

CANADA WATER MASTERPLAN PLANNING APPLICATION OBJECTION

Application reference: 18/AP/1604

Commenter type: Neighbour consultee

Stance: Object

INTRODUCTION

As a local resident, I want the much-needed regeneration of Canada Water to build on what is already in the area and create a sustainable, balanced community. It cannot be something that will be viewed in the future as a missed opportunity or, worse, a development that actively damages the community that is already in the area. The current application, however, stands to actively damage the existing community in several ways, while also creating strain on the local infrastructure that will affect newcomers to the area too.

LOSS OF LIGHT/NOISE

As a resident on the edge of the development, I am very concerned about loss of light from tall buildings. Mine is one of the 108 properties that “will experience an alteration in daylight and/or sunlight which is beyond the suggested BRE Guidelines to some of their windows and rooms” (source: Masterplan Daylight and Sunlight Report). That’s 108 properties out of a total of 128 assessed – so a staggering **84 per cent** of neighbouring properties will therefore be hit by light loss that goes beyond acceptable levels.

It feels like a twisted logic is at play in the Masterplan Daylight and Sunlight Report that seeks to justify this. One of the characteristics of the Rotherhithe/Canada Water/Surrey Quays area is that it is low-rise overall. Yet the applicant seems to argue that the low-rise character of the area means that developers should have **more** leeway to build tall towers that reduce the light to the existing properties by unacceptable levels, not less leeway.

Planners should bend the rules in the applicant’s favour because of the “high existing values of daylight and sunlight due to the unique site context (low rise and largely undeveloped)”, the applicant claims (Masterplan Daylight and Sunlight Report, p1). Translation: we don’t respect the existing character of your area. The same report goes even further by arguing that some properties around the perimeter of the development site have “more than [their] fair share of light” (p14). This is not the case: they have the amount of light that matches the type of neighbourhood they live in, which is a low-rise neighbourhood. The developers want to change the character of the area in a way that does not respect those who live here.

One thing that has seemingly not been taken into account by the applicant is the fact that there is a massive level change down from the western side of the shopping centre development to neighbouring properties on Hothfield Place, Lower Road, Hithe Grove, China Hall Mews etc. This level change already has the effect of reducing the light coming in to gardens and windows, even before tall buildings are built. One half of our house is already pretty dark as a consequence.

In addition, the light consultant only got full or partial floor plans for 18 properties (p9) – how can they be confident in their projections given how little information they have?

The loss of light/skyline will affect my son's bedroom particularly badly, compromising his ability to read and do his homework in his room, which will affect his wellbeing and education. It will also seriously affect the amount of light coming into our top-floor study during winter – cutting half of the daylight/sunlight coming through a roof window. I work from home and this will damage my ability to do so, while also causing stress. The impact to our roof window, I must add, will come from one or both of the towers that are **well outside** the adopted tall buildings area in the Canada Water Area Action Plan (the ones closest to Surrey Quays station). My ability to work from home, meanwhile, will also be massively compromised by the noise from the construction, which is categorised as a 'major adverse' effect (Environmental Statement Volume 1 Main Chapters).

Our rear garden, furthermore, will lose a quarter of its light, damaging our ability to use this amenity and making it harder to grow the plants that support the local habitat (we have a lot of birds and insects in the garden).

I take no comfort in the claim that the impact on my house may turn out to be less than predicted – there is nothing stopping British Land from building to the very limit of the envelope they have been given permission for. And they have lots of financial incentives to build to the maximum. The only way to guarantee that there is a more tapered transition from the big buildings envisaged for the site to the small existing houses and flats on the periphery is by making it an explicit condition of development now.

TALL BUILDINGS

The masterplan says that tall buildings must “contribute to the skyline of London”. However, Historic England has pointed out in its response to the application that the seven tall buildings planned on the site would actually damage the London skyline (<http://www.se16.com/wp-content/uploads/Historic-England-CW.pdf>). They would damage views towards Tower Bridge and St Paul's Cathedral, creating a canyon effect.

I am also concerned about how they will impact on existing heritage assets in the area, such as the Grade II listed Church of St Mary Rotherhithe (as mentioned by Historic England). I'd also point out that the 129m tower planned next to the listed Dock Office (Plot A1) will dwarf and diminish the historic building; it is also way higher than other tall buildings in the area, having a particularly damaging effect on light entering Columbia Point and Orchard House.

The tall buildings proposed by the applicant do not meet the criteria in the Canada Water Area Action Plan for sustaining and enhancing heritage assets, nor do they show exemplary design or contribute exceptionally to the regeneration of the area. Nor do the towers form a coherent cluster, in spite of the applicant's claim.

Finally, the masterplan says that tall buildings will strengthen the “emerging identity” of Canada Water. Again, this shows the applicant's failure to grasp that there is an identity to the area already, one that will be changed very negatively by the influx of towers that only they seem to want. These tall buildings provide a reference point for everything else that is to be built in the development, which means that other buildings are then taller than they need to be, exacerbating light loss and other damaging issues for existing residents.

The proposed leisure centre is one of the worst examples of a building being completely out of scale with the neighbouring properties, for instance, even though it is far from being the tallest planned. The properties on Hothfield Place will be horribly overshadowed and overlooked by this slab-like, so-called “modern warehouse” (the warehouse conceit misses the fact that the historic warehouses

were built next to the docks in industrial areas, not slapped down just yards away from low-rise housing). The mismatch in scale is already causing massive stress for residents of Hothfield Place, and will cause loss of privacy and light. The sports facilities inside the new building, meanwhile, are likely to be dark and gloomy, unlike the light and airy Seven Islands centre, which ought to be refurbished instead – just as the local community wanted.

Finally, the plan to almost triple the height of the building formerly used as Rotherhithe Police Station to eight storeys will create a jarring counterpoint to the low-rise, historic terraced houses of Gomm Road opposite – the building should stay at three storeys to maintain the balance of the area.

INFRASTRUCTURE

The masterplan will create as many as 3,000 new homes but these newcomers will be expected to use existing infrastructure and facilities. Other local developments such as the Sellar site will also be bringing new people into the area, increasing the strain.

It is astonishing that the masterplan includes so little in the way of new infrastructure to match this population growth. The leisure centre is merely a replacement for Seven Islands; the new cinema will also only replace the demolished Odeon (with the bowling alley disappearing). The small new park is not proportionate to the size of the development – Southwark Park and Russia Dock Woodland will become more crowded as a consequence.

The community needs more firm promises of fresh infrastructure to cope. Instead of a **possible** new health centre/primary school/6th form, we need a **guaranteed** new health centre and new schools (and if the possible new 6th form is just a spruced-up, transported Bacon's 6th form as rumoured, then that is clearly not good enough). It is also worrying that there is nothing guaranteed about a higher education tenant moving into the area – if this gets dropped then the sustainability and balance of the development will be seriously devalued.

More sports facilities must be included in the masterplan to cope with the population growth; in Southwark Park, for instance, tennis players often have to queue for more than an hour to play - new courts should be built in the masterplan area to avoid this problem getting even worse. The Health Impact Assessment in Appendix A shows that no childcare facilities are planned on the site – this has to be rectified. The appalling broadband speeds and poor mobile phone coverage in the area must be overtly tackled in the masterplan too: this is vital to the sustainability of the local business and residential community.

TRANSPORT

The infrastructure strain will be most marked in transport, where too much demand is already a problem in public transport, causing Canada Water station to shut repeatedly, damaging local residents' ability to get to their places of work and other appointments.

The transport document in the masterplan has little in the way of concrete measures to offset the influx of so many new residents and workers. It admits that any freeing-up of capacity on the Jubilee Line that results from the Elizabeth Line will be taken up by “general background growth in demand across London” (Masterplan Transport Assessment 6.3.4). The Bakerloo Line extension is dangled as a possible answer to the strain caused by northbound passengers on the Overground changing at Canada Water. But it might never be built. The transport solution has to be agreed before the development is agreed.

Shockingly, the Masterplan Transport Assessment seems to suggest on p124 that part of the solution to the overcrowding on the Tube/Overground is that “passengers who were previously travelling through Canada Water or Surrey Quays choose to seek alternative routes that avoid the area” – i.e., that they just give up on the trains because the experience is so horrible! This suggests that the impact of public transport overcrowding on local residents’ ability to get to work and go about their daily lives is going to be significantly worse than it is now. Furthermore, the modelling used by British Land uses out of date 2011 data.

The road impact also looks to be negative. My wife and son have asthma and I am worried about the effect of traffic pollution on their health. One of the worst sources of pollution in the area is the congestion up Lower Road going north into the Rotherhithe Tunnel, and the congestion along Jamaica Rd going east into the tunnel. Both problems – which already include frequent episodes of gridlock - look likely to be worsened by the development.

SECURITY

Another concern for locals relates to the security of the site while it awaits development – and the amount of money that British Land is willing to invest in protecting local people from crime, which is on the rise in the area as the company’s own figures show (Health impact assessment, p32) and which causes enormous damage to the wellbeing of local people.

British Land’s security measures for the old Rotherhithe Police Station it now owns were not sufficient to stop squatters from settling in soon after it took possession of the building. They were evicted only after Southwark News published a story (southwarknews.co.uk/news/squatters-move-into-empty-rotherhithe-police-station/), but even then residents of Courthope House had to deal with the newly-evicted squatters camping on the entrance to their car park for a few days.

Another problem has been in the shopping centre car parks, where cars have been performing dangerous wheelspin stunts at night – as evidenced by the ‘donut’ tyre marks. Motorbikes performing wheelies over and over again have also been an issue – both problems have jeopardised the safety of pedestrians, while also causing noise problems for local residents.

I would like Southwark Council to demand higher standards of security from British Land and Broadgate (when it takes over the running of the estate). One condition could be to ensure that British Land/Broadgate has live-in security at the empty Rotherhithe Police Station. The council could also monitor measures that the shopping centre is now putting in place to combat the misuse of its car park.