

NEWS RELEASE

Thursday 9 February 2017

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RED CARD FOR MERTON COUNCIL OVER BLACKTOP ON GREEN

A member of the Open Spaces Society⁽¹⁾, Mitcham Cricket Green Community & Heritage⁽²⁾, has today published a **report**⁽³⁾ on works undertaken on the Mitcham town greens⁽⁴⁾ by Merton Council which accuses the council of ignoring statutory controls and illegally developing valuable open space.

The works, undertaken in June 2016, involved operations along Cranmer Road and Commonside West to provide new bus stops, crossings, kerbs and pavements. The new works encroached significantly onto Cranmer Green and Three Kings Piece⁽⁵⁾, two of Mitcham's historic town greens.

Cranmer Green and Three Kings Piece were registered in 1967 as town greens and receive the highest protection from

development known to English law. Under nineteenth-century legislation, it is a criminal offence to interfere with a green unless it is done for the better enjoyment of the green itself. But Merton Council decided to undertake these works without consulting anyone. The council has powers under its own local legislation to remove the affected land from the green, and to provide alternative land to add to the green—but it can do this only with the approval of the Secretary of State, and it has neither sought approval nor offered replacement land.

Tony Burton, Trustee of Mitcham Cricket Green Community & Heritage, said: 'We were shocked to find Merton Council damaging the historic green spaces we expect it to look after. Our network of protected town greens is integral to the character of Mitcham. The results of our legal research are clear cut and we look forward to Merton Council acknowledging its error and committing itself to protecting Mitcham's greens for the future.'

Says Hugh Craddock, a case officer for the Open Spaces Society: 'We call on Merton Council to admit that it blundered in authorising the works on Mitcham's greens, to apologise to

our member and local people, and to consider whether it is now possible to rectify the blunder by identifying suitable replacement land and applying to the Secretary of State. If not, we expect the council to remove the illegal works, or to contemplate prosecution in the criminal courts.'

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Notes for Editors

- 1 The Open Spaces Society was founded in 1865 and is Britain's oldest national conservation body. It campaigns to protect common land, village greens, open spaces and public paths, and people's right to enjoy them.
- 2 Mitcham Cricket Green Community & Heritage is the civic society for Mitcham Cricket Green Conservation Area and its environs.
- 3 The report is published on the website of Mitcham Cricket Green Community & Heritage: <http://mitchamcricketgreen.org.uk> .
- 4 Town or village greens are the essence of towns and villages across England and Wales. Story-book images of village greens tend to be of an expanse of grass in the centre of a village complete with oak tree and seat: many are just like that, but greens are also very varied. The society believes there to be about 3,650 registered greens in England and about 220 in Wales.
- 5 Cranmer Green and Three Kings Piece were registered in 1967 under the Commons Registration Act 1965, along with Figges Marsh, Upper or Fair Green, and Lower and Cricket Green. They were first given statutory recognition in the Metropolitan Commons (Mitcham) Supplemental Act 1891, which placed their regulation and management in the hands of Mitcham Common's conservators. Those powers were transferred to the local council under the Mitcham Urban District Council Act 1923, and now rest with Merton Borough Council.

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