



Save West Hampstead "STOP THE BLOCKS!"



Thank you for allowing a statement from the residents of West Hampstead, who were so outraged, concerned and anxious when learning that more blocks are proposed in our neighbourhood that they formed the campaign group Save West Hampstead "Stop the Blocks!". The campaign has the support of Residents Associations, the West End Green Conservation Area Committee, and hundreds of residents.

We have heard from Camden planners who preside over the plans; and developers, whose job it is to develop and profit, but now is the one opportunity to hear the voices of the residents of West Hampstead: We who live here, nurture families here, are lucky enough to still work here, and those who already dread the dangerously overcrowded roads and pavements around the stations as part of their daily commutes.

Camden's "West Hampstead: Shaping the Future" plan expressly sets out that the area is "well loved for its village feel" and that the Council commits to "enhancing the distinctive village character" and that it will provide "support for local business".

Yet the West Hampstead we know and love is becoming an alien landscape. The future of our village is being shaped with a concrete jungle of tower blocks, filled with boxy apartments beyond the means of the majority of people.

Not long ago, residents and commuters returning home would be greeted by views of stunning sunsets along the railway lines as they emerged from the stations. Now they are faced by a series of overbearing, uninspiring, tombstone-like blocks, built on an inhuman scale which claim dominion over the skyline, and dwarf the "village like" qualities of West Hampstead that Camden states it is committed to "enhance".

The blocks proposed for 156 would obliterate the beautiful views in and out of the Conservation Area; we will be robbed of the one vista looking north over the railway bridge where the roof tops and trees stretching up to Finchley Road are a delight to behold. This is a valuable public amenity and once lost is lost forever.

Our charming and wonderful West Hampstead – the one we are here fighting and pleading a case for today – has always been a wonderfully socially diverse mixture of people.

Yet developments are being allowed that create homes for only the very wealthy, while failing to create homes that meet the needs of ordinary people.

The council now hopes to make amends for repeated failures to meet stated targets of 50% “affordable” housing, by forcing it all into one small site at 156 and the yard behind it. The desire to right previous wrongs drives profit-motivated developers to maximise floor space through intensive over-development.

Despite the site being referred to as “156 West End Lane”, it is in fact two separate entities, the West End Lane frontage and a yard running between the gardens of Lymington Road and the Potteries Path public right of way. A space which was intended as a buffer between the back gardens of Lymington Road homes and the railway.

This space has been used very successfully as a builders yard for nearly four decades, providing jobs, supporting businesses and tradespeople – who in turn employ others – as well as a public amenity to residents from what some refer to dismissively as a “brownfield” site. Let's not see the same mistakes made here as with Liddell Road.

Any “affordable” housing is proposed above the retail units fronting the traffic on WEL, whilst private homes are imagined to occupy the yard and tower over existing homes. These private blocks would overshadow and blight the green, open space and games area on Crown Close, the one amenity for local children.

The proposals presented:

- Breach the National Planning Policy Framework and Camden Conservation Areas policies. We defer to Larry Trachtenberg on Conservation Area issues.
- Breach Camden Local Development Framework policies on maintenance of floorspace to ongoing, viable business. We defer to representatives of Travis Perkins on this matter.

- Breach Neighbourhood Development Planning policies, which we trust the Neighbourhood Development Forum will raise in regard to overt breaches of the neighbourhood plan.
- Breach numerous planning considerations in the Camden Site Allocations Plan, by failing to:
 - "Provide an improved design relationship to adjoining Canterbury Mansions and West End Green Conservation Area to protect and enhance the character and appearance of this area".
 - "Ensure an acceptable relationship to the adjacent residential properties on Lymington Road".
 - "Ensure the overall design and transition in massing achieves an appropriate relationship with neighbouring properties".
 - "Ensure that new development will preserve and enhance nearby built heritage assets".
 - "Ensure that the existing relationship of new development immediately adjoining Canterbury Mansions to the north should be considerably more sympathetic in terms of scale, height and design with an appropriate transition in massing towards the south and east of the site".

These proposals so thoroughly breach planning policies that, were a planning application to be submitted, that in itself would be ludicrous. If approved, a disturbing precedent would be set that would leave the entire borough, all Conservation Areas and Heritage Assets entirely at the mercy of profit-driven developers.

Let it be known that we will fight any planning application tooth and nail.

We ask the council to call a halt to this process and the sale of the publicly owned asset immediately, and to return to the drawing board and come up with an appropriate proposal that shows the Council's commitment to protecting and enhancing the village like qualities of West Hampstead.

We would fully expect the support of our elected representatives, some of whom sit on the Development Control Committee, to serve the best interests of their current and future constituents in West Hampstead by voting against these plans, as they courageously did when they saved Swiss Cottage from the blight of tower blocks.