

## **THE O2 CENTRE AND PLANS TO DEVELOP IT BY LANDSEC – COMMENTS**

**The Landsec plan for the O2 site should not be allowed to go any further without major revision, due to the many issues raised below.**

**I have made most of these comments in reply to previous consultations, but so far have received no proper response.**

### **O2 centre plans: high-rise with little space between buildings**

It seems that the plan is to house some 4,000 people here. Apparently the blocks will be about 16 metres apart only. This makes the space too crowded for residents. And some blocks are planned to be 16 storeys high.

**The overall design is poor and typical of such developments. Varying the height of the buildings is not enough to address this! There is an urgent need to develop very different kinds of housing design. Estates of high-rise buildings in other parts of the country have created alienated and angry populations.**

The impact (eg: shading) on neighbouring streets from high density housing of excessive height needs to be considered.

### **We need radical redesign of housing on such development sites**

For 156 West End Lane a design was created for low-rise housing that housed the required number of people, but was far more human in scale and had the potential to create a community. It was unfortunately ignored by the council and developers.

### **'Affordable' and social housing**

A labour council member told me **Camden wants 50% social housing on the site, but said it is up to Landsec...** This is unacceptable. Camden and London as a whole should set the rules.

In fact, it seems that the application provides for only 35% affordable housing, and only 60% of that housing for social rent. We urgently need social housing for people who are economically challenged, including vital public servants such as teachers and nurses. The definition of affordable is a percentage of the local rents, and in this area these are very high.

### **Issues with social housing**

Will the social housing be mixed with other housing and be of equal quality? It must not be consigned to the least desirable part of an estate, as with the Ballymore development (187 West End Lane) where the social housing is right at the far end of the development, where the railway lines are closest together.

### **Overseas investors purchasing property in London as assets must end**

I have been led to believe that some of the flats on the Ballymore estate at 187 West End Lane **were sold to overseas investors as assets** but I have not followed up on this. **This is something that must stop.** We need to adopt something similar to **laws I believe they have in Denmark** for key parts of the country to help to prevent this kind of exploitation.

<https://parlex.org/husen-advokater-new-legislation-denmark-may-deter-foreign-short-term-investments-real-estate>

### **A lot of empty housing in Camden**

We are constantly told by Camden there is an urgent need for more housing. However, there is already too much empty property in London and **Camden has one of the highest rates of empty properties in the UK.** This should be tackled as a matter of urgency before planning huge new developments like the O2 Centre.

### **MUCH TALK OF GREEN SPACES ON THE SITE BUT IT'S NOT THE CASE**

In early discussions, **Landsec always talked about the open space around the blocks and not the blocks themselves.** It is now clear that this 'open space' is **not adequate** to respond to the pressure that will be exerted on it by a population of 4,000 people plus those who pass through it between West End Lane and Finchley Road.

Furthermore this part of West Hampstead already lacks sufficient open and green space and this development as currently planned will not help. The links between green space and good health and wellbeing are clear and such spaces should be increased in this area.

The development will also apply unacceptable pressure to local infrastructure.

### **IMPACTS ON LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND QUALITY OF LIFE FOR ALL**

#### **Rail and underground station issues**

West Hampstead is a transport hub with 3 West Hampstead stations, but West Hampstead underground station has neither lifts nor escalators. The

same is true of Finchley Road underground station. How will these stations cope with the 4000 people Camden/Landsec intends to house in the O2 Centre? Moreover, I understand that improving these stations is not a priority for TfL. Landsec should actually be compelled to contribute to improving these stations to be able to deal with the extra pressure of numbers, and also to cater for disabled passengers.

### **Overcrowding on pavements and on West End Lane**

The link between the 3 stations is inadequate considering the pressure from people changing lines at West Hampstead. Pedestrians moving between the 3 stations can result in large crowds of people trying to use narrow pavements with risks of accidents, especially when there is a lot of road traffic. There was some talk of linking the stations with walkways, but this seems to have been abandoned.

### **West End Lane – an overcrowded road with challenged infrastructure**

West End Lane is a two lane **LANE** – well-named as such! Too much heavy traffic uses it already. The concentration of weight on this narrow road has caused breakages in the road surface and water leaks in the past. The new developments planned are bound to add to this pressure, especially since **there is a rumour that Landsec plans a road through its site from West End Lane to Finchley Road**, which would increase traffic on a road already far too busy at peak times.

**Thames Water** has recently had to do a huge amount of very disruptive work to address the ageing water infrastructure. They had stressed to the council, eg: in regard to 156 West End Lane that they did not have the water infrastructure to deal with a new development. A fire at the estate at 187-9 West End Lane proved there was not enough water for the fire brigade's needs. In fact problems with the water infrastructure in the area continue, with road blockages regularly caused by repairs which have sometimes had to be repeated.

### **Quality of life in the area**

Many people are concerned about the impact on the local area and the quality of life for residents, as well the **extra pressures on schools, medical services etc. It seems as though plans are always made first and the impacts only thought about afterwards.**

I was actually shocked to find that some people I know who have lived here a long time are thinking of moving due to the impacts experienced already.

## **ABSENCE OF COHERENT PLANNING**

Instead of proper planning, we seem to be staggering from one scheme to another, largely led by those who seek to profit from these developments. **I understand that Camden Council's draft Master Plan draft was put on a shelf**, which would explain the **LACK OF COHERENCE** in current planning. A proper master plan would reduce the number of new developments, which is probably why it has been set aside.

Such lack of coherence probably makes it easier to approve profitable developments but does not improve quality of life for locals.

**And they say the O2 site will be car-free.** So I asked at an in-person consultation how they would ensure that people living there will not be able to park on local streets. They assured me that people living on the site would not be allowed to use local parking facilities... obvious question: will they find ways to game the system?

## **QUALITY OF CONSTRUCTION - AND WILL IT BE CARBON NEUTRAL?**

In view of ongoing climate change and biodiversity loss it is vital to plan any new site with these issues in mind, eg: using durable, good quality building materials that do not cause negative impacts on climate or biodiversity from cradle to grave and result in buildings that are properly insulated and emission-free.

## **Risks from poor quality building materials**

We have to learn also from the Turkish earthquake, where it seems poor quality cement used for building may have contributed to the fact that some new buildings collapsed completely and we still have to determine whether this was due to the nature of the earthquake and the two major shocks or other issues.

**For example, globally, we are running out of sand, particularly the sharp sand required for good quality, durable cement. This means cutting back on making new cement and recycling material where possible.** Gangsters are now moving in and riverbeds and beaches are being raided with serious impacts on local people. With the huge global demand for new buildings and cities, it is crucial to think and plan accordingly, and also vital to avoid using inferior materials. **Concrete made with the wrong kind of sand would be weakened and less durable. It is likely that poor quality sand is already being used by some for their cement.**

**How is Landsec planning to address these issues? So far we have seen no information related to this issue.**

I asked similar questions about previous developments in the **area and never received any answers.**

**Poor quality estates from 1960s demolished**

**It is vital to learn from the fate of previous developments from the 1960s that have had to be demolished because they were so bad, for example, Queen's Park Flats, Layton, Blackpool. This is unacceptable both socially and environmentally.**

It is also important not to forget **Ronan Point, which partly collapsed in 1968** due to design and construction faults, flouting of rules for height limits for the design concept used and very poor workmanship.

[https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1021&context=encee\\_facpub](https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1021&context=encee_facpub)

Many residential blocks offer a **very poor quality of life to residents.** This must not be replicated in the future.

**Carbon emissions and climate change**

Constructing and heating of buildings is a major source of carbon emissions. How will Landsec address this key issue and ensure the site is carbon neutral? They have not made any adequate response to this key question.

What about the use of solar panels and other forms of renewable energy?

And what kind of insulation will be used and how? We are still living with the Grenfell issue with hundreds of blocks needing major work. It is very clear that the building industry knowingly breaks the rules.

How does Camden plan to ensure the Landsec and the construction firms hired to build the O2 Centre do not also break the rules for materials and construction?

**What kind of heating is planned for the buildings on this site?**

This is a critical issue and must be properly addressed, learning from previous issue, above all the need to consider climate change and the need for climate neutrality.

I would strongly advise against using biomass heating because this has been shown to be highly problematic for many reasons, including the destruction of biodiversity to establish fast-growing monoculture plantations to produce biomass.

For example the **Drax power station** in the UK claims to be using sustainable energy when using biomass wood pellets, but in fact this is not true. The impacts on the regions where the pellets are sourced are extremely damaging, environmentally and socially.

In addition, the role of Drax's demand for wood fuel in forcing climate change emissions has, contrary to the usual assumptions, been shown to be very high.

<https://www.nrdc.org/experts/sasha-stashwick/uk-must-stop-subsidizing-its-1-climate-polluter-drax>

### **Other questions**

Will a **community centre** be included in this space? Young people in particular need places to meet and socialise and also become involved in activities.

Will adequate space for **small businesses and workshops** be included? We have lost a lot of this space in recent years, eg: Belsize Business Centre, 258 Belsize Road, London, NW6 4BT, UK, which was converted into housing some years ago.

### **Biodiversity Issues:**

**The UK's biodiversity is in a parlous state all over the country, and, as the London Wildlife Trust would soon tell you, London needs all the support it can get.**

Will facilities for swifts to nest in these buildings be included, since they visit London in the summer and need nesting sites? Bats also need providing for. As for hedgehogs, I have certainly noticed their decline, and wonder the O2 Centre can offer any refuge, although with all the infrastructure around the site, this may not be possible.

Will open spaces be planted with native trees and plants that are good for local wildlife, eg rowan trees and wild cherry?

