

Future Merton

future.merton@merton.gov.uk



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Dear Sirs,

## WIMBLEDON TOWN CENTRE MASTERPLAN

We refer to the Council's publication of an SPD for Wimbledon Town Centre, being its response to the comments received during the consultation period after it published its Wimbledon Masterplan: and wish to make the following observations.

**CONCEPT:** This is a plan that promotes economic growth, by attracting major investment to the town. But should these really be the objectives now?

Instead, should not the emphasis be on climate change, sustainability, energy, adaptation of buildings more than redevelopment, local scale and character, pedestrian areas and meeting housing needs?

**STATUS:** The aspiration to grow to be a Metropolitan town centre in the earlier draft was strongly resisted and we are pleased that this has now been dropped.

**BUILDING HEIGHT AND STREET SCALE:** The maximum heights are now shown as 14 storeys rather than 18. This is still well beyond the maximum of 7 storeys (22m metres to the eaves) that the Society proposed and creates a street scale that is more appropriate to central London. Importantly, nearby housing would be dominated by 14 storey blocks.

Even Tottenham Court Road as an example is mostly 4 and 5 storeys, and the road is much wider.

**OFFICES:** Substantial new office blocks are still being proposed, which are supposed to support local shops etc, (and which presumably will generate significant Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) payments to the Council).

Yet independent reports have said that additional offices in Wimbledon are not needed to this extent. Whilst developers may want to build these offices, after selling the new building to a pension fund, they leave.

New local residents on the other hand support local businesses when offices are closed, so why not build more much-needed housing?

**PEDESTRIANS AND TRAFFIC:** There is a welcome emphasis on creating new pedestrian links and spaces, and improving footway design. A pedestrian arcade leading off the present Piazza is proposed, but it could be a public asset if fully covered and glazed, as in the Hays Wharf Galleria.

The comment "Streets for people and not cars" is welcome (4.5.19).

There is a suggestion that 2-way traffic could be re-instated in Hartfield Road, leaving the Broadway to be used mainly for buses. But this would mean that pedestrians in the Broadway would still have to contend with traffic fumes/noise/danger which is hardly desirable.

The Council should look again at a carefully phased partial, and then a more comprehensive, pedestrianisation of the important central part of the town, as set out in the Society's Vision 2040 plan.

**CLIMATE EMERGENCY:** The recent declaration of a climate emergency by both central government and local Councils has obviously overtaken much of the thinking behind the current plans.

The new document tries to take on board some of the new thinking, but the fundamental re-orientation of plans towards sustainability, energy and carbon reduction has yet to emerge. In other words, is the "expansion at any price" thinking behind the current plan totally out of date?

**GREENING:** There are welcome proposals for major tree planting, and specifically in St George's Road, Worple Road, Hartfield Road, Queen's Road.

How quickly these planting schemes can now be implemented will be a test of the Council's resolve in turning words into action. We see nothing to stop the Council implementing this planting now but to make a success of this plan it must ensure that the trees are planted in a suitable depth of earth and are maintained until they are established.

**CONCERT HALL:** There are references to 'working with the Concert Hall Trust' on the future of the Council-owned car park site in Hartfield Road (4.5.20). But there is still no positive Council commitment to trying to achieve what could be a very significant Frank Gehry-designed cultural and social icon, not just for Merton, but for London.

**SUMMARY:** In essence we believe the Town Centre SPD fails to deal properly with climate change, building heights, the need for housing, pedestrianisation, office needs and the proposed concert hall.

Moreover it fails to understand and respond creatively to the future health and needs of what is seen as one of the most important "High Streets" in the whole of the Borough.

Yours sincerely

Chris Goodair  
Chair, Wimbledon Society Planning & Environment Committee

Please send all correspondence by email to [chairmanpc@wimbledonsociety.org.uk](mailto:chairmanpc@wimbledonsociety.org.uk)