

[REDACTED]

From: T [REDACTED] Goose [REDACTED]
Sent: 06 January 2019 20:35
To: Future Merton
Cc: Councillor Hayley Ormrod; Councillor James Holmes
Subject: Response to Future Wimbledon Masterplan consultation

Dear Sir/Madam,

Please see below our response to the consultation on the Future Wimbledon Masterplan:

1. Building heights

We are extremely concerned that the Masterplan refers to a need for denser development and more "mid-rise" buildings in Wimbledon town centre, to enable commercial growth. These could be up to 18 storeys high.

Definitions of "high-rise" and "mid-rise" may vary, but the fact is that any new buildings exceeding 7-8 storeys will tower over the existing townscape and radically alter the skyline for residents – not just those living in neighbouring streets but also those further afield.

The proposed scale and intensity of development are wholly inappropriate for Wimbledon town centre. They would adversely impact neighbouring residential areas and would change the essential character of Wimbledon, whilst exacerbating current traffic congestion and pollution issues in the town centre.

The building heights proposed in the Masterplan – particularly around St George's Road, Worple Road, the station and the area around the current YMCA – are significantly higher than existing buildings and represent much more than "a moderate increase in heights". The height of buildings should be subject to a comprehensive cap of 7-8 storeys.

We also believe that building heights should be capped at a certain number of storeys in relation to their current height. It should not be possible for example to replace a 2 storey building with 8 storeys. The Council should adopt a formula whereby it permits the lesser of a % increase in the height of the current building and a cap; and the formula should apply to buildings which are shown in the plan as intended to be more than 4 storeys high. For example, with a maximum 50% increase in height with a cap of 8 storeys, then:

- Any building on the plan proposed to be up to 4 storeys high stays as it is.
- Any current 3 storey building, other than those included in the point above above, could become 6 storeys, 4 could become 8, but 5 could only be 8 as well.

2. Evidence base

The Masterplan contains little or no data to justify the suggested need for a projected 50% increase in commercial space in the town centre. Growth in demand appears simply to be assumed, on the basis that 'if we build it, they will come'.

No account appears to have been taken of new technologies, more flexible ways of working and changing shopping and commuting patterns, which taken together are likely to reduce the demand for traditional office and retail space over the next 20 years.

3. Definition as a Metropolitan Centre

In the Mayor of London's draft London Plan, Wimbledon is defined as a "Major Centre", with high commercial and residential growth potential.

But in the draft Masterplan, Merton Council states that it would like to see Wimbledon recognised as a "Metropolitan Centre". This would allow much larger scale development akin to centres like Croydon or Kingston.

We reject this vision of Wimbledon's future as fundamentally undesirable. The town centre is bounded by residential streets on all sides, making large scale redevelopment problematic. We do not want Wimbledon town centre to become a "mini Croydon".

4. Crossrail 2

The Council has a duty to plan for the future of Wimbledon town centre, regardless of whether the Crossrail 2 project proceeds. But it is surely wrong to claim, as the Masterplan does, that "This masterplan is not reliant on Crossrail 2".

In reality, the levels of investment needed to develop Wimbledon in line with the Masterplan's vision are heavily dependent on Crossrail 2 going ahead. For example, the Masterplan itself says that there is little scope to deal with the traffic problems in the town centre or to pedestrianise streets without new railway crossings to relieve the pressure on Wimbledon Bridge.

5. Historic buildings

The Council's own workshops preceding the Masterplan showed that Wimbledon's heritage and sense of community are highly valued by residents. Whilst the Masterplan acknowledges the town's rich history, it gives insufficient weight to residents' clearly expressed wish to preserve historic buildings and facades wherever possible. It is vital that the heritage of Wimbledon is preserved for future generations and not sacrificed for the sake of ever denser development.

6. New concert hall

The Masterplan mentions (page 71) plans developed by the Wimbledon Concert Hall Trust for a new performance venue in central Wimbledon. An obvious location would be the Council car park next to Morrisons, but the Council has yet to give its backing to this use of the site.

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. Consultation process

The consultation process for the Masterplan has been inadequate. Given their importance to everyone who lives and works in Wimbledon, it is not enough simply to publish the documents on the Council's website, place hard copies in libraries and put a small piece in 'My Merton'. With such 'passive' methods of communication, most residents are likely to remain in ignorance.

The Council should have been more proactive and should now consider writing to all residents at their home addresses, as well as for example mounting pop-up information stands in the Piazza and Centre Court, prior to making any further decisions on the Masterplan.

8. Building materials

The building materials promoted should be in line with those that form Wimbledon's heritage characteristics e.g. Portland stone and London stock bricks. They should not be synthetic materials such as those seen on an increasing number of the recently constructed buildings along the Broadway.

Conclusion

Whilst we welcome and support the Masterplan's emphasis on improved quality and design of buildings and the aspiration for a greener, more attractive town centre, the reality is that these aims are compromised and made harder to realise by the nature and scale of development proposed elsewhere in the Masterplan. As such, we cannot support it as currently drafted.

Kind regards

T **Goose & H** Dowlen