

Worthy J

Local Plan

I fully support the following key principles adopted by the council:

“Mid-rise only” development
No scope for high-rise
Respect for the views from Wimbledon Hill

Comments

1. Crossrail 2 – While the local plan does not address the implications of Crossrail 2, it should look forward to the longer term proposals in the masterplan for adding to the available areas for development by using the over-rail areas. These are highly desirable as they would deliver significant growth in capacity (retail, commercial and residential) without major recharacterisation of the Wimbledon centre areas (which local communities would strongly resist). However, the masterplan does not fully recognise the extent to which these proposals are dependent Crossrail 2 being pursued and on the way in which Crossrail 2 is developed. Without these over-rail areas becoming available, the opportunities for appropriate development in line with local residents’ preferences, as expressed in the workshops, is limited to refashioning or replacing existing structures – this would not deliver a significant increase in the commercial, retail or residential value of the area.
2. Major centre or Metropolitan centre – It is recognised in the masterplan that Wimbledon is a major centre (or premier town centre) in South West London and should seek to maintain this status. However, it would not be desirable to develop Wimbledon further to become a Metropolitan centre, even assuming this were achievable. The concept of Wimbledon becoming like Croydon (which is the inevitable consequence of the masterplan proposals) would massively change the nature of Wimbledon and would devalue the area both for local residents and businesses.

Neither the local plan nor the masterplan presents evidence to clarify what would be required to expand the area to a Metropolitan centre. It is likely to require a significant level of new investment and intensive development, which would be incompatible with the existing character of the area, which is so highly prized by local residents and workers.

3. Building heights – the workshops and other views expressed by local residents demonstrate clearly how strongly people value the limited heights of the buildings, even in the more heavily developed areas of Wimbledon. Very few of the current buildings rise to 7 (or occasionally 8) storeys – the vast majority are of course much lower. On average, the building heights around the areas of the local plan and masterplan are around 3 storeys. Assuming more intensive development is required, any increase in heights should be clearly limited to take account of the views of local residents and be consistent with the principle of respecting the views from Wimbledon Hill.

The commitment to “mid-rise only” is welcomed, assuming this means a maximum of 7 storeys. Anything higher cannot be described as “mid-rise”. A suggestion that “mid-rise only” would extend up to 20 storeys is incompatible with any assessment of Wimbledon centre and out of line with the clearly and strongly expressed views of local residents. It is also out of line with the normal meaning of the words “mid-rise” in a suburban context.

The better approach would be to allow buildings to be increased to a maximum of 7 storeys in total, including any existing building (or 50% higher than the height of the existing building, if lower). This would still enable significant development to occur and attract more higher value/higher growth businesses, while maintaining the mix of larger and smaller traders, as favoured by local residents.

4. Historic buildings – it is vital to keep the character of Wimbledon’s historic buildings, which are highly prized by those contributing to the workshops and the wider community. This has been done effectively with the old fire station and Baptist church facades as part of the Centre Court complex. It is essential that other valuable historic buildings are preserved in any future development plans. Centre Court also shows how this can be achieved in a manner consistent with the needs of commercial/retail buildings.
5. Traffic flows – one of the major issues affecting the area around Wimbledon station is the traffic congestion. It will be vital for a healthy and thriving Wimbledon to accommodate the needs of traffic users, both currently and as they evolve over the coming years. An additional rail crossing (as proposed in the Crossrail 2 plans) would deliver a valuable addition to the traffic flows. Without the Crossrail 2 elements, another rail crossing will still be needed to avoid the Wimbledon station area becoming an ever increasing bottleneck and undermining the value of other planned developments.

Equally, any development should ensure that the car parking available is increased in line with the expected increased usage of the areas. Any development, such as hotel or leisure facilities should provide additional parking as part of the development.

6. Building materials – in order to maintain the character of the Wimbledon centre, any development should use as much as possible of traditional building materials, such as Portland stone and London stock brick, and should minimise the use of synthetic materials, which tend to stand out from surrounding traditional materials and undermine the valued character of the neighbourhood.
7. Lack of evidence – the plan presents only limited evidence for the views and proposals for development in it. Without this evidence base, it is difficult or impossible for commentators to make an informed assessment of the merits of the proposals against the principles which have been put forward, or indeed any other relevant factors.

Where the plan fails to adopt the principles expressed in the workshops about retaining an appropriate human scale and the historic character of the area, it appears that the plan ignores these viewpoints without demonstrating why they should be overridden.

In particular, the plan does not obviously reflect immediate issues, such as the current pressures facing retailers and the increasing use of flexible working, which may lead to more limited (or different) needs for extensive retail and commercial development, or longer term issues, such as more electric vehicles, which are likely to affect the pressures on traffic and parking, as well as the need for charging points.

8. Limited consultation – there has been very limited consultation about the local plan and hence limited opportunity for local residents and businesses to contribute effectively to the future of their local area. As the plan contains significant proposals for change to the core Wimbledon area, it is important to have effective consultations among all the communities (including residents).

In addition to the above points, I have the following comments on the proposals for the specific sites mentioned:

Wi2 Broadway Car Park– a comparable number of car parking spaces should be retained as part of any future development, given the limited range of parking available for shoppers and other visitors to the area, and the likelihood that this will increase in the coming years (especially if new hotel or other leisure developments are planned).

Wi 4 Hartfield Road– the additional car traffic should be accommodated by new car parking facilities as part of the development, and should provide effective road access for delivery traffic (supplies and coaches/taxis) without impacting on traffic flows along Hartfield Road or the adjoining streets. Additional congestion in the Hartfield Road area should be avoided.

As most of the buildings on this site are currently 1 or 2 storeys, any development should respect the need to avoid changing the visual character of the neighbourhood. A maximum of 7 storeys should be set for any new development. The recent proposal of a hotel rising to 9 storeys, including roof facilities, is too high to fit with the neighbourhood. Seven storeys would be acceptable.

Wi 8 South Wimbledon station – finding a new use for the current retail unit or bringing it back into use would be a valuable addition to the area. Whatever is done, any new development should recognise the current 2 storey height of the station building and hence be limited to 4 or 5 storeys maximum.

Wi 15 YMCA – any new development should not exceed the height of the existing YMCA building, which is already out of line with the surrounding 2-3 storey residential buildings. Anything higher or more intrusive in visual terms would adversely affect the character of the South Park Gardens conservation area.