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Sent: 06 January 2019 19:29
To: Future Merton
Subject: Future Wimbledon Masterplan

FUTURE WIMBLEDON MASTERPLAN

SUBMISSION BY:

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To Merton Council:

I am sure that many other residents of Wimbledon have submitted similar comments to mine, so I will make my points succinct.

1. Wimbledon's character

Wimbledon has a special history and character and this plan does nothing to build on that or celebrate it. This plan is focused solely on attracting commercial entities to Wimbledon to boost the local authority's business tax revenue. There are no realistic proposals to make this a better place to live for residents – who contribute most of the local taxation revenue. Wimbledon is world famous for its links to tennis and its “village” feel, yet there is nothing in this plan that would build on the town's reputation as a tourist destination and make it an even more attractive all-year-round destination.

Wimbledon has many historic buildings that add to its attraction as a tourist destination and preserves the character of the town and gives it a sense of community and history. But the masterplan gives insufficient weight to residents’ clearly expressed wish to preserve historic buildings and facades wherever possible.

Wimbledon is also a primarily residential area, which means such large-scale commercial development would be highly disruptive and worsen the living environment for existing and future residents. This plan is

wholly inappropriate given the physical structure of the town centre – which is bordered by narrow residential streets – and the demographic make-up of the town.

2. Overbuilding of office space

Wimbledon is already oversupplied with office space – there are several Grade A offices that have been empty for several years, including a four-story office on Alwyne Road. Offices on Worple Road are being refurbished and parts of the building turned into “luxury” flats – precisely because there is no demand for office space in Wimbledon.

The plan presents no realistic assessment of the future demand for office space in Wimbledon and the nature of the buildings – huge, high-rise office space totally out of keeping with the character of Wimbledon – will destroy the local environment, livability and desirability of Wimbledon, turning it into yet another anonymous, faceless, characterless commuter town.

Although it is now generally accepted that new technologies, more flexible ways of working and changing shopping patterns are likely to reduce the demand for traditional office and retail space over the next 20 years, this plan takes no account of these potential changes.

All the evidence points to a long-term decline in demand for office space in London. The council's plan presents no convincing case for why any large company would choose Wimbledon as a base. Nearby Croydon is undertaking a massive city-centre redevelopment and is much more attractive as a location given its superior transport links and larger residential suburbs. Wimbledon, with its narrow roads, limited housing and inferior transport links cannot possibly compete. Kingston also has superior transport links and is a much bigger “centre” - again, a much more appealing destination for commercial businesses/offices.

The Financial Times recently highlighted that even in Croydon, demand for office space is falling and some commercial buildings are now being turned into low-quality sub-standard social housing. The overbuilding of office space that is the focal point of this plan risks the same thing happening in Wimbledon.

Here is the link to the article – which is headlined: ‘Slums of the future’? UK office-to-homes policy sparks fears

<https://www.ft.com/content/48fbe55c-ffb2-11e8-ac00-57a2a826423e>

This is the future that Merton Council risks saddling Wimbledon with. Is that what you mean by Wimbledon re-inventing itself? Wimbledon has already missed the commercial boat. If we are going to reinvent ourselves and change with economic demands, we need an alternative plan with less focus on attracting businesses that ALL the evidence points to are not going to be there.

3. Investment funding

The commercial overbuilding envisaged in the Masterplan is contingent on Cross Rail 2 passing through Wimbledon. If Cross Rail 2 fails to materialise, this plan will never raise enough investment funding to realise the plan – where is the money going to come from unless it's from property developers and “British Rail.” Yet there is no Plan B in place envisaging alternative proposals and development plans. This is bad planning and unrealistic.

3. Destruction of Wimbledon skyline

The current height of office buildings in Wimbledon is in keeping with the character of the town – as one comes down Wimbledon Hill Road into the town, it's an aesthetically comfortable picture – with no office buildings over eight stories high. These massive office blocks will destroy the skyline and break up the town. This is not what town planning is supposed to be in the 21st century.

4. Congestion

The overbuilding of commercial office space envisaged in the plan will lead to significant additional congestion and pollution through the main artery of Wimbledon. This will have a detrimental impact on local residents, existing business and the thousands of school pupils who traverse the town centre daily. Yet this plan gives no cognizance to this health hazard and the impact

on the health of young people who use the town centre.

5. Safety/Law enforcement

The plan's mission is to turn Wimbledon into the “premier business location in south west London” and recognises that Wimbledon is the largest town centre in Merton. As such, residents, visitors, businesses and workers all need to feel they are in a safe and secure environment. However, the Wimbledon police station is now being closed, which will make the town a much less safe environment – do you think people will want to come here – to work and live – if they don't feel safe and secure? How can you possibly have such ambitions when you have no law enforcement presence in the town?

6. Cultural attraction/tourist destination

The Masterplan does refer to the Wimbledon Concert Hall Trust as a new performance venue in central Wimbledon. A world-class performance venue would be a huge asset to the cultural life of Wimbledon. It would also help to attract visitors and businesses to Wimbledon, increase the number of overnight stays and boost overall economic activity. The Council should give the Concert Hall proposal more enthusiastic support and more prominence in the Masterplan.

7. Greening and public space

The nature of working, living, and open spaces is changing dramatically yet this is not recognized in the Masterplan. There is little emphasis on the need for “greening” and for nurturing public spaces for the community. These proposed high-rise buildings will create division, tunnels, dark narrow streets that will be unwelcoming for residents, visitors and office workers.

Conclusion:

This plan does little to highlight and build on the characteristics that define Wimbledon and does nothing to make it a more attractive place to live and work. It is unimaginative and relies on out-dated city-planning concepts about town-centre redevelopment. The first sentence of this masterplan is: Wimbledon is a fantastic place to live. Let's keep it that way with some imaginative planning not a tired re-hash of outdated plans that will not work in the 21st century.

As you know, the rates/council tax paid by residents in Wimbledon far exceed the taxes paid by local businesses. The council needs to serve the community as a WHOLE not just business.