



Response from WHAT (West Hampstead Amenity & Transport) to S73 Application for the O2 Centre 255 Finchley Road London NW3 6LU (Application 2025/0484/P)

Introduction

1. WHAT (West Hampstead Amenity & Transport) is part of the Confederation of Local Community Groups which made detailed representations to Camden Council in advance of its decisions on the original Detailed and Outline Planning Application in March 2023. John Saynor, the then Chair of WHAT, spoke at the Planning Committee meeting.
2. WHAT supports the transformation of this under-used site for residential-led development, and the principles for development set out in the Fortune Green & West Hampstead Neighbourhood Plan, Camden's Local Plan and Site Allocations Plan, and the West End Lane to Finchley Road Supplementary Planning Document.
3. However the concerns raised in the Confederation's original response still apply. These were:
 - The approved plans for the site constitute over-development and over-density when set against the agreed planning framework, and indicated that 950 homes was the right number for the whole of the Homebase & Car Park site.
 - Excessive height, to the detriment of future residents and the surrounding conservation areas, creating significant shadowing impacts and sustainability challenges.
 - Too many single-aspect homes, when the London Plan is clear that these should normally be avoided.
 - Serious deficiencies in green open space, failing to meet Camden's policy standards.
 - Failure to meet Camden's policies in respect of the proportion of affordable, including low cost rent, homes to be provided in new developments.
 - The impact of the development as a whole on the local transport infrastructure, with a modest contribution of £10m towards the cost of installing a lift at West Hampstead Tube station and no improvements to Finchley Road Tube station. WHAT has been told that the cost of one year's design work for the required improvements to West Hampstead Tube Station is over £1m, demonstrating how little is actually being contributed to the costs by the developer.
 - The Phase 3 plans to demolish the O2 Shopping Centre, on grounds of the climate impact of demolition of a recently-constructed building, and the removal of well-used social infrastructure such as the Sainsbury's supermarket, cinema and gym.

Concerns about the S73 Application

4. Having restated our previous objections, we are concentrating our comments about the S73 Application for Phase 1 of the redevelopment on five points: height; density; housing mix; green space; the community centre building.
5. **Height.** The updated plans add two storeys to three of the tallest blocks in Phase 1, and extra storeys to five other blocks. This takes the tallest block to 17 storeys, with two 16 storey blocks.

The tallest block is now over four metres higher than previously approved. These blocks will significantly affect the view from surrounding areas, and the important view of St Paul's from Greenwich as shown in P43 of the Design & Access Statement. Heritage England have restated their view, expressed in their objection to the original plans, that "The volume and scale of the development means that there is a harmful impact to designated heritage assets through development within their setting."

6. **Density.** The updated plans add 43 more homes, taking the total in Phase 1 to 651. This is a 7% increase on the previous number of flats, taking the plans even further away from the Council's own Local Plan and Site Allocations Plan.
7. **Housing Mix.** Of the 43 new homes, 20 are "affordable", with only 8 at genuine social rent levels (described as low cost rent). This means that the percentage that is "affordable" is still 36% by floor space, and still fails to meet Camden Council's policy of 50% affordable homes in new developments. Further, more of the flats are "single aspect" offering poor quality living space.
8. **Green Space.** The application makes much of the additional 300 square metres of green space created by removing one of the blocks. However Camden's standard for open space is 9sqm per occupier. Even if there was only one person living in each of the 43 new flats, that would mean that the required open space to meet Camden's standard was 387 square metres. The S73 application fails to meet Camden's policy requirements.
9. **The Community Centre building.** WHAT members attended the consultation workshops in autumn 2024 about the new Community Centre. We continue to be concerned that detailed design work is being done so far ahead of any residents occupying the building, thereby precluding them from having their say in how it should operate. We also have concerns that the location of the building means that it is no longer connected to the central square, and about its south-facing, glass design, which may lead to overheating in summer.