



**MITCHAM SOCIETY**

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## **Response to Merton Council “Mitcham Matters” consultation on the future of “Mitcham Town Centre”**

### **Ten Point Action Plan for Mitcham Village**

**August 2023**

Mitcham Society welcomes Merton Council’s initiative to ask people about the future of “Mitcham Town Centre” (sic).

We published our first Manifesto for Mitcham Village in 2021, and updated this in March 2023. Our Manifesto for Mitcham Village and our response to the 2023 Scrutiny Review on public toilet provision are of key relevance to this current Mitcham Matters consultation. They are appended to this paper and form part of our response.

In addition to the content of those two papers, we have produced a Ten Point Action Plan for Mitcham Village.

While there is some overlap with some of the content of our Manifesto for Mitcham Village and response to the 2023 Scrutiny Review on public toilet provision, this Action Plan provides Merton Council with some priority goals based on very practical actions it can incorporate into the outcomes focused response we expect to be produced as a result of the current consultation.

### **Ten Point Action Plan for Mitcham Village**

1. Formally recognise Mitcham Village. Merton Council should do what local people are doing in increasing numbers, and recognise that Mitcham Village is the appropriate descriptor for the area which the council currently refers to as “Mitcham Town Centre”. As a minimum Mitcham Village includes the Fair Green open space, the market area, the

shopping parades around Fair Green, Langdale Parade, Upper Green East as it proceeds towards Three Kings Pond and Three Kings Pond itself.

2. Commit to ensuring the maximum possible pedestrian access and the minimum possible motor vehicle access to the Village, enabling people to visit and spend time in an oasis of calm and tranquillity.
3. Take specific action to reduce and remove motor traffic from Mitcham Village. For example:
  - a. Remove motor traffic along Upper Green East, allowing free flowing pedestrian movement from Fair Green to Three Kings Pond. If this proves impossible, widen pavements, restrict traffic flow, and enforce against fly parking in the strongest possible way.
  - b. Close to motor traffic: Upper Green East from Montrose Gardens to Majestic Way, the Majestic Way border with the market area, and the Upper Green West border of Fair Green. In no sense do motor vehicles moving along these streets and parking along them help with the Mitcham Village atmosphere and ethos. They create a physical barrier between the market / Fair Green and shops, bring visual intrusion, noise, and introduce harmful pollutants into our green oasis.
4. Work with the relevant authorities to remove the current significant barriers to pedestrian access to Mitcham Village that are created by ineffective, poorly phased, and badly designed road crossings / traffic lights. These include newer crossings created during the Rediscover Mitcham works, as well as older crossings, and include those in the heart of Mitcham Village as well as those on the approaches. Examples:
  - a. Split crossings such as at Upper Green West which require two push-button waits, and have raised kerbs which are a trip hazard. These result in long pedestrian waits, and encourage people to cross when the lights are not in their favour, creating hazardous situations.
  - b. The multi way crossing at Raleigh Gardens / Western Road / Holborn Way (the Lidl crossing), which currently involves multiple waits for lights to change. This crossing would benefit from an all stop phase and diagonal crossing for pedestrians and cyclists.
  - c. The push button crossing on Upper Green East near Clarendon Road where the wait is exceptionally long. There is no other crossing nearby and sight lines are good. This should be replaced with a raised zebra crossing.
  - d. The T-junction at Raleigh Gardens / London Road where multiple sets of lights need to change for pedestrians to cross. This junction needs to be reimagined with pedestrians taking priority.

5. Commit to providing standalone public toilets, as promised during the Rediscover Mitcham consultation of 2012/2013. As has been shown by numerous research reports the absence of public toilets is a significant deterrent. Ensure that the provision is accessible, free at the point of use, and is rigorously cleaned. If any community toilet scheme is offered as secondary provision, this must be adequately supervised to ensure the provision requirements are met, including advertising that the scheme is open to all – not just customers / service users.
6. Focus on a zero empty shops policy, actively, positively and proactively encouraging a wide range of meanwhile uses for empty shops. The loss of Morrisons, and closure of other shops is leading, inevitably, to a lack of footfall in the Village, and immediate, definite, significant action is required now to reverse the trend.
7. Do not allow conversions of shops to homes or to any other use where there is not an active frontage onto the high street.
8. Take strong measures against litter, fly tipping and the use of the pavement for shop paraphernalia such as delivery frames. This includes known fly tipping hotspots such as the flytipped gated alleyway on Langdale Parade that leads to Langdale Avenue and the currently poorly maintained grass verge along Langdale Parade. Find, fine and eliminate fly-tippers, and find a way to enable shops to take deliveries and leave waste for collection without dumping this on the pavement or grassed areas.
9. Pay significant attention to the clock tower and its surroundings, which, since the clock tower's relocation as part of the Rediscover Mitcham works has suffered from a lack of attention and poor maintenance. In particular:
  - a) Bring back wildflower planting into the raised beds that surround the clock tower. Hailed as a great success by locals and creating a picturesque and inviting display in the year after the clock tower was moved, this wildflower display has not been maintained, and the area has returned to grass. Invest immediately so that the wildflowers are back for 2024, and continue to invest year on year to maintain them.
  - b) Restore running water to the clock tower as was promised as part of the Rediscover Mitcham works, and which has been only sporadically delivered due to ineffective maintenance works on the infrastructure required. Invest significantly and effectively to prevent further failures in this system.
10. Maintain and care for all the pockets of green space within Mitcham Village.

Fulfil the public commitment made in 2013 to registering all of Fair Green for protection, including the new areas created by the Rediscover Mitcham project.

Aside from Fair Green itself, Mitcham Village is characterised by many relatively small, but significant areas of green. Almost all of these green pockets are currently neglected, treated by Merton Council as “dead space” rather than as areas with huge potential to create and maintain a unique and attractive character for Mitcham Village. This must end. The many pockets of green include:

- a) The area around the Dunblane Memorial Tree.
- b) The greens either side of the cycle lane near the Dunblane Memorial Tree.
- c) The green which sweeps round Raleigh Gardens as it joins the Western Rd / Holborn Way junction.
- d) What remains of the strip of green that was created between the carriageway lanes along Holborn Way during the Rediscover Mitcham works and which was more recently transformed with significant hard landscaping and is now, again, a litter trap.
- e) The area at the junction of Holborn Way and London Road, which comprises both a raised bed at the apex and a significantly sized grassed area abutting a high, blank, brick wall. This is a gateway to Mitcham Village, and is by a very popular bus stop. It is crying out to be made much more attractive.
- f) The wide pavement opposite point e), which currently contains several trees set in a sea of paving stones, which would benefit from significant greening to soften this important entrance into Mitcham Village.
- g) The two areas of green outside the former Barclays bank, which are often used for fly parking, and whose grass is embarrassingly patchy and neglected.
- h) The green area along Langdale Parade, which is often subject to refuse, fly tipping, fly parking and retail detritus (as already noted).
- i) Green the concrete void created on Raleigh Gardens (by Lidl’s side wall), or introduce planters to soften the area.

This Ten Point Action Plan, in conjunction with points made in our Manifesto for Mitcham Village and response to the 2023 Scrutiny Review on public toilet provision show how much opportunity there is for Merton Council to invest in Mitcham Village and promote it as a centre of civic pride.

We are ready and willing to assist with the formulation of a detailed programme of action and investment management, and look forward to early contact being made with us by the relevant Council Officers.



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## **Manifesto for Mitcham Village**

**July 2021, revised March 2023**

### **Mitcham Village**

Mitcham Village has a clear physical identity that reflects its heritage and speaks to its role as a 21st century village. Its central focus is what remains of Fair Green, extending to Figges Marsh, Three Kings Pond and Piece, and onwards to The Canons, Cricket Green and its various greens, and Mitcham Common.

Mitcham Village today provides a range of retail and other facilities including banking, grocery and supermarket shopping, Post Office, vet, eat-in and takeaway food, optician, key-cutting, undertaker, two pubs, newsagents, estate agents, dentistry, a street market and public library. A high proportion of the retail offer is made up of independent stores. These are key assets for Mitcham Village, and sit alongside the pond, nearby open spaces and central village green as defining characteristics.

### **Action Plan for Mitcham Village**

Mitcham Village is teetering on the edge of losing its village character for ever. A lack of recognition of the village character by Merton Council, accompanied by the absence of positive action to preserve and enhance the village, leaves it prey to constant and increasing threat.

Our action plan provides a way to begin to reverse the threat, build on what makes Mitcham Village a great place, and look to a brighter future for Mitcham Village and those who live, work and visit here.

#### **Finish what has been started**

The Rediscover Mitcham project ran from 2012 to 2018. Numerous changes were made to the village centre. One notable commitment was left incomplete, and another was not started. Both need urgent action:

- **Revitalise the market.** Money was specifically earmarked to revitalise the market. The market square was made larger, and electricity was provided to pitches. There were a small number of market focused events. The long term effect has been negligible. Today the market is a wasteland. A thriving market is vital. It would bring people in to Mitcham Village.

Investment is urgently needed, but it must be properly targeted, well managed, and this time, have clear long term objectives in mind.

As a start various types of market should be brought in. An Artisan Market could be promoted. Attract stallholders by offering low/no rates, and vet the viability of prospective traders. A Farmers' Market should also be offered. Ensure high-reach advertising, and that every penny invested is invested for the long term.

Mitcham Village, including the market, needs a full time manager on the ground to look after it.

- **Provide the public toilets** that were promised but which have never materialised. The scheme whereby some shops provide access to their loos is broken. There is no significant advertising of the fact, people are unaware it exists and the loos are not available when the shops are closed. It a poor attempt at a solution to a significant problem.
- **Protect the Green** by delivering on the promise made as part of Rediscover Mitcham to register the additional areas of Mitcham Fair Green as Town Green. Future Merton has had this on its 'to do' list for many years, it is a simple task, and completing it would show the council has faith in Mitcham Village as well as providing protection for the remaining grass at Fair Green.

#### **Encourage people to spend time in Mitcham Village**

A thriving market and public toilets and protected greens are good steps to making Mitcham Village a place people want to be. In addition, it is imperative to:

- **Deal with persistent fly tipping and street refuse.** Some sites are notorious for their fly-tipping and the leaving of street refuse. Nobody wants to spend time near a pile of rubbish bags or loose trash.
- **Eliminate persistent and regularised pavement parking.** The market square in particular is often blighted by fly-parking, but it also affects much of Mitcham Village.
- **Close Upper Green East and Upper Green West to through traffic.** These were made more car-friendly as part of the Rediscover Mitcham project. The effect is to surround Fair Green by cars and create a crossroads at its heart. Remove the cars and return Fair Green to a true village setting.
- **Remove all short term parking bays.** Several were put in as part of the Rediscover Mitcham project. They turn the village streets into a car park. They deter walking and cycling. People travelling by car contribute less to the local economy than those travelling by cycle or on foot. [TFL research](#) shows that people walking and cycling to high streets spend more time in the street, with a 216% increase in activity such as going into a shop, stopping at a café or sitting on a bench.

- **Pedestrian areas should be just that.** Cyclists, especially those using electric bikes, on pavements are a danger, but at present there is no enforcement. Provision of more cycle bays would encourage more cycling within the centre.
- **Improve the greenspace.** Thousands of pounds were spent on unnecessary planting as part of the Rediscover Mitcham project. Strips down the middle of Holborn Way are among sections which became litter strewn and notably devoid of anything close to urban planting. Recent changes to Holborn Way have seen this become primarily hard landscaping – a solution to poor maintenance which has reduced greenery. More greening, not less is required.

### **Respect Mitcham Village**

- **Recognise Mitcham Village** as the correct reference for the centre of Mitcham in all official documents, and use signage in the area to welcome visitors to the village. Let's show that we are proud to have a village centre.
- **Make shop frontages more attractive.** This will enhance the village feel, encourage people to want to spend time in Mitcham Village, and encourage new vendors to the area. With Covid and the economic downturn having hit a number of retailers, this is an ideal time to attract new forward-thinking businesses. Incentives are an absolute must. Make a start with Mitcham Village's oldest buildings 5-11 Upper Green East and 4-7 Upper Green West which have been proposed for local listing.
- **Where there are empty shops, take steps to provide meanwhile uses.** Arts groups and other organisations would welcome the opportunity to locate in Mitcham Village for a short while. Meanwhile uses are recognised as preferable to empty shops, and would be an asset to Mitcham Village.
- **Support active frontages** through policy that does not support development which results in the loss of shop fronts to private homes, or to other uses which remove active frontages. The Mitcham Village shopping parades are vital.
- **Invest in shop fronts.** Attractive shopping parades are a huge asset, and other shopping parades in the borough have benefitted from Council investment. Do the same for the Mitcham Village shopping parades.
- **Introduce a "no tall buildings" policy** for Mitcham Village and its immediate surroundings. The old Barclays Bank Building on Upper Green East should set the height limit for the heart of the village. While there are extant permissions which go higher in the area surrounding the village, these should be the last permissions to do so.
- **Make the most of Merton Council owned land** by using it to make Mitcham Village more resilient with cultural, community and health uses alongside retail and residential, including on Sibthorpe Road and Raleigh Gardens car parks.
- **Recognise and embrace the community.** Merton Council should do more work to learn about the vibrant communities that are part of Mitcham. Truly work to develop social

capital. Encourage and financially support community led projects – including on the smallest scale.

- **Tackle street drinking and antisocial behaviour.** This has long blighted Mitcham Village, and makes the place an unappealing one in which to dwell for many. This blight on the village centre should be a priority. Residents invariably quote the street drinking groups, and their overall bad behaviour, as being the major reason for not shopping here.
- **Make it easier for pedestrians to move around.** Work towards rephrasing the traffic lights on crossings in the heart of, and in the surroundings of, the village centre, so that pedestrians have priority, making it easier for them to make their way between the shopping parades. Look for ways to motor vehicles away from the village centre so that it is no longer a through-route between other places. Celebrate the open space and make pedestrians and cyclists the priority.
- **Celebrate Mitcham Village’s heritage** with a programme of local listing and conservation works, developing stronger connections to Mitcham’s other Town Greens, creating a greater profile for the Grade I listed Eagle House and railings and demonstrating raised ambitions for the re-use of historic buildings including the Holborn Workhouse.

More information about Mitcham Society and what we do, including our public comments on planning applications, can be found at our web site [mitchamsociety.org.uk](http://mitchamsociety.org.uk)





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## Response to Merton Council Scrutiny Review of public toilet provision

March 2023

1. Mitcham Society welcomes this review of public toilet provision in the borough.
2. The call for submissions and online survey responses had this preamble:

*The provision of public toilets meets a fundamental need, yet the subject is hardly ever discussed. This survey aims to find out how the provision of public toilets in Merton affects people in their daily lives, especially older people and those with health conditions requiring more frequent visits to the toilet. The results will be used to review and improve the provision of public toilets in Merton.*

3. Our response specifically relates to public toilet provision in Mitcham Village. We include recent history on this matter in the form of the Rediscover Mitcham public consultations in 2012 and 2013, and our 2021 walkabout with the Overview and Scrutiny Commission's Repurposing the High Street Task Group and its recommendations to council.
4. Mitcham Society continues to be deeply disappointed in the lack of public toilet provision in Mitcham Village. Public toilets are a vital part of any thriving hub. If people are to be encouraged to use the village for shopping, socialising, enjoying our green spaces and more, then access to public toilets is a necessity. Not having public toilets is a deterrent. This is particularly the case for people whose need for toilet facilities is greatest, including some older people, those with young children and some people with disabilities. However anyone can find themselves in need of a public toilet. It is unconscionable to work to promote anywhere as a shopping, cultural and community centre while at the same time ignoring this fundamental fact. A report from the Royal Society for Public Health, [Taking the P\\*\\*\\*](#) explores this in detail. Please read it.

5. A community toilet scheme has operated with varying degrees of success in Mitcham Village, and we do not view such a scheme as a viable alternative to dedicated public toilets. Reasons include:
  - a. We are aware of participating businesses failing to publicise that they are in the scheme, leaving people unaware that toilet facilities are available.
  - b. A community toilet scheme by default only operates when a participating business is open, not when it is closed. Therefore availability is not 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
  - c. Pubs, which are open into the evening, are often cited as viable for community toilet provision. They can provide partial provision, but they do not serve the whole community. Many people find pubs intimidating places to enter, and some will not enter on the grounds of not wanting to enter establishments selling alcohol. Nor are they suitable for people with young children.
  
6. Merton Council is fully aware of the need for freestanding toilets in Mitcham Village. Ten years ago it came up with a costed plan to introduce public toilets here. This was an outcome of the “Rediscover Mitcham” public consultation in which members of the public were asked to comment on various proposals. The public identified public toilets as needed. Merton Council agreed and costed their provision at £50,000. They were then deemed unaffordable and removed from plans. We believe this scragpage to have been a false economy. It is a barrier to achieving a thriving and vibrant Mitcham Village.
  
7. The fact that, ten years on, Mitcham Village still lacks public toilets is more than upsetting. The review creates an opportunity which should be grasped, and acted upon. Public toilet provision should be made a priority for Mitcham Village.
  
8. The new public toilets for Mitcham Village should:
  - a. Be free to use. Earlier suggestions from Merton Council have been for a charged public toilet. We strongly object to charging. It is exclusive and creates minimal revenue. Moreover current national trend is for public toilets to be free – to give just one example, Network Rail’s toilets are now free to use.
  - b. Be open and accessible for as many hours as possible with absolutely minimal time closed to the public.
  - c. Incorporate a radar key for disabled use at times when the toilets are closed to the public.

- d. Include full disabled access facilities.
- e. Include baby changing facilities.
- f. Be subject to a rigorous and regular cleaning regime so that they are kept pleasant for people to use.
- g. Not feature a separate urinal open 24 hours a day seven days a week – if the toilet cubicle facility / accessible toilet / baby changing facility is not open for the same period. We do not support a toilet facility which is discriminatory.

### Additional information

- 9. For context we present two instances in the recent past where the importance of public toilets in Mitcham Village has been recognised but not acted upon. One from 2021/22 and one from 2012/13. We ask that the opportunity to address this necessity is not missed a third time in a little over ten years. Mitcham’s residents and visitors to the village deserve more than to be crossing their legs and crossing their fingers in the hope of being third time lucky.

### The failure of Rediscover Mitcham to deliver its promise - 2012/13

- 10. In November / December 2012 a public consultation took place relating to a range of proposed interventions in Mitcham Village and its surroundings. A second consultation took place in June and July 2013 building on results from the first. In this second consultation document, the following text and image appears on the same page. The text to the left of the toilet image reads:

*“This free standing coin operated facility can offer some toilet provision in the town centre”*

#### Toilets

Unfortunately it is not realistic to re-open the toilets in Sibthorpe Road car park nor to provide a new toilet facility on a similar scale. However we recognise that an additional facility, to compliment the existing community toilet scheme, will benefit the town centre and encourage people to stay longer. As such we are proposing a small coin operated toilet with urinal in a central location close to the Fair Green and Market.

1. This free standing coin operated facility can offer some toilet provision in the town centre



- 11. A [report](#) went to the [Street Management Advisory Committee](#) on 18 September 2013. Our Chair made a representation to this committee. Section 3 of this report contains the Rediscover Mitcham consultation outcomes. Para 3.46, (p21) extract “The earlier consultation in 2012 identified some demand for a toilet facility. This would also correlate with the view that toilet provision can make the town centre a more practically attractive location and also address specific anti-social behaviour

issues such as street urination. The location of the toilet, adjacent to the market and main shopping areas, reflects its role not only as a public convenience but also as a contributing factor to the wider regeneration objectives”

12. Section 5 of this report contains proposals, including:

- a. Para 5.15 (p39) “Provide a self-cleaning toilet cubicle with coin operated (20p charge) and radar key access (for disabled people) adjacent to Market Square. It is proposed that initially this facility is open from 08.00 to 18.00 to prevent anti-social behaviour and misuse”
- b. Alongside a photo of the following text:



“In response to concerns regarding the aesthetic appeal of the toilet cubicle building, officers would work with the manufacturers to identify a method for “softening” its appearance that best suits the character of the Fair Green”

13. Section 7.3 of this report contains costings. The public toilet costing is reported at £50,000 (p53).

### **Overview and Scrutiny Commission Repurposing the High Street Task Group 2021/22**

14. In July 2021 we hosted a walkabout in Mitcham Village to support Cllr Peter Southgate in his work on the Overview and Scrutiny Commission’s Repurposing the High Street Task Group exercise. We invited the members of this task group and other local ward councillors. Along with Cllr Southgate we were joined by Cllrs Alambritis, Macauley and Akyigyina for the entirety of the walkabout. Cllr Owen Pritchard joined briefly. We had a wide-ranging discussion about Mitcham Village and actions which could be taken to make it a more attractive place to visitors. The issue of public toilets inevitably came up, and our visit fed into the final report and recommendations.

15. A [paper](#) went to the [Overview and Scrutiny Commission on 16 February 2022](#). The paper notes in para 2.12 “The high street as a ‘place to dwell’ was a frequent term used in task group deliberations. Many of the conversations focused on how to create the environment for people to socialise in a safe, clean and attractive space.”

One of the key points made in this paragraph: “The availability of toilets is also important.”

16. Sadly the recommendations failed to go far enough. Recommendation 5 simply states, “Reinstate the community toilet scheme, and also look at schemes like ‘20p for a pee’ (exemplars in central London and the royal parks).” We have stated elsewhere that a community toilet scheme is not the solution for Mitcham Village.