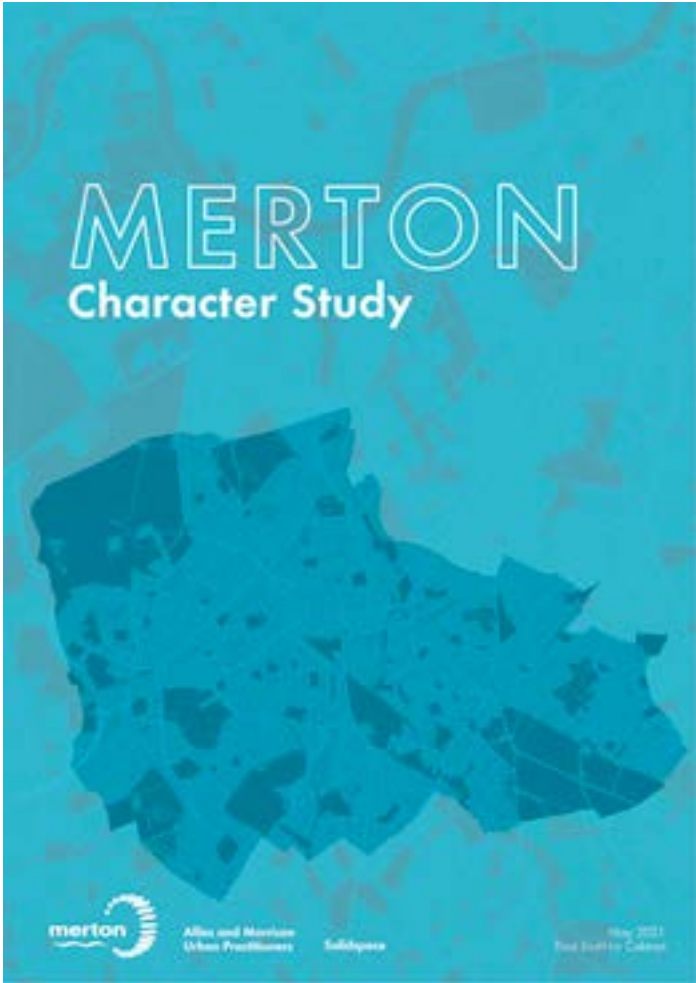
FOREWORD

We'd like to thank everyone who has taken the time to be a part creating Merton's Character Study since early 2020.

Over the course of developing the Character Study we have engaged with Merton's residents, community groups, businesses, landowners and other stakeholders, all of which helped inform the direction of our draft Supplementary Planning Document.

The guidance was published online for formal public consultation between 9 February 2021 to 23 March 2021.

This report was produced in June 2021.



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1.1 INTRODUCTION

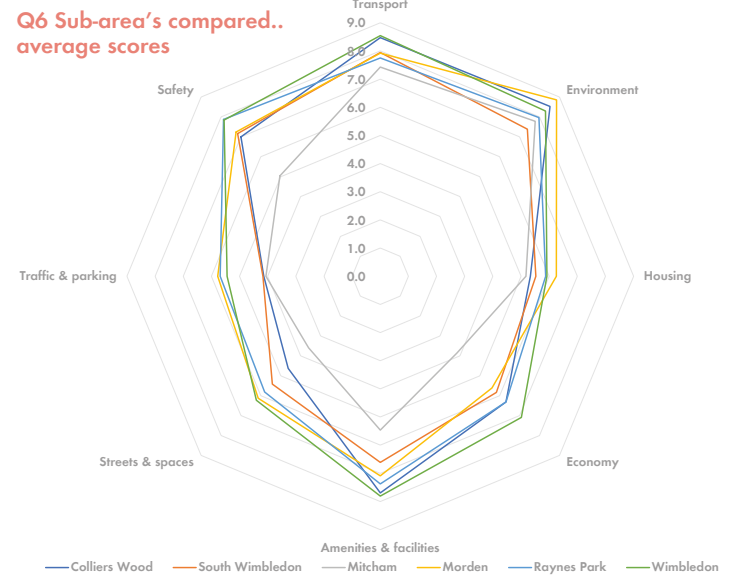
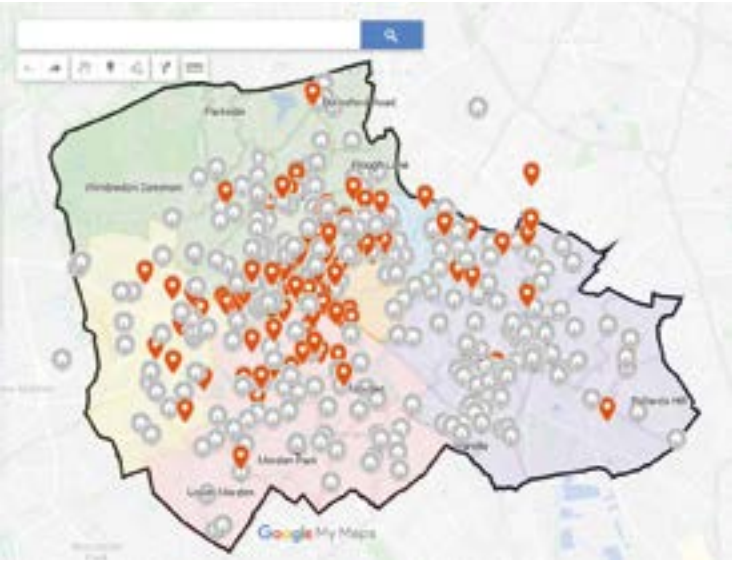
- 1.1.1 Merton Council has prepared a Character Study to provide an understanding of the characteristics of our neighbourhoods to inform a context-led strategy for the delivery of new homes and other development. Where areas have a strong existing character this will be reinforced and protected. In other areas there may be opportunities to re-examine what is there through improvements. In areas with less existing positive character there may be opportunities to reimagine these areas and create new places.
- 1.1.2 The New London Plan puts significant emphasis on boroughs to deliver growth through the adoption of a design-led approach which takes full account of local character and context. The Character Study will also support Merton's New Local Plan Good growth strategy, which aims 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; and to deliver sustainable growth while continuing to preserve and enhance the features that make Merton such an attractive place to live, work and visit.
- 1.1.3 The Character Study will assist the council, community groups, stakeholders and others with an interest in the borough to better understand Merton's distinctive local character. Once adopted as an SPD it will also be an important tool for decision making and for developers and others investors in Merton to use to ensure that proposals positively respond to the local context.



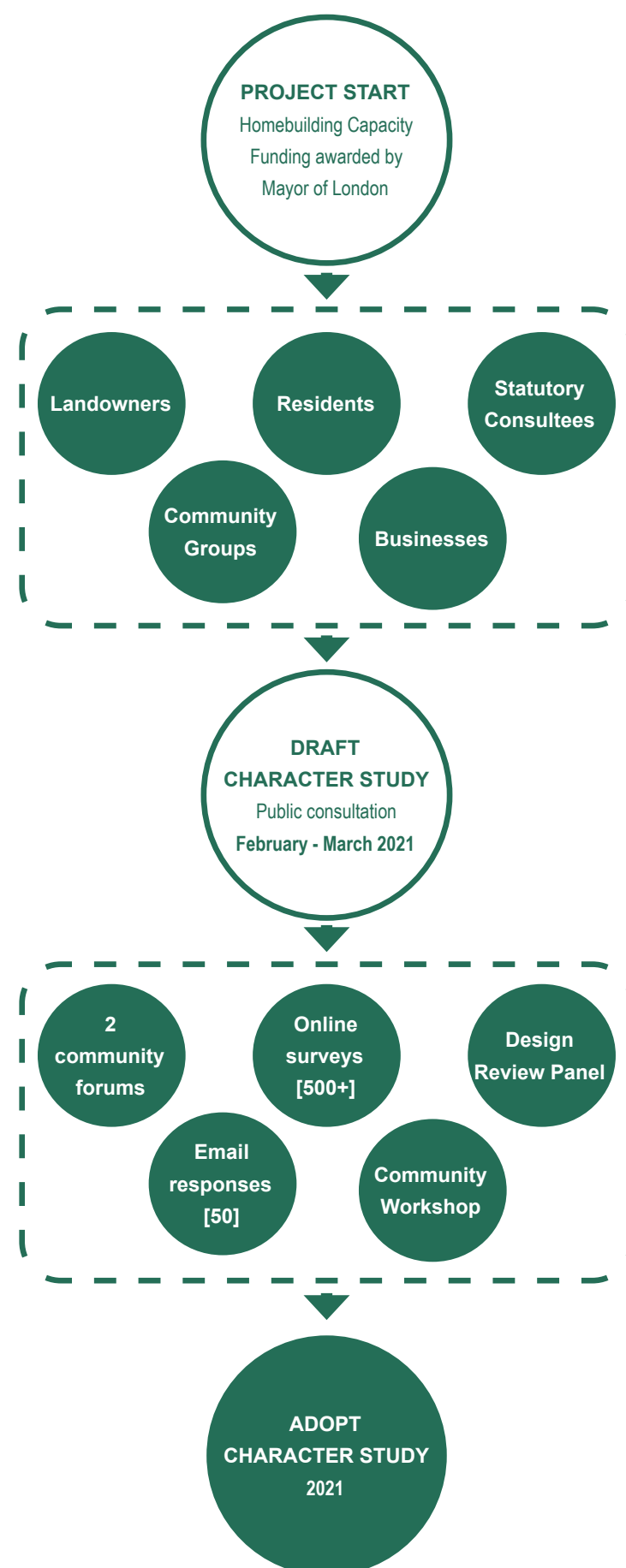
1.2 HOW WE CONSULTED

- 1.2.1 The council is required in accordance with planning legislation to hold a public 6 week consultation. Engagement on the draft Character Study SPD started on 9th February 2021 until 23rd March 2021.
- 1.2.2 The consultation carried out to support the development of the SPD was in two stages:
i. Initial engagement: During the preparation of the draft SPD there was an extensive programme of engagement to help test the emerging ideas.
ii. Formal consultation: After the draft Character Study SPD had been approved by cabinet in January 2021, a public consultation exercise was carried out including, an online survey and online presentation at two community forums.
- 1.2.3 Due to Covid-19 restrictions all of the engagement had to be adapted to take an online and digital form. There were three rounds of engagement during the preparation of the study. First a community survey where specific groups were contacted, followed by an online public survey on the proposed neighbourhoods and a place evaluation, then a focused workshop with individuals, community groups and residents' associations.
- 1.2.4 The adjacent plan illustrates the geographical spread of responses to the boundary consultation online survey. Three quarters of respondents were happy with the way the boundaries had been drawn, the red dots illustrate the clusters of respondents who wished the boundaries to be drawn differently. Their feedback has been used to amend the boundaries within the Character Study.
- 1.2.5 The graph below shows the scores that respondents gave for each of their neighbourhoods for Transport, Environment, Housing, Economy, Amenities & Facilities, Streets & Spaces, Traffic & Parking and Safety. Respondents were also asked what they thought was special about the character of their neighbourhood and what needed improving.

Neighbourhoods review



- 1.2.6 Formal written consultation emails were sent to local residents, businesses, residential groups and organisations, environmental stakeholders (e.g. Environment Agency) and other interested parties.
- 1.2.7 The Consultation was featured in the My Merton e-newsletter which goes to circa 7,000 addresses. Emails were also sent to circa 700 stakeholders on Merton's Local Plan consultation database and circa 500 stakeholders on Merton Council's Consultation Database.
- 1.2.8 Future Merton presented the Character Study to the Mitcham and Morden Community Forums on 25 March and 26 March 2021.
- 1.2.9 The consultation was also publicised via social media on the council's Facebook and Twitter accounts.
- 1.2.10 Over 100 responses were received to the formal consultation on the draft Character Study SPD. A few more responses were received via the SurveyMonkey form (54) as opposed to email (51). The questionnaire on Survey Monkey asked for the participant's views on the sections of the SPD and some demographic characteristics.
- 1.2.11 The Character Study was also presented to Merton's Design Review Panel, who provided comments and recommendations.
- 1.2.12 The feedback for each of the chapters is detailed in the following sections of this report.

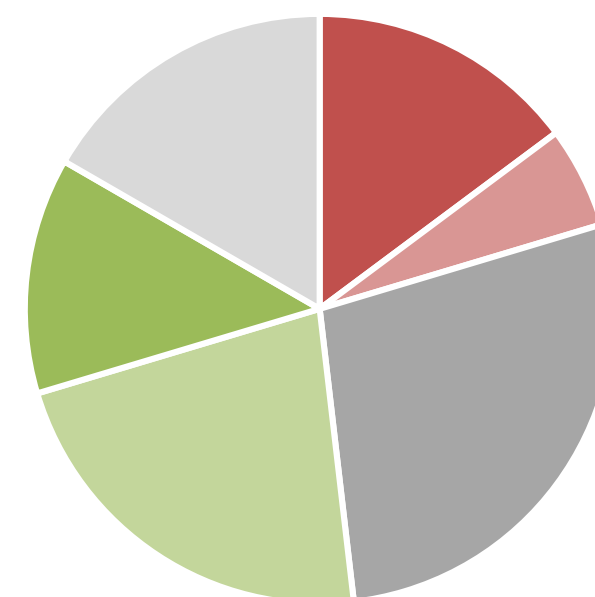


1.3 FEEDBACK: WHY CHARACTER

ANALYSIS

- 1.2.13 This section of the Character Study outlines the purpose of the document, how to use it and a summary of the stakeholder engagement that informed its development.
- 1.2.14 45% of online survey respondents agreed with the contents of this chapter, 28% neither agreed or disagreed, and 17% provided no response. 21% of respondents who responded via the online survey disagreed with this chapter.
- 1.2.15 Many responses welcomed the Character Study as a tool for ensuring that future development is informed by a detailed understanding of local character and that growth can be tailored to individual neighbourhoods.
- 1.2.16 There was concern about new development, in particular that the Character Study would result in taller buildings in some areas, or new development would be detrimental to existing character.
- 1.2.17 On the other hand it was acknowledged that the Character Study will be a useful tool for delivering growth in the borough, in particular in meeting Merton's housing need.
- 1.2.18 Feedback from Merton's Design Review Panel was positive, acknowledging that the Character Study had the potential to raise the principles and quality of design in new development.
- 1.2.19 It was also identified that it must be challenging to engage residents in planning matters, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.

- 1.2.21 Merton's Character Study, once adopted as an SPD will be an important document for informing future planning applications, to ensure that they respond positively to existing character and can contribute towards the suggested improvements identified for each of the neighbourhoods.
- 1.2.22 In response to comments from the consultation a few minor changes to the wording were added, for example: to make the introduction more positive, reference that character is also determined by people, socio-economics, safety and security, and acknowledge that there is limited land in Merton to accommodate growth.



RESPONSE TO COMMENTS AND SUGGESTED CHANGES

- 1.2.20 As stated in Policy D1 in the New London Plan, Boroughs should undertake area assessments to define the characteristics, qualities and value of different places within the plan area to develop an understanding of different areas' capacity for growth.

Strongly disagree	15% [8 respondents]
Disagree	6% [3 respondents]
Neither	28% [15 respondents]
Agree	22% [12 respondents]
Strongly agree	13% [7 respondents]
No response	17% [9 respondents]

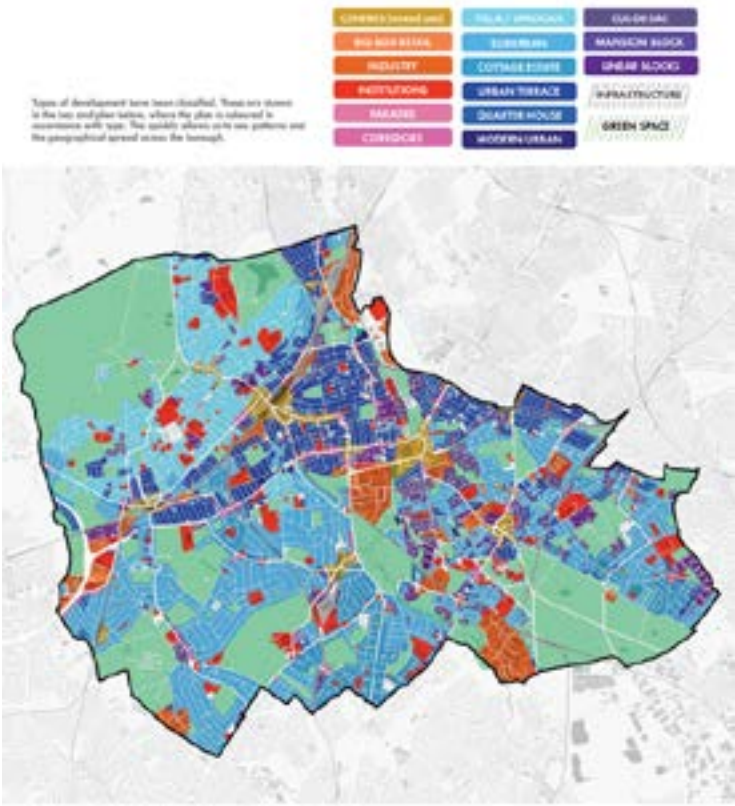
1.4 FEEDBACK:
EXISTING CHARACTER

ANALYSIS

- 1.4.1 This chapter explores the how history, physical and natural landscapes, buildings and places, society and community have shaped Merton's Character. It then provides detailed information on the different typologies of development across the borough.
- 1.4.2 39% of respondents to the online survey agreed with the contents of the chapter, and 17% disagreed. Feedback on this chapter included a few technical clarifications, for example the names of places, dates and suggestions for additional details that could be included.
- 1.4.3 Overall the maps and historical information was well received and identified as being a useful and valuable way of building a picture of the rich and diverse character across Merton.

RESPONSE TO COMMENTS AND
SUGGESTED CHANGES

- 1.4.4 The council greatly value the local knowledge that respondents have provided as part of their feedback on this chapter. This information has been added to the final version of the Character Study.
- 1.4.5 Some responses stated that the maps in this section were small and difficult to read. All of the maps throughout the document are included at full A4 size in the Appendices to make it them more accessible for readers. In the final version of the Character Study additional references have been added to signpost to the full size maps in the appendix.
- 1.4.6 The feedback from Merton's Design Review Panel stated that the Character Study found the right balance between detail and length. In response to comments the final draft now includes a list of relevant documents to signpost the reader to other more detailed information on the character of Merton.



Strongly disagree	11% [6 respondents]
Disagree	6% [3 respondents]
Neither	26% [14 respondents]
Agree	24% [13 respondents]
Strongly agree	15% [8 respondents]
No response	19% [10 respondents]

1.5 FEEDBACK:
MERTON'S DISTINCTIVE NEIGHBOURHOODS

ANALYSIS

- 1.5.1 This chapter defines Merton's 36 neighbourhoods, as informed by the online boundaries consultation and stakeholder workshop. Each of the neighbourhoods has been placed on a spectrum of repair - re-examine - reimagine to show how the nature of intensification should vary across key areas of the borough.
- 1.5.2 22% of respondents to the online survey agreed with the contents of this chapter and 24% disagreed. Many comments specifically related to either the approach of using 36 neighbourhoods or their placement within the repair - re-examine - reimagine spectrum.
- 1.5.3 Lots of comments were received regarding the characteristics of the respondents' neighbourhoods, where they agreed or disagreed with the boundaries, names or level of change identified.

RESPONSE TO COMMENTS AND
SUGGESTED CHANGES

- 1.5.4 The council acknowledges that the boundaries of each neighbourhood should be considered as "blurred" because it is very difficult to define a hard line between two areas. A few issues were identified for Wimbledon Park/Durnsford Road, South Wimbledon and Merton Park and the boundaries for these neighbourhoods will be amended to reflect the feedback received.
- 1.5.5 It was suggested that the South Wimbledon neighbourhood boundary should be altered to include Haydons Road Recreation Ground, and also be broken down into smaller character areas to reflect the distinctive character of The Battles, Old Merton Park, High Path and the industrial areas.
- 1.5.6 In response the boundary for South Wimbledon has been updated and additional text has been added to the neighbourhood chapter to acknowledge the distinctive characters.
- 1.5.7 The boundaries for Merton Park, Wimbledon

Park and Durnsford Road have also been updated in response to the feedback received from residents.

1.5.8 Additional explanation of the terms Repair, Re-examine and Reimagine has been added.

- Place intensification - re-imagine**
More fundamental intervention through the redevelopment of larger sites or centres to be bolder about the level of change, using the prevailing character from surrounding areas to influence re-design
- Place intensification - re-examine**
Some interventions possible to reflect the existing character through the redevelopment of available sites, generally along and behind high streets
- Place intensification - repair**
Enhance the existing character through infill, re-use of existing building fabric and development that is sensitive and context-led



Strongly disagree	15% [8 respondents]
Disagree	9% [5 respondents]
Neither	19% [10 respondents]
Agree	15% [8 respondents]
Strongly agree	7% [4 respondents]
No response	35% [19 respondents]

1.6 FEEDBACK:
COLLIERS WOOD

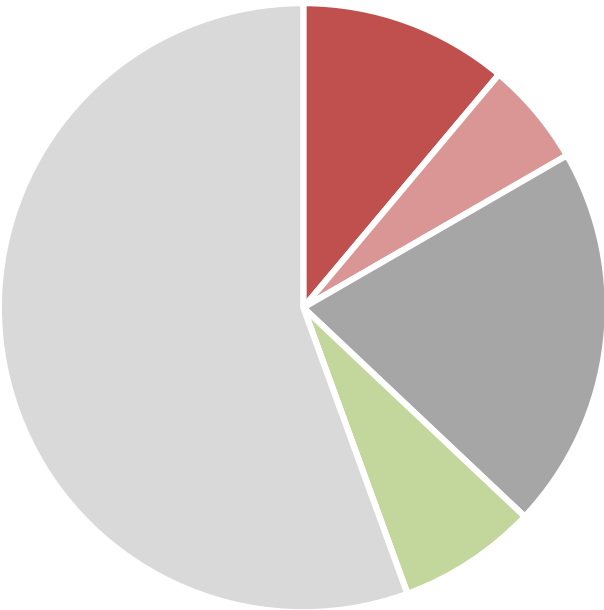
ANALYSIS

- 1.6.1 This chapter describes the character of the Colliers Wood area, details the feedback from the online survey which scored the area highly for transport, environment, amenities and facilities (shown in the graph opposite). A number of growth themes, key issues and opportunities were identified for each of the neighbourhoods within Colliers Wood.
- 1.6.2 7% of the responses received through the online survey agreed with this chapter, and 17% disagreed.
- 1.6.3 The main issues from the 12 responses were potential height of new developments, in particular around Britannia Point, and traffic/pollution.



RESPONSE TO COMMENTS AND
SUGGESTED CHANGES

- 1.6.4 It should be noted that an application for the land south of Britannia Point was submitted around the time of the consultation, and was mentioned in the responses.
- 1.6.5 The council recognise the importance of reducing air pollution and improving access/quality of green spaces in Colliers Wood, and this has been reflected in the content of the chapter.



Strongly disagree	11% [6 respondents]
Disagree	6% [3 respondents]
Neither	20% [11 respondents]
Agree	7% [4 respondents]
Strongly agree	0% [0 respondents]
No response	56% [30 respondents]

1.7 FEEDBACK:
SOUTH WIMBLEDON

ANALYSIS

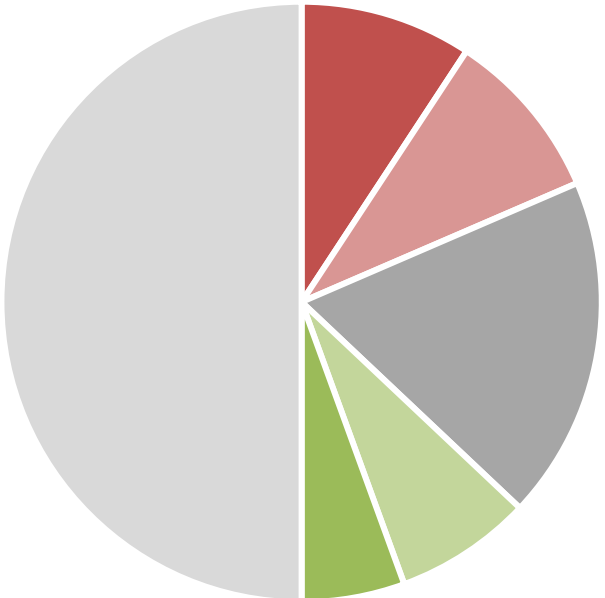
- 1.7.1 This chapter describes the character of the South Wimbledon area, details the feedback from the online survey which scored the area highly for transport, environment, safety, amenities and facilities. A number of growth themes, key issues and opportunities were identified for South Wimbledon.
- 1.7.2 13% of the responses received through the online survey agreed with this chapter, and 18% disagreed.
- 1.7.3 The acknowledgement of the distinctive character of South Wimbledon in this chapter was well received, with respondents quoting what they valued most about their area. There were also further suggestions of how it could be improved.
- 1.7.4 The response from the Battles Area Residents' Association provided detailed feedback on how this chapter could be improved.



A plan illustrating the neighbourhoods within the area
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RESPONSE TO COMMENTS AND
SUGGESTED CHANGES

- 1.7.5 The request for South Wimbledon to be divided into smaller neighbourhoods was considered appropriate given the distinctive character of the Battles, Old Merton Park, High Path and the industrial areas. These have been shown on the chapter map in the final version of the Character Study (shown opposite) and it has been made clear in the accompanying text that each of these areas have distinct issues and opportunities.
- 1.7.6 Photos of the area have also been updated in the final version to show the best examples of its character.



Strongly disagree	9% [5 respondents]
Disagree	9% [5 respondents]
Neither	19% [10 respondents]
Agree	7% [4 respondents]
Strongly agree	6% [3 respondents]
No response	50% [27 respondents]

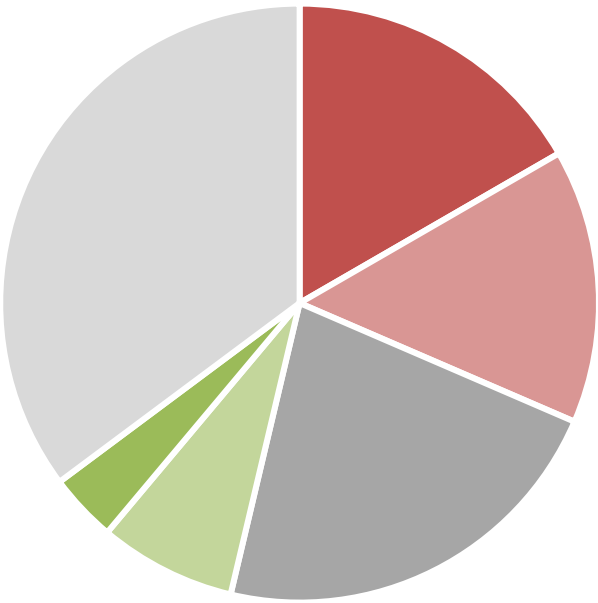
1.8 FEEDBACK:
WIMBLEDON

ANALYSIS

- 1.8.1 This chapter describes the character of the Wimbledon area, details the feedback from the online survey, and a number of growth themes, key issues and opportunities for the 13 Wimbledon neighbourhoods.
- 1.8.2 11% of the responses received through the online survey agreed with this chapter, and 32% disagreed.
- 1.8.3 The main issues related to the potential height of future developments in Wimbledon town centre and their negative effect on existing low-rise, historic buildings, or on existing residential areas.
- 1.8.4 Some respondents thought there was a lack of detail, in particular what makes Wimbledon so attractive as a place to live and work, with an emphasis on culture and leisure facilities.
- 1.8.5 There was general support for the Character Study and respondents said they hoped it would make a positive contribution to the enhancement of historic character in Wimbledon. Although some thought there could be more detail.

RESPONSE TO COMMENTS AND
SUGGESTED CHANGES

- 1.8.6 In response to feedback from stakeholders additional wording has been added to this section in the final draft. This includes:
- Acknowledge the value of back gardens and green areas in Wimbledon;
 - Add the suggested opportunities for Haydon Park Parade and Haydons Road;
 - Add more detail on what makes Wimbledon an attractive place to live and work;
 - Review the wording for the Parkside neighbourhood in line with comments.



Strongly disagree	17%	[9 respondents]
Disagree	15%	[8 respondents]
Neither	22%	[12 respondents]
Agree	7%	[4 respondents]
Strongly agree	4%	[2 respondents]
No response	35%	[19 respondents]

1.9 FEEDBACK:
RAYNES PARK

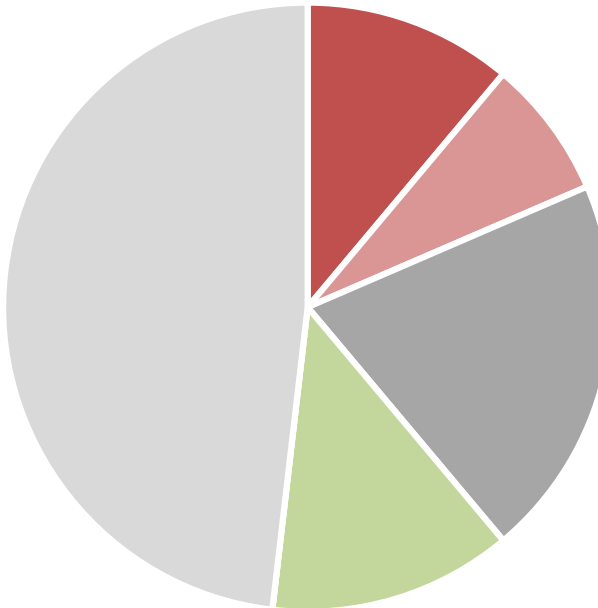
ANALYSIS

- 1.9.1 This chapter describes the character of the Raynes Park area, details the feedback from the online survey which scored the area highly for transport, environment, safety, economy, amenities and facilities. A number of growth themes, key issues and opportunities were identified for Raynes Park.
- 1.9.2 13% of the responses received through the online survey agreed with this chapter, and 18% disagreed.
- 1.9.3 The main issues mentioned were traffic and the road layout in the town centre, and the railway line, which were described as "disruptive". Opportunities identified to reduce the traffic dominance in the town centre were welcomed, including improvements to the public realm and shop frontages.



RESPONSE TO COMMENTS AND
SUGGESTED CHANGES

- 1.9.4 It was suggested that the Character Study refer to the Raynes Park Enhancement Plan. This has been added to the list of additional relevant documents in the appendices of the final draft to ensure that the reader can access more detailed information on the vision for Raynes Park town centre.
- 1.9.5 Additional wording has been added in the final draft on the imbalance between the sides of the stations at Raynes Park and Motspur Park, and that this should be addressed, along with station entrance enhancements.
- 1.9.6 The description of Shannon Corner was reviewed to make reference to its role as an economic centre providing jobs to the wider area.



Strongly disagree	11%	[6 respondents]
Disagree	7%	[4 respondents]
Neither	20%	[11 respondents]
Agree	13%	[7 respondents]
Strongly agree	0%	[0 respondents]
No response	48%	[26 respondents]

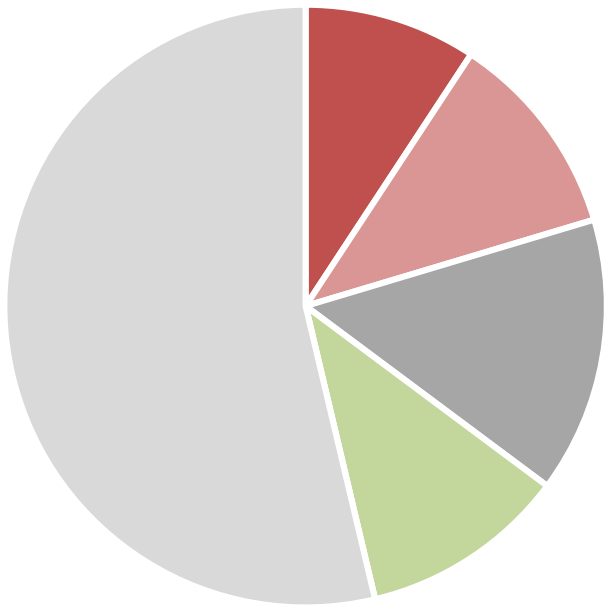
1.10 FEEDBACK:
MITCHAM

ANALYSIS

- 1.10.1 This chapter describes the character of the Mitcham area, details the feedback from the online survey which scored the area highly for environment and housing. A number of growth themes, key issues and opportunities were identified.
- 1.10.2 11% of the responses received through the online survey agreed with this chapter, and 20% disagreed.
- 1.10.3 The main issues were a lack of detail on the existing character of Mitcham, and in particular its history. There were concerns that Mitcham was too far towards Reimagine and should be more towards Repair.
- 1.10.4 It was agreed by some that there were opportunities to improve the existing character of parts of Mitcham through new developments. In particular, where improvements to walking, cycling and green spaces could also be secured, for example along London Road.
- 1.10.5 Local shopping parades were mentioned as being vital for supporting the local community, particularly during Covid-19, and that in the future they will play an important role in 20-minute neighbourhoods.

RESPONSE TO COMMENTS AND
SUGGESTED CHANGES

- 1.10.6 In response to feedback the opportunities for Pollards Hill have been updated to include more strategic greening, improved public transport accessibility and public realm improvements.
- 1.10.7 Additional references have been made to celebrating Mitcham's heritage and reinforcing the historic qualities of Lower Mitcham and Cricket Green, and Mitcham town centre.



Strongly disagree	9%	[5 respondents]
Disagree	11%	[6 respondents]
Neither	15%	[8 respondents]
Agree	11%	[6 respondents]
Strongly agree	0%	[0 respondents]
No response	54%	[29 respondents]

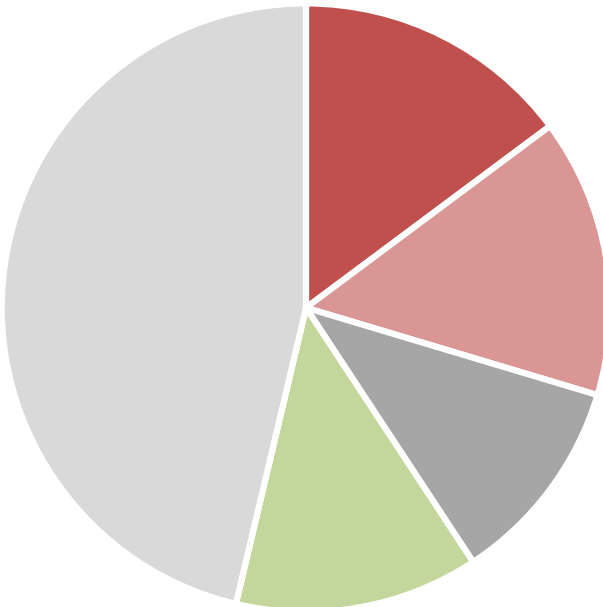
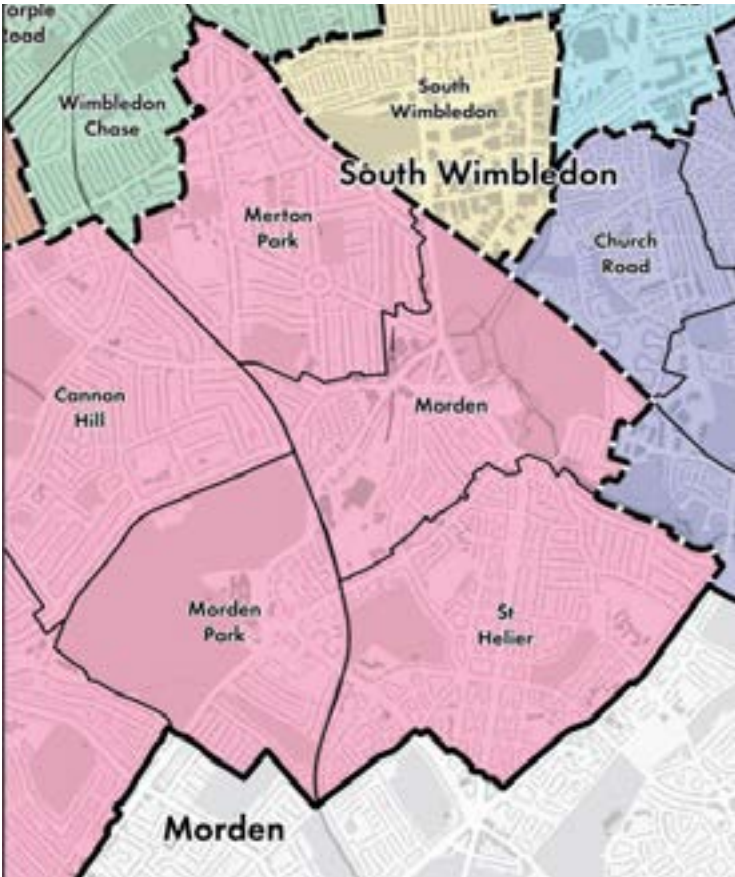
1.11 FEEDBACK:
MORDEN

ANALYSIS

- 1.11.1 This chapter describes the character of the Morden area, details the feedback from the online survey which scored the area highly for transport, environment, amenities and facilities. A number of growth themes, key issues and opportunities were also identified.
- 1.11.2 13% of the responses received through the online survey agreed with this chapter, and 30% disagreed. The main issues were the principle of infill development, the grouping of Merton Park in the Morden chapter as opposed to the Wimbledon chapter, and the potential for improvement to Morden town centre.

RESPONSE TO COMMENTS AND
SUGGESTED CHANGES

- 1.11.3 Many respondents were concerned about the effect of infill development on rear gardens/corner plots in Merton Park would have a harmful effect on the character of the area. The council recognises that this type of development has happened for many years, and the Character Study shows how this could be achieved. The Small Sites Toolkit SPD aims to improve the quality of such developments in future.
- 1.11.4 Throughout the development of the Character Study it has been clear that Merton Park is a neighbourhood that relates closely to Morden to the South and Wimbledon to the North. In response to the feedback received the boundary will include all of the John Innes Conservation Area, as the character relates closely to that of the roads between Kingston Road and Erridge Road. However, it was important that Merton Park was maintained as a single neighbourhood, and has remained within the Morden chapter.



Strongly disagree	15%	[8 respondents]
Disagree	15%	[8 respondents]
Neither	11%	[6 respondents]
Agree	13%	[7 respondents]
Strongly agree	0%	[0 respondents]
No response	46%	[25 respondents]

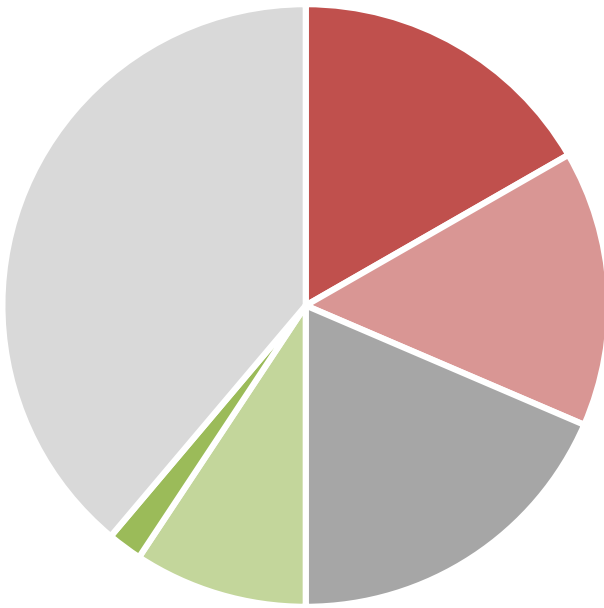
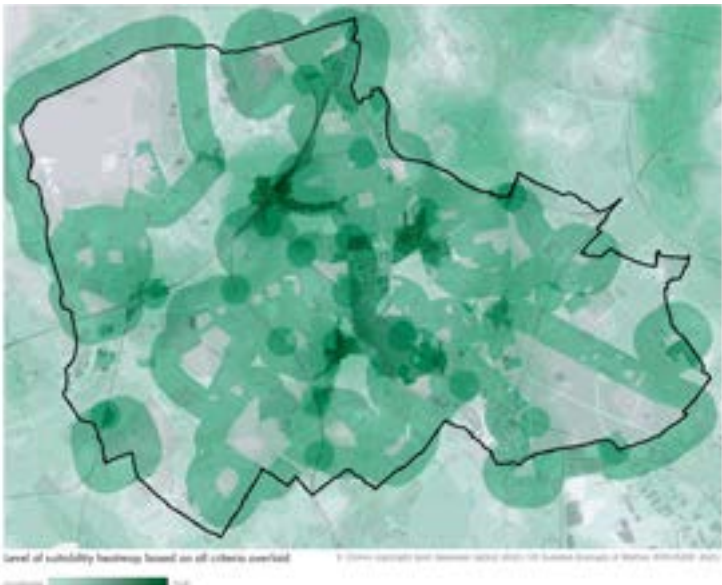
1.12 **FEEDBACK:**
CHARACTER EVOLUTION

ANALYSIS

- 1.12.1 This chapter summarises the aim of the Character Study: defining context-led growth in Merton. It explores the potential evolution of each of the typologies identified in the report, and then focuses on the role of tall buildings.
- 1.12.2 11% of the responses received through the online survey agreed with this chapter, and 32% disagreed.
- 1.12.3 The main issues were concern around the potential for new developments in the borough to be detrimental to existing character, and in particular the impact of infill development on existing residential amenity.
- 1.12.4 Some respondents did not see the justification for growth, but others identified that there was a need for “well-designed, sustainable, and affordable housing all over London”. One responded wrote “we should be forward thinking and bold, we should always try and preserve the past but not let it define our future direction”.

RESPONSE TO COMMENTS AND SUGGESTED CHANGES

- 1.12.5 The contents of this chapter are a fundamental part of defining Merton’s capacity for growth, as required by the New London Plan. It explores how Merton’s different typologies can evolve over time to deliver much needed housing, including through taller buildings, where appropriate (shown in map opposite).
- 1.12.6 A number of responses were received from the Merton Park area about the Opportunity Area boundary. This has now been revised to exclude any existing residential streets.
- 1.12.7 There was concern about infill development on rear gardens/corner plots The council recognises that this type of development has happened for many years, and the Small Sites Toolkit SPD aims to improve the quality of such developments in future.



Strongly disagree	17%	[9 respondents]
Disagree	15%	[8 respondents]
Neither	19%	[10 respondents]
Agree	9%	[5 respondents]
Strongly agree	2%	[1 respondents]
No response	39%	[21 respondents]

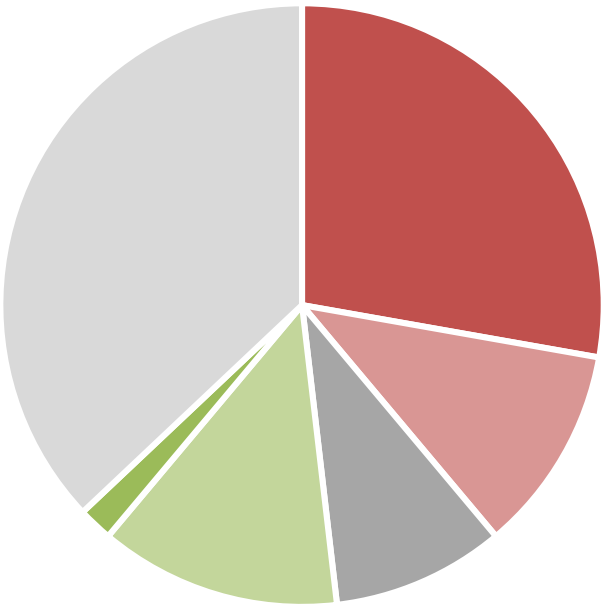
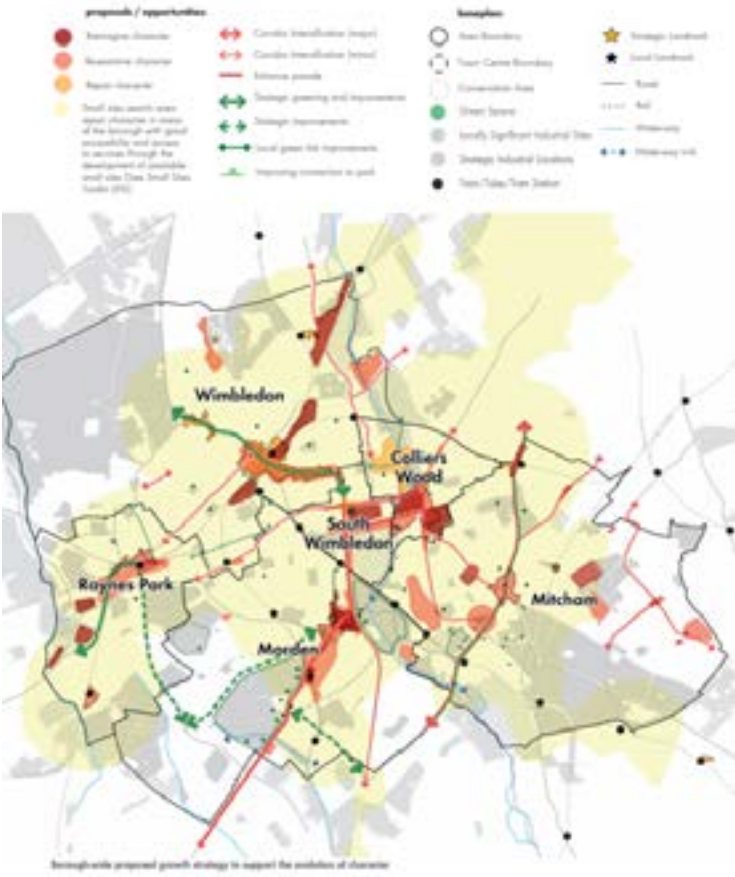
1.13 **FEEDBACK:**
FUTURE MERTON

ANALYSIS

- 1.13.1 This chapter summarises what context-led growth means for Merton, as an outer London borough with a largely suburban character, facing particular challenges in accommodating a step change in housing delivery.
- 1.13.2 15% of the responses received through the online survey agreed with this chapter, and 39% disagreed.
- 1.13.3 The main issues were concern around taller buildings and new developments harming existing character. However, there was lots of positivity about the Character Study’s references to regenerating town centres and local parades to meet changing local needs, emphasis on maintaining green spaces, and reinvigorating areas where the character is in need of repair.

RESPONSE TO COMMENTS AND SUGGESTED CHANGES

- 1.13.4 Following comments from some respondents, a few changes were made to the proposed growth strategy map to make it more legible (see image opposite).
- 1.13.5 The feedback for this chapter summarises a lot of key issues that arose through the consultation. The concern that the Character Study will encourage more, taller development that could harm existing character and residential amenity was a common theme. However, the aim of the Character Study is to improve the quality of those developments that will come forward. As acknowledged by Merton’s Design Review Panel, it will be a vital tool for stakeholders and decision makers in the future.



Strongly disagree	28%	[15 respondents]
Disagree	11%	[6 respondents]
Neither	9%	[5 respondents]
Agree	13%	[7 respondents]
Strongly agree	2%	[1 respondents]
No response	37%	[20 respondents]

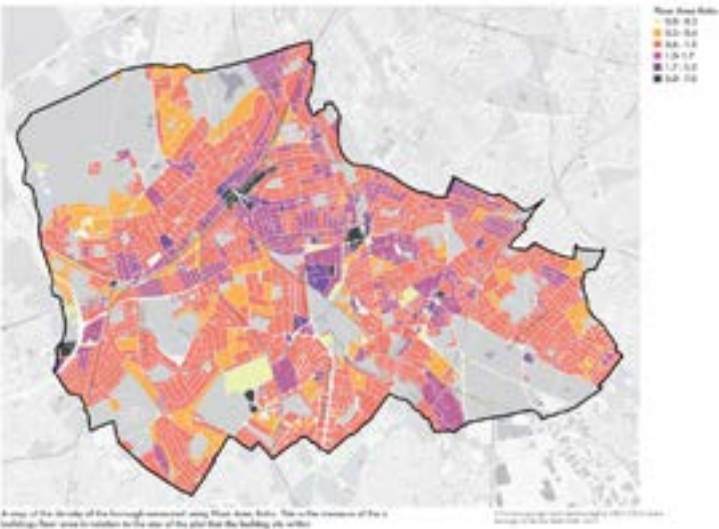
1.14 FEEDBACK: APPENDIX 1: BASELINE MAPPING

ANALYSIS

- 1.14.1 This section provides all of the maps in the document in full A4 size to make them more accessible for the reader. Additional maps detailing the socio-economic and demographic status of Merton are included to provide a complete picture of the factors that make up Merton's character.
- 1.14.2 9% of the responses received through the online survey agreed with this chapter, and 21% disagreed.
- 1.14.3 The main issues were accuracy of some of the information presented, and legibility.

RESPONSE TO COMMENTS AND SUGGESTED CHANGES

- 1.14.4 All inaccuracies identified with the mapping have been resolved in the final version of the Character Study, and the council is grateful to all of those who took the time to respond and notify us.
- 1.14.5 The legibility of the maps has been addressed, including adjusting the colours/ symbology and keys to make the information clearer for the reader.



1.16 CONCLUSION

- 1.16.1 In many ways, the character of a place is defined by an individual's perception of it. The Character Study has been underpinned by extensive public engagement with residents, community organisations, residents' associations, businesses, landowners, developers and council officers.
- 1.16.2 The results of the online questionnaire presented in the pie charts were a mixture of tick box responses and text comments. Our analysis shows that there were many sections where people ticked 'strongly disagree' or 'disagree'. However, comments and email responses revealed that there was overall support for the Character Study, but respondents also used the consultation as an opportunity to highlight other issues there were dissatisfied with in their areas; for example, specific developments/proposals.
- 1.16.3 Overall, the Design Review Panel were very impressed with the scope and content of the document and felt it was well put together and illustrated. Words like exceptional, informative and helpful were used by the Panel to describe the document. One local resident described the Character Study as "thoughtful and well researched".
- 1.16.4 The Character Study will assist the council, community groups, stakeholders and others with an interest in the borough to better understand Merton's distinctive local character. Once adopted as an SPD it will also be an important tool for decision making and for developers and others investors in Merton to use to ensure that proposals positively respond to the local context.
- 1.16.5 The next step for the Character Study SPD is for it to be adopted by Council in 2021.



"We're asked what makes Merton.....Merton? In terms of "character" there's little that's distinctively Merton - it is after all just a 50 year old political construct. It is the neighbourhoods within it that have distinct character."