

000012I

00D012I

Project Number: JYB-LO06 - 44

**MERTON TOWN PLANNING SERVICE IN THE MILLENNIUM**

An Interactive Qualifying Project Report

submitted to the Faculty

of the

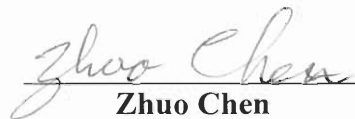
WORCESTER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the

Degree of Bachelor of Science

By


  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Jason Cardinal**


  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Zhuo Chen**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Nathan Smith**

Date: 14 March 2000

Approved:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Professor Joel J. Brattin, Major Advisor**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Professor Holly K. Ault, Co-Advisor**

1. town planning
2. surveying
3. Merton

## **Abstract**

This project has been completed for the London Borough of Merton Council. It surveyed public opinion in three areas: the Town Planning Service's role in development control, the Town Planning Service's role in land-use policy, and the communication between the Town Planning Service and the public. A questionnaire distributed to the Residents' Associations in Merton was our primary method of collecting data. Our secondary method was focus groups, or group interviews, of people who completed the questionnaire. We have provided statistical data concerning the opinions of the surveyed residents on the three research topics. Residents feel that the Town Planning Service is important for the borough, but they were not completely satisfied with the service. They also feel that the Town Planning Service needs to take an active role in improving the borough and communicating with the public. This data will be useful to the Town Planning Service in determining their direction for the twenty-first century.

## **Executive Summary**

Working in collaboration with the London Borough of Merton's Town Planning Service we obtained public opinion on issues relevant to Town Planning, and helped map the direction the Town Planning Service should take in the new millennium.

The Borough of Merton consists of approximately 170,000 people, divided into twenty different geographic areas called wards. Each ward elects three Councillors who represent that ward in Merton Council, the local governing authority. Although the vast majority of Merton's residents are similar in ethnicity (English), the different areas produce varying opinions and desires, making the Councillors valuable in the decision-making processes of the borough. The Town Planning Service deals with many aspects of the borough, including housing, the environment, land-use, and development control.

Prior to our arrival in London, we did extensive background research on topics including British government history, local government processes, town planning, and public opinion research.

Through the use of post surveys and focus groups we obtained residents' opinions on the topics of satisfaction with the Town Planning Service, planning issues, planning policies, and communication between the residents and the Town Planning Service. We used the established Residents' Associations within Merton as our survey sample. These 120 associations are distributed among the 20 wards and represent an even smaller area, usually a street, neighbourhood, or tenant group. The groups are voluntary, and both participation and initiative vary greatly. Our first survey mailing was sent to all 120 contacts listed in the Residents' Association database given to us by the Town Planning Service. After the survey was posted, we began the process of setting up focus groups. Focus group participants expanded upon the

quantitative data of the survey by giving qualitative data such as opinions, ideas, and suggestions.

We called every person to whom the survey was sent in the hope that half the people would participate, giving a total of eight to ten focus groups. However, the vast majority of the calls resulted in wrong numbers or no answers. The combination of our phone results and an initially low survey response rate led us to search for a more updated list of Residents' Associations. We determined that our list was at least four years old. After further research, we found several more current lists, with the best being from the Directory of Community Organisations in Merton, published by the Merton Voluntary Services Council (MVSC). With this updated list we re-sent 35 surveys to new addresses and called all the new phone numbers.

After phoning all available contacts, we were able to schedule one focus group for each of the three main parts of Merton: Wimbledon, Mitcham, and Morden. Limited participation kept each group to four people or less. Several people we phoned cited past dissatisfaction with the consultation process as a reason for not participating, while others simply were not interested.

Our final survey response rate was 30%, based on the original 120 Residents' Associations. Despite our second mailing, we still feel that our database was not completely accurate, so some surveys did not reach the desired people. A response rate of 30% is still above the Council's expectation of 10%. We received responses from all areas of the borough, giving us a good representation of public opinion. The survey contained forty-two questions, which covered topics of satisfaction with the Town Planning Service, planning policy, planning issues, communication between the Town Planning Service and residents, and a demographic section for our analyses and comparisons. We also included a section asking respondents for additional comments or suggestions.

The focus groups and survey results were consistent, with the focus groups elaborating upon questions in the survey and introducing new ideas or angles unable to be expressed in the survey. On the topic of satisfaction, the survey showed a general dissatisfaction with the Town Planning Service, but residents still view the Town Planning Service as important.

On the topic of planning issues, residents viewed all planning topics as very important. The Town Planning Service needs to continue to meet the physical needs of the borough in order to address these topics. Residents should influence planning policies more, and the consultation procedure needs to be improved.

The topic of communication provided the most data. The survey showed dissatisfaction with the current system, and the focus groups talked in depth about the consultative process. Information needs to be made available to residents, and they need to be consulted more, specifically on issues relevant to their local area. In addition, the consultative process needs to begin sooner and be run more effectively.

Lastly, respondents felt much dissatisfaction with the current political system, rather than with the Town Planning Service. It is felt that the political nature of Councillors and the pressures of party politics often prevent effective representation of residents. The efforts of the Town Planning Service and the initiative of the residents can be wasted if residents' views are not expressed and considered by the Council. Much apathy appears to exist within the current system.

Our research has led us to make the following recommendations. First, both the Residents' Associations and the Town Planning Service must have updated contact information in order to communicate effectively with one another. Next, Town Planning information needs to be made more readily available to residents through outlets such as the newspaper and the

library. Third, the consultation process needs to include those residents most affected by a proposal and begin early enough so that opinion can be accurately gauged. Additionally, Councillors' primary concerns need to continue to lie with representing residents' interests. Finally, the Town Planning Service needs to evaluate proposals based upon their impact on residents rather than based upon their legality. By working together, the residents and the Town Planning Service can continue to improve the borough well into the new millennium.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following people:

**Mr. Ian Bremner**

our liaison at Merton Council, for developing and defining the project, and for all of his help throughout the duration of the project.

**Mr. Steve Cardis, Ms. Gillian Pitcher, and the rest of the Environmental Services Department**

for their help.

**The residents of Merton**

who participated in our research by completing our surveys or participating in a focus group.

**Professor Wesley Jamison**

for his help during the PQP and assistance in developing our methodology.

**Professor Joel J. Brattin**  
and  
**Professor Holly K. Ault**

our advisors, for their help and advice throughout the PQP and IQP.

## Table of Contents

	Page
1.0 Introduction.....	1
2.0 Literature Review.....	3
2.1 The London Borough of Merton.....	3
2.2 Town Planning.....	3
2.3 British Government.....	8
2.3.1 Structure.....	8
2.3.2 Modernising Government.....	9
2.3.3 Town Planning Policy.....	10
2.4 Public Opinion and General Attitudes.....	16
2.5 Communication Between the Government and the Public.....	20
2.5.1 Surveys.....	20
2.5.2 Focus Groups and Interviews.....	21
3.0 Methodology.....	23
3.1 Implementation.....	23
3.2 Problems with Implementation.....	27
4.0 Resident Feedback.....	29
4.1 Survey Results.....	29
4.2 Focus Group Results.....	33
5.0 Analysis.....	37
5.1 Satisfaction with the Town Planning Service.....	37
5.2 Planning Policy Analysis.....	40
5.3 Planning Issues Analysis.....	43
5.4 Communication and Consultation Analysis.....	44
6.0 Commentary.....	47
7.0 Recommendations.....	50
8.0 Conclusions.....	50
7.0 References.....	55
8.0 Bibliography.....	57
Appendix A: Contact Information	
Appendix B: Work Plan	
Appendix C: Survey Cover Letter	
Appendix D: Written Survey	
Appendix E: Evolution of Survey	
Appendix F: Telephone Log	
Appendix G: Transcript of Wimbledon Focus Group	
Appendix H: Transcript of Morden Focus Group	
Appendix I: Transcript of Mitcham Focus Group	
Appendix J: Survey Section I - Results	
Appendix K: Survey Section II - Demographics	
Appendix L: Survey Section III - Comments and Margin Notes	
Appendix M: Focus Group Outline	



## Table of Authorship

	<b>Primary Author</b>
Abstract.....	All
Executive Summary.....	Cardinal
1.0 Introduction.....	All
2.0 Literature Review	
2.1 The London Borough of Merton.....	Cardinal
2.2 Town Planning.....	Smith
2.3 British Government.....	Smith
2.3.1 Structure.....	Smith
2.3.2 Modernising Government.....	Chen
2.3.3 Town Planning Policy.....	Chen & Smith
2.4 Public Opinion and General Attitudes.....	Cardinal
2.5 Communication Between the Government and the Public.....	Cardinal
2.5.1 Surveys.....	Cardinal
2.5.2 Focus Groups and Interviews.....	Cardinal
3.0 Methodology	
3.1 Implementation.....	All
3.2 Problems with Implementation.....	Cardinal & Smith
4.0 Resident Feedback	
4.1 Survey Results.....	Cardinal & Smith
4.2 Focus Group Results.....	Cardinal
5.0 Analysis	
5.1 Satisfaction with the Town Planning Service.....	Smith
5.2 Planning Policy Analysis.....	Smith
5.3 Planning Issues Analysis.....	Cardinal
5.4 Communication and Consultation Analysis.....	Chen
6.0 Commentary.....	Smith
7.0 Recommendations.....	Cardinal & Smith
8.0 Conclusions.....	Chen & Smith
Appendix E: Evolution of Survey.....	Smith

**List of Tables**

Table 4.1. Survey Response Rate .....29  
Table 4.2. Survey Results (Scale Questions) ..... 30  
Table 4.3. Survey Results (Multiple Choice Questions)..... 32  
Table 4.4. Wimbledon Focus Group Content Analysis ..... 35  
Table 4.5. Mitcham Focus Group Content Analysis.....37

## **1.0 Introduction**

The beginning of the twenty-first century provides a unique opportunity both to evaluate the past and look towards the future. The London Borough of Merton is taking this opportunity to review its Town Planning Service. All local authorities in Great Britain, including the London Borough of Merton, are mandated by the national Government to provide a Town Planning Service. Although the Government requires the Town Planning Service to exist, it does not stipulate precisely how the Service must operate or what issues are most important in the planning process. Therefore, the Town Planning Service in Merton has a great deal of freedom in how it operates and what policies it develops. The Town Planning Service in Merton receives input from those affected by its service through consultations with residents, local businesses, and local organisations.

The two primary requirements of the Town Planning Service in Merton are to operate a development control service and to write a Unitary Development Plan (UDP). The UDP functions as a guide to direct and control physical changes in the borough in order to meet the needs of its residents (London Borough of Merton, 1999). It consists of two sections: one for strategic town planning issues and another for local planning policy. Although the UDP is created by the Council, it must reflect the national Government's planning policy and objectives. The UDP is reviewed every five years. Public consultations are an essential part of this review.

From the late 1980s to the early 1990s, the national Government took much of the town planning control from the London boroughs because local government was deemed ineffective and unnecessary (Cairns, 1996). This was done by decreasing the importance of the local development plan in considering development proposals, and by promoting more of a free market oriented planning policy. These two measures increased the freedom developers had

within the boroughs. However, local authorities have recently regained some of their power over local development. This has been accompanied by considerable change within national Government. The establishment of the Greater London Authority and its Spatial Development Plan in May 2000 is one change that will co-ordinate town planning amongst the London boroughs. Another aspect of the changing British Government is its modernisation campaign. Modernising government is a campaign for policy renewal and reform. This campaign includes focusing on the needs of government's constituents, rather than on the needs of the government.

This report provides Merton Council with data that indicates the residents' opinions about the role of the Town Planning Service during the Governmental changes. We investigated four major areas: satisfaction with the Town Planning Service, how the Town Planning Service should operate (policy and development control), what issues the Town Planning Service should deem important, and how the Town Planning Service can best communicate with the public. The second and third areas specifically involve the Council's role due to changes in national Government planning policy, while the latter topic is part of the modernisation of government.

We utilised two methods to acquire the necessary data. Our first method was a post survey distributed to a sample of residents of Merton, specifically the 120 chairpersons of the Residents' Associations. These associations act as intermediaries between the Merton Council and the public. We also administered focus groups among a selection of the Residents' Association chairs. These provided qualitative perspective of the residents' opinions. Our research has given the Town Planning Service a better understanding of the town planning preferences of the residents of Merton.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 The London Borough of Merton**

The city of London is broken into thirty-two boroughs. The London Borough of Merton has a population of approximately 170,000. It is a suburban borough located in southwest Greater London. Merton is composed of three different sections: Wimbledon, Mitcham, and Morden. These three areas are different in their socio-economic composition.

The borough of Merton is governed by its Council, known as Merton Council. The members of Merton Council are elected from different areas of the borough, known as wards. There are twenty different wards, with each ward electing three Councillors. The Councillors are responsible for the legal requirements of national Government, including the Town Planning Service. The Town Planning Service in Merton is carried out under the Planning and Public Protection Division of the Environmental Services Department of the Council.

Merton's Unitary Development Plan, created in 1996 and currently under review, analyses the current developmental status of the borough, and serves to "provide guidance as to how changes to the borough's physical environment should be directed and controlled, in the interests of meeting the needs of its residents" (London Borough of Merton, 1999). The Town Planning Service consults with the public to determine its needs. Public opinion is essential to the direction the borough takes in the future.

### **2.2 Town Planning**

Cullingworth and Nadin define town planning as "a process concerned with the determination of land uses, the general objectives of which are set out in legislation or in some document of legal standing" (1997, p. 2). Town planning involves the resolution of conflict between competing interests in land-use and development. There are four groups who can be in

conflict: the government, the development industry, landowners, and the public. Each of these four groups may have a different opinion about the best use of land according to what each can gain from its use. Town planning is necessary today because of the need for public infrastructure, environmental protection, and protection of the quality of life for city and town residents. Some sort of mediator must resolve these conflicts so these needs will be fulfilled. Town planning serves as this mediator (Cullingworth & Nadin, 1997; Tewdwr-Jones, 1996).

The government plays a primary role in town planning by implementing planning policy. Tewdwr-Jones defines planning policy as “*a means of negotiation* between market choice (the desires of the individual) and political choice (the desires and actions of the state)” (1996, p. 2). Market choice includes the preferences of town residents, developers, and landowners. Planning policy and planning itself are closely linked. Planning policy can take many different forms and be implemented through a variety of different structures.

Many factors influence the form of planning policy. These include, but are not limited to, culture, politics, economics, geography, and resource availability. For example, town planning has evolved differently in Great Britain and the United States because of political, cultural, and geographic reasons (Cullingworth & Nadin, 1997). First, because the United States Constitution has a provision protecting the right of individuals to own property, planning policy must protect this right. Britain does not have a constitution like that of the United States that explicitly protects this right, and thus it has more leeway in limiting the use of private property. In addition, because of the large size of the United States, it has always viewed land as a replaceable resource, whereas Great Britain is an island, and has a more limited amount of land. Because of this, Cullingworth and Nadin indicate that optimising land-use, protecting the

environment, and preserving the countryside have long been important in Britain, while these issues have only recently become important in the United States (1997).

Town planning policy influences the economy and social policy. For example, different types of housing developments in the same urban area will result in distinct neighbourhoods and influence the characteristics of its residents. Traditionally, town planning has included only land-use and development policy. These policies usually include infrastructure needs. Other planning policies include town planning as one part of a wider planning scheme that includes social and economic issues.

Town planning and the land or property market are interdependent. According to Andy Thornley, the relationship between planning policy and the land market is both political and economic in nature (Tewdwr-Jones, 1997). In economic recessions, planning policy primarily focuses on the physical environment. During time of economic growth, planning policy focuses on social and economic issues as well. This is not a direct correlation, as there is a time differential in the reactions between policy and economy. The planning-market relationship is also influenced by the political ideology that creates policy. This was evident in the conservative Thatcher government of the 1980s, which favoured a free market. Social policies were not included in planning policy because socio-economic issues would supposedly be taken care of by the market. The development plan was only one of many factors the government used when considering a development for approval. The local government had little control over development and land-use, which made it difficult to address pertinent environmental and strategic planning issues.

Conflict between planners and the development industry occurs because of their different goals. Developers and planners operate on different time scales; developers are concerned with

short-term investment for quick profits, while planners are usually concerned with long-term goals. Developers and planners may also conflict over specific issues. One common planning policy is to promote the development of vacant inner city sites. Developers prefer greenfield, or previously undeveloped, sites to inner city locations because the sites cost less to develop and are less of a financial risk. Ideas that are central to the planner are often an extra risk to developers (Cullingworth & Nadin, 1997).

There are two different approaches to town planning: rational comprehensive planning and incrementalism. Both of these theories are procedural theories; they consider how planning should be done. Rational comprehensive planning and incrementalism represent the two poles of planning theories. The first considers all factors and influences when creating policy, while the latter builds on current policy by making small, or incremental, improvements (Cullingworth & Nadin, 1997; Levy, 1997).

At first glance, comprehensive rational planning seems like the obvious approach. Planning policy has far-reaching influence in a wide range of areas, so the policies' relationships with these different areas should be considered. The first steps in comprehensive planning are to define the problem, clarify values, and determine goals. Value clarification is the process by which all the different factors are given a priority to determine what is most important. The planner then formulates alternative approaches to accomplish the goal and forecasts the consequences. Finally, these approaches are evaluated, with the best approach being implemented.

Charles Lindblom criticises rational comprehensive planning, indicating the procedure is impractical and does not reflect reality (Cullingworth & Nadin, 1997; Levy, 1997). He suggests that planners generally do not have the time or resources to consider every approach. The



rational comprehensive model assumes that there are no pre-existing conditions to constrain a problem. In general, planning problems have a number of constraints that define the solution significantly, and it is not necessary to start from the beginning with rational comprehensive planning. The value clarification step requires that a weight be given to each variable before goals can be set. Lindblom also criticises the rational model because it is not a clear-cut process, and consensus among planners may be difficult or impossible to reach (Levy, 1997). He argues that participants in the planning process will present their own interests in the best possible light in order to ensure that they are taken into account in the planning process and should not be expected to consider all viewpoints. Representatives of each interest should ensure that their opinion is considered by presenting it well.

Supporters of rational comprehensive planning counter these arguments by indicating it is simply a planning ideal for which to strive (Levy, 1997). They claim it is useful to perform value clarification and consider all approaches to whatever degree possible, and a thorough approach will yield the best results.

Lindblom presents incrementalism, or as he describes it, the science of muddling through, as an alternative to comprehensive planning (Cullingworth & Nadin, 1997; Levy, 1997). In this theory, planners agree on a set of goals and determine a set of practical possibilities. The best policy is then implemented. Planners must rely heavily on experience and precedent to formulate policy. Using the incremental approach, planners can make small improvements to existing policy. One advantage of this process is the greater likelihood of policies being accepted because they are not radically different from existing policy. Despite the complexity of planning, an experienced planner can effectively predict the results of these small incremental changes. Levy indicates most critics of incrementalism agree it is a practical model, but dislike

its dependence on experience and existing policy (1997). Cullingworth and Nadin write that incrementalism is necessary for practical purposes, but it is not the most desirable model (1997). The incremental approach is not effective in incorporating new ideas into planning policy. Planners must use the rational comprehensive planning approach when there is no precedent for a policy.

## **2.3 British Government**

### *2.3.1 Structure*

With local governments exercising control over local development, the Greater London Authority (GLA) was established to co-ordinate the development of the 33 boroughs of London. The Greater London Authority will be comprised of the Mayor and the Assembly. The role of the Mayor is to provide leadership to London. The Mayor of London provides the central face for communication from the Greater London Authority to the public. The Mayor controls the Transport for London (TfL) and the London Development Agency (LDA) which have power over transport and economic development, respectively. Many of the issues pertaining to town planning require the input of the London Mayor. The Mayor has to consider issues such as long-term sustainability and improving health care. Other responsibilities of the mayor include setting budgets and appointing people to run key services. One key service is organising taskforce committees to investigate and analyse sustainability options for development (Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State, 1998).

The primary duty of the Assembly is to hold the Mayor accountable on London's behalf. The twenty-five members of the Assembly question the Mayor on his or her activities. The Assembly communicates with the Mayor on issues such as the budget and policy making. The Assembly can either agree or suggest changes to the Mayor's budget and plans. The Mayor and

the Assembly together have responsibilities for transportation, environment, public health, economic development, and planning (Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State, 1998).

### *2.3.2 Modernising Government*

The London Central Government proposes modernising government as a method for re-examining and reforming policies. The purpose of modernising government is to promote policies that are more for the benefit of the future than current policies. Many such proposals for change are directed towards improving communications and services for the public. Some of the ideas are for developing new services, such as automation of address changes, and for improving established services, such as extending the National Health Service health care advice line to twenty-four hours a day (Prime Minister and the Minister for the Cabinet Office, 1999).

The three primary objectives of the Labour Party's modernising government campaign are to develop strategic policy-making, focus on public services users, and deliver high quality, efficient public services. Strategic policy-making requires the participation of the public. First, the public must offer input to the government. Second, public participation is required in the form of operating and supporting businesses. The hope of the modernising government campaign is to better the government in order to improve people's lives (Prime Minister and the Minister for the Cabinet Office, 1999).

Future planning embraces new information technologies, such as the Internet, to meet the needs of citizens and businesses. One potential use of the Internet is to keep residents informed on planning policy. Better technology will give the public, such as small businesses, an additional outlet to market services and encourage new ideas, partnerships, and opportunities (Prime Minister and the Minister for the Cabinet Office, 1999).

The current Labour Government's strategy for modernisation includes improving policy-making. Two types of policies are of interest to the Government (Prime Minister and the Minister for the Cabinet Office, 1999). First, inclusive policies are forward looking and fair for the public. Second, integrated policies use community co-operative methods to tackle issues facing society, such as crime, drugs, housing, and the environment. The combination of both types of policies will hopefully provide high quality services and be responsive to users' needs. Policies will be designed to be fair to the public and to take advantage of the experience of all individuals and businesses likely to be affected by the policies (Prime Minister and the Minister for the Cabinet Office, 1999). Hopefully new policies will justify the Government's optimism.

### *2.3.3 Town Planning Policy*

Cullingworth and Nadin present an in depth historical evolution of British town planning (1997). The current structure of British town planning policy has evolved from that set forth in the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947. This act required government approval for all new development. It also required that all county councils and metropolitan county boroughs prepare their own development plans. The Ministry of Town and Country Planning was created to approve and co-ordinate all of the local development plans. One important aspect of the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act was the introduction of development plans. These plans would indicate, "the manner in which a local planning authority propose that land in their area should be used" (Cullingworth & Nadin, 1997, p. 93). This included a short summary of proposals and maps indicating development proposals for a twenty-year time frame.

The planning structure introduced in the 1940s was ineffective in post-World War II Britain. The structure was created with the intention that the public sector would play a large role in stimulating development. However, the local government machinery was inadequate for

the task. A further hindrance to development was the scarcity of resources. The sagging British economy and the need to rebuild areas destroyed in the war resulted in planning schemes taking a back seat to urgent housing needs (Cullingworth & Nadin, 1997).

The Town and Country Planning Acts of 1968 introduced a new two-tiered planning system, which consisted of structure plans and local plans. The purposes of the structure plans were to provide strategic policy, ensure consistency with national planning policy, and ensure consistency between neighbouring areas. Structure plans had to be approved by the central Government. Town Councils developed local plans to lay out specific planning policy. Local plans were required to conform with structure plans (Cullingworth & Nadin, 1997).

Cullingworth points out that the 1968 planning policy system was not without its problems (1997). When the act was written, it was intended that the same board would write both the strategic and local plans in order to make the system more efficient. However, a restructuring of local government separated these duties to the county and district levels. Co-ordination between the two government levels increased the time required to develop the plans. The differences between county and district goals also had to be resolved. The national Government took so long to approve the plans they were out of date by the time of implementation.

The government of London used the planning policy structure from the Town and Country Planning Acts of 1968 until 1986. Before 1986, the Greater London Council (GLC) prepared a structure plan, while the thirty-two boroughs of London and the Corporation of the City of London each prepared a local plan. In 1986, the national Government eliminated the GLC. Now each borough was required to produce a single Unitary Development Plan (UDP).

The UDP consists of two parts. Part one is analogous to the structure plan, while part two is analogous to the local plan (Cullingworth & Nadin, 1997).

Tewdwr-Jones presents some recent changes to the planning policy structure (1996). The Planning and Compensation Act of 1991 eliminated the need for structure and unitary development plans to be approved by the central Government. Instead, the Government provided Planning Policy Guideline Notes (PPGs) to aid planning authorities in creating plans.

At this point it is important to clarify Britain's legal definition of development. Development is "the carrying out of building, engineering, mining or other operations in, on, over, or under land, or the making of any material change in the use of any buildings or other land" (Cullingworth & Nadin, 1997, p. 105). By this definition, development includes any structural or external change to a building, but does not include interior remodelling. Building maintenance does not constitute development. Significant change in the use of land or a building also constitutes development. To clarify how much change constitutes development, the Secretary of State has declared Use Class Orders (UCO). Changes within Use Class Orders are not considered development, but changes between Use Class Orders are development, unless otherwise specified by law (Cullingworth & Nadin, 1997). For example, although they are in different Use Class Orders, a restaurant can be changed to a shop—but a shop cannot be changed to a restaurant.

The local planning authority must approve all development within its jurisdiction. When considering if a development proposal is permissible, the town planning authority's primary consideration is the development plan, but they may also take other material considerations into account. The planning authority can refuse permission, grant unconditional permission, or grant conditional permission. In the event of a refusal, the developer can appeal to the secretary of

state. Conditions imposed by a planning authority must meet three criteria. First, they must have a planning purpose. Second, they must relate to the permitted development. Finally, they must be enforceable, precise, and reasonable (Cullingworth & Nadin, 1997).

As previously stated, the development plan is the primary consideration in determining the permissibility of a development. Section 54a of the Town and Country Planning Act of 1990 brought the development plan to the forefront of the planning process and marked a change in planning philosophy in Britain (Tewdwr-Jones, 1996). In the 1980s, the development plan had been one of many factors weighed in the consideration of development. Although material considerations are still important, the 1990 Act made the development plan the first consideration. The Town and Country Planning Act of 1990 did not change the structure of the planning process, but it represented a change in philosophy from a market-led system to a planned system.

The market-led planning policy endorsed by the Government of the 1980s gave little attention to socio-economic planning issues. Policy was restricted to land-use and development. Money was injected into areas through development projects. The conservative Government believed that the money invested in these projects would trickle-down from the developments, boosting the economy and providing income to lower socio-economic classes. Cullingworth & Nadin and Tewdwr-Jones indicate there is little evidence to support the effectiveness of this philosophy (1997; 1996).

Newman and Thornley present two criticisms of the British planning system in the 1980s and 1990s: fragmentation and centralisation (1997). Fragmentation refers to the distribution of planning power to different governmental levels and private organisations. Centralisation refers

to the decreased planning control by local government, and the increased control by the central Government.

The fragmentation of planning in London began in 1986 with the elimination of the Greater London Council (GLC) by the central Government (Newman & Thornley, 1997). The GLC had previously supplied strategic planning for the city of London. Some of these duties were redistributed to different local and central Government departments. However, the central Government assigned some of these duties to joint boards or other organisations established by the central Government. Joint boards consist of representatives from different boroughs. Central Government-appointed organisations and committees have removed local government influence on planning policies.

The fragmentation of planning also resulted from new policies of finance distribution (Newman & Thornley, 1997). In 1994, the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) was introduced to consolidate several Government funding programs (Cullingworth & Nadin, 1997). The SRB continued the competitive bidding process used in some of these funding programs. In this method of distributing funds, local authorities or joint boards would bid for central Government funding for projects within their jurisdiction. However, there were no clearly defined project selection criteria, so the project selection was somewhat random. This system resulted in a lack of co-ordination between local authorities, so there was no strategic planning for the entire city. The effects of projects on London as a whole were not evaluated. Also, the cumulative effects of the totality of development projects on the city were not considered (Newman & Thornley, 1997).

Centralisation of the London government is the concentration of power in the central Government rather than in London's boroughs (Newman & Thornley, 1997). Throughout the



1970s and 1980s power was taken by the central Government, culminating with the abolition of the GLC in 1986. Newman and Thornley indicate that the 1990s have seen a return of some power to the local level, but this power has clearly been given on the central Government's terms (1997). The establishment of the Government Office of London (GOL), which represents part of the Departments of Transport, Environment, Trade and Industry, and Employment, is one indicator of the central Government's strong role in London. The GOL provides some strategic planning guidance to the boroughs, and also manages the SRB. Through the GOL, the central Government has maintained the ability to promote planning priorities. It has also allowed local boroughs to be involved, provided they abide by central Government policy.

Sustainability is one planning policy promoted by the central Government. The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions defines sustainability as ensuring a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come. Sustainability is a key component of town planning because sustainable development is concerned with achieving economic growth and maintaining the environment. Economic growth is defined as having higher living standards. Maintaining the environment entails protecting, and where possible, enhancing the environment and making sure that benefits from the changes are available to everyone, not just the privileged few (Sustainable Development, 1998).

Bishop, Brown, and Essex examine the influence of sustainability issues on town planning. They explain the dilemma facing town planners in adapting the planning system to deal with urban growth while still achieving sustainability. Bishop examines the concept of environmental capacity and sustainability for Stroud, a town in Gloucestershire, England. To meet the predicted increase of 4.4 million people in England between 1991 and 2016, homes have to be developed or allocated. To cope with the increase in population, planners suggested

developing the countryside. However, countryside protection policies prevented this. Planners suggested another alternative; instead of developing the countryside, town planning should remove fears of overpopulation and restore public confidence in urban life. The Government's aim is to encourage the rebirth of towns and redevelopment of cities, through careful design and re-development of run-down land and buildings (Essex, Brown & Bishop, 1999).

The London government initialised the second town planning analysis committee called the Urban Task Force 2 to analyse sustainability of urban communities. The committee looked at the physical capacity of the counties in England. After examining English cities and towns, the Task Force's general conclusion was that growth in Stroud could not be sustained within the existing urban regions and that the best choice was to develop into new settlements. The authors of the article acknowledge that in order to secure a high quality and more sustainable urban environment, land allocation will not be enough. The article suggests positive intervention of the public is essential to developing new ideas and new actions (Essex, Brown & Bishop, 1999).

Town Planning requires detailed procedures and systematic practices. According to Merton Council, the planning process from proposal to implementation requires critiques, suggestions, and discussions among Councillors (London Borough of Merton). The declaration of the Town Planning proposal begins with a discussion among Councillors and Council Officers. In the event that a conflict of interest arises among the Councillors, a discussion follows to define the disagreement and suggest alternatives. All of this occurs before the proposal is submitted.

#### **2.4 Public Opinion and General Attitudes**

The loss of policy implementation power at the local level, caused in part by the abolition of the Metropolitan County Councils, has had a profound effect on the public. Local government

reform has been gradual, but has consistently decreased the level of local decision-making power. This led directly to an inability to implement local policy, and therefore prevented the local government from responding to public pressure or outcry. According to David Cairns, these successive reorganisations of local government have “vitiating public support for local government by subordinating democratic purpose to perceived functional requirements” (1996, p. 17). Essentially, the public now feels that their opinions are not heard and therefore have no effect on policy, and that the democratic system is not working at the local level. This must be overcome in order to re-establish communication and properly represent public opinion.

These current conditions did not come about suddenly. Rather, virtually the same central government has been re-elected for the last twenty years, and the changes have been gradual. At the time the changes occurred, the public did not perceive them as a threat, and the local governments did not do enough to deter their slow loss of power (Cairns, 1996). One factor that led to this reduction of power was the public’s perceived indifference. Traditionally, participation in the local electoral process has been poor, giving the impression that it is of little importance to the general public. Supporting this notion are two recent surveys: Working Party on the Internal Management of Local Authorities in England, 1993, and The Commission for Local Democracy, 1995. Both found that the public offered very few complaints, suggestions, or critiques to local governments. However, a lack of expression does not necessarily mean a lack of disapproval. Changes have led to decreased opportunities for participation and representation, most noticeably for the minorities and the poor who lack the funds or means to convey their opinions with any force (Gross, 1995). More than forty percent of Britain’s minorities live in London and its boroughs, constituting a major part of the underrepresented public.

Several schools of thought exist with regard to the lack of public interest or participation in government. Jill Simone Gross claims that the reduction of local power by the national Government has led to an alienation of the public, and the demise of local democracy (1995). On the other hand, David Cairns argues that it is the local government's job to foster public interest and participation (1996). Therefore, Cairns believes that it is the government's fault that the public is not involved.

Gross states that local government serves two distinct functions. First, it must represent the interests of the residents. Second, it must promote participation and community solidarity. The abolition of the Metropolitan County Councils closed one of the major communication channels between the government and the public, making it difficult to fulfil either role. Although Gross is an avid supporter of public participation, she also warns that the general public is very easily influenced and is not capable of direct political decision making. The central Government attempted varying levels of sub-central decision-making, but concluded that the central Government was capable of effectively running a borough on its own (1995). However, the lack of public participation and representation in a centrally run borough led to dissatisfaction and alienation amongst residents. Public interest groups have begun to speak out, but lack of power and resources has limited their effectiveness. In addition, under the current system, the ability of the local government to respond to public pressure has been limited by the central Government. Gross argues that the lack of public participation at the local level is due to the central Government's alienation of the public and local government's inability to respond to public opinion.

On the other hand, Cairns believes that the low levels of public participation are due to public indifference. Like Gross, he also sees local government as having dual purposes. The

first is functional: to carry out the duties and public services of the town. The second is democratic: to involve the public and stimulate interest at the local level. Therefore, public indifference is due to the failure of government to fulfil its democratic role. The ability of the local government to carry out this role is due partly to the ground rules established by Parliament and partly to the way local authorities practice and stimulate democracy within those rules (Cairns, 1996). National Government is capable of fulfilling the functional requirements for a borough, but seizing that power leads to the inability to carry out the democratic purpose. Local government has not taken the necessary steps to retain its democratic role in the midst of its loss of functional power.

Voter turnout at the local level is roughly forty percent, while national elections usually average over seventy percent. This disproportion demonstrates the failure of the government to stimulate popular support. However, the level of participation in the electoral process is not a good indicator of the level of public support. Low participation reflects both public indifference and the belief that local democracy doesn't work (Cairns, 1996). Therefore, the local government must increase the level of public interest and participation, and the national Government must allocate some functional power back to the local government.

The ineffectiveness of local democracy has reached a head, and people have begun to show initiative in regaining a voice in pertinent aspects of local government. Angered by the loss of influence in areas such as taxation and development policies, interest groups have formed at the local level to push for a return of public influence. However, for the local government to regain mainstream support, it must clearly offer a democratic relationship that is valued by the public (Cairns, 1996).

People identify more strongly with their local borough than with the country as a whole, and therefore are more likely to participate in the local democratic system if they possess influence in their local government. To increase voter participation, the government needs to move from an exclusive approach to decision making to an inclusive approach that incorporates the community at large (Cairns, 1996). Cairns also notes that representative methods such as a local cabinet, committees, or a citizens' panel can lead to a prominent and favourable profile for local democracy which would encourage the desired sense of ownership and allegiance (1996).

## **2.5 Communication Between the Government and the Public**

Now that local government has begun to reclaim some public representation power, the methods used to collect accurate and widespread opinions become crucial. Surveys, focus groups, and interviews can all be effective measures to obtain public opinion. Each has its benefits, but also some disadvantages. Therefore, a distribution of techniques along with careful and accurate analysis methods is essential to obtain valid and accurate data that can represent the public and achieve useful conclusions.

### *2.5.1 Surveys*

One very effective method for obtaining mass opinions is the use of a survey. However, surveys are not always reliable, and fail to provide in-depth responses or opinions. Several issues make surveying techniques especially crucial in achieving accurate results. A political climate in transition can provide fuel for interesting and widely varying survey responses, but can also promote inaccuracy (Ansu-Kyeremeh, 1999). Since opinion in a changing environment is not linked to any other demographic factors, there is no statistical way to obtain all views other than surveying a large number of people. In addition, researchers must remain neutral and interpret their results without political influence.

Motivation of both the surveyor and the surveyed has a noticeable effect on the reliability of a survey. The surveyors play a major role as they determine the set-up and execution of the survey. The questions and answer scales must both be carefully constructed in order to avoid projecting any influence on the surveyed. On the other hand it is also very easy for people to project their own opinion on the entire population and respond in a neutral or vague way assuming everyone feels as they do, thus suppressing some alternative opinions and accepting the status quo (Shamir, 1998). Lastly, the motivation of the person taking the survey influences the effort and consideration he or she gives, and therefore affects the accuracy and quality of his or her answers.

Regardless of the accuracy of the survey techniques, the reliability of the answers is still dependent on the people surveyed. Varying interpretations of the scales and values used to answer questions can lead to different answers that actually represent the same opinion. To counter this, we can utilise Cronbach's Alpha. All surveys received are split into two groups, which are then quantitatively analysed. Statistically, the distribution and percentages of the results should be the same. A one-to-one relationship in answer percentages equals an Alpha of one, or perfect reliability. An alpha of zero therefore represents total inconsistency (Karns, 455).

However, reliability is not the same as validity. Accurate survey methods are essential, but the response rates and quality of the questions determine the validity and relevance of a survey. Therefore, every aspect must be analysed, critiqued, pre-tested, and corrected to achieve the most reliable and valid results possible.

### *2.5.2 Focus Groups and Interviews*

Surveys are a useful tool to determine general opinions of a large cross-section, but are not helpful in obtaining specific opinions, beliefs, anecdotes, or suggestions. Polls of informed

public opinion and focused group discussions have become the alternative to mass opinion surveys (Price & Neijens, 1997). By obtaining specific intelligent opinions through deliberate communication, researchers can draw relevant conclusions. Focus groups and interviews provide the setting for these purposeful conversations. By keeping the format and questions somewhat unstructured, interviews can take their own course and explore an issue in ways surveys cannot. In addition, focus groups and interviews are much more financially and logistically feasible for a government to conduct.

Most issues cannot be reflected upon in simple survey question form, but can be analysed through interviews or focus groups in a five-step process. The first step is *elicitation of values*, or the problem phase, which defines the problem and what is at stake. Second is the *development of options*, or proposal phase. In this phase, the multiple dimensions of a problem are sorted out and possible options are formulated. The third step is *estimation of consequences*, in which prospective results of each option are considered. Fourth is the *evaluation of options*, or the policy phase. Each proposal is debated, and preferences are expressed. Finally, a decision is made either by one person or by the group as a whole (Price & Neijens, 1997).

In conclusion, surveys can provide data that can be extrapolated for the entire population, but are time consuming, costly, and logistically difficult. Focus groups and interviews can provide insight and intelligent suggestions from a specific group of people. However, they cannot statistically represent the entire population. Surveys can however be administered to specific groups in order to obtain relevant data, similar to a focus group. Therefore, depending on resources, time, and location, a combination of techniques can be used that will provide relevant and accurate data. Using multiple methods allows for the best representation of opinion.



## **3.0 Methodology**

### **3.1 Implementation**

The goal of this project was to provide the borough of Merton with both qualitative and quantitative representations of public opinion on land-use and development policies. Because it is logistically impossible to consult every resident of Merton, we used two techniques to estimate public opinion. Our first method was a postal survey of residents taken from the established Residents' Associations in Merton. Additionally, we used focus groups to gain further qualitative insight. Each focus group consisted of selected recipients of the post survey. We drew the sample to represent all geographic regions of Merton. The use of multiple methods, also known as triangulation, addressed any implicit weakness or bias present in any one method (Berg, 1998).

Both the survey and focus groups addressed topics specified by our liaison Ian Bremner, a Town Planner for Merton Council. As stated earlier, these topics fall under four categories: satisfaction with the Town Planning Service, how the Town Planning Service should operate (policy and development control), what issues the Town Planning Service should deem important, and how the Town Planning Service can best communicate with residents. The topics of this research are complex and therefore we have been careful to ensure our questions communicated our intended meanings at a level our sample will understand.

As we have indicated, it was logistically impossible for us to survey the entire population of Merton, so we drew our sample from the established Residents' Associations. Residents' Associations are representative bodies that act as intermediaries between Merton Council and residents. There are approximately 120 of these associations representing all parts of the borough. We posted a survey to the chairperson of each Residents' Association. Because the Residents'

Associations are spread throughout all regions of the borough, this ensured that all areas of the borough were represented in our research.

We used several techniques to encourage the Residents' Association chairs to participate. Our survey cover letter (see Appendix C) emphasised the importance and relevance of their opinions and beliefs to the Merton Town Planning Service. The letter also addressed the unique opportunity to examine the Town Planning Service at the start of the twenty-first century. Because of our participants' positions as Residents' Association Chairs, we assumed that they would be interested in giving Merton Council, specifically the Town Planning Service, their input. However, because participation in this study required a commitment of time and energy, we took these steps to encourage participation. In addition to encouraging participation, our cover letter introduced us as researchers, stated the goal of our research, and provided necessary contact information. It also mentioned the upcoming focus groups.

The next key step in our research was designing the survey to ensure valid and reliable data. Validity is ensured through the use of proper survey techniques. A survey is reliable if it accurately represents the surveyed group (Salant & Dillman, 1994). Therefore, our survey results represent the opinions of our specific sample, but do not necessarily represent the opinions of the majority of Merton residents.

The survey has explicit instructions to avoid confusion in how to answer each question. The survey utilises Likert scales to estimate the strength of opinions on issues (Salant & Dillman, 1994). Likert scales gauge where people's opinions lie in a numerical range (see Appendix D for examples). Because our question topics were complex, we broke them down into several simple questions and wrote them simply enough so that the least educated person taking the survey could understand them. We included a section asking for demographic information so we would

be able to determine whose opinions the survey results represent. We closed the survey by thanking the participants and assuring them of the confidentiality of their answers. Once we finalised the content of the survey, we made the instrument aesthetically pleasing. Things such as layout, font, paper type, and clarity all influence participation (See Appendix D for complete survey).

After our survey had been designed, we pre-tested it to find shortcomings and potential misinterpretations. By having our peers, our liaison, and sample residents take the survey, we noted any disparities between our intended meaning and people's interpretation of that meaning. Our liaison addressed problems in survey content and question wording. Sample residents pointed out additional wording problems and confusion on specific topics addressed in the survey. Using this total design method to design, pre-test, and correct, our survey has resulted in adequate participation rates and honest, accurate responses (See Appendix E for a more detailed description).

We then posted the survey to the Residents' Association chairpersons. A post survey was the best method of distribution because it was the simplest to carry out. Each of the 120 chairpersons was sent the cover letter, survey, and return envelope. Because of the limited time, we asked the chairs to reply within two weeks of receiving the survey.

Focus groups are another tool we used to gauge public opinion. Berg defines these as directed conversations with a purpose among a group of respondents and a facilitator and presents an in-depth discussion of their strengths and weaknesses (1998). Focus groups are a quick and inexpensive way to gather a large quantity of data. They allow us to interact with many people in a short amount of time. The interaction of the respondents results in some advantages and disadvantages. The advantage is that respondents can build on each other's

responses and the facilitator can ask questions to clarify these responses. The disadvantages of focus groups include suppression of dissent and peer bias. Suppression of dissent occurs when a respondent with a minority opinion does not express that opinion because it is a minority opinion. Suppression of dissent can be overcome with an effective facilitator who makes sure all respondents are involved in the conversation. Peer bias occurs when a respondent changes his response because of the presence of other respondents. Triangulation with the survey results eliminated this bias.

We had hoped to conduct approximately ten focus groups in the Merton Civic Centre with each group consisting of ten people. Due to poor participation, we were able to hold only three focus groups. The questions for the focus groups addressed the same topics as the survey, but were more open ended to promote discussion (See Appendix M for the focus group outline). One member of the project team led each discussion, while the other two members observed and took notes.

Each focus group represented a different geographic area of the borough. Merton is divided into twenty wards. An optimum design would have had a focus group for each ward. However, time constraints and poor participation limited the number of focus groups we were able to conduct. Therefore we held one focus group each for Wimbledon, Mitcham, and Morden.

We analysed our focus group results using content analysis, a process to analyse notes or data by systematically applying an objective coding scheme to identify and quantify the message present (Berg, 1998). Content analysis allowed us to categorise the ideas in our data. Berg describes an inductive method for developing categories (1998). This involves researchers “immersing’ themselves in the documents...in order to identify the dimensions or themes that

seem meaningful to the producers of each message” (Berg, 1998, p. 230). Several types of categories can be developed, including words, themes, concepts, characters, and semantics (Berg, 1998). There is a slight difference between themes and concepts: themes are simple sentences that express one idea, while a concept category includes many different ways to express a single idea. Characters are people. Semantics examine the connotation and strength of words used by respondents.

The specific data we analysed were the transcripts of the focus group discussions. These were created from the notes of the discussions. We developed the coding scheme based upon our initial focus group results. Each group member developed categories individually. We then determined the best categories and proceeded with the analysis of the remainder of the data.

Upon completion of our analysis, we presented the results to Merton Council and the Town Planning Service in both a written report and oral presentation on 1 March 2000. Appendix B contains the work plan for our time in London. This includes a time line of our tasks and their approximate duration.

### **3.2 Problems with Implementation**

Throughout the course of this project, we encountered several problems. This section of the report presents these problems, some potential reasons these problems came up, and our solutions to these problems. Two problems we encountered when trying to obtain data were the outdated database of contact information for the Residents’ Associations and the lack of participants in the focus groups.

The database of Residents’ Association chairs we were initially given was at least four years old and badly out of date. As we called our contacts to set up focus groups, we discovered that approximately one fourth of the phone numbers and addresses were incorrect. In some

instances the Residents' Associations were no longer functioning. In other instances the contact was no longer chairperson and was not able to provide new contact information. In the majority of cases, the person we spoke to did not know about the Residents' Association.

To overcome this problem, we had to find a new list of Residents' Associations. We first looked on the Merton Council's Intranet where we found a list of Residents' Associations on the Environmental Services Division's page. This list had twenty-two new sets of contact information. We also discovered that the Merton Voluntary Service Council (MVSC) publishes a Directory of Community Organisations in Merton that includes a list of Residents' Associations. This was more recent than the Intranet list. These two more recent lists enable us to send thirty-five more surveys to Residents' Association Chairs. However, not all of the incorrect or missing information had been corrected on these more recent lists.

A second major problem was low participation in focus groups. In addition to being outdated, our list was missing many phone numbers. This limited the number of potential participants significantly. We also found that people were not willing to participate in the focus groups for several reasons. Some people were too busy to attend, while others were unwilling to attend because they were strongly dissatisfied with previous local government consultations. So despite our intentions to hold approximately ten focus groups with seven to ten people in each, we were only able to hold three focus groups, each with less than five participants.

The final problem was the residents' lack of understanding of how town planning actually operates. The goal of town planning is to improve the physical conditions of the borough, but not every issue can be addressed. Priorities must be determined, and there is a constant system of give and take in trying to please everyone. Limited time, money, and manpower make it impossible to improve every aspect of the town at once (Section 2.2 explains

the nature of town planning in further detail). However, residents generally do not understand or acknowledge this fact. This is shown in both the survey results and the focus group discussions. In the survey, residents ranked every planning issue as very important, rather than prioritising them. Similarly, focus group participants complained about local areas that were relevant to only a small group, rather than thinking on a larger scale. Some residents seem either over-idealistic or unaware of the restraints on town planners.

## 4.0 Resident Feedback

### 4.1 Survey Results

We posted 155 copies of our survey, “Merton Town Planning Services in the Millennium,” in two mailings: 120 surveys on 24 January 2000 and 35 surveys on 4 February 2000. The majority of surveys in the second mailing were sent to the same Residents’ Associations as the first mailing, but to different addresses from a more recent list of contact information (see section 3.2, “Problems with Implementation,” for a more detailed explanation). Table 4.1 summarises the response data of the post survey. From Table 4.1, the response rate for the survey was 28%. This percentage is taken from the total number of Residents’ Associations (120) and not the total number of surveys sent (155).

**Table 4.1. Survey Response Rate**

	First Mailing	Second Mailing
Number Returned Completed	26	9
Number Returned Incomplete	3	0
Number of Wrong Addresses	>35	0
Total	120	35

Due to the nature of our survey sample, our results cannot be extrapolated for the entire population of Merton. We do not have a random sample, but rather a purposive sample—one specifically chosen due to its members’ involvement and interest in local government. Although

the Merton Town Planning Service is concerned with statistically representative data, in this project it is more interested in valuable input and suggestions from active people within the community. Initially, we were unsure exactly what type of people would receive our survey since our database contained only addresses and some names. We compiled demographic information describing our survey sample. The results appear below (bold entries represent the plurality of our sample):

- **74% Male**, 26% Female
- **89% English**, 11% Other
- **53% Retired**, 40% Employed, 7% Housewives or mothers
- **49% Over 60 years of age**
- 26% 50-59 years of age
- 14% 40-49 years of age
- 11% 30-39 years of age
- **57% have lived in Merton for over 25 years**
- 17% have lived in Merton for 16-25 years
- 11% have lived in Merton for 11-15 years
- 11% have lived in Merton for 6-10 years
- 3% have lived in Merton for 0-5 years

The survey has produced data in four primary topics: Satisfaction with Town Planning in Merton, Planning Policy, Important Planning Issues, and Communication between the government and residents. Tables 4.2 and 4.3 summarise the results of the survey.

**Table 4.2. Survey Results (Scale Questions)**

Question	Response Description	Percentage Response					Avg
		1	2	3	4	5	
1. How satisfied are you with the current layout and condition of Merton’s natural environment?	1 = not satisfied 5 = completely satisfied	6%	15%	44%	32%	3%	3.1



Question	Response Description	Percentage Response					Avg
		1	2	3	4	5	
2. How satisfied are you with the current layout and condition of Merton's built environment?	1 = not satisfied 5 = completely satisfied	18%	33%	39%	9%	0%	2.4
3. How important do you feel Town Planning is for Merton?	1 = not important 5 = very important	0%	3%	3%	9%	85%	4.8
4. In general, how would you rate your current satisfaction with the Town Planning Service in Merton?	1 = not satisfied 5 = completely satisfied	15%	30%	42%	12%	0%	2.5
5. Ideally, how much power should the Town Planning Service have when considering a land-use proposal?	1 = none 5 = total	3%	9%	29%	29%	29%	3.7
6. How much freedom should individual developers or builders have in realising their proposals?	1 = none 5 = total	41%	27%	32%	0%	0%	1.9
7. How much delegated power should town planning officers possess?	1 = less 5 = more	36%	18%	33%	6%	6%	2.3
8. How much influence should Merton Planning Officers have on the Mayor's Spatial Development Strategy?	1 = less 5 = more	11%	7%	50%	25%	7%	3.1
13. How important is it to achieve good design in the built environment?	1 = not important 5 = very important	0%	3%	3%	11%	83%	4.7
14. How important is conservation and the environment to you?	1 = not important 5 = very important	0%	0%	6%	11%	83%	4.8
15. How active should the Town Planning Service be in enhancing Merton's local environment?	1 = not active 5 = very active	0%	3%	6%	14%	77%	4.7
16. How important is it to restore and develop vacant or run-down sites in Merton?	1 = not important 5 = very important	0%	3%	3%	17%	77%	4.7
17. How important is it to preserve historical buildings and sites?	1 = not important 5 = very important	0%	3%	6%	17%	74%	4.6
18. How important is it to encourage modern development?	1 = not important 5 = very important	6%	12%	32%	24%	27%	3.5
19. How important is the provision of affordable housing in Merton?	1 = not important 5 = very important	3%	17%	20%	14%	46%	3.8

Question	Response Description	Percentage Response					Avg
		1	2	3	4	5	
20. How much influence do you feel Merton residents have in town planning?	1 = none 5 = total	35%	44%	15%	3%	3%	1.9
21. Ideally, how much influence <i>should</i> Merton residents have in town planning?	1 = none 5 = total	0%	3%	12%	41%	44%	4.3
24. How effective do you feel consultative forums are in getting public opinion heard and considered?	1 = totally ineffective 5 = totally effective	21%	18%	38%	21%	3%	2.7
25. How much influence should consultative forums have in the Town Planning Service?	1 = none 5 = total	3%	0%	30%	36%	30%	3.9
28. How much interest do you have in reading or being informed of town planning reports?	1 = none 5 = a lot	3%	6%	18%	18%	56%	4.2
30. Should these reports be short and general, or should they be lengthier and provide all details?	1 = short/general 5 = lengthy/detailed	16%	16%	25%	16%	28%	3.3
32. How likely are you to access town planning information on a web site?	1 = not likely 5 = very likely	65%	6%	6%	6%	18%	2.1

**Table 4.3. Survey Results (Multiple Choice Questions)**

Question	Percentage Response						
	a	b	c	d	e	f	g
9. Who should have the most influence on the Mayor?	public	Councilors	Merton officers	businesses	other	NA	NA
	81%	19%	6%	3%	0%		
10. Town planning policies can vary in scope, should town planning policies be created for:	entire borough	specific areas	specific sites	specific topics	other	NA	NA
	54%	34%	3%	14%	3%		
11. Should the Town Planning Service seek out sites to develop, or wait until approached by a developer?	seek out sites	wait until approached	other	no opinion	NA	NA	NA
	70%	21%	9%	0%			
12. Should the Town Planning Service exercise its right to purchase private property to achieve its planning objectives?	yes	no	no opinion	NA	NA	NA	NA
	40%	40%	20%				
22. Who should possess the most power in Merton's Town Planning?	residents	Councilors	Council Officers	Mayor (GLA)	other	NA	NA
	57%	22%	14%	0%	9%		

Question	Percentage Response						
	a	b	c	d	e	f	g
23. Have you ever attended a consultative forum?	yes	no	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
	68.6%	31.4%					
26. What is the best way for Merton Council to obtain public opinion?	consultative forums	post surveys	phone surveys	voting	borough meetings	focus groups	other
	27%	44%	0%	0%	32%	18%	18%
27. How would you prefer to contact Merton's Town Planning Officers?	tele-phone	post	in person	e-mail	other	NA	NA
	40%	29%	40%	9%	3%		
29. Should these reports be made more easily accessible to the public?	yes	no	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
	100%	0%					
31. Do you have access to the internet?	yes	no	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
	56%	44%					
33. What would be your preferred method to obtain town planning information?	borough meetings	Residents' Assoc. meetings	newspaper	library	website	e-mail	other
	26%	49%	29%	29%	23%	11%	11%

The survey asked respondents for any additional comments or suggestions that they felt were important for the Town Planning Service (See Appendix L for survey comments).

#### 4.2 Focus Group Results

Despite efforts to contact all of the Residents' Associations, we had difficulty getting people to participate in the focus group discussions. We held three focus groups. The first was held on Wednesday evening, 1 February 2000. It was attended by four participants representing three different Residents' Associations from the Wimbledon area. Two participants were English males over sixty years of age, and the other two were English females over 40 years of age. The second focus group was held on Wednesday evening, 9 February 2000. We were expecting two participants from Morden. However, only one participant came, so we adjusted the format of the evening to an interview. We later discovered that the attendee is not a resident of Merton, but is a member of a Residents' and Tenants' Association because he owns a small business within the borough (the transcript of this interview appears in Appendix H, but has not

been analysed because the participant is not a part of our sample). The final focus group was held Tuesday evening, 15 February 2000 and consisted of three participants representing two Residents' Associations in Mitcham. All three participants, two males and a female, were English and over sixty years of age. Transcripts of the focus groups can be found in Appendices G, H, and I. The content analysis of the focus group transcripts is summarised in Tables 4.4 and 4.5.

The following discussion refers to Table 4.4 and addresses the Wimbledon focus group. The feelings on the topic of satisfaction with The Town Planning Service were generally shared among the entire group. All members of the focus group cited dissatisfaction with local Councillors. Each person voiced an opinion, supported another's, or provided examples to support the argument. People also showed great dissatisfaction with the consultation process. Again, every member contributed strongly, and the discussion eventually had to be cut short due to time constraints and repetition of ideas.

On the topic of decision-making, the discussion was less heated. The participants reached a consensus that a balance of decision-making power is needed. Participants also agree that residents should have more influence than they do currently.

Ideas on communication also proved to be unanimous. Every member felt that time constraints prevent effective consultation with the residents. Also, information must be available and understandable to those who wish to be involved. One person mentioned that information needs to be communicated better within the Council and others accepted and agreed with that comment.

Lastly, during the discussion of specific planning issues, members cited individual areas or topics that were important to them. All agreed that every aspect of the borough was not only important, but could be improved.

Our group was extremely vocal and provided valuable insight into a range of topics. Being all from the same region (Wimbledon), they shared many ideas and supported each other fully.

**Table 4.4. Wimbledon Focus Group Content Analysis**

TOPIC	COMMENTS		
	Positive	Neutral	Negative
<b>SATISFACTION</b>			
With TPS		1	4
With local Councillors	1		10
Councillors too political			6
With the Council as a whole			7
With consultation process			14
<b>WHO SHOULD MAKE DECISIONS</b>			
Councillors	1		
Residents	2		
Officers			3
Mix	5		
<b>COMMUNICATION</b>			
Start earlier	10		
Give enough time	3		
Readability of information (understandable)	3		
Make information available to residents	6		
Utilise Residents' Associations (knowledge, input)	4		
Within the Council	4		
<b>PLANNING ISSUES</b>			
Good design	4		
Environment	8		
Redevelopment	2	2	
Modern development		2	
Historical sites	4	1	1

The following discussion refers to Table 4.5 and addresses the Mitcham focus group. On the topic of satisfaction, participants were initially negative, but later changed their opinion to either neutral or positive after realising most problems lay outside the Town Planners' domain. The negativity was shifted towards the Councillors, with comments given on their political nature and failure to accurately represent their constituents. The Council was viewed negatively, as residents' ideas are often paid "lip service," but never actually considered. The conversation was primarily shared by two members of the focus group, with the third showing agreement but not speaking.

All members felt that residents need more input in the decision-making process but realistically can't have input on every issue. Town Planners need a strong say since it is their job to do what is right for the borough, but an overall balance of power between Planners, Councillors, and residents is necessary.

On the topic of consultation, two participants reinforced ideas we had seen in both the survey and previous focus groups. Residents need to be informed early of proposals, in a language they can understand. Residents' Associations should also be utilised, as they can be more effective in gauging public opinion than asking random residents. Again, the conversation was held by two participants, with the third showing agreement.

All planning issues were deemed important for the borough. The environment was the most important, with development and good design also in need of attention. Lastly, redevelopment of old sites and historical preservation were seen as somewhat obvious or expected, but not especially important, thus receiving less attention. Although the Mitcham focus group was dominated by two participants, the third showed agreement and the ideas expressed coincided with those of our survey and past focus groups, reinforcing our findings.

**Table 4.5. Mitcham Focus Group Content Analysis**

TOPIC	COMMENTS		
	Positive	Neutral	Negative
<b>SATISFACTION</b>			
With TPS	2	1	4
With local Councillors			4
Councillors too political			4
With the Council as a whole	1		5
With consultation process		1	2
<b>WHO SHOULD MAKE DECISIONS</b>			
Councillors			
Residents			
Officers	1		
Mix	2		
<b>COMMUNICATION</b>			
Start earlier			
Give enough time	1		
Readability of information (understandable)	2		
Make Information Available to residents	1		
Utilise Residents' Associations (knowledge, input)	1		
Within the Council			
<b>PLANNING ISSUES</b>			
Good design	1		
Environment	2		
Redevelopment	1	1	
Modern development	1		
Historical sites	1	1	

## 5.0 Analysis

### 5.1 Satisfaction with the Town Planning Service

Satisfaction with the Town Planning Service in Merton is relatively low to neutral. On a scale of one to five (1 = totally dissatisfied, 5 = totally satisfied), the average survey response on the satisfaction with the Town Planning Service in Merton was 2.5. However, general

satisfaction with the Town Planning Service was slightly higher in Morden, which had an average response of 3.5, than in Wimbledon and Mitcham, which had average responses of 2.8 and 2.3, respectively. We also questioned participants about their satisfaction with the layout and condition of Merton's natural environment (question 1) and built environment (question 2), resulting in average responses of 3.1 and 2.4, respectively. The answers to these two questions did not depend on the area in which the respondent lived.

The focus group and survey comments can shed some light on why people are dissatisfied with the Town Planning Service. Two residents, one in the focus group and another on the survey, indicated that the Town Planning Service "doesn't have teeth" because of restrictions placed on them by the central government. However, it seems that most of the respondents do not understand how the Town Planning Service is regulated. One person from our focus group said that even if all residents' voices were heard on an issue, it would not be beneficial unless they have a general knowledge of the Town Planning Service structure and how it affects them. During borough meetings, residents need to prove their point rather than speak with emotions alone.

The focus groups and survey comments revealed specific areas where residents are dissatisfied. The most frequent criticism was of the consultation process. Six out of the sixteen survey comments we received mentioned consultation. Residents indicated that the Town Planning Service needs to be more open and provide clear and understandable information to residents. Residents also feel that consultations are not performed effectively; they are not advertised early enough and often seem to be held after decisions have been made. A more detailed analysis of residents' opinions on communication with the Town Planning Service appears in section 6.4.



Residents also indicated other points of dissatisfaction, specifically with Merton Council as a whole, and with their individual Councillors. One criticism brought up in the focus groups was that Councillors are too political, and make decisions along political party lines rather than taking into account the wishes of their constituents. Political affiliation is not a direct problem within the Town Planning Service, but the Service must abide by the Councillors' decisions. However, if the Councillors are not making decisions based on their residents' desires, then the Town Planning Service may not be able to serve the residents effectively. Some focus group participants cited examples from their experiences with their own Councillors. One participant remarked Councillors "see houses, not people's houses." Both survey comments and focus group participants indicated that the political nature of the Council keep long-term goals and problems from being addressed. Ideally Councillors should not be concerned with how their decisions affect their political standing.

Focus group participants also cited instances of dissatisfaction with specific areas and specific plans within Merton. Two focus group participants expressed dissatisfaction with the parking scheme for Wimbledon centre, and felt that it created a parking problem on their street where there was none before. Others opposed specific developments, such as tall buildings that clash with the continuity of shorter buildings, and a proposed supermarket. Finally one focus group participant indicated her dissatisfaction with the state of the wildlife parks and river walks. She felt they were important and beneficial for the borough, but needed to be better maintained. Although maintenance of public areas is not the responsibility of the Town Planning Service, these comments demonstrate the importance of these areas to residents.

Although the surveyed group did not have high satisfaction with the Town Planning Service, they felt that the Town Planning Service was important for Merton. The average

response for question 3, “How important is Town Planning for Merton?” was 4.8 out of 5. This answer did not vary with location within the borough or with any other factor, as 25 out of 29 respondents answered five. This demonstrates the importance of improving the Town Planning Service - and the value of this research.

## **5.2 Planning Policy Analysis**

One planning policy addressed in the survey questioned who should have the most freedom in the development process, the Town Planning Service or the developer. When asked how much power the Town Planning Service should have when considering land-use proposals, the average response on a scale of one to five was 3.7. Conversely, when asked how much freedom developers should have in realising their proposals, respondents gave an average answer of 1.9, with one being equivalent to no freedom for the developer, and five being total freedom. However, no respondents answered four or five, which reveals a disposition against the developer in favour of the Town Planning Service. Two residents commented on the survey that developers currently have too much freedom, one of them stating “there is still no right of appeal for Merton residents...against planning decisions, whereas developers have the right of appeal always to the DoE [Department of Environment].” The second resident stated that the developers’ right of appeal needs to change. Focus group participants felt that developers should be regulated. Some participants mentioned developments in their neighbourhoods, such as a proposed supermarket, and indicated that the Town Planning Service should regulate these developments, so developers should not have complete freedom to realise their proposals.

Within the Town Planning Service decision making power is divided among several different groups. Question 22 gives five options as to who should possess the majority of the power: residents, Councillors, Council Officers, the Mayor (GLA), or other. The majority of

respondents felt that the residents should have the most decision-making power, followed by the Councillors and Council Officers. However, the delegation of decision-making power in Town Planning is not as cut and dry as this question may appear. The focus groups clarified how and when each group should be able to make decisions. It would be impossible for residents to make all the planning decisions within Merton, but their input remains important. Consultation is one means to obtain their input (more detail in section 6.4). Participants tended to agree that residents should have input on controversial developments and developments that affect their own neighbourhoods. However, the majority of developments (e.g. smaller developments such as additions and garages) do not need to go through residents, but should be addressed within the Town Planning Service by Councillors and Council Officers. In the focus group, residents indicated that Councillors must make decisions that agree with the desires of their constituency and are not influenced by other factors such as political affiliation. Residents also indicated that the Council officers, or the town planners, should only be allowed to make decisions that agree with policy presented in the UDP.

The officers play an essential role in the town planning decision-making process. One focus group participant referred to the town planners as “experts” and “technicians.” Part of their role is to provide information to both residents and the Council so that each group can make informed decisions. When asked, “How much delegated power should Town Planning officers possess (e.g. freedom to make decisions without committee vote)?” the average response was 2.3, where the scale of one to five ranges from less to more. The results were bimodal, with the majority of people answering one or three. This means that residents do not feel officers should have the freedom to make decisions without some sort of regulation, such as the UDP. Participants in the Mitcham focus group reinforced this point by stating that Town Planning

Officers should look at a development proposal and determine if it is “good planning” and not just if it is legal. “Good planning” means analysing development proposals from the residents’ perspective and seeing if they fit with the character of surrounding areas.

The second topic addressed in the Planning Policy section of the survey is the scope of Town Planning policies. The majority of respondents indicated that the scope of policies should cover the entire borough. Approximately one third of the respondents felt that policies should address specific areas, while a smaller group felt that policies should address specific topics. No respondents felt that the Town Planning Service should create policies for individual sites. The focus group participants elaborated, stating that all types of policy are necessary. The UDP should contain general policies for the entire borough, while the Officers should create specific policies as necessary. Transport policies, such as a train system, are general and affect the entire borough, whereas a local street layout is specific and requires local resident input. Residents’ opinions on local issues should be considered when creating policy because they know the area best.

The final topic addressed in the survey is how active the Town Planning Service should be in promoting development. When asked if the Service should “seek out sites to develop, or wait until approached by a developer?” the majority of survey respondents indicated that the Service should seek out sites to develop. This would indicate that the service should take an active role in the development process. However, respondents were split on whether the Council should use its right to purchase private property to accomplish planning objectives. Focus group participants indicated that as a general policy the Council should not use this right, but in cases when a site is essential to the borough, this right could be exercised.

### 5.3 Planning Issues Analysis

The topic of Planning Issues in the survey and focus groups was very straightforward and provided clear data. Participants viewed almost every topic within the borough to be of great importance. The importance of achieving good design in the built environment received an average response of 4.7 out of 5 on the survey. Similarly, in the focus groups, participants cited the layout of streets and aesthetics of buildings as very important. Although the survey could only provide numerical data, the focus groups elaborated with examples of street layouts and parking schemes. Similarly, the importance of conservation and the environment also received an average score of 4.8 on the survey. We elaborated on this point in both the survey and focus groups by asking not only how important conservation and the environment are, but how active Merton's Town Planning Service should be in enhancing them. This received an average score of 4.7, and the focus group participants emphasised the need for the town to provide and maintain playing fields, green space, and wildlife areas.

Our next topic was the importance of restoring and developing vacant or run-down sites within Merton. The survey resulted in an average response of 4.7, while the focus group participants felt that run-down sites deserve more attention than vacant sites. One person from our focus groups commented on the costs of redevelopment. It is less expensive to redevelop an old factory into a new factory than it is to change its use. Money is a key consideration in redevelopment. The next topic of preservation of historical buildings and sites provided a bit more discussion. The survey average was a 4.6, but the focus groups told us much more. All participants were strongly in favour of the idea, but debated the definition of "historical." Each site must be carefully considered before it is deemed historical and money is spent on its preservation. Special interest groups can claim their sites to be historical, but the general

consensus was that a site must have some real historical value for a substantial number of people in order to be saved. For example, the old Wimbledon Town Hall was cited as a legitimate historical site, while the old power plant was not. Therefore, some amount of consideration and consultation is necessary in order to save truly historical sites, and not waste public money on others. One focus group participant noted that Merton has a good record in preserving historical sites.

Opposite to the historical sites question was that of encouraging modern development in Merton. This received an average importance of 3.5 on the survey, and was fairly non-controversial in the focus groups. Many participants saw no need to seek out new sites to develop and stated that there were plenty of other areas that deserve the Planning Service's time and money. Lastly, we asked about the importance of providing affordable housing in Merton. The survey results showed a score of 3.8, and the focus groups agreed that this is an essential role of the Town Planning Service.

#### **5.4 Communication and Consultation Analysis**

In general the residents feel that they do not have adequate influence on the Town Planning Service, and therefore require improved methods of communication. There are many methods to obtain the opinions of the residents. Currently, the Town Planning Service uses consultative forums, but survey respondents rated their effectiveness at an average of only 2.7 out of 5. The current walk-in forums allow anyone to express their opinion. This forum may not be representative of the entire borough, because it allows strong expression of minority views. The respondents feel that consultative forums should have more influence on the Town Planning Service and gave an average response of 3.9 for their ideal level of influence. However, the Town Planning Service must ensure that these forums accurately represent residents' opinions.

In addition to consultative forums, there are several other potential methods for Merton Council to obtain public opinion. Survey respondents ranked post surveys as their first choice while consultative forums and borough meetings tied for second. Focus group participants expressed a need for better communication methods between residents and Merton Town Planning Officers. The survey reflected this need with post, telephone, and face-to-face methods of communication being the most frequent choices.

The majority of the residents are very interested in reading or being informed of town planning reports. Our survey did not yield any clear results on the nature of these reports as people were split between wanting short and general reports or lengthy and detailed reports. Focus groups tended to emphasise clear and concise reports with detailed versions available if desired. Two Residents' Association chairpersons wanted planning reports that explain forthcoming planning issues and implications relevant to their particular ward or area.

Many residents felt that planning policies are too complex or confusing for the public to understand. For example, the size and level of detail in the UDP make it difficult for residents to find specific information. One chairperson in our Wimbledon focus group indicated, "accessibility is both availability and understandability." People need to be told how a planning policy affects them and in which ways.

In addition to written reports, we considered many other methods for the residents to obtain Town Planning information. More than half of the survey respondents have access to the Internet but of those who have access, only half were likely to look up Town Planning information online. The most preferred method to get information on town planning is through Residents' Association meetings. Newspaper, library, and borough meetings also rank high. Electronic methods such as the Internet and email are less favoured.

There was a general consensus from our focus group that consultations should start earlier in the planning process. The participants in the discussion felt that by contacting residents sooner, residents would be able to provide key insights into local concerns, or prevent policies with possible negative impacts to their area. Another reason for consulting earlier is to avoid wasting money on unnecessary plans and professional consultants. Often the options presented to residents are neither necessary nor desirable.

Often there is a lack of participation on the residents' part to seek communication channels with the Councillors. One person from the Mitcham focus group suggested the reason is due to the residents' loss of faith in the consultation process for big projects. Residents believe that their voice does not matter in the planning process. He suggested that restoring faith in the local authorities is key to public involvement and support.

Another group from WPI conducted a similar project (Merton Best Value Consultation) for Merton Environmental Services. Their research overlapped with ours on issues involving Town Planning, communication, and consultation. We surveyed chairpersons of Residents' Associations while they surveyed participants of previous surveys: primarily residents, but also local businesses and organisations. By comparing the results of the two projects we can better approximate the opinions of Merton residents and gauge the accuracy of our research.

For their question "In the future, what types of consultation would you be most likely to respond to regarding planning matters in Merton?" 47% of the respondents gave the answer of postal consultations (Gleeson, Papagni & Reynolds, 2000). This corresponds with our results, since post surveys were the most popular choice of residents for Merton Council to obtain public opinion (32.5%). Also with their question "Through what methods do you obtain information concerning Merton Council planning activities?" 81% of the respondents gave newspapers as



method that they use (Gleeson, Papagni & Reynolds, 2000). Our results showed the newspaper as the second most popular choice with Residents' Associations being first (an option not offered on their survey). Our focus groups also cited newspapers as a desired source of Town Planning information.

Another question, "Who do residents feel should make the decisions regarding planning?" got the response of Councillors and residents as the primary and secondary choices (Gleeson, Papagni & Reynolds, 2000). Our survey showed residents as the desired decision making body; however, our focus groups clarified that a mix of residents, Councillors, and Town Planners is most preferred. The similarities between the groups' findings improve our confidence in the accuracy of our research in estimating public opinion.

## **6.0 Commentary**

The focus of this project was to determine the direction that residents wanted the Town Planning Service to take in the new millennium in terms of policy, development control, and communication. This direction is summarised in section 8.0.

Due to the nature of responses, we have focused a great deal on consultation and communication between residents and the Town Planning Service. Residents indicated that they have become frustrated because they feel that their opinions do not change the planning decisions made by the Council.

Several residents stated that the theoretical machinery is in place to get residents' input in planning decisions, but in practice the machinery breaks down during the process. The primary mechanism for residents to give input to the Council is through their local Councillors. However, some of our participants feel that their Councillors are not willing to stand up for the interests of their constituency. Also, residents' statements at committee meetings do not seem to

influence Councillors' decisions. Several residents have said that Councillors are too political, and that politics should not enter the planning decision making process. One of our focus group participants stated that his ward will only sponsor independent Councillors so that party politics will not be an influence.

Despite being frustrated with the lack of results from input, at least one of our focus group participants stated that residents must be prepared to give constructive and meaningful input to the Town Planning Service. Oftentimes residents have an emotional “not in my backyard attitude” and may not consider the impact of development on the entire borough. Planning must address the needs of the entire borough, and not just the needs of individual residents. Therefore, residents need to be educated on the nature of town planning and the fact that priorities and compromises must be made.

Residents can provide useful input to the Town Planning Service because they are very familiar with their own areas. However, when objecting to a proposal, residents cannot let their emotions prevent them from providing sound planning-related reasons for objection to the development. Residents need to think in planning terms for their input to be useful to the Town Planning Service. Constructive reasons as to why the development is not a good idea will be more likely to get results.

It appears that the key to the effective transfer of ideas and information between the Town Planning Service and residents is a great deal of effort from both parties. The Town Planning Service needs to publicise proposed development within Merton, and ensure that local people are notified. If channels of communication already exist, these need to be better publicised so that residents know about them. In turn, residents must be active in seeking out

existing channels of communication, including attending committee meetings and approaching their local Councillor.

Residents' Associations provide a mechanism to inform people of Town Planning issues. This was also the most favoured channel of communication in our survey. However, the Residents' Associations vary in size and also in function. Some associations represent large areas and are concerned with town planning, education, and other local government operations. However, some Residents' Associations represent a smaller area and are concerned primarily with the maintenance and upkeep of that area. These associations are also concerned with local government matters, but are usually only concerned with town planning when it directly affects their neighbourhood. Larger Residents' Associations also have the advantage of more manpower to spread the work around. This is necessary because the town planning process is so complicated. It will be difficult to tailor planning reports to each association. Also, in order to be successful in dealing with the Council, Residents' Associations need effective leadership, participation, and adequate funding. Because these are voluntary organisations, these requirements cannot be guaranteed. Initiative varies greatly among the Residents' Associations and plays a huge part in their effectiveness.

In addition to communication, we gathered data on satisfaction. The results of the satisfaction research are very useful to gauge current satisfaction; however, the Town Planning Service cannot change these attitudes immediately. The built and natural environments do not, and cannot, change rapidly. Changing public satisfaction is a long-term process. Some dissatisfaction arose from frustration with communication and consultation, and these attitudes can be changed through the implementation of better communication methods, as discussed in the Recommendations section below.

## **7.0 Recommendations**

The data we have gathered, along with the problems we encountered over the course of our project, lead us to make several recommendations to the Town Planning Service. The responsibility of implementing these recommendations falls to the Councillors and the Council Officers responsible for development control, policy creation, and consultation. These recommendations are presented below in three categories: development control, planning policy, and communication.

Development control Officers need to exercise their authority to control developers. This is essential for the Town Planning Service to ensure that development objectives laid out in the UDP are met. Residents have expressed that the preservation of environment, the preservation of important historical sites, and achieving good design are all important development objectives.

Council Officers responsible for the creation of policy need to implement policy that meets the physical needs of the borough and incorporates the desires of residents. This requires creating borough-wide policies for strategic policy and other policies that impact the borough as a whole and creating other more specific policies as required. These specific policies could be made for specific areas or regions of the borough or for specific topics, such as housing. The Town Planning Officers need to determine the extent of policy that is required to cover as many planning and development scenarios as possible.

The officers who perform consultation need to remember the desires of residents as well. Residents wish to be consulted early in the planning process on issues relevant to their neighbourhoods. Essentially, improving communication between the Town Planning Service and the residents is the most important recommendation we can make. It can solve many of the current problems by avoiding misunderstandings, facilitating a transfer of information, opinions,

and ideas, and enabling the two groups to work together to better the town as effectively as possible.

Poor communication between the Residents' Associations and the Town Council seems to cause many misunderstandings and hinder the transfer of ideas and opinions. In general, residents feel apathetic towards the Town Planning Service since they feel that it is inaccessible and not concerned with the residents. This is due, at least in part, to the inability of the two groups to contact each other. We had much difficulty contacting Residents' Associations just as the Planning Service does. To solve this problem, there needs to be a current database of Residents' Association contacts and a means to keep it updated. The Merton Voluntary Service Council (MVSC) provides the most current directory of Residents' Associations. The Council should use this list because it is updated annually.

Next, the residents must be able to contact the Council. They need to be made aware of who and where to call to obtain information and to get their opinions heard. A point of contact for Residents' Association within the Town Planning Service needs to be established. This person must be able to direct residents' concerns to the right person or department to get them heard and considered. The lack of participation by some Residents' Associations may be partly due to the difficulties within the local system, but is mainly due to lack of interest. There must be several means for residents to find the information they desire, such as the newspaper, library, or Residents' Association mailings. Information should be consistently published so residents always know where to find it. However, it is not necessarily the Council's job to get information to every single person. As long as information is made available, it is the residents' responsibility to seek it out. Active Residents' Associations have shown the desire and interest level to obtain information and get their opinions to the Council. Increasing the availability of

information and streamlining communications may stimulate residents' interest and allow an exchange of ideas between the two groups.

## **8.0 Conclusions**

The residents of Merton have clearly stated what type of Town Planning Service they want as the twenty-first century begins. Although they are not greatly dissatisfied with the current Town Planning Service, they are not completely satisfied either. Residents feel that the Town Planning Service can improve. Residents have expressed how the Town Planning Service should operate and what areas are important for the Town Planning Service to address. These findings are summarised below.

The Town Planning Service needs to continue to meet the physical needs of the borough. Residents have indicated that preserving the environment is extremely important. This includes guarding greenfield sites, conservation areas, and parks from development. Residents have also stated that restoring and redeveloping vacant and run-down sites within Merton are important. The redevelopment of urban areas goes along with the national Governments' policies of urban sustainability and renewal. It is the responsibility of the Town Planning Service to ensure that this new development is of good design. Residents have stated that it is important that new development does not change the character of the borough. Residents have also indicated that affordable housing is important for the borough, and that the Town Planning Service needs to make adequate provision for it.

The Town Planning Service needs to implement policy to meet the planning needs of the borough. This policy needs to address a wide range of issues and situations, so residents have requested a variety of policies. General borough-wide planning policies are needed to address

things that affect the entire borough and require a great deal of infrastructure, such as transport, while other policies, such as parking schemes, should be formulated for smaller areas.

Residents have also expressed how the Town Planning Service should operate within its statutory framework. The Town Planning Service should exercise strict control over development to ensure that development objectives are met. Developers should not have complete freedom to realise their development proposals. This control by the Town Planning Service is essential to ensure that other planning objectives, such as the preservation of green space and the preservation of the character of the borough, are met.

Residents have also stated who should make planning decisions. Council officers should make decisions on matters that are non-controversial. These decisions must be in line with the policies presented in the UDP. If planning decisions involve controversial issues and development proposals, Councillors need to make the decisions themselves. However, residents' input must be of primary importance in making these decisions. Council Officers need to supply sound planning advice to both the residents and the Councillors so a decision that is best for the borough is made.

Finally, residents have expressed their desire for a more open Town Planning Service. They feel their opinions and voices need to be better heard when considering planning policy. Tools such as Residents' Association meetings and newspaper ads should provide information on current planning issues. Residents suggested providing summaries of planning proposals in the newspaper with names and phone numbers as points of contact to get further information. When at all possible, the residents want to hear about policies that affect their own neighbourhoods the most. They also suggested that planning consultation should start earlier so there is enough time to consult the residents effectively. Residents do not have time to be consulted on all planning

issues; however, they want to offer their views on controversial issues or issues which affect their area.

Improving communication between the Town Planning Service and the residents can be achieved by keeping all contact information updated and improving the consultation process. Through the combined efforts of the residents and the Town Planning Service, the borough of Merton can continue to grow and improve.



## 7.0 References

- Berg, B. (1998). Qualitative research methods for the social sciences. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Cairns, D. (1996, January 1). Rediscovering democratic purpose in British local government. Policy and Politics, 24(1), 17-27.
- Cullingworth, J. B., & Nadin, V. (1997). Town & Country Planning in the UK. London: Routledge.
- Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. (1996). Development Plans. London: Privately Printed.
- Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions. (1998, March). A Mayor and Assembly for London. London: Crown Copyright.
- Essex, S., Brown, A., & Bishop, K. (1999, February). Urban growth versus sustainability: the planner's conundrum. Town and Country Planning: the Quarterly Review of the Town and Country Planning Association, 68(2), 61-64.
- Gleeson, J., Papagni, B., & Reynolds, E. (2000, March). Merton best value consultation project. London: Privately Printed.
- Gross, J. (1995, Winter). British local government: the demise of local democracy. New Political Science, 33/34, 201-222.
- Karns, D. (1988, September 1). A survey of community perceptions and the civic index. National Civic Review, 77(5), 450-462.
- Leach, S. (1999, January 1). Introducing cabinets into British local government. Parliamentary Affairs, 52(1), 77-93.
- Levy, J. (1997). Contemporary Urban Planning. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- London Borough of Merton. Code of Practice and Procedures. London: Privately Printed.
- London Borough of Merton. (1999, September). Unitary Development Plan (UDP) Deposit Draft: Statement of Publicity and Consultation. London: Privately Printed.
- Merton Council. Opportunities for Change: Consultation paper on a revised UK strategy for sustainable development. London: Privately Printed.
- Newman, P., & Thornley, A. (1997). Fragmentation and centralisation in the governance of London: Influencing the urban policy and planning agenda. Urban Studies, 34(7), 967-988.

- Price, V., & Neijens, P. (1997). Opinion quality in public opinion research. International Journal of Public Opinion Research, 9(4), 336-360.
- Prime Minister and the Minister for the Cabinet Office. (1999, March). Modernising Government. London: Privately Printed.
- Salant, P. & Dillman, D. (1994). How to conduct your own survey. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Shamir, J. (1998). Motivation and accuracy in estimating opinion distributions: A survey experiment. International Journal of Public Opinion Research, 10(2), 91-108.
- Tewdwr-Jones, M. (Ed.). (1996). British planning policy in transition: Planning in the 1990s. London: UCL Press, 1996.
- Williams, K. (1999). Urban intensification policies in England: Problems and contradictions. Land Use Policy, 16, 167-178.

## 8.0 Bibliography

- Berg, B. (1998). Qualitative research methods for the social sciences. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Cairns, D. (1996, January 1). Rediscovering democratic purpose in British local government. Policy and Politics, 24(1), 17-27.
- Cullingworth, J. B., & Nadin, V. (1997). Town & Country Planning in the UK. London: Routledge.
- Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. (1996). Development Plans. London: Privately Printed.
- Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions. (1998, March). A Mayor and Assembly for London. London: Crown Copyright.
- Essex, S., Brown, A., & Bishop, K. (1999, February). Urban growth versus sustainability: the planner's conundrum. Town and Country Planning: the Quarterly Review of the Town and Country Planning Association, 68(2), 61-64.
- Gleeson, J., Papagni, B., & Reynolds, E. (2000, March). Merton best value consultation project. London: Privately Printed.
- Gross, J. (1995, Winter). British local government: the demise of local democracy. New Political Science, 33/34, 201-222.
- Hamilton, C., Martin, G., & Marcello, J. (1998, May). Public consultation for the London borough of Merton's unitary development plan review: Best practice guide for the use of focus groups in the London Borough of Merton. London: Privately Printed.
- Karns, D. (1988, September 1). A survey of community perceptions and the civic index. National Civic Review, 77(5), 450-462.
- Leach, S. (1999, January 1). Introducing cabinets into British local government. Parliamentary Affairs, 52(1), 77-93.
- Levy, J. (1997). Contemporary Urban Planning. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- London Borough of Merton. Code of Practice and Procedures. London: Privately Printed.
- London Borough of Merton. Street Plan Folder. London: The British Publishing Company.
- London Borough of Merton. (1999, September). Unitary Development Plan (UDP) Deposit Draft. London: Privately Printed.
- London Borough of Merton. (1999, September). Unitary Development Plan (UDP) Deposit Draft: Statement of Publicity and Consultation. London: Privately Printed.

- Merton Council. Opportunities for Change: Consultation paper on a revised UK strategy for sustainable development. London: Privately Printed.
- Merton Voluntary Service Council. (2000-2001). Directory of community organisations in Merton. London: Meridian.
- Newman, P., & Thornley, A. (1997). Fragmentation and centralisation in the governance of London: Influencing the urban policy and planning agenda. Urban Studies, 34(7), 967-988.
- O'Hare, F., & Funk, R. (2000). The modern writers handbook (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Price, V., & Neijens, P. (1997). Opinion quality in public opinion research. International Journal of Public Opinion Research, 9(4), 336-360.
- Prime Minister and the Minister for the Cabinet Office. (1999, March). Modernising Government. London: Privately Printed.
- Salant, P. & Dillman, D. (1994). How to conduct your own survey. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Shamir, J. (1998). Motivation and accuracy in estimating opinion distributions: A survey experiment. International Journal of Public Opinion Research, 10(2), 91-108.
- Tewdwr-Jones, M. (Ed.). (1996). British planning policy in transition: Planning in the 1990s. London: UCL Press, 1996.
- Williams, K. (1999). Urban intensification policies in England: Problems and contradictions. Land Use Policy, 16, 167-178.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Contact Information**

This project was completed for the London Borough of Merton. For more information  
contact

Mr. Ian Bremner  
The London Borough of Merton  
Environmental Services Department  
Merton Civic Centre  
London Road  
Morden, Surrey  
SM4 5DX

Phone: 0-181-545-3818  
Fax: 0-181-545-3326

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Work Plan**

**Group 6 Task Chart**  
**Merton Town Planning Services in the Millennium**

	week 0	week 1	week 2	week 3	week 4	week 5	week 6	week 7
write survey								
print sample survey								
write focus group questions								
give questions to liaison								
pre-test survey								
Pre-test focus group								
familiarize with environment								
obtain supplies								
administer survey								
administer focus groups								
transcribe, compile, analyse								
write report								
print report								
prepare presentation								
hand in report								
give final presentation								
depart								



## **APPENDIX C**

### **Survey Cover Letter**

**PLANNING AND PUBLIC PROTECTION DIVISION**  
Head of Planning and Public Protection - Steve Clark

date: 14 March, 2000  
my ref: ES/PP/IB/WPI  
telephone: 0181-545-3063  
please ask for: Jason Cardinal, Zhuo Chen, or Nathan Smith

**London Borough of Merton**  
**Merton Civic Centre**  
**London Road**  
**Morden, Surrey SM4 5DX**  
**DX 41650 Morden**

*Switchboard: 0181-543-2222*  
*Minicom: 0181-545-3245*  
*Telex: 893062*  
*Fax: 0181-545-3326*  
*Direct Line: 0181-545-3063*

**WPI:**  
**MERTON TOWN PLANNING SERVICES IN THE MILLENIUM**

Dear Chair:

We are researchers from Worcester Polytechnic Institute (USA) working for Merton Council's Environmental Services Division. We are collecting residents' opinions, attitudes, and suggestions about the Town Planning Service. Your input is greatly appreciated and will be used to map out new directions for the twenty-first century.

You are being asked to participate in this study because of your position as a Residents' Association chair. The enclosed questionnaire seeks your opinions on the role of the Town Planning Service, the importance of different planning issues, and the methods of communication between Merton residents and the Town Planning Officers. Please return the completed questionnaire in the envelope provided within two weeks, as our research period is very brief. Your participation is essential to the success of our research.

Your opinion is crucial to Merton Council's efforts to improve its services for the local community. This survey will help to make your opinion more effective in creating changes in your community.

Finally, you may be contacted to participate in a follow-up discussion group at the Merton Civic Centre. This will allow you to explain your opinions and provide valuable suggestions. If you have questions about the research project feel free to contact us at 0181-545-3063. Again, thank you for your time.

Yours sincerely,

**Jason Cardinal**  
**WPI**

**Zhuo Chen**  
**WPI**

**Nathan Smith**  
**WPI**

**Ian Bremner**  
**Plans and Projects**  
Environmental Services Dept.  
0181-545-3818

## **APPENDIX D**

### **Written Survey**

*Merton Town Planning Services in the  
Millennium*

Residents' Questionnaire

January 2000

**I. IN THIS SECTION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE PLEASE CIRCLE THE RESPONSE THAT BEST DESCRIBES YOUR OPINION ABOUT THE TOWN PLANNING SERVICE IN MERTON.**

*SATISFACTION*

- 1) How satisfied are you with the current layout and condition of Merton's natural environment (e.g. trees, parks, green space)?

not satisfied      1      2      3      4      5      completely satisfied

- 2) How satisfied are you with the current layout and condition of Merton's built environment (e.g. buildings and streets)?

not satisfied      1      2      3      4      5      completely satisfied

- 3) How important do you feel Town Planning is for Merton?

not important      1      2      3      4      5      very important

- 4) In general, how would you rate your current satisfaction with the Town Planning Service in Merton?

not satisfied      1      2      3      4      5      completely satisfied

*POLICIES*

- 5) Ideally, how much power should the town planning service have when considering a land-use proposal?

none      1      2      3      4      5      total

- 6) How much freedom should individual developers or builders have in realising their proposals?

none      1      2      3      4      5      total

- 7) How much delegated power should Town Planning officers possess (e.g. freedom to make decisions without committee vote)?

less      1      2      3      4      5      more

- 8) How much influence should Merton Planning Officers have on the Mayor's Spatial Development Strategy?

less      1      2      3      4      5      more

- 9) Who should have the most influence on the Mayor?
- a. public
  - b. councillors
  - c. Merton officers
  - d. businesses
  - e. other (specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- 10) Town planning policies can vary in scope. Should Town Planning policies be created for:
- a. the entire borough?
  - b. specific areas?
  - c. specific sites?
  - d. specific topics (e.g. business, residential, environmental)?
  - e. other (specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- 11) Should the Town Planning Service seek out sites to develop, or wait until approached by a developer?
- a. seek out sites
  - b. wait until approached
  - c. other (specify): \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. no opinion
- 12) Should the Planning Service exercise its right to purchase private property to achieve its planning objectives?
- a. yes
  - b. no
  - c. no opinion

## PLANNING ISSUES

- 13) How important is it to achieve good design in the built environment (e.g. attractive, efficient layout of buildings, streets, etc.)?
- not important      1      2      3      4      5      very important
- 14) How important is conservation and the environment to you?
- not important      1      2      3      4      5      very important

15) How active should the Town Planning Service be in and enhancing Merton's local environment?

not active      1    2    3    4    5    very active

16) How important is it to restore and develop vacant or run-down sites within Merton?

not important      1    2    3    4    5    very important

17) How important is it to preserve historical buildings and sites?

not important      1    2    3    4    5    very important

18) How important is it to encourage modern development?

not important      1    2    3    4    5    very important

19) How important is the provision of affordable housing in Merton?

not important      1    2    3    4    5    very important

*CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION*

20) How much influence do you feel Merton residents have in town planning?

none      1    2    3    4    5    total

21) Ideally, how much influence *should* Merton residents have in town planning?

none      1    2    3    4    5    total

22) Who should possess the most power in Merton's Town Planning?

- a. residents
- b. councillors
- c. town council officers
- d. Mayor (GLA)
- e. other (specify): \_\_\_\_\_

23) Have you ever attended a consultative forum?

- a. yes
- b. no

24) How effective do you feel that consultative forums are in getting public opinion heard and considered?

totally ineffective      1      2      3      4      5      totally effective

25) How much influence should consultative forums have in the town planning service?

none      1      2      3      4      5      total

26) What is the best way for Merton Council to obtain public opinion?

- a. consultative forums
- b. post surveys
- c. phone surveys
- d. voting
- e. borough meetings
- f. focus/discussion groups
- g. other (specify): \_\_\_\_\_

27) How would you prefer to contact Merton Council's Town Planning Officers?

- a. telephone
- b. post
- c. in person
- d. email
- e. other (specify): \_\_\_\_\_

28) How much interest do you have in reading or being informed of town planning reports?

none      1      2      3      4      5      a lot

29) Should these reports be made more easily accessible to the public?

- a. yes
- b. no

30) Should these reports be short and general, or should they be lengthier and provide all details?

short/general      1      2      3      4      5      lengthy/detailed

31) Do you have access to the internet?

- a. yes
- b. no



32) How likely are you to access town planning information on a website?

not likely      1      2      3      4      5      very likely

33) What would be your preferred method to obtain town planning information?

- a. borough meetings
- b. Residents' Association meetings
- c. newspapers
- d. library
- e. website
- f. email
- g. other (specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**II. IN THIS SECOND SECTION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS. THESE ARE FOR STATISTICAL USE ONLY AND WILL REMAIN STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL. IF YOU ARE UNCOMFORTABLE WITH ANY QUESTION FEEL FREE TO IGNORE IT.**

34) In which Ward of Merton do you reside?

- |               |       |               |       |
|---------------|-------|---------------|-------|
| Village       | _____ | Dundonald     | _____ |
| Raynes Park   | _____ | Hillside      | _____ |
| Durnsford     | _____ | West Barnes   | _____ |
| Trinity       | _____ | Cannon Hill   | _____ |
| Colliers Wood | _____ | Lower Morden  | _____ |
| Graveny       | _____ | St. Helier    | _____ |
| Figges Marsh  | _____ | Ravensbury    | _____ |
| Lavender      | _____ | Phipps Bridge | _____ |
| Abbey         | _____ | Pollards Hill | _____ |
| Merton Park   | _____ | Longthornton  | _____ |

35) Approximately how many people are in your Residents' Association?

\_\_\_\_\_ People

36) How long have you lived in Merton?

- a. 0-5 years
- b. 6-10 years
- c. 11-15 years
- d. 16-25 years
- e. over 25 years

37) What is your age?

- a. 20-29 years
- b. 30-39 years
- c. 40-49 years
- d. 50-59 years
- e. 60 years or greater

38) Please indicate your gender.

- a. Male
- b. Female

39) Please indicate your cultural or ethnic group.

- |                    |                          |
|--------------------|--------------------------|
| a. white           | g. Indian                |
| b. white Irish     | h. Pakistani             |
| c. black           | i. Bangladeshi           |
| d. African         | j. Chinese               |
| e. black Caribbean | k. Tamil                 |
| f. black (other)   | l. Other(specify): _____ |

40) Do you:

- a. own your house or flat?
- b. rent your house or flat?

41) Which of the following choices best describes the property in which you live?

- a. flat
- b. semi-detached house
- c. detached house
- d. terraced house
- e. other (specify): \_\_\_\_\_

42) What is your primary occupation?

Specify: \_\_\_\_\_

**III. IN THE FINAL SECTION OF THIS QUESTIONNAIRE, PLEASE FEEL FREE TO PROVIDE ANY ADDITIONAL COMMENTS OR SUGGESTIONS IN THE SPACE BELOW.**

**YOUR RESPONSES ARE GREATLY APPRECIATED. PLEASE RETURN THIS COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRE IN THE PROVIDED ENVELOPE BY 9 FEB 2000.**

Merton Town Planning Services / WPI Research

Environmental Services

London Borough of Merton

Merton Civic Centre

London Road

Morden, Surrey

SM4 5DX

## **APPENDIX E**

### **The Evolution of the Written Survey**

## Appendix E

### **The Evolution of the Written Survey: “Merton Town Planning Services in the Millennium”**

When conducting social science research through the use of a written survey, it is essential to ensure that the questionnaire is written accurately and will elicit the responses that will produce the accurate data. This appendix explains the steps we took to write a good survey. It will address what we feel were the successes and shortcomings of our survey by analysing our specific process. Although this appendix addresses the development of a survey about the Town Planning Service in the London Borough of Merton, others can use this process to develop surveys on other topics.

The first essential component of writing a good survey is a good understanding of the subject matter. In order to ask the correct questions to elicit the desired data we needed to be experts on Town Planning in Merton. The starting point for becoming an expert is research. We completed the majority of our research during our Preliminary Qualifying Project (PQP). The Literature Review section of this report contains the results of this research. To be knowledgeable about Town Planning in Merton, we researched government and Town Planning in the United Kingdom.

The next required step before writing the survey was to ensure that we knew what specific topics needed to be covered in the survey. In some projects this may be very clear. However, because of the wide range of topics introduced in the Merton Council’s original project brief we needed to clarify the specific content so we could address all of the issues in a clear and concise manner within our survey. Our liaison, Mr. Ian Bremner, a planner employed in the Environmental Services Division of Merton Council, was helpful in clarifying the survey content and scope. Most of the confusing aspects of the original project brief were the result of

unclear wording. The following paragraphs include excerpts from the original project brief from Merton Council, how we addressed unclear points, and how this translated into the survey.

Some of the unclear topics in the original project brief resulted from words that had unclear meanings. They were unclear because of their context in Town Planning. For example, the original project brief states, “Students will be expected to explore the residents’ preferences for...a Town Planning Service which is more or less prescriptive in terms of land use proposals and policies.” In this statement, the exact meaning of the word prescriptive was unclear to us. Mr. Bremner indicated that a prescriptive policy would be sharp, clear, and highly descriptive of what type of development is allowed in an area. A non-prescriptive policy would be a mixed-use policy that does not designate specifically what type of development is allowed, but allows multiple types of development.

Question ten evolved from a specific point on the original project brief, which stated that we should “explore residents’ preferences for...should the Council produce plans on an area basis rather than on a borough basis...” This point sounds like a simple either-or question. However, there are more options for developing policies than for the entire borough or a specific area. The Town Planning Service could also write policies for specific topics. There are other ways to organise policies, so we included an “other” choice in the question. However, this question also indicates how prescriptive the Town Planning Service should be in its policies. Area policies are more prescriptive, or precise, than borough policies.

Another essential aspect of preparing a good survey is pre-testing. We pre-tested our survey with our liaison, other members of the Environmental Services division of Merton Council, and our project advisors. Each of these parties provided some useful insight to improve the survey.

Our liaison's and other Environmental Services Department employees' advice served two purposes: assurance of correct planning terminology, and the elimination of any American terminology. Our original draft contained a demographics question requesting annual household income. Mr. Bremner pointed out that this is a very sensitive question in the United Kingdom, and suggested two alternative questions. The first was number forty: "Do you (own, rent) your house or flat?" The second was number forty-one: "Which of the following choices best describes the property in which you live? a. flat, b. semi-detached house, c. detached house, d. terraced house, e. other (specify)." These two questions are indicators of income, and are not as sensitive for respondents to answer. Other reviewers suggested new topics, such as the provision for affordable housing, to be included in the Planning Issues section of the survey.

Our advisors also provided critical insight on survey structure and question wording, such as the ordering of responses in multiple-choice questions. For example, question thirty-two originally read as follows:

- What would be your preferred method to obtain town planning information?
- a. website
  - b. borough meetings
  - c. Residents' Association meetings
  - d. newspaper
  - e. library
  - f. email
  - g. other(specify): \_\_\_\_\_

However, a more logical ordering would put website nearer the bottom of the list next to email because both are electronic methods of communication and are not currently used extensively by the Merton Council. Our advisors also addressed question clarity. Question 10 originally read

How should town planning policies be created?

- a. on a borough basis
- b. on a topic basis
- c. on a site-specific basis
- d. other (specify): \_\_\_\_\_

The phrasing of the question was unclear to a non-planner. We rephrased the question to read:

Town Planning policies can vary in scope. Should Town Planning policies be created for:

- a. the entire borough?
- b. specific areas?
- c. specific sites?
- d. specific topics (e.g. business, residential, environmental)?
- e. other (specify): \_\_\_\_\_

This rephrasing made the meaning of the question less ambiguous.



**APPENDIX F**

**Telephone Log**

## Appendix F

### Telephone Log:

**Morden:** 23 Residents' Associations, 15 contact numbers available.

Called Thursday, 27 Jan. 5:00-6:30 P.M.

Two wrong numbers

Two outdated members

Six no answer

Two successful, will attend on weds 9-Feb and thurs 3-Feb.

Two call back later.

One refused to participate due to past bad experiences and disgust with local system.

Called Tuesday, 1 Feb. 2:00-4:00 P.M.

Rescheduled 3-Feb appointment to 9-Feb.

Returned one call, and person refused to participate-not interested.

Returned one call, and person refused to participate-not well.

One call back later.

Two wrong numbers.

Three no answer.

Called Wednesday, 2 Feb. 4:30-5:30

Three no answer.

**Wimbledon:** 44 Residents' Associations, 27 contact numbers available.

Called Wednesday, 26 Jan. 6:00-7:30 P.M.

Twelve wrong numbers.

Eight no answer.

One can't come.

Two won't come.

Three will attend Tues 1-Feb.

One may call back.

Called Thursday, 27 Jan. 5:00-6:30 P.M.

Person called back, will not attend.

Called one back, no answer.

**Mitcham:** 50 Residents' Associations, 26 contact numbers available.

Called Thursday, 27 Jan. 5:00-6:30 P.M.

Eight wrong numbers.

Eight no answer.

Six old info. (no longer chair, or association disbanded.)

Three may call back.

Call one back.

Called Tuesday, 1 Feb. 2:00-4:00 P.M.

Three no answer.

Two wrong number.

One old info- Association does not exist.

One may call back.

Called Wednesday, 2 Feb. 4:30-5:30 P.M.

Three no answer.

Thursday, 3 Feb:

Called information for 15 missing numbers, found 6 successfully.

Called Merton Voluntary Service Council to inquire about updated Res.

Assoc. list. Informed us of published directory, and we found a copy

within Merton Council's Environmental Services Dept.

## **Friday 4-2: Obtained updated list**

Called Monday, 7 Feb. 6:00-7:00

### **Morden:**

Called 6 new numbers:

1 wrong number

1 outdated number (past chair 2 years ago)

2 no answer

2 couldn't come.

### **Mitcham:**

Called 11 new numbers:

5 wrong numbers

3 no answer

2 couldn't come. (One may call back if they get out of the hospital)

1 will attend 16-Feb

Called Weds, 9-Feb

Called back attendee for 16-Feb, rescheduled to 15-Feb.

Called Thurs, 10-Feb

Called 1- will call back

Person returned call- will attend 15-Feb.

## **APPENDIX G**

### **Transcript of Wimbledon Focus Group**

## Appendix G

### Transcript of Wimbledon Focus Group

**Date: Tuesday 1 February 2000 7:00-8:30 PM**

**Place: Ante Room, Merton Civic Centre**

#### **Residents' Associations Present**

Wimbledon Union of Residents' Associations

Haydons Bridge Residents' Association (2 attendees)

Amity Grove Residents Association

#### ***Pre-discussion:***

WURA: term limits make for short-term goals for councillors only. They don't think sustainability or long-term since they'll be out of office. Many important planning issues can't be resolved in a five-year term, so they never get attention.

#### ***Satisfaction with Town Planning Service***

HBRA1: fighting proposed Safeways  
Council has done nothing  
UDP changed at the last minute

WURA: Town Planning Service is average. It could improve but does OK.

AG: Town Planning doesn't have teeth. Local authorities will be done in 30 years. Forty years ago most of the local authority's income came from central government and very little control. Now the central government does not provide as much income but implements more control. The Town Planning Service doesn't have much strength. UDP is what council likes to see. There's a process of appeals for disagreeing with changes made by the Council, but it's still not good enough.

#### ***Who should have power?***

AG: Residents. Councillors are elected, and then they are employed by the people.

WURA: A mix. Need a practical approach. Realistically, the can't consult on all issues, but on big issues residents voices should be heard. They should be heard on important policy issues. The day to day decisions should be made by councillors. Councillors are too political. They know the political side and not residents' side. Councillors are the mechanism to implement democracy.

HBRA2: Councillors don't act on our issues.

WURA: Conservation areas more restricted. The committee is made up of 15% councillors, 60% residents, and 25% technical experts. The committee is non-political. People know the local issues better than the councillors. Councillors are forced to listen more, believe it or not. You can call it a forum. It would work for areas other than conservation. The specialist input is useful. Big issues should not be left only to councillors. Resident's don't want political approach.

HBRA2: The situation has not changed. At a public inquiry we were treated like garbage. When you phone people at the council all you get is administration. Too many councillors don't know what they're doing

--discussion of outdated survey addresses—

AG: Need efficiency in the Council. If you start with unclear policies it leads to a dead end. Start with clear policies that have a majority following. Problem of how people respond. You need to decide how you get information. The majority of the respondents doesn't necessarily mean the majority of the people. (20/100 shopkeepers were in favor, out of only 39 who responded.) You need a majority of the people in favour of the change. If you go to and fro, to and fro, you get nowhere. Can't make decisions within the given time frame.

WURA: Councillors nearly always follow on recommendations, about 90% of the time, in the conservation committee. The principle is there and it works well. There is a problem finding out what people think. Need to make sure people understand issues for voting. What is the best way to get public opinion, and how important is it to get public opinion on each issue? Need a balance of the two.

AG: Comes down to listing of policy. It is not unreasonable for borough to have policy for major retail shopping areas. Set a limit, we want x amount of area of retail space at the maximum.

HBRA2: Well, PPG6 has always been there.

WURA: The UDP is supposed to establish policy. Wimbledon society put in 100 separate objections. I don't agree that it (Town Planning Service) has little strength.

HBRA2: Something was added overnight to the UDP five years ago. New UDP asks for residents' help. Land de-designated as a shopping center, but was never re-designated as anything else, so we didn't really win our fight.

WURA: The people who shouldn't have power are officers. Officers can make decisions in line with the UDP. They don't even live in the borough, so they should only deal with non-controversial decisions.

HBRA2: (Agrees with WURA)

WURA: Officers are not policy makers, they are technicians.

AG: We have the theory in place, but it breaks down somewhere.

HBRA2: Councillor was suspended by party for voting against party policy and for the people in his/her ward. That's ridiculous.

WURA: There was a committee (not specified) made up of 9 members, five from one party, four from the other. The majority leader talked about how they were going to vote, until one of the five spoke against it. Then the minority four realised they could defeat the majority party, and voted with the one for the sole purpose of defeating the majority, and not because it was the correct planning decision. And that's how planning matters are decided!

HBRA1: At one point we ended up with no councillors. (one was suspended for going against his party's view, and the other was "promoted" to mayor)

- HBRA2: Our councillor (same as above) tried to remain politically indifferent by offering no opinion either way, but therefore couldn't represent the people since they didn't know what she thought.
- AG: Our local councillor is in the minority group. Which is sometimes better not to have one at all. The first thing you do is try to get the majority group behind you. If you disagree you couldn't ....?
- AG: Need time to object. Access to information is important. This includes readability and availability. Need things to be clear. Need to go through thoroughly. Need an overall thing. Make policy local. Give people time. We are always told too late. Councillors were given 6 days to decide an issue, no time to obtain residents' opinions.  
Consult whether we want something done. Need meetings before money is spent. Consultation (with public) was done after spending £27,000 on consultants and needed to justify it. They gave options, none of which were good. They didn't ask whether or not something should be done. They asked how something should be done.
- WURA: The council is weak on consultation. However, Town Planning Service has only 8 weeks to respond to proposals. Get resident views only on important or controversial cases, since residents don't have the time to deal with every one. Different problems require different solutions.
- Jay:** *How should policy be organised?*
- AG: Start off by having a general policy. UDP is too detailed for general policy. Then take it into parts of the borough. The danger in this is that it is convenient to use wards, but is not always the best way. Small stuff can be delegated, but the immediate neighbours should be informed. Suggested plan?? One example is the bus route. If in doubt of local impact, get in on local organisations.
- HBRA2: There is no single answer. Need an overall policy and a local policy.
- WURA: Depends on the issue for how each situation is organised.
- HBRA2: That was a confusing question.  
Town Center Planning. Hate the cheap look of new facades. Its architecturally awful. Should introduce architecture.
- WURA: That's not under Town Planning. There are too many opinions on what is aesthetically good.
- AG: Problem with consultation is that it is so late.
- WURA: For the Wimbledon parking scheme, chairman has met with councillor regularly. Worked out problems along the way. This will work provided there are organisations for them to go. If there is no Residents' Associations, the council has no place to go.
- Jay:** *How far should they go to obtain opinion? (Active vs. Passive involvement)*
- AG: Depends on issue. We can't always have a voice.
- WURA: People have votes but don't have knowledge. People need to understand the issues. Need to understand pros and cons. It's hard for council to inform residents.
- AG: Voting is only good if the voters are informed



- HBRA2: council doesn't always speak truthfully when informing residents. The parking scheme is being fought by the South Park Residents' Association. The council pushed the problem to our area where there wouldn't have been a problem in the first place.
- AG: Need to consult in the early stages. The information needs to be understandable. This is quite difficult. An example is the forum I attended on drug policy. Anyone who wasn't on the inner loop had to keep asking what different things meant.  
Got a journalistic summary of major issues so people could look at it and see what they needed more information on and then you could go look at it. The UDP was too complex, so someone simplified it so all could understand.
- HBRA2: There is so much information people don't know where to start. The demise of Residents' Associations. The elitist group can understand it. Nobody else can. Planning is not for the normal person, so they get discouraged and give up.
- WURA: On the different type of forums:  
The walk in forums. These are an absolute waste of time. Anybody can come in and say their view. The views are not representative of any group, but only of the person who is saying something.  
The health and safety forum. This usually has a small number of residents, and a large number of special interest groups with axes to grind. Totally unbalanced. Don't represent residents. Represent views that are held very strongly by a small group.
- AG: The local authorities pay lip service to consultation. The people who control the agenda control the discussion.  
Need independent specialists (to explain things) or you're in trouble.  
Consultants are hired and briefed by councillors. In Wimbledon, a group of large architecturally good homes fell into single room occupancy and fell into disrepair. The Council proposed tearing them down and putting up boxes. A local man who was an architect drew up alternative plans to preserve the architecture. Without the architect the buildings would be gone.
- WURA: Difficulty in getting councillors to follow through. Start talking at beginning of plan and scheme for development.
- HBRA2: Bus lane was put in wrong spot because consultants were paid to analyse the wrong area. Consultants were paid for specific area only.
- WURA: The people who know problems are the people who live there. The experts are not interested.
- AG: Consultation must take place early. Before they spend any money.
- Jay:** *How consultation*
- AG: local paper,  
If you tell people who else you're consulting, they can get together on their own. The council doesn't have to bring them together. Council always meets at 7.
- WURA: Put an ad in the Messenger or The Guardian. Just a couple of sentences to tell them where they can get more information on the internet, board, phone number.

- HBRA2: or the library.
- WURA: You can get a list of all the planning applications for 20 quid each year. List is updated every fortnight. See if anything affects your area and then act on it. The mechanisms are there, just not offered or promoted. People need to seek them out.
- AG: Early warning system is not in place. The newspaper could have news divided into sections for each village. This is done elsewhere. People could check if there was anything that would affect their area.
- HBRA2: Representatives. Paper got lost. (dangers of mobile phones)  
Discussions in an environmental forum didn't go any further than discussion. It was a waste of time.
- WURA: Need to require councillors to provide a list of their actions on recommendations. Also require a year-end summary of action. The forum used in the conservation committee could be expanded and used in other areas.
- AG: You've got to know what happens to minutes of meetings. Within the Council there is now way of sending information up. Managers are paid to tell people what to do, but there is no mechanism for sending information up.
- WURA: Councillors. Associations do have people who have knowledge. Officers should be told by expert residents. Can't just rely on councillors.  
Consultation is a big issue.
- HBRA2: People need to know who to phone. (discussion of councillor Puddy?)  
(specific example of councillor insulting residents because of their opinion on a dangerous traffic area.)
- WURA: Some councillors think they know, don't like people to know more than they do. Need to accept that they are not the only ones with knowledge.  
Councillors should accept suggestions not as insults to their intelligence.  
Others can, and are willing to help
- HBRA2: It's about sharing power, not holding power.
- Jay: *How important is good design?***
- HBRA2: Must update to have clean streets. Councillors decided on limiting street cleaning without consulting.
- AG: Actual design is important. Object to sheds (temporary buildings).
- HBRA2: (agrees.)
- WURA: Need to pay for good scheme. Spend sufficient money for big schemes.
- AG: Council employs people to find funding from outside the borough. They have a short time to spend this money, so they spend it poorly.
- Jay: *How important is the environment?***
- AG: Single most important issue
- HBRA2: Wildlife parks and the river-walk are disgusting. Don't do it if you aren't going to maintain it. They are disgusting.
- AG: Number 1.
- HBRA1: Objected to safeway because of pollution.
- Jay: *How important is redevelopment?***
- AG: If buildings are vacant or run-down, take action.
- HBRA2: Safeway

AG:

WURA: Wouldn't trust council to buy them (vacant sites). Don't trust them to do a good business deal. Unless there is a huge plot of land that is needed they should act.

AG: One public car park is leased by the council for the water department. If the water department takes the land back there won't be any parking in (Raine's Park?). There are areas where they should take action. Purchase land only for a single purpose that benefits the town, don't start buying up land all over the place.

**Jay:** *How important is the preservation of historical sites?*

AG: Example is the power station. Don't save it. Not really historical. Not worth saving.

WURA: Real venerable sites should be preserved. You can err too much on the historical side. Need to decide what is important to save.

HBRA1: The Wimbledon Town Hall.

WURA: The Town Hall is important to provide a centre for Wimbledon.

HBRA2: They need to keep the ---Theatre.

WURA: Strongly in favour of Historical sites if it is reasonable.

**Jay:** *Do you have any final comments?*

WURA:

AG: Officers' views need to go upwards, or nothing will get done.

## **APPENDIX H**

### **Transcript of Morden Focus Group**

## Appendix H

### Transcript of Morden Focus Group

**Date: Wednesday 9 February 2000 7:00-8:00 PM**

**Place: Ante Room, Merton Civic Centre**

#### **Residents' Association Present**

Mostspur Park Village Association

*Note: Because only one person attended, we used an interview format instead of a focus group. Mostspur Park is a residents' and tenants' association. We found out after the fact that our participant was not a resident of Merton, but operated a shop within the borough.*

#### ***Pre-interview***

There's a good case for centralised government, there are too many internal conflicts- nothing gets done- no one's ever happy.

#### ***Are you familiar with town planning?***

Not very

#### ***Are you satisfied with town planning?***

I have opposing political views, so no not really. UDP plan is very good, process is thorough and is reconsidered several times. The plan is there if people care to find out, people need to seek it out. They do exceedingly well considered the limited time and money. Great ideas are put forth, but no money gets them deferred. The best laid plans go nowhere.

#### ***Approach to town planning?***

Must appeal to all sections, so a general approach. Can't pick and choose or favour one area. They pay attention to community groups and resident groups, but they're still a long way from implementing their ideas.

#### ***Active or Passive?***

Example: Prince George's playing field for sale in Wimbledon. Wimbledon football club wants to buy it to make a new stadium. Usually 10-30 people attend the RA meetings, but last night about 100 were there to oppose the development. Residents are upset by the crowds and football supporters. There's a rush to sell property and values drop. It's a private sale, the local government has no involvement until the owner tries to develop the land. The buyers do their homework first- they meet with the council behind closed doors to determine the possibility of getting their plan approved. Residents are afraid of that- so they are lobbying and protesting. Wimbledon has a real role to play in this issue. The councillors are apprehensive of how they were voted in in the first place, and are careful to not oppose the people who voted them in. Developer and residents are both influencing the councillors.

#### ***Issues?***

The ongoing thing is re-development. They don't dare stand still. It's a political judgement: put the money into new housing development in hopes those people will vote for them next time... or: Is it their duty to preserve existing residences? People work hard to make a living, so residences should be

supported over big businesses. Tesco opened, small business dropped, but is returning because people have realised over the counter personal service is valuable.

Local authority should provide sporting space. Schools, playing fields, parks, grounds. Now people use privately owned land, but at any time the owner can put a fence around it and that would be it. Need to provide open space.

There's a movement to preserve wildlife habitat—so that wildlife can travel among open spaces. This is a great bone of contention. Some people are opposed since animals are viewed as a nuisance to some.

### ***Good Design?***

They're bound to deal with it, but don't take on an architectural monstrosity, people will say "who approved that??" Don't go over the top, the topic is important though, they need good design.

### ***Historical Sites?***

Again, they can go over the top—minority groups interested in their sites. It is important though. Merton Abbey—lots of Wimbledon supporters, it has a great history. People prove the historical worth of it, so it should be preserved. So yes, they need to preserve valuable historical sites, otherwise they're a "modern day vandal."

### ***Communication:***

#### ***Do people have influence?***

The machinery is there, whether it works like it should, it don't know. Apathy, people won't make it work. People want to be left alone, they're disinterested. They want to work from 9-5 and go home and do what they want. It's getting worse as people care less and less. Local authorities will give up and do what they want—tough luck.

#### ***Who should have the most influence?***

I'd like to say the residents, but it's not possible really. Need to put faith in the town planners, they're paid to do what they do. In most cases, people get the kind of local authority they deserve. So no, residents should not have a say unless it's extremely controversial. With 200 people in a room, you'll get 200 different opinions.

#### ***Most convenient way to contact council?***

Be prepared to attend meetings. People get hints of issues in the press. The council doesn't have the ability to tell every person. Anyone can attend meetings. Usually, residents don't make their cases well anyway.

### ***Comments?***

For every local council there are 30-40 councillors, who are in committee for the local authority, and are at the continual beck and call of their residents, who believe they have a responsibility to represent their individual opinion. Many people don't want to be a part of that. Let the local council do it, then complain after. Could be handled better centrally. Local and central governments are opposing, they never agree and there's tension always.

Selection process for parliament: Wimbledon residents had let their representative lose by 11,000 votes. Wimbledon is considered a better neighbourhood, and they couldn't believe "they" had let it happen. So no they

are trying to get the seat back for their representative. Process starts with 97 applicants, have to sift through CV's and choose best 25. Talk about soul searching- how do you order or preference people. No instructions, and no interaction with outside. Next, give each of the 25 marks from 1-10 in 6-8 categories. All 25 candidates are interviewed by the entire committee. 7 are chosen. Then three are invited for final selection. Their wives attend with them, and the entire wimbledon constituency chooses. At the end of the evening they have a party representative. The whole process takes about 6 weeks. Now they hope to win the seat back in 2 years. It's a huge process, you can't imagine a fairer system.

## **APPENDIX I**

### **Transcript of Mitcham Focus Group**



## Appendix I

### Transcript of Mitcham Focus Group

**Date: Tuesday 15 February 2000 7:00-8:30 PM**

**Place: Ante Room, Merton Civic Centre**

### Residents' Associations Present

Longthornton and Tamworth

Glebe Court (2 attendees)

### *Pre-discussion*

LT: The common problem with local government is lack of participation. I've been with the Longthornton Residents' Association for 24 years. Our residents' association acts as an interface between residents and councillors. Our biggest concerns are with education and town planning.

GC1: The association has been around for 45 years. Glebe Court is a council estate. We employ an estate and staff. We get an allowance from the Council to manage the estate. We do a better job than the council. For example, pipe broke, we called the contractor and got it fixed that night. The following week everything was fixed. We don't have a lot to do with Town Planning.

### *How familiar are you with Town Planning Service?*

LT: I'm most familiar out of the two of us. We represent an entire ward. For example, we had an application for a 3 ½ acre enclosed site where the developer wanted to put 56 houses with access by a single road that was in fact a cul de sac. We petitioned the Council and mounted an objection campaign. Council refused the application, the developer appealed. There was a public enquiry and it got thrown out again. So the developer bid on four houses and planned to demolish two to create rear access. Residents objected, but the plan met the legal requirements so it was passed. The residents went ape-shit. We went to Civil Court. Did our research on house deeds, restrictions onto what can be done. Lawyer said the case was worth a go. We told the developer we'll see you in court. He tried to settle, but we didn't want money, we wanted reasonable planning. Developer backed down.

Town planning called soon after and suggested a 75-bed nursing home on the same land. They agreed subject to compromise with builder and got a nature conservancy on part of the 3 ½ acre site. It went to Council and it was exactly what everyone wanted.

Long story short...Council committee is not swayed by public opinion because they don't want the hassle of defending an appeal.

### *Seek out sites or wait for developers?*

GC1: Don't give developers an iron fist. Residents need to be consulted and allowed to express their views.

LT: <clarified question>

GC1: It's a moot point, really. We must have development, it's difficult to say. We live in Mitcham which has always been an oldy worldy place. It's a village. Don't have much room to develop. I suppose the Council could present a site,

developers could present their proposals, then they could decide. Still need to be in contact with residents.

LT: A particular site occupied by a factory. The Town Planning Department could approach it and rezone it or they could rebuild it as industrial. Unless its rezoned the developer wouldn't know what he could do with it.

GC1: On Church road there are old factories and there are houses built on the factory sites.

LT: We would say the biggest downfall of Town Planning is that all applications are for housing with no consideration for employment.

***How important is good design?***

LT: Very important.

***How important are parks and green space?***

GC1: Got to combine the two (development and parks, etc.).

LT: Very difficult. Unlikely to convert developed land to park land. The battle is to preserve park land.

GC1: A developer took part of our sports ground.

LT: Good design is important.

***How important is it to restore run-down sites?***

LT: The biggest obstacle is cost. The factory can be redeveloped as a factory at a reasonable cost. If you change its use, it costs a lot of money.

GC1: All run-down sites are factories. Eventually they should be redeveloped.

***Historical versus modern development?***

LT: Within Merton there aren't many sites that fit within that context. Sites of architectural merit should be preserved. The Council and the residents are on the same page in this matter. Don't demolish it for the hell of it.

LT: We have a good record for that, but there aren't all that many.

***Communication with residents***

GC1: Residents have to be consulted and reach an agreement. Not one side pushing the other. It's like collective bargaining. Compromise and compare plans. As a resident, you earn the right to be consulted.

LT: In practice it doesn't work. Residents make views known by writing or approaching councillors. Councillors sit on planning committee or present views to the committee. Members of the public can have three minute public presentation time. It's a complete farce. The council just pays lip service, they already have their plans. Residents opinions are far down the list. The most important consideration (for councillors) is that they get land grants. It was politics, you can't get around that. Doesn't matter which party. The principle works, but in practice it doesn't.

***Best way to get views heard.***

GC2: Meetings are good, but people won't attend. A questionnaire, maybe. Newspaper ads.

LT: The biggest obstacle is that an officer goes to a residents meeting and people don't prove their point, they speak with emotion only. They don't present good planning aspects. If people aren't constructive they waste their opportunity. Useful throughput isn't very high.

Meetings are good if they are channelled through the people who know what they are doing (residents' associations). Without guidance it's a mess. Make it relevant to the council.

In the past surveys, Council did not get much useful information. People to know procedures and think along town planning lines. Then you'll get useful information.

GC1: People need to be told it will affect you in such and such a way.

***Should policy be created on a borough basis, area basis, etc.?***

LT: At moment Town Planning policy is specified for the entire borough in the UDP. Covers areas and specific facets. Could be improved, but it is set up well by addressing many areas and topics. Fairly well covered.

GC1: Got to contact various residents. Must have general opinion. Need to present things as they will affect that area and those people so they can respond and participate.

LT: From a borough point of view there are things that can't be covered parochially. For example, transport needs to be addressed borough wide. Other topics can be addressed on an area basis.

GC1: There is a roundabout in Mitcham. Somebody put it there nobody likes it. Somebody decided it was a black spot. But I've never seen an accident there and I've been around a while. (etc. etc.)

LT: You can plan on a borough basis, but specific sites need local input because they know it better than anyone.

***Any final comments?***

GC1: Another thing-building height. Mitcham is oldy worldy. No one is supposed to build above a certain height.....etc. etc.

***Town Planning Process***

LT: The trouble is, we'll let the public have their say, their 3 minutes at committee meetings. There is no guarantee that anyone is going to be swayed. What is the best to approach these people? Ask them to postpone applications to converse with residents. Councillors wouldn't even support this. Council officers are there to advise on planning standards. They're not concerned if it's good planning, but if it is legal.

People have a lack of faith in planning. Public doesn't believe council committee's will take notice of public opinion. What the hell, they'll do what they like. The only time something worked was when we took it to court and not to the Council.

The Town Planning Service is fine on small stuff, like garages or additions to your house, but the public doesn't have faith on big projects, such as location of schools or housing developments.

GC1: Mitcham doesn't have a lot of room.

LT: Council planning department is what the Councillors let it become. Councillors aren't willing to defend people's views. They're too political.

GC1: The problem is that planners don't live in the area.

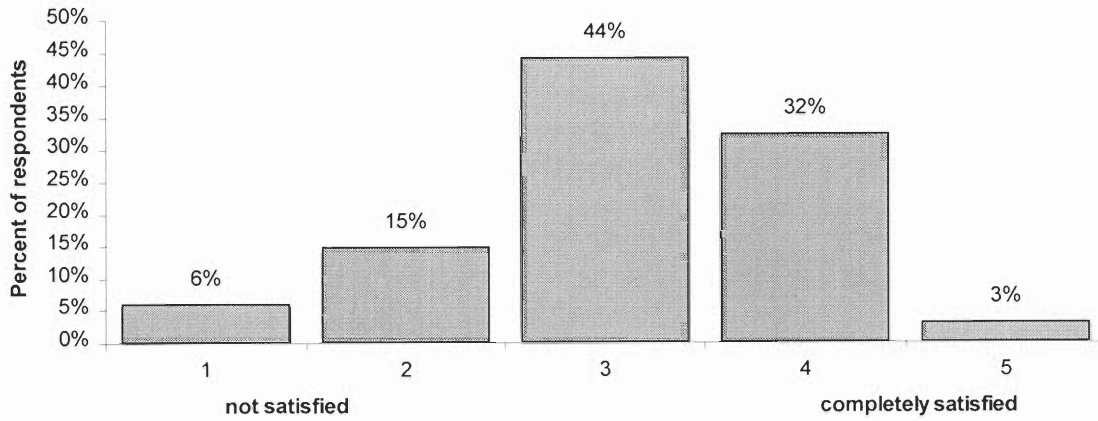
LT: Councillors support an issue in principle, but don't know the situation. They wouldn't live in a housing development that they vote for.

- GC1: We need more cohesion between the Town Planning Department and residents. Developers say we want this. No thought for the residents.
- GC2: Planners need to speak the same language as us.
- LT: Councillors have bad attitudes. They view things from above, and not from a personal level. They see houses, not people's houses. You can fight it, but it costs money and it's with the court, not the planning department.
- GC1: Stimulate interests in residents, make it relevant to them.
- LT: Residents Associations are a good way to inform people with the effect things will have on them. Got to explain in detail.
- GC1: People are afraid to deal with stuff and approach people.
- LT: Councillors are very poor. People don't know who their councillors are. They need to be made known and held responsible for their decisions. We run a newsletter to let people know. Council system doesn't work very well, it's politics first, people second. Town Planning gets blamed for a lot of stuff that's the Councillors fault. Council committee won't challenge it. Town Planning needs to be more concerned with aspects beyond the law. It's real hard to get rid of councillors or officials because they are not held responsible for their decisions.

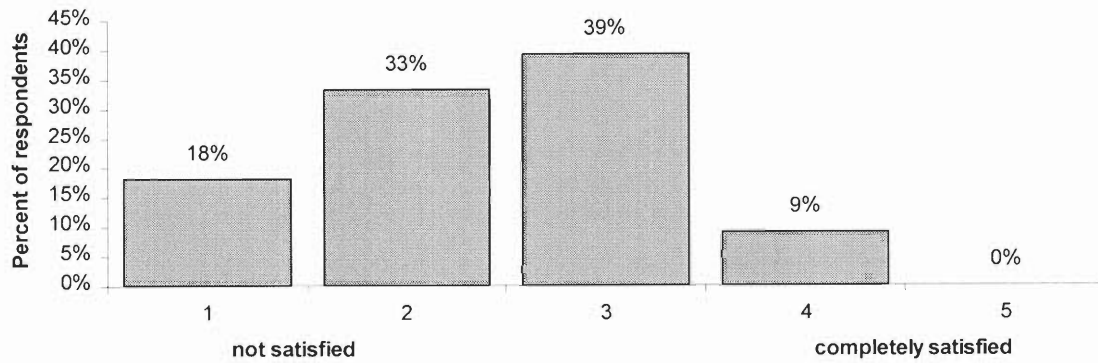
## **APPENDIX J**

### **Survey Section I – Results**

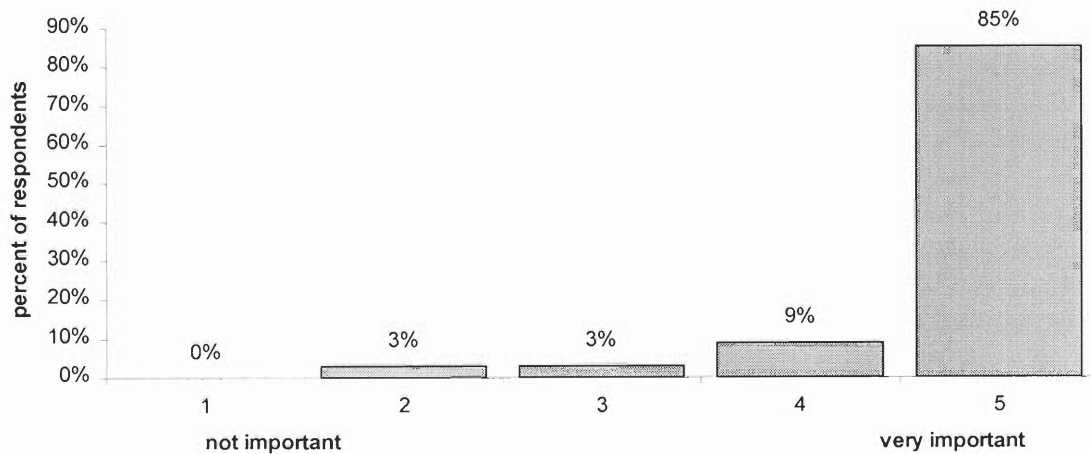
**#1: How satisfied are you with the current layout and condition of Merton's natural environment?**



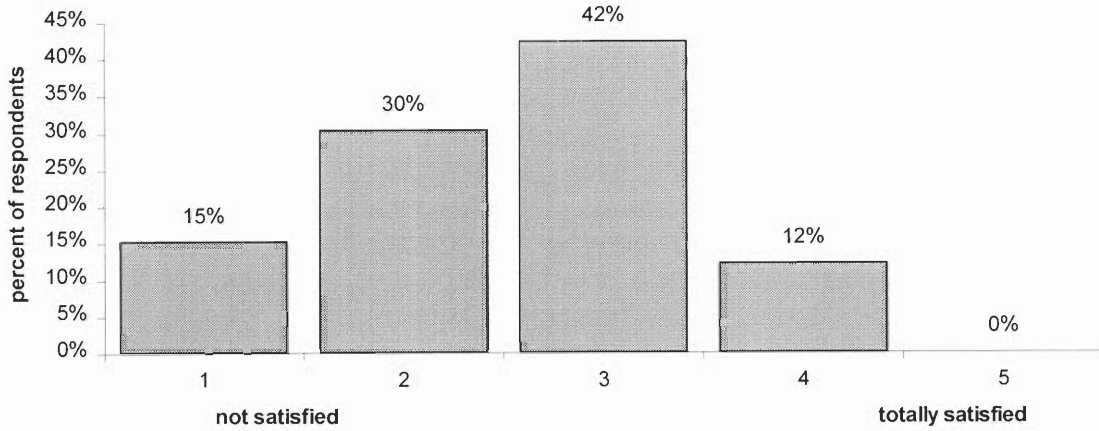
**#2: How satisfied are you with the current layout and condition of Merton's built environment?**



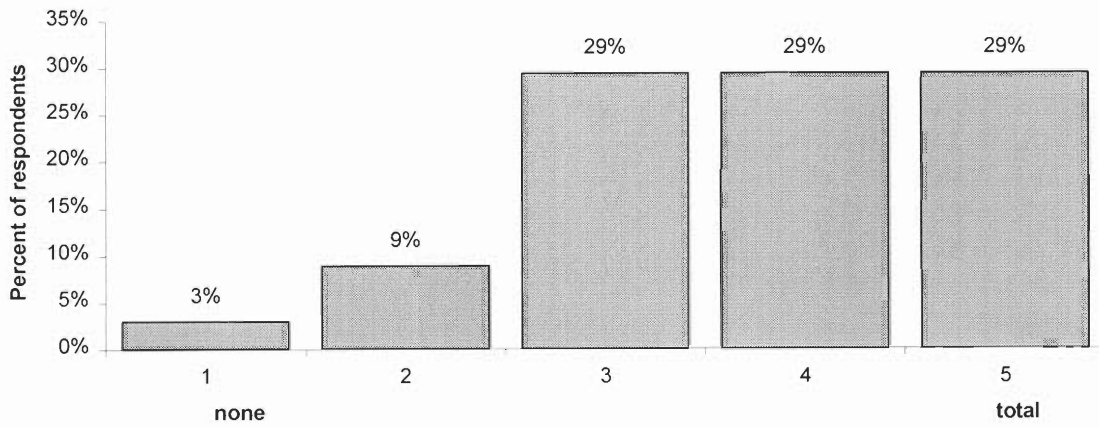
**#3: How important do you feel Town Planning is for Merton?**



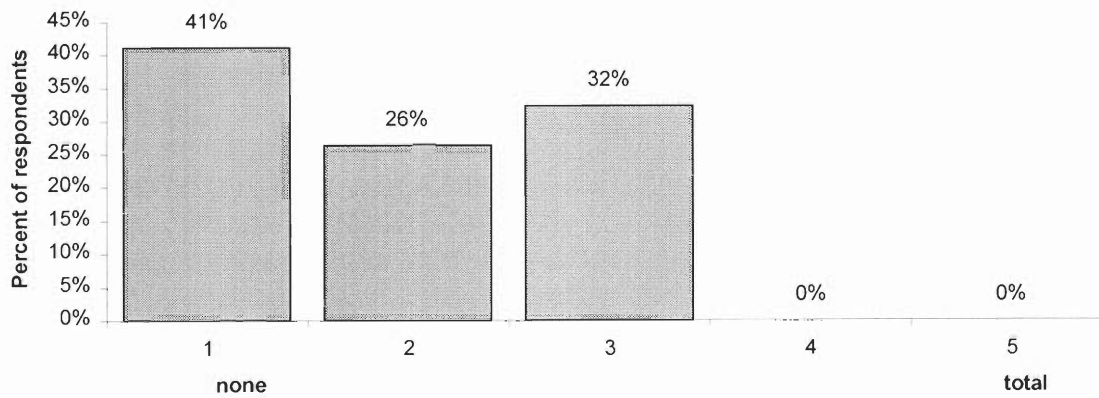
#4: In general, how would you rate your current satisfaction with the TPS in Merton?



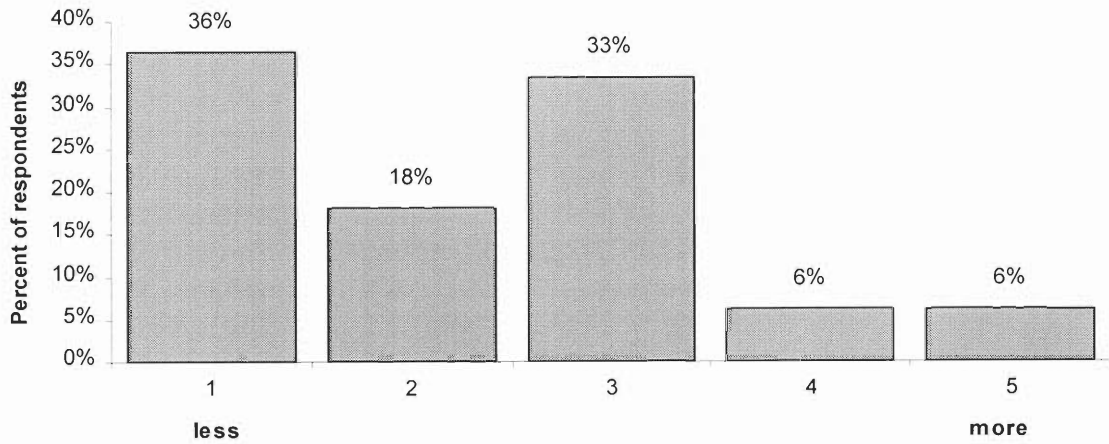
#5: Ideally, how much power should the town planning service have when considering a land use proposal?



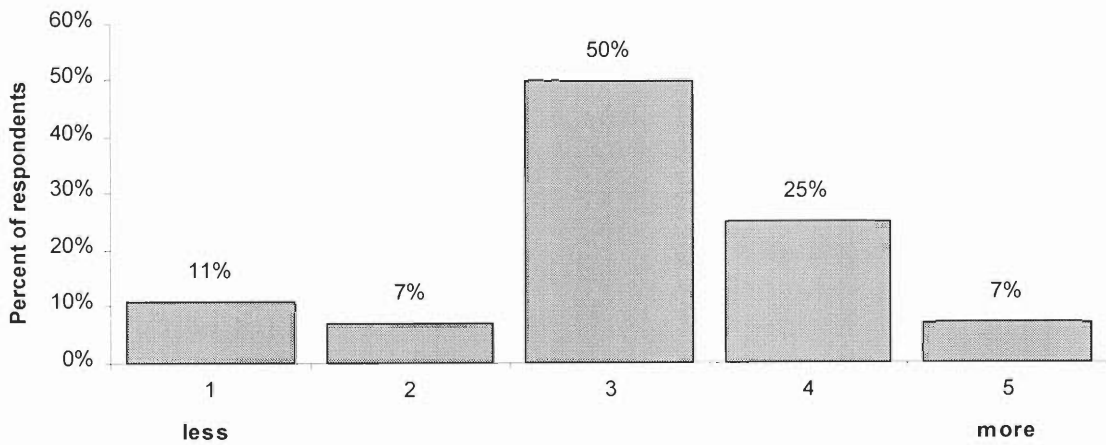
#6: How much freedom should individual developers or builders have in realising their proposals?



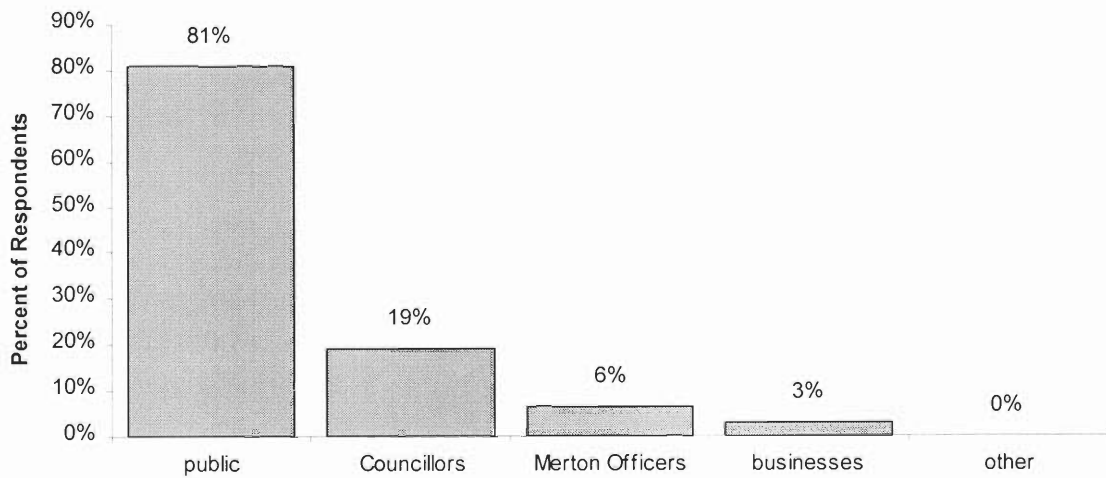
**#7: How much delegated power should Town Planning officers possess?**



**#8: How much influence should Merton Planning Officers have on the Mayor's Spatial Development Strategy?**

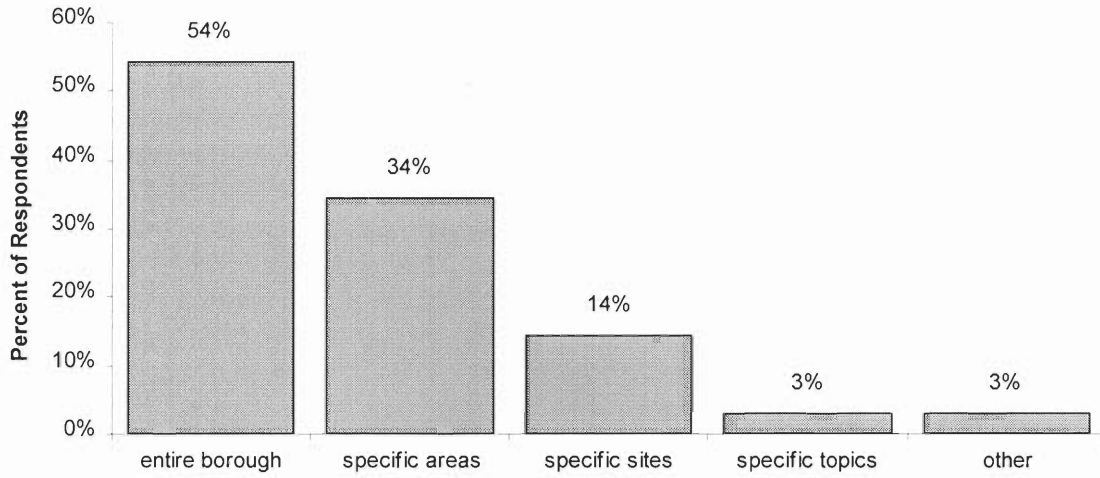


**#9: Who should have the most influence on the Mayor?**

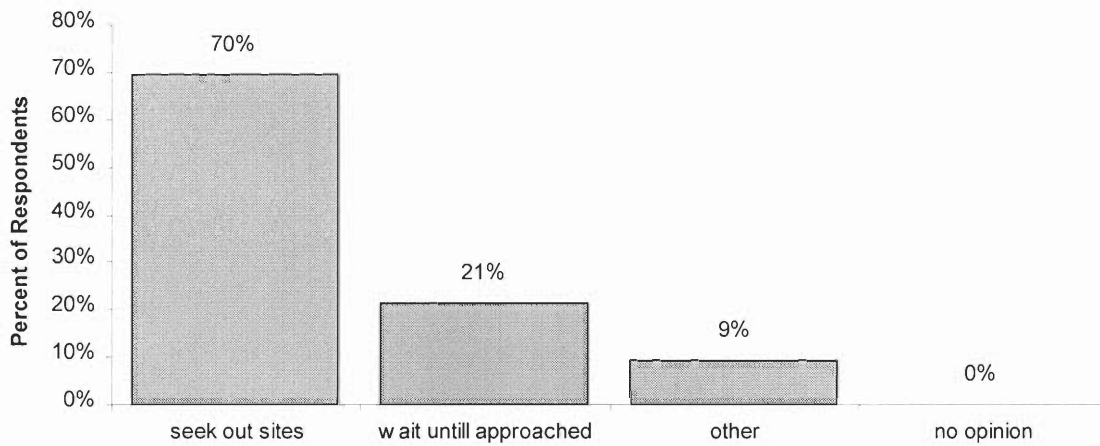




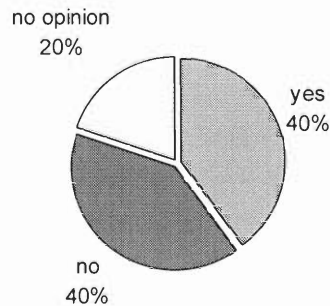
**#10: Should Town Planning policies be created for:**



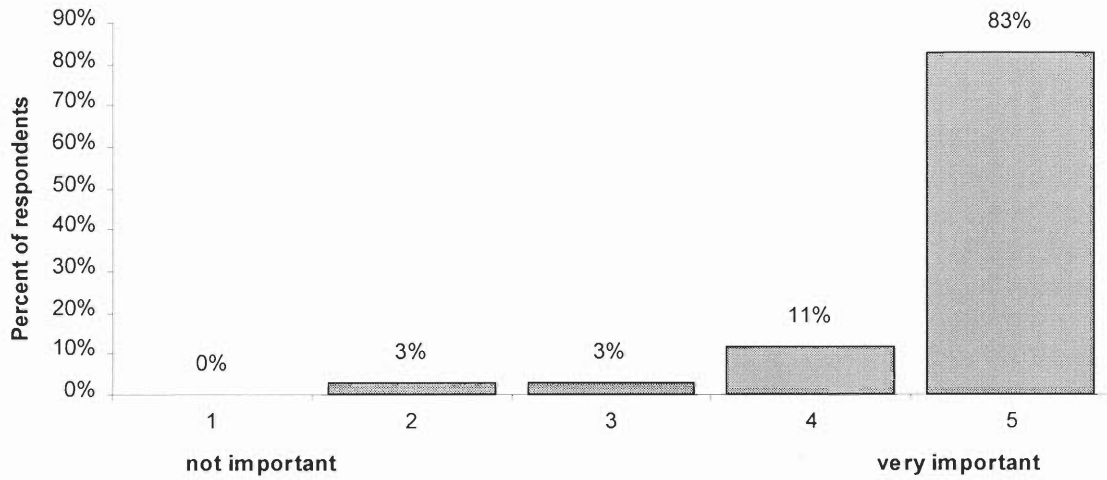
**#11: Should the Town Planning Service seek out sites to develop or wait until approached by a developer?**



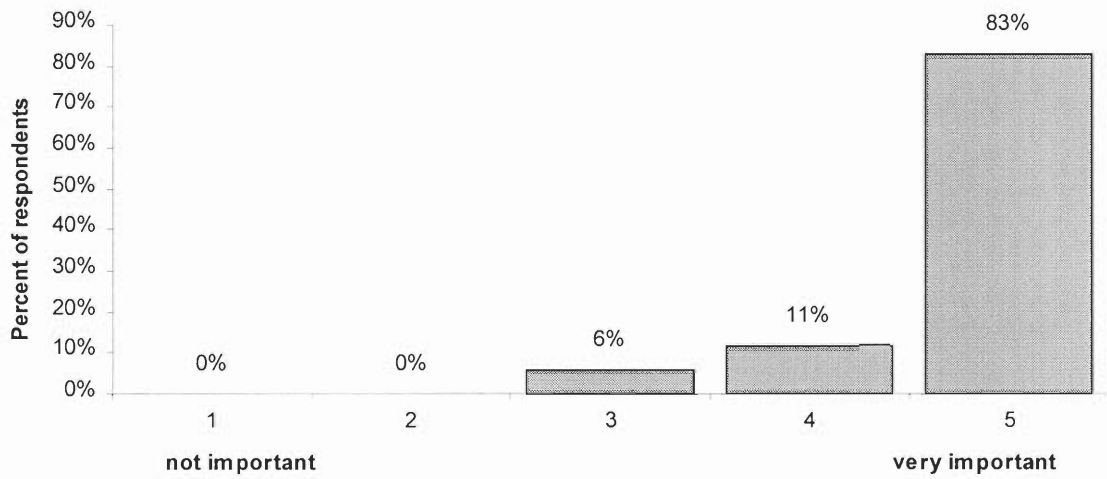
**#12: Should the Planning Service exercise its right to purchase private property to achieve its planning objectives?**



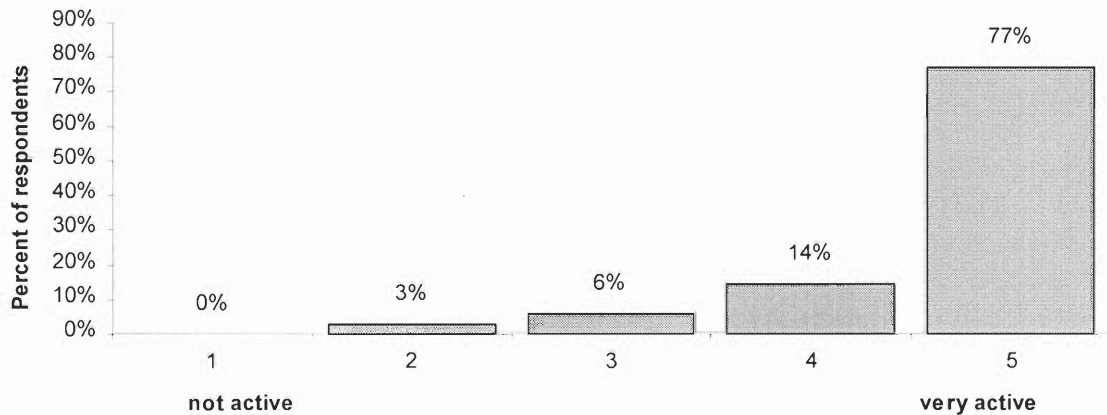
**#13: How important is it to achieve good design in the built environment?**



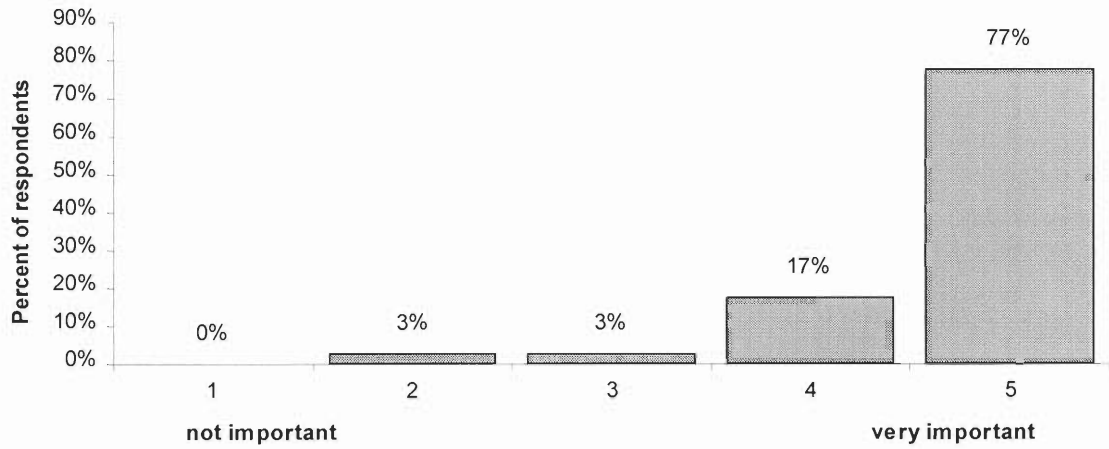
**#14: How important is conservation and the environment to you?**



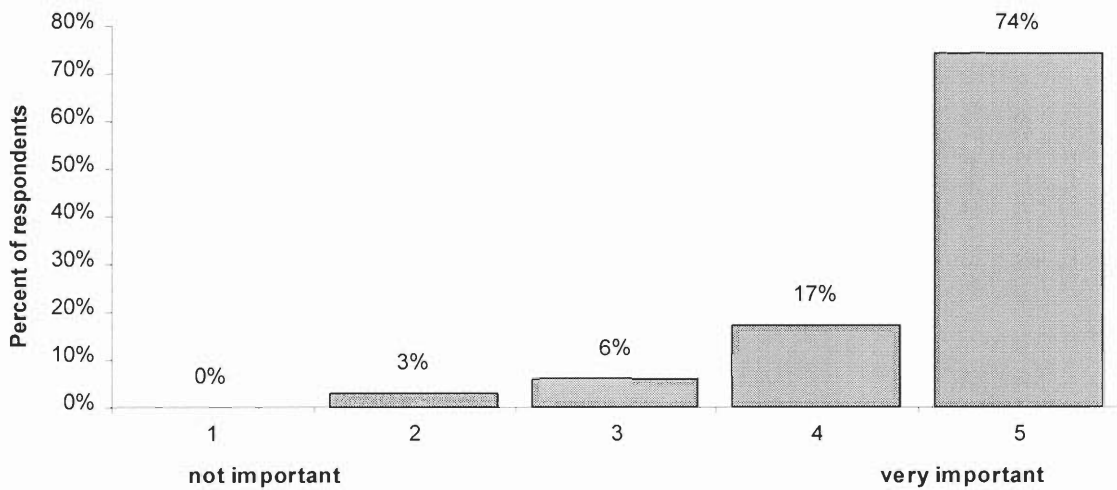
**#15: How active should the Town Planning Service be in enhancing Merton's local environment?**



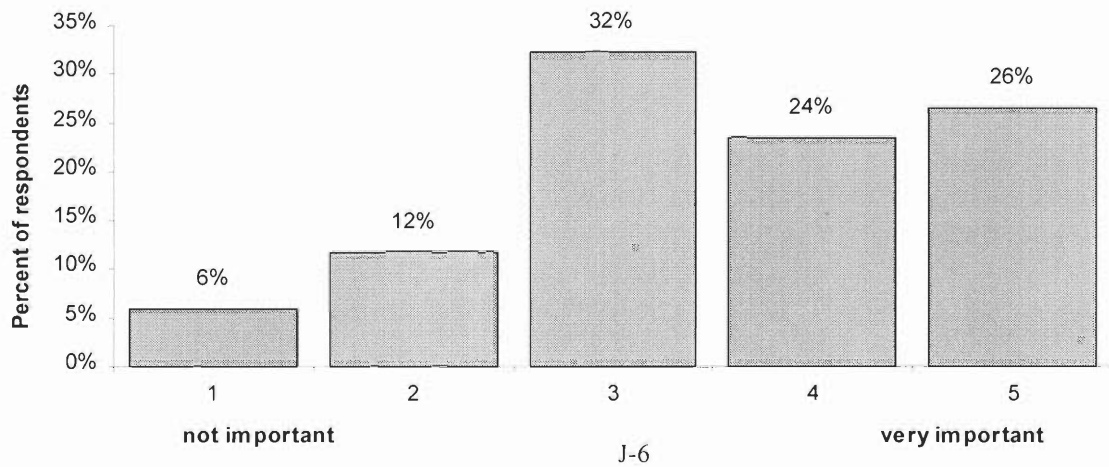
**#16: How important is it to restore and develop vacant or run-down sites within Merton?**



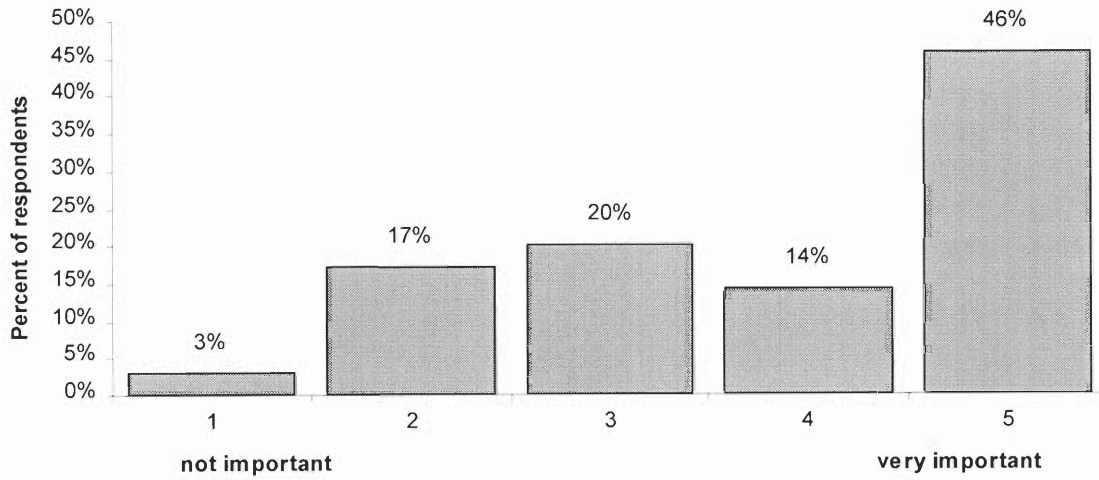
**#17: How important is it to preserve historical buildings and sites?**



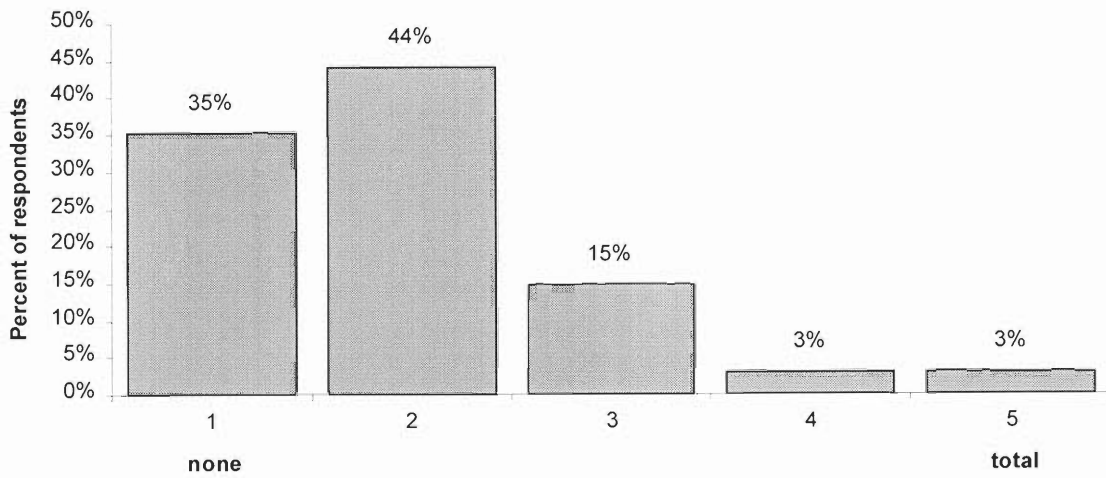
**#18: How important is it to encourage modern development?**



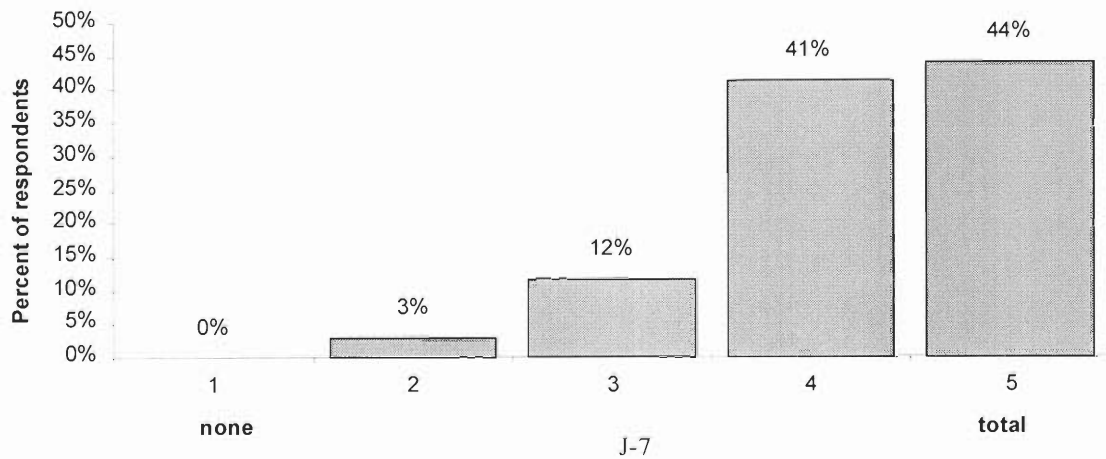
**#19: How important is the provision of affordable housing in Merton?**



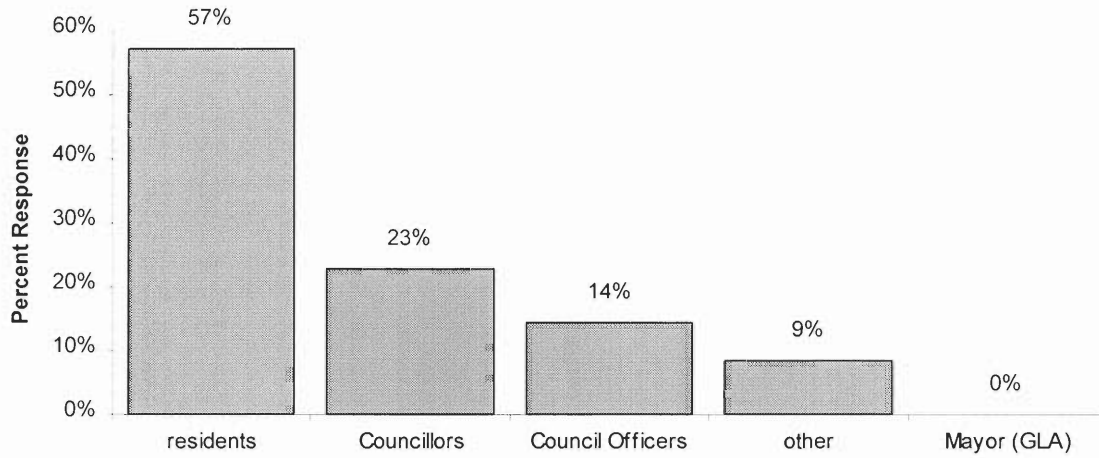
**#20: How much influence do you feel Merton residents have in town planning?**



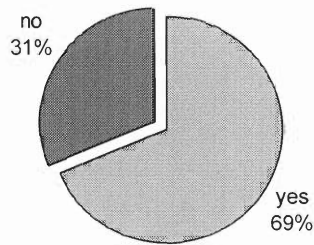
**#21: Ideally, how much influence should Merton residents have in town planning?**



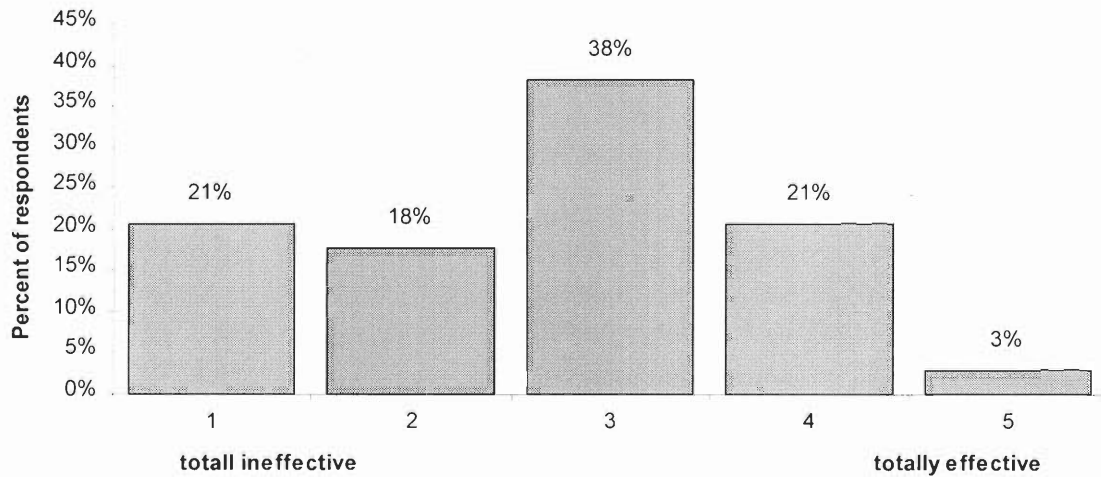
**#22: Who should possess the most power in Merton's Town Planning?**



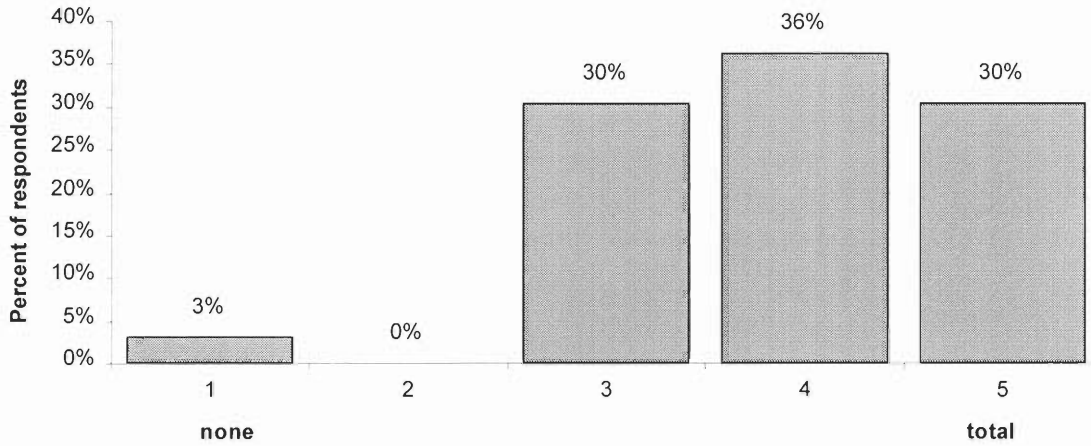
**#23: Have you ever attended a consultative forum?**



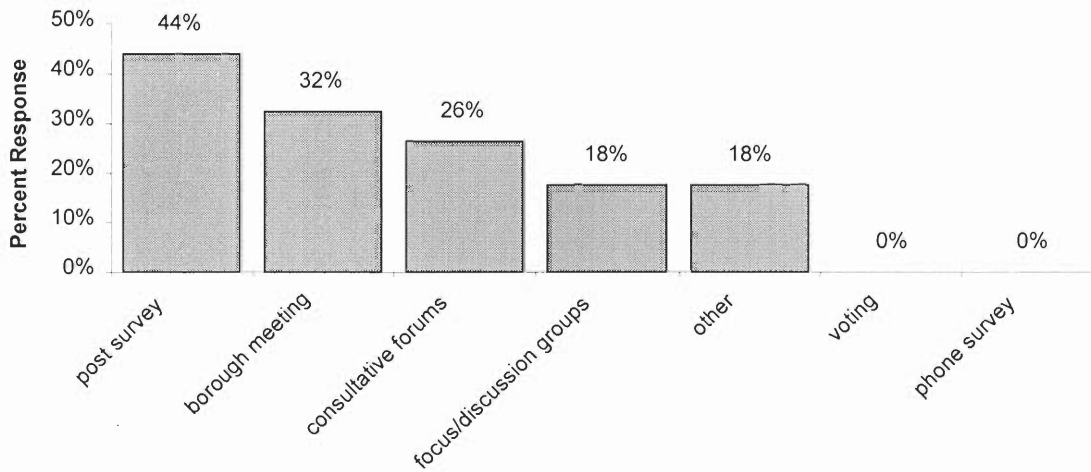
**#24: How effective do you feel that consultative forums are in getting public opinion heard and considered?**



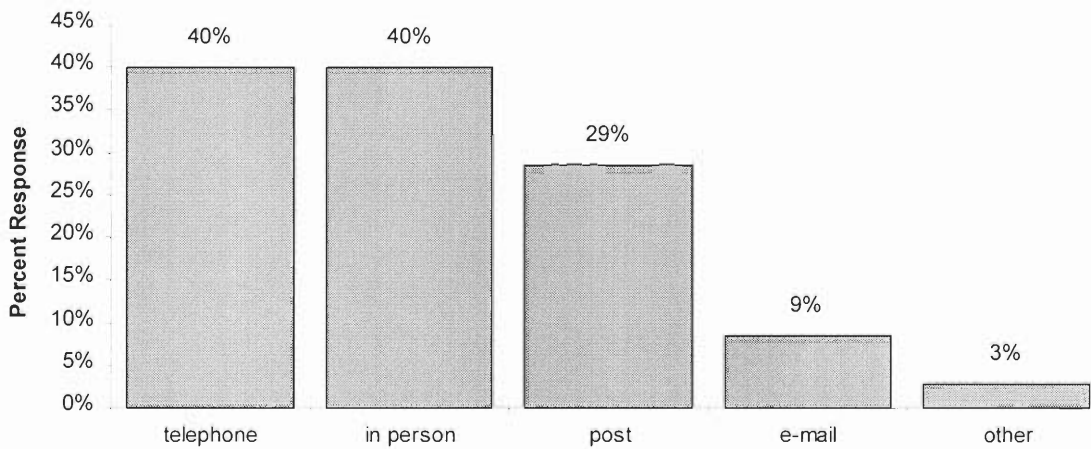
**#25: How much influence should consultative forums have in town planning service?**



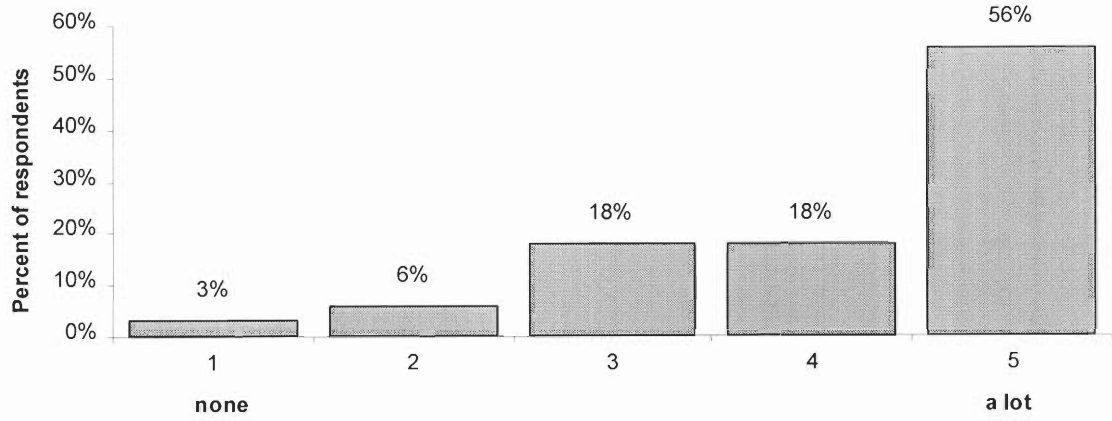
**#26: What is the best way for Merton Council to obtain public opinion?**



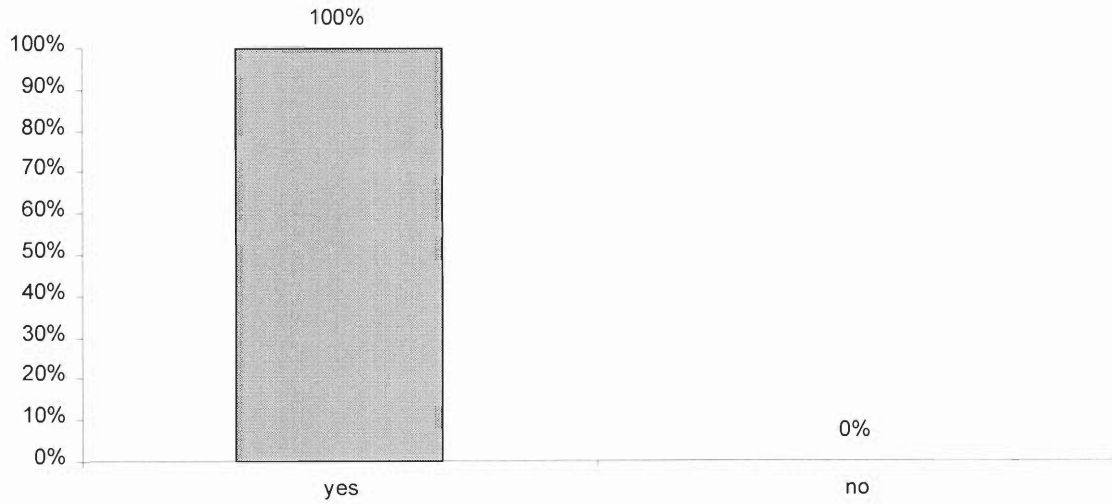
**#27: How would you prefer to contact Merton Council's Town Planning Officers?**



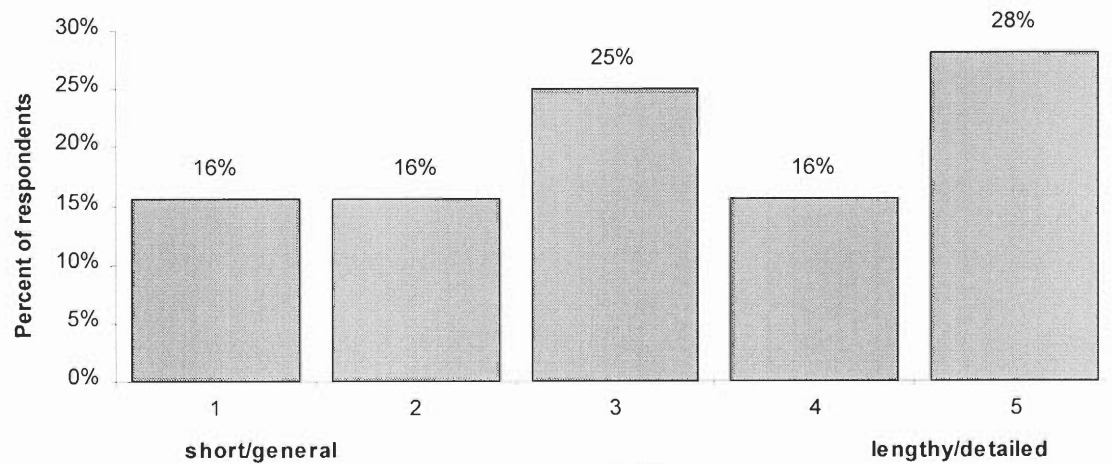
**#28: How much interest do you have in reading or being informed of town planning reports?**



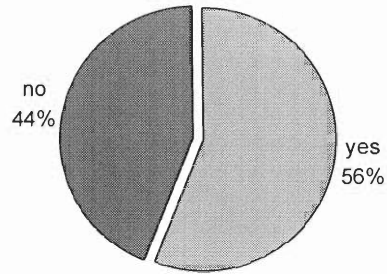
**#29: Should town planning reports be made more easily accessible to the public?**



**#30: Should these reports be short and general, or should they be lengthier and provide all details?**



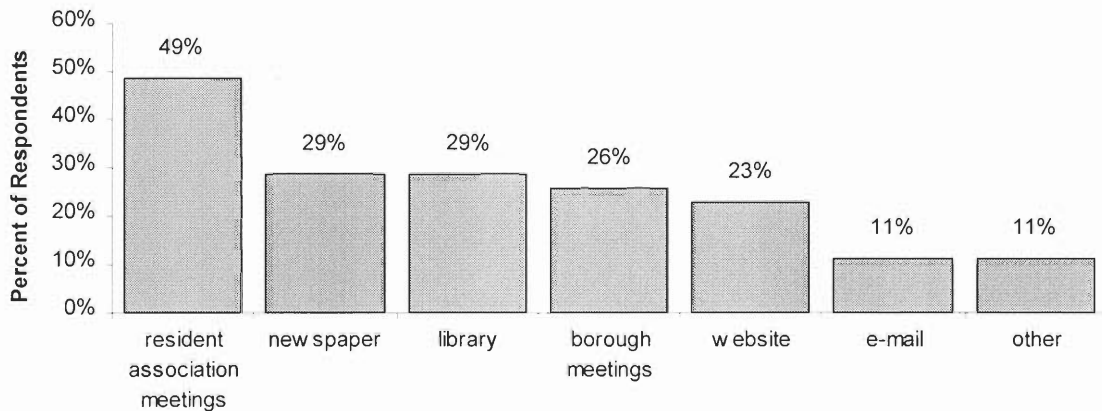
**#31: Do you have access to the internet?**



**#32: How likely are you to access town planning information on a website?**



**#33: What would be your preferred method to obtain Town Planning information?**

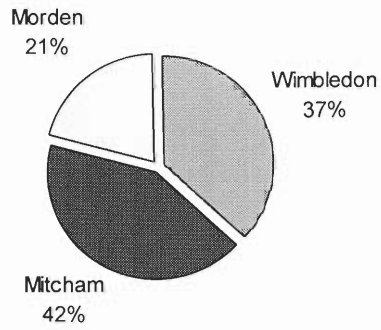




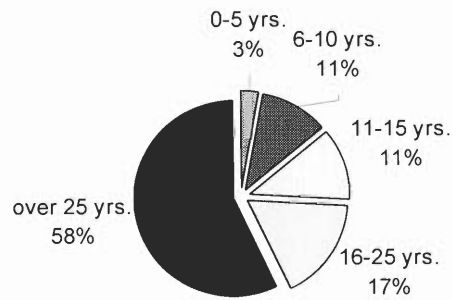
## **APPENDIX K**

### **Survey Section II - Demographics**

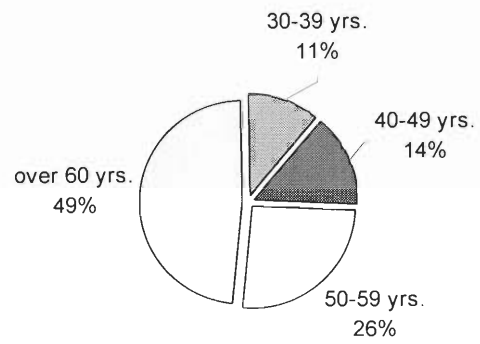
### Respondents by Area



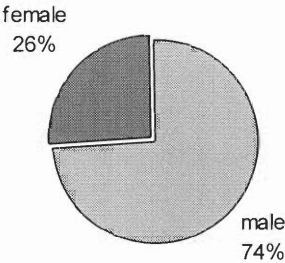
### How long respondents have lived in Merton



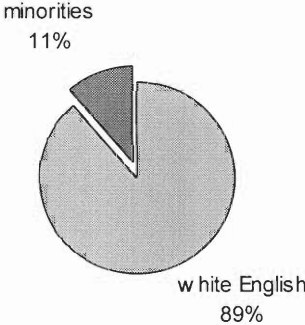
### Age of respondents



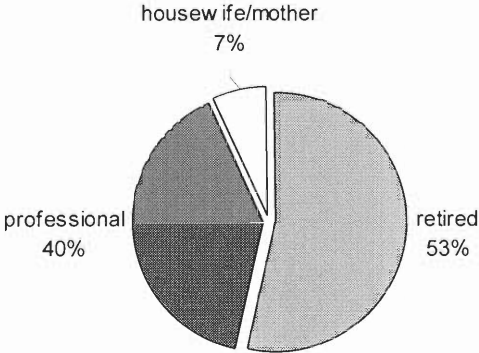
**Gender of respondents**



**Ethnicity of respondents**



**Occupation of respondents**



## **APPENDIX L**

### **Survey Section III – Comments and Margin Notes**

## Appendix L

### Survey Section III: Additional Comments And Suggestions

#### SURVEY COMMENTS

##### Wimbledon

###### *Raynes Park:*

It would be helpful if there were published a summary, by wards or planning areas, of

1: determinations of planning applications

2: forthcoming planning issues

3: relevant background planning matters

say bi-monthly, available to res. Associations.

###### *Raynes Park:*

The planning service need to be more open. And plan's should be given to residents group free to look over when any planning is within there area.

###### *Hillside:*

The main problem in planning in Merton is the constrictions placed on local authorities by the Central Government and the presumption in favour of the developer. There is still no right of appeal for Merton residents (or indeed there of any other boro) against planning decisions, whereas developers have the right of appeal always to the DoE.

###### *Village:*

The value of consultative forums is wholly dependent on how they are constituted. The Conservation Areas Advisory Committee is a good example of a reasonable well constituted forum.

###### *Hillside:*

I think is very important to consider every planning application on its merits/failings and to maintain very strict planning controls even though it requires effort time and energy. It is effort v. well spent, we must develop but maintain at the same time.

###### *Durnsford:*

This questionnaire has been discussed and filled in by a number of residents of a residents association, so private information in unapplicable.

###### *Raynes Park:*

These questions are often ambiguous, or too general. Have found considerable problems with consultation in the past—often it is promised but is not properly undertaken—e.g. UDP. Too few people understand the process, and no one method has proved satisfactory.

Decisions about town planning need to be jointly approached—officers have the professional knowledge the public has the “feel” of the place. Question 8 is totally meaningless to me.

*Hillside:*

Notice of planning committee meetings. This resident's association subscribes to the Weekly Library Lists of Planning Applications received by the borough. Objections to a particular application are acknowledged by the Case Officer who also invites those wishing to speak in a committee meeting to submit their request at least three working day before the meeting. However at this stage no information is given of the date of the meeting. Later when the Case Officer learns the date, he endeavours (no certainty) to contact those who have earlier expressed interest. But he can only give a mere 2/4 days notice because of "the System". The Council encourages as large a turnout as possible of residents at the planning meetings but at least one weeks notice is essential to enable people to free up time and request others to do likewise. Unless sufficient notice of meetings is given then people can't and won't come. Sadly effective communication between Councillors and their electors is defeated and democracy is not best served. "The System" needs to be altered.

*Hillside:*

1. Some new buildings ie. Alexander Road/ Wimbledon Hill/ St. Francis Grove probably deserve award for worst buildings in Britain (Argos, NatWest Bank). Planners who approved these should be fired.
2. Council does not reinforce planning conditions eg. Wimbledon Central's frontage(?) well-over planning position or pavement – height greater.
3. Planners appear weak.

## **Mitcham**

*Trinity:*

Government rules to allow appeal against planning decisions by developers with damages er. must be changed.

*Trinity:*

Rightly or wrongly, many people feel that a lot of decisions have already been taken before notices of Public meetings and inquiries have been posted, so apathy tends to be rife. So often vehement and cogent protestations and arguments have been put forward about various issues, only to have them totally ignored apparently. Detailed explanations seem to be few and far between.

*Pollards Hill:*

It seems to me that in the past, there has been very little consultation with, or involvement of, local residents in planning decisions. Whilst residents obviously cannot be consulted over every planning decision, they could be involved in those that directly concern them.

*Pollard's Hill:*

More Consultation with the Public Please. Ask us what we want. Meetings with us before you decide what you are going to do.

## **Morden**

*Dundonald:*

Your questions about town planning (1-12) assume knowledge that I may not have and interests that I may not share, e.g. Does town planning include the Transport Infrastructure? The councils' attitude (i.e. the elected officials) to residents is condescending. We have not been able to get our local issues addressed as the local Councillor is not interested in us. Residents laugh at the local government democratic process!

*Dundonald:*

Town Planning can be a very emotive issue especially when plans affect our own immediate environment. The "not in my backyard" (nimby) syndrome can soon appear. I have always personally believed a wider view must be taken. – is it good for the country (i.e. fast rail to channel tunnel) would take precedence: is it good for the town/city (i.e. M25 Ring Road). Decisions should be made objectively not emotionally. The same applies to more local planning issues. I.e. does a scheme fit in with the wider borough plan? Etc.

*Ravensbury:*

It is very difficult in some areas to give an absolute preference. When it can be very obvious, that different methods can be more satisfactory depending on the Type of Planning application

## **MARGIN COMMENTS**

### **Wimbladedon**

*Raines Park:*

- 8) never heard of spatial development strategy
- 33) weekly list of planning applications

*Hillside:*

Cover) N.B. I don't feel qualified to answer section I but I have answered section II and the final section. 10-2-00

*Hillside:*

- 26) combination of the above
- 33) combination of the above

*Raines Park:*

- 11) seek out sites to improve (may mean opposite of development)
- 26) d/e, voting needs to be informed

*Hillside:*

- 10) all of these you cannot specify as each is different
- 11) be very wary
- 22) a combination- residents in the near vicinity of the development must have a say.
- 26) all
- 33) a/b/c/d/ by post

## **Mitcham**

### *Pollard's Hill:*

- 24) Ask the Public what they want
- 25) Where are the consultative forums
- 27) Not a Machine, a Person
- 30) Plain English
- 32) at the Library?

## **Morden**

### *Ravensbury:*

- 10) where large enough/ Impact on environment and neighbourhood

### *Dundonald:*

- 8) don't know what this is! (SDS)
- 26) residents associations

### *Cannon Hill:*

- 22) forum of A & CI



## **APPENDIX M**

### **Focus Group Outline**

## **OUTLINE FOR FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION WITH RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION CHAIRS**

### **Why we are here.**

“Good evening. Thank you all for coming. As you may know, we are here to discuss the Town Planning Service in Merton. However, before we get started we would like to introduce ourselves.”

Introductions

### **Our names, background of WPI and IQP.**

“Have you all completed the survey we sent you? If not please take a minute to do that now.”

“Now if you don't mind would you please tell us a little about yourselves?” (Name, Residents' Association, position, how long they've been involved)

### **Background of Project**

“Thank you. Now to tell you a little bit about what we are doing. We are working with the Borough of Merton's Council to evaluate the Town Planning Service. This evaluation has been prompted, in part, by the unique opportunity afforded by the beginning of a new century. However, this evaluation is also important because of some recent changes in the government of London. This is the establishment of the office of the mayor and the Greater London Authority who will develop a Spatial Development Strategy for the entire city. Your opinions are essential to providing new direction for the new century.”

### **Reassurance that their opinions and views are confidential.**

“Two of us are taking notes of the discussion. These notes will also be strictly confidential. There are no right or wrong answers. We are just looking for your opinions and suggestions.”

## **Introduction of topics**

“Tonight we would like to discuss three main topics. These are how the Town Planning Service should operate, what issues are the most important to you, and how the Town Planning Service can best communicate these issues with you.”

## **Topic Discussion:**

“Are you familiar with the Town Planning Service?”

“Are you satisfied with the current Town Planning Service?”

## **How Town Planning Operates**

“What should the role of Town Planning Service be?”

“Should the planning service approach proposals on a borough, topic, area, site basis?” Why?

“Should the Town Planning Service be active in seeking out sites for development, or should it allow developers to propose sites for development?”

## **Important Planning Issues**

“What issues are important for the Town Planning Service to address?” Why?

Ask the following questions if certain issues are not addressed:

How important is the achievement of good design in the built environment (e.g. architecture, street layout)

How important is the preservation of the environment and public parks and common grounds?

How important is redevelopment of unused or derelict sites in the borough?

Which is more important: the preservation of historical buildings and sites, or the promotion of modern development?

## **Communication**

“How much influence do you feel the residents of Merton have on the Town Planning Service and Town Planning Policy?”

“How much influence should they have on Town Planning?”

“What do you think would be the most effective and convenient way for you to give your input to the Town Planning Service (Options: surveys, consultative forums, voting, email, the internet)?”

## **Closing**

“We’d like to close with one last question. Having considered all these topics, how would you rate your overall satisfaction with Merton’s Town Planning Service?”

“Now we’d like to open up the floor to all of you to address any issues you feel are important that we did not cover.”

“Thank you for your input. We and Merton Council appreciate your participation very much.”