

healthwatch Merton

HEALTHY HIGH STREETS CONSULTATION: SUMMARY REPORT





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INTRODUCTION

As part of an ongoing consultation to help shape the Councils licensing policy statement in a part of east Merton, Healthwatch Merton worked in partnership with Public Health Merton to support this work. The licensing policy sets out how the Council plans to use its powers to shape provision of alcohol, entertainment and late night refreshment in Merton.

Healthwatch Merton gathered people's views of the kind of high street/town centre they would like to have in their community as well as finding out if people feel there are too many betting shops, places to buy alcohol and fast food outlets in the Mitcham area.

Further information on the statement of licencing policy can be found on the following website <http://news.merton.gov.uk/2015/07/02/residents-to-have-say-on-mertons-licensing-policy/>

METHODOLOGY

Healthwatch Merton used a range of methods for this research:

Survey

Using questions provided by Public Health Merton, Healthwatch Merton designed a survey that was circulated through the Merton Voluntary Services Council (MVSC) database as well as promoting on the Healthwatch Merton website and through social media.

The survey was also sent to targeted audiences, including local GP practices, local councillors and the Mitcham Town Centre Police team.

The survey was live online for three weeks from Monday 17 August 2015 and a total of 87 online surveys were completed.

Outreach

Healthwatch Merton hosted two 'pop up cafes' in Mitcham Town Centre on Tuesday 1 September 2015 and Thursday 3 September 2015. The Healthwatch Merton Information and Outreach Officer, along with volunteers spoke with residents and passers-by to find out their views of the local area and used the survey as prompts for discussion. A total of 90 people spoke with Healthwatch Merton across the two days. Participants also had the opportunity to design their own healthy high street by choosing from a variety of pictures and also added ideas of their own by writing on a blank picture.

The Healthwatch Merton Information and Outreach Officer spent time at Cricket Green Medical Practice on Wednesday 2 September and spoke with 15 people including patients and staff, again using the survey as prompts for conversations.



Healthwatch Merton engaged with a wide range of people from different ages (ranging from 7-90), ethnicities and backgrounds to ensure that a fair snapshot of people’s views were captured.

FINDINGS

A total of 192 people participated and shared their views on Mitcham Town Centre and local area.

Out of the 192 people that engaged with Healthwatch Merton, 191 provided details of why they visit Mitcham Town Centre, and the area indicated on the map.

22 said that they visited as it ‘has everything that I need’, 128 said that ‘it is local and close to home’ and 41 said ‘it is local and close to where I work’.

Comments that people made in relation to why they visited the area included:

‘I like to support local businesses. It’s important for maintaining community cohesion’

‘I avoid shopping in Mitcham due to the antisocial behaviour and lack of variety’

‘The main reason I go to this area is for Mitcham tram stop’

‘I only visit because it is close...it has a poor selection of shops’

When asked **what people like** about the Mitcham Town Centre, there was a mixed response. All 192 respondents provided their views and could choose all that applied from a selection of statements and also add their own comments.

I don’t like anything	55
Range of shops	52
Health care, pharmacy, optician	51
Green space	49
Cultural/Library	41
Gym/Leisure centre	26
Meeting places	22
Variety of places to eat and drink	22
Walking and cycling opportunities	16

Additional comments included:

‘It’s a shame Mitcham was a busy town centre, it lacks a mix of shops, no variety too many betting shops’



'The parking over Morrisons is good and affordable please don't take it away'

'Mitcham Town Centre used to be a pedestrian friendly area, nice to walk around and shop in the limited shops. Not now though'

'I feel Mitcham's green space has great potential but I don't feel very safe in the area'

'I like that they are rebuilding'

'Not many stalls on market - surprised that McDonald's closed'

'Only like Iceland, Morrisons and Greggs'

'Not a good range of shops - would like to see more health food shops, more cloths shops for kids etc'

'It's very accessible with lots of buses'

'It's ugly. I don't invite my pals to the area because there isn't anything here'

'Nice place, mixed community, reasonably good'

'Not overcrowded because not a lot to attract people. If there were quality amenities and services it might attract more people'

'There's a range of shops but no sit-in restaurants/coffee shops of good quality'

When asked **what people felt best described** the Mitcham Town Centre, the most referenced feedback was *'too many betting shops'* with 125 respondents choosing this statement. Again, a selection of statements was given and respondents could choose all that applied.

Too many betting shops	125
Run down	118
Littered	106
Congested (traffic)	96
Poor quality of shops	93
Too many fast food outlets	74
No variety	73
Too many alcohol shops	64
Too many pay day loans	54
Accessible	49
Has empty shops	47



It is green	29
It is clean	11
Attractive shop fronts	1

Additional comments included:

'It does not make the most of its historic buildings'

'Badly designed road infrastructure, congestion and lack of support for commercial and retails investment'

'Many drunks on green and or outside pub or betting shops'

'Too many 99p shops-why was the letting to Poundland agreed?'

'Too many barber shops being used for drug dealing'

'Too many pound shops'

'Would love to see more nice cafes and 'venues' that attract people to the town centre rather than fast food shops'

'Too many Charity Shops'

'Wrong sort of variety of places and shops'

'Most of the shops don't have anything that I want'

'The local drinkers and drug takers give Mitcham a bad name and make the area look bad'

'Barbers everywhere'

'Bins not empties enough - wind blows litter. Fast food outlets make litter. Some attractive shop fronts'

'Too many barbers - approx. 20. Too many betting shops in small areas'

'Not accessible - I am a wheelchair user'

'Not enough healthy restaurants!'

'Don't like alcohol being consumed on the streets'

'I am moving away from Mitcham as soon as possible'

'Disgusting - broken glass, beer cans'

'Poor variety of shops. No diversity represented'



When asked **what was not liked** about Mitcham Town Centre, a high number of respondents felt that there was a lot of anti-social behaviour that took place in the area and that there was not enough access to toilets.

Anti-social behaviour	117
Not enough access to toilets	111
Crime, safety during the night	94
Alcohol outlets	64
Crime, safety during the day	53
I am happy with it	10

Additional comments included:

'It is tired, run down and has no defined centre or purpose'

'The drug smokers and drunks do not make the Fair Green a nice place to visit'

'People sitting there with cans of beer, some sleeping there during the day, and groups of undesirables'

'It has lost its sense of identity and only shops with cheap products are visible from the road'

'It's run down with little to offer'

'I am a day-time visitor and am happy generally with public behaviour in the area'

'Lack of places selling nice fruit and veg, lack of venues e.g. nice cafes that draw people in from a wider area'

'When betting shops close there is anti-social behaviour. A lot of drunks in betting shops'

'Rats on roads and gardens from fast food takeaway waste'

'The police are nice and friendly and always around'

'It's not very welcoming'

'It's not well lit'

'Community police not here at night. Lots of drinking in town centre and smoking drugs'

'No toilets - very important problem. Too many useless changes to road works. Unnecessary and costly'



'Lots of drunk people and betting people, feels intimidating, makes area unappealing to look at'

A total of 163 respondents shared their ideas about improving the local area and how to make it healthier and nicer place to live and visit. Comments included:

'Tighter planning rules on allowing more fast food outlets, betting shops etc'

'More litter bins'

'Encourage entertainment centres (eg. general cinema/bowling centre etc) to make it a place to visit for those not local'

'Wider variety of shops would be good'

'Close down the alcohol and betting shops, improve parking, more visible policing, clean up the pavements and streets, remove graffiti'

'Some more vibrant colours and spaces'

'No more betting shops. We need some nice cafes for some cafe culture'

'More popular shops and a more eye catching market'

'More police officers patrolling the green and moving the drunks/drinkers on'

'Better type of shops, to encourage more visitors and spending. I.E high street fashion chain, quirky local produce, market with more interesting and choice ie local produce, crafts'

'Nice places to sit and eat lunch'

'More outdoor play equipment for kids and adults; more environmental projects/allotments/free fruit trees and herbs etc planted for us to share; 'community cafe' with space for arts and music'

'Better Lighting is a must'

'Carefully think about attracting other types of shops/market stalls into the area, either by having pop up shops/community cafes. Not everyone who lives in Mitcham wants to buy everything for 99p/£1. If there was a local bakers, greengrocers I know myself and my neighbours would use this, as fresh produce is what we try to buy locally, but have a very limited selection, so use the supermarkets instead'

'Rediscover Mitcham is a good project, but the community could do more to support the town centre'

'More community engagement, fun things to do that don't involve alcohol. Having said that, the old McDonalds provided a youth hub in the centre of the town centre, but this was due to the commitment of the manager - this model could work really effectively. Introducing more independent shops, but also some chains to attract



more people to shop locally - there is so much potential, lots of green spaces, lots of history, etc. Engaging the community is priority to finding out what they want'

'Better walking and cycling, more fresh fruit and veg, places to sit and chat, public toilets'

'More family friendly activities. More community focussed and cultural events to help create a safer and more inclusive atmosphere'

'Make the Common more accessible by trimming overhanging trees and clearing footpaths of overgrowth so we pedestrians can actually reach and enjoy our Heritage'

'Better variety of shops, less betting shops, pound shops and barbers, more independent shops, more coffee shops to meet friends in, less pollution'

'More children's areas to play and meet'

'A Healthy Living Hub (see Healthy Living Hub in Croydon) that provides information and support to help people follow a healthy lifestyle'

'A variety of good quality local restaurants to dine in'

'Cleanliness needs improving. People need to take responsibility and not litter'

'More disabled access'

'More healthy food shops, Turn on of our parks into track and field, more entertainment, support traders in keeping Mitcham clean. Parks need to be more accommodating in a track and field'

'Needs a better social community. Needs more attraction in Mitcham'

'Implement the law regarding anti social behaviour'

'Restrictions - alcohol, fast food, betting'

KEY THEMES

Number of betting shops:

One of the most prominent findings was that there are *'too many betting shops'* with people strongly linking this to anti-social behaviour and crime. With 65% of people making this comment, it is clear that this is an area that people would like addressed.

Number of fast food outlets:

Almost 40% of the 192 people we engaged with felt there were too many fast food outlets in the area. People said that they would like better access to healthy foods including more restaurants that provide healthy options. The



general consensus was that if there were more alternatives to fast food chains these would be regularly used and would be of great benefit to the general health of the community. Many had the view that the large quantity of fast food shops only increased the problem of Mitcham Town Centre being littered and an unpleasant environment.

Number of places to buy alcohol:

When given the opportunity to comment on what best describes Mitcham Town Centre, 33% of respondents (64 out of 192) commented that there were too many alcohol shops in the area. Also worth noting is that the same amount of people commented that this was what they did not like about Mitcham. When adding further comments, people stated that there was a strong link between the availability of alcohol in the area and people visibly drinking in public during the day and night as well as anti-social behaviour, which residents and visitors to Mitcham found intimidating.

General high street/town centre environment and variety of shops:

Overall, there were significantly more negative responses as opposed to positive about the town centre environment. Many of the additional comments centred on the area not being safe or a welcoming environment. A very high number of participants (62%) described the area as ‘run down’ and felt there was a high level of anti-social behaviour which contributed to respondents feeling unsafe and uneasy in Mitcham. When asked what people liked about Mitcham Town Centre, almost 30% answered with ‘*I don’t like anything*’. In terms of the variety and range of shops available in Mitcham Town Centre, 52 people said that they liked the range of shops compared with 73 who said there was ‘no variety’. This showed mixed views on the diversity of retail outlets. The majority of respondents felt that the area was in desperate need of improvement, and would like their high street/town centre to be much healthier than it currently is.

Public Toilets:

While the opportunity to comment on whether there are ‘*not enough access to toilets*’ was given as a quantitative statement (it being the second most referred to reason not liked about Mitcham Town Centre) it is also significant that a large number of respondents made a point to add it as an additional comment that there was not sufficient toilet facilities in the town centre.

Number of barber shops:

A surprising finding of the survey, as well as anecdotal evidence given, was that almost 10% of participants commented that there was too many barber shops in the area. This was surprising as it was not offered as an option on the survey. There was a general feeling from speaking to people that there has been a link between the increase in barber shops and crime.



Lack of amenities and activities for children and young people:

A regular feature of discussion and comment was the lack of amenities and activities for children and young people in the area. From speaking with children and young people ranging from 7-25, they felt that there was very little to do. Parents and carers had concerns about activities for children and young people and older people felt that if there were more amenities/activities it would keep young people '*off the street*' and '*out of trouble*'. Many commented on the closure of McDonalds and felt that this was a focal point for socialising and often brought the community together.

Lack of engagement from Local Authority about the Rediscover Mitcham project:

Another common topic for discussion was the lack of engagement by the Council with residents and visitors to the area around the Rediscover Mitcham project. General feedback was that people would have liked to have been consulted with and able to offer and share their views for improving the area. There was an uncertainty amongst people about the projects progress and outcomes. While people felt passionately about the area that they work and live in, they felt that they are not well enough informed about the on-going regeneration. Many people did comment that they were glad investment was being made and hoped that it will improve the area.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Healthwatch Merton would like to thank all those that supported and engaged with us through-out the consultation. Healthwatch Merton would also like to thank all of our volunteers that helped with the 'pop up café'.



APPENDIX 1 - SURVEY



Calling all Mitcham residents or visitors of Mitcham Town Centre:

Healthwatch Merton are helping Public Health Merton to gather people's views on the Mitcham High Street/Town Centre.

This is part of an ongoing consultation to help shape the Council licensing policy statement in the Mitcham area. The policy sets out how the Council plans to use its powers to shape provision of alcohol, entertainment and late night refreshment in Merton. We also want to take this opportunity to broaden out the discussion wider to talk about other aspects of the Mitcham area including betting shops, fast food outlets and what people want from the Mitcham high street/town centre.

Please click view the Mitcham Town Centre map first as this will help you when completing the survey.

1. If you visit or shop in any of the areas indicated on the map, please indicate why? *

- It has everything that I need
- It is local and close to home
- It is local and close to where I work
- Any additional comments?

2. What do you like about Mitcham town centre? (please tick all that apply) *

- Range of shops
- Variety of places to eat and drink
- Walking and cycling opportunities
- Cultural/library



- Gym/leisure centre
- Green space
- Health care, pharmacy, optician
- Meeting places
- I don't like anything
- Any additional comments?

3. What do you feel best describes Mitcham town centre? (please tick all that apply) *

- Littered
- Congested (traffic)
- Run down
- Poor quality of shops
- Has empty shops
- No variety
- Too many alcohol shops
- Too many fast food outlets
- Too many betting shops
- Too many pay day loans
- It is green
- It is clean
- Attractive shop fronts
- Accessible
- Any additional comments?

4. What don't you like about Mitcham town centre? (please tick all that apply) *

- Crime, safety - during day



- Crime, safety - during night
- Alcohol outlets
- Anti-social behaviour (Drunks, fighting, drinking)
- Not enough access to toilets
- I am happy with it
- Any additional comments?

5. Do you have any ideas about making Mitcham town centre healthier or a nicer place to visit? *



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