

Lingard J. H.

Dear Sirs

I write with comments from examination of the proposed Local Plan and Masterplan, with respect to Wimbledon.

1. Building heights

Both the Masterplan and the Local Plan refer to a need for denser development and more “mid-rise” buildings in Wimbledon town centre, to enable commercial growth.

The definition of “mid-rise” does not seem to be well defined, 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. The proposed scale and intensity of development seems 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”. See also site comments below.

2. Scale: 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.

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. This vision of Wimbledon’s future is undesirable. The town centre is bounded by residential streets on all sides, making large scale redevelopment problematic. We definitely do not want Wimbledon town centre to become a “mini Croydon”.

It is also vital that the Plan takes into account the changes that are taking place in the retail sector and that lively, sustainable places are created and a legacy of empty or low rent shopping is not created. Good quality environments are needed.

3. 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. These matters are fundamental to the future development of Wimbledon, and development proposals must be linked to and coordinated with the impact of Crossrail 2.

Furthermore, the Council must become vocal and assertive in ensuring that the Crossrail proposals provide continuity of life for the town centre and cannot be allowed to proceed without plans to sustain the existing shopping, or provide replacement before implementation of the Centre Court demolition, or talk of the ‘Major Centre’ is pie in the sky.

4. Sites noted in Local Plan

Wi2 Broadway Car Park

Development of this site would be welcomed (perhaps logically for the proposed cultural facilities) but anything proposed needs to take into consideration the reality of continued car use to access commercial, retail and cultural facilities in the UK, for the foreseeable future. That is, proposals need to include parking, and not allow a reduction in parking, pushing a problem on to surrounding streets.

Wi5 Hartfield Car Park

The comments provided above for the Broadway Car park apply equally to the Hartfield Road site. Retained provision of car parking is essential as part of the continuing development and long term appeal of the town centre.

Wi12 Wimbledon Stadium

Having granted planning permission for over development on this site, it is now essential that the Council takes seriously and commits to improvement of the local infrastructure, obligations that it failed to impose on Galliard. By no means the only problem, to cite one example Plough Lane and the junction with Haydon’s Road are already a significant traffic problem, and this will only be exacerbated by the additional residents from the new development and massively so from the stadium visitors. This MUST be addressed.

Wi15. YMCA site

All the proposals for this site so far have been unacceptable with significant detrimental impact upon the residents to the north and east of the site. There is no case for increased bulk or height on this site, which already towers above its surroundings. In particular no increase beyond the height of the low rise apartment blocks already at the crossroads should be allowed on the eastern portion of the site. It has been clearly demonstrated that this will have a severe impact on the surroundings.

Wi?? The Evans Cycles site

I am very surprised to see that this useful opportunity site is missing from the Plan. It is under-utilised and offers good potential for town centre development, at least as good as Wi2.

5. Health and Environment

The Plan has objectives for making Merton a healthy and pleasant environment. The Council needs to do considerably more than make lofty statements. It needs to take seriously those objectives and start giving proper priority to street cleaning and road maintenance. "Mucky Merton" is a very apt tag currently.