

Planning Inspectorate Inquiry ref APP/N5090/V/22/3307073

London Borough of Barnet Application ref 20/3564/OUT

Broadway Retail Park, Cricklewood Lane, London NW2 1ES, commonly known as “the B&Q site”

Opening speech on behalf of the Residents’ Associations (Rule 6 party)

That site in the middle of Cricklewood is such a waste. The B&Q store’s popular with local residents, but the carpark’s mostly empty. It should be used for housing, and that consensus is loud and clear in the public comments on this application. What’s also clear is that it’s wildly inappropriate to put 18-storey blocks there.

Cricklewood’s built around a Roman road but the small core of Cricklewood largely dates back to the nineteenth century. There are two- to four-storey buildings lining the A5 Cricklewood Broadway, and two or three-storey buildings on Cricklewood Lane. Immediately behind them are two-storey buildings, Victorian or sometimes Edwardian, largely terraces or semi-detached houses, and behind them the later suburban developments. On the Brent side, All Souls College Oxford developed land it had held for centuries, with large detached and semi-detached houses on roads named after great men of the college. On the Barnet side, the Handley Page aircraft works and aerodrome were also turned into suburban housing. We’ll see some of that tomorrow.

Watling Street was used to divide Saxons from Danes, and now it divides Brent from Camden and Barnet. There’s not been a lot of co-operation between boroughs over Cricklewood, certainly no tri-borough plan for it. Brent and Camden haven’t looked for intensive development here and Brent’s new Local Plan sees heights of up to 5 storeys as appropriate on Cricklewood Broadway. Barnet, though, is a very large outer London borough, and its little bit of Cricklewood is something of an anomaly right down in its south-west corner. That made intensive development there quite attractive to the council, or at least expedient in terms of meeting housing targets without affecting residents in core wards of Barnet.

It’s been quite hard for Cricklewood residents to engage with Barnet’s policy on development. Most of us don’t live in Barnet, and there wasn’t much consultation on, say, the new Local Plan anyway. Residents weren’t consulted on site capacity and frankly, most of us would have found it hard to convert that into building heights and massing anyway. As for designations in the London Plan ... they just passed us by completely. We still don’t really know what calling this an Opportunity Area means.

We do know that in many ways, Cricklewood isn’t very resilient and is going to be tested. Our roads often clog up completely, our bus services – soon to be curtailed anyway – suffering along with all the other traffic. To the immediate north, the aggregates and concrete site being developed at 400 Edgware Road has approval for 450 HGV movements a day, the waste transfer site to be built further up adds 350 HGV movements a day. Car-free developments for nearly four hundred low-rise units on the Brent site have resolutions to approve. The sites adjoining the B&Q site already do have approval for six-storey development, not car-free, with one nine-storey block.

All that will stress Cricklewood; this development would overwhelm it. It would dominate the centre of Cricklewood without giving anything back – apart from the meaningless justification for every tall

building everywhere, that it creates a “landmark”. It would look down on our homes and steal our skylines. “From the standpoint of human receptors perambulating in the town” (I quote) it would repeatedly obtrude and whether or not we were looking straight at it, it would be an indigestible lump in our awareness, our self-location.

The development matrix descriptions of suburban, urban and central in Barnet’s draft Local Plan make it clear how inappropriate this development would be. This scale can be considered for central locations, with major transport and town centres, already characterised by very dense development. That’s not us.

Instead, immediately northwest of the site, beside a playground the developers wish to co-opt, is a highly distinctive conservation area, a coherent nineteenth-century railway village, a charming and exceptional island that draws its residents into a community. The tall buildings of the development would project above the terraces’ roofs and chimneys, and be intrusive in the homes, gardens, cross-streets and allotments of the conservation area. The attractiveness and sense of place of the conservation area would be hugely and permanently diminished. We understand the phrase “less than substantial harm” is a term of art in policy. To us, it substantially understates the very real harm this exceptional area would suffer.

There’s more, much more, we could say. We hope to touch on some of it as the inquiry proceeds. Local residents have made so many objections; over 2,200 according to the report to the planning committee, over 2,600 in the collation for this inquiry (we don’t know why there’s a discrepancy). Most objections aren’t in legal or national policy terms; we are not professional planning experts. But together, we bring a wealth of local knowledge and direct lived experience, about the heritage of Cricklewood and about how Cricklewood functions now, and in many ways know the area more broadly and more intimately than anyone. Sir, we invite you to see our area, to give meaningful weight to the views of its people on the impacts of this proposal, and to reject – as the Council now have – attempts to categorise Cricklewood as ripe for intensive development as if “central”. Time and again, residents have said that we want significant development of this site, we want housing and we want affordable housing, but at a scale appropriate to the site and to the area. This application is neither.