

PD13374/JNS/LH/TP

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Ms Carmel Edwards

Programme Officer

Merton Local Plan Examination

Merton Civic Centre

London Rd

Morden

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19/05/2022

Via email to

programmeofficer@carmeledwards.com

Dear Ms. Edwards,

**CENTRE COURT SHOPPING CENTRE, WIMBLEDON, SW19 8YE
TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990
REPRESENTATIONS MADE ON BEHALF OF ROMULUS**

We write on behalf of our client, Romulus Limited, the owners of Centre Court Shopping Centre, SW19 8YE ('the Site' / 'Centre Court'). Their ownership includes proposed site allocation Wi16 as identified within Merton's Local Plan document '*0D4aii Proposed Main Modifications to Merton's Local Plan dated 28th March 2022*'.

On behalf of Romulus, this letter seeks to provide formal written representations to the Merton Local Plan Stage 1 Hearings, which are due to take place in June 2022. This follows the issuing of the Inspectors Matters, Issues and Questions ("MIQs") in April 2022.

It should be noted that Romulus have submitted representations in relation to the following Main Matters to be covered by the Stage 1 Hearings in June 2022:

- Matter 3 – Climate Change; and
- Matter 10 – Employment uses, town centres and the Opportunity Area.

For clarity and as requested by the Inspectors, Romulus have prepared a separate written statement for each Main Matter to which they make representations.

This letter therefore provides Romulus' written representations to the examination of the Merton Local Plan, Stage 1 Hearings, in relation to **Main Matter 10 only**.

For reference, Main Matter 10 covers the following:

"Are the Plan's approaches to employment uses, town centres and the Opportunity Area justified, consistent with national policy and in general conformity with the London Plan?"

ABOUT ROMULUS

Romulus are a London-based property investment and development group which owns and manages over 1 million sqft of prime office, retail, hotel and leisure space in London and the USA.

Romulus have been successfully developing and managing properties for over 40 years and their strategy focuses on continual investment to redevelop and add value to their assets. This includes through refurbishment and repurposing.

Romulus acquired Centre Court in Spring 2021 and has since undertaken a detailed review of the current operations of the Site, its function, current layout and use of space. As part of this review, Romulus has identified significant opportunities to bring new life and experiences into Centre Court to ensure the Site retains its position as a hub of community activity for local residents and businesses.

The pandemic has highlighted the structural changes taking place in terms of how people work and live. This has highlighted the need to provide adaptable, high-quality places to work and live. Romulus believes that the Site can be that hub, providing new shopping experiences, places to eat, leisure, flexible workspace and new homes, adjacent to a major public transport interchange.

To enable such opportunities to be realised, Romulus are seeking to undertake a phased programme of improvement works to the Site.

Phase 1 of the improvement works, which are already underway, seek to focus upon repurposing elements of the existing floorspace, introducing a mix of new uses and undertaking amendments to the internal configuration of the Site. The aim is to retain and adapt successful elements of the existing Site, whilst making targeted interventions which address historic issues with Centre Court, which has resulted in parts of the Site becoming vacant in recent years.

Phase 2 of the works are yet to be formalised but there is a strong aspiration from Romulus for the Site to become a destination to live and work. In line with proposed Site Allocation Wi16, Romulus foresee the Site as being capable of achieving *“a mixture of Town Centre Type Uses such as community (including health and wellbeing), retail, restaurants and cafes, financial and professional services, leisure, offices, hotel, residential and last mile distribution.”*

MAIN MATTER 10

Whilst Romulus do not wish to provide detailed commentary on each issue and question raised by the Inspectors in their MIQs, we do wish to make a number of site-specific comments in relation to how any current and future development proposals at the Site will align with the themes outlined in Main Matter 10.

The Merton Local Plan seeks to support the post-pandemic economic recovery through supporting development which provides a greater number and range of jobs and services, adding to the vibrancy of the Borough. This includes through strengthening Merton's town centres and encouraging a range of complementary business and service uses, not limited to retail.

Romulus are strong advocates of the 'town centre first' approach put forward in the Merton Local Plan. As noted above, under Phase 1, Romulus have sought to repurpose and reconfigure units within Centre Court for alternative uses, including provision of office, leisure and healthcare/medical floorspace. This has also included supporting opportunities for flexible and meanwhile uses or pop-ups in vacant units. The new uses will diversify the services offered at the Site and within Wimbledon Town Centre, bringing new employees and generating increased footfall and spend within the Town Centre, supporting Merton's local economy.

Whilst the nature of the uses to be provided under Phase 2 is yet to be fully established, the aspiration is for Centre Court to become a destination location within Merton, providing new shopping experiences, office workspace, places to eat, leisure and new homes as supported by the Local Plan and Future Wimbledon SPD.

Under their ownership, Romulus have established their own co-working brand, Huddle, which offers a range of flexible workspaces and meeting rooms to support start-ups, freelancers and growing businesses at their existing London sites. As part of Phase 2, the aspiration is for Huddle to form an integral part of Centre Court, providing well managed co-working and flexible space to accommodate a range of potential occupiers from small start-ups to large national corporates, close to good public transport links. Romulus believe the introduction of Huddle can help achieve the aspirations of Policy EC13.2 of the Merton Local Plan, which seeks delivery of new and refurbished flexible office floorspace in Wimbledon Town Centre.

Under the Phase 2 proposals, Romulus are considering the introduction of new homes at Centre Court in line with the Council's support for mixed-use development within town centre locations. Whilst the type of residential product is to be confirmed, Romulus are committed to ensuring the relevant affordable housing requirement is met, subject to viability. The potential introduction of high-density residential uses at Centre Court is considered, in accordance with London Plan policy, to be appropriate given the Site's highly accessible location within the Wimbledon/Colliers Wood/South Wimbledon Opportunity Area.

As part of their commitment to Wimbledon, Romulus will support the recruitment of local residents and provide ongoing opportunities for work experience placements, training and skills for local students and higher education colleges. This applies to both the existing and future operation and construction phases of the development. More widely, the Phase 1 and Phase 2 proposals will deliver a significant increase in the number and types of jobs available to Merton residents, including specialist occupations associated with the introduction of new uses, such as specialist health and medical operators.

In line with Merton Local Plan Policy EC13.1, Romulus are also assessing how they can support the circular and sharing economy through the potential provision of an Urban Farm, food growing initiatives and last-mile distribution activities at the Site. Such initiatives would help promote the benefits of a transition to a low carbon circular economy to strengthen London's economic success and make efficient use of space and resources.

CLOSINGS

We would be grateful if the Programme Officer could confirm that our representations have been received and will be considered as part of the Stage 1 Hearings in June 2022 in relation to Main Matter 10.

If you have any outstanding queries on this matter, please contact Julian Stephenson (julian.stephenson@montagu-evans.co.uk / 07818012537), Lauren Hawksworth (lauren.hawksworth@montagu-evans.co.uk / 07392139441) or Tom Pemberton (tom.pemberton@montagu-evans.co.uk / 07554346120) of these offices in the first instance.

Yours sincerely,



MONTAGU EVANS LLP