

Deputation for

Agenda item: 13.The Future of the West Kentish Town Estate (SC/2019/43)

Good evening,

My name is Sophie Blakemore Hirsch, I am a Chartered Planning and Development Surveyor, and I am here this evening speaking on behalf of a group of 18 Neighbours and Residents of the West Kentish Town Estate many of whom, like myself, are built environment professionals, including architects, environmental engineers and landscape architects and are working with the support of Alison Kelly (Counsellor for Haverstock) to form a Neighbourhood Assembly.

In brief we:

- Support, the wholesale redevelopment of the estate to provide new homes for the current residents (currently in substandard accommodation), future residents and new family homes;
- Recognise the opportunity to address neighbourhood level issues, such as crime and anti-social behaviour and

However, we:

- Think the current masterplan, as seen, is not fit for purpose, fails to meet the Residents Brief, and will fail to deliver an area appropriate or planning policy compliant scheme.
- Are opposed to delegated authority being given to the Executive Director Supporting Communities to progress the project in the absence of a planning framework for the wider area.
- Request instead that Cabinet should commission the Planning and Regeneration Department to prepare a Planning Framework for the area, which will statutorily entail appropriate consultation with residents and neighbours of the wider neighbourhood to address the issues of deprivation, transiency and antisocial behaviour faced by the apparently forgotten Haverstock and Gospel Oak wards and set west WKTE within, and connect it to, its wider context.

We believe this approach will ultimately deliver a cohesive approach for the area to serve both Residents, Neighbours and the wider community. Whilst we acknowledge it will take time to produce a Planning Framework, we believe that to proceed as currently proposed misses a number of opportunities and will not be a quick solution. It will be challenged every step of the way, wasting tax payers' money and ultimately fail to deliver in full the social, environmental and economic benefits this potentially pioneering project should have. Given the scale of the funding set out in the accompanying report to this item, this would be a staggering failure in the use of public funds with long term repercussions.

Context

Right now, we are faced with a climate crisis, air pollution and child health crisis, a housing shortage and rising levels of crime and antisocial behaviour.

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At a ward level, we are also faced with a highly transient population with families leaving the area due to the lack of suitable homes, fear of safety for their children and the knock-on effect this has on local schools; (the 2 abutting the estate are so undersubscribed they are being reduced from 2 to 1 form of entry), further risking families leaving the area. This transiency breaks down community cohesion and strips the neighbourhood of people who care passionately about their local environment. In turn, this creates a vacuum in which crime and antisocial behaviour can flourish.

Any proposals for this area must address these issues as a priority. Given the deprivation in this area, and given the segregation caused by rail infrastructure and some of the largest estates in London designed to be facing inwards and full of alleyways and hidden corners it is imperative that a planning framework should be produced to secure marked improvements to address these issues across the whole area.

In Kentish Town, this work was undertaken by a Neighbourhood Forum and took years to complete. This required the dedication and hard work of many people (much of which for free). Unfortunately, in our area people find it easier to move away, further condemning the area to its fate.

The Council has long been aware of the physical deterioration of West Kentish Town Estate, (and indeed the ward as a whole), and the need for its renewal, yet has not taken the opportunity to prepare a set of principles for development. The council is also looking at redevelopment/new homes at Wendling and St Stephen's Close Estates (and further work at Bacton) – is this not yet more reason for a Planning Framework?! This area of Camden has repeatedly been failed by the Planning and Regeneration Department which, despite pressure over the years, has shown no inclination to undertake the task of preparing a framework. We therefore ask why? – it should not be looked at piecemeal.

Masterplan Details

Work undertaken to date has considered whether a low, medium or high intervention would be the best approach to estate renewal. We have been assured that the option 3 (high) master plan and illustrations are purely illustrative. However, it does give indicate how the consultant team was briefed.

First and foremost was the Residents Brief which included many elements that can be delivered at a building by building level and are enshrined in building regulations and “designing out crime guidance”. Significant elements that the residents requested – and which the resultant masterplan failed to address – were:

- 1) **Homes that would be safe, affordable, diverse and attractive.** – it appears to us that there are only 9 new social rent homes for new residents proposed, with 67 new “affordable” intermediate rent units. 79% of the 40% affordable units proposed are replacement units and most of these in a tenure most would argue unaffordable. The inappropriate scale/height/typologies and density proposed to achieve viability lead to a poor-quality environment, with overcrowding, overshadowing and lack of connection to neighbouring sites.

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- 2) **Open spaces that included private space, a variety of type and facilities and retained large trees.** But the masterplan shows a huge loss of trees, loss of green space (misleadingly referred to as vacant space) and a replacement green space that would be heavily overshadowed and has two roads passing through it!
- 3) **An improved sense of safety, security and well-being and clear routes through, and also improvements to Queens Crescent and safe routes to shops and community facilities.** But, in response to safety concerns no consideration has been given to ensuring straight sightlines or safe walking routes to schools, to other community and commercial facilities or transport hubs. The road layout has clearly been dictated by typology to achieve density with safety addressed only at a block level. Trees removed and roads opened to car traffic (which no one has asked for) would all lead to a reduction in the sense of well-being.

Extra to the Resident Brief the single most pressing issue facing the country (and our wards are not exempt from this) is Climate Change/Air Pollution/Children's Health. Proposals to scrap mature trees and create new vehicular routes are frankly staggering. 60 years ago the original estate was designed around these trees, and included the planting of semi mature trees, clearly recognised their impact on wellbeing, biodiversity, shade etc.

For this illustrative masterplan to include the creation of new roads, whilst losing mature trees, in the midst of a health, air quality and climate crisis, plus no new social rented homes for Camden residents in the midst of a housing crisis and the lack of safe routes connecting key community hubs in the midst of a youth safety crisis, is of serious concern.

Resident's support for option 3 (90% based on only 71 residents responding in march, 86% based on only 43 hold holds responding to s105 consultation etc.) is likely to be primarily based on this option providing all current Residents with a new home. It should not be seen as support for the illustrative masterplan in other regards. Work to date has failed to meet the Residents' brief or address any wider critical issues. Presentation of the outcome of this work and consultation to Cabinet, residents and neighbours alike, hailing it a success to be progressed, is therefore utterly misleading.

This is further compounded with promises of a speedy delivery for a project that once subjected to the test of planning will likely prove both unviable and in this market undeliverable. The CIP delivery model itself is questionable in a weak market, relying as it does on private sales. This can be seen from stalling on Maitland Park and Bacton and the Council now looking at buying back unsold units in Cherry Court.

Overall the masterplan appears to have been created in a vacuum, with no thought to what exists outside of the red line, no regard to a host of planning policy, planning guidance and Camden strategy documents, and no realistic consideration of the deliverability of the scheme. The excuse that has been used to date is that this is an "estate renewal project" only. However, it now being badged to Cabinet as a regeneration project. Regeneration by definition is far wider reaching both geographically and in terms of deliverables.

Nothing produced to date as part of this estate renewal process, now regeneration process, has provided assurance that Camden Council will, using its large land ownership in the area, deliver real regeneration and all that that entails. The Community Vision work proposed by

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CIP be prepared in tandem with preparation of a scheme will be too narrow, too little and too late.

To conclude

CIP have failed against every conceivable marker to propose a scheme that has merit. This is before discussions with development control all become caveated with “subject to viability” and inevitably watered down.

We believe this is a unique opportunity to improve a substantial area of the borough and are concerned that the mistakes this project is looking to solve, could end up being replicated.

Cabinet cannot in good faith entrust this project to the CIP team to progress and leave the development control team without the teeth it needs to ensure high-quality, exemplar regeneration.

Cabinet has the power to refuse this request for delegated authority at this time and also has the power to direct that a planning framework be produced as a priority. Cabinet can ensure that this period of a weakened economy is put to good use - ie planning.

We the Neighbours of the West Kentish Town Estate urgently request that Cabinet take this opportunity to secure a better future for Haverstock and Gospel Oak wards. Our concerns are out of concern for the West Kentish Town community as a whole, we all want the best for the West Kentish Town Estate residents, who, with us, feel forgotten.

We would be very willing to collaborate on any further development of the project.