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2008/4488

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Technical Services Department
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As from: 1 Nepaul Road
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May 5th 2009

Dear Mr Hunter

Planning Application 2008/4488 - Redevelopment at Clapham Junction Station

Whilst there is near-universal support for the strategic objective of improving a station as important and busy as Clapham Junction the overwhelming number of people who have contacted me also feel that the negative aspects of the current application, sadly, outweigh the benefits for the local area.

Living just off the Falcon Road, I am also a local resident and regular station-user so can comment from personal experience too. I have considered the original applications and the subsequent submissions this year from Metro Shopping Fund and Network Rail and cannot support the current proposals.

I therefore urge the Council's Planning Committee to refuse the applications.

Some of my reasons for urging refusal can be summarised as follows:

1. The parlous state to which the nation's finances have been reduced by the current Government has given added impetus to the argument that this is 'a once in a lifetime' to improve the station. It is argued by Network Rail that they cannot afford strategic investment in Britain's busiest station and the only way they can fund improvements to the station is by working with a developer who needs a mix of retail and residential capacity on the site to achieve their return on investment.

It is precisely this 'once in a lifetime' argument that convinces me these proposals are unacceptable. Given the disruption and timescales likely to be involved in this development will we emerge at the end with a modern station fit to serve the travelling public of this area for decades to come? Much hangs on this critical question and I believe that the answer to it is No, with too many fundamental issues of station access, capacity and interchange still inadequately addressed.

2. The corollary of the 'once in a lifetime' argument is the argument that the proposed residential development at the site – the 42 storey tower blocks on which most local objections have centred – is a 'price worth paying' for station improvements. I cannot agree with this argument.

I think tall buildings of appropriate and attractive design, in a location that provides the right context, have a significant part to play in the economy and the evolving skyline of both our city and our area.

However the scale, height and density of the proposed towers are overwhelming and inappropriate for this location. Even accepting that issues of design are necessarily subjective it is interesting to note that unlike other developments these towers have found few friends to argue that they will enhance the local scene. Those who do not object to them have generally cited the 'price worth paying' argument above.

The Clapham Junction town centre is predominantly Victorian and Edwardian in character with low to mid rise buildings and some taller blocks to the north on the Winstanley estate. The proposed towers would I feel be overbearing and incongruous in this context. I regret that in design and conception the proposed towers do not look to enhance a townscape with its economic and social roots in the great age of the railways. As the Council's Conservation Appraisal & Management Strategy for Clapham Junction (Paragraph 5.1 Draft 2008) says of the area "generally a high quality commercial centre containing a high proportion of valuable Victorian and Edwardian buildings. All these buildings make a positive contribution to the historic and architectural character of the conservation area."

Would our successors look back and say the same of the proposed landmark towers above the station in a hundred years time? I doubt it.

3. The final point I would make is about a potential missed opportunity should this proposal go through. The area needs more high quality office space not less and in the Clapham Junction station site there is a golden opportunity to create an attractive and sustainable business environment to contribute to our local economy. With rail connections second to none and a vibrant local town centre only minutes from Central London and (with the coming of the East London line in 2011/12) in due course Docklands, it would be ideal. The proposed additional retail space offers nothing like the same opportunity.

Yours sincerely,



Jane Ellison
**Conservative Parliamentary Spokesman
Battersea, Balham and Wandsworth**