



MITCHAM SOCIETY

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Merton Council's Active & Healthy Travel Response to Covid-19

Mitcham Society submission

May 2020

This submission is based on input from Mitcham Society members and others who have shared their thoughts and proposals with us following Merton Council's publication of its "emergency transport response" to Covid-19.

In this document we present:

- Specific proposals for Mitcham
- Comments on the 'first phase' of proposals
- Overarching principles for further Covid-19 work to aid social distancing and promote walking, cycling and active travel in general

Merton Council's Active & Healthy Travel Response to Covid-19

Merton Council's response to Covid-19 has been to produce "*an emergency transport response to the Coronavirus pandemic and to aid social distancing in the borough. The plan is focused on making changes to roads and pavements in the borough to improve road safety, support social distancing and provide more space for walking and cycling.*" (<https://www.merton.gov.uk/streets-parking-transport/lip3>)

While the current "emergency transport response" is rightly specifically to cater for social distancing, we are pleased that Merton Council is thinking of its Covid-19 response as part of a longer term strategy to promote active travel - which it defines as walking and cycling. We see great potential in building on the initial measures to help build greener, healthier, less polluting travel and transport both through what increasingly looks like a relatively long period of social distancing ahead, and into the future.



Core principles

With this in mind it is imperative that the initial plans are brought forward in a borough-wide context and evidenced by clear, on-the-ground actions across our borough. In this context, our overarching aspirations for Mitcham, both now and longer term are include:

- Increased space for pedestrians and cyclists including
 - Wider pavements for improved social distancing
 - More, and more clearly marked dedicated cycle lanes, protected from road traffic as far as is possible with regard to.....
 - A presumption against cyclists sharing pavements with pedestrians unless pavements are wide enough to give people travelling both on foot and by bike adequate and appropriate space – this means that both must be able to *feel* safe as well as to *be* safe
 - Increased permeability for those travelling on foot and by bike
- More pedestrian only spaces including in shopping areas such as Mitcham Village
- Improved walking and cycle routes that recognise prominent locations as destinations but also cater well for those passing through
- More space for those on foot around key public transport hubs including tram stops, rail stations and major bus stops
- Fewer parking bays and a total, enforced, ban on pavement parking in our centres, such as in Mitcham Village
- Fewer people driving young people to school, and instead:
 - more cycling and walking to school
 - enforcement of school travel plans
 - establishment of walking buses
 - active exploration of other measures to encourage walk and cycle to school policies
 - stoppage of the use of residential streets for car based school pick up/drop off, already common and at risk of rising as school safety zone policies are brought forward

These aspirations all sit within two overarching principles:

- No on-the-ground implementation of any measure should involve loss of green space
- All measures should be compatible with the objective of increasing tree canopy cover, especially through street trees.

The 'first phase' proposals

Merton Council describes how it sourced its 'first phase' proposals: *"The initial phase of intervention locations has been developed through a combination of officer observations, feedback from business groups, local councillors and picking up residents' concerns via social media."*



While each of these methods is appropriate, we have several concerns.

We were unaware of any specific attempts to reach out in Mitcham before the ‘first phase’ proposals were published. The group involved in developing the ‘first phase’ proposals includes councillors and officers, yet none reached out to us. We are not aware of any efforts to engage Mitcham people in any way to put forward suggestions for the ‘first phase’ proposals.

Even now, we have seen no public engagement attempts beyond a small number of social media posts from the responsible Cabinet member, and one or two generic tweets from Merton Council. Those who use Mitcham Village and wider Mitcham more generally as residents, workers, shoppers and takers of their Covid-19 permitted exercise, whose local knowledge is detailed and precise, appear to have been left out of development of the ‘first phase’ proposals.

It is notable that while ‘business groups’ are in the list of those giving feedback, community organisations and other local groups are not. Why the skew towards business interest? We wonder if Merton Council has failed to meet its equalities responsibilities.

Mitcham and the ‘first phase’ proposals

At the Overview and Scrutiny Commission meeting on 20 May 2020 we heard that it was reported that 60% of Merton’s Covid-19 fatalities have been in the east of the borough.

It is therefore astonishing that of the 14 proposals that have been published as the ‘first phase’ priority has been given to the west of the borough, with a significant proportion of proposals clustered in Wimbledon centre and Wimbledon Village.

Few proposals touch the east of the borough. Only two reach into Mitcham. These are on either side of a short stretch of London Road between Mitcham tram stop and Cricket Green. There is nothing for Mitcham Village centre or other centres in the east of the borough.

This must change.

Our proposals – which can be found at the end of this document – are not a complete set of proposals for Mitcham. They are a foundation on which to build.

Next steps – action, accountability and transparency

Many London boroughs and other administrations throughout the UK have already implemented measures and are actively seeking citizen participation in identifying more. Merton is considerably behind the curve.



As movement restrictions are being relaxed, as more people return to work (at home or not), and as more young people return to school, people are spending more time outside of their homes, and interventions are now needed as a matter of urgency. We anticipate many of the changes made will continue to be needed into the future as social distancing needs to be maintained.

Mitcham must have adequate measures in place as soon as possible.

With specific reference to Mitcham, but also across Merton, we ask Merton Council to:

- Start putting measures in place immediately, mindful of fact that our centres are all experiencing significant increased footfall and cycle traffic
- Start now, and continue with, widely publicised, readily accessible, ongoing and continuous opportunities for local people to put ideas forward, and be transparent in how those ideas are
 - Logged
 - Collated
 - Assessed
 - Accepted or rejected (with the reasoning made transparent)
- Set out a clear timetable for implementation of each measure, make this public, and update on an ongoing basis
- View the Covid-19 social distancing measures as much more than a one-off, temporary measures, and embed them in all thinking going forward so that over time Merton becomes a less car-focused place, more friendly to people moving around on foot and by bike.

With regard to the initial set of 14 proposals and any future individual proposals or set of proposals published we ask for, alongside the other transparency measures noted above, an Equality Impact Assessment which includes an assessment of how the proposals support Merton Council's own objectives for equalising the disparities and health inequalities between the east and west of the borough, including showing how they address the information we have heard was presented at the Overview and Scrutiny Commission meeting on 20 May 2020 that 60% of Merton's Covid-19 fatalities have been in the east of the borough.

MITCHAM SOCIETY PROPOSALS Covid-19 SOCIAL DISTANCING MEASURES

The measures below have been submitted to us by Mitcham Society members and others during a short period of asking for input.

We do not see them as a finite set of proposals, but rather as a starting point on which to build a future for Mitcham that is less car-focused, with better air quality and more support for those moving around on foot and by bike.

We ask that Merton Council responds to us on each individual proposal, with confirmation that it is added to the “emergency transport response” to Covid-19 and a clear indication of when it will be implemented.

We further ask that Merton Council engage in discussion with us about formulating further measures for Mitcham. We are ready to contribute whatever we can.

Majestic Way

Majestic Way is now often busy with people queuing to use the food shops as well as walking and cycling through. It is very difficult to manage any social distancing. Measures are needed here to help people maintain social distancing.

Commonside West / Upper Green East

From the Rapid Improvement Care Agency to Gino’s Pizzeria. This wide stretch of pavement includes some permitted parking outside shops. Cars regularly park on the pavement beyond this permitted area, making it impossible for people in wheelchairs or buggies to use the pavement, and impossible at the current time for pedestrians to maintain social distance. Measures to enforce against fly parking are needed along this stretch both now and longer term. Medium term action is also needed to remove the pavement parking rights in Mitcham Village Centre along this stretch.

Upper Green West, Upper Green East

Remove motor traffic on these sides of Fair Green, enabling greater pedestrian and cycling permeability, encouraging people to visit Fair Green on foot or by cycle and increasing space available for social distancing.

Upper Green West, Upper Green East, Market Square Fair Green, Commonside West to Three Kings Pond

Remove all roadside parking bays. This will discourage people from driving to Fair Green, enhance the street scene and improve pedestrian access across and through Fair Green, including to shops that surround Fair Green. There is adequate public parking in the nearby Sibthorp Road and multi-storey car parks for those who still feel it necessary to drive.

Montrose Gardens to Three Kings Pond

Increase pavement width along parade of shops and enforce against frequent, normalised pavement parking to facilitate access to shops and social distancing.

Traffic lights

Reconfigure traffic light phasing to give pedestrians priority. This will encourage pedestrian use of Mitcham Fair Green and its approaches. Specifically mentioned to us were the lights at:

- The junction of Upper Green West / Fair Green
- Upper Green West opposite the customer car park
- Commonsides West near Hartgate of Mitcham
- The complex multi-way crossing at junction of Raleigh Gardens and London Road
- On London Road at Chatsworth Place

However this comment relates to ALL traffic lights in Mitcham.

London Road from Cricket Green to Fair Green

Continuation of proposal in the 'first phase' of cycle lanes on both sides of the road. This will create greater permeability for cyclists using Fair Green as a destination or as a through route to assist promotion of active travel.

Church Road Mitcham

The pavement on both sides of Church Road from Cricket Green to Hollowfield Way is particularly narrow, and not wide enough for social distancing. Pavement widening is necessary to enable pedestrians to use this stretch safely. To facilitate this, the road should be declassified as a lorry route.

King George VI Avenue

Implement the recommendation in the Mitcham Cricket Green Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan to prevent parking in King George VI Avenue which cuts across Cranmer Green.

Western Road

The very short stretch of narrow cycle way from Sadlers Close to Asda to be widened, extended the full length of Western Road through to Colliers Wood and complemented by a cycle lane on the other side of Western Road. Both to be clearly marked and segregated from car traffic using temporary barriers. This will enable cyclists to make the journey to and from Colliers Wood more safely and discourage pavement cycling.

Pavement parking

Pavement parking is rife in Mitcham Centre. It reduces pavement widths, impedes pedestrians - buggy and wheelchair users particularly - and radically reduces pavement width necessary for social distancing. Check all pavements and widen wherever possible. Enforce against pavement parking.

Public transport hubs

Provide more pedestrian space on pavements and approaches to Mitcham Eastfields and Mitcham Junction Network Rail Stations, Mitcham and Mitcham Junction tram stops and main bus stops.

Cricket Green

Create more space for those on bike and on foot and increase pedestrian priority at Jubilee Corner at the junction of London Road and Cricket Green road (west) and make Cricket Green road (east) a shared space with equal priority for those on foot. These measures to be achieved within our principle of no loss of green space or tree canopy cover.

Existing cycle lanes

Repaint all to make them much clearer both for cyclists and drivers.

Narrow pavements and cycling

Mitcham has many narrow pavements, and has always been a place where cyclists use the pavement often. Pedestrians often report feeling intimidated by cyclists. Cycling on the pavement is currently increasing. In general, and on as many roads as possible, we would like to see cycling provision added via temporary segregated cycle lanes. This will help people feel more inclined to walk and provide more space for cyclists, increasing both cycling and walking through Mitcham. It is particularly important at, and on the approaches to, Mitcham Village centre at Fair Green.