Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners

Planning Design Economics

LONDON BOROUGH OF MERTON

TOWN CENTRE STUDY

FINAL REPORT

CL10224/PW/SPe/SPa

September 2005

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose of the Study

1. Nathaniel Lichfield & Partners (NLP) were commissioned by London Borough of Merton to prepare a borough wide town centre and retail study, including an assessment of the main town centre and district centres, namely Wimbledon, Morden and Mitcham. The study assesses the future need for additional retail, commercial leisure facilities, housing and other town centre uses. The study includes:

- a survey of 1,000 households within the Borough and parts of neighbouring boroughs;
- a survey of 790 visitors within the three main centres (Wimbledon, Morden and Mitcham);
- a postal survey of commercial occupiers within Wimbledon, Morden, Mitcham, Raynes Park and Colliers Wood centres (163 responses);
- a postal canvas of over 300 national/regional multiple retailers and leisure operators, in order to ascertain their potential space requirements in the Borough.

The Potential for Retail Development

Convenience Retailing (Food and Grocery)

2. An assessment of available expenditure and existing shopping patterns suggest that convenience goods sales floorspace within the Borough is collectively trading about 15% above the expected levels, about £32 million above average. There are significant variations in the trading performance of stores within the Borough. Some food stores, such as Sainsbury in Wimbledon town centre and Tesco Extra at New Malden are trading above their company averages. However, the Sainsbury at Colliers Wood is trading significantly below the company average.

3. In qualitative terms many of the existing food stores do not offer the full range and choice of products available in large superstores. In relation to the four main centres in Merton (Wimbledon, Mitcham, Morden and Colliers Wood) food store provision is weakest in Mitcham and Morden. Overall there is a quantitative and qualitative need to improve food store provision within the Borough, particularly in the southern part of the Borough.

4. Surplus expenditure available in the Borough at 2011 is projected to exceed the benchmark turnover of existing floorspace by about £51 million. The majority of this surplus is expected to relate to large food stores, and could support up to 4,700 sq m net of new food store sales floorspace. The surplus expenditure at 2011 could support a further food superstore. The remaining requirement could be provided in smaller supermarkets and shops. Alternatively extension to existing food superstore could be supported. The current changes to the Sainsbury store in Colliers Wood may increase this floorspace projection, if the amount of convenience sales floorspace within the store reduces.

Additional Food Store and Convenience Floorspace Projections

	2005 to 2008	2005 to 2011	2005 to 2016
Surplus Expenditure £M	**36.06**	**51.46**	**77.44**
Large store surplus	34.38	46.58	67.17
Small shops/store surplus	1.68	4.88	10.27
Sales Floorspace SQ M Net			
Large stores	3,528	4,731	6,704
Small shops/stores	338	971	2,011

Comparison Retailing (Non-Food Durable Goods)

5. An assessment of available expenditure and existing shopping patterns suggest that a significant amount of comparison goods expenditure in the study area is spent at large shopping centres outside the Borough, e.g. Croydon, Kingston, Central London/West End and Sutton. The highest level of expenditure leakage comes from the eastern parts of the study area, where residents have good accessibility to competing centres, and one would expect expenditure outflow to be high in these areas.

6. Overall comparison retail sales floorspace within the London Borough of Merton appears to be trading healthily, which appears to be consistent with relatively low shop vacancy rates within the main town centres.

7. Major retail development in Merton could change existing shopping patterns and could reduce comparison expenditure leakage. Conversely improvements in competing centres may increase expenditure leakage from the study area. Expenditure projections are based on the assumption that Merton will maintain its current market share of comparison goods expenditure, recognising that new development will be required in order to maintain Merton's existing market share of expenditure in the face of increasing competition from outside the Borough.

Additional Comparison Goods Floorspace Projections

Period	**2005 to 2008**	**2005 to 2011**	**2005 to 2016**
Surplus Expenditure £M	**47.36**	**82.63**	**178.20**
Wimbledon town centre	35.77	51.88	91.06
Mitcham/Morden/Colliers Wood	10.45	16.77	32.32
Other local centres Merton	1.14	4.92	14.30
Retail warehouses	n/a	9.06	40.52
Sales Floorspace Sq M Net	**7,630**	**11,817**	**21,261**
Wimbledon town centre	4,887	6,778	11,043
Mitcham/Morden/Colliers Wood	2,499	3,836	6,858
Other local centres Merton	244	1,203	3,360
Retail warehouses	n/a	3,314	13,758
Gross Floorspace Sq M	**10,900**	**16,882**	**30,372**
Wimbledon town centre	6,982	9,683	15,776
Mitcham/Morden/Colliers Wood	3,570	5,480	9,797
Other local centres Merton	348	1,719	4,799
Retail warehouses	n/a	4,735	19,655

8. These capacity projections suggest there is scope for additional comparison goods retail development within the Borough. The long term projections beyond 2011 should be treated with caution.

9. In qualitative terms, Croydon, Kingston and Sutton town centres are larger than Wimbledon and have a more extensive range of multiple retailers. Residents within Merton have a good choice of high street comparison shopping destinations.

10. Wimbledon town centre is supported by Mitcham and Morden town centres and Colliers Wood Urban Centre and local centres within the Borough. These smaller centres have a much more limited range of multiple retailers, but have a selection of specialist independent retailers.

11. The existing provision of retail warehouse stores appears to be excellent in the Borough, and these facilities also appear to serve neighbouring Boroughs. There may be limited need for additional retail warehouse floorspace within Merton up to 2011, provided that town centre development can accommodate the floorspace projections.

Commercial Leisure Development, Community Facilities and Housing

12. Residents within the London Borough of Merton have good access to major leisure facilities in Kingston, Croydon, Streatham and Central London. The proximity of major leisure facilities in these surrounding Boroughs will limit the catchment area and potential for new major leisure facilities.

13. The two main sectors that could offer potential for new leisure facilities, based on our canvas of operators and published space requirements, are health & fitness clubs and bars/restaurants.

Cinemas

14. Cinema provision in Merton is reasonable, and there is also a good provision of multiplex cinemas in surrounding centres including Wandsworth, Streatham Sutton, Croydon and Kingston. The projections suggest that current cinema provision in Merton is sufficient to meet the demand within the Borough up to 2016. Therefore, the potential for further cinema development in the Borough appears to be limited.

Private Health and Fitness Clubs

15. There are a number of private members only health and fitness clubs in the Borough, including four major national operators with six clubs and existing provision appears to be sufficient to meet demand. However, an increase in membership rates along with population growth could increase demand. In addition there is operator demand for a further facility in Wimbledon. Therefore there may be emerging scope for further health and fitness provision in Merton in the future.

Other Leisure Facilities

- The London Borough of Merton has one tenpin bowling facility, but residents also have relatively good access to bowling facilities in Sutton, Tolworth/Surbiton, Croydon or in Streatham. Based on this existing provision there appears to be limited potential for further ten pin bowling facilities within the Borough.

- There is currently one commercial bingo hall in the Borough, and there are also bingo halls in Tooting, Kingston and Fulham. Existing bingo provision in Morden and Tooting appears to be sufficient to meet the needs of Merton's population.

- There are two nightclubs in Wimbledon, and several late bars. The provision of nightclubs in Central London, Kingston and Croydon will limit the potential for major new nightclubs in the Borough, but small-medium nightclub facilities may be viable.

- There are no commercial casinos in Merton. The provision of casinos in Central London will limit potential in the Borough. Wimbledon town centre may have a catchment population large enough to support a small casino. However larger centres such as Kingston and Croydon and Central London are likely to be more attractive locations.

- The proportion of Class A3/A5 uses (including restaurants, takeaways and bars) within the main centres in the Borough is comparable or above the national average for town centres. The canvas of operator's and published requirements suggests there is operator demand for restaurants/bars within Wimbledon town centre. The requirement for Class A3 to A5 floorspace could be between 1,700 to 2,500 sq m gross up to 2011.

Community Facilities

16. The study provides general guidance on the potential need to safeguard opportunities to provide improved community facilities in Merton.

17. The London Plan and the results of the surveys undertaken in this study, demonstrate the importance of community facilities, and the need for these facilities to be provided locally. Policies should seek to ensure that appropriate community facilities are provided within easy reach by walking or public transport. The net loss of such facilities should be resisted. Where necessary facilities should be improved in any localised area of deficiency. When considering the appropriate mix of uses within developments it will be necessary to carefully consider if the proposal could address a localised area of deficiency in the provision of community facilities, and whether the opportunity is suitable and viable to meet this need.

Housing

18. The London Plan indicates that Merton's target is 8,610 dwellings for the period 1997 to 2016, or 430 per annum. The schedule of development sites within the UDP includes a limited amount of land for housing only (7.83ha) and there is increased emphasis to mixed use development, with 47.22ha allocated for mixed use development including housing. These mixed use allocation include a number of sites within the four main centres, i.e. Wimbledon, Mitcham and Morden town centres and Colliers Wood Urban Centre.

19. Some of the sites evaluated for town centre uses in this study may also have potential for high density residential use. The indicative maximum potential capacity of these sites is over 1,100 dwellings, which could be accommodated if all the opportunities sites were implemented and included a significant element of residential development.

The Hierarchy and Role of Merton's Centres

20. Wimbledon is the main shopping centre within the Borough of Merton, at a higher level in the hierarchy than the two other centres, Morden and Mitcham. Below the three main centres are several local centres and local shopping parades.

21. Wimbledon is ranked 115th out of 1,672 centres across Great Britain. Management Horizon's rank for other shopping centres near the study area is shown in the table below. With the exception of Wimbledon, centres in Merton are ranked considerably lower than other centres in neighbouring Boroughs, particularly Sutton, Richmond, Putney, Streatham, Tooting and Clapham Junction.

Management Horizons UK Shopping Index 2003/04

MHE Venue	MHE Index Score 2003 - 2004	2003-2004 Rank
Oxford Street	286	9
Kingston-upon-Thames	253	16
Croydon	204	30
Sutton	162	70
Kensington	133	105
Wimbledon	**130**	**115**
Richmond-upon-Thames	109	165
Putney	102	183
Clapham Junction	72	262
Tooting	63	307
Streatham	56	351
Wandsworth	45	435
Brixton	43	452
Mitcham	**32**	**589**
Balham	27	635
New Malden	29	649
Morden	**21**	**863**
Clapham High Street	16	1,120
Carshalton	15	1,194
Merton	**15**	**1,194**
Colliers Wood	**14**	**1,268**
Raynes Park	**14**	**1,268**
Battersea	13	1,348

Source: Management Horizon Europe (2003/4).

22. Wimbledon town centre has the greatest range and choice of shops and services in the Borough, and is in particular the main focus of comparison (non-food) shopping in the Borough and has the lowest vacancy rate as shown below.

Centre	No. Shops/Services	No. Comparison Shops	Vacancy Rate %
Wimbledon	235	118	2.1
Mitcham	139	50	7.2
Morden	147	46	8.2
Colliers Wood	109	39	12.8

Raynes Park	65	19	4.6

23. Future development plan policies in Merton must clearly define which centres are town, district or local centres within the context of PPS6 and the London Plan. The designated centres in the Merton UDP are inconsistent with the London Plan.

24. Growth in expenditure should provide opportunities to improve the range and quality of shopping and leisure facilities across the Borough. Wimbledon town centre has good prospects for attracting new investment and major retail/leisure development. However, Mitcham and Morden also provide opportunities to improve facilities and both centres are in need of regeneration and improvement.

Wimbledon Town Centre

Wimbledon's Main Strengths • Good range and choice of national and independent shops and non-retail services compared with other centres in Merton. • Large food stores suitable for both main and top up food shopping. • Buoyant evening economy and leisure facilities. • Strong demand for premises resulting in a low vacancy rate and rental growth. • Occupiers suggest good current trading performance. • Good quality building and attractive mix of period buildings, well maintained with good street furniture, landscaping and lighting. • Good public transport access.
Wimbledon's Main Weaknesses • Does not offer the same quality and range of facilities available in Kingston and Croydon, especially clothing and footwear retailers. • Limited supply of premises available to accommodate new operators. • Linear structure with low pedestrian flows within peripheral areas. • High volumes of traffic generate noise and fumes. • Availability of car parking consider insufficient by occupiers. • High overheads not affordable to some independent operators.

25. Wimbledon town centre as the main centre in the Borough and should continue to be categorised above other centres in the Borough in the hierarchy. The centre serves shoppers from across the Borough and beyond, particularly for comparison shopping. The town centre has a relatively good range and choice of national and independent shops, and is the main comparison shopping and leisure destination in the Borough. However, the centre does not offer the same quality and range of facilities available in

Kingston and Croydon or London's West-End, especially clothing and footwear retailers.

26. Wimbledon town centre should be maintained and enhanced as a major town centre, serving the Borough as a whole, and should embrace a wide range of activities. It should function as the main comparison shopping destination in the Borough, and also the main destination for leisure, entertainment and cultural activities that serve the Borough's residents. In order to maintain and enhance this role, the centre should be the focus for major retail developments, large scale leisure and other uses that attract large numbers of people including major cultural, tourism and community facilities.

27. In order to meet the Borough's need for retail, leisure and other town centre uses major development is required in Wimbledon. The future priority is to ensure the successful implementation of key development sites within the town centre in order to deliver new retail, leisure and entertainment facilities. The main priorities are:

- Wimbledon Station; and
- The Broadway Extension.

28. Development of these sites will be complex, in particular the Station site will involve development over the railway lines/station platforms and the Broadway site will require replacement car parking either underground or at upper levels. Therefore development of these sites will require commitment from both the landowners and the Council. If implemented these developments would be expected to increase the level of comparison retail floorspace within the centre. The successful completion of these developments and their occupation should be secure over the LDF period. The Wimbledon Station site may only be implemented in the long term. Nevertheless, given the complexity of development on this site opportunities should be explored in the short term.

Mitcham and Morden Town Centres

29. Mitcham is the smallest of the three main town centres in Merton, and has a small number of multiple retailers. The centre has a basic range of shops and services, but these facilities serve most of the day to day needs of local residents. The centre primarily serves the retail needs of residents within the east of the Borough.

Mitcham's Main Strengths
• Facilities and specialist shops serve most of the day to day needs of local residents. • A number of convenience retail outlets, anchored by a Somerfield food supermarket, but not ideal for bulk food shopping. • Large pedestrianised area and Green. • Community facilities, including a library and advice centre. • Bus routes serve primary catchment area.

Mitcham's Main Weaknesses • Least affluent local catchment population in the Borough. • Limited number of comparison retailers and national multiple retailers. • The low quantity and quality of the retail offer • No natural circuit for pedestrians. Upper Green West Road is a barrier to pedestrian movement, exacerbated by traffic congestion. • Façades are poorly maintained and lack of previous investment. • Perception of poor security and safety. • High proportion of occupiers suggests trading performance has declined.

30. Morden also has a good range services serving the day to day needs of local residents. However, the centre has a limited number of larger retail units to accommodate national multiple retailers.

Morden's Main Strengths
• Good range services serving the day to day needs of local residents. • Frequent usage of pubs/bars/restaurants during the daytime and evening. • A number of convenience retail outlets, anchored by a Safeway (Morrisons). • Served by both buses and London Underground. • A very high proportion of visitors use the library in Morden, but lack of other community facilities. • Overall level of satisfaction amongst operators regarding trading performance.
Morden's Main Weaknesses • The vacancy rate is higher than in Wimbledon and Mitcham. • Poor choice and quality of shops and services. • Perception of poor security and safety. • Limited number of larger retail units to accommodate national multiple retailers. • Occupiers believe marketing activities for the centre are poor. • The availability and price of car parking also criticised.

- The station is out-dated and in need of improvement.

31. Mitcham and Morden town centres will continue to be second level centres in the hierarchy, below Wimbledon town centre. Their role as important shopping/service centres should be maintained and enhanced to ensure they provide an appropriate range of facilities and services. However, there is a need to regenerate Mitcham town centre in particular. Within these centres there is potential to intensify town centre activities including retail, leisure and community uses as part of major redevelopment, linked to existing and improved public transport facilities and improvements to the environmental quality of the centres.

32. This core area within Mitcham town centre has been the subject of a major urban design and master planning exercise. Emerging proposals include the redevelopment of a large central section of the town centre. Around 77,000 sq m gross of new development may be provided including 17,500 sq m of retail/A3/A4/A5, 40,000 sq m of residential, 8,500 sq m of community uses and 10,000 sq m of multi-storey car parks. This development should make a significant contribution in terms of meeting the need for high street comparison floorspace in the south east part of the Borough. The combined floorspace projection for Mitcham/Morden and Colliers Wood is 5,500 sq m gross by 2011 and 9,800 sq m gross by 2016

33. The strategy for both centres should seek to ensure these centres adequately serve their respective catchment areas, i.e. for Mitcham the south east of the Borough and for Morden the central/south area of the Borough. In order to maintain and enhance their important roles, development and expansion will be required, and both centres should have a role in meeting the need for new development in the Borough over the LDF period. Development in these centres should not seek to serve residents across the Borough as a whole, or beyond the Borough boundary.

34. The need to improve both food and non-food shopping facilities in Mitcham town centre is the key priority, and the successful implementation of the current redevelopment proposals will meet this objective. Other proposals for retail/leisure development within Mitcham's catchment area should only be permitted in exceptional circumstances.

35. Within Morden there is also a need to improve both food and non-food shopping period. The Morden Station site remains the most likely opportunity to meet this objective. Opportunities to progress redevelopment proposals on this site should be explored in the short term to ensure delivery during the LDF period.

Colliers Woods

36. Colliers Wood is identified as an *Area for Intensification in South London* within the London Plan, and the key objective for future development will be to increase employment and housing provision in the area. The regeneration of Colliers Woods is likely to be housing and employment led, although opportunities for appropriate retail and leisure uses may assist the wider regeneration objectives for the area.

37. Within Colliers Wood separate shopping designations should be considered. Shops and services within Collier Wood Urban Centre do not provide a single shopping destination. There are a number of potential options for Colliers Wood's shopping designation in the LDF, as follows:

- small shop uses on Merton High Street and Colliers Wood High Street could form a number of separate neighbourhood parades;

- the cluster of retail and service uses located around the Merton Road/Merton High Street junction, which is currently designated as a neighbourhood parade, could be designated as a South Wimbledon local centre, or alternatively two separate neighbourhood parades could be identified west of the Sainsbury store;

- the Sainsbury food store and retail warehouses at Prior Road Retail Park and the Tandem Centre could be designated as out-of-centre retail areas; and

- alternatively, the Sainsbury store could be designated as a separate local centre, following the proposals to provide smaller units within the store.

Local Centres

38. The five designated local centres in the Borough are the third level of centres in the hierarchy. These centres should be maintained to ensure they provide basic food and grocery shopping facilities, supported by a limited choice and range comparison shops and a range of non-retail services and community uses. Small scale infill development is likely to be appropriate within local centres.

39. The designated local centres should serve small catchment areas, focused on their respective local communities. Development within these centres should be commensurate with this role and limited catchment area.

Neighbourhood Parades

40. Neighbourhood parades should predominantly serve catchment areas extending no more than walking distance, although some centres may also serve passing trade. Neighbourhood parades should continue to be maintained and protected, in order to ensure all residents in the Borough have access to a basic range of small shops and services of a local nature. Core facilities will include convenience stores, post office, newsagents and pharmacy.

Future Strategy Implementation and Monitoring

41. There are a number of broad areas of possible action the Council could pursue in order to maintain and enhance the role of shopping centres within the Borough, as follows:

- application of guidance within PPS6, particularly relating to need and the sequential approach in determining out-of-centre retail and other development proposals that generate significant numbers of trips;

- measures to improve accessibility and public transport to the town, district and local centres in order to encourage more residents to shop within their nearest centre;

- the implementation of shop frontage policies within the development plan to protect retail and other desirable town centre uses;

- the implementation of public realm improvements to improve the attractiveness of shopping environments within all centres;

- the continued support for town centre management activities; and
- measures to bring forward development opportunities.

42. The recommendations and projections within this study are expected to assist the Council in preparing development plan policies over the coming years and to assist development control decisions during this period.