



# THE JOHN INNES SOCIETY

*For Conservation in the John Innes Estate at Merton Park.*

*Charity Number 803759.*

## RESPONSE OF THE JOHN INNES SOCIETY TO MERTON LOCAL PLAN CONSULTATION 2a.

The John Innes Society was founded fifty years ago and is a Civic Amenity Society registered as Charity Number 803759. The aim of the Society is conservation in the John Innes Estate at Merton. Our Area of Benefit includes the John Innes (Wilton Crescent) Conservation Area, the John Innes (Merton Park) Conservations Area and the Merton Hall Road Conservation Area, which together amount to some 47.24 Hectares plus the residential area to the South as far as Morden, which was developed by the Merton Park Estate Company after the death of John Innes.

We have about 700 members, most of whom live within the Area of Benefit. We have links with the John Innes Horticultural Institute, now at the John Innes Centre at Norwich, which was originally established in Merton Park.

The area is unique in that it is one of London's first garden suburbs, developed on former farmland by John Innes (1829 to 1904). There are a variety of styles and sizes of houses, the earlier ones in the Domestic Revival style, followed by Arts and Crafts designs, all set in tree lined streets, with holly hedges being a unifying feature throughout the estate. One could say that John Innes was the original "place maker". As well as the protection afforded by Conservation Area status, there are several Article 4 Directions in force, including one to require planning permission for new crossovers, designed to protect the historic vistas of holly hedges.

The Society has contributed to the Character Appraisals and Management Plans for our Area of Benefit and we review planning applications and make representations whenever we consider the development proposed would be out of character or fail to preserve and enhance the area. We also review relevant Borough policy documents.

We have taken part in public consultations on the London Borough of Merton's successive Local Plans and in respect of this Local Plan (hereinafter called The Plan), we submitted a full response on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2019 to the previous round of consultation.

For this consultation, we have the following comments and objections, our criteria being **"Does this version of The Plan contain sound Policies for making planning and land use decisions?"**

1) **The Plan is very poorly organized and presented**, which makes finding the actual policies extremely difficult. There is no Index and no search facility we could access. Local Plans should be working Land Use documents - not long drawn out Wish Lists, however worthy the wishes might be. They are not books, to be read cover to cover. What the practitioner is looking for are relevant policies and justifications – set out in a clear and easily accessible format. As it stands The Plan is therefore unsound. It appears to have been prepared by different authors but with no attempt to organize policies or avoid duplication.

One has to search through to Chapter 16 (located for no apparent reason between Chapters 10 and 11) to find Development Control policies (D) which are given the Topic title “Places and Spaces in a Growing Borough.”

Chapters 2 and 3 both contain *Good Growth Strategy* policies. Chapters 3 and 13 both relate to Infrastructure. According to the page footers there are two Chapters 14. There are numerous typographical errors and some sentences in which policies are incomplete. The numbering in the crucial Chapter 16 is very confusing.

2) Due to the poor way in which the plan has been presented, we had some difficulty tracking down whether the representations we had made in January 2019 have been implemented. At this stage of consultation, **the Plan should have been marked up to indicate the changes which have been made since the last consultation**. The public should not be required to search through chapter after disjointed chapter, some with names changed since the previous consultation. A Contents List and an Index would make all the difference plus good cross referencing between the Chapters. Had this been done, much repetition could have been avoided.

3) The Plan’s formulation has been so long drawn out (last major consultation 2 years ago) many of its aims and policies are now out of date and no longer accord with current Government proposals. There is reference to the Tramlink extension to Sutton (Appendix TN10), which TfL appear to have abandoned. The Wimbledon policies were drawn up when Crossrail 2 (Appendix TN4) was proposed. Events since have made it most unlikely that scheme will proceed within the life of the Plan.

Recent Government White paper proposals are overlooked, maybe to be dealt with later by way of SPD’s. Over reliance on post Plan SPD’s creates uncertainty and makes the Local Plan itself unsound. Not all of the National Framework new proposals may come to pass, but those that do will affect many of The Plan’s good policies. Uncontrolled Changes of Use from commercial to residential will make policies supporting Neighbourhood Parades (TC 7.7) and 20 Minute Neighbourhoods, unachievable.

**We question the legality of development control policies being set out in SPD’s rather than in the Local Plan. SPD’s should only be used to illustrate Local Plan policies, not as further Policy documents in their own right. Doing so is an attempt to bypass the Public Examination stage of Local Plans.**

This seems a strange time to progress a Local Plan and one that does not allow for current very far-reaching National Framework changes.

4) Nearly all of the current consultation period has taken place during Lockdown, which means that digital versions of The Plan had to be used. **The diagrams and plans are very poorly reproduced for viewing online. A proper appraisal has been compromised.**

5) The Plan often lacks data, or links to data, to justify its aims and policies. **There are no policies to monitor delivery effectively.** Some of the data it seems will be introduced in SPD's which will only be published after The Plan, with the potential for conflict between The Plan policies and the policies in the SPD. **That makes Merton's policies complicated to access and unsound.**

6) **The Plan is heavily weighted towards providing more housing on every available site, but without an equivalent expansion of the social infrastructure which will be required for so many new residents.**

Educational provision is referred to as if it is someone else's responsibility. Policy IN16.2 has just two short policies (i and j) which only "support". The Plan should be **identifying and safeguarding sites for new schools**, and also for health services, community facilities, leisure and recreation. The Government and London Plan Policy D1A makes it clear that the provision of social infrastructure is the responsibility of Local Authorities and this Plan's failure to do that makes it unsound.

7) The Green and Blue Infrastructure Policies (08) in Chapter 12 are worthy but there are too many loopholes by way of allowing financial compensation in lieu of onsite delivery. (e.g. 08.6). There are no effective policies for enforcement or ensuring long term compliance. **There are no clear policies or commitments as to how and where such financial contributions are to be utilized.**

The Plan's wish list includes greening and sustainability, but there are **no clear proposals to preserve, protect or add to Merton's Tree Canopy. (08.5). That is a major omission for a "leafy Borough".**

**We would suggest that all trees and groups of smaller trees in Green Corridors should be protected by TPO's.**

The ecological importance of private gardens, including front gardens, needs emphasis **and there should be a firm presumption against building new dwellings in back gardens.** Small Sites in gardens appear to be an easy target for densification but in fact each new home will take up a far larger footprint than any garage or outbuilding it replaces, eating into the ecological value of the garden and destroying tree cover which is often located at the end of gardens. Even "car

free” homes need access for emergency services, refuse collection and deliveries. There will be new road frontages and pavements, all of which require hard surfaces replacing what was previously uncovered land. At the back most new homes will have at least a patio and may well have sheds and outbuildings all on non-permeable surfaces. Our climate is changing not only to become warmer but also in the UK, wetter. Densification of development on greenfield sites such as back gardens will only add to the problems already being experienced with climate change. **At the London Plan consultation stage, an assurance was given to a Merton Councillor, before a large audience in the Council Chamber at the Civic Centre, that development sites would not include private back gardens. The London Plan (Policy D4) makes it clear that all new developments should be inclusive to all and street based, with good frontages and natural surveillance. That rules out backland developments in gardens and confirms what was stated at the meeting in Merton.**

**Why has this London Plan policy been ignored in Merton’s Local Plan? This is unsound.**

Some new housing is indeed needed, but since the inception of this version of Merton’s Local Plan, purchasing habits have changed. **Merton now has a number of redundant or underused retail parks (e.g The Tandem Centre at Colliers Wood) which should be considered for residential redevelopment rather than greenfield sites which involve ecological damage.**

8) Current Government proposals lay great **emphasis on public participation in shaping local Land Use.** Merton held consultation workshops, but these were months, if not years ago, and have not been updated. **The outcome of those consultations has been mainly ignored.** High rise flats were rejected, but in this Plan, they are proposed for Wimbledon, Morden, Mitcham and Colliers Wood. In the 1990’s Merton had a policy of demolishing high-rise blocks on its Estates (e.g the Phipps Bridge Estate) and replacing them with lower rise developments to provide better living conditions to reduce social unrest. High rise developments often fail to provide a mix of home sizes so are unsuitable for lifetime homes. This Plan’s proposals are likely to repeat the mistakes of the recent past and that makes it unsound. Consultees could foresee these problems, but they are ignored in this Local Plan.

9) **This Plan lacks a policy to support any Neighbourhood Plans,** even if they are referred to in subsequent SPD’s. That is contrary to Public Policy and unsound. The Plan also refers to levelling up between the West and East of the Borough, but there are no policies to bring this about. **Neighbourhood Plans should be encouraged for all of the Borough with full officer support for the promoters, and with particular attention to bringing forward Neighbourhood Plans in the East of the Borough.**

10) **This Plan lacks commitment for enforcement, which is unsound.**  
e.g. F8.10 SUDS; P8.11.(Air Quality).

11) The Plan’s Proposed Changes to Environmental Policy Maps has been poorly surveyed and are far from accurate.

e.g., **Site 13** (Dwellings at end of Rutlish Road) now excludes “vegetated area and footpath adjacent to Tram Stop” which is actually a valued and well cared for site for local nature conservation. The “brambles and snowberries” are a long-established breeding and feeding site for butterflies and birds and it is the home of a colony of Long Tailed Tits. There is good tree cover with nesting boxes on the trees and logs and brushwood have been left to provide natural bug hotels. **We have no objection to excluding the land which has already been built on for housing and parking, but we would ask that the rest of Site 13 remains protected as part of the adjoining Green Chain Corridor.**

**In the Lists of Historic Parks and Gardens, we would like to see The John Innes Park included. This is a Green Flag awarded Arts and Crafts Park, and within which there are a number of significant Locally Listed Buildings including the Bandstand.**

12) Throughout the Plan, there is overuse of the expression “high quality design” which is defined in various places throughout the plan, including Chapter 16 Places and Spaces (D5.1). There needs to be linking and review to avoid confusion. This is an example of where work to compile an Index would be useful to iron out duplications and conflicting interpretations. We support the general Policy D5.3 but not some of the justifications which follow in that Chapter as we cannot give our support to documents which have yet to be consulted on and reviewed. e.g Merton’s Borough Character Study. **We would like to see policies which achieve positive enhancements, rather than the negative results of decisions made on the grounds that “only an acceptable level of harm would result”.** That is what happens in Merton now.

**We object to Policy D5.5.5** which classes Locally Listed Buildings as Undesignated Heritage Assets. They are the renamed Grade III Listed Buildings and should be recognized as such. The same applies to Local Parks and Gardens. In Merton Park we have some Listed Buildings (all of those in the care of the Local Authority being in a state of disrepair and at risk due to lack of resources) and we have many Locally Listed Buildings as one would expect from a Garden Suburb of historic architectural significance and exemplary “place making” layout. **Locally Listed buildings, and their settings, require far stronger protection.**

**We would support and commend to the Future Merton Team the Report called “Living with Beauty - promoting health, well-being and sustainable growth” – published in January 2021 by the “Building Better – Building Beautiful” Commission.**

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