

Future Merton  
C/o Paul McGarry and Tara Butler

Sunday 23 May 2021

*Re: PlanWimbledon designation consultation – representation from PlanWimbledon*

Dear Paul, dear Tara,

As the consultation on our application for designation draws to a close, PlanWimbledon are submitting this letter as our own representation.

Since PlanWimbledon's application was submitted in February, we have made tremendous progress from an already strong base, as the understanding of the benefits that neighbourhood planning offers our whole community gathers momentum. We are confident and excited at the prospect that the consultation votes will underpin our designation as neighbourhood forum for the proposed Wimbledon area.

We would like to make the following observations from our experiences and learnings to date. In particular, we wish to correct some of the misconceptions which have come across:

- **There is a strong and growing appetite for neighbourhood planning across the neighbourhood**

We are thrilled by the accelerating level of support and enthusiasm for neighbourhood planning across the area. Latterly, the Covid pandemic has driven both a greater sense of community and the desire to have a say in the future development of our home and work environments.

- **We have strong cross-sectional support from the local community**

This is reflected in our membership which now stands at over 550, representing an uplift of more than 100% since we applied for designation back in February. New members have come from across the proposed territory of the plan and across the spectrum of demographics, as well as from businesses, residents and landowners, and a wide variety of associations. (Please note that we count each association as only one member). Our social media presence has encouraged younger members to sign up to PlanWimbledon.

- **The Wimbledon area has been rigorously defined and reflects a cohesive view from the local community**

The proposed area for the Wimbledon neighbourhood forum has been determined by an extensive engagement programme with the local community, with inputs from a wide range of stakeholders. The proposed area reflects the local community's opinion of what is appropriate for the neighbourhood plan.

The size of the proposed area of Wimbledon is a testament to the strong feeling of belonging that the community has, and of the history of the town and its diversity. While each sub-area has its own individual characteristics, everyone identifies strongly with the town centre as Wimbledon's anchor and community heart. The town centre is a focus common to all the neighbourhood's constituent communities.

- **The proposed area is not 'too large'**

It is important to note that there is no maximum recommended size of area for neighbourhood planning. While the overall size of the proposed Wimbledon area has attracted concern from certain quarters, it is not the largest neighbourhood forum area.

In Bracknell, the whole town (including its high street and train station) has successfully created a neighbourhood plan, which is to be submitted for referendum shortly. Bracknell Town Centre has 55,000 adults and a geographical area twice that of Wimbledon (16 km<sup>2</sup> for Bracknell, compared to 8 km<sup>2</sup> for Wimbledon). Like Wimbledon, Bracknell includes a train station, art spaces and protected green spaces.

Merton has the potential to become a trailblazer among London boroughs. There is enough talent, expertise and enthusiasm within our proposed boundary to prepare a very successful neighbourhood plan.

- **PlanWimbledon is pro-development**

We have received some feedback that PlanWimbledon are perceived as being opposed to development and progress. This is a complete misconception. The group is dedicated to ensuring that Wimbledon continues to be an attractive and vibrant location for people to live, work and visit. This can be achieved only by fostering a strong local economy which is resilient to, and takes advantage of, the radical and fundamental social and economic changes being wrought.

We recognise how important it is that Wimbledon draws in visitors to spend money and support the local economy. As a more advantaged area in the borough, Wimbledon needs to work hard for Merton as well as for those who work or live here.

PlanWimbledon is legally bound to operate within the framework of the Local Plan. We look forward to working in partnership with Future Merton in developing effective and beneficial policies which will build on and enhance the current planning framework.

- **PlanWimbledon has a strong relationship with the business community**

From the outset, we have been determined to make neighbourhood planning in Wimbledon a creative collaboration between all the area's community constituents: business, residential, faith, arts, education, health, care and all the other stakeholders, including councillors and Future Merton.

We are particularly delighted by the many businesses who have joined us across the area. Here, too, the diversity and depth of the support is considerable: from local convenience stores to nationwide food and drink chains; from interior design stores to charity shops; from wellbeing practitioners to arts and crafts; and from landowners to individual local workers and business owners.

We have found that many businesses relish the opportunity to join an organisation that connects them with their local customers and the local community in a matter of mutual interest and support.

The Wimbledon Village Business Association is one of our members, as are numerous individual businesses and landowners of all kinds and sizes across our proposed area, including many in Wimbledon town centre. Just last week we had a productive meeting with the Chamber of Commerce, who will be discussing their potential PlanWimbledon membership with their Board. We also had a very constructive meeting with Romulus, the new owners of Centre Court, where we found many synergies in our aims. We look forward to collaborating with them.

- **Our relationship with Love Wimbledon**

We have had several meetings with Love Wimbledon, the BID currently covering Wimbledon town centre. Unfortunately, they have chosen not to support PlanWimbledon's designation for the proposed area during the consultation period, and have stated that they 'are considering applying for a separate neighbourhood forum' which would cover the town centre only. We are deeply concerned about this for the following reasons:

1. Planning does not fall within Love Wimbledon's remit.
2. Love Wimbledon have stated several times that they are not interested and do not have the resource to create a neighbourhood plan. Neighbourhood planning is, by its very nature, not remunerated.
3. The severing of the town centre from the surrounding areas would remove the connective tissue from the neighbourhood, and would create strong resentment from PlanWimbledon's supporters.
4. Taken to its logical conclusion, this would mean that the town centre would not be guaranteed to have a neighbourhood plan. The result of that would be that Wimbledon town centre would not be able to benefit from the many advantages a neighbourhood plan would deliver, thus undermining the town centre's future growth.

We are committed, once designated, to build a constructive working relationship with Love Wimbledon.

- **PlanWimbledon is not a lobbying or campaigning group**

PlanWimbledon is a non-partisan, not-for-profit group. We are donating our time, energy and talent and have no financial interest. We conduct ourselves with full respect for other community stakeholders and their interests. Our remit as the designated forum would be to create a neighbourhood plan. To keep that focus, and to ensure high standards of governance, PlanWimbledon operates under an approved constitution with a steering committee elected by its members annually. We have Wimbledon at heart.

We greatly appreciate the help and advice you have given us throughout the whole process. We know that organising a completely new consultation is time-consuming, but we hope that this process has prepared you for the many potential future neighbourhood forum applications which we have found are being considered within the borough.

At our half-way meeting with you, knowing that over 600 overwhelmingly positive responses had been received in the first couple of weeks gave us the confidence that we are spearheading something which people really want in Wimbledon.

#### **Next steps**

PlanWimbledon are organising a General Meeting in June to report our progress to our membership, and to start the planning process for the next stage of our journey.

We look forward to meeting Future Merton again after the consultation has ended to discuss the results.

Many thanks.

On behalf of PlanWimbledon,

Suzanne Grocott, Chair