

Appendix 1: Merton 2030 Strategic Framework

Our Ambition for Merton 2030

Our ambition is to make Merton a place you are proud to call home - a borough that enables you to get as far as you want to go, and a place where nobody is left behind.

This means building on our past educational and economic successes, and ensuring you have the skills and job opportunities you need to go places and fulfil your ambitions. It means building on our core strength of local communities and how we support them to thrive.

Above all, it means listening to you – by investing into the things you want to see developed, such as our high streets, open spaces and community hubs, and by tackling the things you told us need improvement - including street cleanliness, parking and transport.

To achieve all this, we will set five clear work programmes.



Fig. 1: Key themes from Your Merton engagement

What will Merton look and feel like in 2030?

Our aim is that by 2030, those programmes have delivered a real difference in quality of life in the borough.

Our biggest assets, our **local communities**, are thriving – communities have a sense of identity and pride in their area, and people feel connected and safe locally. Most of all nobody is left behind, with both community and council support for those in need.

In addition, people are spending more time in the area because we've helped deliver **better quality spaces** to spend their leisure and family time; we've encouraged more diversity into our local High Streets; and invested into our highly-rated open spaces.

Local high streets are now bustling, with a mix of independent and high-street traders, as well as cafes, restaurants and community spaces. They feature a visible improvement in **street-scene and cleanliness**. They are now places to spend time to relax, socialize and stay healthy, not just places to go when you need something. And each one is unique, reflecting the needs of its communities.

Investment into improving **access to skills & education** has allowed people to make the most of a stronger local economy, with a focus on supporting schools, apprenticeships, colleges and adult education helping more people into local employment as career opportunities grow.

But we have also incorporated our residents' biggest local priority – a **cleaner, and greener borough**. We've improved our key open spaces, and our green-flag parks are now the place of choice during the summer for local families. Additionally, we are delivering on our commitments around climate change and air pollution. This has meant change, but we've engaged residents in it and people recognise why it is necessary.

Finally, we have invested to **celebrate our history and the diversity** across each community in the borough. Local references & infrastructure generate pride in what makes us Merton – our local communities. To deliver all this, the council is working collaboratively with local communities and partners more than ever before.

How we are going to deliver Merton 2030

Five strategic priorities will drive delivery of our ambition and guide the strategic direction of the council and its partners. Each priority has delivery objectives which set out what we aim to achieve in the coming decade, alongside those projects that are currently being delivered in the borough.

Through further collaboration and engagement, we will be developing more detailed plans to shape delivery of Merton 2030 together with our partners and communities. Collective action will be key to achieving all priorities, and there will be opportunities for everyone to get involved.

Priority 1: Maintaining Excellent Education and Skills

Education and skills will be key to opening up opportunities for Merton residents in the wake of the pandemic and supporting the borough's economic recovery - whether that's through early years settings, primary and secondary school, further education or adult education.

Children and young people across the borough deserve the best start in life and opportunities for the future, no matter what their situation or where they live in our borough. Merton has prided itself on being a great place for families and offering an excellent standard of education. However, the pandemic and online learning has had a greater impact on those who are more disadvantaged with the risk of widening the gap in school readiness and attainment between the east and West of the borough.

In the Youth Survey research on the impact of Covid-19, 73.1% percent of young people said they were worried or very worried about falling behind and or less confident about their learning because of Covid-19 and lockdown. Many reported that their future plans have changed as a consequence of Covid-19.

Merton will be a borough where the potential of all our residents is maximised, especially our children and young people.

Working with our schools, libraries, further education sector and our local charities, voluntary groups and businesses we will develop a renewed employability and skills offer in the borough. Improving the pathways between education and employment will enable Merton to build its local skills base and increase opportunities for young people and those on lower incomes.

In the longer term, Merton will be looking ahead to future growth sectors and how we can position ourselves to capture the skills opportunities – for example, the transition to a green, net zero economy and continued growth of the tech sector.

What we're doing now

- Expanding our SEND places to provide excellent education for children in our borough with special educational needs.
- Working with schools on catch-up from Covid, including targeted additional mental health support for pupils and support for those at risk of falling behind.
- Investing in a new Apprenticeship scheme targeted at young care-leavers and other young people facing disadvantage in Merton to help them access employment opportunities
- Piloting a new programme of support for young people with learning disabilities to support them towards employment and volunteering skills.
- Supporting digital skills and connection for those who are digitally excluded through the Connecting Merton project by offering laptops on loan through libraries and classes.
- Establishing digital, education and wellbeing hubs in libraries

What we're planning for the future

By 2025...

- We will work with partners to develop vibrant partnerships on youth employability – co-produced with young people.
- We will expand our work in partnership with our local colleges to develop more opportunities for Merton residents and pathways to further skills and employment.
- We will work with our local business sector to exploit the Apprenticeship Levy to its fullest and support local employment and skills.

By 2030...

- We will maximise the skills opportunities in the transition to a green, net zero economy and work with partners in the business sector (such as our industrial estates) to develop a local green jobs skills base.
- We will work with partners to develop a compelling offer to bring the tech sector to Merton and increase our digital skills base in our local workforce.

Priority 2: Promote a dynamic, connected and inclusive community and economy with safe, vibrant high streets and jobs for our residents

Community spirit and connection matter to residents in Merton - they value the diversity in our communities, want to hold onto the community spirit from the pandemic and see more places in their local area where people can come together. Young people felt more positive about their local area during the pandemic but want to see tangible change for the future.

High streets are often viewed as the heart of a community but many people in Merton are dissatisfied with the offer in their town centres, especially in the east of the borough. The pandemic risks accelerating the decline of our local high streets with more people shopping online, businesses closing down and more vacant premises. Some parts of the borough have been worse affected by anti-social behaviour and seen an increase in reported incidents over lockdown.

People who live and work in Merton want the town centres to be places where they can spend time, with things to do and opportunities to catch up with family and friends. They want to see action and investment targeted to the areas that need it most.

Revitalising high streets as hubs of the community will be the future of town centres in Merton - supporting a connected community and driving local economic recovery.

Merton has a wealth of local assets to draw on – our business sector with a range of small businesses and a vibrant self-employed workforce; our community infrastructure such schools, libraries and sports facilities; our exceptional green spaces and excellent transport links. Using space in our town centres differently could unlock huge potential.

The council will work collaboratively with the local business sector, community and voluntary sector to think creatively about ways to repurpose our high streets and opportunities to bring in good quality investment. Making sure our high streets are safe, accessible and welcome to all for the future will be an important part of this.

Looking to the future, our focus will be to regenerate high streets in Merton, develop a model for community development and do more to grow a sustainable green economy in Merton, supporting the transition to low carbon economy and a green recovery.

What we're doing now

- Developing support to local businesses including an e-commerce digital platform to promote local independent businesses as a 'virtual high street', a market management offer in Mitcham and a local register of medium sized business in Merton
- Trialing 'Health on the High Street' a pop-up health and wellbeing service on Mitcham High Street
- Introducing the Workery in Mitcham - a co-working space for local start-ups, entrepreneurs and freelancers, building on the successful model of Wimbletech CIC.
- Bringing a community banking service and debt advice into East Merton libraries so businesses and residents can access local community banking.
- Delivering parklets, outdoor seating and spaces for events, as improvements to the public realm and support for the hospitality sector
- Investing in extra capacity for street pastors in high streets and night-time economy with focus on safety of women and girls
- Carrying out a communication campaign and engagement to seek views and raise awareness around the safety of women and girls in the borough
- Commissioning an innovation lab approach to develop ideas for the future of Merton's high streets in collaboration with the business sector and partners.

What we're planning for the future

By 2025.....

- We will set up an investment fund to support community development through our Strategic Partner Grant programme.
- We will use all assets and levers at our disposal to kick-start the regeneration of key town centres – in particular Morden and Mitcham - and leverage external funding for the long term.
- We will continue to support creation of different types of services and workspaces on our high streets to support entrepreneurship, self-employment and working close to home.
- We will support businesses by working to improve internet connectivity and faster WiFi, addressing internet cold spots in East Merton

By 2030....

- We will regenerate Morden High Street, including development of affordable housing
- We will develop Masterplan for Mitcham to maximise the area's economic opportunities in the long term while capitalising on existing assets.
- We will work with our industrial sector to identify opportunities to develop the green economy in Merton, looking ahead to a low carbon transition.

Priority 3: Supporting and caring for residents who are most in need and promote the safety and wellbeing of our communities.

Supporting those who are most in need in Merton and reducing health inequalities will be key to building resilient and safe communities and the wider conditions that make up a healthy place.

The pandemic showed the level of unmet need in parts of our borough and shone a light on existing inequalities, especially in the East of the borough. People with care and support needs, such as the elderly and disabled people, were hardest hit, as were vulnerable children. Some have been at greater risk of violence, abuse and harm, such as survivors of domestic abuse.

Many have felt isolated during this time and had difficulties accessing their usual support network and local services. Two in five young people said that they were concerned about their mental health during lockdown and want to see more support, advice and understanding for mental health in the future.

Merton will be a healthy and safe place where people across the borough can thrive and get access to the right support at the right time.

Prevention will guide our approach at all points so that people can get help at an earlier stage. Residents will be both empowered and supported to lead healthy, happy and independent lives. Where people do need supported residential care we will ensure that as far as practicable that this is in Merton so that people remain close to their networks of support.

Young people will be involved in decisions about the future of the borough and their voice will matter, in response to Youth Parliament recommendations from the survey on the impact of Covid-19 on young people.

Looking ahead, Merton will work on developing a longer-term strategic approach to community empowerment and support, based on a new framework for working collaboratively with communities. This will set out how the Council can take action with Merton communities at different levels to ensure that everyone gets help when they need it and that in turn these communities are more resilient and empowered.

Drawing on the community infrastructure in Merton will be key to promoting the safety and wellbeing of our communities – harnessing Merton’s diverse voluntary and community sector and its community assets as well as working with our partners in health, police and social care. People greatly value the support from local grassroots organisations, faith groups and mutual aid networks and want to see more of this in future.

What we're doing now

- Recommissioning our Community Hub to build on the local support offer from our voluntary sector partners for residents who are most need.
- Establishing a Youth Fund which will be jointly managed by young people and the Children Trust to respond to the needs evidenced in the Merton Youth survey
- Piloting our Transforming How We Work with Communities approach looking at Early Years Speech and Language and Young People's wellbeing.
- Collaborating with the NHS on a refreshed Health and Care plan to tackle health inequalities in Merton.
- Introducing the Mockingbird model to support local foster carers so that more young people can be placed in foster care closer to home

What we're going to do

By 2025...

- We will be offering a redesigned early help offer for parents and children to provide support and interventions at earlier stage
- We will develop a contextual safeguarding approach for children and young people at risk from harm, exploitation, and abuse outside the home.
- We will develop and commission a new model of support at home for the most vulnerable from 2023
- We will improve transition for young adults between child and adult services through joint commissioning opportunities.
- We will develop a long-term model for community empowerment and support in collaboration with our local partners and communities.

By 2030...

- We will be embedding prevention of ill health and promotion of wellbeing into everything we do as a Council through a 'Health in all Policies' approach - informed by a robust evidence base.
- We will adopt our new long-term model for community empowerment and support to embed our approach to working collaboratively with communities through

Priority 4: Ensure a clean and environmentally sustainable borough with inclusive open spaces where people can come together and there is a variety of natural life

Merton is one of the greenest borough in London with a diverse range of parks, recreation grounds, waterways and nature trails which are greatly loved by its residents. They are viewed as shared assets of the community – place where people can escape urban life, de-stress and come together with friends and family. But they are also key to tackling climate change – cooling the built environment, improving air quality, mitigating impacts such as flooding and supporting biodiversity.

Residents are concerned about climate change and want to see the Council act as a leader, especially our young people who named it as their top concern. Maximising Merton's green spaces to their fullest extent will be key to building a borough that tackles climate change challenge and embeds environmental sustainability in everything it does.

Residents want Merton to be a clean, green and environmentally sustainable borough that they can take pride in. Getting the basics right through delivering our 'Cleaner Greener Programme' will be key to addressing residents' frustrations and meeting their expectations on cleanliness and effective waste management.

Our aim is to become a borough which is known for its fantastic green spaces filled with nature – a haven from urban life used by all our communities and the key to tackling climate change.

Our residents are ambitious for our green spaces and deeply value them. We will engage with our partners, community groups and residents – including young residents in Merton - for their ideas on how we can make the most of our parks and green spaces for the future, navigating any tensions and trade-offs.

Our green spaces are key to our aspirations for Merton as a healthy place and will have an important role to play in our plans to tackle health inequalities in the long term – in particular boosting mental and physical health and mitigating risks from air pollution.

Between now and 2050 the borough aspires to become net zero. To achieve this, Merton will need to progress an ambitious climate change agenda – supporting a green recovery and transition to a low carbon economy; tackling waste management issues and promoting more walking and cycling. Involving young people in action on the environment will be an important to achieving these ambitions and building a clean, healthy, sustainable borough for the next generation.

What we are doing now

- Investing additional £250,000 into street scene cleanliness as part of our Cleaner Greener Merton Programme.
- Investing an additional £400,000 in a range of enhanced enforcement activity and increased street cleansing capacity, including piloting a park ranger service to improve safety in our parks and green spaces
- Installing air quality sensors in priority locations around the borough to support our ambition to tackle toxic air pollution
- Promoting active travel and air quality through schools by engaging with parents and young people on school active travel policies and introducing School Streets.
- Planting more trees through the Urban Tree Challenge to progress towards our targets for increasing tree canopy cover by 2050.

What we are going to do

By 2025...

- We will increase youth involvement in our green spaces and climate action plan with a link to the green economy and designing our future for Merton.
- We will review our contract with Veolia for street cleanliness and waste management.
- We will decarbonise our operational building stock and vehicle fleet
- We will develop a long-term plan for walking, cycling and EV charging infrastructure

By 2030...

- We will be on track to meet our target of increasing the tree canopy coverage by 10% in Merton by 2050.
- We will achieve net-zero targets in Climate Change Strategy, including the targets of the council to be carbon neutral by 2030 and borough to be carbon neutral by 2050.

Priority 5: Work to make Merton a fairer, more equal borough and support those on lower income by tackling poverty and fighting for affordable housing.

A better future for the borough must be one which all people in Merton feel part of and benefit from. Working side by side with communities and supporting them to build on their assets will be key to making Merton a fairer more equal borough and improving the lives for those on lower income.

There is hope that the crisis offers a point to build a fairer and more equitable place for the future. In the East of the borough, there are higher levels of overcrowding, poor health, deprivation and poverty and a greater proportion of lower income households, which continue to be hit harder by economic uncertainty and rising household costs. But there are also vibrant diverse communities where people are well connected and look out for each other.

People in these parts of the borough want to see these issues addressed but are clear that there are huge strengths and assets in their local area. They want to feel positive about the future, see action in the local area and be involved in making things better for their community.

Merton will become a borough where opportunities are the same for all residents – a better future which all people in Merton feel part of and benefit from

Looking ahead, there is an opportunity to build on the success of the Merton Community Hub so that a wide support and advice offer is available at a local level to residents experiencing poverty, expanding referral pathways across the borough.

The council will improve how it uses data to build a more accurate picture of hardship and vulnerability that can give better insight into our communities, inform delivery and targeted interventions.

Good quality, affordable housing is fundamental to a decent standard of living. Increasing housing supply with a share of affordable housing that meets local need and ensuring housing is delivered to high standards will be a top priority for Merton - requiring a joint effort by the council and housing providers.

What we are doing now

- Continuing to provide financial support to those on lower income through the household support grant and council tax support scheme
- Administering additional financial assistance targeted to those on low income during Winter 2021 including free school meal provision over the holidays and a range of holiday activities for children.
- Improving our use of data to build an accurate picture of hardship and vulnerability as part of our Supporting Families programme
- Refreshing our Equalities strategy to tackle inequalities and disadvantage in the borough in the wake of Covid-19.
- Increasing the supply of temporary accommodation through joining the pan-London Capital Letters' scheme to procure properties

What we're going to do

By 2025...

- We will explore how we can redefine the social contract with the community and maximize social value through the council's procurement processes
- We will develop initiatives to improve connectivity and increase digital inclusion for East of the borough

By 2030...

- We will deliver affordable housing and quality housing through regeneration of High Park and Eastfields
- We will increase housing supply through the redevelopment of Morden Town Centre.
- Building affordable housing for our residents to enable people to stay in the borough, rather than being pushed out for due to high housing costs - linked to supporting high wage jobs in borough for residents

What you can expect from us

Our ambition for Merton 2030 can only be achieved by working in collaboration with our partners, businesses and community groups. Over the next six months, we will work together to develop plans for delivery and a roadmap for how we will work together to achieve our collective ambition.

As a council, we have an important role to enable delivery against these five strategic priorities. We have already invested £1million to kick start delivery and will be developing an investment strategy to guide future resourcing.

We have identified ten principles which will guide our delivery as a council in the years ahead– setting out what you can expect from us and how we will work across the council to deliver the best for the borough and our communities.

1. Engage, involve and communicate effectively with our community.

Our residents care a lot about their borough and want to be involved in conversations about the future. We will engage, involve and communicate effectively so that our community has a voice and is kept informed about what is happening in their local area.

2. Actively promote equality, representation and inclusion

Merton is proud to have diverse communities. We will actively celebrate and promote equality, representation and inclusion in everything we do as a council and in our communities across Merton.

3. Aim to keep council tax at or below the south London average

At a time of increased financial pressure on households, we will aim to keep our council tax at the same level or lower than the South London average to reduce the financial burden on our residents as far as possible.

4. Ensuring financial stability and value for money

Our residents expect us to be responsible stewards of the council finances and to make the best use of the resources at our disposal while delivering for our residents. We will continue to ensure financial stability while delivering safe services of the best possible quality and finding innovative solutions to maximise efficiency.

5. Invest in the efficient & secure use of digital tech & data

Modernising our use of digital technologies and data will enable us to become a smarter and more evidence-led council. Developing a digital strategy, making better use of insight and intelligence and offering more digitally designed services will all be key to supporting delivery of the ambition.

6. Work with and learn from national, regional and local partners.

We will collaborate with our local partners and grassroots organisations to shape how we collectively deliver the priorities, building on our strong history of partnership working in Merton. We will learn from best practice across London and other local authorities to identify the right solutions for Merton.

7. Consider the environmental and social impact of all that we do

At all points, we will consider the impact on our communities of anything we do, especially for those who are most disadvantaged. Our commitment to tackling climate change means that we will design policies, programmes and strategies with the environment and climate change impact in mind.

8. Monitor our progress – from local to global.

We will use the data and insight that we have about the borough and its population to set a baseline and monitor our progress against our aims. We will draw on UN Sustainable Development Goals to set indicators for tracking delivery and impact against our priorities.

9. Put Merton first in all economic and financial decisions

We will look at how we can champion Merton in our financial decisions, especially our commissioning and procurement as a council and how it could best benefit our local communities and economy.

10. Look to the long term

We will act with long term in mind to achieve sustainable and measurable change—using all opportunities and levers at our disposal to make progress in the short term but with a clear strategic direction for the future.

What we are doing now

- Commissioning an external financial assessment to support a refreshed investment strategy
- Additional investment in IT to improve our digital capabilities and delivery of services to our residents
- Creating a workforce strategy to ensure the council has the right workforce, skills and support for staff with a focus on health and wellbeing
- Developing an equality and inclusion strategy for the council and investing in initiatives to strengthen our ability to be a fully inclusive and cohesive workforce
- Investing in additional communications and community engagement capacity, in including improvements to social media engagement with residents and support for Merton2030 rollout.