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2 February 2009
Mark Hunter,
Planning Service,
Technical Services Dept,
Town Hall,
Wandsworth High Street,
London SW18 2PU

Re: Planning Application 2008/4488

PLEASE COPY TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE PLANNING
COMMITTEE AND PLACE ON THE COUNCIL'S PLANNING WEBSITE

Dear Mr Hunter,

I am writing, as I know many people have already done, to urge the planning committee to reject outright the Metro Shopping Fund development proposal for Clapham Junction Station area, and in particular the "twin towers".

This is Battersea, not New York. We are a fairly homogenous community of low-rise, mostly brick-built and frequently Victorian or Edwardian buildings. The photo spread across the opening pages of the council's "Our Wandsworth" brochure amply demonstrates how out of scale and unsympathetic in character are the few existing high-rise blocks in the area. Standing out like a sore thumb is putting it mildly. Places like the sad, greying concrete towers of the Winstanley Estate are a relic of the Sixties craze for high-rise. As "a good place to live" to quote part of the slogan you spread across the aforementioned photo, they have been discredited and many of their fellows have been demolished.

Yet Metro wishes to inflict two monstrosities on us, bang in the centre of Battersea, that at 42 stories are roughly twice the height of the tallest Winstanley tower. They are also to be covered in stainless steel blue and yellow cladding which will make them stand out even more – if that's possible. Even in the developers' own flatteringly constructed mock-ups, these towers look hideous, overpowering and totally out of keeping with their surroundings. Cutting them down a few floors – a favourite developers' trick – is not an option. At 21 floors they'd still be an eyesore. No towers. Period.

TECHNICAL DES
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Objection Acknowledged

No Response Required

Response Required

Comments

There is a planning dictum that in general, tall buildings should be grouped, and preferably in non-residential areas. So we have Canary Wharf and scattered towers arising around the City, though most development stays around 13 stories. To be frank, since part of London's charm is that in general it is a low-rise city where the few really large buildings that stand out on the skyline are true architectural delights, such as Westminster Abbey, the Houses of Parliament and St Paul's, most modern high-rise adds little.

But the sudden rash of developers trying to stick up towers in Wandsworth borough is even more out of place. The developers won on the Ram Brewery site because Wandsworth town centre is already so fatally compromised by the shoddy former Arndale Centre and traffic blight that it has lost any focus and character and possibly has fewer residents in the immediate area. In Putney the developers lost because it still has a heart, integrity and many locals living near the High Street. We around Clapham Junction – or Battersea Junction, as some would more accurately like to rename it – also intend to win. With the cafés, bars and small shops around Battersea Rise, Northcote Road and St John's Hill, and Clapham Common nearby we have a village feeling, and you do encounter local friends in the street. It is a comfortable, human-scale place to be – and a Conservation Area. Those alien towers would overshadow everything, with no way to avoid seeing them.

The brochure *Our Wandsworth 2018* says: "Our vision: We want Wandsworth to be a community of global citizens living within environmental limits in an attractive high quality environment." Do you think that most people will see these monsters as contributing to that "attractive environment".

"Carbon emissions and household waste levels are still too high," the brochure complains on Page 5. Don't you think that the addition of 556 flats containing a possible 1,000 people will increase rather than decrease household waste and carbon emission levels? Just how *do* you get rid of waste from the 42nd floor? And how much energy will you have to use powering the lifts to get up there?

On Page 6 the brochure says: "Traffic congestion is considered a big problem... *[you say]* that it's getting harder to park a car. However, a growing population is likely to put a strain on the public transport infrastructure. Traffic levels have been falling, so our challenge will be to ensure they continue to fall." About 1,000 new inhabitants will indeed add to the strain on transport infrastructure. If they have cars they will add to the traffic levels. And with only 239 parking places allocated to them, could well add to the problem of on-street parking.

One of the arguments against this development is that all these are luxury flats, with no provision for affordable social housing. The developers appear to have evaded the obligation to provide this by some offer to provide a health centre. Haven't we now got an expanded health centre at St John's, just up the road?

And how does this sidestepping square with the council's page on "Housing Needs": "In the wider population there is concern about the availability of affordable housing. For some of you this means that house prices are too high. For others it means that there aren't sufficient low-cost house purchase options available." In "What we'll do" you promise to: "Provide an extra 1125 affordable homes by 2011. Halve the number of homeless households occupying temporary accommodation." These 556 flats aren't going to help in these ambitions. Indeed, one wonders just who will live in them. Certainly not families, since they're almost all one or two-bed, and imprisoning children on the 42nd floor would probably have the council's social services crying shame.

If the credit crunch continues, many flats could remain empty. Someone at the January 28 protest meeting suggested the towers were in fact a disguised way for the council to solve its housing problem, by waiting until they turned into unoccupied white elephants then using them as council housing – paid for out of our rates. This sounded a little cynical until I read Page 5 of last week's Wandsworth Guardian:

"Trade unions are lobbying Wandsworth and Merton local authorities to buy flats in the Plough Lane housing development... to be used as council houses.

"More than 100 properties remain mothballed as the recession hits, with the GMB union claiming they should be used to reduce the waiting list for subsidised properties.

"A quarter of Plough Lane's 600 new homes...are yet to attract buyers." Is this the future for the twin towers?

Let us pass on to the commercial development of the site. I gather about 50 retail outlets are envisaged. Page 7 of the council plan states: "We must ensure our small shops are not squeezed out by big chains, and that our town centres are well-placed to survive in a difficult trading climate." It also says: "Businesses have two key issues – parking and business rates." Independent traders have been largely forced out of Northcote Road by the rack-rent landlords who own much of it – plus business rates and parking restrictions – and replaced by chains like Fat Face. And that was before the recession.

Check out the number of pound shops, charity shops and indeed empty shops in the area. There might soon be more – Debenhams and Whistles are both associated with the now crashing Baugur empire. Do you think anyone but chains will be able to afford the rents and rates of the new development? So will it be worth offering "financial assistance to eligible small businesses" – ie, money from our rates – as the council promises? And on its commitment to creating jobs, small businesses will go, existing office space – including the

PCS union HQ – will go, even good community pubs like the Windsor Castle, will all disappear, taking jobs with them.

Look what happened to the earlier retail development in Clapham Junction Station. The upper floor was a market, which soon died and is now a gym. The lower floor struggled even in the boom years and is now largely occupied by commuter-serving food stores and other chains. Either way, this development does not look likely to help the small independents who have made this area such a pleasant place and who got Northcote voted “the second best shopping street in London”. Though that was before the greedy landlords sucked their blood.

I note, incidentally, that “our vision” includes the council’s desire for “five distinct town centres”. But the gang of developers obviously don’t agree, since if they had their way, Putney, Wandsworth and Battersea would all have twin towers! And on the subject of the rash of towers, the council’s vision includes “working with developers to bring forward key sites such as Battersea Power Station”. How many developers have done zilch with the power station? And what do the latest want to spend their cash on: building yet another tower, the REO, guaranteed to ruin views in all directions and take the cash needed for the power station.

Finally, the station improvements. On “Tackling transport” the council says it will “Improve passenger facilities and accessibility at key local railway stations including making Clapham Junction fit for the 21st Century”. So is the council going to finance this? Because otherwise, it implies some kind of getting into bed with the developers, which would appear to be a conflict of interests.

If the council is relying on Network Rail then it is worth quoting the response of that body’s spokesperson to Jane Ellison, Battersea Conservatives Parliamentary Spokesperson: “Network Rail has been jointly involved with Metro in the planning of the redevelopment of the station area and we are supportive of their proposal.” Later the reply continues: “Network Rail would not have the capabilities of providing these improvements alone.” And later still: “Our strategy... has therefore been to work with development partners to deliver refurbished stations.” This implies we only get the improvements if we accept the towers.

Jane Ellison, who, as Tory, you might have thought would be all in favour of freedom of commercial development and private financing, concludes on all counts, including the proposals for the station itself, that it is not worth paying the price of the towers, and has circulated local inhabitants thus. Her political opposite, Labour MP Martin Linton, is similarly opposed to the towers. Many others, from town planners to CABI, the architects’ body, have voiced opposition on grounds from social to structural and aesthetic. Basically, Metro

Shopping and Network Rail apart, the only people to whom the twin towers might appeal, heaven forbid, are Al Qaeda as a possible prime London target, seeing as they would be above Britain's biggest rail terminal – a victim, you might recall, of IRA bombing.

Wandsworth Council has made much in the past year or two of standing up for local concerns, opposing Heathrow's third runway, the closure of the Bolingbroke Hospital, the shutting of post offices and even the slow destruction of independent traders in Northcote Road. In its "Our Wandsworth" brochure, it claims: "We listened to the concerns local people have now and for the future." In every aspect, the Metro Shopping plan seems to be in conflict with the council's own stated aims for the borough in its "long-term vision for the future" and should be voted down by the planning committee, unanimously, once and for all.

When the council was dismissive of local protests about its plans to close Battersea Arts Centre and Wandsworth Museum it painfully learned that we here truly *are* a community and will fight for what we believe in and care for. We care for Battersea as it is and will be. We will fight.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Michael James Snaith". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Michael James Snaith