



28 February 2009

Ms Helen Keegan
Planning Officer
London Borough of Wandsworth
Town Hall
Wandsworth High Street
London SW18 2PU

Dear Ms Keegan.

Tileman House (2008/5428)

I am writing to oppose the planning application for Tileman House. I do so on four principal grounds:

- Height and footprint
- Precedence
- Amount of housing (including insufficient affordable housing)
- Insufficient office space

Before I set out the detail of my objection I would like to set out briefly why I believe the council should produce a far stronger plan for Putney than exists at the moment.

Upper Richmond Road plays host to some distinctly average architecture, overbearing buildings and poor quality environments. Yet this part of Upper Richmond Road is a crucial component of Putney's economy, providing a large part of the area's office accommodation which in turn should generate business for shops, cafes, restaurant, and ideally enable local people to find local jobs.

It is currently failing in that purpose, in part because developers are exploiting gaps in council planning regulations by deliberately leaving purpose-built office accommodation empty until it can qualify for change of use - moving from the less profitable employment use to the more lucrative housing use.

The problem is broader and more significant than that. We are witnessing piecemeal attempts to transform Upper Richmond Road into an environment quite alien to the Putney of today. To achieve the successful, vibrant town centre we all wish to see, there is a need for a cohesive plan that looks at the entire stretch of Upper Richmond Road on both sides, essentially from Charlwood Road to at least Woodlands Way and arguably West Hill.

Only then will we be able to develop a plan - admittedly one that will take years to complete - that controls building heights, enables bold but appropriate architecture and design, meets local housing need (which includes the provision of affordable housing to rent), provides more retail opportunities, protects office space and builds in the additional services and infrastructure Putney clearly needs.



Stuart King

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No one seems to deny that this particular building is in dire need of improvement. But because we lack an overall plan for the area, inappropriate plans that propose a clear overdevelopment are encouraged. As a consequence, the local community must fight tooth and nail to resist these out-of-control overdevelopment applications which, far from enhancing Putney, will blight it for generations to come.

Height and footprint

At its highest, the proposed Tileman House is almost twice the height of the adjoining 125 Upper Richmond Road, which itself is a substantially tall building. Indeed, 15 storeys is just below the level at which substantially deeper foundations are required to sustain "skyscraper" heights. It is not, solely, height that creates overwhelming buildings but the amount of ground space they occupy - the building's footprint.

Even though the buildings along this part of Upper Richmond Road are large and bulky, there remains a green, open space buffer between them and the mansion blocks in St John's Avenue to the south. The Tileman House plans not only increase height but they move the building very much closer to the southern boundary of the site.

Precedence

I discussed precedence in my submission against Putney Place. The same key point applies to this application. Although every planning application must be determined on its own strengths and weaknesses, precedence is a concept with consequence in planning law. In large scale planning applications, the height, change of use and impact of one planning consent is used to justify similar or greater height, usage and impact.

There is a broad consensus among those residents who have completed my survey on Tileman House - the largest single source of responses on this issue by far - that the existing height of buildings in Upper Richmond Road is high enough. I would argue that the street scene in Upper Richmond Road would be substantially enhanced if the proposal was reduced in size, an approach which would also produce a more marketable, higher quality, more successful development.

Housing

Nineteen flats exist in the current Tileman House. This is proposed to increase to 100: a five fold increase. In a town centre, I believe that housing plays a secondary purpose to economic wellbeing, so I question the central purpose of this application: namely to turn an office block into a residential apartment block.

Nonetheless, I accept that an element of housing will increase the viability of any plan to replace the existing Tileman House. It is, however, the amount of housing that drives the height and bulk of this building: reducing the number of units so reduces the scale and improves the quality of life for both its occupants and those surrounding it.

I continue to criticise the council for the lack of affordable housing obligations it places on developers on sites such across the borough. At least half of a very much lower number of units in this scheme should be affordable homes - to rent from a social landlord. Our borough has lost over half the 32,000 affordable rented council homes it had in 1981 due to Council policies - policies that have served to increase homelessness, push ever more families into overcrowding and force many others to move miles from the community in which they grew up.

There is one principal way to redress this: and that is to significantly increase the number of affordable homes being built. At a time when demand for private sector housing has evaporated; with hundreds of new-build apartments left empty and developers resorting to ever

more desperate ploys to dispose of these elephants, it makes no economic sense for the council to be piling up even more; especially given the clear need for affordable housing.

Office space

As I mentioned earlier, the large amount of vacant office space in Putney at present is a result of owners and developers deliberately keeping properties empty once a commercial tenant's lease expires. This is misguided short-termism, which the council should resist. The areas weathering the economic downturn the best are those that have diverse economies. An area does not flourish if it purely comprises homes; just as an area that is just commercial becomes dead in the evening. Successful economies benefit from a mix of commercial, housing, retail and manufacturing sectors; which create a virtuous circle of success - supporting each other, creating more business opportunity and, ultimately, prosperity for residents and businesses alike.

It is a major concern of mine that office space - one of these key components - is being lost at an alarming rate in central Putney. Office workers support local restaurants and cafes; they shop in Putney High Street; they go out after work in the area; and the businesses they work for bring in business rates, job opportunities and investment in our area.

A proper plan for Putney would prevent this loss of office space, provide adequate amounts of housing that our area can sustain, and develop the infrastructure that can support a thriving community. We do not have such a plan so we must make do by defeating applications like this one on a case by case basis.

I therefore urge the council to reject this application.

Yours sincerely,



Stuart King