

Planning Reference 2022/0528/P
Redevelopment of the O2 Centre Site

MY OBJECTIONS

INTRODUCTION

I have taken part in Landsec's consultations. We were hoping it would take on board many of community's concerns. We wanted a vibrant development which would incorporate better facilities and more open spaces, but instead, the proposals will cause considerable congestion, and breach Camden's planning policies.

1. The site is covered by the Fortune Green & West Hampstead Neighbourhood Plan¹, which earmarks the land between West End Lane and Finchley Road for redevelopment. Unlike the local Conservatives, I agree that a large car park is not a good use of the site. There is a severe housing shortage in the borough, and I support new housing on this site, as envisaged in this Neighbourhood Plan. It is well connected to public transport, and I support a car-free development, which mixes housing, employment, leisure, retail and community uses.
2. Throughout all the consultation periods I have consistently called for the proposals to:
 - a. Provide step free access to Finchley Road, and West End Lane tube stations.
 - b. Meet Camden Council's target of **50% affordable housing**, to deliver a mixed community; and
 - c. Include new amenities, including **much-needed green open spaces**, places for children and young people to play, and a health centre.
3. I have engaged actively with Landsec's consultations over the past two years and encouraged residents to share their views. It is therefore deeply disappointing that there have been no meaningful changes to the plans submitted for approval. On the points listed in para 2:
 - a. There is **no clarity on the timing or level of any funding for upgrades of the local tube stations**, and no indication that there are active discussions with Camden Council and Transport for London to take this issue forward;
 - b. The proposal for only 35% affordable housing (and only 60% of that housing for social rent) means that, **out of nearly 1,800 homes, only 315 will be social housing to address the needs of the 7,000 households on Camden's housing waiting list;**
 - c. **The proposed open space amounts to only one-third of Camden's policy requirement – only 13,308 sqm compared to the policy requirement of 33,261sqm.** The developer has offered the

¹ <http://www.ndpwesthampstead.org.uk/>

Council a financial payment to mitigate the shortfall – but this money doesn't have to be spent in the local area, which is already classed as deficient in open space.²

- 4. I urge Camden Council to reject this application, and work with Landsec to develop a plan that listens and responds to residents' concerns.**

Key Concerns: The plans don't address overcrowding and access to local Tube Stations

5. The plans propose 1,800 new flats, bringing an estimated 3,000 – 4,000 new residents to the area. The development is car-free, and so most of them will use local train and tube stations. The nearest stations - Finchley Road and West Hampstead tube stations and Finchley Road & Frognal overground - are inaccessible to people with disabilities, mobility issues, prams, or heavy luggage. While the Planning Statement refers to safeguarding land for new access routes to the tube stations, and making a financial contribution, there is no detail provided, and no assurances given.
6. Arup's transport assessment shows that both Finchley Road and West Hampstead stations will be overstretched by 2031 – West Hampstead in terms of gate capacity, and Finchley Road (where many passengers switch from the Metropolitan line to the Jubilee line) in terms of platform capacity. In terms of train capacity, it is not clear that the assessment takes account of the significant additional development being planned further north, for example at Wembley Park.

Key Concerns: The proposed housing mix does not meet Camden Council's policy.

7. The Affordable Housing Statement sets out that 35% of the development will be "affordable", assessed as a proportion of the floorspace. (It is worth noting that, if the number of units is used as the calculation, it is only 31% affordable.) Only 60% of the affordable housing will be for low-cost rent, available to the 7,000 households on Camden's housing list, the remainder being "intermediate" rent. Thus in a development of nearly 1,800 homes, only 315 will be what people generally understand to be "council housing".
8. Paragraph 3.83(e) of the Local Plan ³ (Policy H4) states that "an affordable housing target of 50% applies to developments with capacity for 25 or more additional dwellings". It is therefore clear that the proposed development does not meet Camden Council's policy. The developers have repeatedly been told of Camden Council's concern about this – for example in September 2021, as part of the pre-application discussions, David Fowler from Camden's planning department wrote to the developer about the prospect of the council using its powers to compulsory-purchase some of the site, saying "We have discussed the Council using its compulsory purchase powers to ensure the site comes forward comprehensively. Comprehensive redevelopment is a fundamental requirement of the Council on this site, however, for the Council to use its compulsory purchase powers there needs to be significant public benefits. This would be difficult to argue with a poor affordable offer."

²[Camden Open Space, Sport & Recreation Study, 2014.](#)

³ <https://www.camden.gov.uk/documents/20142/4820180/Local+Plan.pdf/ce6e992a-91f9-3a60-720c-70290fab78a6>

9. Over 50% of the market homes will be studios/ 1-bedroom flats, between 20% and 50% 2-bedroom flats, and, in the detailed application, only 4% 3-bedroom properties. This will deliver more small units, rather than the 3 and 4-bedroom homes needed to sustain a genuinely mixed community, and which are required by Policy 1 of the Fortune Green and West Hampstead Neighbourhood Plan.
10. Paragraph 18.20 of the Planning Statement indicates that the development will be “Build to Rent”. All the homes in the detailed planning application are for rent. This will mean that the development will be a transient population, with people living here for a short time, without a stake in the local area, before leaving to settle somewhere else.
11. While we recognise the difficulty that Camden Council faces in meeting the constraints of the Government’s Housing Delivery Test, the impact of the “Build to Rent” approach, and the predominance of small units, will mean that this community will not be diverse and connected, but rather transient and isolated. It will not achieve the “We Make Camden” vision of being a place where people “start well, live well, and age well”.

Key concerns: The plans don’t deliver the required green open space, even considering plans for land Landsec doesn’t own.

12. Camden is the 5th most dense borough in London. People in Camden can enjoy 16 square metres of green space per person, compared to 19 in London and 214 across England. In the light of these stark statistics, the redevelopment of the O2 Shopping Centre and car park site could have been an opportunity to create a lively, green, heart for a new community.
13. Instead, the plans comprise a new community green of 0.35hectares (less than half the size of Fortune Green, which is 0.8ha), a new central square of 0.17ha (smaller than Iverson Road open space, which is 0.2ha), Billy Fury Yard (also 0.17 ha) and a linear park of 0.65ha. It is difficult to find out how wide this is proposed to be, but in September 2021, David Fowler from Camden Council’s planning department wrote to the developer as part of the pre-application process stating “The proposed linear park would have a width of 19-23m. We have raised concerns over whether this route would feel like a park or just a route. Under the proposals, the 20m wide linear park would need to work very hard, providing an east/west thoroughfare, place for tables and chairs for the ground floor uses, dwelling space and also play space. It needs to be demonstrated that all these functions can be accommodated within this width. Any opportunities should be taken to increase its width.”
14. The plans fall far short of Camden’s standard for open space which is 9sqm per occupier. Indeed, the application accepts that **“the proposed development is unable to meet the full policy requirements in respect to open space”** (para 10.42 of the Planning Statement.) It states that to meet the policy it would need to provide 33,261 sqm of open space, whereas the proposals overall only include 13,308sqm – less than half of what is needed. The developer has offered the Council a financial payment to mitigate this – but this money doesn’t have to spent in the local area, which is already classed as deficient in open space.
15. Further, the proposed community green (the largest and greenest space in the development, with space for children’s play as well as a Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA)), is in the second phase of the site (towards West End Lane), which is on land that Landsec do not own (currently car showrooms). A significant number of the other amenities, including the space earmarked for a health centre, and a

creche, is on this land. **There is a significant risk that, if planning approval is given for the detailed application, and Landsec are unsuccessful in purchasing the car showroom land, the community green and health centre will never happen.**

Key concerns: The height and density of the development is not in line with London Plan Policy.

16. The height and density of the development has been a major concern for residents, as it is out of keeping with buildings in the local area. Most of the immediate area is 5-6 storeys, with some buildings (such as one of the West Hampstead Square / Heritage Lane blocks) rising to 12 storeys. Landsec's development proposes 6 buildings of up to 16 storeys, and 14 buildings of up to 12 storeys. This does not fit with Policy 2 of the Fortune Green and West Hampstead Neighbourhood Plan which states that development should be "human in scale, in order to maintain and create a positive relationship between buildings and street level activity." Some residents have suggested that by building higher, greater revenue can be generated to fund benefits such as a higher proportion of affordable housing, or green space. **This application, however, fails to meet the Council's policy in regard to either affordable housing or open space, despite proposing greater height and density than other buildings in the local area.**
17. The proposals have been criticised by the Greater London Assembly⁴, who state (Paragraph 86) "The proposals are not considered to be in accordance with London Plan Policy D9 (Part B). There are some concerns that the scale and massing of the Detailed Phase and the Outline Phase 3 results in some areas of non-compliance with London Plan Policy D9 (Part C), including harm to the significance of heritage assets and townscape, which require further consideration."
18. The height will have a major impact on those living near to the site, especially the residents of Rosemont Road which overlooks the site to the north. Despite repeated requests, none of the drawings in the application demonstrates the impact on their views. There are also significant impacts on views from the Redington/Frognaal, Fitzjohns/Netherhall and South Hampstead Conservation Areas. Historic England, in their response (2 March 2022) note that "The buildings on the site are substantially greater than that found within the conservation areas and would appear in some views from within them and out of them. The volume and scale of the development means that there is a harmful impact to designated heritage assets through development within their setting."
19. Finally, the height and density of the proposals is exacerbated by the choice of a grey/beige colour palette. The developers have said that the design is informed by St John's Court (the building atop Waitrose, Finchley Road) but this block itself is an exception to the predominant red brick of most of the buildings on both the Finchley Road and West End Lane sides of the site. Policy 2 of the Fortune Green and West Hampstead Neighbourhood Plan requires "a presumption in favour of a colour palate which reflects, or is in harmony with, the materials of its context."

Key concerns: The plans do not meet Camden Council's net-zero carbon targets.

20. A large, surface level car park is not a climate-friendly use of the land and redeveloping this site offers the opportunity for a development that leads the way in sustainability. It is therefore disappointing **that Landsec's proposals do not meet today's requirements of the London Plan or Camden Council for net-zero carbon development**, let alone what might be the standards when the development is completed in 15 years' time. The Planning Statement (para 14.51) states "Overall, it is anticipated that the Proposed

⁴ <https://planning.london.gov.uk/pr/s/planning-application/a0i4J000006cLcdQAE/20220181>

Development would achieve in the region of a 66.3% reduction for the Detailed Proposals and 53% reduction for the Outline Proposals in CO² emissions beyond the baseline, with the zero-carbon target shortfall to be offset through carbon offset payments.” In other words, Landsec are seeking to pay Camden Council a sum estimated to be in the region of £828,345 to offset their failure to meet the Council’s requirements. The plans fall far short of Camden’s vision to be a leading borough in tackling climate change.

21. Further, London Plan Policy S12 requires developments referable to the Mayor to “*demonstrate actions taken to reduce life-cycle carbon emissions*”. The Planning Statement (paras 14.41 – 14.47) considers the issue of embodied carbon suggests that demolition of the O2 Shopping Centre and replacement with more modern, low-energy buildings, would result in a comparable “whole life carbon” emission. It suggests that a stretch target of achieving lower whole life carbon emissions would only be achieved if “100% of the substructure, approximately 60% of the superstructure and approximately 90% of the façade embodied carbon[was].... retained. In other words, the plans do not achieve the London Plan policy requirements unless some rather heroic assumptions are made about the demolition process.
22. There have been serious flooding issues in this area in recent years, and the plans have not sufficiently addressed this issue. Thames Water has expressed serious concerns. In its response (14 March 2022) it states “Following initial investigations, Thames Water has identified an inability of the existing SURFACE WATER network infrastructure to accommodate the needs of this development proposal.” They have said that the proposed run-off rate is “far too high”, risking serious flooding of the London Underground lines and properties in South Hampstead ward (See also comments from South Hampstead Flood Action Group). It is not clear from any subsequent documents that this issue has been addressed.

Key concerns: A range of traffic and transport issues have not been adequately addressed.

23. There are a number of concerns about the way that traffic will use the site. The transport, servicing and waste plans do not reflect today’s road and pavement usage, let alone anticipate changes over the coming 15 years. Concerns are listed below:
 - a. It is proposed that buses, refuse trucks and delivery vehicles will enter the site from Finchley Road, and use the part of Blackburn Road which currently runs from Finchley Road to the car showrooms in order to cross the site. Deliveries and refuse collection will use kerbside loading (Paragraph 15.102 of the Planning Statement). This route is also the main through-route for cyclists, who will share the space with vehicles, running considerable risks as these big vehicles pull in and out of the delivery bays.
 - b. No provision has been made for space for motorcycle delivery drivers at any point on the development. Yet a cursory look at residential streets or developments will show that there are motorcycle delivery drivers (Uber Eats, Deliveroo etc) on every street every evening, and outside every restaurant or café, waiting to pick up jobs. Unless space is designed in from the start, the pavements and open spaces will be constantly used by motorbikes, putting pedestrians at risk, and noise from the bikes will disturb the local residents.
 - c. No provision has been made for a rest area for bus drivers – they will be expected to use cafes or shops to get a drink, or go to the toilet. There are obvious risks here which could easily have been mitigated.

24. The plans include a lot of words about improving access to the site from Finchley Road, but this is not backed up by the detail. For example, Paragraph 15.97 of the Planning Statement notes that there will be no new pedestrian crossing over Finchley Road, cutting off this development from residents in Belsize and Frognal. Para 11.28 of the Planning Statement indicates that to service the new “Town Square” there will be a new servicing yard, accessing loading bays from a new entrance from Finchley Road – crossing the pedestrian route up Finchley Road from the tube station.

I urge Camden to work with Landsec and TfL now to look at the way S106 monies can be sensibly used to take the opportunity to improve the highway configuration and safety aspects. Some good design will be of considerable value to the communities and the local shops and businesses in the area.

The S106 monies needs to be of an adequate to sum and should also be used to mitigate the misery of development work that is phased over a long period.

Key concerns: reprovision of Sainsbury’s and other O2 shopping centre amenities.

25. Residents have been concerned by the loss of a number of well-used amenities in the current shopping centre, especially the Sainsbury’s. Although there are plans for a replacement Sainsbury’s, it will be substantially smaller, because of the car-free nature of the development. Landsec say that this accords with retail trends, with fewer people undertaking a “weekly shop” in a car. However, no detail is provided about any “blue badge” parking for those with disabilities to access the new Sainsbury’s or other retail stores (because it is part of Phase 3). As a result, concerns have been raised that those who need to drive (such as those with disabilities or shopping with young children) will have to drive further, leading to an increase in car traffic. This should be explored by the Planning Committee.
26. Residents have also expressed concern about the impact of the proposals on other shops on Finchley Road. In pre-application discussions with the developers, David Fowler of Camden’s planning department wrote (para 4.8) “Under the proposals there would be a significant loss of commercial uses and an even greater loss of Class E uses and we have significant concerns about the impact on the vitality and viability of the Finchley Road Town Centre.” It is not clear that these concerns have been addressed.

Key concerns: construction timeframe and management

27. The plans envisage the development happening over three phases, preceded by an initial phase demolishing the Homebase store. The expected length of the construction is 10 – 15 years (para 5.62 of the Planning Statement). Phase 1 will comprise the centre of the site (Homebase and car park, Phase 2 the western section (subject to purchase of the car showroom and Builder Depot site), and Phase 3, the eastern section (involving demolition of the O2 Shopping Centre), which is not expected to start for another 5 – 7 years.
28. There are two important implications of this:
- a. The residents of Phase 1 will not benefit from any of the amenities (community green, MUGA, health centre, retail offer in the Town Square) for several years while Phases 2 and 3 are under construction.

- b. There will be at least 15 years of construction noise and traffic experienced by local residents on all sides, and possibly 10 years of construction experienced by the residents of the Phase 1 development. There is limited detail on the construction management approach at this stage, but Para 16.26 states “In the worst instances, construction noise would create a temporary, short-term, major negative effect that is significant.”

29. My experience as a councillor⁵ is that Camden Council’s Construction Management Team does not have the capacity to enforce adherence to Construction Management Plans (CMPs) for routine building works, and it falls to residents to contact constructors, developers and the Council to highlight CMP breaches. I am therefore concerned about the impact of 15 years of construction on residents living near to the site or on access routes.

30. Camden Council’s approach to construction management is significantly worse than neighbouring authorities which use a “Code of Considerate Practice”. This secures funds from the developers to fund a higher number of Construction Management Officers, who make much more frequent announced and unannounced visits to major construction sites to ensure compliance. If Camden are not willing to change their approach, then residents around the site, and those of the first phase of the development, face 10 -15 years of noise, dust, and traffic chaos.

End

Linda Chung 20/3/23

⁵ <https://www.hamhigh.co.uk/news/23366164.cllr-linda-chung-living-building-work-hampstead/?ref=twtrece>