Speak Out Woolwich 28 November 2021

74 Crescent Road

London SE18 7AQ

OBJECTION to Planning Application 21/3231/F

From Meyer Homes Limited

Phase 3 and 4 Woolwich Central, Land at Love Lane, Grand Depot Road, John Wilson Street, Thomas Street and Woolwich New Road, Woolwich, SE18 6SJ.

**Introduction**

1. Speak Out Woolwich (SOW) is an active and well-supported local residents’ group. One of our key aims is to represent the views of local people in regeneration and development schemes in the Woolwich area, and to ensure these are done not to the community but with the community. We wish to see bottom-up rather than top-down regeneration.
2. We welcome investment in and the development of Woolwich but in a way that is inclusive of the local community and which improves the provision of socially-rented housing, supports local businesses, improves job opportunities and protects and enhances the local heritage and environment.
3. SOW was joined as a party to the Public Inquiry into the previous scheme submitted by Meyer Homes, which was rejected by RB Greenwich and appealed unsuccessfully by Meyer Homes.
4. SOW were one of six local residents’ and amenity groups which spoke against the original development at the Public Inquiry, the others being the Friends of Woolwich Common (FoWC), the Positive Plumstead Project (PPP), the Woolwich and District Antiquarian Society (WaDAS), the Greenwich Conservation Group (GCG) and the Greenwich Environment Group (GEG). This was in addition to a very large petition and general public opposition.

**Issues**

**Height**

1. This new application presents a scheme where the ‘unacceptably dominating and overbearing’ 27-storey tower in Phase 3 has been reduced to a 15-storey block, which still intrudes massively into the green space outside Tesco’s.
2. This block will still loom over the neighbouring buildings around this green space and the nearby General Gordon Square. It’s size and shape will still be out of proportion to those other buildings.
3. The site adjoins the Woolwich Conservation Area and any development should therefore preserve or enhance the character of the WCA. This proposal does neither. It will in fact conflict completely with the principles agreed by RBG in the Woolwich Conservation Area, as highlighted in the Draft Appraisal in September 2021
4. The seven blocks proposed for Phase 4 are also disproportionately high, ranging as they do from nine to sixteen storeys. There is a clear inference that these blocks are not the most suitable architecturally that could be designed for the area but rather the biggest lumps that could be crammed into the site.

**Design**

1. The designs of the blocks, whether at the front or the rear of Tesco’s, are uninspiring and will detract from, rather than add to, the feeling that Woolwich has a history to celebrate, especially in the Town Centre. Some of the buildings next to the site date back to Georgian times, and many others to Victorian times, yet there is no acknowledgement of this in the design of this scheme.
2. There will clearly be overshadowing of General Gordon Square – as the proposed tower is to the south of the square. The overshadowing is acknowledged in the Sunlight and Daylight Report, although the CGIs are far from clear as to the exact impact. The overshadowing will be at its worst in the spring, winter and autumn months and will seriously detract from the amenity of this much-loved and well-used public space.
3. Also, where the sunlight and daylight figures are shown for individual properties around the site, the report constantly harks back to the 2007 scheme. What is important for local residents is not whether conditions will be better than 2007 but the effect this plan will have on them now.
4. The building in Phase 3, while no longer the copper/red colour of the original tower, now seems to have been designed to be as bland as possible, presumably in the hope that few people will spot it is there.
5. The Planning Inspector was interested in something being built to hide the carbuncle that is the current Tesco building. However, we’re not convinced the proposed Phase 3 building is what local people would want to perform that function.
6. As was noted in the Draft Appraisal of the Woolwich Conservation Area, there are 59 Local Heritage Assets and 18 Listed Buildings in the vicinity of this site. In our response to that Draft Appraisal, we reinforced the need to make every effort to ensure the character of the area is not swamped by a slurry of monolithic tall buildings. Yet here we are with another set of monolithic tall buildings being

proposed. It is no surprise the Conservation Area was put on the Heritage at Risk Register in 2019.

1. In basic terms, this proposal represents a severe overdevelopment of the site. The developers are seeking to cram as many residents as they can into Phase 4. This site borders onto a major road and two other busy streets. In the previous application this was dealt with by not providing any balconies for the flats.
2. Because this did not meet planning requirements, some of the flats now have balconies, whence the residents can appreciate the pollution for themselves.

**Loss of the Green Space**

1. We understand why the green hillocks were originally placed outside Tesco’s (because the developers were expecting to steam ahead in that area) but in the years since the area has become one which is utilised by local people and has formed a link with General Gordon Square itself.
2. Woolwich is being concreted over at an increasing rate, slowly removing any green lungs the area may have. The Council has made great efforts to make General Gordon Square a popular amenity for local people. This neighbouring space could be

used to build on those efforts, rather than being lost under a mountain of environmentally-damaging concrete.

1. Indeed, one can imagine how the addition of the Phase 3 tower will alter the feel of General Gordon Square by looming over it.

**Damage to Local Buildings**

1. When the Tesco building was constructed, it was acknowledged that the piledriving and other works caused damage to local buildings. This was raised at the Public Inquiry, most notably with regard to the foundations of St Peter’s Church and Presbytery (a Pugin building). Scant compensation was paid to the church, leaving them to find nearly £1million to rectify the damage.
2. This larger site is surrounded by many buildings which could suffer if this development goes ahead. The Woolwich Conservation Area Draft Appraisal mentions not only St Peter’s but several adjoining local heritage assets, which we are fearful would be adversely affected by this development.
3. Some nearby buildings date back not only to Victorian times but are, in fact, Georgian period and are close enough to the site to cause concern.

**Tenure Mix**

1. The original application was condemned at the Public Inquiry for offering no social housing in Phase 3 and the usual segregated so-called affordable provision in Phase 4.
2. The original Phase 3 block was described at the Public Inquiry as ‘a visible landmark for creating division in the community’. The new block in Phase 3 remains so. Of the proposed 134 flats, 14 are for shared ownership and NONE are for social rent. This represents 10.4% shared ownership and 0% social rent. It is widely accepted that the costs of shared ownership in such a block are such that they are out of reach for local people trying to find a home.
3. Overall, some 23% of the properties in the application are said to be ‘affordable’. Again, this definition is open to wide interpretation. However, the key point is that both RBG’s policies and those of the Mayor for London require 35% to be affordable.
4. Even hitting this 35% figure would only go a small way to making a dent in the Borough’s need for homes for local people. Yet Meyer, like other developers, appear certain that they can present a scheme with the 23% figure and this will be acceptable to RBG.
5. Only 9% of the planned units will be family units – and all of those will be above ground level. This in a borough where there are in excess of 20,000 on the housing waiting list and over 40% of those in the top priority are families needing homes of 3 bedrooms or more.
6. The total ‘affordable’ housing in this scheme is 16% LAR and 7% shared ownership. We stated at the Public Inquiry that social rent levels will be unaffordable if service charges are added to the rent. Plus, the shared ownership flats are likely to require an average annual income in excess of £50,000. How do local young people get on the housing ladder at those figures?
7. 10% of the units will be wheelchair units but again these are all above ground level. The existing Tesco housing has been plagued by problems with lifts, some of which were mentioned at the Public Inquiry. The needs of disabled people are again being nodded to (to meet the required quota) but not seriously taken on board.
8. Even if one accepts the definition of affordability, only 16% of the homes are deemed to be affordable. This means that 84% of the homes are not affordable for local people. This is not a development for Woolwich but for people from outside to buy. Looking at other recent schemes ‘buy to leave’ (investments) has still not gone away. Indeed, Woolwich is already full of studio, 1-bed and 2-bed flats, many of which are unoccupied.

**In Conclusion**

1. Although there have been some alterations to the plans previously submitted, it seems to us that this new application ignores much of what was said before and during the Public Inquiry.
2. There is much more that could be said about this scheme but we believe the above is sufficient to show that these plans are unacceptable to local people.
3. We are therefore submitting this OBJECTION to the above-named Planning Application and would ask the Royal Borough of Greenwich to REJECT the plans.

Kevin Veness

For and on behalf of Speak Out Woolwich