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Dear Sir/Madam

1 FRANCIS GROVE, WIMBLEDON, SW19 - RECENT EXHIBITION OF PROPOSALS

Having viewed the recent exhibition (10/11 September) of your proposals for the site, the Society feels it would be useful to set down the following comments, which hopefully would help the project go forward before a planning application is submitted.

The proposed height is in our view excessive and does not relate well to the scale of local buildings. To the west there is the 2 and 3 storey residential area with other uses. Adjoining is an office building recently upgraded, and opposite is Tuition House, being ground plus 5 floors. There would seem to be no case for a new building to be any higher. See the NPPF reference to “sympathetic to local character” (127).

Secondly, you will know that the government (and the GLA and the Council) have declared a “Climate Emergency”. A radically new approach to energy in planning and development is now likely. The adaptation/upgrading of recently built buildings over demolition is likely to be far more sustainable than demolition and redevelopment. Accordingly, this adaptation approach (as with the adjoining building, which is of a similar date, and Wellington House nearby) should be the first choice in our view.

Thirdly, there was reference to the proposed new building “aspiring” to be BREEAM Excellent. This as you will know is only the second grade – “Outstanding” being the current top level. And “aspiring” seems to indicate that it is an objective rather than inherently achievable. This we do not believe will satisfy the likely “energy neutral” approach that the Climate Emergency changes will probably generate and require for new buildings.

Lastly, although displaying proposals before making a planning application is welcomed, it would have been of greater use if the public could have been drawn into the actual creation of the project from day one. This is the approach that is promoted in the NPPF eg “*encourage applicants...to engage with the local community... before submitting applications*” (40) and “*take account of the views of the local community*” (128). It might be helpful to note that, when the Council set up public working groups to identify what was wanted (and not wanted) in the future planning of the town centre, there was an overwhelming opposition to higher buildings. The Council’s so-called ‘Masterplan’ does not appear to command a great deal of support from the local community, and as far as we know is not formally adopted policy: it was also produced prior to the declaration of the Climate Emergency. Whether there is a need for much additional office space in the town centre has been questioned (see for example the Ramidus/CAG report for the GLA in 6/2017: and the report by Knight Frank Rutley on the future of Wimbledon offices specifically (2018).

Yours Faithfully

Chris Goodair:
Chairman, Wimbledon Society Planning and Environment Committee

cc: Merton Council Development Control
Merton Council Hillside Ward Councillors
Wimbledon East Hillside Residents’ Association (WEHRA)