

[REDACTED]

From: D [REDACTED] Whitehead [REDACTED]
Sent: 06 January 2019 23:14
To: Future Merton
Subject: Future Wimbledon Masterplan

I have reviewed the above and have the following observations:

1. whilst it is useful to set out the council's current thoughts for the future they do not seem to be based on any real analysis of what people genuinely want. They seem to be based more on the aspirations of the council which are not really relevant;
2. a number of unsupported statements are made (e.g. "Whilst other neighbouring centres such as Croydon, Wandsworth, Kingston and Nine Elms are expanding their residential and retail offer; we believe Wimbledon is in a unique position to amplify what is already successful and to position Wimbledon SW19 as the premier business location in south west London.") which in many cases appear simply to be accepted as arguments for imitating those other places rather than as an opportunity to consider whether Wimbledon should really distinguish itself from them. I have no desire to live in Kingston (with its appalling traffic, low quality ambience and sense of impermanence), Wandsworth (with narrow, trafficked streets, random shops and lack of range of housing), Croydon (where do I start?) or Nine Elms (that is not a community!) otherwise I would live there. I choose to live somewhere with excellent housing stock, a strong sense of local community, excellent transport links, wonderful outdoor space and high quality shops, bars and restaurants;
3. It is either dishonest or naive to present market rates as being what businesses currently pay for office space. Rent-free periods are entirely normal, break clauses commonplace and these arguments vacuous. Tenants such as Close Brothers are here because it ISN'T the City, not because they want their Wimbledon operation to be nearly as expensive. Should Brexit occur then City rates may well drop significantly. Lidl will not want to pay more than they currently do. Have they expressed a contrary intention? If they are driven out, who do you expect to take over not just their existing space but all the additional capacity you suggest might be built?
4. Your report states that "We need to be clear on the nature of the town centre; the uses that contribute towards a vibrant and successful commercial offer; how this integrates with the existing residential communities and crucially, how the quality of design – public realm and architectural design lie at the heart of successful places and underpin good growth." I remain to be convinced that you offer this clarity, however, in particular how this "integrates" with the local community. How many people locally want to be loomed over by skyscrapers (even if they can technically be described as "mid-rise")? How many people want the massive additional traffic adding further chaos to Worple Road, Alexandra Road, the High Street and Merton Road etc (reducing the burden on the bridge would be welcome but the roads leading to two potential new bridges are entirely ignored). What impact will this actually have on the lives of the people who live here - the people whose votes put councillors in place? The concern seems more - again - for the ambitions of politicians which cannot be allowed to be the driving force.
5. Cultural integration is something which is touched upon but with no real clarity. The value of an aspirational concert hall with exceptional architectural merit, real artistic quality and global appeal would be highly significant as a yardstick to challenge all other development to match. Setting the standard at a level which in fact would distinguish us from the Croydons, Kingstons etc in fact might be worthwhile - but you shy away. Why?

I look forward to hearing of the outcome of this exercise.

Yours faithfully,

D [REDACTED] Whitehead
[REDACTED]