Introduction

Strategic objective 8 of the LDF Core Strategy for Merton promotes a high quality urban and suburban environment, where development is well designed and contributes to the function and character of the borough.

In order to deliver quality change through the development process that safeguards the best of the borough's character and secures positive improvements elsewhere, we need an initial clear understanding of the borough's existing character.

The existing design SPG which was adopted in 2004, is being replaced by a new Design SPD to support the LDF Core Strategy and sites and policies DPD.

The Borough Character Study supports and reinforces the new Design SPD and Sites and Policies DPD by highlighting Merton's specific local characteristics and local issues that may be addressed through the development process. The revised SPG will be written to respond to the locally distinctive characteristics of Merton highlighted within the study. From this analysis, guidance will be formulated that has local significance and will help to preserve existing character where appropriate, enhance existing character where it has deteriorated and establish a new identity in areas where the sense of place has broken down.

The study will examine the features of each of the 36 defined Neighbourhoods and smaller scale character areas that contribute towards their individual character. This information will contribute towards guiding future change in the borough to ensure that local distinctiveness is preserved and that regeneration occurs in areas that would benefit from well-designed new development to reinforce their existing character. The study will set a cohesive framework for the future development of the borough.

The study will give equal consideration to the distinctiveness of all areas of the borough regardless of existing designations.

For areas of the borough that are designated Conservation Areas, the study should be read in association with the published conservation area. character appraisal.

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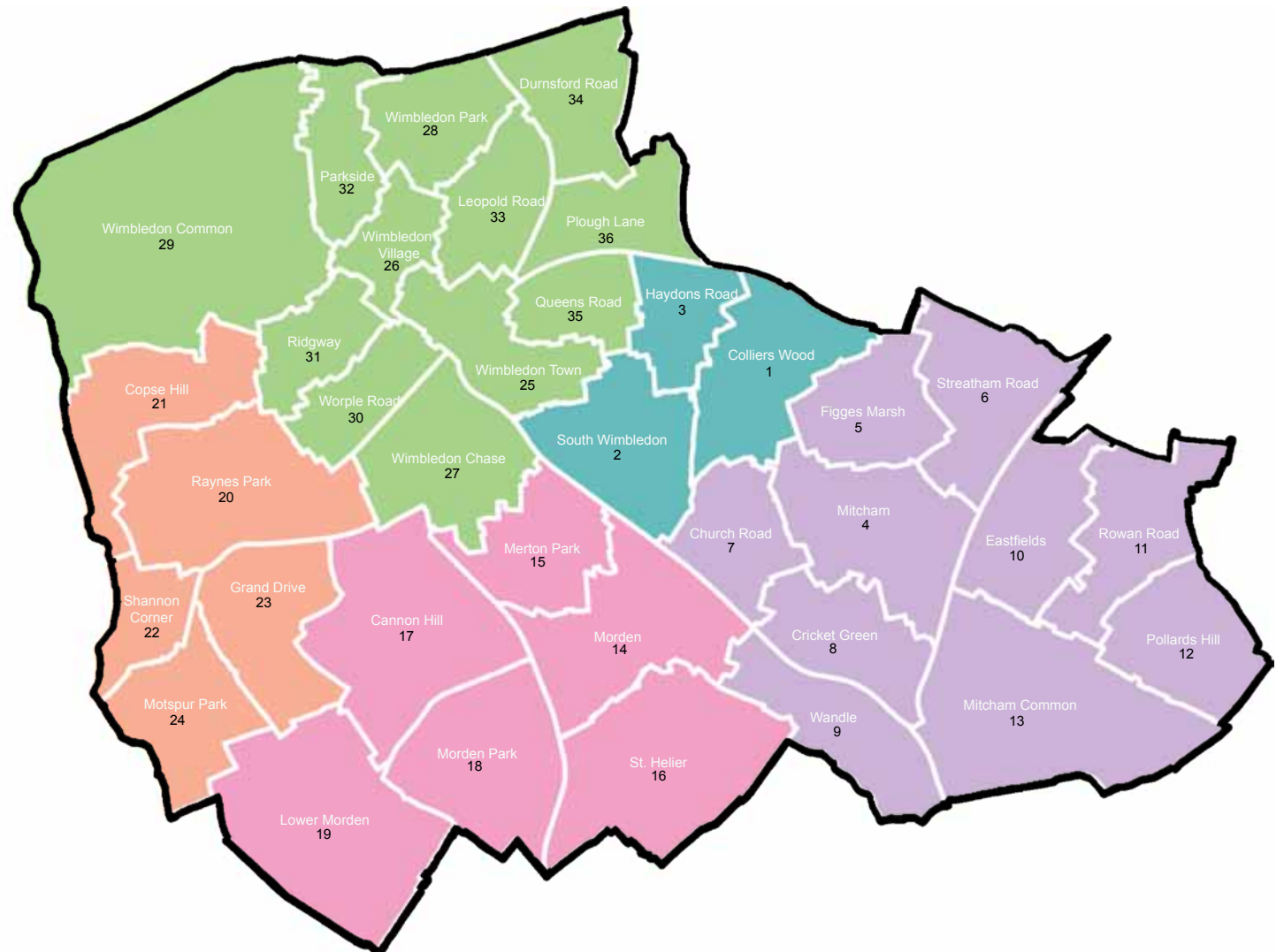The study will establish a hierarchy of areas of the borough starting with the sub areas identified in the LDF

Map showing LDF Sub Areas

Method

The LDF Sub Areas have been further subdivided into 36 Local Neighbourhoods.

Key:

LDF Sub Area

- Colliers Wood
- Mitcham
- Morden
- Raynes Park
- Wimbledon
- ▬▬▬ Borough boundary
- ▬ ▬ Neighbourhood boundary

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Defining the Neighbourhoods

Local Neighbourhoods have been defined on the basis of local associations; areas of the borough that people recognise, refer to and identify with. They are not meant to relate to administrative boundaries. These Local Neighbourhoods often relate to the physical characteristics of the urban environment, with these physical features influencing whether people feel that they are in one particular place or another.

Therefore some physical features have been used to define both the edges and content of these neighbourhoods. These range in form and scale and may include any of the following features:

- **Town centres**

- **Local shopping areas**

- **Concentrations of similar activity (eg. industrial uses)**

- **Different land uses**

- **Changes in topography & landscape**

- **Open spaces**

- **Urban edges with open space**

- **Major roads (generally without frontages)**

- **Railway lines**

- **Changes in building typology or architectural character**

- **Boundaries of developments that don't link with other developments**

Neighbourhood Analysis

For each neighbourhood, the origins and general character, land use, built form, open space and movement are briefly described. This is followed by a plan that identifies the key characteristics of each neighbourhood and includes features such as; significant views and areas of landscape, landmarks, gateways and areas for potential enhancement projects.

Example of neighbourhood analysis plan

Defining the Character Areas

Within each neighbourhood, the area has been further subdivided into character areas. These areas are more locally significant areas within the larger neighbourhood. They have been defined on the basis of identifiable typological features and characteristics such as:

- **Building form, age and height**

- **Street pattern**

- **Density**

- **Land use**

- **Vitality and tranquillity**

- **Open space**

- **Trees**

- **Features, landmarks and views**

The study examines the features of each area that contribute towards their essential character.

Character Area Assessment

Each character area is assessed using the following two approaches:

1 Character Statement
For each character area a character statement is prepared. This is a visual analysis of the area, identifying the key characteristics and features of note.

2 Criteria based assessment
This section scores each character area against a set of assessment criteria. The criteria are intended to give an indication of the relative "quality" of the area based on principles of good urban design. These criteria have been developed with reference to CABE's "By Design" and "Building for Life: Delivering Great Places to Live" and are intended to give a numerical value to the "quality" of the character area. A table showing definitions of the assessment criteria used is on the following page.

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Criteria Based Assessment : Definitions

|			
IDENTITY: Clearly identifiable "edges" that distinguish it from the surrounding development: • Clear change in building type, style, landscape features or use between one area and another • Edge defined by other barrier such as roads, railway lines or landscape edges	**ARCHITECTURAL INTEREST: Area containing buildings of architectural or historic interest:** • Listed building or Locally Listed • Buildings / Conservation Area • Other buildings of local significance in terms of their architectural or historic qualities	**TREES: Significant trees or shrubs that make a positive contribution to the identity of the area:** • Trees or shrubs within the public realm • Trees or shrubs within private gardens	**ECONOMIC VITALITY: Area with few vacant or underused sites which affect the character:** • Empty units • Underused buildings that detract from the area • Vacant sites
URBAN LAYOUT: Strong street pattern or road layout with well defined public spaces: • Clearly defined and identifiable street layout, either planned or organic • Clear hierarchy of streets and public spaces	**BUILT FORM: Buildings with cohesive scale, massing and details:** • Buildings of broadly the same height • Buildings of similar form • Similarity of plot widths, lengths and building lines • Use of cohesive palette of materials • Similar detailing e.g. Windows, brick detailing, roof details etc.	**LANDSCAPE: Green open spaces or riverside areas that make a positive contribution to the identity of the area:** • Open space or riverside within or visible from an area • Landscape in front or rear gardens that contributes to the street • Grassed or landscaped verges or open spaces	
MOVEMENT: Building and street layout that is easy to find your way around with good connections to the surrounding streets: • Clearly identifiable routes around the area • Clear hierarchy of routes for both pedestrians and vehicles • A street layout that is well connected with the surrounding area by a variety of alternative routes	**PUBLIC REALM: High quality public realm and or generally consistent boundary treatments:** • Public realm that contributes to rather than detracts from identity • Public Realm with a clear relationship with building frontages • Broadly consistent front garden boundary treatment e.g. Walls, hedges, fences • Active edges overlooking the public realm	**FEATURES: Topography, significant views or landmarks that contribute to the experience of being within the area:** • Significant gradients • Long distance views to open space, landmarks or landscape features • Views to buildings or landscape features • Individual buildings that contribute significantly to the identity of the area • Identifiable "gateways" or entry points into an area	

Character Area Assessment Map

The extent to which the areas satisfy the assessment criteria has been scored to enable each area to be allocated to one of the following three categories of quality.

1) A score of 75 or more indicates an **area of established high quality.**
2) A score of between 55 and 70 indicates an **area with scope to reinforce the existing character.**
3) A score of 50 or less indicates an **area requiring enhancement to reinforce identity.**

These categories will be identified on the character area assessment map.
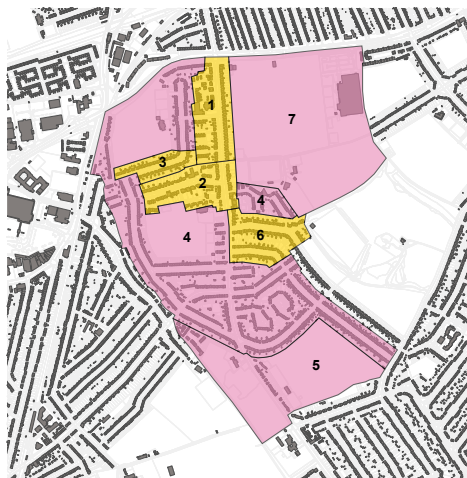
Example of character area assessment map
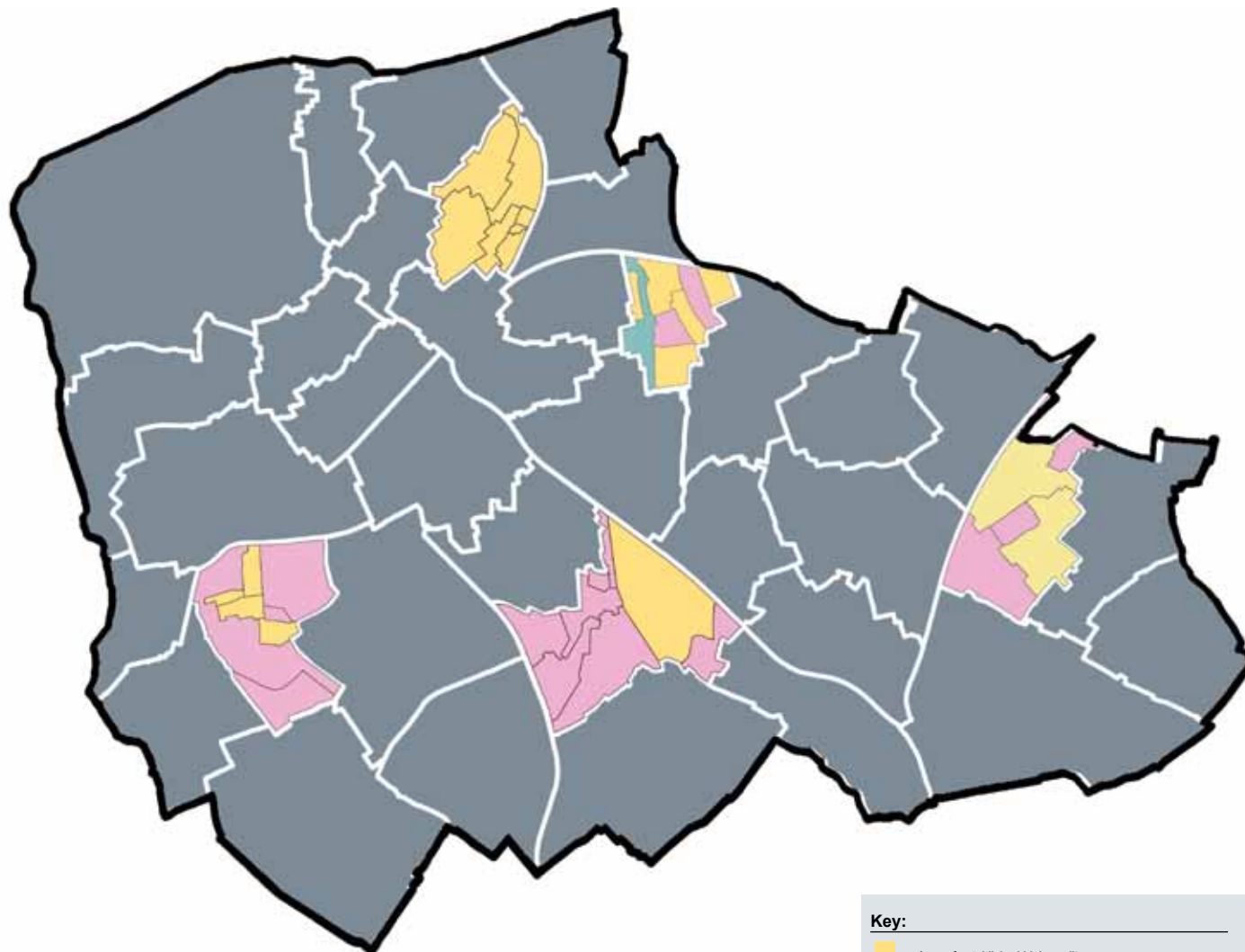
Borough wide character area assessment map

Key:

 Area of established high quality

 Area with scope to reinforce the existing character

 Area requiring enhancement to reinforce identity

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Character Area Issues and Guidance

Following the allocation of the area into one of three area types:
1) Area of Established high quality
2) Area with scope to reinforce the exisitng character
3)Area requiring enhancement to reinforce identity,
the character area Issues, Guidance and potential enhancement projects are identified for each area.

Images of common built form and public realm issues encountered during the study

St.Georges Road, Mitcham: Potential to improve the visual appearance of traffic calming scheme

Buckfast Road: Loss of front boundaries and planting in front gardens

Haydon's Road: Unsympathetic alterations to a former shop unit

Spencer Road: Pebbledashing or painting facades and replcement windows can harm the unity of the street.

Acacia Road: Planter in need of upgrading

Garfield Road: Oversized front dormer destroys the lines of the original roofs

Content to be added at later stage

Introduction

Neighbourhood Analysis notation glossary

Major movement corridor
Generally the primary route used by vehicular traffic for movement through the neighbourhood and is typically a busy route which is part of the Transport for London network, Strategic road network or London distributor road.

Minor movement corridor
Generally a secondary route used by vehicular traffic for movement through the neighbourhood or part of the area and is typically a moderate to busy route which is part of the London distributor road or local distributor road network.

Movement corridor needing enhancement
A major or minor movement corridor whereby the public realm such as condition of pavements, railings and or condition of the pedestrian environment for example crossing points are in need of improvement. This can include fragmented townscape, diminished landscape features and poor quality shop-fronts which have a negative visual impact along a road.

Major barrier
Denotes a physical barrier such as a railway which prevents permeability between two areas, these barriers often define boundaries or can bisect a neighbourhood.

Major gateway
These are primary entry point/s into the neighbourhood which due to a change in built form, use, building and / or landscape arrangement mark a sense arrival into the neighbourhood for example a transition from urban to rural or industrial to residential, enclosed space to open space or vice versa. Some major gateways are reinforced by architectural detailing which frames the space to create a focal point. Major gateways are typically located along major movement corridors with a high volume of traffic.

Minor gateway
These are secondary entry point/s into the neighbourhood which due to a change in built form, use, building and / or landscape arrangement mark arrival into the neighbourhood however do not have high volumes of traffic and typically allow access to a secondary route which feeds into the wider neighbourhood.

Major neighbourhood node
This is a focal point where there is a concentration of activity in the neighbourhood such as town centre, significant shopping parade and / or transport interchange which in addition to serving the needs of neighbourhood residents may also be used by those living in the wider area. This is generally in proximity to major movement corridors and has high volume of traffic.

Minor neighbourhood node
A less significant node which is typically serving the needs of residents specific to the neighbourhood such as a small shopping parade.

Neighbourhood node needing enhancement
A major or minor neighbourhood node where the streetscape and / or building arrangement or condition is such that it has a negative visual impact on the neighbourhood whereby enhancement is required.

Strategic landmark
This is a landmark which makes a significant contribution to the townscape such as building or monument which is of strategic importance due to its scale, historical or architectural significance and is typically visible from beyond the neighbourhood / borough boundaries.

Local landmark
A landmark which makes a contribution to the townscape such as building or monument which is of local importance due to its scale, historical or architectural significance and visible in the specific neighbourhood or local area.

Key view to green space
An unobscured prominent view of a significant area of green space which contributes to the visual amenity of the neighbourhood.

Glimpsed views
A view of green space and / or landmark which is partly obscured by vegetation, fencing and or structure, although view is limited it contributes to the visual amenity of the neighbourhood.

Significant view to landmark / feature
A prominent view of landmark or building for example a significant vista or view of focal point which contributes to the visual amenity and overall character of the neighbourhood.

Panoramic view

A viewpoint particularly where there is a gradient in the landscape which provides an expansive view of the neighbourhood and / or areas beyond.

Significant green space

This notation includes both designated and publically accessible undesignated areas of green space, from large playing fields to significant grass verges that have a positive impact on the character and local distinctiveness of the surrounding area.

They include areas that visually contribute to the streetscape as well as areas of green space that, whilst not contributing directly to the character of the public realm, improve the setting and amenity of the properties adjacent to them.

Linear grass verge

Denotes areas of green space particularly significant grass verges with a linear form which make a positive contribution to the visual amenity of the area but are too small to indentify individually on the analysis plan.

Green space in need of improvement

A green space as defined in previous column where the condition of landscaping has deteriorated or landscaping arrangement has potential for enhancement which would make a positive contribution to the visual amenity of the neighbourhood.

Significant tree / group of trees

A single tree or group of trees such as a tree lined avenue which make a significant contribution to the visual amenity and / or character of the neighbourhood.

Waterspace

A water feature in the public realm such as pond, lake, stream or river which makes a contribution to the visual amenity and / or character of the neighbourhood.

Topography gradient

A change of level or slope in the landscape or streetscape.

HR **Public realm enhancement needed**

A specific space or collection of spaces in the public realm which has been identified as detracting from the visual amenity of the neighbourhood and has the potential as an enhancement project to make a positive contribution through improvement to the character of the area. Public realm issues which have a negative visual impact can include the condition of roads, pavements, general landscaping and green spaces however this is not exhaustive, public realm enhancement projects are identified after neighbourhood assessment to be specific to each neighbourhood and outlined in character area guidance.