

04 December 2008



Mr Neil Shaw  
Planning Service  
Technical Services Department  
London Borough of Wandsworth  
Town Hall  
Wandsworth High Street  
London SW18 2PU

Dear Mr Shaw,

**Planning application 2008/4552: Danebury Avenue**

I am writing to oppose the Council's planning application for Danebury Avenue. My opposition to the plans is on five grounds:

**1. Design**

There is a lack of consensus over the merits of retaining the existing buildings to replacing them in the interests of "regeneration". When I consulted residents of the area in September, 34% of residents supported demolishing Allbrook House, but 45% opposed demolition, with 20% declining to express a view. Of those respondents who live in the blocks targeted for demolition, 78% (14 people) opposed the demolition of Allbrook House and 22% (4) supported it. There is no mandate for demolition.

There is also clear opposition to increased building heights. In my consultation earlier this Autumn, 85.9% of respondents (238 people) said any new buildings should either be the same height as now or lower. Just 14% supported higher building heights.

I believe that there is a real risk that the significantly increased heights of every single building bar the replacement for Allbrook House, plus the layout of these plans will turn Danebury Avenue into a dark canyon overrun by traffic and little else - certainly not the urban idyll characterised in the artist's impressions of the site. I understand that Savills have undertaken no wind tunnel modelling of this development but given the location of the Alton at the top of a hill, on the edge of large amounts of open space these plans will create a windswept, inhospitable and hostile development.

I note that English Heritage has recommended that this planning application should not be determined because of the lack of clarity on the impact of this plan on the Alton Estate and Roehampton Village conservation areas and the justification for demolishing several run-down but otherwise fit for purpose buildings. I strongly support the recommendation of English Heritage and urge you to accept that this application in design terms is not of sufficient detail or quality to determine.

Continued...



**Stuart King**

Labour's Parliamentary candidate for Putney, Roehampton and Southfields  
Putney Labour Party 35 Felsham Road London SW15 1AY

t 020 8788 8961 | f 070 9289 3658 | e [stuart.king@putneylabour.org.uk](mailto:stuart.king@putneylabour.org.uk)

Furthermore, I would like to develop some of the arguments English Heritage touched upon in respect of the Alton conservation area. As you will be aware, large parts of the Alton Estate have been listed as prime examples of the London County Council's Architects' Department, the designs of which were inspired by le Corbusier.

Although Allbrook House itself is not one of those listed, the five blocks of nearby Highcliffe Drive, which are of identical design, except on a larger scale, have been. In fact, I would argue that, practically, Allbrook House is a more successful example of this architectural design because, while the Highcliffe Drive blocks have been prone to huge amounts of anti-social behaviour, in part because they are perhaps too large, Allbrook House by being smaller and better cared-for avoids many of these problems.

Allbrook House, being the gateway to the estate situated right on Roehampton Lane, is the building most passers-by see. It is a brutalist, dominating landmark. But that is an insufficient ground, in itself, for it to be demolished. The building is not in poor condition - in fact it has recently been redecorated; its residents are not unhappy with it (as responses from this specific area showed); the accommodation is spacious and the views of Roehampton village, Putney Heath and Richmond Park which it affords are spectacular. Can and should it be improved? I believe so.

## **2. Transport and access**

The key issues in respect of transport are twofold: the amount of extra traffic being brought to a traffic grid already beyond maximum capacity at peak hours; and the intention to send shopper traffic, Heavy Goods Vehicles and the cars of the new residents down Danebury Avenue.

In respect of the first, I have read - and reject - the transport assessment carried out to support this application. The assumptions within it that the bulk of usage of the new supermarket will be "local", redirected from ASDA, is deeply flawed given the size of the planned supermarket and the brand loyalty customers of particular stores tend to have. Most Waitrose shoppers will not cease travelling to Putney should a Morrison's open up near to where they live, because they are loyal to Waitrose. Equally, Aldi shoppers would not suddenly start shopping at a Waitrose store because the determinant for them is Aldi's low-cost prices.

In my survey of residents, I asked which retailer they would like to operate the supermarket. No retailer won the support of more than 20% of respondents, which suggests that there will be little transfer shopping from existing retailers to the new one, because of the strength of loyalty to brand. So we can expect whoever eventually runs the new supermarket to attract shoppers from a large catchment area of at least Roehampton and Putney, and probably beyond. This will be added to by commuters who may actually switch to using Roehampton Lane once a supermarket exists there to do their shopping on the way home from work.

Roehampton Lane is already heavily congested and the traffic studies within the transport assessment were conducted before the impact of the 400+ homes in the new Queen Mary's Place development has been felt. There is no capacity for increased car movements on this major road- indeed TfL and the Council have started to look at ways of mitigating the existing impact of traffic here.

The models used in the transport assessment are also flawed in respect of the likely movements of the residential aspect of this development. Given that the principal unit size proposed is one-bed, we can reasonably assume that the new development will in the main be populated by transient professional, young, single and reasonably affluent people who will cherish mobility. Many more than the assessment estimates will in all probability have cars - because the poor public transport accessibility of the Alton will be off-putting to those who do not. The

application proposes a threefold increase in the number of housing units in this area and so we can expect a far higher impact from car movements than the transport assessment predicts.

The second transport concern - and one of the three biggest concerns overall - is the plan to channel the extra traffic down Danebury Avenue as far as Harbridge Avenue. I find this aspect of the plans astonishing given that adding hundreds if not thousands of additional car movements to this densely populated residential area is entirely counter-productive to all the stated "regeneration" objectives the council claims.

For example, how can the idea of creating a focal point for the community around a town square and café be squared with the idea of separating this "island" from the rest of the estate because of the far heavier flow of traffic that will be sent down here? Since when has it been a tenet of town planning to push traffic through residential, densely populated areas? Successful shopping areas thrive when they are free of traffic - it is a key reason why Putney Exchange is a more pleasant shopping environment than Putney High Street.

There are no plans to widen Danebury Avenue: which at its junction with Holybourne Avenue and Roehampton Lane is already congested whenever buses try to enter and exit the Alton. Traffic regularly backs up all the way to Harbridge Avenue and beyond - especially at school home time. In addition to this existing traffic, these plans propose to make all the new units on Danebury Avenue serviced from this road, instead of, as now, from Laverstoke Gardens. To that will be added HGVs servicing a supermarket larger than Sainsbury's in Putney and some new retail units on this side of the road. Plus shopper traffic. Plus three times more residential traffic.

Road traffic accidents in this area are certain to soar and given the high proportion of young families and older people in this area, the risk of children or pensioners being seriously injured is too great. The traffic aspects of the application are non-sensical: this plan cannot work in practice and on this ground alone the planning application should be rejected.

### **3. Housing**

There are three problems in respect of housing: the proposal to triple the number of units in the most densely populated part of the Putney constituency; the insufficiency of affordable homes to rent in the proposed development and the imbalance between one-bed properties and family sized accommodation.

59% of those who replied to my survey stated that they opposed additional homes being built on the Alton. The council has, in my view, failed to justify a threefold expansion of homes in this densely populated estate.

The Council claims that it has provided the maximum number of affordable units it can whilst still making the scheme financially viable. That is only the case because the Council is seeking to make several million pounds of profit from the redevelopment - an aim that I suspect is the driving force behind this application but one that should not even be on the agenda, let alone at the top of it. On a break-even model the Council could reduce the density of the proposed housing AND increase the proportion of affordable housing.

Furthermore, the council pledged from the outset that there would be affordable rented homes on the new development for anyone who wanted them. Yet these plans do not provide a like-for-like amount of affordable rented homes; there are in fact just 52 such homes planned in the new scheme. Given that almost 100 homes exist at present in the area the application covers, it is clearly not possible for every one of the residents to be able to return to the area.

Again, the council's choice of housing types and tenure cannot be squared with its professed aim of regenerating Roehampton. Any regeneration must benefit residents. Yet by halving the number of affordable homes and building just six family sized units (none of which will be

affordable units) which the Alton is now desperately short of due to the huge sell-off of council housing in the area these plans clearly aren't designed to benefit local people at all.

I asked residents whether they would be interested in buying one of the new homes proposed: two thirds said no, just 18% said they might be. And that low figure is before anyone knows the price of the marketed homes.

The preponderance of one-bed properties in this application indicates, as I mentioned earlier, that the target market for these units will be single people and the buy to let market. Both of these represent transient groups who will have little connection with or interest in the community on the estate for any length of time. The Alton already has far too many buy-to-let properties and the damage these have caused to community cohesion on the estate is clear for all to see. I strongly oppose worsening this problem, and adding to the oversupply of buy-to-let properties when the clear demand locally is for affordable homes to rent to replace some of the 16,000 such homes the council has sold off since 1981.

I have one further criticism of these plans and that is in respect of the proposal to build homes right along Roehampton Lane. These homes will be directly on top of the road, resulting in a poor quality - indeed a deeply unhealthy - environment for anyone unfortunate enough to live in them (is this where the council plans on locating the rented affordable homes by any chance?). While it is true that there are homes on the other side of Roehampton Lane, these are set back from the road with high walls and long front gardens full of foliage cushioning their residents from the pollution and noise of Roehampton Lane. The housing proposed on this site has no such benefit. Nowhere else on the Alton do homes front Roehampton Lane like this and the estate was deliberately designed that way. At present, the estate is shielded from Roehampton Lane by trees and foliage that will be lost in these plans.

From a design standpoint; from an affordability standpoint; from a standpoint of meeting local need; and from a standpoint of providing a correct mix of property sizes, this application fails.

#### **4. Community facilities and open space**

The residents of Roehampton have time and time again told the council that their biggest objection to any redevelopment plans is the loss of the green space at the top of Danebury Avenue by the library. This space is so important because it provides a buffer shielding the estate from the traffic of Roehampton Lane and providing greenery in a part of the estate where open space is not in abundance.

I talked in the previous section about the importance of this buffer zone. Furthermore, the council has been entirely disingenuous in claiming that there is a like-for-like replacement of open space in their plans: they have included private open space accessible only by residents of the new build in this calculation where at present all the open space is publicly accessible.

An overwhelming 91% of respondents to my survey - 253 people - said they wished the green space to be left alone. Of that 91%, 28% supported the idea of providing a small town square on the dead space alongside the current library where the public toilet and stepped area is.

But it has not just been through my consultation that residents have demanded the council keep its hands off this green space: they did so in the original council consultation and they did so at the public meeting organised by the Putney Society last year. That the council has chosen to ignore this resounding expression of local opinion is outrageous; rejecting this application is the last chance the local authority has to show that it is interested in regenerating Roehampton to the benefit, not the detriment of local people.

The Council must also look again at the provision of facilities for the community. The proposed merger of three youth clubs into one into a tiny space where the Right Plaice chip shop now is flies in the face of all evidence that we should be expanding facilities for young people and

adolescents. That this youth centre will also be expected to share facilities with a residents' hall is absurd. And while Roehampton needs a proper site to house the Safer Neighbourhood Police team, sticking them in a tiny, narrow building right next to where the HGVs and customer cars for the proposed supermarket will enter and exit is undesirable.

Again, we must ask why, if something isn't broke, the council insists on fixing it. Roehampton Library is popular, cherished and well-used. 74% of respondents to my survey expressed themselves as extremely or quite satisfied with the library as it is. 69% said they had used it within the last six months. 74% said that rebuilding the library on the green space was not a high priority for them. When a library is meeting local need as Roehampton Library clearly is, it is a grotesque waste of money to demolish it for the sake of it. There are no planning grounds for the proposed demolition and there are several as to why it should not be rebuilt on the proposed greenfield site the council seeks permission for.

I attach a copy of my survey of residents of Roehampton which elicited over 300 responses - far in excess of the 60-odd the council itself managed in its 'consultation' conducted in July. The residents oppose this planning application.

Those of us who spend a great deal of our time in Roehampton oppose this planning application. English Heritage have recommended that this application is unfit for determination. The application clearly fails to address local needs and will not, therefore, achieve its stated aim of regenerating Roehampton. It will gridlock Roehampton and turn the heart of a residential area into a major road used by non-residents. This application is financially and environmentally wasteful, poorly thought-through, destroys the original, carefully and thoughtfully planned layout of the Alton, and commands little support. This application should be rejected or, at the very least, sent back for substantial revision and genuine consultation with the area.

Yours sincerely,



**Stuart King**