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Dear Sirs

## **MERTON STAGE 2A DRAFT LOCAL PLAN**

On behalf of our client, Aberdeen Standard Investments (ASI), we have the pleasure in submitting representations to the Stage 2a Draft Local Plan. The representations focus predominately on the Centre Court Shopping Centre which our client manages on behalf of the fund in which it sits.

Montagu Evans has submitted representations previously on the Future Wimbledon SPD which is referenced in the draft Plan.

If you have any queries please contact either Julian Stephenson [Julian.stephenson@montagu-evans.co.uk](mailto:Julian.stephenson@montagu-evans.co.uk) or Lauren Hawksworth [lauren.hawksworth@montagu-evans.co.uk](mailto:lauren.hawksworth@montagu-evans.co.uk) at this office.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Montagu Evans' in a cursive script.

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# WIMBLEDON

## P4: KEY OBJECTIVES

### A VIBRANT TOWN CENTRE

Wimbledon has not benefitted from any significant major development over the last decade. This contrasts significantly with nearby boroughs and town centres, particularly centres in the neighbouring borough of Wandsworth, which have been transformed by the support for mixed use higher density developments with sensitive heritage settings such as the Ram Quarter.

Wimbledon's position as a major town centre is at risk of being downgraded in the London Plan unless there is an acknowledgment and clearer support for higher density development to make the most efficient and sustainable use of scarce land. All development should be 'appropriate'. There needs to be a clearer statement about supporting high density development which is the sustainable choice because of the limited availability of development sites.

### GREENING WIMBLEDON

No reference is made to how greening Wimbledon should also be considering options for sustainable energy.

### CONSERVING CHARACTER

ASI **objects** to the way this objective is worded and requests that it should be reviewed. There is clear support in national policy for development in town centres. Supporting development '*that is commensurate with the scale*' is a statement that makes a presumption against sustainable higher density development that is needed in Wimbledon and is already supported in the Future Wimbledon SPD. Heritage assets are clearly an important asset to Wimbledon town centre but their presence does mean that historic scale should be replicated.

This approach is contrary to the NPPF in that it is pre-determining whether there is substantial harm (under paragraph 195) or less than substantial harm (under paragraph 196).

Therefore, we suggest the following alternative wording.

'...development of high quality that seeks to avoid substantial harm.'

### OTHER OBJECTIVES

Wimbledon is defined as a major town centre in the London Plan. Annex 2 defines major town centres as generally containing over 50,000 sq m of retail, leisure and service floorspace. They may also have significant employment, leisure, service and civic functions.

The NLP should be including additional objectives which reflect this important function, in terms of offices, homes, retail and leisure.

Only major centres are capable of supporting a significant quantum of offices apart from larger metropolitan and international centres. This chapter should have a clear objective which covers **offices/workspace**.

Separately given the structural change in the retail market currently taking place and since shopping is one of the most important functions of the town centre there should be a separate objective relating to **retail and leisure**.

The new Class E in the Use Classes Order recognises this change and the NLP needs to align its policies to reflect this more flexible approach to use in town centres.

Wimbledon's excellent accessibility means that it is a highly sustainable place for people to live. There should be a clear objective in this chapter to accommodate more **homes**, with different types of tenure. This should address whether the town centre location, given its physical constraints should potentially accommodate a different mix of units than the Borough-wide targets with a lower proportion of family sized units. Wimbledon's accessibility can be contrasted with Kingston's which although defined as a Metropolitan centre has a poorer railway service and no tram

We suggest that this chapter needs to be revisited comprehensively because the balance is not achieved between referencing the need for 5,000 homes and 6,000 jobs and how the plan helps deliver that.

The chapter should be providing a framework for how development will be encouraged and the criteria for managing it.

## POLICY N3.6 WIMBLEDON TOWN CENTRE

Under criterion b, there needs to be a clear explanation of how this aspiration will be delivered. We suggest the following wording:

*'Encourage development by identifying opportunities for new additional floorspace as well as improving existing floorspace. This will assist attracting businesses...'*

Under criterion c, there needs to be a recognition that the quality of leisure facilities in the town centre is limited and in many instances is poor. The theatres are not supported by sufficient good quality restaurants. Wimbledon Village is far more successful in this respect. An international reputation requires high quality businesses to support those visitors, not just the needed improvements in the public realm.

Criterion d needs to be re-drafted as it is too limiting as currently worded and therefore ASI **objects** to this criterion. While there will be some 'traditional urban blocks' there will be a far wider range of building typologies – the appropriate response being determined by townscape and heritage visual impact assessments. Wimbledon's accessibility means that it is an appropriate location for tall buildings and this should be recognised in criterion d. We suggest the following amended wording:

*'...and design with a range of build types and scales framed by high quality streets and spaces.'*

Under criterion e, the views analysis that ASI has undertaken does not support the principle of taller buildings being set away from the historic core. The Council's approach is built on the idea of a clear view down Wimbledon Hill Road. The road is curved so the town centre is viewed from closer rather than from distant views, taller buildings should be located close to the station and should be used as a visual marker. At present, the Council's approach is instead built upon an artificial separation leading to a confusing approach that separates groups of taller buildings.

In order for the development aspirations to be deliverable and viable there needs to be an explicit recognition and support for increased density therefore we suggest the following amended wording:

*'...through the sustainable development of key sites within the centre with higher densities of development.'*

### PARAGRAPH 3.6.2

The SPD by its nature had to link back to the planning policies in the 2011 Core Planning Strategy and in particular Policy CS.6 and Policy 14 – Design.. The New Local Plan should be taking the opportunity to provide a policy framework which supports the more ambitious growth identified in Policy N1. The indicative heights set out in the Future Wimbledon SPD are still not aligned with the growth required for this Major Centre (and has been successfully delivered in other London Major Centres). Therefore while the SPD has helped provide a direction of travel, by being still tied to the 2011 plan it cannot take the next step to provide up to date policies which can assess proposals for higher density development

ASI believes that the New Local Plan should be introducing a criterion based tall building policy rather than attaching too much weight to the SPD which was always seen as a stepping stone in the development of policy as it did not have the benefit of a more sophisticated views analysis which provide a more robust basis for the assessment of townscape and heritage impacts.

Paragraph 127 e of the NPPF states policies should ensure that developments:

*'...are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);'*

The first criterion 'design quality' sets the test that

*'future development should enhance their character and setting'.*

This wording should be replaced:

*'future development should assess whether it is beneficial or harmful on the significance or the ability to appreciate heritage assets'*

There is nothing to suggest that substantial scale and height of new buildings cannot be acceptable when there are nearby heritage assets and views from conservation areas. This happens all over London through rigorous testing. The wording should be positive rather than negative.

Under 'urban greening and sustainability', there is nothing to guide the appropriate sustainable energy strategies for development including potential technologies such as PU and air or ground source heat pumps.

ASI supports the suggestions on the future of the high street. The structural changes now taking place will mean that the size of conventional retail floorspace in shopping centres such as Centre Court will reduce. The number of independents is likely to increase but the challenge will be how these types of operators can trade sustainability and how developers can afford to include occupiers that are likely to be able only to afford lower rents which affect viability.

In terms of workspace, ASI supports the expansion of workspace in Wimbledon town centre, but it is important to recognise that if there is to be affordable workspace, it needs to be subsidised by sufficient provision of workspace being operated at commercial values.

Given the delays in Crossrail 2 and the uncertainties of it as a project, there needs to be a strategy which supports the improvement of Wimbledon station even without Crossrail 2.

As before, there is no guidance on town centre parking which needs to be addressed.

### PARAGRAPH 3.6.6

ASI agree with the wording of the paragraph up to '...outwards.'

There is no detailed analysis to justify the statement that the local topography and quality townscape mean that Wimbledon is not suitable for high rise towers. The first point to make is that the plan should be referring to **tall buildings** rather than high rise towers.

Wimbledon urgently needs a **tall buildings strategy** to be produced to provide a framework for testing height and massing in the context of the impact on heritage assets. This would be followed up by a **criteria based tall buildings policy**. Tall buildings of up to 14 storeys are already supported in the SPD. These are not 'mid-rise urban blocks similar to those of Bloomsbury' mentioned in paragraph 3.6.7.

There is no **definition** of what constitutes a tall building in the plan.

There is no definition of what constitutes a moderate increase in heights.

In both instances the plan wording is imprecise.

The plan needs to adopt a more **positive approach**. It is simply not sustainable to be setting out a mid-rise suburban approach in one of London's major town centres where the station and its immediate surroundings have one of the highest PTAL rating in London. This is in conflict with the London Plan.

The topography of Wimbledon is not dissimilar to Clapham where levels rise above the town centre at Clapham Junction and where more detailed townscape analysis has supported well designed tall buildings alongside listed buildings and in and adjacent to conservation areas.

The only way this inherent conflict will be resolved is for the Council to commission a tall buildings strategy.

In these circumstances ASI requests that the following wording of paragraph 3.6.6 is deleted and redrafted;  
*The local topography and quality townscape mean that Wimbledon is not suitable for high rise towers therefore to accommodate growth in keeping with the area, sites within Wimbledon town centre need to become denser and accept a moderate increase in heights'*

Most of all Paragraph 3.6.6 should be making a commitment to a much needed tall buildings strategy and policy.

### PARAGRAPH 3.6.6

It cannot be the case that a single approach is appropriate to all of Wimbledon:

*'The council encourages dense mid-rise urban blocks similar to those of Bloomsbury where heritage assets are complemented by new buildings of design quality'*

This may be an appropriate building typology but different parts of Wimbledon will require a different design response. Either this paragraph needs to be expanded or qualified considerably or it may be appropriate if it is **deleted**.

### PARAGRAPH 3.6.8

An analysis of views has been undertaken when ASI looked at the opportunities for redevelopment of Centre Court Shopping Centre which is now supported by site allocation Wi16.

Paragraph 3.6.8 is suggesting that there are clear views from Wimbledon Hill. This is incorrect. The alignment of Wimbledon Hill Road is not straight and is characterised by trees. This means that there is not a simple straight view into the town centre. The massing in the SPD was originally produced to set buildings away from the Broadway and Wimbledon Bridge Road. A more sophisticated response is required based upon detailed views analysis, which respects heritage assets rather than the broad brush approach set out in this paragraph.

### PARAGRAPH 3.6.11

In paragraph 3.6.11, the draft plan currently identifies the opportunity to redevelop offices built since the 1960s. However, for those to be viable in locations outside the CAZ, such as Wimbledon, there needs to be a realistic expectation that the density of development needs to increase significantly to allow such developments to be viable. By just adding a few floors, this will only be a stop gap solution and not meet the strategic policy requirement to accommodate growth.

### PARAGRAPH 3.6.13

Paragraph 3.6.13 should be expanded specifically to make it clear that the Wi16 allocation (Centre Court Shopping Centre) can be redeveloped in advance of Crossrail 2.

### PARAGRAPH 3.6.14

Paragraph 3.6.14 should recognise more clearly the opportunity for the delivery of new homes in Wimbledon town centre which will be essential to support the aspirations for growth of employment. Merton needs significant housing delivery in the town centre otherwise it will fail to meet its identified housing needs.

### PARAGRAPH 3.6.16

In relation to paragraph 3.6.16, given the changes to the Use Classes Order and the introduction of the new Class E, we question whether having a Primary Shopping Area definition is still correct or relevant. With the structural change in the retail market it is highly likely that there will no longer be the need for the scale of retail floorspace currently in the Centre Court Shopping Centre and that a reduced quantum of floorspace is likely to be more sustainable in the short not just the longer term. The reference to 'main and enhance' should be amended as follows:

*'We will support the transformation of Wimbledon town centre around the Wimbledon Station and Centre Court Shopping Centre to a hub for commercial, business and services with increased employment and places to work and be entertained.'*

### PARAGRAPH 3.6.18

The reference to 'shopfronts' should be **deleted** to be consistent with the new Class E. This paragraph is more widely in conflict with Class E because it does not incorporate wording to reflect the acceptability of the wider definition of commercial uses.

### PARAGRAPH 3.6.19

The Wi16 allocation of Centre Court Shopping Centre should be referenced explicitly as an appropriate location for offices. This can be addressed by the insertion of an additional sentence after 'working':

*'The future redevelopment of Centre Court Shopping Centre can potentially deliver a significant increase in the quality and quantum of workspace in Wimbledon town centre as it offers one of the few sites to accommodate larger floorplates.'*

### PP 58: SITE WI16

The site...falls partly within the Broadway Conservation Area.

The Broadway Conservation Area was designated in 1985. It has an anomalous boundary which is in urgent need of review as it arbitrarily includes part of the shopping centre, abruptly cuts off the former Debenhams end of the centre and then only includes the frontages of the northern side of the existing mall. This issue is highlighted in paragraph 201 of the NPPF which states that:

*'Not all elements of a Conservation Area... will necessarily contribute to its significance..'*

Under 'Design & accessibility guidance' ASI supports the requirement to provide links and access to Wimbledon Station and the bus stops. However it **objects** to the wording that development:

*...must look to facilitate a potential road bridge linking Queen's Road and Alexandra Road to the rear of the site.'*

A number of points arise.

First, it is more likely that a pedestrian only bridge linking the platforms in the railway station will be delivered over the life of the plan. This would respond to both the existing and future passenger capacity issues face by the station and would contribute directly to passenger safety and amenity. This may or may not link to either of both of the Wi16 site or Alexandra Road.

Second, the suggested location marks not only the entrance to the car park but also the service yard to Centre Court Shopping Centre. While both these would change in any future redevelopment as envisaged by the proposed Wi16 allocation, the likelihood is that service and vehicular access would remain in this location. This is because any redevelopment would be likely to seek to avoid service access closer to the Broadway and the listed former town hall. Therefore the requirement to facilitate a potential road bridge in this location could potentially compromise the delivery of one of Wimbledon town centre's key development sites by setting conflicting requirements.

Third, a key aspiration of the Town Centre SPD is to improve the pedestrian environment along Queens Road. ASI very much supports this approach but the introduction of a road bridge would bring additional traffic to Queens Road which would be in direct conflict the desire for an improved pedestrian environment aided by active frontages along Queens Road.

Fourth, ASI questions whether the road bridge is deliverable physically. The road bridge would have to clear the tracks. The nearest example where this has been delivered is the bridge to Emmanuel School off Spencer Park in Clapham. This however is not a public road and benefits from the railway being in a cutting in this location. ASI questions from its work on Centre Court Shopping Centre whether there is sufficient space to create the ramps to allow the tracks to be cleared between the boundary of the railway land and Queens Road itself.

Fifth, ASI believes that there would be a negative visual impact arising from the introduction of the bridge in this location.

Sixth, a major piece of transport infrastructure of this nature should be tested and modelled before it is placed in a plan. Otherwise it introduces potential blight. ASI is not aware of any highways modelling or engineering feasibility studies that have been undertaken. It is essential that this should be undertaken first before the bridge is put in the plan.

Until these points are addressed ASI asks that the text listed above is removed.

The guidance in the NPPF is clear. Site allocations should set guidance for the scale of development that can be supported. Paragraph 124 states that:

*'Plans should contain policies to optimise the use of land in their area and meet as much of the identified need for housing as possible' (para 123 (a))*

It goes on to say:

*'...should include the use of minimum density standards for city and town centres...These standards should seek a significant uplift in the average density of residential development...'*

The allocation fails to do this. It should as a minimum state that it is an appropriate location for tall buildings and higher density development. That is what is already set out in the SPD which is parasitic to the adopted plan which will be replaced by this new plan. The Council acknowledges that the SPD does not represent a cap on massing.

At present the reference to the OA support for 500 new homes and 6000 new jobs is left entirely disconnected from the wording of the allocation. The allocation should bridge that gap. ASI suggests the following wording which can expand upon the OA reference by **deleting the sentence beginning:**

*All sites...'*

And replacing it with:

*'The Site represents one of the most accessible in the OA and is more accessible than those at Colliers Wood. It will be expected to support high quality development including tall buildings. The range of uses shall be agreed as part of the application process but will be expected to accommodate significant employment as well as new homes.'*

In the final table 'The site location', ASI objects to the wording and asks for the following **amendments:**

*...character and townscape which shall be tested by a heritage townscape and visual impact assessment and taking account of the guidance in the Future Wimbledon SPD'*

In the preparation of the Future Wimbledon SPD the Council has acknowledged that its approach has been constrained by the need to link it to the adopted 2011 Core Planning Strategy and in particular Policy CS.6 and Policy 14 – Design. Paragraphs 22.20 in support of Policy 14, cross-references the now decade old Merton Tall Buildings Background Paper 2010 which was based on a mid-rise approach to development and advised that tall buildings are generally not acceptable in Merton with the exception of Wimbledon, Morden and Colliers Wood. The Site allocation is seeking to suggest that any future development is

*'... in line with the height parameter set out in the Future Wimbledon SPD.'*

ASI would like to reiterate its previous comments that

1. If the height parameters are now being treated as a cap, then this will mean that development is not viable for residential;
2. There has been no tall buildings strategy undertaken based on a vigorous view analysis. This needs to be undertaken as a priority to take forward the work started by the SPD and the last work which was undertaken in 2010;
3. There is no criteria based tall buildings policy in the plan which is consistent with best practice and found in most up to date London Borough plans; and
4. Since the SPD only tests one site option it does not provide a framework for testing other massing options that would arise out of studies looking at different ranges of uses and how massing affects the composition of the development in terms of a group of buildings and the effect on the setting of heritage assets.

## **POLICY N1**

Policy N1 sits as a high level objective but with no plan for how its objectives will be delivered. For example, this should include:-

- supporting redevelopment to achieve a more efficient use of land;
- identifying the Council's approach to prioritising certain uses, otherwise the most viable uses will always be brought forward first;
- the approach to parking to support development including cycle parking;
- how homes will be provided to support the new jobs;
- the scale of growth identified will need more than adding additional floors to buildings.

We recommend that this policy should be reviewed in its entirety before the next round of consultation.