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Dear Sir / Madam

Representations to the draft Local Plan 2020 On behalf of Thornsett Group

These representations have been prepared on behalf of Thornsett Group and respond to the draft Local Plan 2020 issued for consultation in October 2018. Thornsett are entered into a development agreement with the YMCA St Paul's Group to redevelop their site at 196-200 The Broadway, which benefits from a specific allocation for redevelopment within the emerging Local Plan.

Thornsett strongly welcome the inclusion of the Site Allocation within the draft Local Plan and the wider aspiration for redevelopment of the site and Wimbledon Town Centre.

These representations have been prepared in line with representations to the draft Wimbledon Town Centre Masterplan SPD which is simultaneously open for consultation. The aspiration to deliver wholesale regeneration across Wimbledon Town Centre is strongly supported, as is the identification of key development sites to deliver such regeneration.

Existing Allocation and Planning Discussions

The site benefits from an allocation in adopted planning policy (Site Proposal 62 in the Sites and Policies Plan – 2014) which:

- Identifies the site as a gateway to the town centre;
- Assumes early delivery within the Plan period;
- Supports the provision of homeless accommodation alongside the introduction of residential accommodation and other supporting uses.

Pre-application engagement more recently in 2018 with both LB Merton Officers and the LB Merton Design Review Panel have supported proposals for redevelopment at a high level, subject to further assessment of key planning considerations including active frontages, a scheme delivering exceptional architecture and the provision of public realm.

Site Description

The site is located in Wimbledon Town Centre to the north of The Broadway, between the junctions of Trinity Road to the east and Stanley Road to the west. The site forms the corner site on The Broadway and Trinity Road which is currently cleared alongside Olympic House at 196-198, an existing office block and the existing YMCA facility at no. 200.

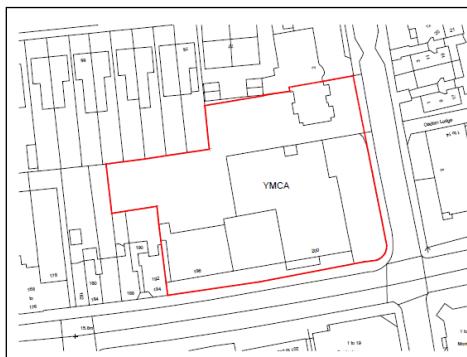


Figure 1: Site Location Plan

Fronting The Broadway, the site currently contains a mix of buildings ranging in height from two to eight storeys. The character of the surrounding area is mixed with uses including commercial floorspace, retail and residential accommodation, alongside important community uses such as the nearby New Wimbledon Theatre and the existing YMCA facility on site.

YMCA Wimbledon

The YMCA has been at the heart of the Wimbledon community since 1874, with the current building opened by the Queen Mother in 1974. The facility has housed and supported thousands of young, vulnerable local people and today provides accommodation for young people from the local area who are referred from LB Merton and No Second Night Out. The building can accommodate up to 111 people, who can stay up to a maximum of two years if necessary. Residents receive support including training and life skills courses, volunteering, arts and drama projects, day trips and personal development programmes and projects.

In addition, there is a Health & Wellbeing centre which delivers over 50 exercise classes a week to the wider community. Children's activities are provided at Pod2, a multisensory soft play facility for children under 8 years old.

The building also provides room hire for the local community, with rooms suitable for small meetings and informal gatherings for community groups. The facility provides valuable accommodation and facilities for both an established need and also the local community. Delivering the range of services mean that the facility are a major local employer, with over 50 people employed across the site.

The fact that all these services are provided is made even more remarkable given the condition of the building which has deteriorated in recent years, and is now struggling to meet the needs and requirements of such a facility, with running costs becoming prohibitive to the service that the YMCA provides.

Architecturally, it is evident from the Masterplan SPD which is also being consulted upon that the existing building is seen as an eyesore which detracts from the character of the area. There is recognition that the building is of poor aesthetic quality, reflected in the 'Likes and Dislikes' figure contained within the Masterplan SPD, identifying the existing YMCA building as a major dislike.

In addition to the issues with the exterior of the existing building, the property is also no longer fit for purpose and the YMCA have significant ongoing costs to ensure it remains habitable. Refurbishment is not a viable long-term option and given the deterioration, there is an ongoing risk to the provision of the facility.

The future of the site has been debated for a number of years. The YMCA have been exploring redevelopment for the last 7 years and have engaged with 3 separate developers, two of which have not been able to prepare a viable scheme.

Thornsett are able to realise the potential of this site and deliver the re-provision of this valuable facility alongside other significant benefits as further detailed in this letter.

Proposed Site Allocation



Emerging Policy WI15 seeks to allocate the site for mixed-use redevelopment. The current draft of the allocation states that the following would be suitable on site:

"a suitable mix of retail (A1 Use Class), financial & professional services (A2 Use Class), restaurants & cafes (A3 Use Class), drinking establishments (A4 Use Class), offices (B1(a) Use Class), community (D1 Use Class) and residential (including Hostel or Hotel) (C3 & C1 Use Class)."

The emerging allocation also identifies this site as "*a significant corner site with an active frontage facing onto the Broadway*" whilst also specifically identifying the following opportunities:

- *"the site is a prominent corner site with an active frontage facing onto The Broadway and also acts as the eastern gateway to Wimbledon town centre. Therefore, redevelopment of exemplary design quality is a must."*
- *"opportunity to provide modern, well-designed hostel type accommodation and support services for vulnerable people in an accessible location."*
- *"This site is a corner site with an active frontage facing onto The Broadway so redevelopment of exemplary design would be welcomed. The ground floor should have an active frontage, respecting the dual aspect and corner site."*
- *"public space would also be welcomed".*

It is clear from emerging policy that this site is seen as a key, prominent site within the Borough and specifically Wimbledon Town Centre. This is supported, as is the recognition that the site is capable of delivering a range of uses in addition to the re-provision of the YMCA facility.

Exemplary Design

Within the draft allocation, there is emphasis on delivering an exemplary design which is welcomed and to be expected. With exemplary design however comes significant cost in order to deliver a design, and subsequently a finished built product, which aligns with such aspirations. Therefore the allocation within the draft Local Plan needs to reflect the impact that delivering exemplary design will have on the viability of a project.

Viability in this instance relates to both the various land uses that are to be sought including active frontages, public realm and affordable housing, but also in terms of the quantum of development (height, scale and massing) that is required to ensure a scheme is brought forward.

There needs to be this explicit recognition within the allocation that the delivery of such a high quality scheme will likely have impacts on viability and therefore concessions may need to be made on other aspects. Whilst the various land use requirements such as active frontages and public realm may also be key considerations and deliverables, this may necessitate additional building height or mass to ensure a viable scheme.

Acceptable Land Uses

The current iteration of the draft Local Plan identifies that a range of different uses as being accommodated on the site including a range of Class A retail, Class B commercial, Class C residential and Class D community uses.

Whilst it is recognised that the site is capable of delivering a range of uses, the allocation should explicitly recognise that it might not be viable to deliver all of these uses and that the above are possibilities and appropriate uses rather than necessities.

In line with the narrative above with regards to viability, it is unlikely that all of the uses will be delivered alongside on another on site. We would therefore welcome recognition of this within the allocation itself.

In terms of suggested alternative wording under the Council's proposed site allocation, rather than "*a suggested mix of....*", it would be welcomed if this could be updated to state "*possible appropriate uses on site include...*" to allow for this flexibility and recognition that delivery of all uses would not be viable.

Opportunities

A viable scheme on the YMCA site is capable of delivering substantial public benefits, including:

- Provision of much better quality accommodation for the YMCA and securing its future in this location and in the Borough which would otherwise be uncertain;
- Delivering residential accommodation to cross-subsidise the YMCA facility and also meet the pressing need for new homes in the Borough;
- Delivering a building of much higher architectural quality worthy of being at the gateway to the town centre;
- Incorporating public and semi-private realm within the site which would be designed accordingly in order to ensure it would be used and maintained effectively;
- Creation of active frontages along The Broadway which would align with the key aspirations for the Masterplan;

The YMCA site is a crucial part of the success of the regeneration of the town centre and there is an opportunity to create a landmark building for this invaluable local facility.

There is, thus, strong support from Thornsett for the identification of this site as an allocation within the draft Local Plan. It is important though that the Local Plan reflects the viability constraints of achieving exemplary design and the impact that this could have on delivering

such schemes. There should be recognition of viability within the allocation and that in order to fund such regeneration, additional height, scale and massing may need to be incorporated into individual schemes.

Thornsett are extremely supportive of the Masterplan as it stands, however with some tweaks to the document it is felt that this flexibility will enable a scheme to come forward which delivers the aspirations of the Masterplan, the adopted Site Allocations document and the emerging Local Plan 2020.

We would be delighted to meet to discuss the draft allocation, or the contents of these representations in greater detail.

Yours sincerely

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