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**To:** Future Merton  
**Subject:** Masterplan

## **Response to Future Wimbledon Masterplan (October 2018 Consultation Draft)**

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.

We consider 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.

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. But in our view these laudable aims are compromised and made harder to realise by the nature and scale of development proposed elsewhere in the Masterplan.

### **Full response to consultation**

#### **1. Building heights**

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

The key passage (page 69) reads: "The townscape and topography is not suitable for high rise towers (in comparison to Nine Elms, Croydon and the City) but Wimbledon does need to become more dense and accept a moderate increase in heights to accommodate future growth."

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 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.

We believe 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'.

FoWTC accepts 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 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.

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.

FoWTC rejects 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. And residents have made it clear to us that they do not want Wimbledon town centre to become a "mini Croydon".

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**

We recognise that 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 document 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.

We therefore suggest that the Masterplan should not be put to Merton's full Council for approval nor adopted until decisions have been taken by Government regarding Crossrail 2.

### **5. Historic buildings**

The Council's workshops preceding the Masterplan and a survey by FoWTC itself both 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.

### **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.

We believe that 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. We urge the Council to give the Concert Hall proposal more enthusiastic support and more prominence in the Masterplan.

### **7. Consultation process**

Given the importance of this subject to everyone who lives and works in Wimbledon, we consider that the consultation process for the Masterplan has been seriously inadequate. It is not enough to publish a 136-page document on the Council website, place a hard copy in libraries and put a small piece in 'My Merton'. With such 'passive' methods of communication, most residents are likely to remain in ignorance.

For the next version of the Masterplan, we suggest that the Council should consult again and should be more proactive by writing to all residents at their home addresses, as well as mounting pop-up information stands in the Piazza and Centre Court.

Regards,  
T ■ Merriott

Sent from my iPhone