

Parnjit Singh

From: Ben Castell <[REDACTED]>
Sent: 20 February 2022 23:41
To: Planning Planning
Subject: Objection to planning application 2021/3225/P – Murphy's Yard

[REDACTED]

I contributed to the Dartmouth Park Neighbourhood Forum (DPNF) response, which highlights 6 fundamental issues with the application, any one of which could be sound reason for refusal, and also mentioned some other concerns.

This short note does not repeat those solid policy arguments but highlights but reflects some wider points mainly focused on design.

I am a town planner, working for 25 years at the interface of planning and design, and have advised UK and overseas governments on design, including preparing national design guides and guidance on community engagement in design. I have also spent hundreds of hours at evenings and weekends over the last 10 years progressing the work of DPNF. This response is in a personal capacity. I believe it is the first time I have objected to a planning application.

I am really pleased that so many of the comments submitted so far acknowledge what a brilliant site for development this is. However, they are virtually unanimous in the view that to consent what is proposed would be a huge mistake.

The damning feedback from the Design Review Panel (DRP), most notably the September 2020 meeting which reviewed a scheme very similar to the one that has been submitted, has been highlighted by other submissions. I don't know why this advice was largely ignored but doing so is most likely going to result in further time and resources being needed – from the developer, the Council, the community etc – to fix what is a deeply flawed proposal. The one positive point from this episode is that an extraordinarily high level of consensus has been achieved as to what a popular and appropriate design response would be; the objections show that most people support the principle of development at Murphy's Yard and I have no reason to believe that they wouldn't get behind a plan designed at the human scale with a mix of housing typologies and uses.

I have spoken to some prominent architects about the scheme at various stages of its modest evolution. Their views are quite consistent and well-aligned with the second DRP, although sometimes developing the ideas further. They all struggled to see how this proposal couldn't be anywhere, how it is rooted in this area. The following ideas have emerged so far:

- ∞ An exciting response would be a fine-grained, well mixed neighbourhood of 4-8 storey buildings with yards. Think about how the spaces are enclosed.
- ∞ This isn't King's Cross, a massively different central location next to 2 mainline train stations – forget about the theatrical stage sets. We have the Heath for big open spaces, and no need grand gestures to pull investors in, the market is well-established.
- ∞ Think about how those vast spaces will feel and be used. Learn the lessons about the scale of successful spaces in London/UK.
- ∞ Introduce a much greater range of scales – not everything has to be monolithic – and appearances, letting the character of the neighbourhood evolve
- ∞ Cover spaces in greenery, with sustainable urban drainage, places to grow food.

- ∞ Much better integration of spaces for work and living, with shared childcare, stimulating economic opportunities close to home.
- ∞ Keep all motor vehicles (apart from disabled and emergency access) away from streets, which can be given over to people of all ages. The car-free policy presents a wonderful opportunity to rethink how we approach movement. Put deliveries on trolleys.
- ∞ Really mix up tenures, beyond existing rigid models.
- ∞ There must be a more flexible/adaptable approach to the employment than those huge footprint blocks.
- ∞ Work harder on fixing those missing east-west routes across the railway.
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Plenty of the responses for far have focused on the towers, a particularly unimaginative design response in such a sensitive location. People look at the residential towers that have gone up elsewhere in London and are deeply unimpressed with how they look and their inaccessibility to people in need of housing. We were told at the Development Management Forum that people don't like tower blocks because of failed 1960s developments (which is ironic, because towers dropped in open space, 60s-style, is exactly what's being proposed here), whereas it's the recent examples that leave them cold. But it's important to note that this isn't about whether people like towers or not, it's about whether towers are a policy-compliant response to development on this site. Emphatically, they are not.

The case against high rise is well made here: <https://www.bristolagainsthighrises.com/Why-we-should-not-encourage-him#>

There is a recent LDA report on this and the sorts of neighbourhoods we should be building in London summarised here: https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/letter_to_councillors_-_housing_typologies_1.pdf

There is a thoughtful Observer article here, including the conclusion that "In Britain, tall buildings are signs of failed planning, which finds it hard to discover the space for more sustainable and humane ways of building homes": <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2020/jul/11/skyscrapers-wasteful-damaging-outmoded-time-to-stop-tall-buildings>

The design its current form has a very limited shelf life. If it gets as far as planning committee, it must be refused.

Best wishes

Ben Castell, NW5