



Local Development Framework

Tall Buildings Background Paper

2010

CONTENTS

1. Introduction.....	2
1.1. Study context.....	2
1.2. Study Area	3
1.3. Study Methodology.....	4
1.4. What is a tall building?	4
1.5. Tall building typologies.....	5
1.6. Advantages and disadvantages of tall buildings.....	5
2. Planning Policy Review	7
2.2. National guidance	7
2.3. Regional Guidance	9
2.4. Local Guidance	13
2.5. Key considerations from planning policy	17
3. Urban Analysis	18
3.1. Urban Analysis Layers	18
3.2. Development Patterns in Merton.....	19
3.3. Transport Provision and Capacity	31
3.4. The Historic Environment.....	35
3.5. Building Heights and Tall Buildings	40
3.6. Topography and Significant Views.....	44
3.7. Regeneration Areas.....	51
3.8. Opportunities and constraints.....	54
4. Detailed Area Studies	60
4.2. Wimbledon Town Centre	61
4.3. Morden Town Centre	68
4.4. Mitcham Town Centre	74
4.5. Colliers Wood Town Centre.....	79
4.6. Raynes Park Local Centre	86
4.7. Recommendations	92
5. References.....	94

1. Introduction

1.1. Study context

1.1.1. The Tall Buildings Background Paper forms part of Merton's Local Development Framework, as an evidence base in support of the Design Policy outlined in the Core Strategy. In accordance with PPS12 – Spatial Planning, it is essential that what is set out in the Core Strategy is underpinned by thorough evidence.

1.1.2. The London Plan highlights that tall buildings make a significant impact, not just locally, but across large parts of London, and should be of exemplary design. Through preliminary discussions on the development of Merton's Core Strategy, the Greater London Authority (GLA) has requested that the strategy include a proactive policy on where tall buildings may be acceptable in the borough taking into account the requirements on tall buildings in the London Plan. Government Office for London has provided feedback on the draft version of this background paper (August 2009), and English Heritage has also commented and provided in-principle support, subject to recommendations on how the paper could be strengthened. London Borough of Wandsworth has also requested that the tall buildings policy take into account long range views from Wandsworth. These recommendations have all been adopted in producing this final version.

1.1.3. In relation to tall buildings, the Design Policy within the Core Strategy states the following:

All development needs to be designed in order to respect, reinforce and enhance the local character of the area in which it is located and to contribute to Merton's sense of place and identity. We will achieve this by protecting the valued and distinctive suburban character of the borough by resisting the development of tall buildings where they will have a detrimental impact on this character. Tall buildings may therefore only be appropriate in the town centres of Colliers Wood, Morden and Wimbledon, where consistent with the tall buildings guidance in the sub area policies, where of exceptional design and architectural quality and where justified in terms of their impact on the townscape and historic environment, and the benefits towards regeneration and public realm. Outside of these locations tall buildings are unlikely to be appropriate.

1.1.4. The paper will begin with an examination of the policy background to tall buildings, and will set out the design assessment undertaken of the borough in relation to future tall buildings using urban analysis layers. Following this assessment, detailed area studies were carried out on various locations in Merton which provide support to the policy approach outlined in Merton's Core Strategy. The paper recommends locations in the borough where tall buildings may be appropriate, sensitive and inappropriate, and determines preferred building forms within each of the appropriate locations.

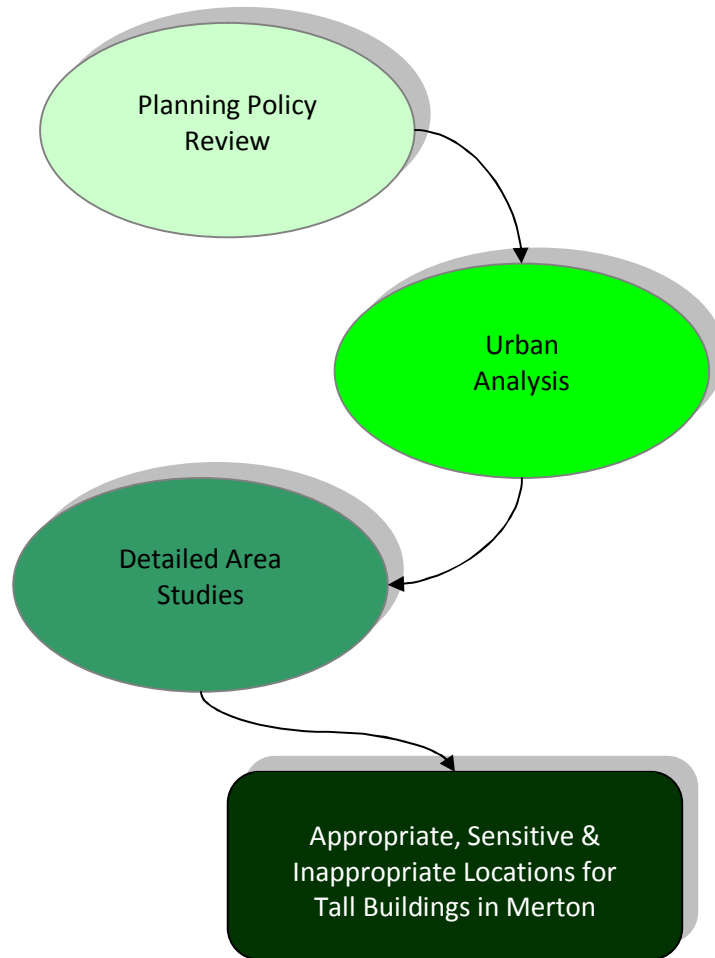


Figure 1: Background Paper Stages

1.1.5. Given the strategic nature of the study, exact boundaries around potentially appropriate tall building locations were not identified. Not all sites and proposals for tall buildings within the potentially appropriate locations will be suitable for tall building development. In assessing the design and impact of tall building

proposals, regard will need to be given to the criteria set out in the London Plan, and the Criteria for Evaluation in Guidance on Tall Buildings.

1.2. Study Area

1.2.1. The study area for the paper is the whole of the London Borough of Merton. Merton is designated as an outer London borough in the London Plan, situated south west of the City of London and bordering Wandsworth, Kingston, Sutton, Croydon and Lambeth boroughs. Merton occupies an area of 37 square kilometres and is predominately residential in character, playing a transitional role from urban to suburban neighbourhoods, neither bordering Surrey nor central London. Open space is an important component of the character of Merton, occupying 18% of the borough.

1.2.2. The borough contains several distinct districts and town centres including Wimbledon, Morden, Mitcham and Colliers Wood, and some impressive open spaces including Mitcham and Wimbledon Commons. There are a number of smaller local centres scattered at Arthur Road, Motspur Park, North Mitcham, Raynes Park and Wimbledon Village that each have their own distinct character.



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Figure 2: London Borough of Merton context

1.3. Study Methodology

1.3.1. The methodology adopted for this study is consistent with the recommended approach by CABE and English Heritage outlined in Guidance on Tall Buildings (2007). The guidance recommends that local planning authorities identify sensitive, appropriate and inappropriate locations for tall buildings in their development plan documents as part of an exercise in place-making informed by a clear long term view.

1.3.2. CABE and English Heritage advise local planning authorities to consider the scope for tall buildings, where they area a possibility, as part of strategic planning. This may include how they contribute to areas of change. In identifying locations

where tall buildings would and would not be appropriate, local planning authorities should, as a matter of good practice, carry out a detailed urban design study. Guidance on Tall Buildings is outlined in more detail in this background paper.

1.4. What is a tall building?

1.4.1. The London Plan defines tall and large buildings as those buildings that are 'substantially taller than their surroundings, cause a significant change on the skyline or are larger than the threshold sizes set for the referral of planning applications to the Mayor'.

1.4.2. Considering the London Plan definition, any building that has a significant impact on the existing scale and character of an area through height can be considered a tall building. In the context of Merton, where most of the borough is characterised by 2 storey suburban houses, any building of 4 storeys or higher could be considered a tall building in these locations. In the centres however, and in central London, this height may well be considered average, and have little presence in its surrounding environment. This highlights the importance of treating every site and every proposal for a tall building individually, and basing the assessment on its merits and context. This paper will explore the existing building heights in Merton, and define what constitutes a tall building in various parts of the borough in Section 3.1.4.

1.5. Tall building typologies

1.5.1. Tall buildings can come in many forms. The London Plan definition covers both tall and large buildings in the capital. In Merton's context however, large buildings are those that stand out within their immediate context, but are not necessarily significantly higher than their surroundings, or make a significant impact on the skyline. Large buildings may have a large footprint and may appear bulky, for instance industrial buildings or large retail buildings such as the Sava Centre in Colliers Wood. Alternatively they may be structures, such as the Gas Works in Mitcham or Windmill in Wimbledon Common.

1.5.2. High rise tower blocks located in denser areas of the borough are most common for residential, commercial or mixed use functions, where they can be an efficient use of land, and will be significantly taller than their surroundings and have a significant impact on the skyline. These tall buildings do not necessarily have a large building footprint and if designed well at the ground level can contribute positively to the streetscene.



Figure 3: Example of a large building in Morden Industrial Estate on Morden Road

1.5.3. Although this paper will highlight the locations of existing large buildings in Merton, the focus of the paper will be on

identifying appropriate, sensitive and inappropriate locations for tall buildings only.

1.5.4. Tall buildings become very prominent in a suburban London borough such as Merton, and make a significant impact on local character and it is therefore essential that this evidence base thoroughly explores appropriate locations for tall buildings. It is considered that adequate guidance exists at the local and regional level for assessing the design and impact of large buildings.

1.6. Advantages and disadvantages of tall buildings

1.6.1. Tall buildings are the subject of much debate regarding their suitability in cities such as London having regard to the urban pattern, and considering the mistakes of the past. There are arguments for and against tall building development, and CABE and English Heritage have highlighted in the Guidance on Tall Buildings (2007), that many previous tall buildings were designed with a lack of appreciation or understanding of the context to which they sit, and have been unsuitably sited, poorly designed and detailed, badly built or incompetently managed. However it is also said that tall buildings can make a positive contribution to city life, be excellent works of architecture in their own right, can affect the image and identity of a city as a whole, and can serve as beacons for regeneration and stimulate further investment.

1.6.2. Tall buildings should only be considered as one option for high density development, and it is important to ensure that Local Development Frameworks undertake adequate research to determine where in London tall buildings may be suitable. This background paper will undertake this task in the context of Merton. In suburban locations such as Merton, it is possible to achieve higher density development without resorting to the construction of taller buildings, as illustrated in the diagram below.



Figure 4: Tall buildings may considered as an option for high density development

1.6.3. Tall buildings are highly visible. Designed well, and in the right locations, they can make a powerful contribution to the quality and vitality of their setting. They can also contribute to sustainable urban development. For this same reason, poorly designed tall buildings can act as unpleasant markers in urban landscapes and detract from the character of a city, and can cause disproportionate harm to heritage assets and the wider historic environment. The standards demanded of tall buildings are therefore higher than those of low rise buildings, reflecting the relative visual prominence of tall structures.

1.6.4. Tall buildings often have a longer life span than those of low rise buildings due to the initial level of investment in construction and the time and cost in demolishing high buildings. In London, this is compounded by the fact that the quality of earlier tall buildings failed in respect of design, detailing and construction, and these are now in some cases remnants of what tall building quality should not be.

1.6.5. The London Plan requires that ‘tall buildings should always be of the highest architectural quality, (especially prominent features such as roof tops) and should not have a negative impact on the amenity of surrounding uses’. The plan, referencing CABE and English Heritage in Guidance on Tall Buildings (2007), goes further to state that ‘the location of a tall building, its alignment, spacing, height, bulk, massing and design quality should identify with and emphasise a point of civic or visual significance over the whole area from which it will be visible’.

1.6.6. While this paper addresses tall building locations rather than detailed design, tall buildings must be of an exceptional design and architectural quality. Tall buildings are less constrained than low-rise buildings by the shape of land plots or the layout of streets. More of the street level area can be given to public amenities and recreational space. Proposals for tall buildings must also ensure that the interface with the public realm is addressed.

2. Planning Policy Review

2.1.1. The Local Development Framework must be in general conformity with national and regional policy including Planning Policy Statements and the London Plan. It is therefore essential that this evidence base acknowledges both the higher level policy requirements as well as the urban design assessment in identifying appropriate, sensitive and inappropriate locations for tall buildings in Merton. Outlined below are the key considerations coming from national, regional and local policy.

2.2. National guidance

Planning Policy Statements (PPS)

2.2.1. PPS1 – Delivering Sustainable Development, PPS3 – Housing, PPS4 – Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth and PPS5 Planning for the Historic Environment are the most relevant national policy statements offering strategic guidance in identifying potentially suitable locations for tall buildings.

2.2.2. Government objectives focus around the delivery of sustainable development that exhibits high standards of urban design, located in areas with accessible public transport provision to reduce the need to travel, makes more efficient use of land through higher density, mixed use development located on previously developed land, as well as protection of the natural and historic environment and townscape character. PPS1

seeks to protect and enhance the natural and historic environment. Local development plans should set out a clear spatial strategy with a vision for the future pattern of development. Plan policies should be based on up to date information on the characteristics of the area and recognise the limits of the environment to accept further development without irreversible damage. PPS1 also refers to delivering good design based on an evaluation of an area's characteristics, responding to context and reinforcing local distinctiveness.

2.2.3. PPS4 supports a hierarchy and network of centres within the borough, with all development comprising town centre types uses to be located in existing centres to protect their vitality and viability. PPS 3 requires local authorities to set out a strategy for the planned location of new housing to meet regional housing targets in a sustainable manner. New housing should be directed towards locations with good public transport accessibility, a range of community facilities and with good access to jobs, key services and infrastructure.

2.2.4. PPS5 requires that local planning authorities maintain an adequate evidence base on the historic environment to inform the plan making process. Rather than just protection, the historic environment is presented as a key influence on the character of an environment and an areas sense of place, as a potential catalyst for regeneration and as a stimulus to inspire new development of imaginative and high quality design. PPS5 also highlights that the historic environment is a pillar of sustainable development.

2.2.5. From PPS guidance it is clear that the Council should direct higher density development, which includes tall buildings, towards the existing centres in the borough with good public transport access. Due to the mainly suburban character of the borough, this high level policy has a profound impact on suitable

tall building locations by limiting them to areas of high PTAL, which include the boroughs centres. The background paper will however explore and justify all areas of the borough in relation to tall buildings.

2.2.6. It is anticipated that any future tall buildings Merton would generally be of a mixed use nature, combining elements of housing with commercial development, as supported by policy where located in centres. Regard will be given to the Core Strategy's planned distribution of new housing development within the borough reflecting the requirements of PPS3, and the projected distribution of office and retail development in-line with PPS4. The historic environment is central to the character of Merton, including within centres such as Wimbledon, and can be used as a tool to stimulate regeneration in centres, for example the regeneration proposals for Morden, Mitcham and Colliers Wood which are addressed in this background paper. The Council's evidence base on the historic environment will be used within this background under the urban analysis to inform the assessment on potentially suitable locations for tall buildings, in accordance with PPS5.

Guidance on Tall Buildings (English Heritage and CABE, 2007)

2.2.7. CABE and English Heritage recommend that local planning authorities identify appropriate locations for tall buildings in their development plan documents, informed by a clear, long term vision, rather than in an ad hoc, reactive, piecemeal manner.

2.2.8. In undertaking this strategic planning exercise it is recommended that an urban design study be prepared

considering the wider objectives of sustainable urban design as set out in By Design, as well as:

- The historic context of the wider area through the use of historic characterisation methods
- Carrying out a character appraisal of the immediate context, identifying those elements that create local character and other important features and constraints, including:
 - Natural topography
 - Urban grain
 - Significant views of skylines
 - Scale and height
 - Streetscape
 - Landmark buildings and areas and their settings, including backdrops, and important local views, prospects and panoramas
- Identifying opportunities where tall buildings might enhance the overall townscape.
- Identify sites where the removal of past mistakes might achieve a similar outcome.

2.2.9. Having identified the constraints and opportunities through an urban design study, specific policies and locations should be included in the development plan and supplementary planning documents clearly identifying, in map-based form, areas that are appropriate, sensitive or inappropriate for tall buildings. This background paper will adopt the recommended approach by undertaking a strategic urban design study of the borough to identify potentially suitable locations for tall buildings. In particular, this will translate into appropriate, sensitive or inappropriate areas of Merton for future tall building development having regard to the Guidance on Tall Buildings.

By Design (CABE & DETR, 2000)

2.2.10. By Design sets out the wider objectives of sustainable urban design. Development plan policies should be drawn up so as to reflect local needs and opportunities. In understanding the local context, an appraisal is recommended that firstly undertakes an assessment of how an area performs in terms of urban design objectives, secondly identifies opportunities and constraints and capacity for development, and thirdly consider influences on local policy context such as national and regional planning policy guidance.

2.2.11. The following broad urban design objectives should be used to understand an area in terms of its urban design:

- *Character* – a place with its own identity
- *Continuity and Enclosure* – a place where public and private places are clearly distinguished
- *Quality of the Public Realm* – a place with attractive and successful outdoor areas
- *Ease of Movement* – a place that is easy to get to and move through
- *Legibility* – a place that has a clear image and is easy to understand
- *Adaptability* – a place that can change easily
- *Diversity* – a place with variety and choice

2.3. Regional Guidance

The London Plan

2.3.1. The London Plan provides regional guidance in designating suitable locations for tall buildings, and design criteria for assessing future proposals. The Mayor acknowledges that tall and large buildings should be part of a strategic approach to changing or developing an area, and should not have an unacceptably harmful impact on their surroundings. They can form part of a strategic approach to meeting the regeneration and economic development goals laid out in the London Plan, particularly in order to make optimal use of the capacity of sites with high levels of public transport accessibility.

2.3.2. The London Plan replacement defines a tall building as ‘those that are substantially taller than their surroundings, cause a significant change on the skyline and are larger than the threshold sizes set for the referral of planning applications to the Mayor’.

2.3.3. Policy 7.7 Location and design of tall and large buildings is the main policy in the London Plan addressing tall buildings and where they are potentially suitable across the capital.

2.3.4. Tall and large buildings should be part of a strategic approach to changing or developing an area, and should not have an unacceptably harmful impact on their surroundings. In terms of LDF preparation, Policy 7.7 requires boroughs to work with the Mayor to identify areas in their Local Development Frameworks where tall buildings might be appropriate, inappropriate or sensitive.

2.3.5. In terms of planning decisions, applications for tall or

large buildings should include an urban design analysis that demonstrates the proposal is part of a strategy that will meet the criteria below.

2.3.6. In accordance with Policy 7.7, tall buildings should:

- a. *generally be limited to sites in the Central Activity Zone, Opportunity Areas, Areas of Intensification or Town Centres that have good access to public transport.*
- b. *Only considered in areas whose character would not be adversely affected by the scale, mass or bulk of a tall or large building.*
- c. *relate well to the form, proportion, composition, scale and character of surrounding buildings, urban grain and public realm (including landscape features), particularly at street level*
- d. *individually or as a group, form a distinctive landmark that emphasises a point of civic or visual significance, and enhances the skyline and image of London*
- e. *incorporates the highest standards of architecture and materials, including sustainable design and construction practices*
- f. *have ground floor activities that provide a positive relationship to the surrounding streets*
- g. *contribute to improving the permeability of the site and wider area, where possible*
- h. *incorporate publicly accessible areas on the upper floors, where appropriate*
- i. *make a significant contribution to local regeneration.*

2.3.7. Tall buildings should not:

- a. *affect adversely their surroundings in terms of microclimate, wind turbulence, overshadowing, noise, reflected glare, aviation, navigation and telecommunication interference*

- b. *impact adversely on local or strategic views*
- c. *be encouraged in areas that are inappropriate or sensitive to the impact of tall buildings. Such areas might include the settings of conservation areas, listed buildings, and registered historic parks and gardens, scheduled ancient monuments, the edge of the green belt or metropolitan open land, the setting and the outstanding universal values of World Heritage Sites or other areas designated by boroughs as being inappropriate or sensitive for tall buildings.*

2.3.8. The London Plan sets down a hierarchy of centres across London. Merton has three designated centres, being Wimbledon (Major centre), and Morden and Mitcham (District centres). Policy 2.15 - Town Centres identifies that designated centres should be the main foci beyond the Central Activities Zone for commercial development and intensification including residential development.

2.3.9. The London Plan also identifies South Wimbledon and Colliers Wood as an Area for Intensification in Map 2.4. In Annex 1 the plan states that the location contains a range of major opportunities for intensification including South Wimbledon and Colliers Wood. Any new development and infrastructure brought forward in this area must have regard to the strategic flood risk assessment. The potential for redevelopment and reconfiguration of the edge and out of centre retail parks at Colliers Wood to contribute towards the establishment of an integrated town centre along with improvements in public transport and local accessibility should be explored.

2.3.10. Policy 3.4 Optimising housing potential seeks to ensure that development densities are appropriate to their location, with reference to the Density matrix in Table 3.2. Policy 7.6 Architecture provides policy guidance to ensure that architecture contributes to the creation of a cohesive built environment that

enhances the experience of living, working or visiting the city.

2.3.11. The policy principles laid out in the London Plan are most applicable for the London region in identifying potentially suitable locations for tall buildings in Merton, and therefore is the starting point in the assessment of the borough. This background paper and the Core Strategy policy on tall buildings are entirely consistent with Policy 7.7 of the London Plan.

The London Plan Sub-Regional Development Framework – South London

2.3.12. The development framework identifies that the possibility for tall buildings in Merton should be explored as part of the LDF process, and that locations most suitable for intense land uses are those with good public transport links subject to an assessment about capacity and the urban design requirements expressed in the London Plan.

2.3.13. Any urban design study should include an examination of opportunities and constraints, including topography, designated strategic and local views, local context, scale, height, urban grain and setting.

2.3.14. Overall the development framework concludes that there are significant opportunities for increasing densities in south London in accordance with the London Plan density matrix. In town centres the sub-area will benefit from policies that encourage a fuller mix of uses which will contribute to the objective of sustainable communities.

Outer London Commission

2.3.15. The Outer London Commission (OLC) has been set up by the Mayor of London to develop policy recommendations to help enable outer London to realise its economic, social and environmental potential and play a full part in London's continued success. This includes identifying the links between housing, retail, office based and other types of employment and development in outer London, and the role that heritage and design issues might play. While the OLC has not addressed tall building development specifically, the commission does outline several recommendations that may have implications on tall building development in Merton.

2.3.16. A Pre-publication Report was prepared by OLC and released in May 2010. Among the recommendations the following are the most relevant to tall buildings and Merton:

- *The OLC has rejected the concept of four 'super-hubs', one in each quadrant of outer London, perhaps based on the Heathrow area, Brent Cross/Cricklewood, Croydon and Stratford. Most of the office growth projected for the London Plan is expected to come from relatively low value added local services spread across outer London.*
- *Town Centres in outer London should be the single most important set of business locations outside central London; and that the focus here should be on promoting access to a competitive selection of goods and services, foregrounding the use of more environmentally- friendly modes of transport.*
- *Areas for Intensification continue to fill a valuable role in identifying those areas with the greatest potential for development. Within these structures, the social and environmental infrastructure typically needs to be improved*

so as to enhance their attractiveness as places to live and work.

- *The OLC is supportive of the London Plan placing greater emphasis on the concept of ‘place making’ as well as on town centres being the focus for neighbourhoods that can meet the needs of a population growing at either end of the age range. A neighbourhood based approach will help strike a balance between social infrastructure provisions and necessary growth, retaining an emphasis on ‘place making’ and ‘life time neighbourhoods’.*

2.3.17. Although the interim recommendations do not address tall buildings specifically, they do offer some policy guidance in identifying potentially suitable locations in Merton. In line with the London Plan, town centres should form the main focus for outer London neighbourhoods, as a location to direct denser development (which may include tall buildings), and to encourage more sustainable transport nodes. Town centres such as Wimbledon and Morden with high PTAL ratings are consistent with these recommendations. Wimbledon Town Centre is designated for medium growth in the London Plan as a location to direct office development, and Morden is to undergo regeneration activity which will see density increases in the town centre.

2.3.18. Areas for Intensification (AFI) such as Colliers Wood and South Wimbledon are supported by the OLC, and mechanisms for implementing this AFI in Merton are being identified in Merton’s Core Strategy, which will include improving on the quality of Colliers Wood as a centre.

2.3.19. The OLC also stress the importance of quality of life and maintaining neighbourhoods in outer London, and this is particularly relevant to Merton where neighbourhoods beyond the centres are generally low rise, suburban in character and

often high quality built environments that should be protected from tall building development.

2.3.20. The principles outlined by the OLC will be addressed further in various parts of this background paper.

Design for London – Housing Intensification in Seven South London Town Centres (2009)

2.3.21. Morden formed one of seven south London secondary town centres within the Design for London study that explored how future housing intensification could unlock the potential of these town centres, investigating barriers to good quality intensification in the current social and planning environment, and suggests some possible solutions. The study presented three illustrative scenarios for possible intensification of Morden Town Centre:

- *Scenario 1 focuses around a mixed building typology within the centres urban blocks, opening up some of the relatively large retail blocks for public space, and at the same time increase development densities to a scale and feel that complement the centre.*
- *Scenario 2 addresses the strengthening of the town centre edges through medium scale development, encouraging the creation of a proactive development framework and integration of new development with suburban surroundings.*
- *Scenario 3 focuses on more large scale regeneration to accommodate greater population numbers and develop a distinct identity for the centre within the capital, such as*

outdoor leisure, sports and play. This scenario encourages joint venture urban intervention and redevelopment over the under-utilised tube tracks.

2.3.22. The development scenarios are theoretical; however they do highlight the ability for well serviced suburban district centres to accommodate significant development and increases in population, whilst respecting the character of the centre and enhancing the identity of the centre across London.

2.4. Local Guidance

Emerging Local Development Framework – Merton’s Core Strategy

2.4.1. Merton’s Core Strategy forms part of the Local Development Framework, and is at pre-submission stage, and is due to under pre-submission consultation in summer, prior to examination in autumn of 2010. The draft Core Strategy identifies six sub-areas of Wimbledon, Raynes Park, Morden, Mitcham, Colliers Wood and the Wandle Valley, and seeks to protect and enhance the established areas of Wimbledon Town Centre and Raynes Park Local Centre in the west, regenerate Mitcham Town Centre and Morden Town Centre, and restructure and consolidate the Colliers Wood Centre. Refer to the sub-area context diagram below.

2.4.2. The Core Strategy sets out a coordinated approach for each of the sub-areas to guide improvements or maintain already valued local assets to create or maintain sustainable neighbourhoods, directing regeneration or enhancement, as set

out in the sub-area policies.

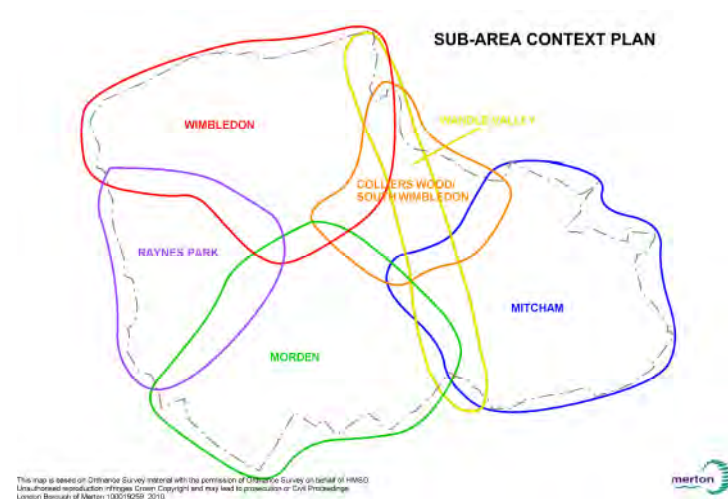


Figure 5: Merton’s Core Strategy Sub-area Context Plan

2.4.3. In addition to the existing designated centres of Wimbledon, Morden and Mitcham, the Council will work with the Mayor of London to designate Colliers Wood as a District centre, to bring the centre into the retail hierarchy to enable it to develop from an out-of-centre retail park to a coherent, attractive town centre with a broader range of town centre type uses. A masterplan will be prepared for Colliers Wood Centre that will assist in effectively managing both the type and growth of development that will come forward throughout the lifetime of the Core Strategy, ensuring that proposals are commensurate with size and scale of the centre's status within the retail hierarchy.

2.4.4. The strategy will seek to accommodate the boroughs annual housing target into well serviced areas. In particular the regeneration and intensification of the Morden Town Centre is expected to accommodate a significant proportion of the

boroughs housing target over the 15 year plan period. The majority of the new homes are anticipated to be in the form of higher density development within the town centre.

2.4.5. Mitcham Town Centre is also proposed for regeneration however viability issues have hampered progress to date. The Core Strategy focuses on small scale improvements within the town centre to attract inward investment, and the Mitcham Sub-area will accommodate a significant proportion of new housing on identified suburban brownfield sites.

2.4.6. Wimbledon Town Centre is the boroughs only Major Centre and will continue to be the focus of major town centre development in the borough, with the Core Strategy encouraging major office development, leisure, retail, cultural, community facilities and high quality hotels in the town centre over the life of the plan period.

2.4.7. The quality of the environment and local accessibility will be improved within Raynes Park Local Centre, and development will be encouraged that reflects local physical and social character. Other local centres in Merton will see environmental improvements, and maintained for day-to-day shopping and other services.

2.4.8. The Wandle Valley will act as a strategic fulcrum in bringing together initiatives that will contribute towards bridging the gap between the east and the west of Merton. This includes:

- *Creating a thriving, attractive and coherent district centre at Colliers Wood with an improved range of town centre uses;*
- *Improving the overall environment of Mitcham by supporting businesses and enterprise, increased provision of intermediate, family and private sector housing and*

enhancing the public realm; and

- *Regenerating Morden District Centre to provide improved quality and quantity of commercial, residential and leisure uses.*

2.4.9. Existing employment areas including Strategic Industrial Locations (SIL) and Locally Significant Industrial Locations (LSIL) will be protected, ensuring that they contribute towards business, industrial, storage and distribution functions. Scattered employment sites will be retained for small or growing businesses and/or community uses. Importantly, the Core Strategy aims to help the borough adapt to changing commercial circumstances by recognising and supporting a broad range of enterprises that contribute to our economy. In particular, a decline in traditional manufacturing in London is not leading to a permanent reduction in demand for premises, as growth areas such as creative industries, advanced manufacturing, research and development, recycling and waste management, construction, printing and publishing and logistics are utilising such sites.

2.4.10. Valued areas of the borough will be protected from inappropriate development within the LDF, including open spaces, MOL and SINC's, conservation areas, listed buildings, scheduled ancient monuments, particular areas of archaeological priority, Registered Parks and Gardens and undesignated assets such as locally listed buildings. New development will be expected to contribute to the distinctive areas of the borough, be of a high quality consistent with national and regional guidance, protecting and enhancing built form heritage and creating inclusive, safe and attractive environments.

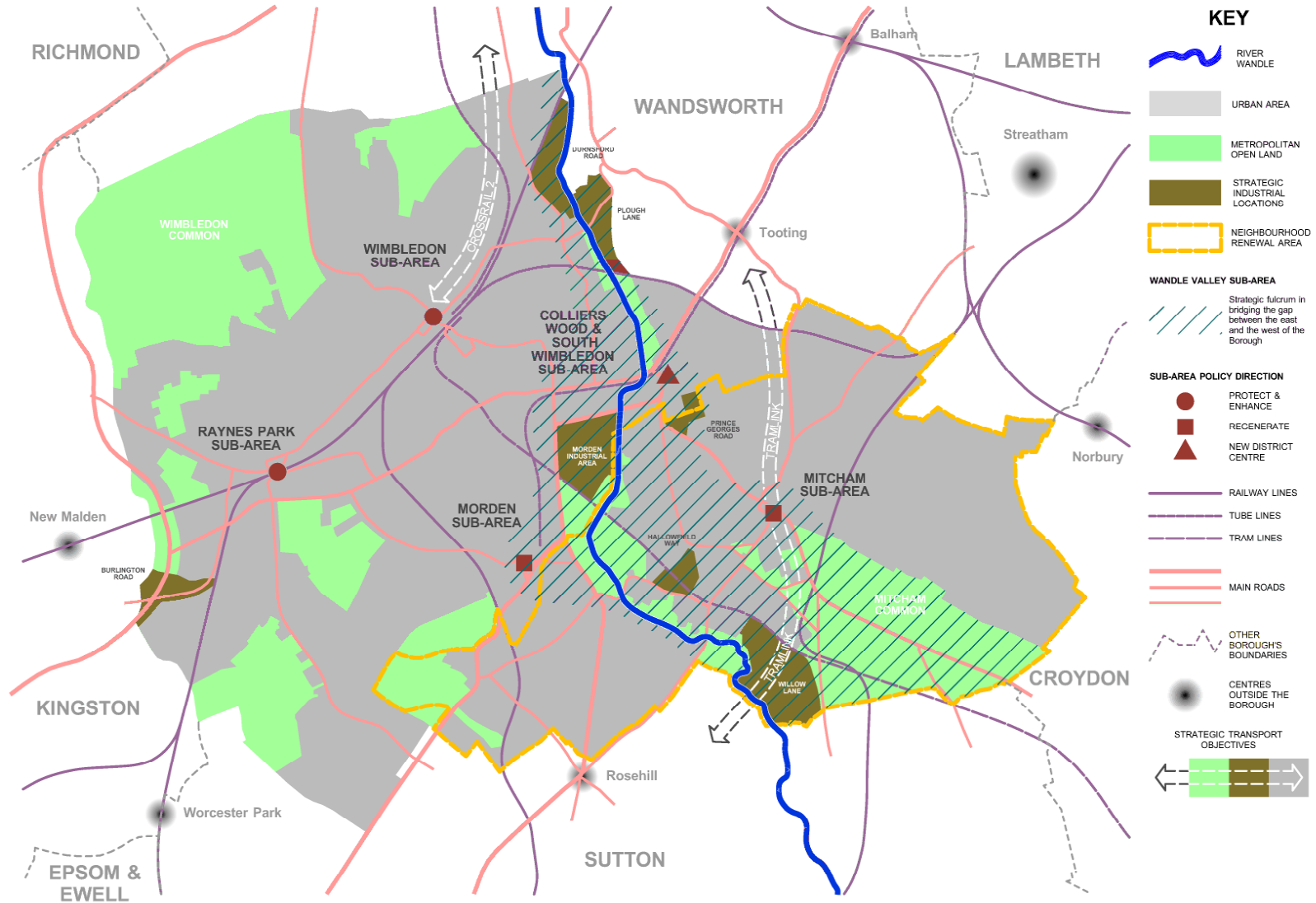


Figure 6: Merton's Core Strategy Key Diagram

Merton's UDP (adopted October 2003)

2.4.11. The current local policy defines high buildings as those buildings and structures which significantly exceed the general building heights of their surroundings, which is considered to be 30 metres (100ft).

2.4.12. The UDP does not take a proactive approach in designating appropriate locations for high buildings, but rather identifies sensitive areas where high buildings will only be permitted in very exceptional circumstances (Policy BE.19 – High Buildings; Sensitive Locations). Proposals for high buildings must be of a very high architectural quality and well-located in terms of public transport accessibility. Areas sensitive to high buildings are identified as conservation areas, metropolitan open land, settings of listed buildings, important local views, prospects and panoramas and historic parks and gardens.

Merton Design SPG (September 2004)

2.4.13. Merton's Design SPG promotes better design in new development in Merton, and provides urban design objectives, a general character appraisal of the borough and urban design guidance including on high buildings. The SPG reflects national policy guidance in By Design and develops specific guidance on aspects of detailed design relevant to local circumstances.

2.4.14. The general character appraisal divides Merton up into distinctive 'character areas' which provide a framework for identifying their character, and assessing the appropriateness of new development. They are specific to Merton and a fundamental part of the existing built form character of the Borough, and comprise Pre-suburban Settlements, "Grid Iron" Terraces, Loosely Structured Suburban Development, Medium Intensity Suburban Development,

Areas with blocks of flats, Inter war Garden City layouts, Post 1945 Council housing estates, Commercial centres, and Large scale industrial, warehousing and retail parks. The character areas are considered in more detail in the urban analysis section of the background paper.

2.4.15. The SPG identifies that high buildings may present problems within the sensitive areas of the borough as defined in the UDP. Any proposal for a high building should be the subject of a contextual urban design analysis, which assesses impact on skylines, local, medium and distant views, places, neighbouring amenities and communities.

2.4.16. The main factors which any high building development proposal should consider are:

- *Use of high buildings to emphasis a point of civic or visual significance, or a centre of urban activity or regeneration.*
- *The positive interaction of the high building to its surroundings at street level, through hard and soft landscaping.*
- *The creation of a building of outstanding architectural merit. The creation of a skyline feature.*
- *Appreciation of the impact of the building from a variety of different positions (both near and far away), from which the new building would be seen. This would include the impact of the building on the view, its relationship to other key features in that view, and on skylines. The potential for the building to contribute positively to the image of the locality of the borough, or of London as a whole.*
- *The use of intensity of the development to provide a rich mix of uses.*

2.5. Key considerations from planning policy

2.5.1. In policy terms, higher density development is directed towards centres and those areas that are well serviced in terms of public transport and infrastructure, and those areas that can accommodate the increase in density without having a detrimental impact on the character of the locality, including the historic environment. This includes Merton's town centres that are well serviced, as illustrated by Design for London through the Morden Town Centre case study.

2.5.2. The London Plan usefully defines tall buildings in the context of the capital, links the benefits of tall building development to local regeneration, and acknowledges the need to protect existing character from inappropriate tall buildings. Merton is not within the Central Activities Zone and has no Opportunity Areas, therefore options for accommodating tall buildings within the borough need to focus on the Area for Intensification at South Wimbledon and Colliers Wood, as well as Town Centres that have good access to public transport.

2.5.3. The directions coming out of the emerging LDF are important in relating Merton to the London Plan tall building policy, particularly in identifying areas of the borough that could undergo regeneration over the plan period including Morden Town Centre, Mitcham Town Centre and Colliers Wood Centre, and those areas that will benefit from the clustering of economic activity such as Wimbledon Town Centre.

2.5.4. The London Plan also links in with the Guidance on Tall Buildings by requiring local authorities to establish locations where tall buildings might be appropriate, sensitive and inappropriate. This

approach will be adopted in formulating a response for future tall building development in Merton.

2.5.5. Merton's Design SPG already identifies that tall buildings may present problems in sensitive areas of the borough. Although these areas are identified in the SPG, this background paper reviews these areas informed by a detailed design assessment of each town centre, and presents the findings in map based form in accordance with the Guidance on Tall Buildings.

2.5.6. This paper broadly adopts the process outlined for the preparation of planning policy in By design, by considering the national, regional and local policy context, and undertaking an urban design assessment of the borough as advocated by the London Plan Sub-Regional Development Framework-South London. This is presented as a series of analysis layers to understand the boroughs urban form, and allows for the identification of opportunities and constraints.

2.5.7. More detailed studies of potentially suitable locations of the borough were carried out, adopting the CABA and English Heritage principles of natural topography, urban grain, significant views of skylines, scale and height, streetscape and landmark buildings. This detailed character work supports the policy approach to tall buildings within Merton's Core Strategy.

2.5.8. Planning policy at all levels supports new development of a high design quality incorporating the highest standards of architecture and materials, and this is particularly important in relation to tall buildings given their prominence within the urban landscape. Although this paper does not develop specific guidelines for the assessment of tall building proposals, this general principle of the quality of tall buildings will apply throughout.

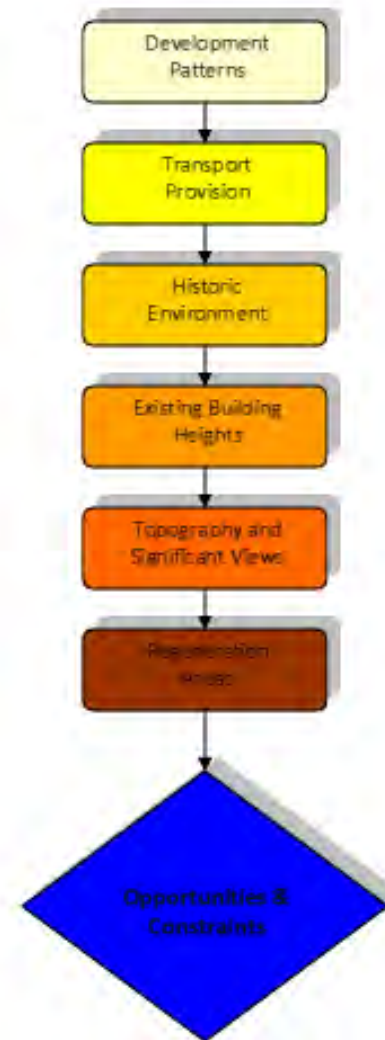
3. Urban Analysis

3.1. Urban Analysis Layers

3.1.1. The urban analysis of the borough combines all the relevant layers of information to develop an understanding of the boroughs urban form. The identification and discussion of these characteristics in relation to urban design and planning policy principles assists in generating opportunities and constraints for tall building development in the borough. From this, some areas are identified as inappropriate for tall building development, some as sensitive locations, and the remaining locations form the subject of detailed area studies.

3.1.2. The urban analysis layers include:

- Development Patterns (centres, industrial areas, suburban neighbourhoods and open spaces);
- Transport Provision and Capacity;
- The Historic Environment ;
- Existing Buildings Heights and Tall Buildings;
- Topography and Significant Views; and
- Regeneration Areas.



3.2. Development Patterns in Merton

3.2.1. The borough has developed through numerous original settlements that are now established centres set amongst large areas of infill development, mostly suburban residential neighbourhoods, open spaces and industrial locations. This analysis layer will explore the key development patterns in Merton including the centres, industrial areas, suburban neighbourhoods and open spaces.

Centres

3.2.2. Within the London Plan, Merton's Major Centre is at Wimbledon, with smaller district centres at Mitcham and Morden. A variety of local centres and neighbourhood parades are also scattered across the borough.

Wimbledon Town Centre

3.2.3. Wimbledon is the borough's largest town centre, providing a wide range of facilities focusing around retail and office uses. With excellent transport connections to central London and south east England, attractive historic surroundings including high quality homes and schools, and a lively cultural offer, Wimbledon town centre is an attractive business location and shopping destination. There is a focus of retail, as the main high street comparison shopping destination in the borough, plus major office and leisure services. It also provides community services, and is a major night-time leisure destination.

3.2.4. In accordance with the London Plan, Major Centres are typically found in inner and some parts of outer London with a

borough-wide catchment. They generally contain over 50,000 sqm of retail floorspace with a relatively high proportion of comparison goods relative to convenience goods. They may also have significant employment, leisure, service and civic functions.

3.2.5. The London Plan classifies Wimbledon Town Centre for medium future growth, with moderate levels of demand for retail, leisure or office floorspace and with physical and public transport capacity to accommodate it. The centre is also designated as a sub-regional night time economy location and is suitable for speculative office development.

3.2.6. The Core Strategy encourages the strengthening of the retail and business core of the Major Centre to cluster economic activity. The centre will be the only location in the borough to accommodate major office development, and will also see a range of community, leisure, and year round uses such as high quality hotels.

3.2.7. The Council is encouraging the redevelopment of key sites centrally located within the town centre. These sites include (but are not limited to) the Sir Cyril Black Car Park, Wimbledon Station, YMCA Site and Wimbledon Theatre Car Park, and others that will come forward over the life of the LDF. These key sites are generally located centrally in the town centre and therefore are amongst fairly large scale built form, and have the ability to enhance the retail, leisure, commercial and residential offer in Wimbledon Town Centre and build on the physical character of the Major Centre.

3.2.8. The centre contains areas of historic value, as well a fairly dense town centre structure with two distinct clusters of high buildings. These areas will be explored in the background paper.

Morden Town Centre

3.2.9. Morden Town Centre is classified as a District Centre in the London Plan, providing convenience goods and services for the local

community and accessible by public transport, walking and cycling, with a range of between 10-50,000 sqm. of retail floorspace. Morden Town Centre is designated as a medium growth centre.

3.2.10. Morden's built form has changed remarkably little since it was first developed in the late 1920s as a local convenience centre catalysed by the Underground station. The areas housing offer is overwhelmingly dominated by suburban housing which along with significant areas of public open space, surrounds the suburban centre.

3.2.11. Today, some buildings in Morden look outdated and some areas appear run-down and are in need of rejuvenation. Morden's role as a District Centre has diminished in the last decade as other nearby centres have expanded. Although Morden has a reasonable number of shops for a District Centre, the range and depth of the retail offer, as well as the quality of the premises and the goods sold, is not as good as it has the potential to be. Smaller, independent retailers are prevalent. However there are also a number of charity shops and fast food outlets. Despite the very high footfall not many people stay to use the services.

3.2.12. The centre is somewhat dependent on its largest employer, the local council which is based in the centre in a large 14 storey tower. In terms of buildings heights this building is the exception as the remaining building stock within the town centre ranges from 2 to 5 storeys.

3.2.13. Regeneration activity is proposed in the emerging Core Strategy, as the Council believes that this location has the potential to accommodate increased densities within the town centre, improving its vitality and viability. Refer to the discussion on regeneration further below.

Mitcham Town Centre

3.2.14. Mitcham District Centre is the smallest of the three main town centres in Merton, having grown from a historic village predating the 14th century.

3.2.15. The centre is similarly designated as a district centre in the London Plan and is identified for medium future growth, with a small number of multiple retailers the primarily serve the retail needs of residents within the east of the borough. However, it has been in gradual decline for many years. The number of vacant shops has increased and the quality and quantity of retail has reduced. There is a sense that Mitcham town centre has received much less private investment than other areas of the borough over the past three decades.

3.2.16. While much of the area surrounding the centre is developed with either industrial premises, open spaces including Mitcham Common and block of flats up to six storeys in height, the centre itself has a fairly low scale, historic setting.

3.2.17. The Mitcham Town Centre SPD proposes regeneration of the centre whilst at the same time retaining the low rise historic setting. Refer to the discussion on regeneration and the Core Strategy further below.

Colliers Wood Town Centre

3.2.18. At present Colliers Wood can be defined as a cluster of high street shops, with more recent scattered retail warehouses and a Sainsbury/M&S superstore which bear little relationship to one another. Merton is seeking re-designation of the Colliers Wood centre in the emerging Core Strategy to District Centre status to allow it entry into the hierarchy of centres across the capital and to plan for transformational change to provide a greater retail offer and more of a pedestrian orientated environment within the centre.

3.2.19. This will be achieved following the adoption of a masterplan for the centre that addresses the significant flooding constraints and outlines the future quantum of growth that will assist in generating a coherent town centre with a range of town centre uses.

3.2.20. The 18 storey Brown and Root Tower dominates the Colliers Wood skyline, with other medium rise buildings and the low rise shopping parades and bulky goods retail warehouses. This paper addresses how a more coherent town centre could be developed with the use of tall buildings.

3.2.21. The regeneration aims for Colliers Wood Town Centre are presented below in Section 3.7.

Local centres

3.2.22. Local centres at Arthur Road, Motspur Park, North Mitcham, Raynes Park and Wimbledon Village function as attractive, thriving and accessible centres for day to day resident needs. These locations support a wide range of local needs in each centre, however major increases in shopping floorspace are resisted. Due to local development constraints, growth of these centres is limited to a level that allows the centre to function for the purpose it is intended.

3.2.23. The character of these locations generally do not lend themselves to tall buildings, for instance Wimbledon Village and Arthur Road are set within Conservation Areas, and Raynes Park adjoins high quality low rise residential neighbourhoods set within Conservation Areas on higher land to the north. These centres will be explored further in this background paper.

3.2.24. Neighbourhood shopping parades

3.2.25. Neighbourhood shopping parades comprise rows of local convenience shops that are scattered across the borough and provide a direct service to the public, which are easily accessible to people

without a car or with restricted mobility, such as people with disabilities, carers and elderly people. These are generally located within residential areas or along main travel routes and are often small clusters of shops, and are generally developed at a scale compatible with the suburban surroundings.

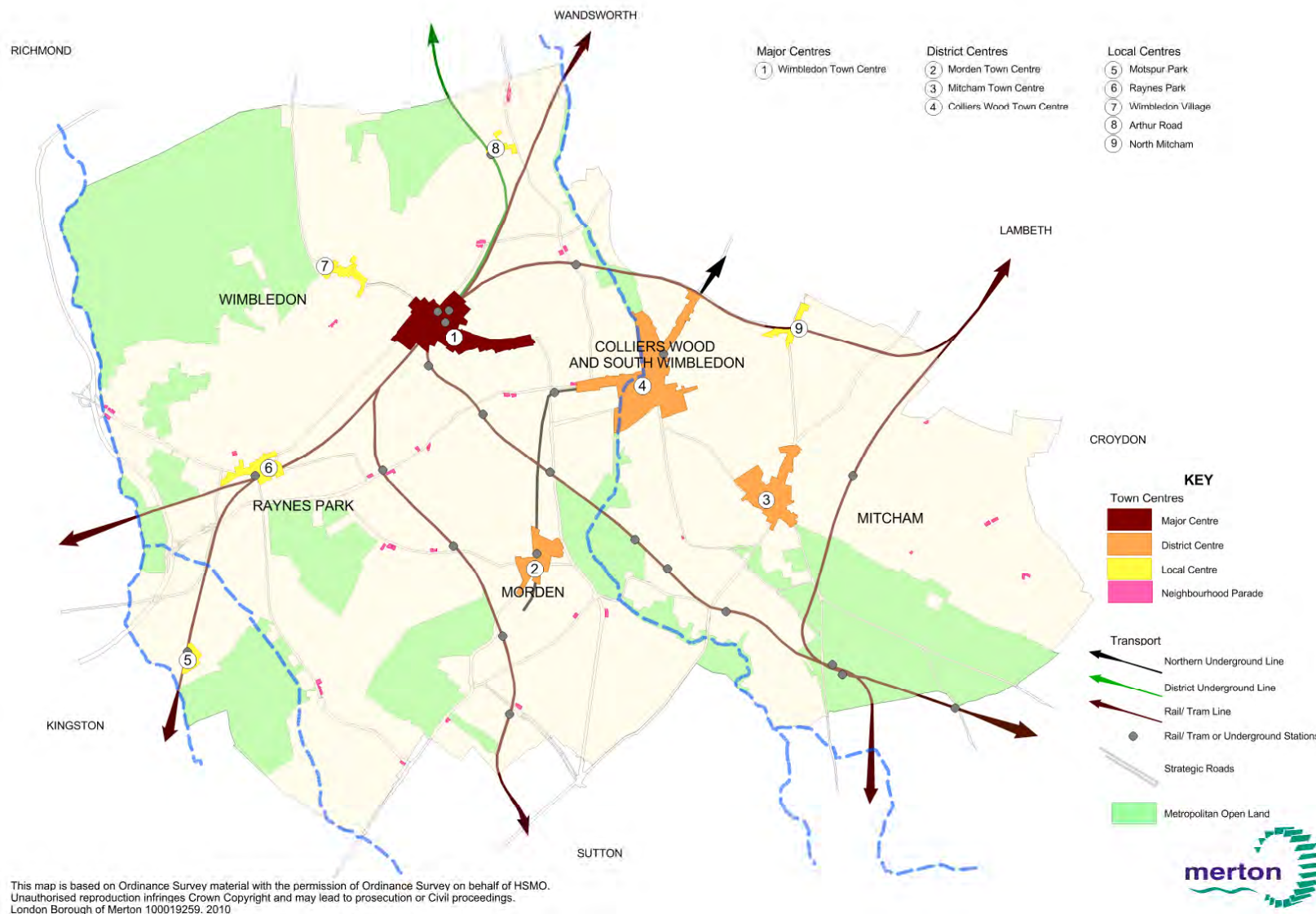


Figure 7: Merton's Town Centre Network

Industrial Areas

3.2.26. Merton has approximately 158 hectares of land designated for industrial and warehousing development, categorised as Strategic Industrial Locations (Durnsford Road; Morden Road & Prince Georges Road; Willow Lane and Hallowfield Way, Beverley Way) and Locally Significant Industrial Areas (Streatham Road; Gap Road; Dundonald Road; Garth Road). Most of the boroughs industrial areas are located outside of town centres where accessibility levels are lower, and the urban form is generally less dense.

3.2.27. To help support and strengthen the local economy during this time of continued economic uncertainty and in order to provide the borough with a strong foundation for future business growth, competition and employment, the Core Strategy aims to substantially protect and wherever possible, improve the quality of the borough's designated industrial areas and scattered employment sites in order to:

- Help meet the four objectives from Merton's Economic Development Strategy;
- Provide space for firms to take advantage of new commercial opportunities;
- Allow for flexibility for indigenous businesses to move/grow according to needs of location and size;
- Minimise disruption to neighbouring uses including residential and community services;
- Enable business support services to target specific locations and symbiotic relationship between enterprises (e.g. BIDS); and
- Allow for diversity in commercial circumstances.

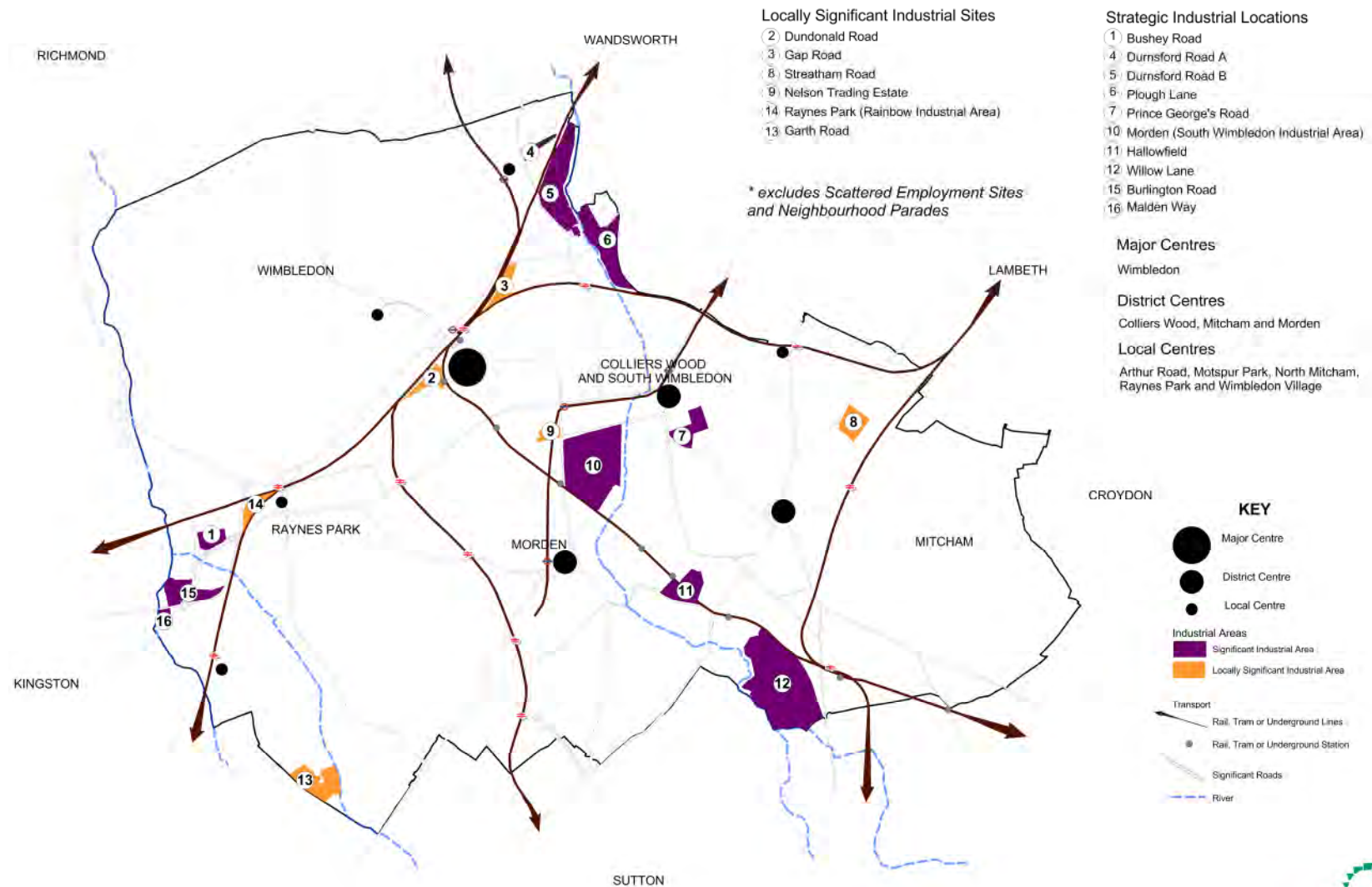
3.2.28. The relationship between numbers of jobs and employment floorspace is not straightforward and is becoming harder to quantify given ongoing advances in technology and changes in working practices. A decline in traditional manufacturing in London is not leading to a permanent reduction in demand for premises, as growth

areas such as creative industries, advanced manufacturing, research and development, recycling and waste management, construction, printing and publishing and logistics are utilising such sites.

3.2.29. Taking this into account it is acknowledged that the designated industrial areas will adapt and change to the needs to businesses over the plan period, and may intensify as the market demands. Industrial areas are unsuitable for stand alone office developments that are not ancillary to industrial functions, as these are more suitable for accessible town centre locations. Designated Industrial areas generally have low public accessibility within the borough, with the exception of Morden Industrial Estate which is located in close proximity to South Wimbledon underground station.

3.2.30. Stand alone office buildings are more suitable to tall buildings given their internal function, whereas industrial buildings are generally more low rise. It is acknowledged however that some industrial functions may have the ability to accommodate large buildings as a result of the intensification of existing industrial sites, however this intensification should not compete with town centres, and proposals will need to be justified based on their proposed function and their impact on the character of the surrounding environment. Most industrial buildings are large as oppose to tall, often bulky with a large footprint that is generally more appropriate to industrial functions. There are practical limits to the increase in heights in industrial locations based on the use of the land in these areas and the need to cluster dense development into the centres across the borough.

3.2.31. Morden Industrial Estate is considered most likely to intensify for industrial function over the plan period due to its central location and accessibility within the borough. Beverley Way (Shannon Corner) is located on the A3, and development is supported where it meets the demand for logistics and warehousing that can take advantage of its access to the major road network, without harming the vitality of viability of existing town centres.



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Figure 8: Economic Development in Merton

Suburban Neighbourhoods

3.2.32. Merton's Design SPG provides a borough-wide character analysis. This divides the borough up into distinctive 'character' areas which provide a framework for identifying their character and assessing the appropriateness of new development. They are specific to Merton and a fundamental part of the existing built form character of the borough. In terms of the boroughs residential neighbourhoods the distinctive areas comprise:

- "Grid-Iron" Terraces
- Loosely Structured Suburban Development
- Medium Intensity Suburban Development
- Areas with blocks of flats
- Inter war Garden City layouts
- Post 1945 Council housing estates

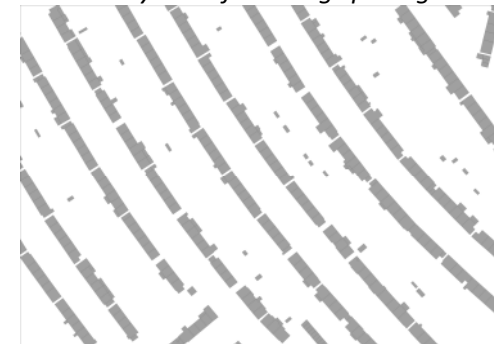
3.2.33. In addition to this there the analysis identifies the non-residential character areas of Commercial Centres and Large Scale Industrial Warehousing and Retail Parks. Apart from some exceptions, many of the neighbourhoods outside of the non-residential character areas are fairly homogeneous and cohesive. Introducing large scale, tall buildings, that by definition will significantly exceed the height of surrounding buildings and become prominent in their surroundings, will have a detrimental impact on this character.

3.2.34. In particular, the Grid-Iron Terraces and the Medium Intensity Suburban Development which occupy large areas of the boroughs suburban environment are both characterised by a consistent urban grain, with a regular rhythm of building spacing, front setbacks and building heights of generally 2 storeys, and overall a strong sense of architectural cohesion. Any infill development that does not respect

this scale and height will erode the very character that defines the neighbourhood.



Figure ground plan of grid-iron terraces (above Figure 9) and medium intensity suburban development (below Figure 10) that illustrate the fine urban grain and consistent rhythm of building spacing and setbacks



3.2.35. Other distinctive areas that are not as homogenous include the Loosely Structured Suburban Development, where setbacks, orientation and parcel shapes and sizes change through the neighbourhood, and the Inter War Garden City Layouts where pockets of higher flats and shopping parades interrupt what is otherwise a very integrated and planned residential layout. These neighbourhoods however display cohesive elements, for example the Loosely Structured Suburban Development displays a distinct density,

with large parcels and street frontages, an emphasis on landscape features and building quality, with buildings heights consistent at 2-3 storeys. Within the Inter War Garden City Layouts there is a strong sense of architectural cohesion, with the exception of the higher flats and shopping parades, which are generally setback from the suburban neighbourhoods and located along major traffic routes such as St Hellier Avenue in Morden. Similar to grid-iron terraces and medium intensity suburban development, introducing tall building elements within these neighbourhoods will erode a fairly consistent residential character. Directing tall buildings to more diverse, denser locations such as the Commercial Centres will ensure that neighbourhoods such as these are protected.



Figure ground plan of garden city neighbourhoods (above Figure 11) and loosely structured suburban development (below Figure 12)

3.2.36. Post 1945 Council Estates and Areas with Blocks of Flats are scattered in various locations across the borough, and generally offer a high density and in some cases are quite distinct differences to their surroundings. Areas with Blocks of Flats are generally located in more accessible areas, forming part of the character of the boroughs town centres, or located along the frontage to major routes. Locations along major routes generally directly abut low scale suburban neighbourhoods and are therefore sensitive to tall buildings.

3.2.37. The Post 1945 Council Estates, such as High Path Estate in South Wimbledon, form large and distinct neighbourhoods of their own. These character areas will be retained where it is demonstrated that they offer value to the surrounding character, however are generally considered to be anomalies and not typical of the suburban character of Merton.



Figure 13: Post 1945 Council Estates such as High Path Estate

3.2.38. Tall buildings will not be encouraged in these locations that are mainly suburban and located outside of the boroughs centres. The presence of existing high density development does not guarantee that a similar density would be appropriate should a redevelopment scheme come forward. Accessible locations such as town centres will be explored in the Detailed Area Studies in Section 4 for the potential they offer in accommodating tall buildings in the

borough, including those centres with existing Areas with Blocks of Flats.

3.2.39. Overall it is considered that suburban neighbourhoods in the borough are unsuitable locations for tall buildings, based on the distinct low scale and cohesive character of these areas, and their locations which are generally outside of centres in areas with low accessibility. Please also refer to the discussion further below regarding building heights, and protection of suburban development as advocated by the European Landscape Convention.

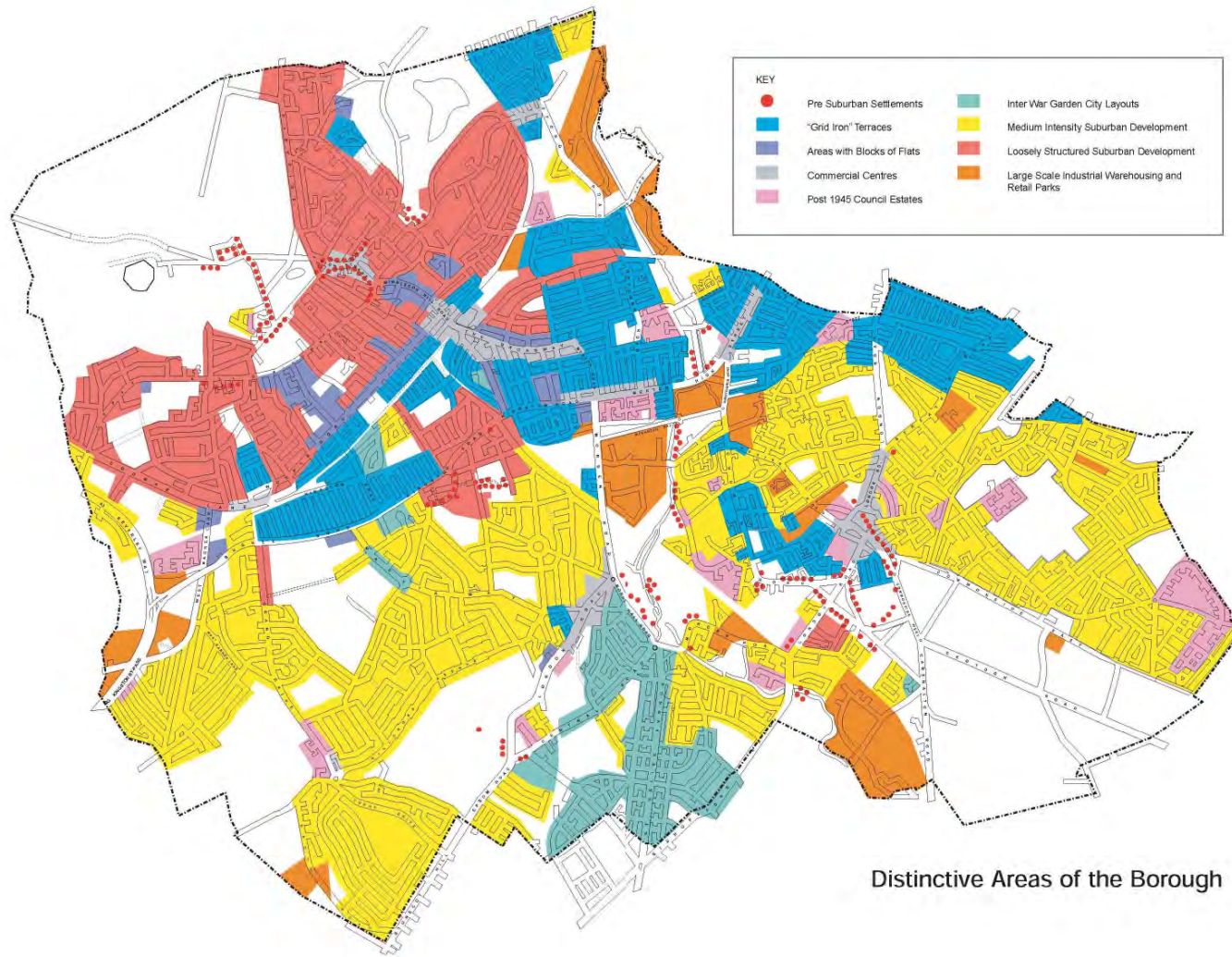


Figure 14: Distinctive Areas of the Borough (Merton Design SPG)

Open Spaces

3.2.40. Open space in an urban environment provides relief from buildings and defines the townscape. Merton has over 700 hectares of green space, equating to 18% of the borough compared with the London average of 10%. Open space is therefore an important component of the character of Merton.

3.2.41. There are 67 parks in Merton, which play an important role in preserving its natural and cultural heritage. 7% of the borough comprises of a European protected Special Area for Conservation, namely Wimbledon Common, and 24% is designated Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC).

3.2.42. Open space incorporates designated parks, sports pitches, commons, allotments, front gardens, cemeteries and church yards, school playing fields and waterways and streams

3.2.43. Historic parks and gardens are an important part of the borough's environment and heritage. The borough has four sites included on the English Heritage 'Register of parks and gardens of special historic interest':-

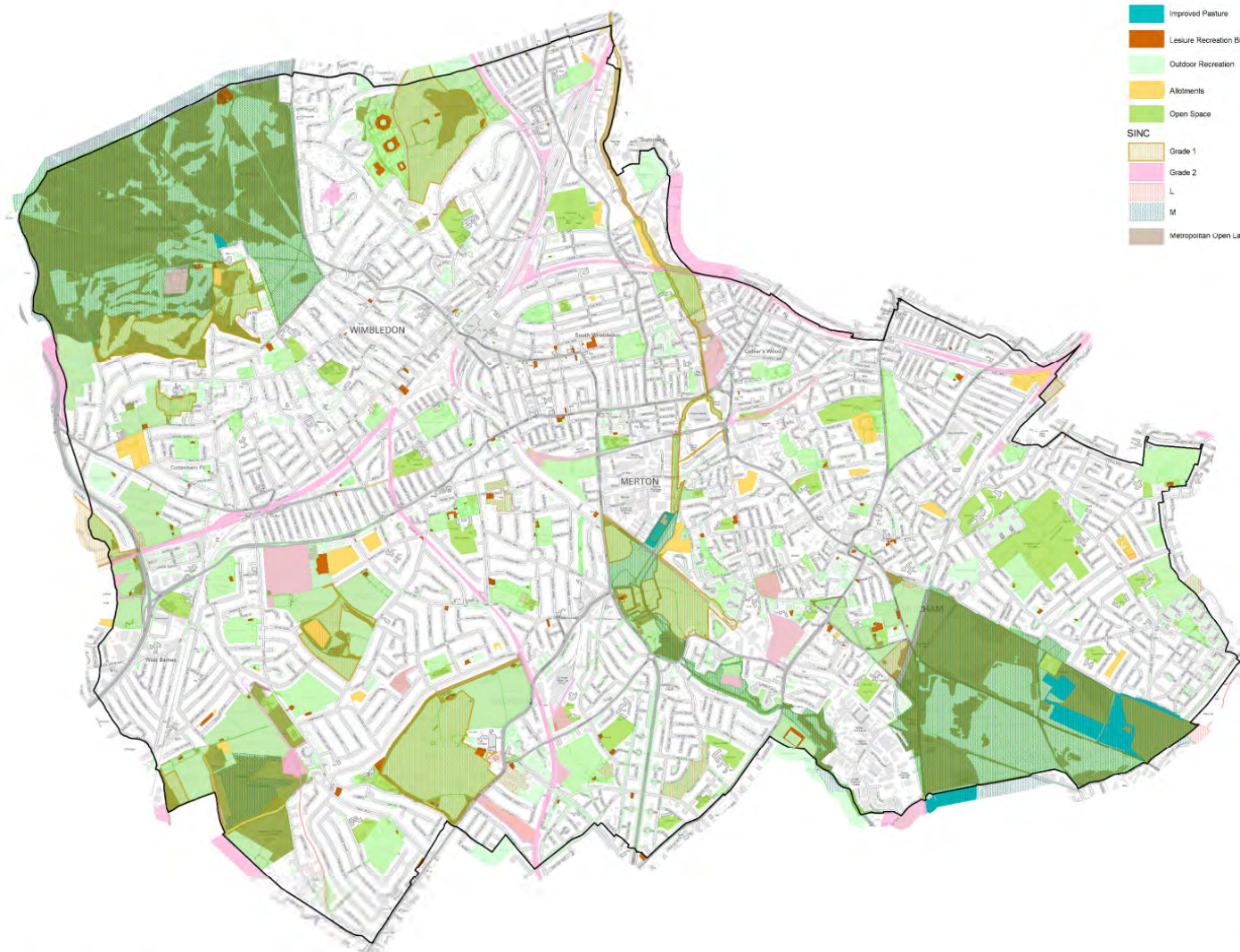
- Cannizaro Park, Wimbledon : (Grade II*)
- Wimbledon Park, Wimbledon: (Grade II*)
- Morden Hall Park, Morden: (Grade II)
- South Park Gardens, Wimbledon: (Grade II)

3.2.44. The London Plan states that protecting and adding to London's open space is particularly important to mitigating and adapting to climate change and creating a more attractive, well-designed and green city. Further to this, open spaces are home to significant wildlife species and act as an area for nature conservation. Metropolitan Open Land (MOL) within the Borough must be protected in accordance with the London Plan. The draft Core

Strategy proposes to protect existing designated open spaces within the borough from inappropriate development, the exception being where there is demand for education facilities that cannot be met elsewhere in the borough. This is particularly related to school playing fields and has no direct relevance to the development of tall buildings and therefore should not be considered.

3.2.45. Open space has strong policy support for protection across all layers of government, and it is therefore appropriate to exclude the designated open spaces within the borough from consideration for tall building development.

3.2.46. Development of land outside of the boundaries of open space, but in proximity to it, may also damage the setting, character and visual accessibility of the open space, including Registered Parks and Gardens. Open spaces should be protected from nearby tall buildings that are visually intrusive, and development that adversely affects the setting, amenity, quality or utility of the open space. This is particularly relevant for Morden Hall Park which adjoins the Morden Town Centre, and will be considered as part of the ongoing regeneration program for this centre and addressed in an Area Action Plan (AAP). Regard will be given to the sensitivity of areas adjoining and nearby open spaces for tall building development under the detailed area studies in this background paper.



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Figure 15: Merton's Open Spaces



3.3. Transport Provision and Capacity

3.3.1. The borough is characterised by a range of transportation options including strategic and local road networks, cycle routes and public transport services comprising mainline train, tram, underground and bus. The policy review above identified that across national, regional and local planning policy, higher density development is encouraged to locate within areas of the borough with good public transport accessibility within close proximity to infrastructure and services. This includes tall buildings that by definition are considered to be dense development. This layer of the analysis will seek to identify the areas of the borough where there is good transport accessibility, and from this provide a basis for identifying potential locations for tall buildings within the borough.

3.3.2. The highest areas of public transport accessibility are located within the boroughs centres where a variety of interchanges between transport modes are available, and where infrastructure and services are clustered. The clustering of buildings in denser locations is widely acknowledged as an efficient urban structure that in transport terms is more accessible. Studies by Newman and Kenworthy have demonstrated that denser location such as Tokyo and Singapore are much more sustainable having regard to the consumption of fuel.

3.3.3. In Merton, Wimbledon Major Centre and Morden District Centre are both rated 6 in terms of PTAL and both centres are designated centres in the London Plan. Raynes Park Local Centre is also rated 6 as it is located on the main south bound overland train line, and offers reasonable bus connections. Other centres with moderate public transport accessibility are Mitcham District Centre, Colliers Wood Centre, South Wimbledon Centre and North Mitcham Local Centre.

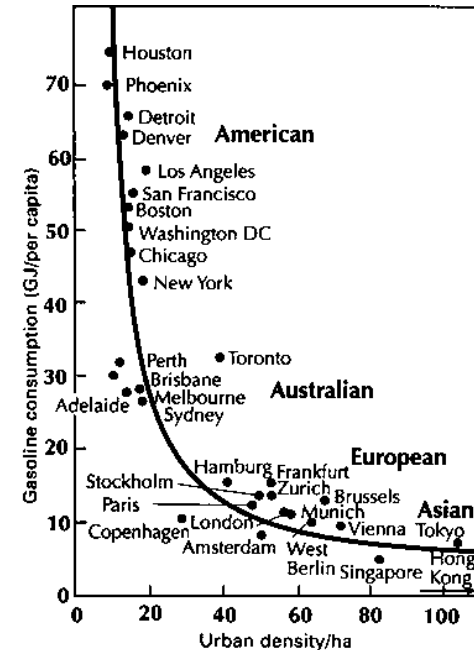


Figure 16: Newman & Kenworthy – Gasoline consumption vs. urban density

3.3.4. The borough is predominately suburban and therefore the neighbourhoods outside of the designated centres offer lower levels of accessibility, in particular areas beyond Morden and Mitcham District Centres, Motspur Park, and the area north of Colliers Wood spanning west around Wimbledon Major Centre to Wimbledon Common, taking in Plough Lane.

3.3.5. In terms of road access, the borough is serviced by an extensive network made up of the Strategic Road Network, London Distributor Roads, Local Distributor Roads and Local Access Roads. The Strategic Road Network traverses north-south and east-west of the borough, linking with Sutton, Kingston and Croydon centres. The London Distributor Network connects Merton’s town centres to the Strategic Road Network.

centre specific transport provision and capacity work is identified in the detailed area studies.

3.3.6. Planning policy directs higher density development towards centres that have the highest public transport accessibility. The tram services and bus routes offer connections between centres, however along the routes within the suburban neighbourhoods there is little increase in accessibility, and the higher PTAL areas are therefore located at modal interchanges within centres.

3.3.7. Wimbledon Town Centre, Morden Town Centre and Raynes Park Local Centre have the highest accessibility rating of 6. Other locations with a high accessibility rating of 5 include Colliers Wood Town Centre, Mitcham Town Centre. These centres should form the basis of any further analysis of potential locations for tall buildings due to their accessibility levels which should act as a starting point in accommodating future development in the borough. South Wimbledon Neighbourhood Parade and North Mitcham Local Centre also have high accessibility ratings although given their existing low scale development patterns and their status within the town centre hierarchy they do not warrant further analysis.

3.3.8. The Council is in the process of developing a Sustainable Transport Strategy and Local Implementation Plan which will set out a plan to deliver both Merton's LDF Core Strategy and the Mayor of London's Transport Strategy. It will include the key issues needed to improve Merton's transport environment for a more sustainable future. It will identify the areas with which Merton has a direct responsibility and those areas, particularly public transport, where a third party is the key decision maker. A programme of schemes to address the issues where Merton is directly responsible will be prioritised for funding opportunities including those managed by Transport for London. The strategy will also identify borough preferences for areas of third parties responsibility like public transport and the TRLN which will include transport capacity and infrastructure upgrades required to support future growth. The town

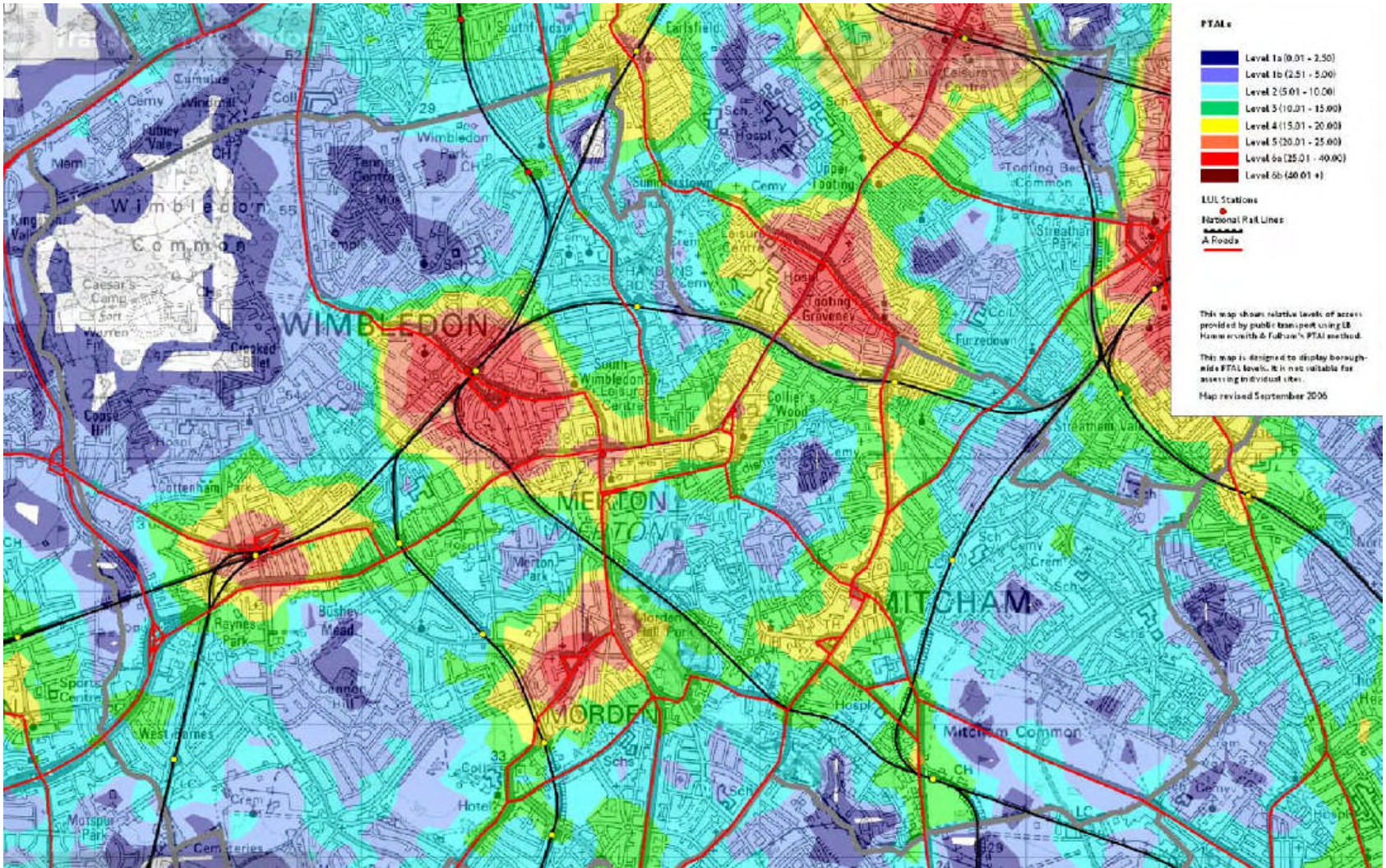
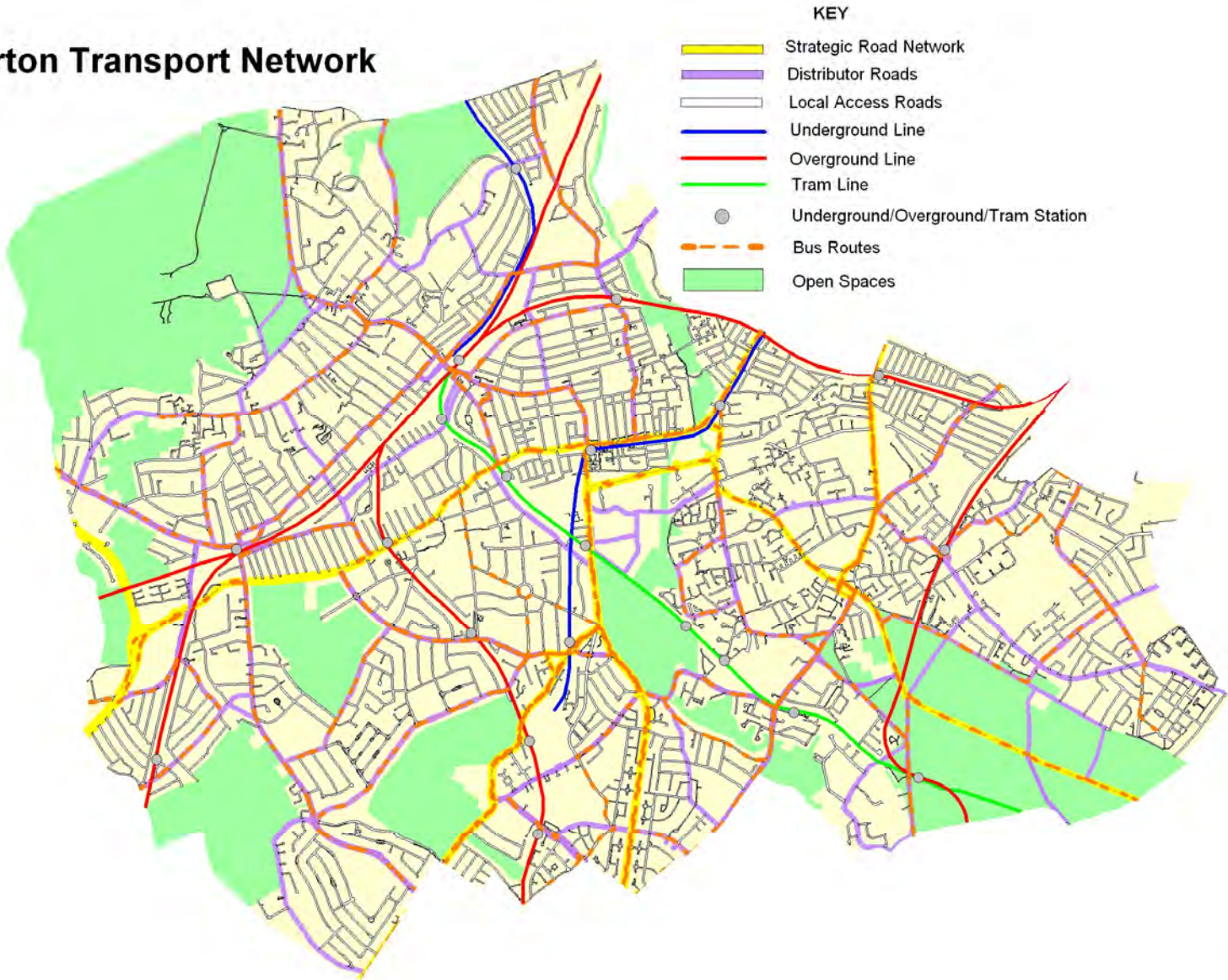


Figure 17: Merton's Public Transport Accessibility Map

Merton Transport Network



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Figure 18: Merton's Transport Network



3.4. The Historic Environment

3.4.1. Merton has 28 Conservation Areas, which are supplemented by a list of local buildings of historic, architectural or townscape value, a programme of character appraisals and management plans for conservation areas. Statutorily listed buildings and other heritage sites, such as historic parks and gardens and scheduled ancient monuments complete the key elements of the historic character of Merton. This layer of the analysis will seek to identify the historic assets of the borough and discuss their relationship to potential locations for tall buildings within the borough. The historic context of the borough is mapped further below.

The number of Buildings at Risk in Merton has continued to fall from 10 in 2004/05 to 6 in 2008/09. Merton is meeting its target to reduce the number of listed Buildings at Risk, but not Buildings at Risk as a percentage of the total number of listed buildings in London, which has increased since 2006/07. In accordance with the Annual Monitoring Report in 2008/09, this highlights that there is a need to continue to reduce the number of listed buildings at risk in the borough, and further promote Merton's historic built environment.

Conservation Areas

3.4.2. Conservation areas are designated by the Council as areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which should be preserved or enhanced. 28 Conservation Areas have been designated as high environmental quality, and are a significant factor in defining local identity and distinctiveness. Refer

to the table below which identifies each Conservation Area and its characterisation status.

3.4.3. The borough is home to four Historic Parks and Gardens, all of which are within an identified Conservation Area. These include:

- Cannizaro Park, Wimbledon
- Wimbledon Park, Wimbledon
- Morden Hall Park, Morden
- South Park Gardens, Wimbledon

3.4.4. Each of the 28 Conservation Areas displays its own individual historical significance. All new development within the borough is expected to preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Areas, and this is enforced through local design guides for all of the areas. The scale and massing of any new buildings should relate to existing buildings, and the predominate scale and rhythm of development within the Conservation Areas.

3.4.5. As tall buildings are by definition significantly taller than their surroundings and cause a significant change on the skyline, this contravenes the guidance provided for new development in Conservation Areas within the borough. The consideration of potential locations for tall buildings within the borough should therefore eliminate Conservation Areas on this basis. Special regard will need to be given to those areas adjoining and surrounding Conservation Areas to ensure that the significance and prominent landmark form of a tall building does not undermine the qualities and significance of the Conservation Area. This is particularly relevant for parts of Morden Town Centre that adjoin Morden Hall Park, which will be addressed through the Area Action Plan for the regeneration

of the centre. Some flexibility may be required within or adjoining Conservation Areas in designated town centres where denser, commercial development is common; such as Wimbledon Hill Road in Wimbledon Town Centre, however regard must be given in particular to the scale of development within each Conservation Area.

3.4.6. Smaller local centres such as Wimbledon Village and Arthur Road are to be protected for their unique character within the Core Strategy, most of which is attributed to the fairly low scale historic environment. Tall buildings in these localities are therefore not appropriate having regard to the need to protect and enhance the Conservation Areas.

Listed Buildings

3.4.7. A number of statutorily listed and locally listed buildings exist within the borough. These buildings, along with their settings, such as formal gardens, are an important element of local character.

3.4.8. The buildings themselves are unsuitable for tall building development however regard should also be given to the backdrop and setting of the buildings to ensure that tall, large scale buildings will not be visually intrusive and dominating to the historic buildings.

Scheduled Ancient Monuments

3.4.9. Scheduled ancient monuments are identified under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 as monuments of National importance to which statutory protection is afforded. The borough has three such monuments:

- Caesars Camp, Wimbledon Common
- Merton Priory Colliers Wood; and
- Morden Park Mound

3.4.10. Archaeological remains are a crucial link with our past, and once lost, they can never be replaced. English Heritage is the main national body which identifies archaeological sites, develops policies to protect them and promotes the importance of archaeology. Scheduling is the only legal protection specifically for archaeological sites, and given the national significance of the three monuments these areas and their settings should be eliminated as potential locations for all buildings as part of this study.

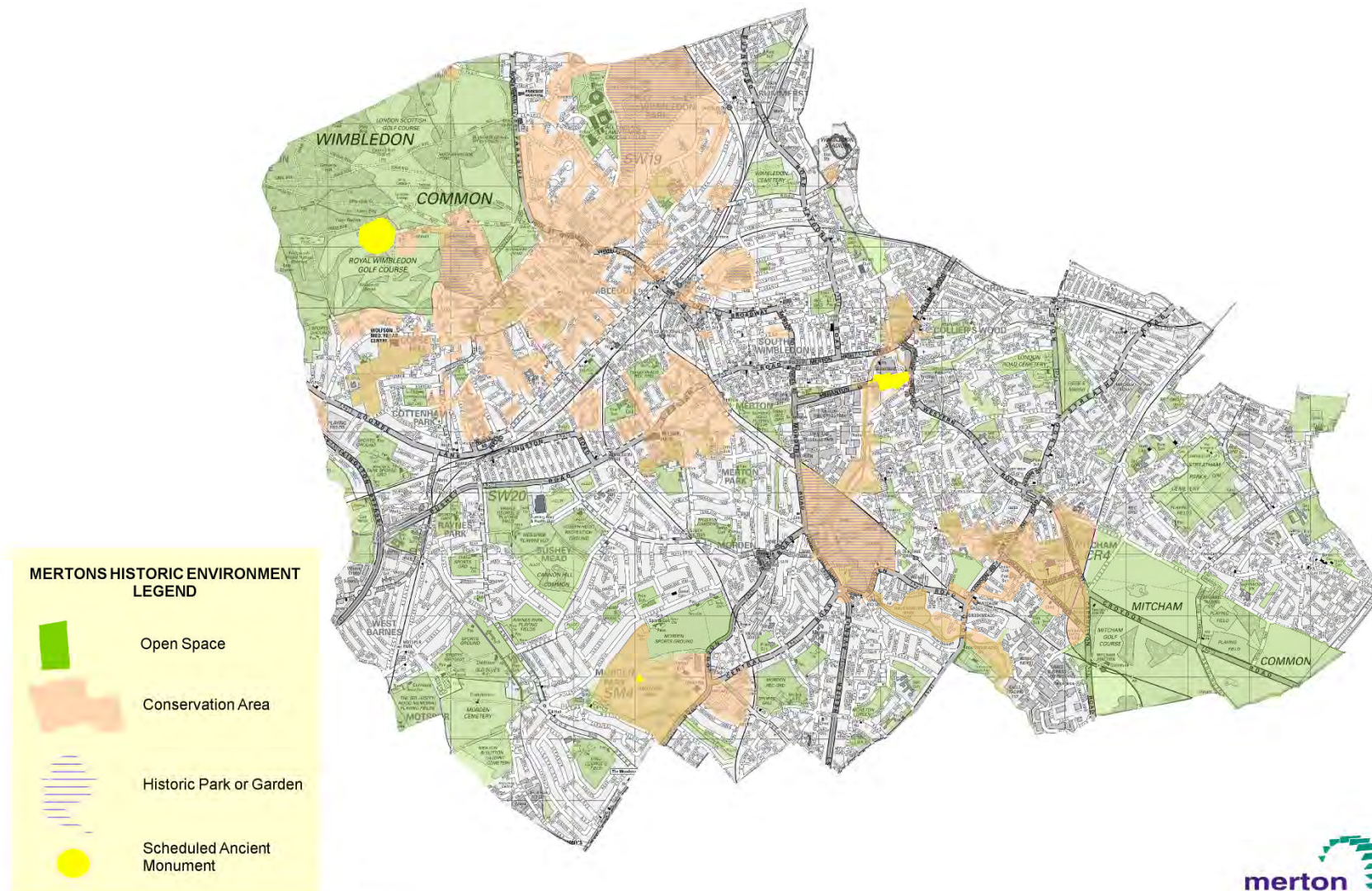
3.4.11. The Detailed Area Studies in this background paper will address the historic environment and the potential for tall buildings within individual town centres.

Archaeological Priority Zones

3.4.12. It is important to prevent potentially valuable archaeological remains and data from being destroyed without record when sites are developed. Merton has been the location of settlement from prehistoric times on and of important industrial developments from early modern times. Consequently, it is likely that there are a number of unexcavated sites across the borough and past archaeological discoveries and documentary sources can be used to indicate where further evidence may lie buried.

3.4.13. The adopted Merton Unitary Development Plan requires that where a development is proposed within an Archaeological Priority Zone, a preliminary archaeological assessment may need to be undertaken before proposals are considered. This requirement may also be applied to sites outside the Archaeological Priority Zones especially where they are over 0.6ha or where there is proven or known archaeological potential. These requirements will be applied for future tall building development.

3.4.14. Refer to the map of Archaeological Priority Zones in Merton further below.



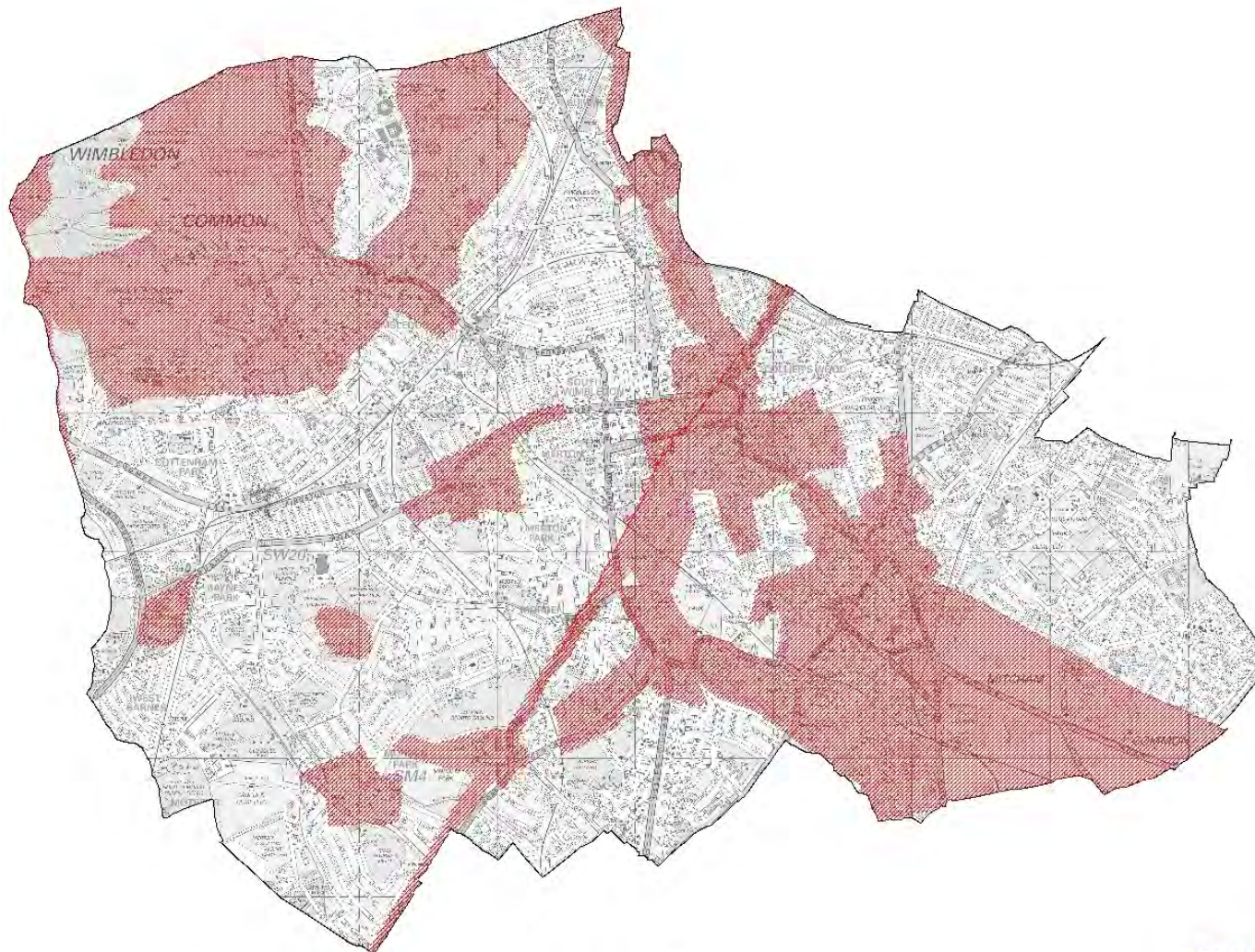
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Figure 19: Merton's Historic Environment (excluding Statutorily and Locally Listed Buildings)

Merton's Conservation Areas and status of characterisation work (as at July 2010)				
Complete		In draft form		Not yet started
Conservation Area	Appraisal	Management Plan	Design Guide	
1. John Innes Merton Park	Published 02/2006		Published 1994	
2. Wimbledon Village			Published 1996	
3. Wimbledon North				
4. Wimbledon West	Published 06/2004			
5. Mitcham Cricket Green			Published 1996	
6. South Park Gardens	Published 2005			
7. John Innes – Wilton Crescent	Published 10/2005			
8. Bertram Cottages	Published 10/2005			
9. Pelham Road	Published 10/2005		Published 1989	
10. Wimbledon Hill	Published 07/2006		Published 1995	
11. Wimbledon Broadway			Published 11/1999	
12. Drax Avenue				
13. Upper Morden	Published 11/2007			

Conservation Area	Appraisal	Management Plan	Design Guide
14. Merton Hall Road	11/2005		
15. Bathgate Road			07/1995
16. Wandle Valley			
17. Dunmore Road	Published 10/2005		
18. Lambton Road	Published 10/2005		
19. Durham Road			
20. Westcombe Avenue			Published 1995
21. Copse Hill	Published 01/2002		Published 2002
22. Wool Road	Published 01/2002		Published 2002
23. Wimbledon Chase	Published 10/2005		
24. Vineyard Hill Road			
25. Kenilworth Avenue	Published 10/2005		
26. Leopold Road	Published 10/2005		
27. Dennis Park Crescent			Published 11/1996
28. Wimbledon Windmill			



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Figure 20: Archaeological Priority Zones in Merton

3.5. Building Heights and Tall Buildings

Existing building heights in Merton

3.5.1. Merton is designated as an outer suburban London borough, predominately characterised by low rise suburban neighbourhoods.

3.5.2. For the purposes of identifying appropriate locations for tall buildings in Merton it is important to gain an understanding of the existing building heights across the borough, and provide a sense of what 'tall' means in each location.

3.5.3. The Distinctive Areas of the Borough Map has been used as a starting point in generating the following building height categories:

- Suburban Low rise and undeveloped land (0-3 storeys)
- Mid-rise (4-6 storeys)
- High rise (7-10 storeys)
- Prominent high-rise towers (11+)
- Large buildings 'one-off' landmarks

3.5.4. Having regard to these categories the existing building heights in Merton have been broadly mapped, refer to the following page. It is clear from this mapping exercise that Merton is overwhelming characterised by low scale suburban development of 3 storeys or lower. Current planning policy in Merton supports the protection of the suburban landscape in Merton as an important element of local character. New development should be designed in order to respect the predominately low rise building form. This is supported by the European Landscape Convention (ELC) which is dedicated exclusively

to the protection, management and planning of all landscapes in Europe.

3.5.5. 'Landscape means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors' (ELC, 2000)

3.5.6. This paper, as an evidence base to support policy formulation for the next 15 years, continues the protection of the suburban landscape in Merton in line with existing local planning policies and the ELC. Tall building development will be strongly resisted in low-rise residential neighbourhoods in Merton.

3.5.7. Some mid-rise development is scattered amongst residential neighbourhoods however these tend to be 4 or 5 storeys rather than 6 or 7 which have less of an impact on the character of the surrounding neighbourhoods. This development is mainly prominent in accessible locations, such as between Raynes Park and Wimbledon Centres, and along major roads such as Worple Road and Kingston Road. There is an opportunity to strengthen this development pattern, where mid-rise development will complement the surrounding character in locations such as Worple Road, and neighbourhood parades such as Wimbledon Chase.

3.5.8. The core of Mitcham Town Centre displays a small scale historic setting, bordered by more recent mid-rise development, predominately flats, and located mainly along transport routes. There is a desire to protect the setting of the town centre core, while still allowing dense development to come forward around the town centre at a scale comparable with existing development.

3.5.9. Wimbledon Town Centre is the most significant location in the borough in terms of building height, with two distinct clusters of tall buildings to the east along The Broadway and to the west around St Georges Road. The Core Strategy is proposing to strengthen and enhance Wimbledon as a Major Centre, encouraging major

development including office development. Additional tall buildings may assist in achieving this, and will provide the opportunity to consolidate and strengthen the town centre skyline.

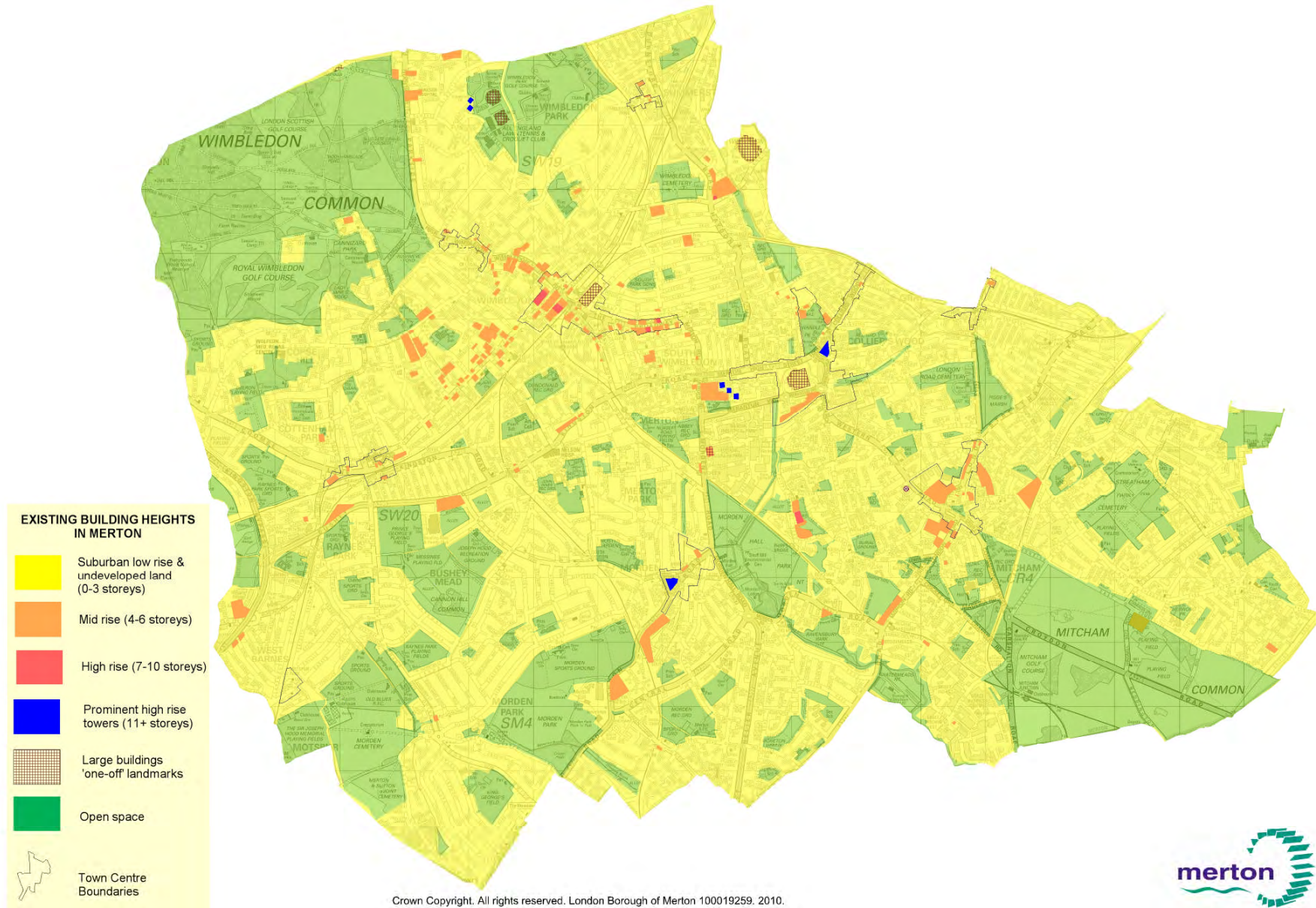
3.5.10. Very few prominent high-rise towers are located in Merton, and they are often poorly integrated with their low scale surroundings. This is particularly evident with Fresham Court in Phipps Bridge and Burghley House and Somerset House adjoining the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club. The Core Strategy should resist future development of this nature that creates undesirable, out of centre tall buildings that do not respond to their low scale setting.

3.5.11. There is however an opportunity to strengthen the position of stand alone prominent buildings where they are located in centres, such as Morden and Colliers Wood, by using complementary tall or mid-rise buildings to create a transition in height down to the surrounding low scale neighbourhoods.

3.5.12. Local Centres in the borough are made up of a combination of low and mid rise development. Future development in these locations should have regard to existing development patterns and sensitivities such as Conservation Areas in Wimbledon Village.

3.5.13. Development within Industrial Areas is not often referred to by storey height, however existing development in these locations range from low to mid-rise. There is an opportunity to consolidate and intensify industrial areas across the borough provided that impacts on amenity, character etc. are considered. Tall buildings may be useful in achieving improvements to the economic prospects of industrial areas in Merton.

3.5.14. How the existing building heights in Merton impact on the location of future tall buildings in the borough will be explored further in the detailed area studies.



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Figure 21: Existing Building Heights in Merton



Tall Buildings in Merton

3.5.15. It is important to refine the definition of what constitutes a tall building having regard to the existing building heights across Merton, to determine what constitutes 'significantly taller' in the local context. Based on these tall building categories it is important that proposals for tall buildings are accompanied by an urban design study that considers among other things the relationship of the proposal to the context, which includes surrounding building heights. Each tall building proposal should be assessed on its individual merits and must demonstrate that the proposal does not compromise heritage assets or the wider historic environment. The following tall building categories have therefore been identified:

Mid-Rise Buildings

3.5.16. Buildings that are generally between 4 and 6 storeys in height. A large proportion of Merton is characterised by 1-3 storey suburban development, and in these low rise locations a mid-rise building may be considered as 'significantly taller', and may significantly change the skyline.



Figure 22: Example of mid-rise buildings in Wimbledon Village

High-Rise Buildings

3.5.17. Buildings that are generally between 7 and 10 storeys in height. Considered to be 'significantly taller' and will significantly change the skyline in all areas on Merton.



Figure 23: Example of high rise building – YMCA Building in Wimbledon TC

Very Tall 'Prominent' Buildings:

3.5.18. Large, prominent buildings in Merton that have a height of 11 storeys or higher. Buildings within this category are considered to be 'significantly taller' in all areas of Merton, and will significantly change the skyline. Examples include the Merton Civic Centre in Morden and Brown and Root Tower in Colliers Wood.



Figure 24: Example of prominent building, Brown and Root Tower in Colliers Wood

3.6. Topography and Significant Views

3.6.1. In accordance with the Guidance on Tall Buildings (2007), CABE and English Heritage recommend the consideration of strategic views within an area, backdrops, and important local views, prospects and panoramas, as well as the identification of landmark buildings and their settings.

3.6.2. Merton is not located in the area affected by the London View Management Framework (LVMF); however that does not mean that the borough does not have strategic and local views that are an important element of local character. Regard has been given to the types and definitions of views in the LVMF, as well as to local circumstances in formulating view categories for the purpose of this evidence base. This analysis will identify important views within Merton, and how these impact on the future location of tall buildings.

3.6.3. The topography of the borough in most respects is responsible for many of the strategic views. Merton is predominately flat through areas of Wimbledon, South Wimbledon, Morden, Mitcham and Colliers Wood, rising up to the west of Wimbledon. Land in Wimbledon Park around Arthur Road Local Centre, and to the north of Raynes Park and west of Wimbledon rises up to form a plateau around Wimbledon Village and Wimbledon Common. The plateau covers much of Wimbledon Common which for most of its part is heavily treed. On this basis any large scale development in the local centres of Raynes Park, Wimbledon Village and Arthur Road will be visually exposed when viewed from lower areas of the borough.

3.6.4. The topographical character of the borough therefore varies from east to west, with areas of Mitcham offering views west up to

the plateau, and West Wimbledon (north of Raynes Park) affording views out across the entire borough towards Colliers Wood, Mitcham Common and further on to Croydon. Several locations in Wimbledon Park offer expansive views to Westminster, City of London and Canary Wharf.

3.6.5. It is essential that the analysis of topography and views takes into account the impact that tall buildings could have on significant views across the borough, if located in exposed, sensitive or inappropriate locations. It is important to acknowledge the value that the clustering of large buildings together (usually into centres), can have on defining and protecting important views. In some instances, tall buildings can act as a marker in navigating the borough, and be a positive addition to existing strategic views. As tall buildings are seen in distant, middle and local views, their impact at these respective distances must be considered in the design development, as identified in Tall Buildings: A strategic design guide, British Council for Offices and RIBA Publishing (2005):

- In distant views, the overall massing and proportion is most important. The relationship between the building's silhouette and the skyline should inform its design;
- In mid-distance views, the building's overall composition and detail are perceived in balance. Here, the hierarchy and articulation of the elevations are particularly important; and
- The local views show the interrelationship between the building's base and its immediate setting. At this scale, the quality of materials and its detail are particularly important.



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Figure 25: Merton's Topography

Strategic Views in Merton

3.6.6. Views form an important part of local character and how people view their local area. The analysis of views across the borough has been a strategic exercise that has identified diagrammatical views within the following view categories:

Vista

3.6.7. A distant view or prospect, especially one seen through an opening, as between rows of buildings or trees. Vistas within the borough provide views of the broader region in particular directions.



Figure 26: Vista from Wimbledon Park to central London

Panorama

3.6.8. An unobstructed and wide view of an extensive area in all directions, involving various elements including the urban and natural landscape. A panorama is essentially a broad prospect. The background, middle and foreground are generally viewed as part of a cohesive whole.



Figure 27: Panoramic view from Wimbledon Park to City of London and Canary Wharf

Open space views

3.6.9. Significant views to and from open spaces within Merton.



Figure 28: View through Mitcham Common

Important Townscape View Setting

3.6.10. A contained urban view within a townscape setting. Focal points serve to strengthen and improve the view. These views are generally in centres, and shorter than those within the linear view corridors.



Figure 29: Local Townscape Setting of North Mitcham Local Centre

Linear view corridor

3.6.11. Generally contained views within the borough, usually of a boulevard nature and bordered by a fairly consistent edge. These views are long and mainly suburban in character, and in some cases are directed towards prominent buildings or focal points.



Figure 30: High Street Colliers Wood Linear view corridor

Strategic Views into Merton

3.6.12. The analysis of topography and strategic views in Merton has also taken into consideration strategic views from adjoining boroughs. The topography of the south-west London region is rather flat, and therefore it is important to acknowledge and protect any significant viewing corridors in the region when determining the future location of tall buildings.

3.6.13. The most prominent buildings in the borough are clustered into existing centres and therefore create a consistent skyline when viewed from the key western vantage points of the borough. This existing pattern of tall buildings should be reinforced and encouraged through any future tall building policy, given the need to protect suburban hinterland in between centres, and the benefit that clustering buildings into key locations has in defining views, retaining strategic views across the borough and reinforcing activity and legibility in the urban realm. In terms of design quality and local

distinctiveness, in reinforcing existing tall building clusters, appreciation must be given to the role that individual buildings play in the form of the cluster overall. This is a key factor in demanding new tall buildings are of exceptional design quality given their prominence in the urban landscape.

3.6.14. Any new buildings within the borough should not block or hinder existing strategic views, and it is recommended that all proposals for tall buildings undertake an analysis of the impact of the proposal on local and strategic views in relation to the site. In particular the local centres of Arthur Road and Raynes Park are located at the base of the western rise where significant strategic views are afforded to central London and across Merton towards Croydon. Development in these local centres should be commensurate to the scale of the centre, and development should be restricted in these locations to a height that does not interrupt the views. Given that both of these centres are already of a local, convenience scale, this restriction on tall development is a reasonable approach.

3.6.15. The Important townscape view settings and Linear view corridors identified as part of this survey have importance based on their building edges, for instance Wimbledon Village, Arthur Road and North Mitcham local centres where low scale, relatively compact town centres provide a distinct linear character. It is important that tall buildings are discouraged from interrupting this setting and building edge, and that the scale of any proposal is complementary to the view.

3.6.16. Some intensification is anticipated within North Mitcham over the plan period; however this will be of a scale suitable to the local setting. In these locations, low and mid rise buildings are less likely to be detrimental to the local setting.

3.6.17. Open spaces are protected within all levels of government policy; tall buildings should limit their impact to open spaces such as

Wimbledon and Mitcham Commons where bordering these areas or located in areas that may interrupt views to and from open spaces, including those open space views identified as part of this study. In particular, the impacts of future development as part of the Morden Town Centre regeneration on views into and out of Morden Hall Park will be considered as part of an Area Action Plan for the centre.

3.6.18. The Wimbledon Ridgeline is an important node in the south-west London landscape. From Wandsworth to the north, two protected views into Merton to the Wimbledon Ridgeline are identified from the boroughs Important Local Views SPG. The two views traverse into Merton through Wimbledon Park, linking with Merton's highest point. It is important to note that although the views incorporate the low scale local centre at Arthur Road, they have no impact on any of Merton's main centres including Wimbledon.



Figure 31: Wandsworth Cemetery to Wimbledon Ridgeline

3.6.19. A significant view from Richmond Park to the north-west of Merton opens up to Wimbledon Common, incorporating the valley and the Beverly Brook. The view is rare in such an urban area, connecting Richmond Park with Putney Heath and Wimbledon Common. Although Wimbledon Town Centre and Wimbledon Village lie beyond the tree tops of Wimbledon Common, the low scale built form of Wimbledon Village and the position of Wimbledon Town Centre at the base of the Wimbledon Ridgeline mean that the natural landscape prevails with no interruption from the urban landscape.

This is an important landscape corridor that should be protected through future development.



Figure 32: Richmond Park to Putney Heath and Wimbledon Ridgeline

3.6.20. The landscape to the south of Merton rises up to form a high point at the southern edge of Sutton Council, with views to the southern end of the Wimbledon Ridgeline incorporating Raynes Park Local Centre, and views into central London traversing through the suburban neighbourhoods of south London. Similarly the area south of Croydon Town Centre offers distant views of Merton's suburbs surrounding Mitcham Town Centre, extending beyond into central London.

3.6.21. There is an opportunity to strengthen the strategic views that traverse through Merton from the south to central London by reinforcing the existing clusters of tall buildings in key locations, while protecting the vast areas of low rise suburban development in the borough.

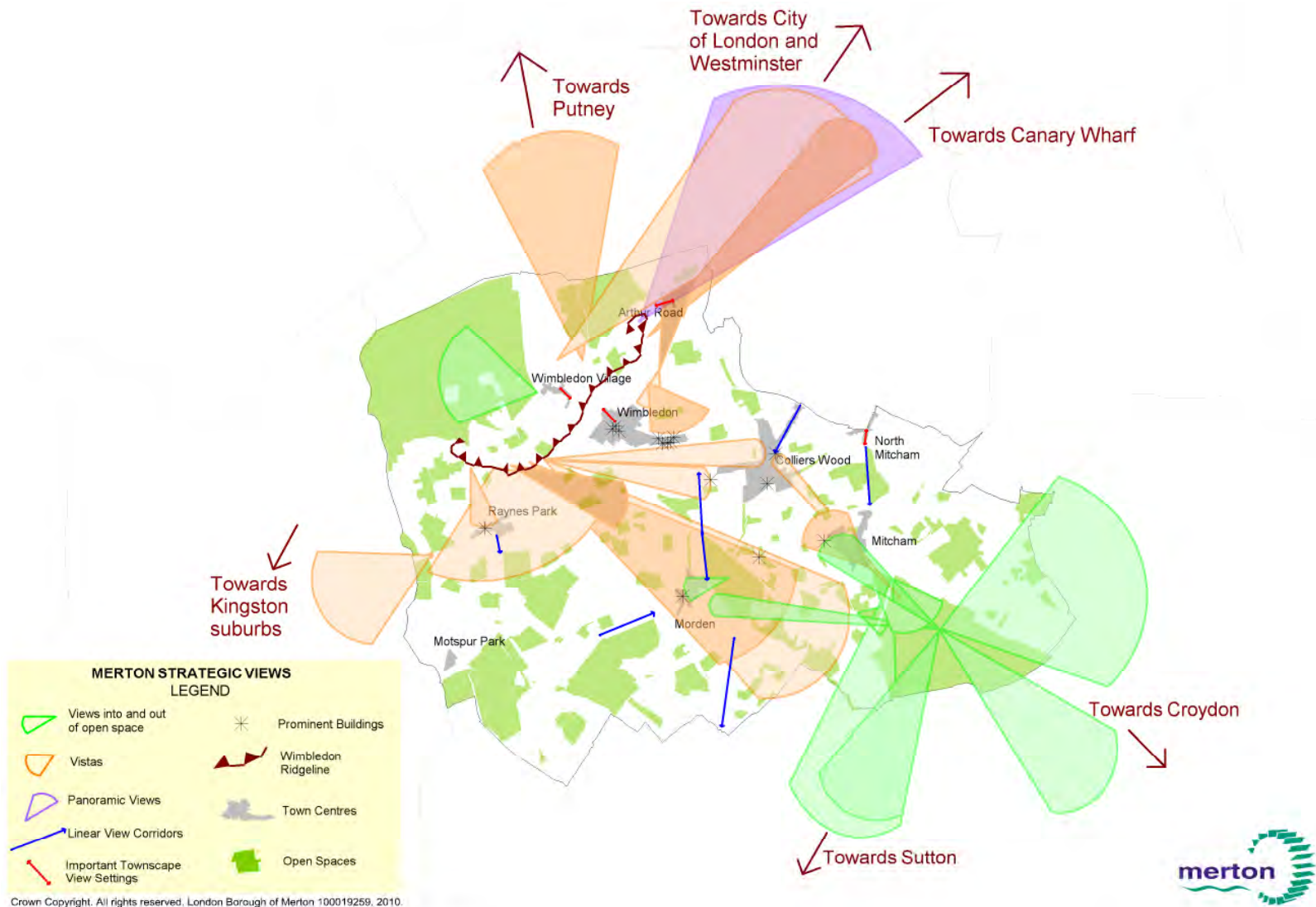


Figure 33: Strategic Views in Merton

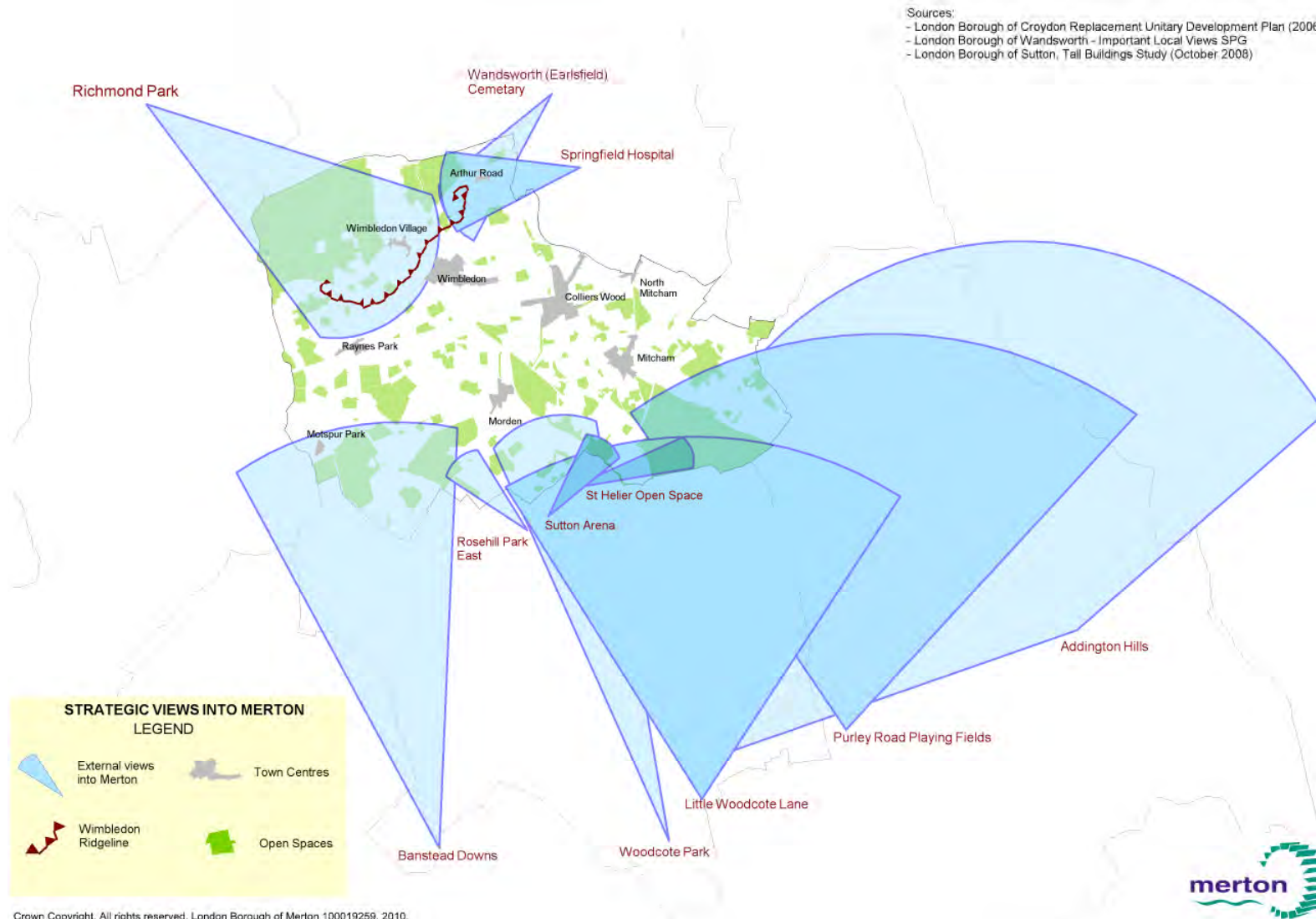


Figure 34: Strategic Views into Merton

3.7. Regeneration Areas

3.7.1. The London Plan identifies that tall buildings should make a positive contribution to local regeneration. The emerging Core Strategy outlines the Council's intentions in relation to the regeneration of Mitcham and Morden District Centres, and for the restructuring and consolidation of the Colliers Wood Centre, providing a greater range of town centre type uses and supporting its designation as a district centre in the London Plan. The approaches adopted for each of the three centres it outlined below.

Morden Town Centre

3.7.2. For Morden Town Centre, a plan-led regeneration project will increase development capacity and make more efficient use of land by incorporating higher density housing and commercial opportunities; exploiting the centre's excellent public transport links, while protecting the character and distinctiveness of the adjacent suburban neighbourhoods.

3.7.3. Morden is envisaged to accommodate a high proportion of housing growth expecting to deliver a range of between 1,450 and 1,850 new homes over the 15 year Core Strategy plan period to 2026. It is anticipated for a large proportion of the additional housing growth to come from the planned regeneration of Morden Town Centre as well as from some incremental development.

3.7.4. As part of the public consultation on the project undertaken in September and October 2008, there was general support for more apartments within the town centre, flats above shops and the

comprehensive redevelopment of the rear of the tube station. There was also strong support for excellent design quality and the intensification of the town centre. Overall there was general support for the redevelopment of the town centre to accommodate housing growth, and general support for an increase in densities to assist in achieving this.

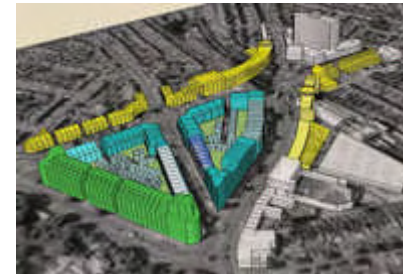


Figure 35: more Morden, potential massing model for the centre

3.7.5. The town centre is one of the only suitable locations in the borough to accommodate a substantial population increase. Morden is surrounded by open spaces and suburban development of a low scale, which limits the options in accommodating population growth. The town centre therefore can only increase in height and density to achieve this growth, of which is considered an acceptable scheme. The Council is currently exploring density and redevelopment options for the centre and will go out to consultation shortly to determine the most appropriate scheme for the centre. Following this an Area Action Plan (AAP) will be prepared to guide future development. This background paper will explore in a strategic sense the appropriate and sensitive locations in the centre for future tall building development.

Mitcham Town Centre

3.7.6. Mitcham Town Centre Supplementary Planning Document was adopted by Council in 2006, aiming to redevelop the heart of the centre to assist in regenerating the deprived eastern areas of the borough. The SPD proposes a new urban form on several key redevelopment sites within the town centre that reinforces the local distinctiveness of the area and aims to create a vibrant urban character. Although the document makes reference to tall buildings through redevelopment, the demand for tall buildings within the centre must be balanced with the requirement to respond to the largely small scale historic setting. The SPD therefore specifies proposed building heights for Mitcham town centre through regeneration varying from 3 storey buildings around the Fair Green to a 6 storey building framing the entrance from London Road into the core area of the town centre.



Figure 36: Mitcham SPD proposed low scale redevelopment that responds to the largely small scale historic setting of the district centre.

3.7.7. In the context of the existing built form in the Mitcham Town

Centre and having regard to the definition of a tall building in the London Plan, it is unlikely that these proposed height limits will allow for the development of tall buildings as part of the town centre regeneration project. This background paper will adopt the recommendations of the SPD in respect to Mitcham Town Centre, discouraging tall building development in line with the proposed height restrictions.

3.7.8. Since the SPD was adopted, issues of viability concerning comprehensive redevelopment have been raised by developers and in research. We have been considering the best way to move forward, and as an enabler and facilitator to regeneration, remain open to considering proposals for comprehensive redevelopment of the town centre. However, we are also interested to consider proposals for individual sites and incremental development which may represent a more viable approach to achieving the vision set out in the SPD, alongside a programme of complimentary initiatives contributing to the regeneration and enhancement of Mitcham Town Centre; to increase its attractiveness as a place to shop and do business.

Colliers Wood Town Centre

3.7.9. At present Colliers Wood is dominated by car based bulky goods retail outlets that fail to provide any coherent town centre structure and limit pedestrian accessibility. Despite major flooding constraints, what is clear from research and consultation results is that in Colliers Wood the opportunity exists for quite significant transformational change, away from an out-of-centre retail park.

3.7.10. The emerging Core Strategy is seeking to take forward a co-ordinated approach to develop Colliers Wood as a District Centre, to guide major sites and development opportunities to provide a more coherent, attractive centre which is easier to get around. The Council

supports a mix of unit sizes, including smaller units in Colliers Wood to encourage a range of town centre uses such as banks, cafes and cultural facilities.

3.7.11. The presence of existing taller buildings in the Colliers Wood centre offers some opportunity to consider additional development through the restructure as part of this study. The Brown and Root Tower which is currently in a dilapidated condition, dominates the Colliers Wood skyline. The site currently has planning approval for mixed use redevelopment including the refurbishment of the Tower, and once implemented will result in an attractive building which has the potential to improve the character of Colliers Wood and encourage inward investment into the centre, including other tall buildings.

3.7.12. No detailed work has been undertaken in identifying key redevelopment sites or working on the flooding constraints, only the identification of a long term aspiration for Colliers Wood. It is important that any development within the centre is undertaken in a co-ordinated way that seeks to achieve the overall vision for the centre. We will prepare and adopt a masterplan for Colliers Wood by 2012, setting out how the designation of Colliers Wood as a district centre will be implemented and delivered. The masterplan will assist in effectively managing both of type and quantity of development that will come forward through the life of the Core Strategy, ensuring that new development proposals are commensurate to the size and scale of the centre's status within the retail hierarchy. This background paper will explore in a strategic sense the appropriate and sensitive locations in the centre for future tall building development.



Figure 37: Brown and Root Tower Colliers Wood

3.8. Opportunities and constraints

3.8.1. Based on the urban analysis layers the following opportunities and constraints can be identified in relation to future tall building development in Merton.

Regeneration and economic clusters

3.8.2. Areas where regeneration is proposed within the Core Strategy including Morden and Colliers Wood offer some opportunity, through comprehensive redevelopment, to introduce higher building elements where this is consistent with the understanding of how the area will transform over time. In this case, Morden offers scope based on the preliminary master planning work, and community consultation undertaken to date. Substantial change is envisaged in the Colliers Wood centre over the longer term and how this change evolves on the ground needs to be considered in relation to tall buildings. The presence of existing tall buildings in Colliers Wood offers an opportunity to build on this clustering with additional tall buildings as part of the proposed comprehensive redevelopment.

3.8.3. Mitcham has a detailed town centre SPD to guide the regeneration of the centre through key redevelopment sites. The core of Mitcham Town Centre displays a small scale historic setting, bordered by more recent mid-rise development, predominately flats, and located mainly along transport routes. The SPD proposes to protect the setting of the town centre core, while still allowing dense development to come forward around the town centre at a scale comparable with existing development. This does not include tall

buildings.

3.8.4. Wimbledon, although not the focus for regeneration within the Core Strategy, is a Major Centre and a cluster of economic activity. The Core Strategy aims to enhance the status of Wimbledon as a Major Centre by encouraging major development, in particular office development, and supporting the redevelopment of key sites in the town centre over the plan period. Many of these sites are central to the town centre function, where mid rise and high rise buildings are the norm. In this sense Wimbledon does have the opportunity to continue the current development trend in relation to tall buildings, through the release and redevelopment of key development sites.

Higher building precedent

3.8.5. The views analysis and existing building heights in Merton mapping identified existing prominent buildings in the borough and discussed how these buildings impact on existing strategic views.

3.8.6. It is noted that the key clusters of tall building in the borough are located in Wimbledon and Colliers Wood centres, where existing development assists in framing the views across an otherwise low rise suburban borough. It is suggested that tall buildings could be used to contribute to these existing clusters and add to the precedent, so as to enhance the status of the centres and protect low rise areas of the borough from inappropriate development. New tall buildings will be expected to be of an exceptional design quality that will facilitate improvements to other existing large scale buildings in these centres, and overall reinforce and enhance the built form quality in the borough. This approach is consistent with the general policy direction for Wimbledon and Colliers Wood in the Core Strategy.

3.8.7. The Merton Civic Centre in Morden is a very prominent

building from various points across the borough, and through regeneration there is opportunity to cluster other tall buildings in this centre, of exceptional design quality. The concept of high density in Morden Town Centre has been supported in consultation exercises, and can be used to enhance the quality and setting of the existing tower. Colliers Wood is also set to achieve substantial change over the LDF period and could indeed also benefit from these principles.

3.8.8. Refer to below for an indication of how Canary Wharf evolved through exceptional design quality and the clustering of tall buildings. While it is not envisaged that a 'Canary Wharf' style centre will emerge in Merton, the principle of how Canary Wharf has evolved can be applied at a lower scale to centres in the borough.



Figure 38: Canary Wharf skyline 1999



Figure 39: Canary Wharf skyline 2009

3.8.9. Mitcham is home to the gas works site, however this facility, although prominent, is not considered to act as a precedent to tall buildings. The Mitcham SPD enforces a maximum building height of 6 storeys on key redevelopment sites in the town centre, which is consistent with existing built form adjoining the centre.

3.8.10. The High Path Estate in South Wimbledon is a stand alone high rise 'prominent' housing estate with three tower blocks that adjoin the local centre of South Wimbledon. The area is located in between Colliers Wood and Wimbledon centres where some existing tall building development is evident, and where a variety of retail is on offer. The estate at this point in time is not the subject of any regeneration activity and is not located in an area that the clustering of mixed use buildings to improve the economic value of the place is appropriate. However, the location has a PTAL rating of 5 and does have regeneration potential, and the suitability of the redevelopment of the High Path Estate or the location of other tall buildings within

this centre should be explored as part of master planning for an Area Action Plan (AAP).

3.8.11. There are no other areas of the borough that offer a substantial higher building precedent that could be used as basis for further investigation for tall building development. The Council is not seeking to increase the densities substantially in other low rise centres across the borough such as Raynes Park, Wimbledon Village, Arthur Road, Motspur Park or North Mitcham, where these areas are valued for their mostly convenience retailing use and village like character that will be protected and enhanced without major change to the fabric of the centre.

3.8.12. Stand alone high rise buildings including Fresham Court in Phipps Bridge and Burghley House and Somerset House adjoining the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club are anomalies in the suburban landscape. The Core Strategy should resist future development of this nature that creates undesirable, out of centre tall buildings that do not respond to their low scale setting.

Strategic views and topography

3.8.13. Based on the main views within the borough, tall buildings should be clustered into existing centres where the visual impact of development on these views will be minimal, and where new tall buildings can assist in enhancing existing clusters and improving the quality of existing tall buildings, such as in Colliers Wood and Morden. Clustering tall building development into existing town centres will also reinforce existing long range views through Merton from Sutton to the south.

3.8.14. In Wimbledon a substantial cluster of tall buildings already exists, and given its status as a Major Centre and the bringing forward of key redevelopment sites and encouragement of major

development through the Core Strategy, complementary tall building development may be appropriate. Regard will however need to be given to ensuring that future tall building development does not interrupt the Wimbledon Hill Ridgeline and long range views from Richmond Park.

3.8.15. Given their location at the base of the western rise, Raynes Park and Arthur Road Local Centres are considered inappropriate locations for tall buildings, and development in these local centres should be restricted to a height that does not interrupt the views and is commensurate to the convenience function of the centres. Development pressures in Raynes Park as a result of its high public transport accessibility therefore need to be controlled. Wimbledon Village and North Mitcham form well preserved Important Townscape View Settings where fairly low scale built form creates a pleasant, linear environment that should be protected through redevelopment. Future development that borders these centres should have regard to the scale and linear views identified as part of this study. Tall buildings are therefore not considered appropriate in these local centres and future development in these locations should not exceed the mid-rise development heights.

3.8.16. All new tall buildings should have regard to the strategic and local views in the borough, and a detailed assessment of the impact of tall buildings on views should be undertaken for all proposals.

Designated Industrial Areas

3.8.17. Tall buildings may be appropriate in designated industrial areas across the borough. These areas are expected to consolidate and intensify over the life of the Core Strategy; however their ability to provide for tall building development is dependent on the function of the building. For instance, stand alone office buildings are directed towards centres with higher accessibility levels and not industrial

areas, however some industrial operations may have the ability to function within taller buildings as industrial processes change. In these cases taller buildings may be suitable in designated industrial areas. Most industrial buildings are large as oppose to tall, often bulky with a large footprint that is generally more appropriate to industrial functions. In-line with planning policy, the most accessible designated industrial areas will be suitable for more dense development. Flexibility will be needed in the future assessment of such proposals, and the Core Strategy should be flexible in order to support economic growth in the borough over the next 15 years.

3.8.18. Designated industrial areas including those at Shannon Corner and Morden Road Industrial Areas are sensitive areas of the borough where taller buildings may be appropriate where contribution to the regeneration and enhancement of employment uses, and where they will not have a detrimental impact on areas outside of the designated industrial area.

3.8.19. We will have regard to future development opportunities in industrial areas on a site by site basis over the plan period. The DCDPD will outline criteria for the assessment of proposed development in designated industrial areas.

Inappropriate Tall Building Locations

3.8.20. The urban analysis has identified several areas of the borough that are considered inappropriate locations for tall buildings, and include designated open spaces, conservation areas, listed buildings and scheduled ancient monuments and should be considered a constraint to tall building development and excluded from further consideration. These areas will be addressed further in the detailed study areas where located in town centres where an individual approach should be adopted between protecting sensitive locations and increasing development densities.

3.8.21. Based on the urban analysis layers concerning the Distinctive Areas of the Borough and Existing Building Heights, Merton's valued and distinctive suburban character should be protected from tall building development, consistent with the European Landscape Convention. This consists of much of the area outside of the borough's main centres including the local centres and neighbourhood parades, grid-iron terraced streets (e.g. the Apostles in Raynes Park), medium intensity suburban development (e.g. Inter-war areas in Lower Morden), garden city layouts (e.g. St Helier Estate) and loosely structured suburban development (e.g. Merton Park), all of which have a very distinctive character which is an important and positive characteristic of the borough as a whole. The introduction of tall buildings in these locations will erode an otherwise fairly cohesive and homogenous environment.



Figure 40: Merton's valued low rise suburban neighbourhoods

3.8.22. Other areas such as Post 1945 Council Estate and Areas with blocks of flats require a more flexible approach based on their existing scale and character that is often more intensive than their surroundings.

3.8.23. However the existence of a tall building in a particular location will not of itself justify its replacement with a new tall building on the same site or same area. Stand alone tall buildings outside of town centres should be discouraged.

3.8.24. Some mid-rise development is scattered amongst residential neighbourhoods in accessible locations, such as between Raynes Park and Wimbledon Centres, and along major roads such as Worple Road and Kingston Road. There is an opportunity to strengthen this development pattern, where mid-rise development will complement the surrounding character in locations such as Worple Road, and neighbourhood parades such as Wimbledon Chase. New development in these locations should generally be classified as mid-rise and should not be 'significant taller' than surrounding development or should not significantly alter the skyline.

Design Quality and Tall Buildings

3.8.25. Tall buildings are very prominent within the south London landscape in Merton, where the area is characterised by low rise suburban development. Given this prominence, tall buildings must be of an exceptional design and architectural quality, and be used to protect, reinforce and enhance Merton's local character, sense of place and identity.

3.8.26. In some locations new tall buildings should be used as a means to encourage the improvement of the quality of existing prominent buildings in the boroughs centres, such as Brown and Root Tower and Morden Civic Centre.

Summary and Principles

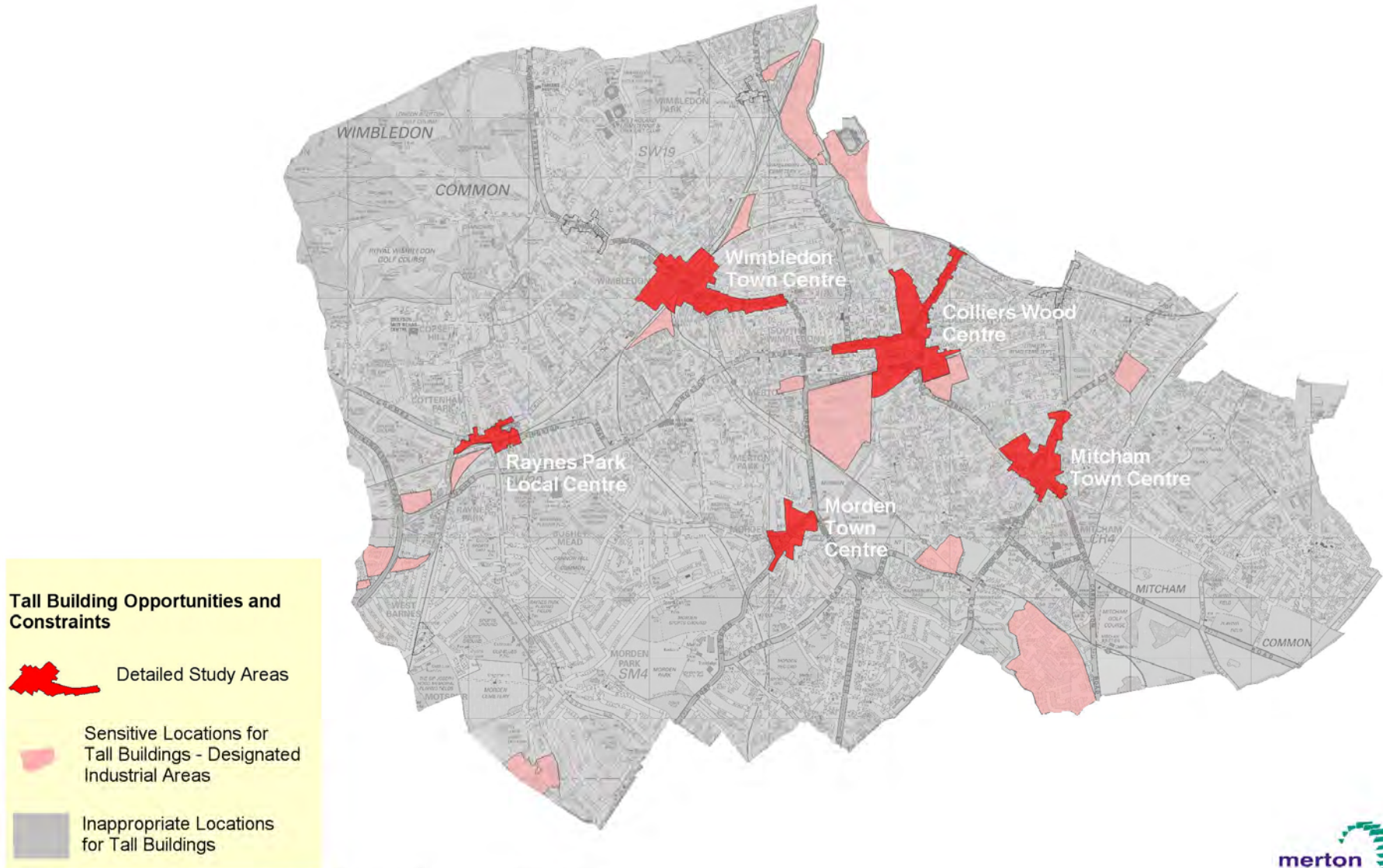
3.8.27. Based on the urban analysis and subsequent opportunities and constraints, it is considered that locations for tall buildings should be explored further where the following factors are present:

- *Regeneration or change is envisaged ;*
- *Good public transport accessibility;*
- *Existing higher building precedent.*

3.8.28. Based on these identified opportunities and constraints and the principles above, Detailed Area Studies will be carried out for Wimbledon Town Centre, Morden Town Centre and Colliers Wood Centre. Although Mitcham Town Centre (designated district centre) and Raynes Park Local Centre (high PTAL) are not considered to be appropriate tall building locations following the urban analysis, detailed area studies will be carried out to ensure that all areas in the borough are thoroughly considered for tall buildings.

3.8.29. Designated Industrial Areas in Merton are considered to be sensitive locations for tall buildings. Tall buildings may be appropriate in these locations where contributing to the regeneration and enhancement of employment uses, and where they will not have a detrimental impact on areas outside of the designated industrial area.

3.8.30. Outside of these locations tall buildings are considered to be inappropriate.



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Figure 41: Tall Building Opportunities and Constraints in Merton



4. Detailed Area Studies

4.1.1. Character appraisals have been undertaken for the town centres of Wimbledon, Morden, Mitcham, Colliers Wood and Raynes Park, considering the wider objectives of sustainable urban design as advocated in By Design. In addition, the appraisals have regard to the following detailed principles as recommended in the English Heritage and CABE's Guidance on Tall Buildings (2007):

- The historic context of the wider area through the use of historic characterisation methods
- Carrying out a character appraisal of the immediate context, identifying those elements that create local character and other important features and constraints, including:
 - Natural topography
 - Urban grain
 - Significant views of skylines
 - Scale and height
 - Streetscape
 - Landmark buildings and areas and their settings, including backdrops, and important local views, prospects and panoramas
- Identifying opportunities where tall buildings might enhance the overall townscape.
- Identify sites where the removal of past mistakes might achieve a similar outcome.

4.1.2. Where a town centre is identified as broadly appropriate for tall building development, strategic mapping of the location will identify sensitive locations for tall buildings. The studies are strategic in nature to reflect the status of the Core Strategy within the LDF.

4.2. Wimbledon Town Centre

Urban Design Analysis

4.2.1. Wimbledon is the borough's largest town centre, identified as a Major centre in the London Plan. The centre has the highest level of public transport accessibility in the borough and this makes the centre a sustainable location for major development.

4.2.2. The Council's priority for Wimbledon is to maintain and build on its current vitality and viability as one of London's major town centres, improving the transport interchange, with more business and professional services and quality shops, balanced with community, leisure, arts, culture and associated facilities including tourism, achieving a noticeable uplift in the quality of the centre.

Historic context

4.2.3. Apart from the historic environment surrounding the centre, 'Wimbledon Broadway' and 'Wimbledon Hill Road' Conservation Areas cover the central and western parts of the centre respectively. Existing development within these two Conservation Areas is generally low rise with some more recent mid-rise development.

4.2.4. The character of Wimbledon Town Centre is strongly influenced by its historic buildings. It is the Council's policy to enhance this character through the encouragement of the restoration of the original architectural features.

4.2.5. The New Wimbledon Theatre, a Grade II statutory listed building, is a building that is central to the character of Wimbledon. The New Wimbledon Theatre is an Edwardian theatre built by the theatre lover and entrepreneur, J B Mullholland. Built on the site of a large house with spacious grounds the theatre was designed by Cecil Massey and Roy Young, possibly following a 1908 design by Frank H Jones. The New Wimbledon Theatre is one of the very few surviving and refurbished Theatres of architectural merit in outer London.

4.2.6. The Former Wimbledon Town Hall is a Grade II statutory listed building that is a focal point in the core of the town centre, as well as the historic Wimbledon Library.

4.2.7. The Wimbledon Broadway Conservation Area is characterised mainly by parades of shopfronts forming larger purpose built commercial buildings with residential or office accommodation above. Nineteenth century shopfront design was based around a set of principles which was noticeably successful in achieving a satisfactory relationship between the shopfront and the building as a whole. These principles still hold good.

4.2.8. The upper levels of the Victorian and Edwardian shop buildings have a strong vertical emphasis due to their narrow width and repetition over each bay, which provides a unifying quality to each terrace and therefore the street as a whole. Typically three storeys high with a pitched roof concealed behind a parapet, the upper facades are predominantly of brick and often feature brick or stone window surrounds, string courses, cornices, and expressed party walls. The stone elements are often decorated or moulded to give prominence and interest and enhance the façade generally.

4.2.9. The consistent height, scale and upper level architectural

detail to these buildings make this historic area generally unsuitable for tall buildings which by their definition will change the skyline and appear significantly different than their surroundings in terms of height.

4.2.10. Wimbledon Hill Road Conservation Area covers a large geographical area, part of which encroaches into the western edge of the town centre at the base of the western rise. Within the town centre boundary the Conservation Area covers the older shopfronts to Wimbledon Hill Road, rear development along Worple Road Mews and St. Marks Place which includes St. Marks Church, Wimbledon Library and The Alexandra Public House.

4.2.11. The historic buildings in the Conservation Area are generally low-rise, limited to 2-3 storeys, with shopfronts at the street level and office and residential accommodation above. More recent office development at the western edge of the town centre is mid-rise. Wimbledon Hill Road is identified as an Important Townscape View Setting, with an enclosed, high quality streetscape. The most notable views within this part of the Conservation Area are views of individual buildings and terraces. However the view along the line of Wimbledon Hill Rd, towards Wimbledon Village is notable for the sight of fine mature trees on each side of the upper part of the road, which provides a strong contrast between this residential area and the more urban character of the town centre.

4.2.12. This historic environment in Wimbledon Town Centre should be used to inspire imaginative design that acknowledges historic assets as key elements to the character of the area. Proposals for tall buildings in Wimbledon must strike a balance between the need to protect the historic environment and the desire to maintain and increase densities within the major centre location. Tall building proposals should respond to the setting of

heritage assets in Wimbledon, particularly given the quality and extent of heritage assets and the historic environment in this area.

Character appraisal

4.2.13. Wimbledon is a linear town centre stretching primarily east from the station along The Broadway, tightly bound by low rise, high quality housing, including conservation areas to the north and west. West of the station the centre widens, adjoining surrounding neighbourhoods. The type and character of the buildings within the centre is very mixed; a wide range of heights, facades, units sizes and frontages giving a disjointed impressions which does not complement the surrounding attractive residential environment. Refer to the Existing Development Patterns Map for Wimbledon Town Centre.

4.2.14. The town centre itself is relatively flat, and the centre is positioned at the base of the Wimbledon ridgeline. The western edge of the town centre incorporating the Wimbledon Hill Conservation Area therefore begins to rise up towards Wimbledon Village inside the town centre boundary. As the heights of buildings in this area are mostly low rise, this change in topography does not have any significant impact on the town centre skyline.

4.2.15. A significant view from Richmond Park to the north-west of Merton exists to Wimbledon Common and the top of the Wimbledon ridgeline, with the valley of the Beverly Brook in the foreground. The view is rare in such an urban area, connecting Richmond Park with Putney Heath and Wimbledon Common. Although Wimbledon Town Centre lies beyond the tree tops of Wimbledon Common, the position of Wimbledon Town Centre at the base of the Wimbledon Ridgeline means that the natural landscape prevails with no interruption from the urban

landscape. This is an important landscape view corridor that should be protected through future development. New tall building development in Wimbledon Town Centre must protect this strategic view and demonstrate that the height of new building proposals will not be detrimental the view.

4.2.16. The centre in its present state is a combination of taller, dense buildings of up to 8 storeys, with smaller low rise buildings in between, accommodating shop fronts at ground level with one to two levels of residential or office space above. Street frontages are a mixture of small single fronted shops, as well as those that have been consolidated to form larger retail units more suitable to retail chains, or purpose built developments containing larger units such as Centre Court Shopping Centre. This streetscape character together with the height and bulk of buildings in the centre sets Wimbledon apart from other smaller centres in the borough.

4.2.17. There are two distinct clusters of mid-rise and high-rise buildings in the town centre, located at the western end around St Georges Road, and along the linear eastern end of The Broadway. These existing tall buildings in Wimbledon are primarily for commercial/office based uses.

4.2.18. The linear structure of the eastern Broadway end of the town centre has allowed for an emerging taller building rhythm and scale east of Wimbledon Theatre. Some buildings at this location reach heights of between 6 and 8 storeys, including the recent redevelopment of Broadway House, and the existing

YMCA Building. There are however a number of low-rise buildings at this end of The Broadway that will face development pressure over the life of the LDF in line with neighbouring sites.



Figure 42: Tall building cluster along the eastern end of The Broadway

4.2.19. The second cluster of mid and high-rise buildings is located to the west of the station around St Georges Road. The cluster incorporates the St George's office buildings and Tuiton House along St Georges Road, extending west to Worple Road. The buildings range up to a height of 8 storeys and generally occupy larger plots given their location within the western area of the town centre which does not have the same linear structure which limits the dept of plots and potential building heights.



Figure 43: Tall building cluster around St Georges Road

4.2.20. There are several infill development opportunities within the centre and it is considered that there is potential to accommodate tall buildings complementary to the predominant height of existing buildings, given the existing precedence and the importance of Wimbledon as a major centre within the borough.

4.2.21. The Core Strategy prioritises 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 the Wimbledon Station Precinct, Hartfield Road Car Park and the car park adjacent to the Wimbledon Theatre. Development of these sites will be for mixed commercial uses that support and enhance the vitality and viability of the town centre.

4.2.22. A key element of the redevelopment of the Wimbledon Station Precinct will be the provision of significant improvements to public transport facilities and interchange. This is a long term aim but will have a major impact in the centre due to its large size and central location.

4.2.23. The linear structure of the centre with surrounding high

quality residential areas limits the acceptable height of town centre development. It is anticipated that any future tall building development in the centre would be relatively consistent with the height and scale of current buildings. Tall buildings should be considered only where they complement the existing scale and character of the centre and its historic surroundings. New development proposals for tall buildings should be managed to ensure that the height, scale and massing is appropriate having regard to the surrounding sensitive residential areas, ensuring that a transition is achieved between the major centre and low rise development.

4.2.24. The council is currently preparing a Regeneration Strategy for the borough. This will highlight the potential of Wimbledon Town Centre to support new development and an identification of the potential for public realm and transport improvements. The Strategy will provide a co-ordinated framework to guide proposals, investment and areas for improvement, and secure partnership working including with Merton Chamber of Commerce, Network Rail, Transport for London, landowners and developers.

4.2.25. Emerging from the Regeneration Strategy, planning and development briefs will consider in more detail on a site by site basis how tall building development can be accommodated

within the town centre, and identify transport infrastructure opportunities, priorities and funding, and where future development schemes, such as tall buildings, can assist in achieving desired transport outcomes. For Wimbledon, this may be incorporated into a single SPD document.

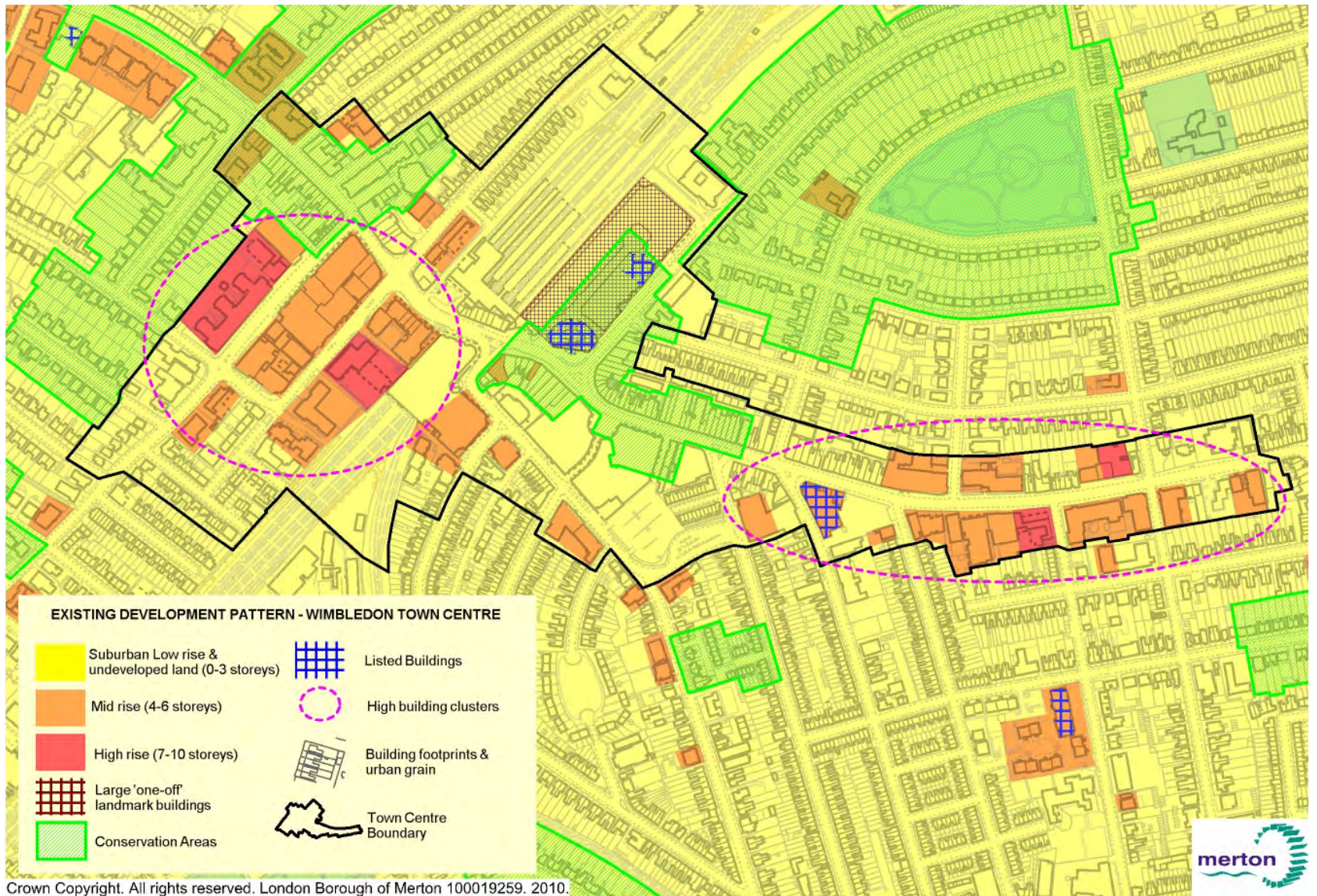


Figure 44: Wimbledon Town Centre Existing Development Patterns

Tall Buildings Opportunities in Wimbledon Town Centre

4.2.26. Based on the analysis within this detailed area study, tall buildings may be appropriate where of exceptional design and architectural quality and where justified in terms of their impact on the townscape and historic environment, and the benefits towards regeneration and public realm.

4.2.27. In Wimbledon Town Centre, tall buildings should contribute to creating a consistent scale of development based on a range of similar but not uniform building heights. These should be determined by reference to surrounding building heights and townscape characteristics.

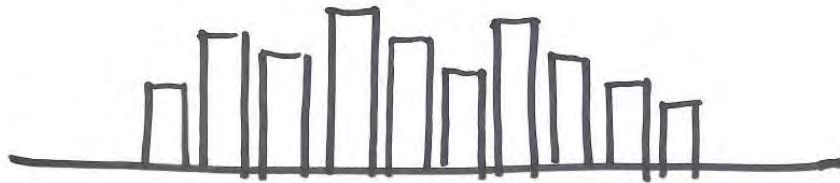


Figure 45: Indicative Wimbledon Town Centre skyline

4.2.28. Regard will need to be given to the Conservation Areas and the setting of Listed Buildings within and adjoining the centre where an individual design approach will be required to ensure that large scale development respects the historic character of these areas. Other locations that may be sensitive to tall buildings include those areas near to the edge of the town centre boundary due to the close proximity of low rise high quality residential development, and those locations where tall buildings may impact on the Wimbledon Hill ridgeline, including long range views into the borough from Richmond Park.

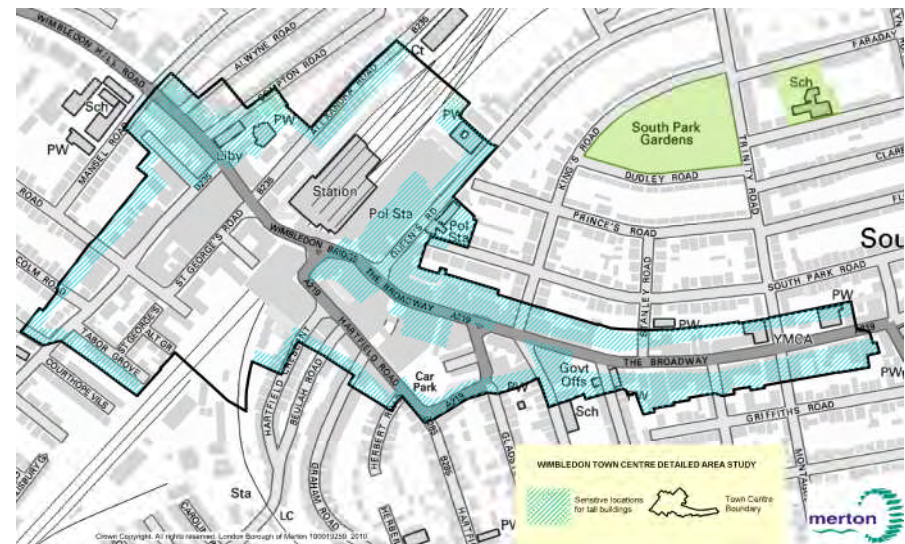


Figure 46: Wimbledon Town Centre Detailed Area Study

4.3. Morden Town Centre

Urban Design Analysis

4.3.1. Morden is a compact, convenience driven District Centre. It is the borough's only example of 'Metroland' 1920's and 1930's suburban development catalysed by the arrival of the Underground in 1926. Located at the southern end of the Northern Line, the town centre is a hub for local bus services and accommodates a large underground depot.

4.3.2. The town centre consists of a series of two and three-storey 1930's perimeter blocks of shops and apartments, and more recent developments of small supermarkets, their car parks and the prominent early 1960's office block of 14 storeys housing the Merton Civic Centre. The transition to the surrounding low-rise suburban development occurs within a 2 minute walk from the station.



Figure 47: Morden Town Centre along London Road to Morden Hall Park

Historic Context

4.3.3. As a result of Morden's origins as a suburb in the 1920's, the town centre is not a historic centre. There are no designated conservation areas or statutory listed buildings within the town centre boundary.

4.3.4. The town centre does however benefit from the historic Morden Hall Park which abuts the boundary to the north east along Morden Road. Morden Hall Park is a designated Conservation Area and a Grade II registered Historic Park of Special Historic Interest and is now owned by National Trust. The park incorporates numerous statutory listed buildings. Those relics within close proximity to Morden Town Centre include the Gates and Piers to the main entrance along Morden Road, Morden Hall itself which is situated behind the wall to Morden Road, and the historic white bridge over the Wandle River to the rear of Morden Hall.

4.3.5. Morden Hall, built in 1770, has seen a variety of uses from a family home to a boarding school for young gentlemen and even a military hospital during the First World War. Many of the other estate buildings, including two 18th-century cottages, are gathered around the two water mills, which until 1922 were used for grinding snuff. These historic assets add an important contribution to the identity and character of Morden, and well as the borough as a whole, and should be used as a catalyst for the future regeneration of the town centre in accordance with PPS5: Planning and the Historic Environment.

4.3.6. The strategic views analysis identified an important vista from Morden Hall Park to Morden Town Centre taking in the tree tops within the park. Given the historic, secluded character of the park brought on by the dense vegetation and walls to

Morden Road, the views towards the town centre are an important aspect of people's enjoyment of the park.

4.3.7. Intensification and development within Morden Town Centre must have regard to the historic significance of Morden Hall Park. The areas of the town centre that adjoin Morden Road are particularly sensitive and new development should aim to protect the strategic tree top views from the park towards the town centre, and have regard to detrimental impacts to the historic open space such as overlooking and overshadowing. Building heights should generally be limited in these locations to mid-rise, and address the low scale historic context within Morden Hall Park.

moreMorden Regeneration

4.3.8. Morden Town Centre represents a key development opportunity, being an area that is under-developed and currently uncompetitive with equivalent town centres across London. As discussed previously in this paper the emerging moreMorden regeneration proposals will see an increase in densities throughout the centre to accommodate more population within the centre itself, and facilitate an increase in retail offer, improvements to the public realm and overall enhance the sense of place. Options are being explored to accommodate anywhere between 500 and 1500 residential units within the town centre. The objectives of the more Morden project are:

- *Re-define the role of the suburban centre, creating an economically sustainable and viable town centre by building on Morden's assets.*
- *Re-enforce Morden's leisure, cultural, education and civic opportunities.*

- *Improve the quantity, quality and mix of commercial, residential, retail uses.*
- *Intensify underdeveloped sites; making more efficient use of land incorporating higher density housing and commercial and enterprise opportunities that exploit Morden's excellent public transport links and accessibility.*
- *Intensify the centre at a suitable scale in order to help protect the character and distinctiveness of Morden and the adjacent neighbourhoods.*
- *Enhance accessibility between the town centre and its suburban hinterland and open spaces, achieved by reducing severance caused by traffic, 'greening' Morden through tree planting and improving the pedestrian environment and public transport facilities.*
- *Achieve high quality urban design, architecture and public realm incorporating high quality spaces and streets with pedestrians as the priority – not the car.*
- *Provide more opportunities for the community to meet, socialise and make better use of their town centre through provision of attractive, safe and accessible public spaces and community and leisure facilities.*

Character Appraisal

4.3.9. The existence of the Morden Civic Centre provides Morden with some visibility from key viewing points in the west of the borough such as West Wimbledon, which have the potential to be improved through improvements to the quality of the civic centre. The land inside the centre itself is level and located among the lower eastern parts of the borough, and

surrounded by low rise residential development. Future tall development does have the potential to be highly visible within Merton's urban landscape.

4.3.10. The primary streetscape along London Road between Morden Hall Park and the Underground Station offers a fairly consistent building height and frontage, with retail at ground level and two levels of office and residential units above. The exceptions are the Sainsbury's building and the Underground Building which are both mid rise.

4.3.11. At most points along London Road the prominent high rise Civic Centre tower is visible at 14 storeys high, and is an iconic building within the centre, even if it requires visual improvement and modernising to improve its overall appearance.



Figure 48: moreMorden 3D modelling of existing development

4.3.12. As a result of the scale of development within the centre, the frontages to London Road offer a fine urban grain, with mostly narrow shop frontages abutting the pavement. More recent supermarket development with larger building footprints has failed to contribute to the scale of development within the centre and has resulted in a town centre that lacks identity.

4.3.13. As discussed the centre sits amongst fairly low rise suburban development, and the transition from the centre to the suburbs is quick in terms of building scale and density. That said however, there are underused and undeveloped sites that are located in between the suburban surroundings and the London Road streetscape that offer opportunities for increasing town centre densities to create a more viable and thriving district centre.

4.3.14. These sites include the land to the rear of the underground station (UDP Site Proposal 1MO), the Iceland and Lidl buildings along Aberconway Road, and the York Close car park site. The Council also owns the Abbotsbury triangle site with a southern frontage to London Road, which contains a significant amount of the town centre retail provision.

4.3.15. Using these underdeveloped or underused sites to accommodate increased densities and buildings that may be defined as tall buildings can assist in regeneration aims for the centre by accommodating a greater number of smaller residential units in the centre with increased retail and leisure facilities. Taller buildings of exceptional design quality on these sites will add definition to the town centre skyline by clustering tall building development together and enhancing the presence of the civic centre building, which in turn will increase the profile and building quality of the centre in south London, one of the aims of the regeneration project.

4.3.16. There are also several corner and gateway sites that may be appropriate for taller more prominent 'gateway' buildings consistent with the requirements of the Design SPG in relation to higher buildings. These sites, at the major road entry points to the centre, could be developed to create 'entry' buildings, and assist in defining the centre and enhancing its sense of place.

4.3.17. Given the stark contrast between the 14 storey Civic Centre and the surrounding low rise residential neighbourhoods, there is a desire to ensure that new development assists in 'bridging' rather than 'increasing' the height gap. The Civic Centre should therefore remain the pinnacle building in terms of height, and new development should assist in creating a transition to surrounding low rise development, creating a cluster of taller buildings and improving the town centre skyline.

4.3.18. Although tall building development may be suitable within the town centre boundaries, development must respect the suburban residential hinterland surrounding the centre. Locations along the edge of the town centre boundary where these adjoin the suburban hinterland are particularly sensitive to higher buildings, and new development coming forward must respect the transition needed between the town centre and surrounding neighbourhoods in terms of height, massing and scale.

4.3.19. The council will shortly be commencing the preparation of an Area Action Plan that will guide future development and address individual redevelopment sites in the centre. The AAP process will include a strategy to identify transport infrastructure opportunities, priorities and funding, and where future development schemes, such as tall buildings, can assist in achieving desired transport outcomes.

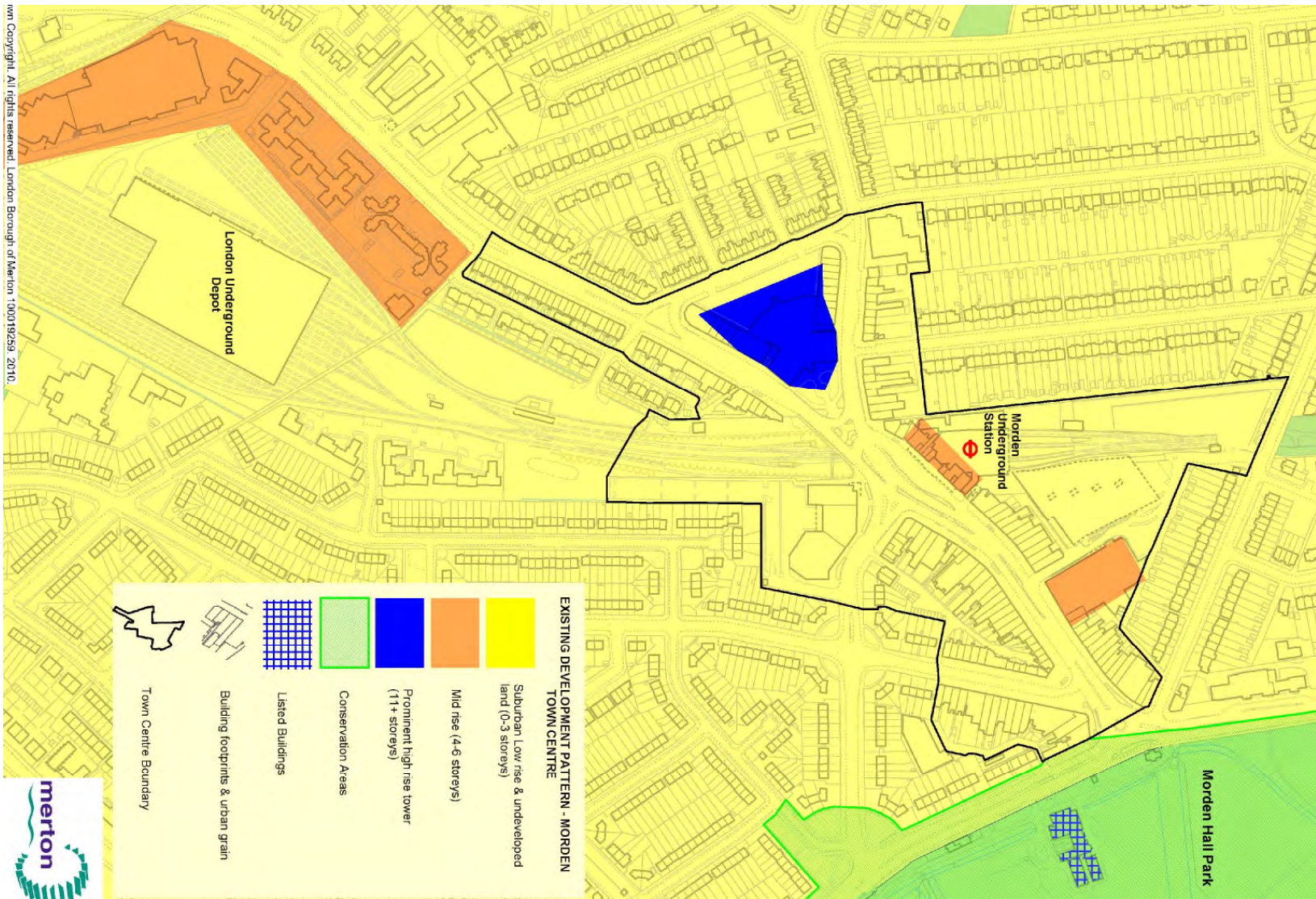


Figure 49: Morden Town Centre – Existing Development Patterns

Tall Building Opportunities in Morden Town Centre

4.3.20. Based on the analysis within the detailed area study, tall buildings may be appropriate in Morden Town Centre where of exceptional design and architectural quality and where justified in terms of their impact on the townscape and historic environment, and the benefits towards regeneration and public realm.

4.3.21. Tall buildings should be guided on the principle that the Civic Centre should remain the pinnacle building in the centre in terms of height. This can then form the basis for a number of tall buildings that relate well to each other in terms of scale, massing, form and architecture. Opportunities exist to use tall buildings to enhance the image of Morden, creating gateways to the centre and landmarks in key locations that add character and legibility.



Figure 50: Indicative Morden Town Centre skyline

4.3.22. Locations that may be sensitive to tall buildings include the town centre edge adjoining Morden Hall Park (due to the impact on the historic environment) and also locations on the periphery of the town centre (due to their close proximity to low rise residential neighbourhoods). A framework for the development of appropriate taller buildings in Morden will be detailed further in the emerging Morden Area Action Plan.

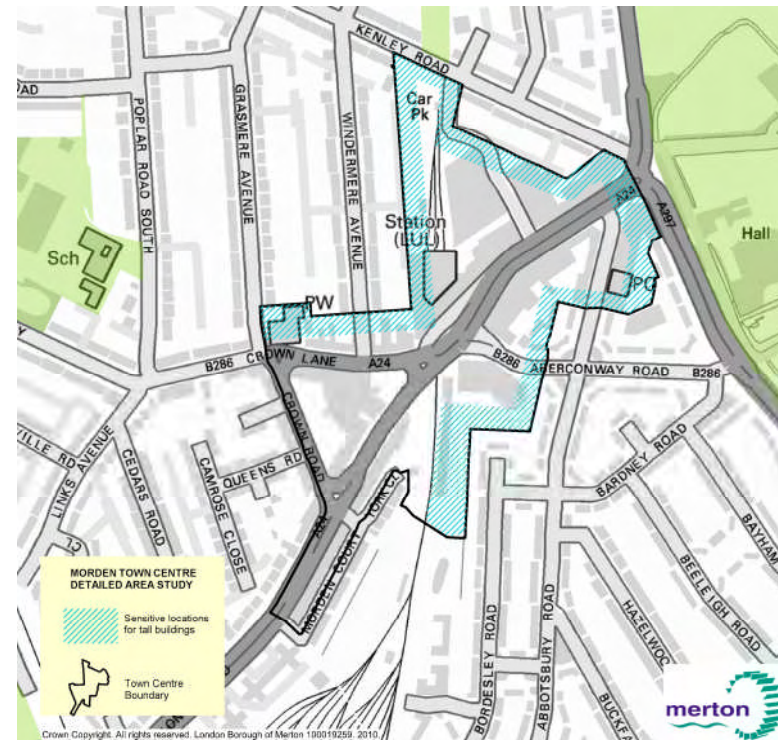


Figure 51: Morden Town Centre Detailed Area Study

4.4. Mitcham Town Centre

Urban Design Analysis

4.4.1. Mitcham District Centre is the smallest of the three main town centres in Merton, having grown from a historic village predating the 14th century. As identified in the Urban Analysis section of the paper, the Mitcham Town Centre Development Brief SPD provides an urban design and redevelopment framework for the physical regeneration of Mitcham town centre. The SPD vision is:

‘To provide a district town centre with quality shopping, quality housing, a quality environment, good transport links and improved community facilities’.

4.4.2. To achieve this vision the SPD proposes a new urban form on several key redevelopment sites within the town centre that reinforces the local distinctiveness of the area and aims to create a vibrant urban character.

4.4.3. Since the SPD was adopted, issues of viability concerning comprehensive redevelopment have been raised by developers and in research. We have been considering the best way to move forward, and as an enabler and facilitator to regeneration, remain open to considering proposals for comprehensive redevelopment of the town centre. However, we are also interested to consider proposals for individual sites and incremental development which may represent a more viable

approach to achieving the vision set out in the SPD, alongside a programme of complimentary initiatives contributing to the regeneration and enhancement of Mitcham Town Centre; to increase its attractiveness as a place to shop and do business.

4.4.4. This Urban Design Study for Mitcham Town Centre will adopt the findings of the SPD.

Historic Context

4.4.5. Mitcham contains a number of attractive historic buildings and spaces. The key statutory listed buildings in the town centre are the Clock Tower and Eagle House (Grade I). In addition there are a number of locally listed buildings in the town centre. These include Mitcham Library, the Kings Arms PH, the White Lion PH, St. Mark’s Primary School and St. Mark’s Church. In addition to this there are a number of other buildings in the town centre that, as groups, contribute positively to its character and townscape. This includes a number of groups around the Fair Green and along London Road.

4.4.6. Public open spaces in the area include historic spaces such as the Fair Green, Mitcham Common and Figge’s Marsh. These spaces play an important role in the quality of life and identity of Mitcham, and also represent an important regeneration and recreational asset for the area. The street pattern is also an important element of historic character, being organic in form and based on the shape of the Fair Green and Three Kings Piece and streets leading away from and converging on the spaces. This character is particularly susceptible to inappropriate change due to the simplicity of its layout and it not being extensive in coverage.

4.4.7. Part of the town centre area also forms part of Cricket

Green Conservation Area. This includes all parts of Commonsides East and Commonsides West where they abut the town centre boundary. Any development within or adjacent to the Conservation Area will have to pay special regard to the preservation or enhancement of its special character.

4.4.8. Conservation of these historic assets and enhancement of their urban setting should be a key element of any regeneration strategy for this area. Preservation of historic assets is best made through their continuous use and upkeep. New developments should embrace the unique opportunity in Mitcham to incorporate these historic assets, upgrade them and enhance their setting.

Character Appraisal

4.4.9. The character of the town centre is defined primarily by its street pattern, urban layout, the Fair Green, a range of buildings adhering to the traditional village grain and a number of buildings of architectural merit. However, whilst there are a good number of existing buildings contributing in this sense, architecturally many of these are either in poor condition or are unsuitable to modern retailing needs. There are also a significant number of larger, more modern buildings that are of poor quality and appearance, which significantly undermine the traditional character of the town centre. Thus the townscape quality of Mitcham is fragile and the SPD provides guidance to ensure that the local distinctiveness is not inappropriately lost through redevelopment.

4.4.10. The recent relatively poor social and economic performance of Mitcham Town Centre, resulting in long periods of low development interest and especially low volumes of new, large scale development, has meant that the town has not

experienced the pressures for change that other more successful areas have. Consequently this has enabled the retention and preservation of a number of notable buildings and spaces. This has allowed Mitcham Town Centre to retain a degree of distinctiveness and village character, compared with other centres in Merton. On the other hand, areas that have been redeveloped have seen poor quality buildings, materials and spaces created as a result, with little reference to local distinctiveness.

4.4.11. The historic buildings and spaces in the area are a major asset. Together they significantly contribute to the local identity of Mitcham. However, it is not just this that defines the distinctive character of Mitcham. The list below identifies the key components of character that define the distinctive character of Mitcham. These are elements that should either be retained or replicated in any regeneration proposals.

- **Urban Form:** The layout of streets and spaces are organic in arrangement and reflect the town's village origins. This is particularly so of the area around Fair Green and the pond.
- **Urban Grain:** The size and shape of individual plots of land and the size and position of buildings built on them.
- **Building Scale and Appearance:** The size of buildings in terms of their height, the proportion and scale of their architectural features, the level of detailing and architectural style.
- **Key Spaces:** The Fair Green is the defining space of Mitcham and the Three Kings Pond to a similar extent.
- **Key Buildings:** The Clock Tower, Kings Arms and White Lion are the most important buildings in the town centre core. Also of importance in the core are 1-13 Fair Green Court, 8, 8a, 8b, 9 & 9a Upper Green West, 213-221 London Road and the safe building on the Fair Green. Other buildings outside

the core such as the library on London Road are also considered key to the character of the town centre.

4.4.12. To achieve the vision set out in the SPD, regeneration proposals will have to create a safe, vibrant, walkable and integrated local district centre. The area will need to be home to new facilities that will be valued by new and existing communities. Creation of high quality, well designed new buildings and public spaces will be of key importance, while all those involved in the regeneration of the area will be required to protect and enhance its historic and green assets, as they greatly contribute to the identity and uniqueness of Mitcham Town Centre.

4.4.13. In the town centre core, the SPD organises future development around perimeter blocks (building fronts facing streets, with servicing and private amenity space to the rear). This provides a clear definition between public and private spaces, with the opportunity to provide intermediate levels of privacy where appropriate (such as small front gardens to houses or outdoor setting areas for cafes).

4.4.14. The urban layout of the area around the two retained pubs, including the three mixed use blocks located to the west and south of the retail anchor, is dictated by the desire to reinforce the human scale and increase the richness of the urban environment.

4.4.15. The regeneration of the centre itself will involve the encouragement of increased densities to facilitate more sustainable mixed use development that will enhance the viability and vitality of the centre.

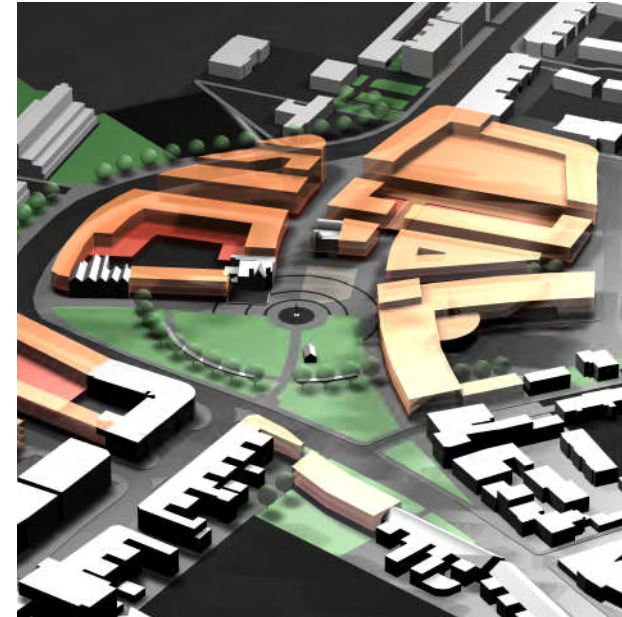


Figure 52: Mitcham Town Centre SPD Vision – new development should respect the small scale historic setting

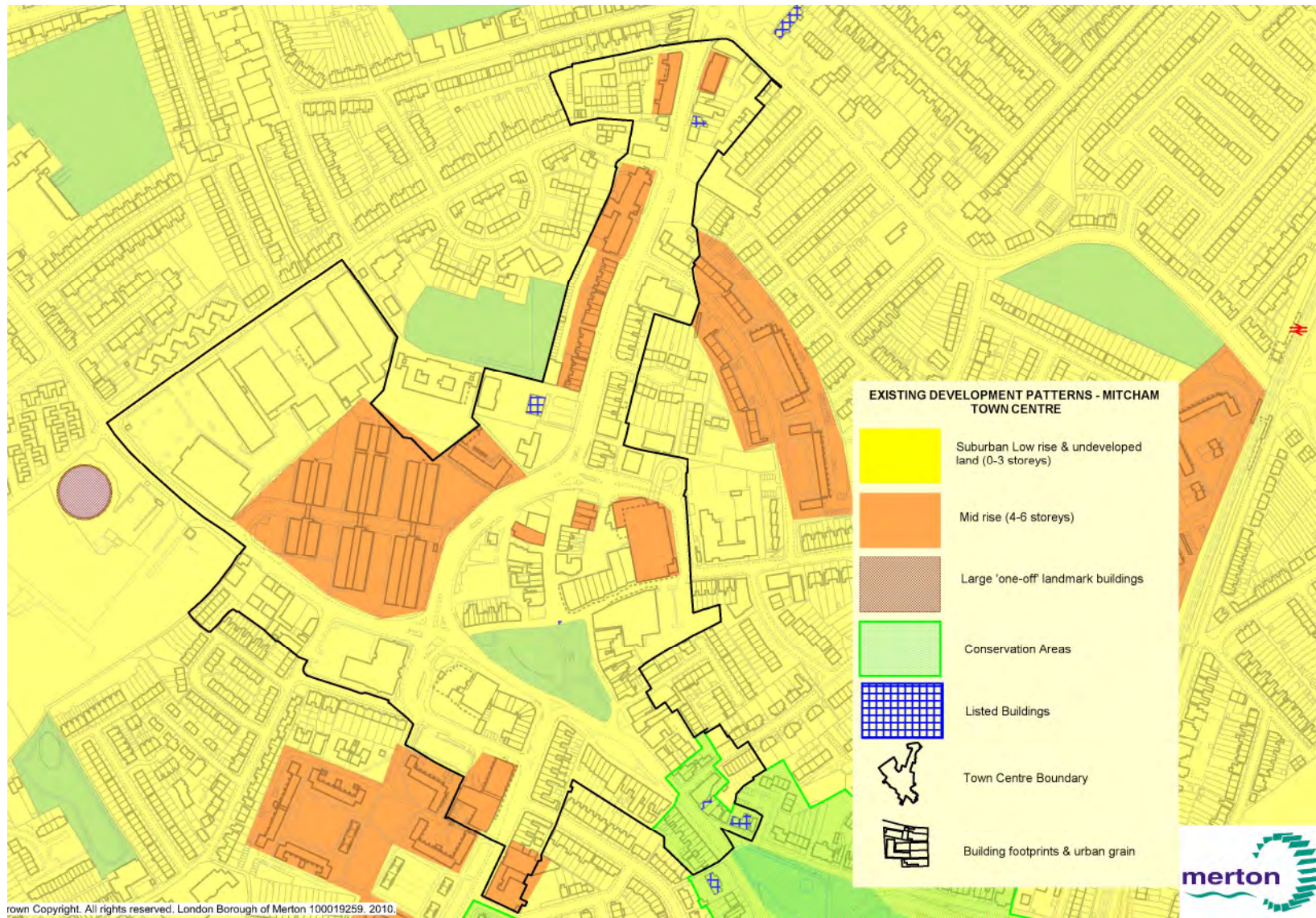


Figure 53: Mitcham Town Centre – Existing Development Patterns

Tall Building Opportunities in Mitcham Town Centre

4.4.16. Creating an exciting and vibrant urban character and a sustainable mixed-use development is closely linked with the issue of high density, which not only increases potential for mixed-use, but leads to more efficient use of land and services. This is particularly relevant for town centre locations. Higher density often brings with it taller buildings (though not always the case).

4.4.17. However, the demand for high density/taller buildings in Mitcham Town Centre has to be balanced with the requirement to respond to its largely small scale historic setting. This is particularly important in respecting and reinforcing local distinctiveness. The proposed building heights within the Mitcham Town Centre in the SPD therefore vary from 3 storey buildings around Fair Green to a 6 storey building framing the entrance from London Road into the core area of the town centre.

4.4.18. These height ranges support the protection of the low rise, local setting in the town centre core, and encourage development of similar heights to the existing blocks of flats surrounding the town centre core. New development in Mitcham Town Centre will therefore not be substantially taller than its surroundings or cause a significant change on the skyline.

4.4.19. Based on the urban design and regeneration recommendations in the SPD, tall buildings as defined in the London Plan are not appropriate in Mitcham Town Centre. Further justification and information regarding the Mitcham Town Centre can be found in the Mitcham Town Centre Development Brief SPD.

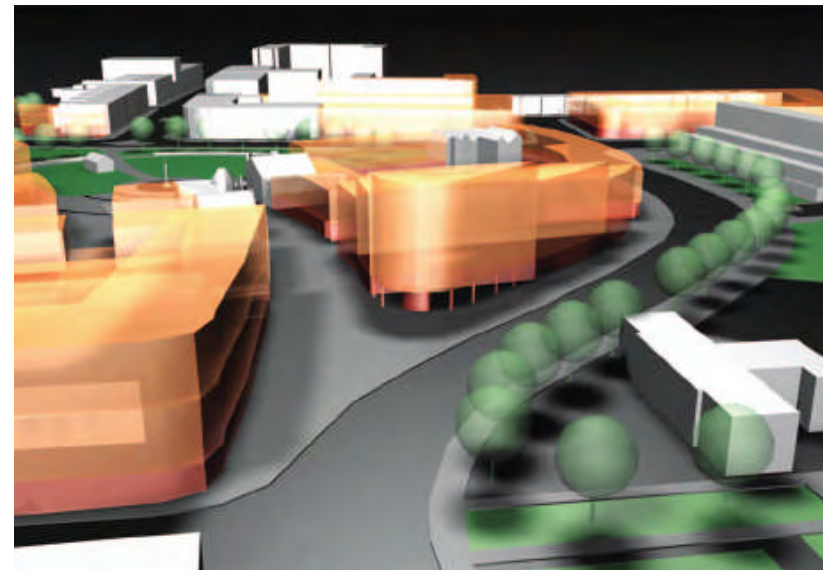


Figure 54: Mitcham Town Centre Regeneration Vision

4.5. Colliers Wood Town Centre

Urban Design Analysis

4.5.1. Colliers Wood is a suburban car based retail centre located on the Northern Underground Line with bus connections to Wimbledon, and Tooting Broadway Centres. The centre is made up of a mix of retail units, with typical single fronted fine grain units along the high street and car based bulky goods retailing to the south beyond the tube station. The river Wandle traverses through the centre which provides green space but also presents flooding constraints towards town centre development.

Historic context

4.5.2. The Colliers Wood Centre has a rich historic significance based around the Merton Priory, a monastic complex first established on the site in 1117AD and continuously rebuilt, extended and occupied until the Dissolution in 1538. The priory is a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

4.5.3. It also includes Merton Abbey Mills which houses a series of water based and water powered industrial works developed on the site of the priory from the 17th century, some of which continued to operate in the 20th century.

4.5.4. Wandle Park lies alongside the river Wandle, an area rich in early industrial history, and is of informal design consisting of grass, an informal network of paths, many trees particularly beside the river as well as a number of wetland features

introduced when the original concrete river channels were removed and more informal natural banks introduced. Originally forming part of the grounds to Wandlebank House owned from 1791-1821 by James Perry who owned the Merton Corn Mill.

4.5.5. Together with several statutorily and locally listed buildings which among others include the Charles Holden classically designed low rise Colliers Wood Underground Station, and the gothic style Singlegate School, this completes the historic context of Colliers Wood Centre.

4.5.6. These historic assets are all covered by the Wandle Valley Conservation Area, and historic characterisation work has been undertaken in the Wandle Valley Conservation Area Character Appraisal, Sub Area 2: Colliers Wood and Sub Area 3: Merton Priory.

4.5.7. Merton Priory is arguably the most significant of the historic assets in the town centre, however much of the priory no longer exists. The earliest buildings and structures within the conservation area comprising remnants of the Merton Abbey Complex including surviving sections of priory walls dating from the medieval period or possibly later are located in this part of the conservation area.. These incorporate elements of flint and rubble construction. There are also the remains of the Priory Chapter House, which are located under the elevated Merantun Way; adjoining surface car parks to the north and south, and fast food take away outlets. The Council and the Merton Priory Trust are working towards improving the setting and interpretation of the Chapter House.

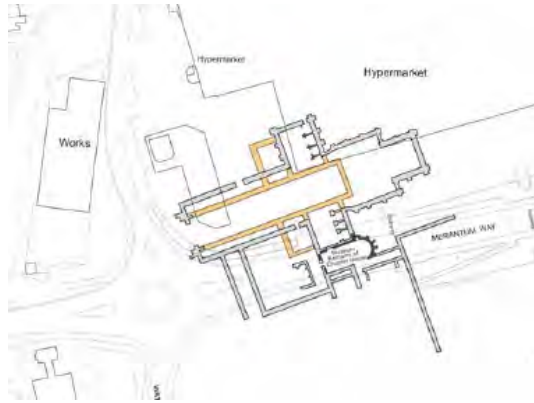


Figure 55: Plan of Abbey Church (including the Chapter House) overlaid onto a modern map of the area

4.5.8. The predominant land use within Merton Priory and Abbey Mills was historically industrial, driven by the close proximity to the River Wandle. However as industry has declined some buildings have been converted to new uses, particularly the Merton Abbey Mills craft market which now comprises a mix of craft and retail outlets, restaurant, cafe, public house and a number of studio office units. Many industrial buildings to the south of Merantun Way were demolished during the 1970s and 80s and the site remained vacant for many years but has recently been developed for a mixed-use residential/leisure development. Within the conservation area the area to the south of Merton Abbey Mills has now been developed for residential use.

4.5.9. This part of the conservation area has a very distinctive character that sets it apart from the surrounding area. The Merton Abbey Mills complex in particular comprises an informal grouping of mainly 2 storey buildings of a predominantly industrial character that embrace a number of different building forms and architectural styles. This character has been preserved by the design and layout of the new residential development to

the south of Merton Abbey Mills, in the form of mid rise residential blocks.

4.5.10. The historic character of Colliers Wood is rich and covers a vast area of the town centre. Many of the remaining historic buildings within the centre, such as the Underground Station and Merton Abbey Mills buildings are low rise. In particular Merton Abbey Mills has been restored to form an important element of the character of Colliers Wood, and the adjoining mid rise modern residential blocks have been designed to take into account the significance of the place and enhance rather than detract from this area of Colliers Wood.

4.5.11. Future development in Colliers Wood should aim to achieve the same balance with the historic environment in accordance with PPS5. Generally however high rise 'prominent' tall buildings should be restricted from the area surrounding Merton Abbey Mills owing to its low rise historical significance, directed to more central locations around the existing Brown and Root Tower. It is important that the impact of new development is assessed against the potential impacts on significant archaeology and heritage assets, particularly in the southern parts of the town centre.

4.5.12. Unfortunately the remains of the Chapter House are not within the setting they deserve, and future development in this area must play a positive role in the setting and interpretation of this historic asset.

4.5.13. Other historic assets such as the setting of the low rise underground station and Singlegate School represent sensitive locations for future dense development in the town centre. The settings and integrity of these and other listed buildings should not be detrimentally impacted by future tall building development.

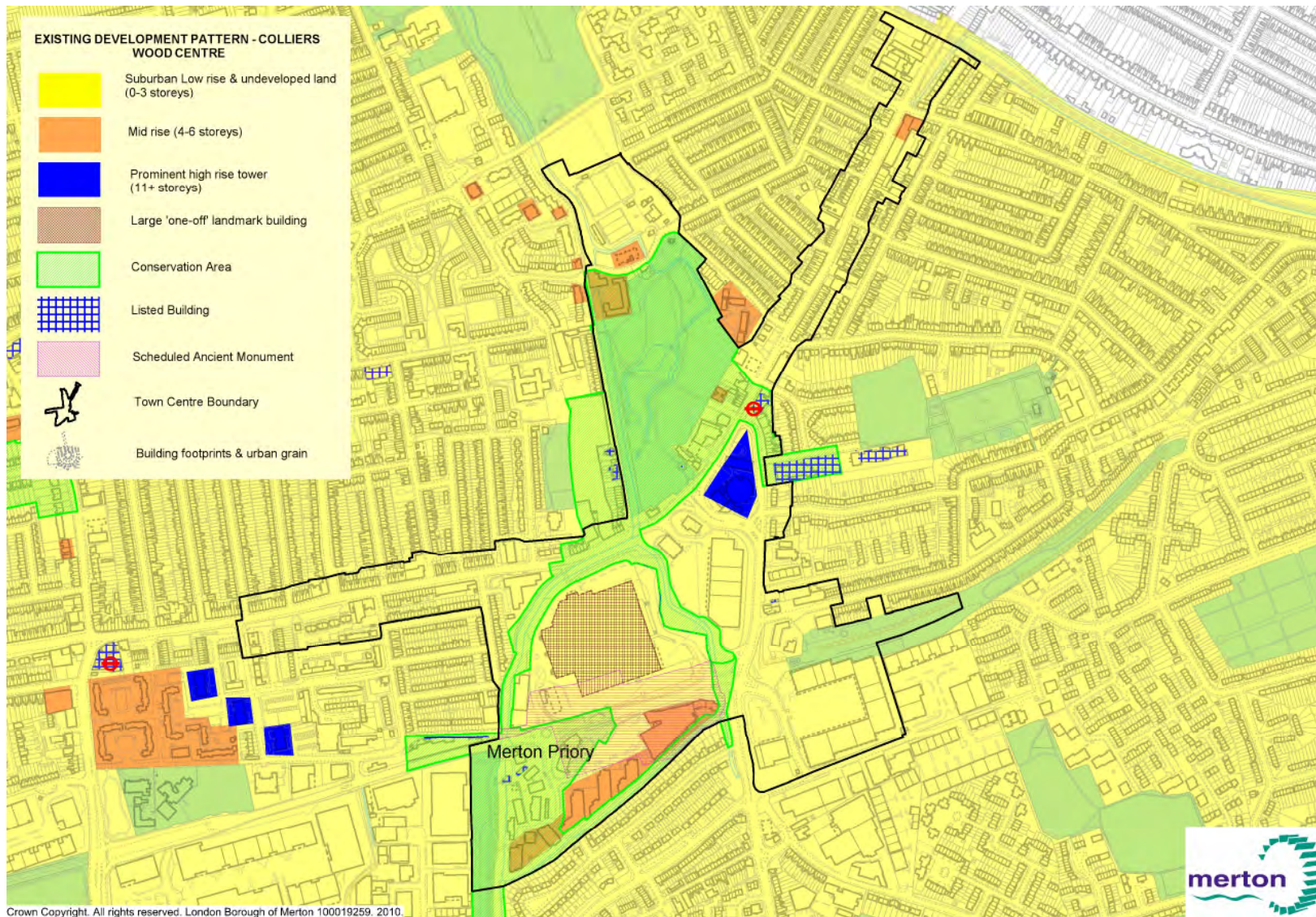


Figure 56: Colliers Wood Existing Development Pattern

Character appraisal

4.5.14. The centre is located in the level, lower eastern area of the borough and is highly visible from the higher areas towards West Wimbledon. The existing Brown and Root 17 storey high rise tower and other mid rise development can be viewed from these points, as well as from other locations such as Mitcham Common.

4.5.15. Building on the existing single prominent tower within the centre will help reinforce the skyline of the borough as well as assisting in the reconfiguration and improvement of the overall character of the centre. This is particularly relevant for the Brown and Root Tower which in its present state offers nothing by way of visual amenity or functionality to the centre. The building functions as Merton's gateway from Wandsworth to the north, with the Brown and Root Tower the first strategic view offered of the borough along High Street Colliers Wood, as identified in the strategic views analysis.



Figure 57: northern gateway to Merton from Wandsworth with view of Brown and Root Tower.

4.5.16. The Colliers Wood Centre is home to a mix of various building styles, heights and characters. With reference to the Distinctive Areas of the Borough in the Design SPG, Colliers Wood can be classified as a mix of different characters, being that of a commercial centre along High Street Colliers Wood, and retail parks south of the high street where car based bulky goods retailing is prevalent.

4.5.17. The urban grain of the centre is mostly based on large plots of land occupying retail sheds with extensive car parking areas that have no relationship to the original shopping strip along the high street which is made up of low rise single retail units with residential or office accommodation above. The large retail sheds are often one to two storeys in height and occupy vast areas of land. The centre is serviced by major arterial roads that traverse through, including Christchurch Road north/south and Merantun Way east/west.

4.5.18. This is identified as being the problem with the current layout of Colliers Wood, there is no connectivity and no sense of place. Although the centre itself occupies the largest geographic area of any town centre in the borough, it does not provide a single shopping destination and lacks cohesion. Therefore the Council is pursuing designation of Colliers Wood to that of a district centre, and transformational change to the structure of the centre over the long term.

4.5.19. The layout and overall size of the centre has allowed for the introduction of taller buildings which have little impact on surrounding areas. The centre, although large in overall area, has a small cluster of taller buildings, the largest and original building being the Brown and Root 17 storey tower occupying land opposite the station. This building is vacant and in need of major

repairs and renovation works. The site has been the subject of several planning applications, and has planning permission for conversion and alteration to the existing tower block and erection of a new building, with an overall capacity of 218 units, 2 retail units, office space, a café/bar and a new public library between the two buildings, as well as the creation of a new public open space.

4.5.20. It is important that any further development and reconfiguration of the centre is undertaken as a means to facilitate the refurbishment and redevelopment of the Brown and Root Tower. At the time of drafting this paper demolition had begun to remove the existing multi storey car park at the rear of the tower, and we have received advice from the landowner that a fresh application for refurbishment of the tower and redevelopment of the site predominately for housing would be forthcoming.



Figure 58: One of the development schemes proposed for Brown and Root Tower in 2006

4.5.21. Beyond this, four mid rise buildings of 6 storeys in height are located south of Merantun Way, including the Premier Inn

Hotel and three residential towers. Although 6 storeys may not be considered a 'tall building' in this setting, the combination of these buildings, the existence of the Brown and Root Tower, and the sheer size of the centre and the plots within the centre offers scope for building on this precedence. Due to the size of the centre, the existing mid rise buildings bear little relationship with the Brown and Root Tower. The Sainsbury's Sava Centre (or Hypermarket), abutting the River Wandle, although not tall, is considered a large building due to its footprint and is central to the character of Colliers Wood. There is a desire to integrate retail sheds such as this into the structure of the centre.

4.5.22. Beyond the centre are fairly compact low rise suburban neighbourhoods characterised by tightly built up 'grid-iron' terraces, however these areas bear little relationship to the centre itself. The setback of these neighbourhoods to the core of Colliers Wood generally offers scope to increase the density of development in Colliers Wood. Locations within the town centre adjoining the suburban neighbourhoods, such as along High Street Colliers Wood, are particularly sensitive to the introduction of higher buildings.

4.5.23. The Core Strategy aims to create an attractive, permeable environment in central Colliers Wood with a better street layout, a greater mix of units and wider range of non-retail uses that will make it a more desirable destination. Although more detailed area based work is required to consider how the centre may evolve over time, it is considered that the transformational change envisaged in Colliers Wood can be facilitated through the encouragement of tall buildings in the centre that will create more of an identity and improve the quality of the centre.

4.5.24. Given the contrast between the 17 storey Brown and Root Tower and surrounding retail warehouses and low rise residential neighbourhoods, and the desire to create a more

functional and connected town centre, new taller development should assist in 'bridging' rather than 'increasing' the height gap. The Brown and Root Tower should therefore remain the pinnacle building in terms of height, and new development should assist in creating a transition to surrounding low rise development, creating a cluster of tall buildings and improving the town centre skyline of Colliers Wood.

4.5.25. Although tall building development may be suitable within the town centre boundaries, development must respect the suburban residential hinterland and the sensitivities associated with the historic character of parts of Colliers Wood, including the Conservation Areas, Listed Buildings and Scheduled Ancient Monument. New development should generally cluster around the existing tower, minimising any detrimental impact on the rich historic environment that dominates the southern precinct of Colliers Wood Town Centre.

4.5.26. No detailed work has been undertaken in identifying key redevelopment sites or working on the flooding constraints, only the identification of a long term aspiration for Colliers Wood. It is important that any development within the centre is undertaken in a co-ordinated way that seeks to achieve the overall vision for the centre. We will prepare and adopt a masterplan for Colliers Wood by 2012, setting out how the designation of Colliers Wood as a district centre will be implemented and delivered. The masterplan will assist in effectively managing both of type and quantity of development that will come forward through the life of the Core Strategy, ensuring that new development proposals are commensurate to the size and scale of the centre's status within the retail hierarchy.

4.5.27. In transport terms the re-designation of Colliers Wood to a District Centre is a major step in improving the current

network. The master planning process will include a strategy to identify transport infrastructure opportunities, priorities and funding, and where future development schemes, such as tall buildings, can assist in achieving desired transport outcomes.

Tall Building Opportunities in Colliers Wood Town Centre

4.5.28. Based on the analysis within the detailed area study, tall buildings may be appropriate in Colliers Wood Centre where of exceptional design and architectural quality and where justified in terms of their impact on the townscape and historic environment, and the benefits towards regeneration and public realm.

4.5.29. The Brown and Root Tower should remain the pinnacle building in the centre in terms of height. This can then form the basis for a coherent group of buildings that relate well to each other in terms of scale, massing, form and architecture.



Figure 59: Indicative Colliers Wood skyline

4.5.30. Locations that may be sensitive to tall buildings include the historic environments of the Wandle Park, Merton Abbey Mills, Merton Priory and the setting of Listed Buildings where tall buildings should consider the potential impact on the significance and scale of the historic environment and open spaces. Locations near to the edge of the town centre boundary should consider the sensitivity of low rise residential neighbourhoods.

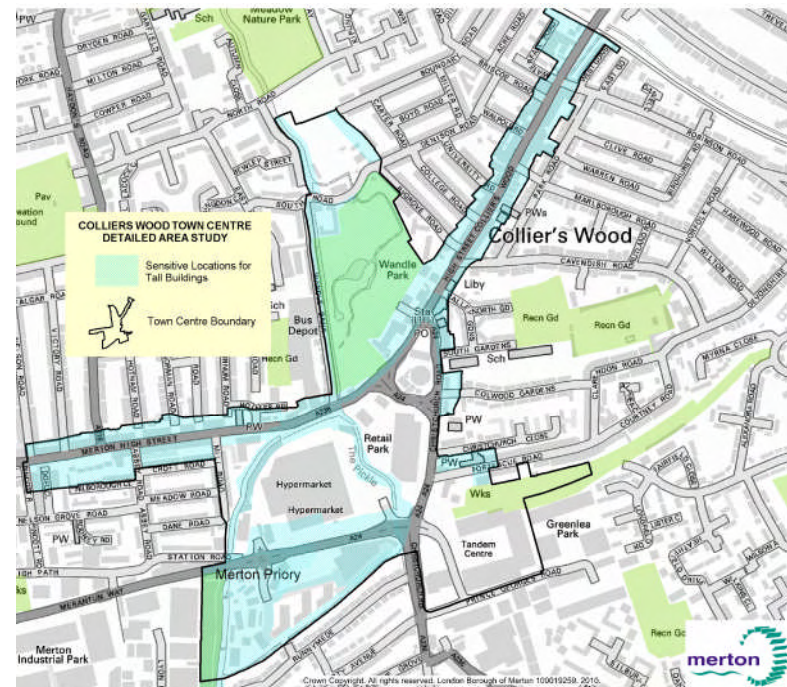


Figure 60: Colliers Wood Detailed Area Study

4.6. Raynes Park Local Centre

Urban Design Analysis

4.6.1. Raynes Park is a small local centre with a mainline train station and attractive surrounding residential area. The area is within a high PTAL range, primarily based on the frequency of the train services that pass through the station; however the centre is compact and mostly low rise, and has been maintained to ensure it provides regular grocery shopping consistent with its status as a Local Centre.

Historic Context

4.6.2. Prior to May 1838, when the London & South Western Railway opened, the area now known as Raynes Park was farmland. Raynes Park and its station get their name from the Raynes family who owned the land crossed by the railway. Today, Raynes Park is a relatively prosperous commuter suburb sandwiched between Wimbledon and New Malden.

4.6.3. Although the existing urban form is fairly compact and fine grain, there are limited designated historic assets within the core of the local centre surrounding the rail station. Much of the historic environment associated with Raynes Park is located to the north of this area.

4.6.4. Raynes Park Methodist Church, located at the northern edge of the town centre boundary along Worple Road, is the sole statutorily listed building in the local centre (Grade II). The church sits within the Lambton Road Conservation Area which

covers a small portion of the town centre, extending further north of the town centre boundary. It was designed by Withers and Meredith in a Byzantine style, and built in 1914. This building is considered to make a substantial contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. The striking design and roof form and the two large gables of the Methodist Church serves as a modest landmark structure.

4.6.5. The land beyond the local centre boundary rises up towards the West Wimbledon Ridgeline, and is characterised by low rise, compact, high quality residential areas. These residential areas are covered by two Conservation Areas, being Lambton Road and Durham Road, both of which play a significant role in the character and identity of the Raynes Park and West Wimbledon area, including the local centre.

4.6.6. The Lambton Road Conservation Area displays a regularity that is considered to be the key strength of its character. In particular the regularity relates to the rigid geometry layout of the building plots associated with 19th century by-law housing, building heights of predominately 2 storeys, building form comprising terraces of houses or short terraces of commercial units with shops over, as well as the building lines, roof form, rhythm and symmetry of the buildings, and the architecture and detailing. The cohesive architectural character of each street and each terrace together with the quality of the street design and street materials sets the Conservation Area out from the surrounding neighbourhoods.

4.6.7. To the north-west, Durham Road Conservation Area does not display the same level of regularity in building plots and form, with a mixture of substantial terraces containing maisonettes and semi-detached houses, and a clearly expressed rigid geometry to building plots and layouts associated with 19th century by-law housing, mixed with other plots that have been

amalgamated or are irregular in terms of their width and depth.

4.6.8. However, most buildings are 2 storeys in height, and the majority of the buildings in the Conservation Area have a strong architectural relationship to other buildings in the area. There are a series of 5 different groups of buildings, which are identified as having common characteristics, which reinforces the special character of the area as a whole. The most obvious of these groups comprises the maisonettes in Panmuir Rd and the adjacent sections of Durham and Cambridge Roads. The group value, rhythm and symmetry associated with these different groups of plots and buildings together with the quality of the street design and street materials sets the Conservation Area out from the surrounding neighbourhoods.

4.6.9. The qualities of these low rise residential neighbourhoods displaying regularities in building plots and form are sensitive to the introduction of large, taller buildings that do not respond to the plot and street layout and building height. Demolition of the housing accommodation and redevelopment of the resulting site will be strongly resisted in view of the uniformity of the areas. In the case of the redevelopment of other non-residential buildings the Council will be looking for good design that will both enhance and compliment the area. The scale of new development will be expected to reflect the existing scale of the area.

4.6.10. This is particularly relevant for the parts of the Conservation Area within close proximity to the local centre boundary where the impacts of tall buildings will be particularly detrimental to the historic quality of these neighbourhoods.

4.6.11. As the land rises up north from the town centre encompassing the conservation areas, local views are afforded from parts of Durham Road, Pepys Road, Lambton Road and Cambridge Road to the south towards Raynes Park Local Centre.

The rising land and resultant local and strategic views from the Conservation Areas play a role in the historic character of the locality. Dense, high development within Raynes Park Local Centre has the potential to interrupt local and strategic views from these locations and should therefore be resisted.

Character Appraisal

4.6.12. As discussed previously in this paper, the local centre is located at the base of the boroughs higher western vantage points of West Wimbledon, where significant views are afforded across Merton towards Croydon. For this reason any tall development within the centre will have a severe impact on these strategic views. Development within the local centre should be commensurate to the scale of the centre, and development should be restricted to a height that does not interrupt the views. These views are also associated with the historic significance of the neighbourhoods of West Wimbledon.



Figure 61: views from north of Raynes Park Local Centre

4.6.13. The centre has retained a similar building scale as its origins as a railway village on the outskirts of London. The elevated railway line and station divide the centre into two parts,

with the fine grain core of the centre located to the north mainly along Coome Lane, and a parade of small commercial units located along Approach Road to the south.

4.6.14. Although the centre contains a mix of commercial units and styles, the predominant height is 2-3 storeys and the units are mostly a single width, and display a fine grain, which ensures that the centre maintains a pedestrian, local scale. A 1960's 6-storey office building interrupts the otherwise low-rise streetscape, Durham House located along Coombe Lane, which is set within a larger parcel containing mainly poor quality buildings. This building could be considered an 'undesirable' landmark building in the local centre, and the Council is exploring options for preparing a planning brief for the site to remove the higher building and redevelop the whole site at a scale comparable with the rest of the local centre.



Figure 62: Raynes Park Local Centre streetscape

4.6.15. Most of the immediate surroundings of the local centre are attractive, tree lined streets. Grid-iron Edwardian terraces merge into larger detached and semi-detached late 19th century houses to the north and 1930's suburbia to the south. There are some out-of-centre commercial development and residential apartments to the west. The Rainbow Industrial Estate is located to the south of the centre, set amongst the two elevated railway lines and thus is secluded and not visible from any of its

surroundings. This site is anticipated to come forward for industrial intensification and regeneration over the life of the LDF period.

4.6.16. Recently the Council has commenced works to improve the overall quality of the centre via the Raynes Park Local Centre Enhancement Plan. The enhancement plan guides short to medium term investment in the physical environment that local residents and business have said is important to Raynes Park. It focuses on:

- *Improving access and circulation for pedestrians, cyclists, road traffic and public transport users;*
- *Strengthening Raynes Park's retail offer, making it a more attractive destination for local shopping needs; and*
- *Improving the physical environment, appearance and maintenance of the public realm.*

4.6.17. At the time of preparing the Background Paper a number of key sites within the local centre boundary have been identified as having development opportunities, or currently within the planning process. These sites are listed in the Raynes Park Local Centre Enhancement Plan. Although these sites are identified, the Core Strategy is seeking to retain Raynes Park as a small local centre, ensuring that new development respects local character and amenity.

4.6.18. One such site is the former Thames Water site on Coombe Lane, which abuts the elevated railway line. The site was subject to a planning brief, and has planning permission for a part 4 part 5 storey building to accommodate a new Waitrose store at ground level with 88 apartments above. The building and higher 5th level has been sufficiently set back from Coombe Lane to accommodate a new public piazza to the street frontage,

and this setback combined with the location adjoining the elevated railway line ensures that the building will not be detrimental to the Coombe lane streetscape.

4.6.19. In addition Selsey House on Lambton Road has planning permission for a part 2/3/4 storey medical centre. The site abuts low rise residential properties, and has been designed to ensure that appropriate interfaces are achieved including setbacks and reduction in the building height closer to the site boundaries.

4.6.20. Although the centre has a high PTAL and the redevelopment of redundant sites is welcome, there is a desire to protect the scale and local character of Raynes Park Local Centre. New development proposals should be managed to ensure that the height, scale and massing is appropriate having regard to the surrounding local centre context, and that an appropriate transition is achieved between the local centre and surrounding sensitive residential neighbourhoods. In the future this will be achieved by encouraging development within the low rise and lower end of the mid-rise building height categories identified in this paper. Tall buildings should be discouraged in Raynes Park Local Centre.

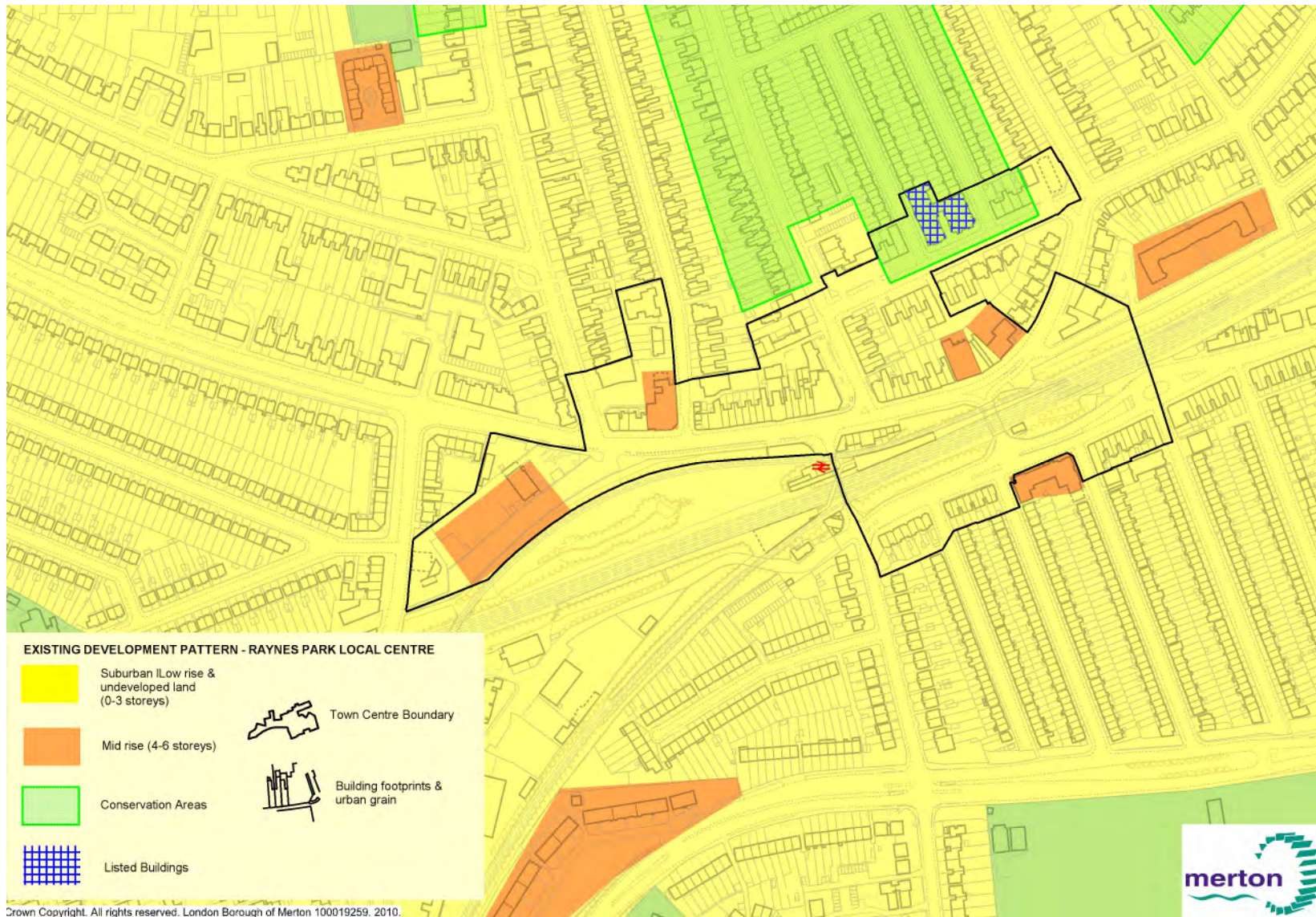


Figure 63: Raynes Park Existing Development Pattern

Tall building opportunities in Raynes Park Local Centre

4.6.21. The Core Strategy is seeking to retain Raynes Park as a small local centre, ensuring that new development respects local character and amenity. Local scale improvements are being undertaken to improve the local environment and streetscape to focus on the quality of the centre. No regeneration is planned for the centre, and over the life of the plan we will see local scale enhancement and incremental change.

4.6.22. New development coming forward within and around the town centre must reinforce the low rise character of the centre, respect the low scale residential hinterland including Conservation Areas to the north, manage the interface with sensitive residential areas, and acknowledge the strategic views across the borough from higher land to the north.

4.6.23. Tall buildings are therefore not appropriate in the Raynes Park Local Centre given its status as a local centre, its highly visible location amongst the strategic views across the borough and the need to protect the views from sensitive historic neighbourhoods on higher land to the north. Tall building proposals in Raynes Park should be strongly resisted.

4.7. Recommendations

Summary

4.7.1. Tall buildings are generally not appropriate within the borough due to its predominately suburban low rise character, and will be resisted in all areas of the borough where they will be detrimental to this valued character. Tall buildings may be suitable in areas of the borough where all of the following factors are present:

- *Regeneration or change is envisaged*
- *Good public transport accessibility*
- *Existing higher building precedent*

4.7.2. Tall buildings of exceptional design and architectural quality may therefore be appropriate in the town centres of Colliers Wood, Morden and Wimbledon where justified in terms of their impact on the townscape and the historic environment, and the benefits towards regeneration and the public realm.

4.7.3. In Colliers Wood Centre, the Brown and Root Tower should remain the pinnacle building in the centre in terms of height. This can then form the basis for a coherent group of buildings that relate well to each other in terms of scale, massing, form and architecture. Locations that may be sensitive to tall buildings include the historic environments of the Wandle Park, Merton Abbey Mills, Merton Priory and the setting of Listed Buildings where tall buildings should consider the potential impact on the significance and scale of the historic environment and open spaces. Locations near to the edge of the

town centre boundary should consider the sensitivity of low rise residential neighbourhoods.

4.7.4. In Morden Town Centre, tall buildings should be guided on the principle that the Civic Centre should remain the pinnacle building in the centre in terms of height. This can then form the basis for a number of tall buildings that relate well to each other in terms of scale, massing, form and architecture. Opportunities exist to use tall buildings to enhance the image of Morden, creating gateways to the centre and landmarks in key locations that add character and legibility. Locations that may be sensitive to tall buildings include the town centre edge adjoining Morden Hall Park (due to the impact on the historic environment) and also locations on the periphery of the town centre (due to their close proximity to low rise residential neighbourhoods). A framework for the development of appropriate taller buildings in Morden will be detailed further in the emerging moreMorden Area Action Plan

4.7.5. In Wimbledon Town Centre, tall buildings should contribute to creating a consistent scale of development based on a range of similar but not uniform building heights. These should be determined by reference to surrounding building heights and townscape characteristics. Regard will need to be given to the Conservation Areas and the setting of Listed Buildings within and adjoining the centre where an individual design approach will be required to ensure that large scale development respects the historic character of these areas. Other locations that may be sensitive to tall buildings include those areas near to the edge of the town centre boundary due to the close proximity of low scale high quality residential development, and those locations where tall buildings may impact on the Wimbledon Hill ridgeline, including long range views into the borough from Richmond Park.

4.7.6. Designated industrial locations including those at Shannon Corner and Morden Road Industrial Area are sensitive areas of the borough where taller buildings may be appropriate where contributing to the regeneration and enhancement of employment uses, and where they will not have a detrimental impact on areas outside of the designated industrial area.

4.7.7. Tall building proposals in Merton will need to have regard to the environmental impact of certain locations, including where adjoining or located nearby to conservation areas, the setting of listed buildings and scheduled ancient monuments, where overlooking open spaces, where they may impact on important local or strategic views, and where their presence could effect the valued and distinctive suburban residential character of the borough.

4.7.8. The valued and distinctive suburban character of Merton consists of much of the area outside the borough's main town centres including the local centres and neighbourhood parades, grid-iron terraced streets (e.g. the Apostles in Raynes Park), medium intensity suburban development (e.g. Inter-war areas in Lower Morden), garden city layouts (e.g. St Helier Estate) and loosely structured suburban development (e.g. Merton Park), all of which have a very distinctive character which is an important and positive characteristic of the borough as a whole.

4.7.9. All proposals for tall buildings will also be assessed against the policy guidance in the London Plan and the criteria for evaluation in the CABE and English Heritage Guidance on tall buildings (July 2007).

Policy Wording

4.7.10. The background paper supports the proposed wording in Merton's Core Strategy Design Policy in relation to tall buildings:

All development needs to be designed in order to respect, reinforce and enhance the local character of the area in which it is located and to contribute to Merton's sense of place and identity. We will achieve this by protecting the valued and distinctive suburban character of the borough by resisting the development of tall buildings where they will have a detrimental impact on this character. Tall buildings may therefore only be appropriate in the town centres of Colliers Wood, Morden and Wimbledon, where consistent with the tall buildings guidance in the sub area policies, where of exceptional design and architectural quality and where justified in terms of their impact on the townscape and historic environment, and the benefits towards regeneration and public realm. Outside of these locations tall buildings are unlikely to be appropriate.

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