

As a ward councillor for Kentish Town North ward, which includes this site at Wiblin Mews and College Lane, I am writing to object to the proposals submitted under reference 2024/5549/P. I recognise that this site has a long and complicated history, with planning permission having been granted on appeal 22 years ago in 2003. The 16 houses (1-12 & 17-20 Wiblin Mews) as well as two flats (1 and 2, 24 College Lane) were completed in 2017 with no significant building work having taken place since then.

The affordable housing block, which was initially constructed to a shell condition, has remained dormant for at least seven years, awaiting fit-out. Despite multiple applications to address various issues with the original plans, the current proposal represents a significant departure from the commitments made.

The duplex maisonettes are yet to be constructed despite having had planning permission for several years. This has left Wiblin Mews as a building site for many years, with no works having taken place, and neighbours have reported issues with water ingress and damp into their properties. There have also been health and safety issues raised to the building site not being secured at times, which residents reported to the Health and Safety Executive, and I have raised with Camden Council's enforcement team in the past.

Given this background, I urge the Planning Committee to reject the current application and encourage the developers to revisit their approach, particularly in relation to the completion of the affordable housing block, which must be prioritised in accordance with the original commitments to the local community.

Affordable housing

My principal concern lies with the proposal to convert the affordable housing units into market-rate housing at this late stage of the development process. The original planning permissions, as reflected in various iterations of the development, made a clear and unambiguous commitment to the provision of on-site affordable housing. It is deeply disappointing that, after so many years of inaction, the developer now seeks to amend this fundamental aspect of the scheme.

The Kentish Town Neighbourhood Plan is clear that "Today Kentish Town finds itself under pressure. There are extreme demands for decent adequate affordable social housing." The Camden Local Plan and London Plan are equally clear about the importance of ensuring that affordable housing is incorporated into developments of this nature.

The developers chose to build and market 16 houses, which were sold for between £1,000,000 and £1,675,000, before completing the affordable housing block. These have increased in value according to the developers own analysis to between £1,150,000 and £1,990,000. That the affordable housing block has been left empty, throughout a housing crisis, and in the shadow of a local authority housing estate with a substantial waiting list has not gone unnoticed. The plan to provide a payment of £868,000 in lieu of on-site affordable housing is a slap in the face for our area. As local residents have pointed out, issues such as cost pressures and changes to Building Regulations are not new. Had the construction proceeded according to previous planning permissions, we would not be facing this situation today. The Members' Briefing relating to the previous permission (2019/2623/P) was rightly very clear about the next steps on affordable housing, and that these should include London Affordable Rent and Intermediate Rent properties. It also raises continuing concerns about the developer's commitment to affordable housing, as the 2019 Briefing says: "The unilateral agreement attached to the 2003 appeal identified that the tenure of each affordable dwelling would be agreed with the Council, however to date this has not happened, nor has the building been demised to a Registered Provider." I do not believe that the developers have entered into discussions with a Registered Provider in the years since, which is a serious concern.

There is also insufficient detail on some of the practical issues regarding the affordable housing. For example, there is no plan for waste storage and collection from these properties, which is

particularly important given there is no vehicular access to 24 College Lane, and other properties on College Lane have hand-picked litter collection.

On this point, I strongly object to the removal of the on-site affordable housing provision and believe that the fitting out of the affordable housing block should be prioritised to ensure it is made available to a housing provider without further delay.

Amendments to the duplex maisonettes

While I recognise that the maisonettes were granted permission more recently, I am concerned by the proposed amendments to the design. Although some minor adjustments may be necessary to comply with current Building Regulations, the introduction of a structure to house the lift over-run and heat pumps warrants careful consideration. This modification should be assessed to ensure that it does not exacerbate light impact or reduce amenity for neighbouring properties. Additionally, the proposed additions would increase the height of the block beyond that of the surrounding properties, which could have a negative impact on the overall design and character of the area. While I am broadly in agreement with the installation of heat pumps, I know that residents would benefit from further technical information to ensure that there will be as little noise pollution as possible, and perhaps a planning condition on noise could be considered.

There are also unresolved issues related to water ingress and surface water management on the site, which have not been addressed in this application. A persistent pool of water surrounds the basement of the affordable housing block, which is an unsustainable situation. I would expect the developers to provide a comprehensive plan to resolve these water management issues, for the benefit of both the residents of this development and the wider community.

Concerns about the construction process

Almost every resident that I have spoken to about this planning application has expressed some concern about the construction process, especially following their experiences pre-2017. Many residents have referenced this in their individual submissions.

Issues such as access requirements and prolonged noise and vibration have had a significant impact on residents of the Ingestre Road estate, Little Green Street, and surrounding streets, including College Lane, Highgate Road, and Lady Somerset Road. Residents on Little Green Street are particularly anxious given the special character of their Georgian terraces built in the 1780s and the vulnerability of them to vibrations from heavy vehicles.

The plans suggest that the remaining works would take approximately 12 months to complete; however, there is no definitive timeline provided, nor any commitment to commence the works immediately upon approval of the planning application. I understand the strong desire among many leaseholders on Wiblin Mews for the completion of the works to be expedited, particularly to address longstanding issues with the boundary walls at 12 and 17 Wiblin Mews.

Given this is in the middle of a highly residential area, and due to the history of complaints from neighbours on Wiblin Mews and in surrounding properties, I would recommend that a Construction Working Group is established to keep the local community informed as to the progress of works and provide a regular forum to discuss construction issues that should arise.

Conclusion

I trust that the Planning Committee will carefully consider these concerns in their deliberations. I remain hopeful that a more constructive approach can be found, which will honour the original commitments made to the local community, complete construction on site as soon as possible, whilst delivering the affordable housing that is desperately needed in Kentish Town.

Yours sincerely,
James

Councillor James Slater

Labour & Co-operative Councillor for Kentish Town North
Associate Cabinet Member for Leaseholders

London Borough of Camden, Town Hall, Judd Street, WC1H 9JE