



BENEDICT WHARF – outline application for 600 homes
Application number 19/P2383
July 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 the Borough Character Studies, the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan and numerous development proposals in the area. We have worked with the London Borough of Merton and our local councillors to produce the Cricket Green Charter which establishes our approach to development and change in the area and has been acknowledged in the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan for Cricket Green (<http://mitchamcricketgreen.files.wordpress.com/2013/04/cricket-green-charter.pdf>). We have also contributed to production of the Merton Heritage Strategy as a member of the Merton Heritage Forum. We are members of The Canons Steering Group delivering a £5m Lottery funded project and also undertake practical projects, organise walks and run Mitcham Heritage Day and Community on the Green. We are celebrating the 50th anniversary of Mitcham Cricket Green Conservation Area this year.

2. The Benedict Wharf site has long been a focus for our work. It is the largest previously developed site in the neighbourhood and strategically located at a key gateway to Mitcham Cricket Green Conservation Area. Any development of the site will have significant consequences for public access and links between Mitcham and Morden. We have campaigned for many years to reduce the impact of the site's current use on local amenity, including speaking in City Hall at the Mayor of London's call-in of earlier plans to intensify waste management uses. We have undertaken [lorry surveys](#) which demonstrate the major impact of the waste management facility on the historic section of Church Road in the Conservation Area and adjacent to the primary school. We are aware of other issues the site creates including significant odour problems for those living near the site. We are members of the Community Liaison Group. Our input has helped to secure many of the public consultation exercises undertaken for this application. We have publicised and supported these exercises as part of our civic role.

3. We share the view that Benedict Wharf is a wholly inappropriate site for industrial uses. We welcome the plans to relocate to a more suitable location on Beddington Lane. Benedict Wharf is unsuitable for Strategic Industrial Land allocation and, given the future site in Beddington Lane has lain dormant for many years, we believe it entirely appropriate for this allocation to be removed from Benedict Wharf to allow for much more appropriate residential development. We believe the need for a waste management site in the area is met through the new Beddington Lane development and that the need for Strategic Industrial Land more generally is met through the emerging

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Local Plan, which includes measures both to allocate new sites and intensify the use of existing ones. Merton has a significant area of industrial land and much of it is not intensively used.

4. We have warmly welcomed SUEZ's initial approach to repurposing Benedict Wharf. Its early public acknowledgment of the negative local impact of its operations combined with a commitment to secure a future legacy which local people and SUEZ would be proud of was refreshing and encouraging. We appreciated working closely with SUEZ in responding to Merton Council's call for sites and there is considerable alignment in our submissions. We are pleased that Merton Council's draft Local Plan agrees with our approach to a broad definition of the site allocation to include the Cappagh site and land owned by Merton Council along Hallowfield Way.

5. We are concerned that SUEZ's commitment to securing its legacy in the quality of future development has been diluted as the proposals have progressed. We are further concerned that the commitment is unlikely to be secured through an outline application. This will allow the site to be sold off at an enhanced valued and built out by a different developer who may bring forward a scheme which will not match up to SUEZ's stated commitments for the quality of development. There are too many reserved matters for us to be confident in the quality of the scheme that will be brought forward.

6. We have welcomed SUEZ's response to our representations on the need to secure design quality by providing a design code and comment on this below. In order to be confident in the scheme we have asked SUEZ also to give consideration to further commitments on the landscape, open space and pedestrian routes around and through the site and to a programme of community investment. We should be pleased to supplement these representations ahead of the planning application being determined should these or other commitments come forward.

Community engagement

7. We have worked hard to secure effective pre-application engagement from SUEZ. This has included two opportunities for the public to look at display boards, a managed workshop and a walk through the site and the surrounding area. While welcome, we have often had to push hard for these engagement opportunities, and we are disappointed that there has been no effort to collaborate and co-design the future of the site. The community's role has been limited to responding to SUEZ's proposals. We do not recognise the "*continuous engagement with the existing community*" claimed in the proposed Design Code. The approach might best be summarised as "Goldilocks' consultation" over false choices – with feedback usually invited on three options where the first is stated as not being viable or compliant with externally driven housing targets and the third is presented as major overdevelopment of the site. Unsurprisingly, the outline planning application has emerged from the second option.

8. We have been particularly disappointed that, at our request, SUEZ undertook work on what was labelled a "Create Streets" option based on houses and streets and even presented this to a meeting of the Community Liaison Group but has point blank refused to provide details and allow critical review against the plans it has brought forward. This is one illustration of an inadequate consultation process that does not meet the NPPF requirements for applicants to "*work closely with those affected by their proposals to evolve designs that take account of the views of the community. Applications that can demonstrate early, proactive and effective engagement with the community should be looked on more favourably than those that cannot*" (paragraph 128). We believe there is too little evidence of the Benedict Wharf scheme design being altered to take account of community views and that its engagement has not been effective enough for it to be looked on favourably. The lack of transparency for the pre-application advice provided by Merton Council on different aspects of the proposals further weakens confidence and public trust in the quality of the scheme. It cannot be appropriate for the pre-application advice not to have been written up and made

available, not least given the existence of a Planning Performance Agreement to support administration of the application.

9. We ask that any outline planning consent is conditional on early local community engagement prior to the submission of detailed proposals for implementation of an outline planning permission, and that this engagement is of the highest standard, incorporating best practice on co-design, community input and real joint working. This can be secured by SUEZ through the terms on which it sells the site.

10. The outline application gives every impression of being a scheme designed to meet an externally driven housing requirement established by GLA planning officers as a quid pro quo for repurposing Strategic Industrial Land. It does not represent an appropriate design and density response to the local context and community feedback. We believe the resulting development will feel placeless and not part of Mitcham. It will also cause harm to significant heritage and other assets.

Masterplan

11. The outline application has been brought forward in advance of Merton's Local Plan review. It is recognised as a departure from the development plan. While supporting the change of use of the site from waste management to residential we are concerned that this will compromise the wider opportunity for the local areas from development of this site.

12. Benedict Wharf is key to unlocking a much more significant development opportunity that also embraces the Cappagh Site, Merton Council's land along Hallowfield Way, Worsfold House and La Sporta. It is also adjacent to a potential tram extension or bus rapid transit route.

13. It is clear that the commitment to achieving these wider objectives remains weak. The most basic requirement is an effective link between the site and Belgrave Walk tram stop across TfL land and yet the best the Statement of Community Involvement can offer is "*the possibility of an interim pedestrian and cycle route connecting the southwest corner of the site directly to the tram stop.*"

14. We ask that any development of Benedict Wharf and these other sites is addressed in this wider context and each is future proofed for the development of all of the others.

Urban design

15. The development should respect the character of Mitcham and be led by an urban design vision that emphasises the importance of streets and houses. It should be of a height that avoids visual intrusion, shadowing and encroachment on London Road Playing Fields and negative impacts on views from the two adjacent Conservation Areas. The quality of the scheme should be such that there is public pressure to include the whole site within a Conservation Area within 10 years. This would mark a fitting transformation of Benedict Wharf with its long history of "bad neighbour" uses and provide the positive legacy which SUEZ states it wants to leave for the site.

16. This quality is not achieved by the outline application. It largely comprises pavilion and other blocks of flats of moderate design quality which are excessively high, lack local character and will cause significant visual intrusion.

17. The poor and misleading quality of analysis in the supporting documents is evidenced by the review of the impact on key views. It is not credible to associate the self-evident visual impact of the scheme on London Road Playing Fields revealed in the photo-montages with a written assessment that the scheme will have a "*moderate &*

beneficial impact" and *"not appear overly dominant"*. The quality of analysis undermines trust in all the evidence provided in justification of the development.



18. The pavilion blocks are a particularly weak aspect of the design which maximise the negative impact on London Road Playing Fields and appear driven more by the commercial value of the views which are offered to purchasers. They also create areas of uncertain public realm between and around the blocks.

19. The primacy of the Grade II* listed Mitcham Parish Church at the gateway to the Conservation Area and the key access to the site is not respected and the development should be subordinate to this by virtue of its height and massing.

20. The Design and Access Statement neither demonstrates how the proposals respond to the [character study for Cricket Green](#) nor how it preserves or enhances Mitcham Cricket Green and Wandle Valley Conservation Areas which both abut the site.

21. We welcome the inclusion of the Design Code with five character areas as a response to the need to secure a high standard of development from whoever undertakes the detailed design but this is not binding. Instead, following the Design Code is *"strongly encouraged"* and it is dependent on Merton Council having the capability to *"test and review proposals for Benedict Wharf from inception to delivery"* without providing the resources or the skills necessary to do this. The Design Code also fails to address two recurring themes that came through the community involvement in the proposals – a preference for homes provided on streets and avoiding an increase in the height of buildings in the area (as evidenced on page 25 of the Design and Access Statement which shows only one building of six storeys local to the site). The Design Code does not deliver the natural extension of Mitcham which the local community has asked for.

22. We ask that any outline planning consent is conditional on a mandatory design code that delivers a quality of development capable of being included in a Conservation Area within 10 years.

Access and permeability

23. The Benedict Wharf site presents a major physical barrier to movement through the area. Mitcham Parish Church is, for example, closer to Morden Hall Park than Merton Civic Centre but the interaction between them is far less. The development provides a strategic opportunity to transform permeability at a neighbourhood scale.

24. We have identified opportunities to create new pedestrian and cycling routes linking Mitcham to Ravensbury Park, the Wandle, Morden Hall Park and Morden (including through the Phipps Bridge green spaces) and to provide direct access to London Road through Baron and Fenning Courts. We welcome their inclusion in the proposals but there is no confidence in their delivery.

25. We ask that any outline planning consent is conditional on delivery of these new routes and subject to legal agreements securing their delivery beyond the immediate site.

26. The outline planning application provides high level commitments to investment in the future of Church Path and Baron Walk public rights of way but these lack necessary detail. Both public rights of way have important historical associations and a distinct character and the residential stretch of Church Path is of the highest townscape quality that should be preserved and enhanced by the scheme. Any outline planning consent should be conditional on a detailed assessment of the historic character of Church Path and Baron Walk. This should inform proposals that respect their character. It is imperative to avoid the residential stretch of Church Path becoming a major through route for cyclists and illegal use by mopeds. The proposed access along this stretch of Church Path should be redirected along a repurposed Hallowfield Way and this will also both make for a more appropriate route for users to join Church Road and avoid unnecessary loss of trees. Assessing and valuing the character of the historic rights of way will also avoid their conversion into placeless new routes characterised more by engineering standards in their construction than their sense of place. The opportunity should be taken to remove the unnecessary fencing along the boundary with London Road Playing Fields.

27. We also ask that the route of the Surrey Iron Railway (the world's first public railway) and the medieval Ravensbury Path (omitted in much of the historical analysis) is recognised in the scheme and that the Ravensbury Path benefits from sensitive investment.

Diversity of builders

28. The scale of the development at Benedict Wharf provides an opportunity to address the expectations in national planning policy to speed up delivery of new homes by working with developers to encourage sub-division of the site (paragraph 68) and to meet the requirements of the Self Build and Custom Build Housing Act 2015 (paragraph 61) as well as making provision for community-led housing delivered through a Community Land Trust. These opportunities and their implications for the speed (currently over three phases) and certainty of delivery and meeting local housing needs are not addressed in the outline application.

29. We ask that any planning consent is conditional on an assessment of the opportunity for delivery by multiple developers, including provision for community-led housing. The site should not be built out by a single developer.

London Road Playing Fields

30. The development proposals depend in large part on the amenity provided by London Road Playing Fields for new residents – "*living by the park*". Their design is heavily influenced by the prospect of views over this open space from the new pavilion blocks. The scheme provides a transformational opportunity to invest in London Road Playing Fields for the benefit of existing residents as well those moving in to Benedict Wharf. These plans need to be based on a careful assessment of its existing character and future opportunities, including its tranquillity and wildlife value. London Road Playing Fields contains significant areas of woodland and grassland which could offer more for wildlife and local amenity. It also provides opportunities to establish new routes from both London Road and Church Road through the development site to Ravensbury Park and Morden Hall Park. The current plans largely want to 'take' what London Road Playing Fields offer as a way of marketing properties rather than truly valuing the space and investing in it for all users and addressing the negative impacts. The opportunity should also be taken to rename London Road Playing Fields as Baron Fields to raise its profile and secure much more active community engagement in its future.

31. We ask that any outline planning consent is conditional on a community-led assessment of the character and opportunities for London Road Playing Fields and an investment plan for delivery.

Surrounding public realm

32. We welcome the intention to restrict vehicular access to the site through Church Path to emergency vehicles. The impact of the scheme on Church Path will still be significant and any outline planning consent should include commitments to improve the public realm of the Church Path cul de sac and remove lorry access rights such that Church Path operates as an area where pedestrians and vehicles have equal priority. We address the need to re-direct the proposed Church Path cycle route to Hollowfield Way in paragraph 26.

33. The development is dependent on access from Church Road via Hollowfield Way. This route currently offers a degraded public realm dominated by underused highway and a poorly configured and designed roundabout. The roundabout is located at a key gateway to Mitcham Cricket Green Conservation Area. More consideration should be given to addressing the poor state of the highway and public realm. Any outline planning consent should be conditional on investment that improves the public realm in Hollowfield Way and at the junction with Church Road and enhances the gateway to the Conservation Area. This should include investment in the sensitive boundary with Benedict School. Hollowfield Way needs reimagining as a residential street, aided by development of Merton Council's land fronting Hollowfield Way as part of a more integrated development.

Community investment

34. The outline planning application provides few commitments to necessary investment in local community infrastructure and assets despite the scale of development proposed and its local impact. We would expect a [community investment programme](#) akin to that provided by The Collective for its development proposals by Trewint Street bridge in Earlsfield for a smaller scheme providing fewer than 300 co-living spaces.

35. The Benedict Wharf plans make no provision for on-site community facilities. We agree that this infrastructure is best provided from the existing community facilities and providers. Existing community infrastructure therefore needs committed investment if it is not to carry an unfair burden in addressing demands generated by the scheme.

36. We have identified the following community investment priorities:

- A management plan and endowment for London Road Playing Fields (an endowment was required by the Mayor of London from SITA (as it was known then) upon completion of the unimplemented plans for more intensive waste management on the site, so a precedent has been set)
- New and enhanced routes:
 - through Phipps Bridge to Morden Hall Park
 - from London Road between Baron and Fenning Courts
- Major improvements to Mitcham Parish Centre and Mitcham Parish Church as community facilities supported by a community endowment
- Enhancements to Ravensbury Path, Church Path and Baron Walk which also respect their character as historic pedestrian routes
- A long term solution to the future of the La Sporta building which brings it into positive community use.

37. We ask that any planning consent is condition on preparation of a community investment programme, informed by existing providers of community infrastructure in

the local area. This programme should be required to be delivered in tandem with the development of the site.

38. Additionally, it will be important that the scheme is supported by appropriate investment in public transport provision, including the route, frequency and capacity of the 200 bus.

Commercial use

39. We recognise the potential of the site to accommodate a small amount of commercial development focused in one area to service the needs of new residents and the surrounding area. We do not support an A3 use within the mix of uses as this could give rise to significant disturbance from take aways and home deliveries. We do not support commercial use being allocated for the area of the site immediately adjacent to existing residential development in Church Path. The intrinsic residential character and high quality townscape of Church Path should be enhanced and not damaged by the scheme and the commercial opportunity is better located as part of a repurposing of Hallowfield Way and/or adjacent to the tram stop.

40. In conclusion, we ask that the issues raised in these representations are addressed prior to determination of the outline planning application or that it is refused. We stand ready to engage further with all parties to bring about the best outcomes for this critical site and its environs.