

Millward. C

I believe it's also highly relevant that the draft Local Plan states in clause 3.6.7 that Wimbledon is 'not suitable for high rise towers'. This statement is completely at odds with the draft Master Plan which promotes such developments in a variety of locations - which document does the Council support?

Subject: Local plan

Key points I would like to make:

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 draft Local Plan does not specify how high these could be but it is apparent that they could be anything up to 18 storeys.

Definitions of "high-rise" and "mid-rise" 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".

I am particularly concerned about the sites in the draft Local Plan labelled Wi2 (Broadway car park); Wi4 (Hartfield Road); Wi5 (Hartfield Road car park); Wi6 (Highlands House, The Broadway); Wi9, 10, 13 and 14 (all on St George's Road); Wi11 (Victoria Crescent); and Wi15 (YMCA, The Broadway).

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'.

No account appears to have been taken of new technologies, 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.

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.

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.

Local residents have repeatedly rejected 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 workshops preceding the Masterplan and a survey by FoWTC 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.

Any development on this site should respect the scale of the residential neighbourhoods which lie to the immediate south, east and west.

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 both the Masterplan and the Local Plan 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 and place hard copies in libraries. With such 'passive' methods of communication, most residents are likely to remain in ignorance.

The Council should be more proactive and 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.