

Wandsworth Society

Wandsworth Local Plan
Supplementary Planning Document
Draft Historic Environment SPD

2 February 2016

This draft of the SPD provides a useful overview of national, regional and local planning policies and contains much interesting information on the history of the development of the borough. However, we do not consider that the document succeeds in its intention '[to set] out further guidance on the Council's policies in respect of managing the historic environment' or to provide 'detailed guidance ... when making proposals that involve works to heritage assets ...'¹

Where detail is provided to guide those considering 'making proposals that involve works to heritage assets' it is limited to works to listed buildings (8.1 - 8.14), and later (8.24 - 26) the construction of basements. Reference to the Council's own further guidance in other SPDs would be useful on these and other matters, such as parking in front gardens. It would also be helpful to identify, and if possible, provide links to the advice to owners of listed buildings provided by The Georgian Group, The Victorian Society The Twentieth Century Society and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings.

It is helpful to have national, regional and local planning policies summarised in section 3, but there is not much more there than a list of duties, requirements and policies. To a degree this is understandable, the duty to care for and safeguard the historic environment is seemingly clearly set out in the National Planning Policy Framework, the London Plan and Wandsworth's Local Plan. Nonetheless it is good to be reminded that the NPPF requires local authorities to take into account 'the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets' (3.5), that the London Plan 'contains policies to protect and enhance the contribution of listed buildings, historic landscapes, archaeology and World Heritage sites' (3.11), and that in the Core Strategy the Local Plan 'sets out a spatial vision for the borough protecting and improving the built and natural environments.' (3.20), and in Policy DMS 2 that 'Applications will be granted where they sustain, conserve and, where appropriate, enhance the significance, appearance, character and setting of the heritage asset itself, and the surrounding historic environment'. (3.25)

From which it would appear that the Council's view, in accordance with national and regional guidance and policy, is that the value of the historic environment could not be overstated; that the care and safeguarding of heritage assets were primary concerns in the framing of its planning policies.

¹ http://www.wandsworth.gov.uk/info/1004/planning_policy/1225/supplementary_planning_documents_spds/3

It is then all the more difficult to understand the decisions to give planning approval to the developments at Garratt Place, 102-104 Wandsworth High Street, the Ram Brewery, Battersea Power Station and Nine Elms, where the destruction of the historic environment rather than its protection and enhancement will result from these decisions.

Where these developments are referred to they are cited as good examples of the reuse of redundant historic buildings, where the 'heritage assets' have led to regeneration, and provide keys to 'reinterpret' the past. There is no mention of the proposed 26-storey tower of Garratt Place which will blight the Old Burial Ground and adjacent listed buildings, the 38-storey tower of the Ram Brewery, which, less than 50m from the end of Church Row, will dominate this early C18 century terrace, the development enfolding the power station and the devastation of the views of the Westminster world heritage site caused by existing and approved development at Nine Elms.

The repeated assertions that heritage assets, and crucially their settings, are precious and that their care and safeguarding are important are meaningless if the weight given to two policies in the Local Plan is taken to trump all other policies relating to the historic environment. These policies are Policy DMS 4 - Tall buildings, which features only as a mention in the list of relevant planning policies, and DMS 2 - Managing the Historic Environment item c which outlines the balance of benefit and harm argument. There is a clear need for further guidance on the interpretation, and what we consider to be misuse, of these policies that has resulted in the approval of the applications noted above.

Strangely in item 4.7 in a resume of the character of the borough there is a general description of the borough's town centres, noting that 'The landscape was pepper-potted with isolated taller buildings in the 1950s and 60s as part of the post Second World War reconstruction.' Albeit only a slightly pejorative comment on the 10 or so storey buildings of that era; but what will the Historic Environment SPDs of the future have to say about the 20, 30, 40 and 50-storey buildings now being allowed to pepper the landscape?