

Walworth Society Objection to Planning Application 21/AP/1819

21/AP/1819 | Redevelopment of the site to provide an 18-storey building (including a mezzanine floor) plus basement and rooftop plant of a maximum height of 85.73m AOD providing 49,565sqm GEA office floorspace (Class E(g)(i)) and 8,800 sqm GEA areas of floorspace for the following flexible uses; office/retail/services/food and drink/medical or health floorspace (Class E(g)(i), E(a), E(c), E(b) or E(e)), including ancillary cycle parking, accessible car parking, servicing, plant, roof terraces, landscaping, public realm improvements and other associated works incidental to the development (such as revising the layout of Deacon Street).

OBJECTION GROUNDS

- **Affect local ecology**
- **Development too high**
- **Loss of light**
- **Out of keeping with character of area**
- **Over development**

The Walworth Society objects to this application on the following grounds.

Summary. In summary these are:

- **This application represents a change to the consented master plan and significantly undermines it. The masterplan was developed following systematic engagement with local people and this application negates that work in favour of a greedy last-gasp desire to provide office space which is far less needed in Southwark than the council homes which could be delivered instead.**
- **The case for office space is not proven. All too clear is the need for council homes in the borough.**
- **The design of H1 is greedy and over-bearing, of poor quality and unsuited to this key location at the north end of the Walworth Road.**
- **The development will have a detrimental impact on the Walworth Road, a number of Conservation Areas and a number of listed buildings.**
- **The development does nothing to contribute to creating a safe Walworth Road and create links between the Elephant and Castle and Walworth. It and the wider Elephant Park development more generally fails to create a safe environment for people in West Walworth to cross to Elephant Park.**
- **The development will have a detrimental impact on Elephant Park, neighbouring residents and bio-diversity across the area.**

1. The changes to the consented masterplan

The consented masterplan will be significantly undermined with this development. The plot is located at the edge of the consented masterplan, and has significantly increased in massing from what was consented. In the original master plan Plot H1 was the smallest plot (in terms of both height and massing) of all plots surrounding Elephant Park. Although the original proposal included a tall structure (approx. 82m in height), its massing was substantially smaller than the new proposal, with much lower blocks skirting the Walworth Road and Elephant Road, similar in scale and layout to those that have

been erected. The original massing and arrangement was drawn up in conjunction with an in-depth consultation process which engaged with many local groups and a huge number of residents over a period of six months. In 2010-12 local people would have not agreed to the massing of this block, its over-bearing character and its lumpy form, or to the extremely negative impact that the design and form has on the finely grained late-C19th buildings opposite (all built at one time c1880) and on the Walworth Road Conservation Area as well as the detrimental impact (through wind, over-bearing, lack of light, lack of space) that it will have on the many pedestrians that use this tricky junction as part of their everyday travels to and from the buses, trains and tubes at the northern end of the Walworth Road.

2. Consultation - local people and their views have been ignored

This proposed change has been carried out without significant consultation or discussion. The first and only meeting that the Walworth Society took part in (along with residents of the Strata Tower) was unambiguous in rejecting the proposed change of use and the design. Subsequent requests to be updated on the proposals were rejected as Lendlease and their representatives chose to not take on board any comments from local people about the problems with the development.

3. Council homes are needed: not offices

Without clear justification for the change to the consented master plan from 2012, this proposal for a change of use from residential, leisure and community space to office space should be rejected. We believe that there the proposed office space in this location is not justified especially when there is a shortage of green space in the area and a proven need for social housing. If Lendlease have built out their agreed quota for homes on the masterplan, the need is for Southwark Council to buy or take back the land and to build much needed council housing and to increase the amount of public green space. The previously agreed community uses D1 and Leisure uses D2 should be retained.

The proposal for a change to office use is not justified and should be refused. There are already two consented proposals which will result in an increase in office space in the immediate area including a number of 6 new floors on top of Skipton House and the refurbishment of the former Town Hall and Library to make 300+ new co-working spaces. The pandemic had resulted in office workers working more from home, with most companies planning for hybrid working styles in the future. It is clearly not the case that there is a need for less housing since the masterplan was approved.

4. The proposed H1 massing: greedy and over-bearing

The massing in 2012 showed lower residential blocks facing onto the Walworth Road and Elephant Road with one single tall block facing onto Elephant Square. The proposed office block appears to be more than double the consented volume as it strives to fill all of the available space with internal office floor space for rent.

We support the comments of the Southwark Council Design Review Panel as to the development's "overly bulky character and deep plan of the design, as well as the lack of detailed articulation of the façade". We note that the "deep plan character of the office floor plan has not been amended" and the development has not been returned to the DRP for comment. The resulting massing is at odds with the more successful podium pattern to the south where 3/5 separate blocks occupy each city block, integrating with the scale and rhythm of Walworth Road as a high street.

The excessive mass and design of the proposed building will have a detrimental effect on all of the positive design thinking to date that has sought to integrate old and new buildings along the periphery of Elephant Park, on the Walworth Road and on Rodney Road and Balfour Street. The other so-called “landmark building” on Rodney Road is disliked by local people. The Energy Centre stands out like a clad concrete bunker when the other blocks around it are much more contextually arranged and designed at a human scale.

5. Design quality: substandard and unsuited to this location

This building fails to make any positive contribution to the landscape, nor is it an appropriate landmark as the design is overbearing, greedy, uncontextual and introverted, contrary to the design requirements of P16 of the New Southwark Plan.

All of the elements proposed are questionable and ill-conceived; the concept is limp and does no justice to Michael Faraday other than give the name to a pattern that may not even shade the interior sufficiently. The quality of the office space is mediocre and dark at its centre because the plan is too deep. The caged private balconies have greenery which, if it grows, will impede light and views to the park. The over-scaled 10-metre high lobby bears no relationship to any other building on the Walworth Road. It relies on large areas of blank façade on Walworth Road and Deacon Street upon which greenery will magically grow in “socks” on north facing facades. The building and its users are completely orientated to the south-east for views of the rest of the private development, to the tube and to Elephant Park thus demoting Walworth’s high street to a back street.

6. Detrimental impact on the quality of the streetscape of the Walworth Road.

The building design is particularly detrimental to the setting of the Walworth Road and in particular the historic terrace comprising numbers 82-96 Walworth Road which the 2012 E&C SPD identified as being worthy of local listing. The proposed development will dominate these buildings and bears no relationship to them as a piece of high-quality streetscape development.

We assert in particular that the proposed development fails in relation to saved policy 3.20 of the Southwark Plan requiring that a tall building (point iv) is required to “Relate well to its surroundings, particularly at street level”.

As we have noted, the original masterplan was drawn up following an in-depth consultation with many local groups and residents. Three working groups were established which influenced the masterplan in many ways including the final design for the relationship of the new buildings to the Walworth Road. Three sets of architects (AHMM, Maccreanor Lavington and Panter Hudspith) were introduced to the sites by local people and out of this work a number of guidelines were established for designing the new north end of the Walworth Road which has been to date very successful at street level. This included setting back the new building elevations behind the existing tree line and the continuation of the “historic high street”. This means that ground floor heights are single storey and there are vertical elements which set out to mimic the rhythm of the historic high street (ie the vertical pilasters between the shops every 4-5m).

These design guidelines have been tested and are familiar to Lendlease but have been ignored by ACME architects. The consequences are a proposal that is failing at street level. The Walworth Road elevation

is 10m high, almost three storeys, appearing at the end of a busy historic single storey retail high street. The proposed elevation on the Walworth Road has two storeys of blank elevation (6m) above entrances to what are often private uses (potentially medical or affordable office) and even cycle stores. This will be a completely blank and underused frontage for a whole block of the Walworth Road adjacent to the dark undercroft of the railway bridge. The elevation of Deacon Street is worse still, dominated by entrances to back of house facilities, a completely blank 10m high façade to a building that is over 40m long, with three small windows at one end. This building and its users completely will, by design, completely turn their backs on this section of the Walworth Road, making it a dreary, dark, and potentially dangerous canyon.

This is contrary to the New Southwark Plan Vision for Walworth in terms of encouraging a flow of people south from the Elephant and Castle to Walworth and a) improving the connections of neighbourhoods and communities across Walworth Road and b) improving the retail and service offer of Walworth Road.

It is significant that many of the design proposals (eg section 4.4 Spatial Organisation in the Design and Access statement) are viewed from Elephant Park rather than the Walworth Road. It is clear that the cues for the building are being taken from the park rather than high street perspective which is key for our economic future.

7. Creating a safe Walworth Road

Walworth Road is one of the busiest roads in our area and the traffic impacts that will come with operating a large office space will be material.

There is requirement to create high quality conditions for walking and cycling. We note the proposed introduction of a formal crossing close to the railway viaduct. We are dismayed, however, at the lack of integration of this and other developments that Lendlease have constructed along the Walworth Road north of Wansey Street to fit with AV.16 The Walworth area vision and to “Improve cycling and walking routes” and to support walking and cycling (P50 and P52). The central character of the Walworth Road in its northern extent remains one of being an overwide road which encourages fast driving and is not designed appropriately for the 20mph limit. Throughout the Heygate Estate/Elephant Park regeneration there has been an opportunity to create a safe northern part of the Walworth Road which a) integrates it between Walworth and the Elephant and Castle and b) ensures that residents in the estates on the west side of the Walworth Road have the opportunity to cross safely to the new developments (ie not have to cross a 4 lane road). A condition of this development should be a contribution to the redesign of the northern part of the Walworth Road as a safe boulevard and plan for the development of this scheme.

8. Harm to the Walworth Road Conservation Area and the setting of listed buildings.

Owing to its height, massing and the poor quality of the design we believe that the development is detrimental to and causes harm to a) the nearby Pullens Conservation Area, b) the Walworth Road Conservation Area which commences just 180 metres to the south and c) to the nearby Grade II listed buildings namely - Southwark municipal offices (Walworth Town Hall), library and clinic buildings on Walworth Road and nos. 140, 142, 150 and 152 Walworth Road. This issue is acknowledged as a substantive one in the Southwark Council pre-application response (1150308 - which appears in the published planning application documents).

9. Detrimental impact on neighbouring residents

The aim behind the original design of plot H1 was to maximise the separation between the tall structure in H1 and neighbouring buildings. The new proposal contradicts this and will have severe negative impacts on almost all neighbouring buildings. The proposed massing on the north side of H1 will impact light in Mawes House and Tantallon House. To the south, the proximity to Hurlock Heights combined with the height of the structure has severe impacts also on all residents facing H1 that live beyond the most upper floors. For the Strata Tower to the west side there are also severe light impacts. Of concern too is the fact that most apartments in Strata only face east, meaning residents have no option to resort to using other windows.

10. Detrimental impact on Elephant Park

Elephant Park is a successful part of the development to date and is already over-subscribed with users especially amongst local children. H1 will dominate views and reduce sunlight in Elephant Park. Given the importance of the park in the overall development and its use by local people the impact of this massing will be felt by the wider community.

11. Detrimental impact on bio-diversity

We note that officers are concerned about the impact of the proposed design on the landscape surrounding H1 and the removal of proposed trees and the dominance of hard landscaping. We believe that this will have a negative impact on the bio-diversity that the Elephant Park development has facilitated to date.