

The Tonsley Times

SPECIAL EDITION

An emergency newsletter from the Tonsley Residents' Association

tonsleyresidents.org.uk



Goodbye Homebase. Hello tower blocks. The Tonsleys 'Village' is about to be swamped. We need your help.

We have never published an emergency newsletter before. However, the updated development plans for the Homebase site on Swandon Way have just been released and we wanted to let you know what is proposed, our views on it, and enlist your help to ensure that this huge, overpowering scheme does not dwarf our precious neighbourhood.

It is easy to get emotional about the Tonsleys. Whether you've lived here for decades, or recently moved to the area, you'll probably agree that part of its charm comes from it being one of the true 'London Villages' nestled in the middle of housing estates and industrial units, rail lines and waterways, an oasis between two strands of the South Circular.

Tonsley residents are fortunate in that we have the best of both worlds – a small network of picturesque, low rise Victorian terraces, great transport links to the rest of London and of course we are just a few steps away from the river.

It may not be perfect (as 4.30 am flights into Heathrow attest), but it's getting close.

All of us on The Tonsley Residents' Association recognise that change happens, good and bad, and we are not advocating freezing our area in time and automatically complaining or grumbling about any change as a knee jerk reaction.

The last 10 years have seen some terrific improvements and enhancements to both the Tonsleys and the surrounding areas. We accept we cannot, and should not, stand blindly in the way of the evolution of the area. Every now and then, however, a plan is put forward that we think genuinely threatens the quality of life we are lucky enough to enjoy.

The latest proposal for 343 flats in blocks ranging from 10 to 15 stories, will tower over us and destroy much of our 'village' feel. We will be a tiny, low-rise enclave blighted by a slab of massive, modern buildings on our northern edge.

They will do nothing to solve local housing problems, being as unaffordable as they are overbearing. They will contribute further to the crowding at Wandsworth Town station and potentially increase train and plane noise for us all.

And, perhaps worst of all, the developers will make their millions, putting profit above all else, and then move on leaving a legacy that cannot ever be undone. We will have to live with it, our only options being 'suck it up' or move ourselves.

Please take a look through the plans online and make your voice heard. More details inside.

Thank you

What's happening?

For the last couple of years, a proposal has been working its way through design and planning to demolish the Homebase on Swandon Way and replace it with a mixed development of mainly residential flats, with some additional retail and office space.

In the summer, the plans were (just) rejected by the planning committee on the grounds of scale and mass. The developers have now re-submitted the designs having made some fairly minor reductions in the height of the main tower on the eastern edge by the station entrance, from 17 to 15 stories, and by putting a small extra walkway through the rest of the development.

It's still vast; much more densely packed than even Battersea Reach, and hugely more so than The Schoolyard development just over the roundabout.

The TRA are not against this development per se, and the appeal and quality of the designs are completely subjective. However, in our view, it's just too big.

The Homebase site is quite small and the developers want to cram in as much as possible. We believe the council should stick to its principles and reject anything this large in this space.



The new view from McDonald's towards Wandsworth

The true cost of land

Developers will claim that they have to make their buildings a certain density or particular height in order to be profitable or have enough left over to contribute to local infrastructure. A smaller development with more public space or fewer storeys would not 'realise the full value of the land'.

This is, of course, utter nonsense. The value of the land is almost entirely dependent on what you're allowed to do with it. If a small but rich seam of gold was suddenly discovered underneath Homebase and Wandsworth Council allowed unrestricted mining, it would be worth billions. If nuclear waste was discovered instead, it would be worth nothing.

The owners of this site – the National Grid Pension Trust – can, in effect, print their own money simply by getting the council to agree to the largest possible amount of building. The land is theirs already, and whilst they may have made deals with the development company for profit sharing and additional investment, fundamentally the more flats they build, the more cash they make.

The pension fund has a duty to maximise its returns in order to pay out to pensioners, but at what cost? Why should we all have to suffer because of ill-advised decisions taken years ago by long since retired fund managers?

Why are the council always so supportive of big developments?

For every square metre of residential property that's constructed, the council get £250. This is the Community Infrastructure Levy that all developers must pay. For the development as currently proposed that's around £5.5 million. It's not surprising that they may consider riding roughshod over their own guidelines and wave this through.

The developers have also made a commitment to contribute to the cost of re-opening the far end of the tunnel at Wandsworth Town station (WNT). This will of course largely benefit their own residents, not ourselves. It will not make the platforms any more accessible (we need lifts to all platforms more than anything), nor give us any more trains. In any case Network Rail who own the station might even turn the offer down.

Our council must resist the carrots on offer and take a longer term view to help preserve our area.

Facts and fictions.

In the interests of balance and fairness we should point out that there are some aspects of the proposals that are not as problematic as they may appear, or at the least do not really give us grounds to object.

TRAFFIC

There will, of course be disruption and potentially extra traffic at the end of Old York Road (OYR) during construction. TfL have already made comments about this and will be working to ensure it's minimised, especially as by the time it starts they may have re-routed the Wandsworth one-way system.

However, once complete, it is likely that there will be far less traffic at the OYR junction compared to all the people coming and going to Homebase. Perhaps a 60-80% reduction. There are hundreds of people going to and from Homebase each day; even more at weekends and bank holidays. A residential development will have just a handful.

LESS NOISE, MORE NOISE

The vast curtain of glass and concrete proposed will, in all likelihood, provide an even greater amount of noise insulation for most of the Tonsleys created by vehicles on Swandon Way, especially with the increase in traffic after the road changes. So far so good.

However, that same wall of glass and brick will also likely be reflective of aircraft noise when they are flying overhead to the south, creating a canyon effect. Similarly for residents near the station, they will reflect back both the train rumblings and platform announcements.

Because of the build density, there is little planting of trees or passages of space through the development that would mitigate this effect.

We've created a shortcode link directly to the planning page. Browse the docs and make comments.

Alternatively search the Wandsworth planning register for application 2016/7356



A BOOST FOR OYR

Increasing rates and rents make it harder and harder for small business. Old York Road is the heart of our community and anything that will give the shops and restaurants on it an increase in footfall and sales has to be welcomed especially as the Ram Brewery development will provide further competition.

The larger the hinterland for them, the more they will thrive. However, we hope that even they will not feel this is 'at any cost' to the character of their home too.

TRAIN OVERCROWDING

Although a good proportion of the 575 odd new residents and most of the 125 new employees of the shops and business space will be using WNT, there are unfortunately almost no grounds to object just because the trains are at capacity (although see the side bar, because the developers think they are half empty). This is seen as speculating on the future.

However, the greater passenger numbers could one day be used as a stick to force through a re-evaluation and upgrade of the station. Here's hoping.

Why can't we have more trains?

It is outside the developers control to increase capacity and in fact largely beyond the council and even South West Trains too.

For the time being there are no more platforms available at Waterloo until the old Eurostar terminal re-development is complete and the subsequent work to shut and lengthen platforms 1-4 to allow 10 coach trains is finished (mid-2018 at the earliest).

However, the most fundamental issue is that track capacity is limited by the three level crossings between Barnes and Mortlake. Any more train movements would result in all of them being pretty much shut for an hour each morning and evening and for long periods during the day.

The best we can hope for is to lobby the council, the Mayor and our MP to put pressure on Network Rail and SW Trains to 'upgrade' WNT to the same status as Putney and get the twice hourly semi fast trains to Richmond make an additional stop.

In the very dim and distant future perhaps the tens of £millions will be made available to build underpasses and bridges for the line between here and Richmond. It would probably mean closing the entire line for 6 months.

Don't hold your breath.

Everything's actually fine, you just didn't notice.

If you fancy a giggle, when you go to the planning site, turn to page 21 of the ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT VOLUME I PART II. Apparently the trains departing WNT towards Waterloo between 8 and 9 in the morning are only between 40% and 80% full and can easily accommodate the extra couple of hundred passengers they themselves expect to use the services. Who knew?

The evening figures are entirely irrelevant as they pretend rush-hour is just between 5 and 6pm. Accordingly, these trains are almost empty.

All of their calculations also assume you can fit 4 people per square metre throughout the length of the train resulting in each carriage being able to hold 140-150 people (it's actually about 70 seated plus 50 standing if everyone snuggles in really, really tight).

See everything for yourself at <https://goo.gl/5HtwJ6>

Not happy? Here's what to do: <https://goo.gl/5HtwJ6>

Firstly, **PLEASE MAKE A COMMENT ONLINE** on the Wandsworth planning website (application number 2016/7356). It can be just two or three lines long if you like, but please make an objective comment today. Don't worry about repeating what others have already said.

WE MUST ACT FAST

It may be just coincidence, but the updated planning application is very low key compared to some others.

As of 6th January, the new submission is not on the council interactive map – you can only find it if you know the planning number: 2016/7356.

It was submitted just a couple of days before Christmas and the deadline for comments is the 26th January.

The architects have every other development that they are working on listed on their website, except this one.

There's nothing about it on DTZ's own website. All most odd.

OUR COUNCILLORS

You can also contact our councillors and ask that they support you, and their residents in objecting to the scale of the development. You may, or may not, want to remind them that they work for you and were voted for by you as your representative (next elections May 2018).

Piers McCausland (on planning committee)
pmccausland@wandsworth.gov.uk

Will Sweet (on planning committee)
WSweet@wandsworth.gov.uk

Stuart Thom
sthom@wandsworth.gov.uk

Will Sweet was brilliant at the last planning meeting and wholeheartedly supported a reduction in scale. Please thank him and ask him to do it again.

OUR MP

You can also email or write to our MP:

Jane Ellison
jane.ellison.mp@parliament.uk

As a parliamentary Conservative liaising with a Conservative council she may be able to bend an ear or two if she has enough encouragement.

PLANNING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

At least half agreed with our position and voted against the last set of proposals (we don't know which members). Their email details are on the council website here:

<https://goo.gl/nyuZNO>

Whilst none of them have any particular reason to support us, perhaps if we appeal to them politely to continue to reject the scheme until it is a more sensible size, they may listen.

What can we object to?

Layout and density of building

It is way above the London guidelines for building massing. They are eking out every square inch. The density is above anywhere else in the area, even Battersea Reach. This is what prevented the last set of plans going through and may be the best thing to keep referring to.

Impact on the local environment

Is it out of keeping with another nearby residential area that would have its character irrevocably altered? We think so.

Overlooking, loss of privacy, visually overbearing.

The tower will overshadow Bramford gardens, Alma Road and Podmore Street. The other blocks will loom over Old York Road and Ferrier Street.

Local, strategic, regional and national planning policies

In the Wandsworth Local Plan this site is marked as being unsuitable for buildings over 9 stories. The council presumably spends quite a bit of our taxes on preparing and updating this document.

If it's then going to completely ignore it the moment a developer with a fat wallet comes along, what's the point? The inspectors and surveyors recommended it as unsuitable for tall buildings BECAUSE IT'S UNSUITABLE FOR TALL BUILDINGS. The council should follow their own guidelines.

Cumulative Impact

Possibly a nonstarter as there are so many, in some cases even larger, developments going on. But it will add to overloading of local services, so this is likely to be the magic phrase to use if you want to mention the trains.

What can't we object to?

The following will be ignored by the committee. They have guidelines to follow. If they can't write something in their report as grounds for refusal, we can't use it as an objection.

All the following are therefore – for the purposes of objecting - unusable and may result in the entire objection being dismissed.

Speculation on future events or property prices

Loss of a view

Impact of construction work

Loss of DIY stores in the area

There's currently no law saying you have the right to buy wallpaper on a Sunday morning within half a mile of home.

There are more details on the Wandsworth planning site here:

<https://goo.gl/jTRdyd>