

Dear Sir/ Madam / Woking Planning Committee,

This letter is with regards to PLAN/2020/0568 – Land to the North and South of Goldsworth Road, Woking, Surrey, GU21 6JT.

I am writing to you as a physically disabled resident of Nankeville Court, and as a resident that will be looking directly onto the new 43 (recently adjusted from 40) storey tower block. I am writing to oppose this new mixed use planning development consisting of 5 tower blocks, ranging from the height of 9 to 43 storeys containing 965 residential units, homeless shelter and commercial spaces. Please see my objections below:

Design and Visual Impact

When the New Central development was built this was with the Woking residents in mind it was built to work with the existing design and layout of Woking, particularly the surrounding terraced housing and office blocks. The New Victoria Square development was approved on the basis this would be the new centre of Woking allowing for the taller structures to be built. To then build 5 more towers directly opposite surely takes away the impact the Victoria Square development was meant to have. That nice brand new skyline bar at the top of the Hilton Hotel will now not have nice panoramic views of the North Downs but the 43 storey tower block in front of this! Is this the skyline Woking really wants?

Driving along the A31/ Hogs Back towards Guildford, or walking anywhere along the North Downs Way, Woking already towers over the surrounding Surrey countryside and this is without any of the new proposed/ planned developments. Do we really want to make this even worse by adding more high-rise tower blocks?

While the Goldsworth Road developers have stated they have designed the development to mirror the Victoria Square layout, this cannot be the case with the tallest block already being 6-9 storeys higher than the tallest Victoria Square building, 19-22 storeys above the highest New Central tower, and 5 towers instead of the Victoria Square's 3. Considering it has been stated these towers are to compliment the surrounding area, there doesn't seem to have been any consideration or consultation from the surrounding properties.

Loss of Amenity

Ever since I moved to Woking in 2015 there has not been a year without considerable building works. As well as the continuing Victoria Square construction the widening of Victoria Arch is due to take place next year to facilitate the growth of Woking and to benefit this planning application. If this development was to go ahead this would take the building disruption and noise in Woking to at least 2029, that is another 9 years and personally that will have meant at least 14 years of living in Woking with constant traffic, noise, building, road and pedestrian disruptions. Is it really acceptable to ask the residents of Woking to accept disruption for at least another 10 years? (With the delays from Covid-19 we may be looking at least 15 more years of disruption.)

To also facilitate this development a considerable area of office space will be demolished. The developers have explained the demographic moving into these flats will be young professionals (I will go into this demographic later in my letter). If this is correct then can I ask, particularly with the current Covid-19 employment crisis we are facing, where will these young professionals be working? As a young professional living in Woking who due to my disability cannot commute to London I know the difficulties of getting a job in Surrey and when you do it is likely you will need a car as the public transport connections within Surrey are not good enough. Alternatively, they work in London which



means the railway and public transport links need to be looked at and upgraded considerably to cope with the increased demand. With friends that live in Woking and commute to London, they already struggle to get on a train every morning, and when they do it is a 25 minute standing journey. Not the most comfortable. If we add the over 1000 people from this development and the additional demand from Victoria Square 400 apartments, Woking Gateway 475 apartments, the new 1,200 properties from the canal suburb development in Sheerwater, and potentially the BHS tower and the Church Street Tower. With all these additional people, are Woking looking to promote businesses to move to the area to provide more jobs as well as improve public transport links to accommodate the increase of people?

Parking is a lacking amenity in Woking already, placing residential restrictions on all the local roads, Woking's parking infrastructure is already being impacted with the current population. The developers have stated they will offer 0.3 of a parking space per flat, this amounts to around 347 parking spaces for 965 flats (potentially over 1800 residents). Why so little? This is my question? I have raised this already with the developers and their response is, the people buying these flats will be young professionals so will be using club cars, or public transport. Living in Woking while there is a young professional population there is a considerably high percentage of young families, and due to housing prices, these young families are buying apartments like the ones that are proposed for Goldsworth Road. This means a two bed flat could be housing a family of four, who need a car to transport the kids to school/ travel to work etc. This demographic is demonstrated in a presentation by Ray Morgan OBE on the Future of Woking Town Centre, presented on the 9th November 2018. In the below table it highlights that in 2016 the highest populations in Woking were between the ages of 35-49 closely followed by the ages 0-9. If this doesn't highlight a large percentage of Woking's population to be young families then please clarify what does?

▪ **Total Population - June 2016 99,695**

Estimated Population																		
Age 0-4	Age 5-9	Age 10-14	Age 15-19	Age 20-24	Age 25-29	Age 30-34	Age 35-39	Age 40-44	Age 45-49	Age 50-54	Age 55-59	Age 60-64	Age 65-69	Age 70-74	Age 75-79	Age 80-84	Age 85-89	Age 90+
7044	7311	5917	5197	3938	5376	6465	7897	8002	7432	7123	6194	5058	4999	3773	2944	2368	1659	998

It is not only parking for the residents that is inadequate. But from personal experience, these developments often do not consider the considerable parking amenities you need for the maintenance and upkeep of the apartments. Living in New Central this is seen on a daily basis. Like the Goldsworth road development, New Central has a pedestrianised area, which means the only area for the maintenance teams, removal men, deliveries, bin collection and many more, is the entrance that leads down to the underground carpark. More often than not these vehicles block the entrance/ exit completely meaning you cannot get in or out. If parking/ areas are not provided for these amenities then this along with the residents parking puts further pressure and demand on the existing parking amenities in Woking, resulting in more congestion. Additionally this development won't only have the vehicles maintaining and servicing the apartments but the vehicles, servicing, delivering to and maintaining the commercial spaces. From the layout I am concerned sufficient parking for these vehicles has not been included.

To create the pedestrianised area at least two disabled parking spaces are being removed, and not relocated. Considering you are looking to build commercial spaces as well as apartments should these spaces not be relocated to make the new retail area accessible for disabled people. One disabled space has already been removed from use (high street) due to the road restructure for the Victoria Square development. Are we aiming to make Woking less accessible with the new developments?

Not only is this development going to put pressure on parking and public transport, the increased population from all these developments will put never ending pressures on the existing surgeries and schools in the area. As a Woking resident it is already difficult to get a GP appointment with the current population. Increasing that with the Victoria Square, Woking Gate, proposed BHS, Church Street and Goldsworth Road towers, will place an unmeasurable pressure on these services. I appreciate Victoria Square will be built with a GP surgery, however for this to service the over 2000 apartments proposed to be built is unrealistic.

This development is proposed with commercial spaces in mind as well as residential. When asking the developers about the commercial spaces on the Q&A session the developers said they had not organised what retailers/ restaurants/ cafés would go into these spaces. When New Central was built it was completed in a similar way with residential built on a layer of commercial spaces, however, these commercial spaces (except the Tesco's and Indian restaurant) are empty or have been repurposed into more residential apartments. Before Covid-19 Woking was struggling with its retail space in the town centre, many shops/ restaurants empty or closing down. However, with the effect of Covid-19 this is only going to be made worse. To name a few Las Iguanas, Café Rouge and Carluccio's have already gone and they will not be the last. I would argue that we should make the amenities that are currently available in Woking centre appealing for businesses and residents before we add anymore. I don't think any of us want another area of Woking with empty commercial spaces.

As explained in the points above this development will only add to the increasing pressure Woking is already seeing on its amenities.

Highway safety

Due to my disability I cannot walk long distances, meaning to get into Woking from my flat I require the use of a mobility scooter. This means to get around I need to have pavements wide enough to for two-way traffic and lower curbs to get on and off the pavement. I am concerned with the widening of the Victoria arch and the need to shut off Goldsworth Road to pedestrianise it that this will impact on the pedestrian routes and put me at risk. During the work on the high street (new bus stop area opposite the new Victoria Square development) there were several times I had to use my scooter on the road as there were not suitable provisions for disabled people.

The volume of traffic in Woking is a never ending issue. Driving through Woking every day for 4 years to get to and from work there always seems to be a different set of traffic lights, a new road closure or a new diversion. Ever since the reduction of Victoria Way from 2 lanes to 1 happened a couple of years ago there is a constant queue both down Chertsey Road (A320) and Chobham road (A3046). For a period the section of the Victoria Way between the CAPgemini building and the railway bridge was closed off and it was diverting everyone from Woking town centre via Lockfield Drive and Parley Drive. Considering I live just the other side of the railway bridge and it should have only taken me 5 mins to get home it took me 45 mins (from the Victoria Way/ Lockfield Drive Junction). Considering it will be this area that needs to be restructured (AGAIN) this will mean the same diversion and likely

even longer delays. The impact that these small road closures can have on the surrounding road infrastructure is huge, as well as the environmental aspect of hundreds of cars sat in traffic running their engines.

Loss of Privacy, overshadowing, light

Alongside Parking this is my biggest objection to this development. The first point I raised to the developers in their initial consultation in ChristChurch Woking was that this development will block out any sunlight I did get into my flat. They insisted that the New Central blocks are North facing so I do not receive any light from that side anyway. Seeing as I live in my flat 365 days of the year I think I know when/ if I get sunlight into my flat. Yes, I do not get much but I do get the late afternoon/ early evening sunlight. If these blocks are to be put up it will completely block/ remove any little sunlight I did have. Being disabled it is difficult for me to get to the local parks/ green areas unless I drive, so opening my flat door to enjoy the summer evening sun gives me a chance to enjoy it from my home. If these towers were to go ahead it would cut this out completely.

My privacy will be affected from the start of this development. The privacy is not only lost once people move into the apartments, but starts as soon as the builders arrive on site. The towers will be going up directly opposite my flat meaning as soon as these towers start construction my bedroom, spare bedroom and living room will all be overlooked, leaving me with no privacy. I have experienced this with the Victoria Square development. While it is not directly opposite I am still overlooked by most of the storeys in at least one of the apartment blocks and most of the Hilton Hotel and have been since the builders began construction. How would you feel double checking everything you were doing in case someone could see you in your flat?

Please see the image (Picture 1) at the conclusion of this letter to see where the back of my flat looks out on and you will see that all I will see is the tower blocks from this development.

Planning history/ related decisions

The developers seem to think the main positive reason for this development is they are rebuilding the 'York Road Project' homeless shelter and the 'Woking Railway Athletics Club'. While they are showing an investment in the community, I do not feel this should be giving the positive press they are looking for on these two instances. Considering to build this development they will need knock down both the homeless shelter and athletics club buildings, surely it should be a given that they would rebuild/ fund new homes for both of these areas. Additionally in all previous consultations I have questioned the developers on affordable housing, in which their only response is they will not be providing any affordable housing. Surely we should be working with projects to resolve the issues of homelessness in Woking rather than making the social class divide worse through expensive apartment blocks. Furthermore, we are currently facing an unprecedented unemployment and economic crisis from Covid-19, shouldn't we be helping support people through these times, helping them to get back into work and society rather than pricing them out of the town centre?

Ecology

My first question is honestly how are five new high rise towers going to help the Ecology of Woking? Wouldn't an inner town park or something similar do much more for the Ecology?

Seeing the very artistically drawn designs of this development it shows very lush areas of greenery. Honestly I don't see how this is a realistic portrayal of the area! Considering this is to have commercialised areas and a pedestrianised area I do not see how green areas will also be able to be adapted into this space, realistically it is not a big enough space! The developers are pitching the

development as green areas for Woking residents to enjoy, however, from the drawings they are small raised areas of grass and a couple of trees. Not sure as a resident how these areas are meant to be enjoyed other than making the area look slightly pretty and to distract everyone from the high-rise towers that surround them.

Living in Woking with all the recent developments I have had experience of being promised nice green areas and these promised areas gradually becoming gravelled areas due to the level of upkeep and the lack of sunlight the plants receive. New Central had very similar designs in their plans for raised beds in the central pedestrian area. Less than 5 years after planting these they are now gravel beds with plants (not very pretty) that can survive without any sunlight and the strong winds through the wind tunnels the towers produce. Looking at the drawings of the Goldsworth Road development, they are looking to have a very similar design with the plants and raised beds in the centre of the development. Considering the towers will block any sunlight, and likely wind tunnels will this be another green area that becomes gravel? Commercial way is another example, in the initial designs it was presented as having medium sized grass areas with a tree in the centre, the reality is some of the trees have a tiny circle of grass at the base of the tree, others have been replaced with metal grates with gravel at the base of the tree (please see Pictures 2 & 3). From these past experiences from previous developments, I cannot see the lovely green artwork, being a realistic example of what the area will look like.

Finally the size of the green areas proposed and likely lack of sunlight will not be able to house and encourage new wildlife. Should we be looking into green areas that residents can enjoy, picnics, playing with the kids at the weekend and encouraging new wildlife not small areas to distract from 40 storey tower blocks.

Flooding

While Goldsworth Road is not on a flood plain, considering they are looking to pave the area and have limited areas to absorb water. Considerable drainage works need to be considered in a development like this. Experience of this is the drainage works are provided to look nice (small thin grates integrated into the pavement). This can cope with small rain showers, however, with the unpredictable English weather these drains cannot cope with 2 – 3 days of heavy downpours. The New Central development has been close to flooding many times due to this specific issue. If you want a pedestrianised and commercial area space it needs to have considerable drainage.

To conclude, I want to start by saying that I am not against regenerating the area of Goldsworth Road. As explained above I just cannot agree that this is the right development for this area. Woking does not have the infrastructure to cope with 2174 additional apartments: Victoria Square (400 apartments) and Woking Gateway (475 apartments) developments, as well as the potential future developments of the BHS tower (est. 160 apartment, 33 storey block), Church Street (174 apartments, 34 storey block) and the Goldsworth Road (965 apartments), as well as the 1,200 properties approved as part of the Canalside, Sheerwater development. This could amount to an est additional 12,000 people. With Woking's public transport, doctors surgeries, schools etc. all being under considerable pressure already, how is Woking supposed to cope with this additional pressures? I would finally like to add that I have been to all the public consultation meeting the developers have had including: consultation at Christ Church, Woking, and both the online Q&A sessions they had during lockdown. Considering these were meetings to consult the community and take on feedback to improve the development, attending both of these sessions there has been no changes based on the feedback given by the public. I ask the planning committee to turn this

planning application down and look to projects that can support all areas of the community and not just provide more expensive apartment blocks.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

Kind Regards

Ms Suzie Forbes



Picture 1 – View from my flat – where the five tower blocks will be constructed.



Picture 2 – original design drawing of Commercial Way



Picture 3 – reality of Commercial Way