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Sent: 22 December 2018 08:26
To: Future Merton
Subject: Wimbledon Local Plan

I am writing in support of the Friends of Wimbledon Town Centre and their submission to the Council. As a reminder -

1. Building heights

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 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 their 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, 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 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.

FoWTC rejects this vision of Wimbledon’s future as fundamentally undesirable and I entirely agree. 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. There is also much pressure on Ashcombe Road. There need to be more crossings over the railway line.

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. Why?

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. I was unaware until alerted by Friends of Wimbledon Town Centre. The Council should get a grip and inform residents about what they propose in a more positive fashion, as suggested below.

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.

E Strouts
