

Regeneration and Planning
London Borough of Camden
2nd Floor, 5 Pancras Square
c/o Town Hall, Judd Street
London, WC1H 9JE

Dear David Fowler

Objection to Planning Application 2022/0528/P (O2 Redevelopment Masterplan)

We, the undersigned, strongly object to the planning application 2022/0528/P, concerning the redevelopment of the O2 Centre, Homebase, the car park, and other related plots.

We are concerned that this proposal is an overdevelopment of the site: the proposed buildings, up to 15 storeys, are too tall for the character of the area and will materially impact the setting of its immediately adjacent conservation areas (South Hampstead, West End Green, Reddington Frogna, Fitzjohns Netherhall) and other heritage assets near the development site. This is non-compliant with London Plan policy D9: with the site context's heights and typologies being almost all mansion blocks and terraced/semi-detached houses between 3-6 storeys, the site is not suitable for tall buildings. The proposal likewise contravenes and exceeds West Hampstead Neighbourhood Plan's policy 2, which this site falls under, regarding the appropriate scale of buildings. It is neither "sensitive to the heights of existing buildings" nor "human in scale"; its impact on local views will be catastrophic.

The O2 Centre is the only shopping centre in our neighbourhood, providing many local amenities, with one of the few large supermarkets, many small and medium-sized retailers, the only garden centre in the area and the only car park on Finchley Road. The proposal adds excessive residential units at the loss of amenities, including retail, leisure, cinema, and other employment-sustaining land uses. The proposal does not even offer like-for-like provision of amenities and facilities, despite increasing the local population and local demand for infrastructure. The phasing strategy of the site also fails to provide increased infrastructure in the first phase, leaving it until the second-last phase to provide a health centre and creche, increasing risks that these may not be provided at all. We are concerned that the development will result in a permanent loss of continuous employment, during economically difficult times.

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Not only are we losing a key economic centre that is important to many of us, but by adding thousands of new residents, we are stretching the capacity of our existing local infrastructure. We are concerned that Finchley Road and West Hampstead Underground Stations are already over capacity and cannot accommodate an expanded population; the applicant's proposals to add a bus stop and fund a feasibility study to increase station accessibility do not address this transport capacity shortfall. The loss of the car park also severely impacts the viability of the town centre role of the site and its existing amenities, contrary to paragraph 10.20 of Camden's own Local Plan regarding parking in redevelopments. The large supermarket currently provided by Sainsbury's is an important destination for shoppers across north-west Camden, being the largest supermarket in the area. In the absence of being able to park at the site, Sainsbury's have clearly stated that they do not intend to take on a large store. The car parking should be re-provided in order to continue to support the continuity of its current commercial uses and the viability of the current town centre.

We are concerned that this development will increase pollution, both noise and air pollution during its excessively long 18-year construction timeline, to the detriment of Camden's air quality responsibilities. The demolition of relatively new, sound buildings such as the O2 Centre, built only in 1998, will result in substantial carbon emissions contrary to Camden's climate change policies, and result in excessive raw materials extraction when a 'retain and retrofit' strategy is more circular and sustainable. The construction of a further 1850 homes will also result in substantial emissions, both in the construction, and in the embodied carbon of its materials. The loss of the only large garden centre and DIY/hardware store would lead necessarily to trips, likely made by car, by Camden residents to Brent Cross or similar locations: increasing, rather than reducing, traffic and climate change impact and emissions.

We are also concerned about the potential for increased crime due to the under-considered urban strategy of the masterplan. The development adds a large population in an 'island' site with low urban permeability and visibility in its pedestrian routes. These routes are also not adequately overlooked by natural surveillance through active uses, instead faced with an excessive number of blank frontages or service entrances. Considering the high crime rates already in the area, this will result in many cul-de-sac-like conditions that can harbour criminal and anti-social behaviour. The added population will also stretch even further the already-overstretched local policing resources.

Based on the critical issues above, we strongly urge Camden as the planning authority to deny planning application to 2022/0528/P.

Yours sincerely,
From the petition organisers,

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And the undersigned:
(Privacy note: we have received requests from some of our signatories that they do not wish their contact information or addresses to be published publicly. Please redact as much as permissible any identifying information from all our signatories when publishing these objections onto the planning portal.)