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**Councillor Siân Berry**  
**Highgate Ward**  
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Jonathan McClue  
Planning Team  
London Borough of Camden

Dear Jonathan,

**Objection to planning application for Murphy's Yard 2021/3225/P**

I am writing to object strongly to the proposed development and to request that refusal is advised and/or that the applicant withdraws the scheme to rethink its approach.

My history of involvement with the development site as a local ward councillor, and the key reasons I believe it breaches policy are set out briefly below, along with a positive proposal for next steps.

***History of local involvement in plans for Murphy's Yard***

I am extremely disappointed at these proposals. Particularly when the local community has expressed strong support for the principle of extensive development on this site, and set out clear parameters and goals for how this could be provided, to see something that fails to meet these community goals and fundamentally breaches so many policies is very sad.

As a local councillor for Highgate Ward I have worked closely with community groups and the Dartmouth Park Neighbourhood Forum since at least 2013, and have a clear appreciation of what the community hoped for from this site. I saw the work that went into the engagement process and writing of the two adopted Neighbourhood Plans for the area.

I also took part in the process of putting together the Kentish Town Planning Framework, and saw the serious amounts of time and effort that community groups and local citizens put into that. I witnessed the hard work put into establishing good ideas like the green route to the Heath, recognising the difficult choices that needed to be made when space and costs are limits on what one site can achieve.

I saw how much people wanted to see large numbers of new homes, particularly family homes, and I saw them accepting the principle of larger and higher buildings on the site, and working hard to establish where these could fit into the local context without causing harm, and where they could not.

Many people gave many hours of volunteer time and effort during these years. They worked hard to establish where and how this could all fit together, so that the final Neighbourhood Plans for Kentish Town and Dartmouth Park, and the Kentish Town

Planning Framework are all good examples of a community working positively with planners to create a template with real vision and a positive view of development.

In the period during which the specific plans in the current application have been developed, I have also joined local people in taking part in a number of consultation exercises by the applicants and their architects and consultants. At those sessions, I have observed clear and specific constructive feedback being received from the community by these professionals, and then no changes being made.

It is hard to express the level of my disappointment that positive proposals and constructive comments during consultation from the local area have appeared to have had no impact on the designers of this scheme at all, and I have to echo the comments of the DPNF that there appears to have been no real attempt at participatory engagement at all.

### **Overall objections to the current outline plans**

I fully support the objections submitted by the two local Neighbourhood Forums with adopted neighbourhood plans in Dartmouth Park (DPNF) and Kentish Town (KTNF), as well as the points made by the Mortimer Terrace Nature Reserve trustees, the West Kentish Town and Gospel Oak neighbourhood forums, the Dartmouth Park Conservation Area Advisory Committee, the Kentish Town City Farm, and resident groups within my ward including the Lissenden Gardens Tenants Association.

The specific policy breaches that are most fundamental to the reaction of the community, its representatives and the statutory consultation bodies are as follows, and I also wish to express my support for objections from resident groups and individuals that tackle in detail the following planning policy issues and points:

- **Issues with increased traffic**, particularly due to the servicing and delivery requirements of the excessive floorspace of non-residential uses proposed.
- **Excessive embodied carbon in the proposed new buildings**, and low environmental standards of the proposed new buildings, as well as the way the proposals will make worse the urban heat island effect. The Whole Life-Cycle Carbon Assessment shows that initial construction will result in 1.9 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions – more than double Camden's entire Scope 1 and 2 emissions over a year and this directly contravenes Camden's ambitious commitments to achieve net zero by 2030. Significantly, the Environmental Impact Assessment includes no consideration of how this could be reduced by adopting a different design strategy.
- **The lack of any space for community-led housing**, ignoring the context of a healthy range of existing co-operative housing groups in the local area and a strong desire to see space within the development set aside for these models of affordable housing provision, which was communicated throughout the engagement process.

### **Affordable housing and size mix**

The applicant has chosen to propose just 35 per cent affordable housing and just 21 per cent low-cost rent (London Affordable Rent), with no homes at true social rents at all, which does not reflect local needs and is not policy compliant. The market homes will be out of reach of almost all local residents, with the viability assessment showing that the assumed price of a 2-bedroom flat will be close to £1 million.

The proposal is therefore in breach of both Camden (H4) and London Plan (H4 and H6) affordable housing policies and would not meet any kind of local housing need. Policy H5 of the London plan (the threshold approach) is cited in error in several places in the application but, nevertheless, a viability assessment has been submitted, the detail of which I would strongly challenge.

It would be constructive and sensible for Camden officers to examine viability very closely in this case. In particular I believe the approach chosen in the viability assessment provided is bizarre - namely to use existing land value as a benchmark rather than looking at the overall costs and profits of the actual scheme. This choice in effect bakes in existing land value (that the applicant does not have to pay) as additional profit, and this should not be accepted.

The viability assessment submitted says (in section 5.5):

“Alternatively, the benchmark land value can be inserted into the appraisal as a fixed cost and the level of profit generated by the scheme becomes the benchmark by which viability is measured. If the target rate of developer’s profit is generated the scheme is deemed to be viable. This method has been adopted for this FVA.”

There is no way that this is a suitable approach in a case where the applicant owns the land, and has done for decades, and where they have repeatedly assured the community during engagement that they have a firm intention to retain the freehold of the land and generate profits through leasehold sales and ongoing revenues from the development. Instead, an approach to viability which looks at the ability to generate a long-term profit as a continuing freeholder should be used.

It is well known that Transport for London is pursuing a similar approach to development on its land and in a number of recent applications has been able to propose 100 per cent affordable housing. Therefore, no less than the policy requirement of 50 per cent should be even considered in this case.

The size mix of homes is also very far from what Camden planning policy (and local need as defined in the SHMA) requires, with more than four fifths of the proposed 825 homes proposed as 1- and 2-bedroom flats, and only 14 homes as 4-bedroom family homes. Both the relevant neighbourhood plans also express a clear need for family homes, and a large site like this ought to be able to make a significant contribution to local problems of overcrowding and housing need.

### **Inappropriate overdevelopment and type of development**

The scale and type of development is much larger than the planning framework requires, particularly for non-residential uses.

The planning framework asks for 'in the region of 750 homes' and to 'retain the existing quantum of industrial floorspace' in line with Camden Local Plan and London Plan requirements. However, the proposals in the application are for up to 825 homes (with all the excess effectively represented by market-rate homes) and up to 95,000 sqm of non-residential uses, far more than the existing 20,000 sqm of employment floorspace on the site.

This excess amount of development compared with local need and policy requirements results in excessive height and bulk for a large number of the proposed buildings, which overall creates a development that is out of context for the area and has unacceptable impacts.

### **Impact of excessive bulk and height on daylight, sunlight and views**

The additional bulk and height of the buildings in the proposed development - largely resulting from the overprovision of non-residential uses - leads to severe impacts on protected views and on the daylight and sunlight received by neighbouring properties, amenities and nature sites.

The strong objection from Historic England makes very clear the impact on protected views, and the objections from the KTNF and DPNF also set out the dramatic impact on views that their neighbourhood plans seek to protect. Historic England says in its objection:

"The impact would be significant, blocking, and diminishing the impact of, views of key parts of central London from a number of angles on Parliament Hill. Regional and local policies both strongly support the importance of these strategic views. Historic England has significant concerns about the harmful impact of the proposals, and these should be addressed."

In preparing its neighbourhood plan, DPNF commissioned work looking at the topography of the area and creating a broad framework for the likely maximum heights in each area of the development in order to have no impact on these views. The Kentish Town Planning Framework matches closely with these findings with its recommendation for a general height of eight storeys with some higher buildings where it is appropriate.

The Daylight and Sunlight assessment accompanying the application provides clear evidence of the unacceptable impact of the additional heights in inappropriate areas of the development on neighbouring residents and amenities, in particular the impact on homes in Meru Close and Hemmingway Close and the co-operative homes at Heathview in my ward, which has been assessed as suffering from major adverse sunlight impacts from the development.

It is clear that the excessive bulk and height of the proposals is to blame for these impacts on the nature reserves, including in particular the large building which has been placed between the railway lines south of Gordon House Road. Again, the problems that would be caused by a tall building in this location were pointed out repeatedly to the applicants and architects during consultation and these concerns have been completely ignored, which is incredibly disappointing.

These impacts are a clear breach of policy in terms of impact on neighbours, and represent another fundamental reason for refusal and a rethink of these plans.

### **Impact on nature sites**

I can find no assessment of impact on surrounding nature sites in the Environmental Impact Assessment or the Daylight and Sunlight report, with only amenity sites, the roof gardens of Greenwood Place and the gardens of residential properties considered in the assessments of open space.

However, the site is also surrounded to the north by protected nature sites along the railway lines, including the Mortimer Terrace Nature Reserve (MTNR), of which I am a trustee, which is a local nature reserve, a protected Asset of Community Value and a Local Green Space protected in the Dartmouth Park Neighbourhood Plan.

The objection from the MTNR trustees sets out the species and the special nature of this ecologically sensitive area that must be overshadowed by the development in a severe way. This can be deduced from the assessment impacts on Heathview since the MTNR lies between the development area and Heathview, and the overshadowing of the MTNR can clearly be seen in the diagrams in the Daylight and Sunlight report appendices reproduced below. The MTNR is much closer to the proposed buildings and the impact will be even more significant than that assessed for the building, giving another reason to refuse these plans.

### **Specific objection to entrance and exit plans at Gordon House Road**

I also want to note my specific objection to the detail of the proposed plans for the area around Gospel Oak station on Gordon House Road.

These planned entrance to the development for vehicles, and the outlined facilities for walking and cycling access to the Heath do not provide the best solution, and in fact appear to be creating a new dangerous junction without good lines of sight for vehicles where different road and pavement users will come into conflict.

The opportunity has been missed to provide natural desire line access for walking and cycling both to the Heath and to the current station entrance and this must be rethought and redesigned before any plans for this part of the development will be acceptable.

In addition, there is a very long-established need for wider pavements and a new entrance to the east of Gospel Oak station to help accommodate the large numbers of pedestrians using the station and the Heath, which causes pedestrian crowding and congestion, particularly in warmer weather during school term time. Proposals for this new entrance appear in the Dartmouth Park Neighbourhood Plan.

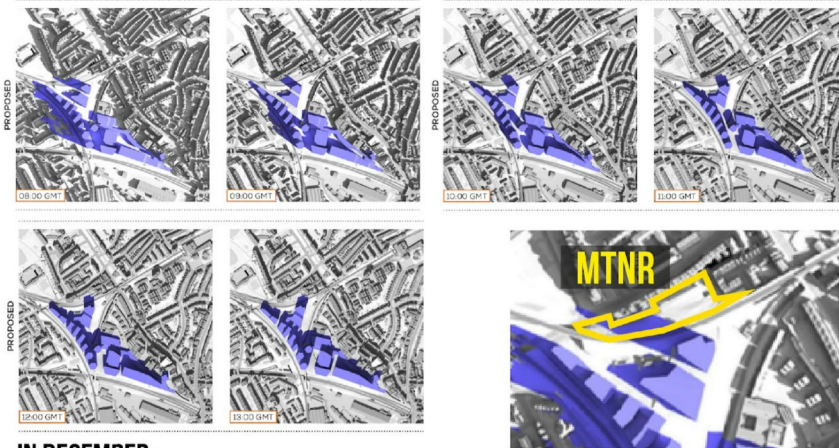
Given the platforms at Gospel Oak extend across Gordon House Road, there is also a clear opportunity for an additional entrance/exit from the station to be added on the south side of the road.

These two opportunities have been communicated to the landowners from the start of discussions about the site, and it is disappointing that no discussion with Network Rail about either of these improvements to the station seems to have taken place.

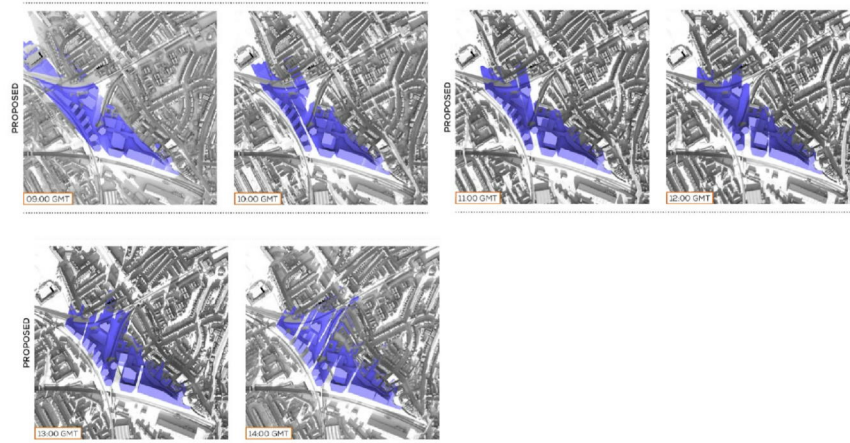


## SHADOWS FALLING OVER THE MORTIMER TERRACE NATURE RESERVE

### IN MARCH:



### IN DECEMBER:



**Conclusion: this application should be withdrawn and rethought through co-design with the local community**

I believe that, given these multiple fundamental failures to meet policy requirements, this development should be recommended for refusal at the earliest possible stage and the applicant urged to work again with the community on a redesign of the scheme.

There is a strong case for detailed viability work to be done with Camden officers at the same time, using a more appropriate methodology, with a view to determining whether the same amount (in numbers) of social and affordable housing can be provided with a smaller amount of floorspace for non-residential uses, and fewer of the less-needed 1-bedroom market homes.

An option developed with the community along these lines would preserve the current benefits in terms of addressing local housing need (which is overwhelmingly for new social housing and truly affordable homes), and enable compliance with the policies the development currently breaches which result from the excessive size and height of the currently proposed buildings.

I firmly believe that withdrawal of these plans, a rethink, and renewed good-faith engagement with the local community could provide a strong basis for a good development, with long-term profits, compliant with both Neighbourhood Plans and the planning framework. Such a proposal could be put forward in future by Murphy's and could enjoy strong community support.

Finally, I wish to quote and support the offer made by the DPNF in their message to Murphy's of February 2021, when the problems with the emerging scheme became apparent. They said:

"Nobody is fighting development here and we understand that a development needs to achieve certain densities. We worry the opportunity to create a place that responds to the area's special urban character, and that draws on a serious understanding of the lessons of what makes for a successful city neighbourhood, is being squandered. People are keen to help shape the Murphy's development through a creative exercise, and there are lots of skills to offer.

"We appreciate that we have been consulted but it would be wonderful to be able to influence, to come together to engage in a creative, collective way. There is a wide pool of interested talent in the area. A meaningful programme of co-designing from first principles, based on a shared understanding of the parameters you need to achieve, could chart a new way forward."

I am sending copies of this letter to Camden's planning officers and directly to Murphy's in the hope that: a) good advice will be provided to the applicants through their consultants, and b) the chance to withdraw these plans, work with local people again, and restore our community's faith in a valued local employer will be taken up.

Yours sincerely

A black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of Councillor Siân Berry.

**Councillor Siân Berry**  
Green Party, Highgate Ward

cc Paul Brosnahan, Murphy's