



OPEN SPACES STUDY
A response to Merton Council's study by The Environment Partnership
from Mitcham Cricket Green Community & Heritage

January 2019

1. Mitcham Cricket Green Community & Heritage takes an active interest in the future of the Cricket Green Conservation Area and its environs. We are the civic society for this part of Merton and part of the wider civic movement through membership of the national charity Civic Voice. We have been closely involved in the development of Merton Council's draft Borough Character Study and the Cricket Green Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan. The Cricket Green Charter (<http://mitchamcricketgreen.files.wordpress.com/2013/04/cricket-green-charter.pdf>) established our approach to development and change in the area and was developed in partnership with London Borough of Merton, the local community and local councillors. We also undertake practical conservation work, including the cleaning and restoration of local landmarks and management of ornamental and other planting, and bring residents, businesses and organisations together to appreciate the importance of the Conservation Area and its environs. We organise community events including Mitcham Heritage Day and Community on the Green. We also contribute to the Independent Merton Green Spaces Forum
2. We welcome the opportunity to contribute to this Open Space Study as part of the review of Merton's Local Plan and to inform others aspects of Merton Council's policies and approach. We have made an extensive input to the Local Plan.
3. We are unclear as to the scope of the study commissioned by Merton Council and the purpose of the open ended questions which have been circulated for feedback. It would be helpful if, perhaps through the Independent Merton Green Spaces Forum, a more collaborative dialogue with community groups concerned with open spaces throughout the Borough could be undertaken. The consultation questions are also based on the assumption that the map and typology of Merton's open spaces is both accurate and appropriate.
4. Our main interest is in the open spaces in and around Cricket Green ward and its environs. This covers the area bounded by Mitcham parish churchyard (Me 0229), Fair Green (Me 0242), Watermeads (Me 0251) and Mitcham Common (various codes). We have a particular interest in the network of registered Town Greens owned and managed by Merton Council and these also include Figges Marsh (Me 0067). The Cricket Green area has significantly more entries in the London Borough of Merton Open Space Site List than any other.

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5. The PPG17 classification of the different categories of open space has limitations. It does not address, for example, the special status of the network of registered Town Greens nor does it recognise the planning policy status of different open areas or the different functions of the open space as part of the green infrastructure of the Borough.

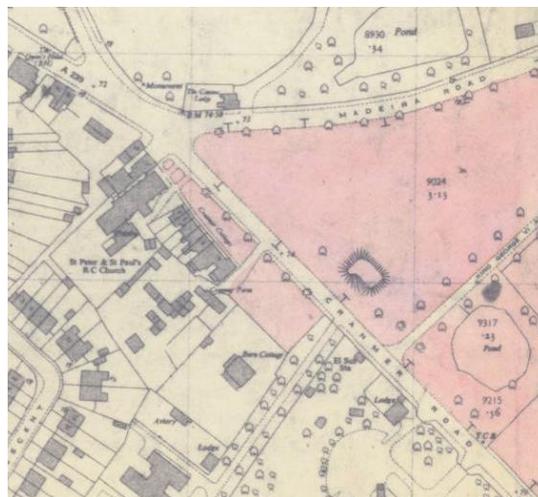
Errors and omissions

6. There are numerous errors and omissions in the map provided:

a. Significant areas are categorised as “outdoor sports facilities” where either no sport is played or it is of a transitory nature and not the predominant use. This includes the grounds of The Canons (Me 0032) and Park Place (Me 0146) (currently the focus of £5m investment supported by the Lottery), Figges Marsh (Me 0067) and Three Kings Piece (Me 0242 & Me 0284). Where sport is played on some of this land, largely football, it is temporary and their primary role is as a major visual contributor to the townscape, informal recreation and as green infrastructure. We would also question the categorisation of school grounds as “outdoor sports facilities” given their multi-functional use.

b. There are important omissions, including

- An area of registered Town Green on the west side of Cranmer Road between the Roman Catholic Church and entrance to Cranmer School (extract from Town Green map below). This should be part of Cranmer Green (Me 0045).



- An area of registered Town Green between two stretches of Commonsides East which should be included in Three Kings Piece (Me 0242) (extract from Town Green map below)



- New open space created in Mitcham town centre as a result of the recent Rediscover Mitcham investment which Merton Council is committed to registering as Town Green alongside Fair Green (Me 0142)
 - Land behind Mary Tate's almshouses currently used as allotments and providing amenity space
 - Parts of the grounds of Cricket Green School (Me 0047) and its categorisation different to other schools
 - Valued open space in front of Date Valley School and Brook House to the east of Cricket Green Road by Cricket Green (Me 0141)
- c. There are some incorrect categories, including:
- Categorisation of the grounds of Worsfold House (Me 0235) as being "Natural and semi-natural urban greenspace" but not the adjacent area at the north end of London Road Playing Fields (Me 0016)
 - Categorisation of Three Kings Pond and Commonsides Rough Site of Importance for Nature Conservation at the north end of Three Kings Piece (Me 0242) as "Outdoor Sports Facilities" rather than "Natural and semi-natural urban greenspace".
- d. The map incorrectly includes the buildings of Glebe Court as well as the open space in Me 0080
- e. There are some glaring typographical errors or mistakes in the Open Space Site List:
- "Grammer" for Cranmer
 - "Grebe Court" for Glebe Court
 - "Hasslemere" for Haslemere
 - "Mitcham Sports Ground" (Me 0146) is not known as Mitcham Sports Ground

7. Given that the study is also to be used to provide updates to Merton Council's Greenspaces and Leisure Teams we should also flag myriad errors and omissions in the data about the Borough's green spaces in the inventory provided to the new green space contractors idverde as part of the tendering process for the recent maintenance contract. This information needs to be comprehensively updated, including input from Friends and other community groups.

Priority improvements

8. We have identified the following policy changes and improvements as priorities for the area's open spaces. These can be funded through a combination of local authority, community infrastructure, grants and other sources.
- Preparing and implementing management plans for each of the Town Greens and the three Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (Cranmer Green, Mitcham Parish Churchyard and Commonsides Rough) following community engagement – the plan for Cranmer Green was prepared by London Conservation Services in 2001 with a five year management plan. We are not aware of management plans for the other two sites
 - Preparing and implementing a management plan for Mitcham Common following community engagement – the most recent management plan was from 2007-2012
 - Positively managing the distinctive variety of open space for quiet enjoyment, recreation, sport and nature. Formal designation of open spaces should be kept minimal, so that a wide range of activities can take place on the same space, and formal structures and ground markings (such as pitches) kept to a bare minimum and made temporary

- Recognition of the importance of the area's ponds and their protection in planning policy, including Three Kings Pond, The Canons pond, Cranmer Green pond and the ponds on Mitcham Common
- Extension of Metropolitan Open Land to Mitcham Bowls Club
- Recognising the strategic importance of Mitcham Common as the second largest open space in the Borough and establishing the ambition for it to be part of a continuous area of green space extending to Beddington Park at the heart of the Wandle Valley Regional Park and providing multiple public benefits, including contact with nature, opportunities for healthy recreation and a reservoir of clean air
- Improving maintenance and management of the open spaces which has seen a significant decline in some areas following the contracting out to idverde
- Ensuring effective watering of trees, raised beds and other planting during increasingly dry summer months
- Supporting community action to manage and protect open spaces and undertake projects
- Protecting key paths (including public rights of way) which both traverse and link green spaces to safeguard permeability (including Cold Blows, Church Path, Love Lane (around Mitcham Parish Church), Tramway Path, Baron Walk, Fieldgate Lane and Ravensbury Path)
- Recognising the Wandle Trail as a key strategic link and improving its continuity and management
- Identifying opportunities to create new non-vehicular access routes (including through the Wilson, through Benedict Wharf, through the Birches, between Church Road and London Road Playing Fields, between Three Kings Piece and Mitcham Common and from Riverside Drive to Watermeads)
- Requiring long term maintenance of planting and trees associated with new development through aftercare conditions and funds for their long term monitoring and to recognise the established arboricultural practice that new and replacement tree species will need to be resilient to climate change and so increasingly may not be native to the UK
- Strengthening planning policy to ensure that any development related to sport or recreation is well designed and respects the natural and historic environment, including the avoidance of light pollution from external illumination or inappropriate floodlights (as evidenced in The Canons)
- Removing cars and the railings running along King George VI Avenue which bisect Cranmer Green as recommended in the Cricket Green Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan.
- Recognising Bellamy's Copse in the grounds of The Canons as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation
- Undertaking a significant programme of succession planting of trees throughout the area
- Removing cars parked on the registered Town Green alongside Commonsides East
- Recognising key views and vistas in the area by protecting them and ensuring appropriate management of trees and other vegetation to ensure they are not blocked – see [Wandle Vistas](#) for some priority examples
- Sensitive boundary treatments to green spaces which prevent illegal incursions while being sympathetic to the character of the area, with an increased use of hedgerows in view of their contribution to wildlife corridors and mitigating air pollution
- Safeguarding private open space in front gardens through strong controls over their paving for off street parking