

Dear Planning Inspector,

Re: Prince's ward Councillors letter of objection to the Woodlands Nursing Home site development

I am Councillor Joanne Simpson and I am writing to you on behalf of the three Labour Party ward Councillors for Prince's ward. We are writing to object to the erection of a 29-storey tower at the former Woodlands Nursing Home in the heart of Kennington.

The ward we represent encompasses Vauxhall and Kennington. In Vauxhall, we represent a swathe of the riverfront which is within the Vauxhall & Nine Elms Boundary (VNEB) and Central Activities Zone (CAZ). Over the years we have watched this area transform with the construction of high-rise tower blocks, some we have supported, some less so. Regardless, these tall buildings have been designed with the Vauxhall SPD in mind, which has allowed for cohesive development within high-rise clusters, with the riverfront being able to absorb the height of the structures, thus ensuring they look appropriate for what is a fast-changing area of Vauxhall and Nine Elms.

Kennington, however, is nothing like Vauxhall. It is not near the riverfront. It is not within either the VNEB or the CAZ. It has a distinctively village-like feel with pockets of early 19th-Century two- to three-storey terraces such as St Mary's Gardens and Walcot Square, both of which are regularly used for filming, and picturesque terraces from the early 1990s like Denny Crescent and Cardigan Street. Where more modern and high-rise development exists, this is of high quality design and within clusters, like the three Cotton Gardens Estate towers designed by architect George Finch in the 1960s, and the more recent Ethelred Towers, to whose three towers the Council recently added a fourth, thus retaining the cluster. None of these blocks are above 22 storeys. The remainder of Kennington is a mix of low rise terraces and purpose-built inter-war housing estates averaging no more than six storeys.

What is being proposed in the heart of Kennington village is a stand-alone monstrosity of a tower 29 storeys in height. It has a poor design in itself, and does not relate to any of its surrounding neighbours or the character of the area in either height, scale, mass, design or bulk. Its excessive height and sub-standard design would render it highly visible: the first thing you would notice when standing at Kennington Cross, walking up Kennington Lane or enjoying one of the picturesque squares. It would loom over Kennington, appearing incongruous, unneighbourly, unduly prominent and totally out of keeping with the area.

The appellant makes reference to the recently-constructed tall buildings in Elephant and Castle. However, this is not Elephant and Castle – the application site is in Kennington, which does not comprise of the same built-up character and form of the Elephant. The site is too far away from tall buildings in neighbouring Southwark to be considered a cluster. The development would be an eyesore and its height and design and wholly inappropriate for this area.

As Councillors for the area we would also like to strongly support our residents' objections to the application on the grounds of the unacceptable loss of outlook and light many of our neighbours will experience as a result of this unacceptably designed proposal. We have been contacted by hundreds of residents who are concerned about

this, in particular those living on Brook Drive, Castlebrook Close, Dante Road and Wilmot House and Bolton House on George Mathers Road. Many of these residents will also lose precious sunlight to their cherished outdoor spaces. Being London, private outdoor amenity space is sparse. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown now more than ever how important it is to have good quality housing, and if you are lucky, a little outdoor space. To have this compromised by a development which fails to provide an adequate level of truly affordable (i.e. not the definition in inverted commas foisted upon us by the Government) is an insult. These new homes will not be available for local people and we struggle to see the benefit to the community of this development.

Even those who might be lucky enough to acquire one of these new flats cannot expect to have a good quality home. The units provided within Block A would have poor levels of daylight and any future children would have to contend with an inadequate standard of playspace which the appellant has failed to demonstrate is either safe or usable, never mind of a decent enough quality for children to play in.

We as the three ward councillors really struggle to see what the benefits of this development might be which would outweigh the significant harm caused to the character of the area and nearby heritage assets, the unacceptable impact on neighbouring amenities, the substandard quality of the new homes and outdoor areas and playspace, and the unacceptable lack of genuinely affordable housing.

We would like to end our representation by thanking the many residents who have contacted us with their worries and concerns about this huge tower, during what has been a long drawn out saga where, from what we can gather, the appellant has not collaboratively engaged with the Council to reach a scheme which would comply with Lambeth's Local Plan. Particular thanks goes to the Stop the Blocks group, Cleaver Square and Bowden Residents' Association and Vanbrugh Court Residents' Association, as well as the many individuals who have come to our Councillor surgeries or called or emailed with their anxieties. As Labour Councillors, we strive to represent those whose voice is not always as loud as others. We can genuinely say that Kennington residents are united in their opposition to this huge tower. Thank you for your time taking our representation into consideration.

Best wishes,

Councillors Joanne Simpson, Jon Davies and David Amos
Labour Councillors for Prince's ward