

Comments for Planning Application PLAN/2020/0568

Application Summary

Application Number: PLAN/2020/0568

Address: Land To The North And South Of Goldsworth Road Woking Surrey GU21 6JT

Proposal: Demolition of all existing buildings and redevelopment of the site for a phased mixed-use scheme, comprising 965 residential units (Class C3), communal residential and operational spaces, commercial uses (Classes A1/A2/A3/A4/B1/D1/D2) at ground floor and homeless shelter (sui generis) within 5 blocks of varying heights of between 9 and 40 storeys (plus rooftop amenity) to the north and south sides of the site together with soft and hard landscaping including public realm works, highway alterations to Goldsworth Road, car parking, cycle parking, bin storage, ancillary facilities and plant (Environmental Statement submitted).

Case Officer: Brooke Bougnague

Customer Details

Name: Mr David Robbins

Address: Lindisfarne, Heath Road, Horsell Woking, Surrey GU21 4DT

Comment Details

Commenter Type: Resident (local res.- member of public)

Stance: Customer objects to the Planning Application

Comment Reasons:

- High-over density of development
- Impact of development
- Out of Character
- Overlooking

Comment: My objections relate to the towers proposed on the 30/32 Goldsworth Road being buildings T1 T2 and T3 as defined in the application. This site was identified and considered as UA13 in Woking's Site Allocations Development Plan Document currently subject its public examination process. However this document was intended to analyse potential development sites in Woking to see how they could be used to fulfil the Council's planning development aims as expressed in its Core Strategy and its other planning policies. The Officers arrived at various conclusions as follows:

1. "...the site should yield at least 125 dwellings" plus retail and office space. It also said "there is support in principle to grant planning permission for a mixed development which would see permission for 560 dwellings". This application would yield 753 units (T1, T2, and T3; a rise of 34%) which is well in excess of the officers' view of its potential.
2. "Contribution towards Affordable Housing provision in accordance with Policy CS12 in this case 50% to be provided on site". The Developer in this application is offering 48 affordable units rather than 40% 301 units or 50% 376 units. A viability study based on 'robust and credible viability evidence' allegedly provides justification for this low number of units offered by the developer.

Given the suggested profitability in that study, one does wonder why the developer would want to invest in this scheme at all.

3. "Appropriate and adequate provision of car and cycle parking". 263 parking spaces (including those allocated for car clubs and charging points) will be provided for the total of 965 units being proposed overall. I could not see any provision mentioned for visitors, so visitors be they disabled or elderly would have to use the town centre car parks at cost.

4. "The site is located between the proposed Victoria Square Development and the proposed Woking Fire Station (both now built). Any development on the site would need to be designed to provide a transition between the building heights at either end". Given that T1 at 41 storeys is much higher than Victoria Square, this transition proposal has been clearly ignored.

5. "Relocation of existing community floorspace should be sought". Where?

Redevelopment of this site is clearly needed and desirable but along with a number of recent town centre applications this plan goes too high and its density and its mass are excessive. The application refers to the fact that consents were recommended by the planning department in the BHS site and the HG Wells site (2019 /1141 and 2020 /0611) but were turned down for sound reasons at Committee. This application makes no concessions to the objections raised by the Boroughs' Councillors in those cases. It will be noted that the Applicant in this case had a number of pre-application meetings with Woking Borough so there is perhaps an indication that it was encouraged to ignore the Councillors' objections to those other developments....height, mass and lack of affordable housing. Although not a planning matter, it appears from the various applications for towers that are out of proportion to our town's size, needs and status that WBC is seeking to largely exceed the number of residential units planned in the Core Strategy and ignore the required mix of dwellings envisaged by the Core Strategy. I have seen no study of the impact upon the town and its infrastructure if all the towers in the pipeline were to be built. No master plan was drafted so that the residents could understand what was the cumulative effect of all these developments.

Whilst there is some reference to high buildings in the Core Strategy, I believe that most residents did not expect that within a few years there would be plans for a dozen behemoths of around 40 stories. The town accepts that Victoria Square is a focus in the town centre and that heights generally would rise, but nowhere in the Core Strategy does the image of a town centre dwarfing its surroundings become clear.....this concept has developed out of the blue over the intervening years and I seriously wonder if the Councillors' understood the breadth or extent of this rising scale. Did they realise that Woking's buildings might need navigation lights because of potential danger to aircraft? Victoria Square was meant to be the flagship development and thereby bigger than other developments in the town whereas subsequently applications have mainly gone higher.

I, like many people, expected more high blocks to be developed in the town but I did not anticipate those heights going beyond 10 to 15 storeys. At that height the atmosphere ambience, and character at street level can be enhanced. As heights increase beyond those limits, their nature becomes looming and uncomfortable. Imagine for a moment the area between T2 and the building

across the road. Has there been a proper light survey to see how much the reduction in visible sky will reduce the light...certainly the sun penetration of that area will be modest at best. I cannot understand the wind effect reports but it seems unlikely that Goldsworth Road will not be a wind tunnel.

So let's reset our aims and put limits on building heights for good planning reasons which are defensible. Let us see Woking forgetting its position as a major land owner and developer through its wholly owned subsidiaries and re-consider the town as we, the residents, want it to be..yes, economically successful ...yes, vibrant ...yes, green...yes, sustainable ...but also somewhere its residents want to visit, can visit easily by car and bike and scooter, want to sit outside and drink coffee and eat, and use fully again after these recent difficult months. Finally surely Covid 19 will dampen any desire to live in a very dense development!