

Wandsworth Society

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Councillor Mrs Sarah McDermott
Chairman, Planning Applications Committee
Wandsworth Council
Planning Service
Town Hall
Wandsworth High Street London SW18 2PU

sent by e-mail planning@wandsworth.gov.uk

19 May 2015

Dear Mrs McDermott

2013 0507 Display of illuminated hoarding : East Hill

We objected strongly to this proposal in our letter of 10 March, principally because of its massive size and inappropriate siting. We have now read the officers' report of 12 May and are writing to you as a matter of urgency because we profoundly disagree with its conclusions and the precedent that would be set if its recommendation to approve was followed..

The case file suggests that there have been rather more than the total of 47 objections noted in the committee report - although some may be 'repeats' of the same objections (a problem that we wrote to you about in the context of another application on 3 May). The two 'general comments' recorded in the officers' report, even if submitted as such, are also clearly objections. Overall, these letters expressed concern and dismay at the proposal in very strong terms. None of them was in any way supportive.

Our principal grounds of objection remain:-

- the size and overwhelming nature of the structure
- its location in a residential area adjacent to two conservation areas.

Local residents also have two other areas of concern, which we support:-

- Road safety - we are told there have been 16 accidents in the last 10 years at the East Hill/ Woodwell St junction. There is a pedestrian crossing and a slip road entry approaching the site and a busy bus stop and a major road intersection just beyond it.
- The Gwynneth Morgan Centre - the sign will loom over the well-designed centre with its attractive roof line, damaging its appearance and blocking light from the main room at the west end

We have noted that the planning application sought only a 5 year consent (1.7.15 to 1.7.20), but there is no reference to this in the officers' report

Size and structure

The proposed structure stands 11.5 metres high (almost 38 feet) and 6.4 metres wide (21 feet). The height is well above that of a 3-storey house and 2 1/2 times the height of a London bus. In the context of the low-rise buildings surrounding it, the sign is massive, obtrusive and overwhelming

The Council's agents, Wildstone, have produced photographs of the structure which are highly misleading . They do not show what the eye will see. If, as we urge, members inspect the site, they will see the enormous impact the structure will have, higher than the existing lamp standards and as high as the 5 mature trees fronting the day centre. This would be unfortunate in a structure that was necessary. This sign

is neither wanted nor necessary and is thus causing damage to the environment for nothing other than financial gain.

In 2013, a mast was proposed directly across East Hill from the day centre (2013/4333). The officer's report found the proposed mast (15m high, but slender) "completely out of keeping with the surrounding area, due to ... the difference in scale when compared to the surrounding buildings". The report also said it would be "extremely unneighbourly" to the flats in Spanish Road. Why have the officers now come to such a different conclusion for a much worse eyesore?

Location - effect on the area

Any consideration of the effect on the nearby residential properties must take into account the necessity for the sign to do its job of selling its message. The signs recently installed on the Trinity Road bridges emphasise this. Aside from the issue that they have not been built in accordance with the planning consent and are ugly and intrusive, the sign on the East Hill bridge is glaring, and made all the more obvious by changing every few seconds. Similarly, except in sunny daylight, the Huguenot Bridge sign commands the view from the common and all the way north from the County Arms.

This site adjoins two conservation areas and is highly visible from parts of both. The sign will be seen from Birdhurst Road (beneath the trees and from the adjoining grass and formal garden) and from Wandsworth Common West Side (surprisingly, as far south as Cicada Road). Other houses and flats within the conservation areas whose normal street scene will be compromised include the houses between 56 East Hill and the corner of Alma Road, and the proposed flats in Book House

Outside the conservation areas, the sign will be in full view of the recently approved flats at 39-41 East Hill and flats at the north end of Phoenix Way.

Finally, as a number of residents have pointed out, the back of the sign will be an alien presence and loom over the south-western part of the East Hill estate.

The planning officer's report acknowledges the adverse impact of the rear of the proposed structure and is concerned to ensure that attempts to mitigate the harm by planting are correctly implemented. Yet incredibly it does not find that the front of the structure has an adverse effect with its sole purpose to draw attention to itself with brightly lit images changing every 15 seconds.

Precedent

We believe the Council, as the applicants for this scheme, are wrong in considering this application for an advertising hoarding is in any way acceptable. The Valuers Department may consider that they are acting in the best interest of the community in promoting this scheme. We do not. We think it regrettable that this proposal was allowed to progress this far.

No justification for the sign has been put forward in the officers' report, only a defence of its siting and effect. The public's view is that it is unwanted and unacceptable

Modern planning decisions often need to examine the balance between the benefit and harm created by major proposals. Here, this balance cannot be struck - the harm is perfectly obvious but the physical benefits are none. Apart from the Council, and the commercial interests involved, no one believes there is any benefit to the neighbourhood or the borough - except financially.

If the Planning Applications Committee grants planning permission for this application there is a danger that they will be considered to be doing so simply for the financial return. It suggests any applicant in future could put forward a scheme offering a financial return, but having no planning merit, in the expectation that the return would justify planning permission - this is, after all, what the Council are doing now. This precedent is obviously unacceptable, bad planning practice and might even be 'ultra vires'

Our conclusions

1. We believe the proposal is in direct conflict with Policies DMS 1 (a), (b) or (c) or DMS 8 in approved and emerging documents
 - physical integration with its surroundings (DMS 1 (a))
 - scale, massing and appearance (DMS 1 (b))
 - harm to the amenity of neighbours (DMS 1 (c))
 - light pollution (DMS 1 (l))
 - harm to visual amenity (DMS 8)
2. We consider the proposed sign to be unpopular, unwanted, wrongly located, ugly and obtrusive
3. We think a dangerous precedent would be set if permission were granted,

We trust that Fairfield Ward councillors will take the lead in opposing the sign in view of the many strong objections from residents of the ward. We would urge councillors to visit the site to gain a real impression of the likely impact of such a huge sign.

We trust that the Planning Applications Committee will come to the conclusion that this application is completely unacceptable on planning grounds. The proposed development clearly causes great harm to the 'visual amenity of the surrounding area and streetscape', and in planning terms clearly provides no benefit.

Yours sincerely

Tony Taylor
for

The Wandsworth Society's planning sub-committee

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Planning Applications Committee
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