



# OWGRA

Osterley & Wyke Green Residents' Association

13 March 2020

Mr Duncan Matthews,  
Land and Development Director  
Berkeley St Edward  
Chelsea Bridge Wharf  
380 Queenstown Road  
London  
SW11 8PE

Dear Duncan & Colleagues

## **RESPONSE TO ST EDWARD 2<sup>nd</sup> PUBLIC EXHIBITION, TESCO & HOMEBASE, SYON LANE, Feb 2020**

Following the presentation to the Community Liaison Group (CLG) on 25 Feb and 2<sup>nd</sup> public exhibitions on 27 & 29 Feb, we would like to convey the reactions of the OWGRA Residents' Action Group and what we have been hearing from local residents.

Essentially, there was disappointment and some anger at the presentations which showed a lack of attempt to address OWGRA's wish list (letter sent to you dated 7 Feb 2020) and residents' known concerns coupled with a lack of information and clarity on the boards.

Here is a summary of our major concerns:

- Building heights, massing and density at both sites, 17 storeys anywhere within either site is far too tall; maximum should be no more than 4 or 5 storeys.
- The mix of style and design of buildings seems to have no cohesion or pattern and some of them are plain ugly.
- Residential accommodation quantum is way above that shown in Hounslow's Local Plan and there is no indication of the types of flats proposed.
- The lack of attempt to place the buildings within the context of the character of Osterley, Syon and Brentford.
- Proximity to local heritage ignored apart from token view from Syon Lane south.
- Lack of amenities and strain on local infrastructure.
- Some attempt has been made to design landscaping but within close proximity of tall buildings would be lost to general view or access; 300 trees can be planted on a tennis court! Also, the suggested 'privacy' offered by the mature trees in the visuals would not be like that for a long time eg the trees in the pictures on the Homebase site opposite Northumberland Gardens would not shield from the shop fronts for many years.
- Traffic impacts not yet assessed.
- Environmental impacts not yet assessed.

- The notes of the 25 Feb CLG meeting are misleading and do not reflect the negative reactions to the plans that were presented.

### **Results of the autumn 2019 survey and St Edward summary of CLG meeting of 25 February 2020**

We are curious as to where the 1110 responses came from to the first exhibition and consultation. Who were these people? Had they attended the exhibition? Which postcodes do they live/work in? We were told they all came from TW7 but find that difficult to believe.

The main concerns which came out of that survey do not appear to have been addressed:

- traffic impact
- height, massing and scale effect on existing local community
- environmental impact
- infrastructure
- schools

From the 25 February 2020 CLG meeting, 'Nature meets the City' is not how we see the development as currently proposed; it is more high-rise imposed on suburbia and totally unacceptable.

- The developments on Syon Lane do not respect existing neighbours, rather it seems to us to be an attempt to destroy what is a relatively quiet low-rise suburban residential area by the cumulative impact of some 15 high-rise buildings. Hounslow's Local Plan Policy CC5 states that the borough has a number of tall buildings that do not positively contribute to townscape and their existence should not be grounds for more.
- The 'through route' for pupils at the new Bolder Academy could be a recipe for disaster within tall buildings so close together with as yet unknown levels of security (promised to be 'long term') for future residents and businesses.
- The small 'parks' scattered around the site would be cold, dark and inhospitable most of the time given the height of the buildings.
- Photomontage can show anything at all and even make tower blocks disappear into the distance, where the reality is that they dominate everything around them.

Many of the CLG were appalled at the proposals but were assured they were not set in stone; we need to see great improvements very soon, starting with much reduced height and massing.

### **Homebase site in more detail**

- There doesn't seem to be any significant change between the plans shown at the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> exhibitions, apart from the addition of a green wall on one of the buildings on Syon Lane. The height and massing look very similar, although we note a small reduction in the number of flats from 500 to 470. There is an apparent 'turnaround' of the curved section of the building fronting A4 and Syon Lane to allow for limited 'views' of the listed Gillette Building especially from Syon Lane South.
- The height and massing are unacceptable in a suburban area and out of character with the mostly 2 storey houses and maisonettes in the vicinity. Tall buildings would propel an intrusive cluster towards them.
- No information about what types of flats (studio, 1, 2, 3 bedroom, etc), floor space, price levels, density per hectare, etc.
- The location of some of the flats adjacent to the A4 and Gillette Corner is not appropriate where pollution levels exceed legal limits.
- The design and style of the buildings are out of place in a suburban setting away from a town centre and with a low PTAL; they would be more suited to a town centre eg City of London or Canary Wharf, but not in this part of Osterley/Isleworth/Brentford (TW7).

### **Tesco site in more detail**

- The tiny visual on exhibition board no. 11 gives a very fuzzy view of what the development on this site might look like. It is interesting that at the CLG meeting you included the numbers of storeys on top of these buildings, but these had disappeared from the exhibition boards.
- The visuals on pages 11, 12 and 13 give no idea of what the development might look like from afar and how it might affect sightlines of the Grade II listed Gillette building.
- 1600 homes on this site is an overdevelopment; the Local Plan Site Allocation 2 proposes 350 as a minimum, but exceeding that by a factor of over 4.5 in what is a suburban area seems to be plainly excessive.
- Only 40 of the 1600 homes would be houses (2.5%).
- No information about how many flats, how many rooms, floor space, density per hectare, etc.

If it helps, I have recently taken numerous photographs from various angles in the surrounding area to be able to superimpose the proposed new developments on them to show how they might look from near and far. These photos were taken from Osterley Station, Osterley Park, along Syon Lane from the junction with Jersey Road to Busch Corner, along the Great West Road from Osterley Station to the junction with Boston Manor Road, Nishkam School, Oaklands Ave, Syon Park Gardens, the Northumberland Estate, the Trees Estate. I am happy to share these photos with you, so that you can superimpose the tower blocks proposed. We believe that the development cannot be fully and fairly judged without seeing such views. We continue to stress the incompatibility between the number of homes proposed by yourselves and the minimum numbers in the Local Plan (Tesco site: 1600 vs 350, Homebase site 470 vs 340)

### **Transport and traffic**

- We note you claim to have made improvements to cycling and pedestrian routes but there is nothing about improving traffic flow at Gillette Corner, which is very worrying. We are very concerned at the information on page 19 which suggests that the Southall Rail Link and West London Orbital Line would be completed by 2025, whereas we know that this is highly unlikely. With a PTAL of 2, there should be no major developments in this area until these rail links are implemented.
- Car ownership and vehicular traffic are not forecast to reduce to any great extent over the foreseeable future, despite hopes, so traffic at Gillette Corner will continue to operate above capacity and increase further. The right hand turn for vehicles from Syon Lane South onto the A4 East at Gillette Corner and the corresponding right hand turn from Syon Lane North onto the A4 West are dangerous, and this problem needs to be addressed urgently. There should be no redevelopment of Gillette Corner without reconfiguration of A4/Syon Lane Junction.
- Traffic gridlock is already occurring during long periods within the rush hours, without any further development. The narrowness of Syon Lane cannot be addressed due to the railway bridge, and this route is favoured by ambulances (shortest route to West Middlesex Hospital A&E, with no speed bumps).

### **Parking**

Many residents are expressing concern at the reduced level of parking proposed for the new store. We know that Nishkam School traffic uses the current Tesco car park on weekday mornings and afternoons, but at weekends the Tesco car park is also very full and we are concerned that the parking provision for Tesco customers arriving by car at the new site will be insufficient and cause problems along Syon Lane and Gillette Corner, This is a particular problem on Rugby Saturdays when the Tesco Extra store in Twickenham is closed (to provide parking for rugby matches at Twickenham) and many of its customers travel by car to the Tesco Osterley store (also there is considerable extra rugby traffic on those days in the area causing additional congestion on Syon Lane and Gillette Corner).

## **Environmental impact**

- Hounslow has declared a Climate Emergency. Gillette Corner already exceeds legal pollution levels, and no mention has been made of how these will be affected by the proposed developments. There cannot be residential units overlooking the highly polluted A4 and Gillette Corner.
- All new developments in Hounslow must be carbon neutral, so we would request sight of the carbon calculations for these developments, both for the construction phase and for the buildings when occupied, as soon as possible.
- Noise and reflection of noise off hard surfaces is another important factor in relation to positioning developments beside major roads and under flight paths.

## **OWGRA wish list, 7 Feb 2020**

We sent you a 5-page letter on 7 Feb 2020 with a list of our wishes for these two sites, basically for the development to respect the character of the area and not be excessive in height, massing and density. The 14 topics covered in that letter are stated below.

- context
- height of buildings
- identity and built form
- style and size of homes
- movement
- nature
- public spaces and uses
- amenity space
- functionality and sustainability of buildings
- resources and infrastructure
- lifespan
- traffic and transport
- environment and pollution
- fire and safety

We do not see anything in the new proposals that we saw at the end of February that has meaningfully addressed any of our concerns. This is extremely disappointing and not what we had hoped for given Berkeley Homes' reputation for working with local residents.

## **"Regenerating Cities"**

It has been enlightening to read the chapter that Tony Pidgley, Founder and Chairman of Berkeley Group, has written for 'Regenerating Cities' published in 2019. Below are some very pertinent extracts:

*"Building a partnership like this is never simple and it's always different from one place to the next. It has to start with a good long look at the local community and lots of conversations. You have to go out of your way to find and listen to people. Then you have to take a blank sheet of paper and start to shape a shared vision that gets to the heart of it and delivers the changes people care about.*

*But not everyone works like this. Some sites just use fixed ideas and standard designs to save some money. There will be consultations of course, but the process is mostly just for show. In the end, places built like this lack the warmth and welcome of a real community.*

*These ideas didn't come from an architect's studio. They took shape gradually, through hundreds of conversations with hundreds of different people. They came from the ground up and that's why local people love them.*

*It was such a success that we established a Residents' Design Committee. This gives advice on everything from masterplan principles to where you plug in your kettle and make a cuppa. We provided architectural training and funded a design adviser to help people learn about the industry and make informed choices.*

*At the end of the day, we just treated people with respect. There's still more to do but people are on side and the community is getting stronger. But we never take that for granted.*

*When you look at places which have really transformed and grown over the last 30 years or so, it often starts with new infrastructure. It's not always the most glamorous or profitable part of the process, but laying these critical foundations is essential. In London the success of Canary Wharf, King's Cross, Stratford, Woolwich and Nine Elms are all driven by major investment in transport, and the other amenities and spaces that make these places work.*

*Over the years, Berkeley has contributed to many strategic infrastructure projects including new Tube links, bypasses, bridges and even piers. In every case I ask myself two simple questions. Will this make life better for the local community, and will it enable new growth and homes?*

*I worry that infrastructure is still not the top investment priority it should be. We have certainly moved in the right direction in recent years, but the housing crisis demands a bolder approach and I'd like to see more spending power passed down to devolved authorities and local councils. That's where you find the passion, vision and local knowledge you need to make things happen.*

*If you are going to transform an area and build a community, a long-term approach is essential. All my experience tells me that great places come when developers, councils and communities embrace partnership, think long-term and work hard to trust each other. If we get this right, we can always create real communities that stand the test of time."*

We want to work with you and we agree with what Tony Pidgley says. At present we can see no evidence that you want to work with us in a constructive way. This is not just our view in Osterley, it is shared by all the other local residents' associations involved in the CLG.

### **"Beauty in Architecture"**

The proposed design of the corner building proposed for the current Homebase site is a confusing and jarringly contrasting mass of styles and architectures that do not complement each other or their surroundings. They are out of place in a suburban setting away from a town centre and with a low PTAL, the 17-storey tower and other tower blocks on that site, as well as the tower blocks proposed for the current Tesco site remind us of 1960s/1970s architecture, not the style of architecture that we would aspire to in a pleasant suburban area like Osterley. Hounslow Council has previously expressed a desire for this site to house a landmark building; OWGRA believe that the current proposals do not do that.

The "Living with Beauty" report of the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission, published in January 2020, covers many of the aspects of architecture with which local residents concur. Below are some extracts from this 178-page report that we would fully agree with.

Specifically, the report makes the case that people want and need to live in beautiful surroundings but that developments have tended to force ugliness on them. They feel that the areas in which they have chosen to live are violated by buildings which are out of place and which destroy a sense of place and community.

The report argues that:

*"Beauty should be the topic of an ongoing debate between the public and the planners, with the developers bound by the result."*

We have no sense of any such approach in the case of the Tesco and Homebase developments.

The report adds that:

*"A comprehensive recent study agrees, arguing that about three quarters of new housing developments are mediocre or poor."*

Further on we read:

*"We should recognise that the pursuit of beauty is an attempt to work with our neighbours, not to*

*impose our views on them. What people want is buildings that reflect the history, character and identity of their community and that belong in their surroundings: somewhere, not anywhere."*

It is hard not to view the latest proposals you have shown us as anything other than 'mediocre or poor' and that they are being imposed on us by you.

Later we read:

*"Visual preference research is of the first importance, and design codes should take note of this research."*

We see no sign of any such process.

Ben Page, chief executive of Ipsos MORI concluded in his evidence for the report that:

*"The broad preference is against tower blocks, in favour of the vernacular, in favour of human scale, some vernacular details, it doesn't have to be pastiche, it doesn't have to be cobbles... You get a strong preference for housing and medium rise. Towers always come bottom."*

How clear does this message need to be to make a difference? Is there any possibility at all that our views can make a difference on this issue?

Built developments can change communities for better or worse. In the section on the role of democracy in the process the report says:

*"Finally, people want a voice in deciding what should be built – how the scheme looks, where it is, what quantity of houses it involves, and whether it is an enhancement of or a detraction from the surroundings. We should be offering the public a voice in planning decisions from the very beginning of the planning process, and with a view to adapting the result to the needs and desires of the local community, both existing and incoming."*

Do you share this view? Do you think that such engagement has so far been a part of the consultation process? Unfortunately we don't, hence our disappointment.

The report discusses some specifics of design:

*"... planners and local governments have accepted ways of building that dehumanize the places where they occur. ... ugly templates that are casually reproduced in our cities and industrial estates were not achievable a hundred years ago, when bricks and mortar were the primary structural materials. Sheds, boxes, glass screens and envelopes are easily produced and have replaced the old functional, long-lasting and well-mannered archetypes. The result is there for all to see: buildings that stand without coherent relation to neighbouring structures, that are neither durable nor beautiful and which are therefore destined for dereliction."*

The report recommends developers and planning authorities:

*"...to declare war on ugliness, and to combine to remove the blight of the boxlands – those concrete plazas with scattered shoebox structures that have no frontage on the street and are semi-derelict throughout their life. ... Tower blocks in cleared spaces do not necessarily achieve greater density than the terraced streets that they replace. For example, none of the post-war estates achieved the density of Pimlico or Notting Hill Gate."*

The question of the health impact of poorly conceived developments is discussed in the report:

*"We have examined carefully the negative health and well-being data for high-rise estates, ... there is much evidence for the view that we will not normally achieve the kind of humane densification that we are looking for by 'building upwards' – evidence that has not always been taken into account in recent urban developments, especially in London and Bristol. We need to weave the ground-level fabric more closely, not to stretch it to the skies."*

The report mentions that research is showing a link between mental health and 'ugliness':

*"Visual preferences are not isolated from the rest of human well-being. There is a growing body of*

*research into the impact of contemporary ways of building on physical and psychological health, revealing a striking correlation between ugliness and mental health problems.”*

We support the report’s advocacy of “gentle density” and the importance of “streets patrolled by sunlight”. We also strongly agree with the report that:

*“Prior to any development there should be an infrastructure plan, and highways and other statutory bodies should be brought into the discussion at the earliest stage. Aesthetic standards should be emphasised at the outset so that the cost of meeting them is factored into the price of the land, so preventing the current practice of undercutting rival bids for the land by stinting on beauty and character. And all this should be subject at the earliest stage to the voice of the people”.*

We are also keen to avoid what the report calls “token tree planting” to make up for essentially poor and/or inappropriate design.

The report pointed out that:

*“Currently stakeholder involvement is largely confined to public consultation exercises, usually near the end of the process. Yet, as the Commission itself has acknowledged, a development project’s success ultimately depends on long term support by users and public. This can only be fully achieved by their early (i.e. pre-gateway) and continuous involvement during the process.”*

This was followed by the recommendation that “A stakeholder involvement plan” should be drawn up at project initiation stage and should be monitored at each development stage.

On the question of securing maximum social benefit from a development the report says:

*“User/community involvement becomes especially important since it is their activities and view of the project benefits that in the end drive regeneration project success. They need therefore be central to an assessment of the development. One good outcome indicator of regeneration scheme success is the degree of social interaction created by the development.”*

The report adds that:

*“There is a robust body of academic work that describes how this has been done in practice.”*

We believe that the general principles developed in this report can already be found in the NPPF and should be seen as being in the spirit and the letter of that document. We note particularly the NPPF comments on community involvement in paragraphs 39, 40, 52, 128 and 129.

We do not see any substantive evidence that any of the above statements have been reflected in your proposed design. We would like to see alternative plans at more acceptable heights, as the Building Better report highlights ‘tower blocks ...do not necessarily achieve greater density than... terraced streets...’. We would like to see designs that excite and inspire people, rather than ones which intimidate and demoralise. We want designs for these sites that we can be proud of and that people appreciate.

We would reiterate that we are not opposed to these developments in principle as we know the area can be improved, but we are looking for proposals that respect the character of the area and are not excessive in height, massing and density and that our views are listened to and taken into account.

As part of our commitment to openness and transparency, we will be sharing this letter with OWGRA members, our Ward Councillors, other local Residents’ Associations, the press and we will be posting it on our website.

Yours sincerely

Barbara Stryjak on behalf of  
OWGRA (Osterley & Wyke Green Residents’ Association) Tesco/Homebase Residents’ Action Group