

[REDACTED]

From: T [REDACTED] Jackson [REDACTED]
Sent: 05 January 2019 17:25
To: Future Merton
Subject: Wimbledon Masterplan
Attachments: 190105 Wimbledon Plan.pdf

Please find attached my letter in response to the October 2018 consultation document – Future Wimbledon Masterplan.

Kind regards,

T [REDACTED] Jackson



5 January, 2019

Planning Department
London Borough of Merton
Merton Civic Centre
London Road
Morden SM4 5DX

Dear Sir or Madam,

Response to Future Wimbledon Masterplan (October 2018 Consultation Draft)

As a resident of Wimbledon since 2000, I am keen that the future development plans for Wimbledon allow it to maintain its character whilst continuing the positive developments such as the development of the Morrisons / Odeon complex around the Wimbledon Piazza.

I am also keen to encourage the development of derelict land such as the old community hall on St. Georges road and the YMCA plot on the corner of The Broadway and Trinity Road.

Summary of response

The draft Future Wimbledon Masterplan contains proposals which would radically alter the nature, design, size and daytime population of Wimbledon town centre. Commercial usage is envisaged to increase by up to 50%, with a doubling in building heights in some areas, from 7 up to 18 storeys.

This scale and intensity of development to be wholly inappropriate for Wimbledon town centre. It 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. It has the potential to turn the centre of Wimbledon into a mini version of Croydon, which is not everyone's ideal of a desirable residential suburb.

I welcome and support the Masterplan's emphasis on improved quality and design of buildings and the aspiration for a greener, more attractive town centre. But in my view these laudable aims are compromised and made harder to realise by the nature and scale of development proposed elsewhere in the Masterplan.

Detailed Response

1. Building heights

The Masterplan refers frequently to a need for more "mid-rise" buildings in the town centre to enable commercial growth.

However, key passages include (page 64) "Building heights were an issue and many people felt that the masterplan should set limits on building heights in the town" and (page 69) "The townscape and topography is not suitable for high rise towers (in comparison to Nine Elms, Croydon and the City)". Page 69 also includes several photos of 5-8 storey buildings presumably to illustrate what is meant by "mid-rise".

These are not consistent with 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”. It is disingenuous to suggest otherwise.

Definitions of “high-rise” and “mid-rise” may vary, but the reality is that any new buildings exceeding 7-8 storeys high 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 consultation regarding the planning application for the new Premier Inn on The Broadway (18P2723, 11P3437, 11P1167, 04P2250 et al.) where neighbouring residents made clear their strong feelings around building heights and their objection to the ninth floor and the height increase relative to the six story CIPD building next door and seven storey NHS building opposite on the corner of Stanley Road and The Broadway. Building height has also led to long term objections and stalemate regarding the redevelopment of the YMCA site on the corner of The Broadway and Trinity Road.

I suggest that the Masterplan should state unequivocally that new buildings in excess of 7-8 storeys are unlikely to receive planning approval because of their visual impact on the surrounding area, their incongruity with existing historic buildings and the increase in traffic congestion and pollution to which more intense development would inevitably lead.

2. Evidence base?

The Masterplan contains little or no data to justify the suggested need for a projected extra 8,000 jobs and proposed 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’. Could it be that the increased requirement for commercial space has more to do with increasing the base for business rates.

I accept that a certain level of economic activity is required to sustain a thriving town centre. But this needs to be based on a transparent and proven methodology which keeps in balance the number and type of jobs in Wimbledon with the shops, bars, restaurants and other facilities required by residents and visitors. The economic modelling must also take account of new technologies; new, more flexible ways of working; and changing shopping patterns, which taken together are likely to reduce the demand for traditional office and retail space over the next 20 years. This has been highlighted by the many dire results from high street brands over the 2018 Christmas period.

This kind of analysis is completely absent from the Masterplan. Without it, there is a risk of encouraging inappropriate and/or speculative commercial development, which is out of keeping with the rest of Wimbledon town centre and which places unsustainable pressure on the town’s infrastructure and services.

3. Metropolitan or Major centre?

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

This vision of Wimbledon’s future is fundamentally undesirable. The town centre is bounded by residential streets on all sides, making large scale redevelopment problematic. Residents have made it clear to us that they do not want Wimbledon town centre to become a “mini Croydon”. I have never heard of Croydon quoted as desirable or well-planned location, even though my grandparents lived there just after the Second World War.

The Council’s aspiration also runs counter to the Mayor’s draft London Plan in which the Wimbledon/Colliers Wood/South Wimbledon area is designated an Opportunity Area, with growth potential for 5,000 new homes and 6,000 new jobs. On this basis, an extra 4,000 jobs in Wimbledon town centre alone might be a more realistic planning assumption for the Masterplan.

4. Crossrail 2

I recognise that the Council has a duty to plan for the future of Wimbledon town centre, regardless of whether the Crossrail 2 project proceeds. However, 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.

Given the delays that have been experience by Thameslink 2000 and Crossrail, I therefore suggest that the Masterplan should provide an alternative development scenario based on Crossrail 2 being delayed to 2040 or being abandoned.

5. Historic buildings

The Council's workshops preceding the Masterplan and a survey by Friends of Wimbledon Town Centre both showed that Wimbledon's heritage and sense of community are highly valued by residents, including myself. 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.

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. I recommend that the Council gives the Concert Hall proposal more enthusiastic support and more prominence in the Masterplan.

Sincerely,

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area.

T ■ Jackson