

Borough Plan Advisory Committee

Date: 10 January 2012

Agenda item:

Subject: Draft Borough Character Study for public consultation

Lead officer: Director for Environment and Regeneration, Chris Lee

Lead member: Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration,
Councillor Andrew Judge

Forward Plan reference number: 1092

Contact officer: Conservation and Design Officer, Caroline Kearey

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Members of the Borough Plan Advisory Committee recommend to Cabinet:

1. That Cabinet approves the first phase of the Draft Borough Character Study for the purposes of public consultation between January-March 2012.
2. That Cabinet agrees, subject to the results of the public consultation, that minor amendments to the first phase of the Draft Borough Character Study are delegated to the Director of Environment & Regeneration, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration, to enable approval and formal adoption.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report seeks approval for the first phase of a Draft Borough Character Study for Merton, incorporating the findings for five of the 36 borough neighbourhoods identified in the study. The initial five neighbourhoods covered in the draft study are: Haydons Road, Morden, Eastfields, Leopold Road and Grand Drive. The draft study is attached as Appendix 1.

2. DETAILS

- 2.1 Strategic objective 8 of Merton's Core Planning Strategy promotes a high quality urban and suburban environment in Merton, where development is well designed and contributes to the function and character of the borough.
- 2.2 In order to fully achieve this aim it is necessary to have a clear understanding of what constitutes the character of different parts of the borough. The character study will support and reinforce the emerging revised Design SPD and the Sites and Policies DPD by providing locally

specific character assessments that highlight Merton's local characteristics and local issues.

The Study aims to achieve the following:

- 2.3 To give all areas of the borough a considered statement of what constitutes its character and guidance on how it can be conserved and enhanced.
- 2.4 To identify, through the assessment process, areas of the borough that fall into one of the following three categories:
 - An area of established high quality
 - An area with scope to reinforce the existing character
 - An area requiring enhancement to reinforce its identity
- 2.5 For each of the three categories above, guidance will be formulated at the end of the study that is locally specific 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.
- 2.6 Through the extensive consultation proposed, which will coincide with that of the revised Sites and Policies DPD, it is hoped that residents will become engaged with the character definition process. Local knowledge is key to the study and working with residents who are concerned about the visual appearance of their area will achieve a more robust study.

How the study will be used

- 2.7 The study will assist in the planning process by identifying issues relating to the public realm and built form within specific areas of the borough and by providing locally specific guidance to address these issues. This will contribute to preserving local distinctiveness and ensuring that regeneration occurs in areas that would benefit from well designed new development.
- 2.8 The study will be a tool for use in planning appeals and inquiries by demonstrating that a robust approach has been taken to defining borough character, thereby raising the significance of Merton's distinctive characteristics.
- 2.9 The study identifies potential public realm improvements within each neighbourhood which will contribute towards a neighbourhood project bank.
- 2.10 Through close consultation with residents, the study supports the aims of the Localism Bill and may contribute towards and assist with, the formulation of community plans.
- 2.11 The Borough Character Study will support and reinforce the revised Design SPD by providing locally specific guidance within the overall framework of

the objectives of the Design SPD. In addition, for the three categories of area that will be defined by the study, set out in paragraph 2.3 above, additional design guidance will be produced which will be drafted to meet the specific requirements of each category.

Study methodology

- 2.12 A hierarchy of analysis ranging from neighbourhood level, down to smaller character areas within the neighbourhoods has been used in the study. A mixture of textual description and graphic analysis has been used to convey the characteristics of each of the neighbourhoods. The full description of the detailed methodology used is contained within the introduction of Appendix 1.

3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1 None for the purposes of this report

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 At present it is envisaged that the commitment to the completion of the Draft Borough Character Study can be achieved through existing financial and staffing resources. The document will be made available on the Council's website in an electronic version.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS AND STATUTORY PROVISION

- 5.1 Following full consultation on the completed study, it is proposed that the study will be treated as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications and appeals.

6. HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 None for the purposes of this report.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 None for the purposes of this report.

8. CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 8.1 The first phase of the Draft Borough Character Study will be consulted on alongside the Sites and Policies DPD between January and March 2012.
- 8.2 This initial consultation will focus on the introduction and methodology of the draft Borough Character Study, as well as the five neighbourhoods, in order to assess any issues or alterations that may need to be carried out to the methodology before additional work is commenced.

9. TIMETABLE

- 9.1 Appendix 1 contains the introduction to the study including the methodology as well as five completed Neighbourhood Assessments. It is envisaged that following the approval of the method and approach, the further 31 areas will be prioritised for completion by the end of 2012.

10. APPENDICES

- 10.1 Appendix 1: The Draft Borough Character Study: Reinforcing Local Distinctiveness (January 2012)
- 10.2 As the Borough Character Study is a long document, only a few copies have been printed at this stage. From Friday 06 January 2012, copies will be available in the Cabinet office, in the four party group offices and available to view on the Council's website
- 10.3 Paper copies will be circulated to Cabinet on Wednesday 11 January 2012.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 Merton's Core Planning Strategy 2011-2026

12. OFFICER CONTACTS

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