

29 October 2020

To Head of Planning, Lewisham

Dear Ms Talbot,

Re: Hesper House DC/19/113716

“Demolition of existing buildings on site and the construction of a 5-storey building (plus basement for parking) consisting of 7x three bedroom and 3 x two bedroom self-contained dwellings at the site known as Hesper House, Wells Park Road, SE26, incorporating 10 off-street parking spaces.....”

Summary:

I am writing on behalf of Sydenham Hill Ridge Neighbourhood Forum.

We are concerned by the lack of consistency in the Planning Officer’s Report on Hesper House Planning Application DC/19/113716 in considering, as part of the Recommendation to Approve process:

- (1) either the Lewisham Characterisation Study, and / or
- (2) the planning decision made by another Lewisham Planning Officer in our Neighbourhood Area for a comparable development in the similar time period.

(1) Lack of consideration of Lewisham Characterisation Study, March 2019

The Lewisham Characterisation Study of March 2019 characterises the area around Sydenham Wells Park, in which Hesper House is located, as characterised by “free form **suburban** blocks”.

Set out below is the extended relevant text from Lewisham Characterisation study:

*“8.2.18 The Sydenham Hill neighbourhood is focussed on Sydenham Wells Park. The area is characterised by its free form **suburban** blocks set within communal landscaped gardens on spacious and tree-lined streets. The hilly topography is a key feature and many of the streets offer panoramas towards the city and the West End...”*

(Source: pages 178 – 179 of Study)

There is no suggestion in the Lewisham Characterisation Study that our Sydenham Hill Ridge Neighbourhood area “exhibits a mixture of urban and suburban characteristics, and does not clearly fall into either setting as defined”, as described in the Planning Officer’s Report on Hesper House application (*see Paragraph 72*).

The argument by the Planning Officer of “a mixture of urban and suburban characteristics”, which is fundamental to the case for recommending this development proposal, seems to

us to flatly contradict and/or shows a lack of awareness of the Lewisham Characterisation Study.

By way of aide-memoire, on the Council's website, it states in relation to the Characterisation Study:

*"The study provides the evidence for policies set out in the Lewisham **LDF Core Strategy** and acts as a general reference document for the council and residents, developers, designers, planners and other stakeholders."*

(2) No reference to Recommendation to refuse Planning Permission for a comparable application, 2 Sydenham Hill, DC/19/114486, in July 2020

Reference: "Astra Palace Hotel 2 Sydenham Hill: DC/19/114486 | Demolition of existing hotel (Use Class C1) and erection of a part four and part five-storey building comprising 9 self-contained flats..."

In the case of 2 Sydenham Hill, which is within our Neighbourhood Area and close to the Hesper House site, a different Lewisham Planning Officer recommended turning down an application for a similar sized development, filed almost contemporaneously with the Hesper House application, on the following grounds:

"The proposed development, by reason of siting, and excessive scale and height, would appear as an overbearing form of development that would fail to respond sympathetically to the character of the surrounding area and the prominent corner location..."

"The proposed siting, height and scale of the development would serve to impact detrimentally upon the amenities of neighbouring occupiers by way of reduced outlook and increased sense of enclosure, contrary to Core Strategy Policy..."

Surely similar arguments to those used in DC/19/114486 by the Lewisham Planning Officer may apply equally in the Hesper House case, or at least need to be considered in the Planning Officer's Report on DC/19/113716?

Conclusion:

We draw attention to this apparent lack of consistency in the context of the Planning Committee A which will consider the Hesper House Planning Application on 4th November 2020.

Next steps:

We invite the Planning Department to respond to our concerns.

As is our custom, we send a copy to each of the five Lewisham Ward Councillors whose wards include parts of our Neighbourhood Area, so they are each aware of the Forum's

emerging concerns as we set out about carrying out our Early Engagement Survey and preparing first draft of elements of the Forum's Neighbourhood Plan.

We are also copying in local Civic Societies and Lee Neighbourhood Forum, all of whom have provided the Forum in its set-up phase with valuable experience (to be clear, none of these organisations have any responsibility for this letter), to ask whether they also see a similar pattern of inconsistency outside our own small Neighbourhood Area.

We would like to find out whether the Hesper House Officer's Report is representative of a broader problem across Lewisham.

As the Hesper House application is to be decided by Lewisham Planning Committee next week, we are also sending a copy for the attention of the Secretary to that particular Committee meeting; and we ask the Secretary to draw the attention of the Chairman to our concerns.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Weil
Secretary
Sydenham Hill Ridge Neighbourhood Forum (SHRNF)
Private home address: 75 Sydenham Hill, London SE26 6TQ
E: news@sydenhamhillridge.london

Background to Sydenham Hill Ridge Neighbourhood Forum (SHRNF)

Sydenham Hill Ridge Neighbourhood Forum (SHRNF) and Sydenham Hill Ridge Neighbourhood Area (SHR Neighbourhood Area) were designated by Lewisham and Southwark in March 2020.

SHRNF has been involved in looking at and responding to various planning applications within the SHR Neighbourhood Area during its early stages and has developed a methodology based on walkabouts and consultation.

Cc:

Claudette Minott, committee@lewisham.gov.uk Property Ref LE/73/I/TP

Lewisham Ward Cllrs whose wards include parts of Sydenham Hill Ridge Neighbourhood Area:

- Cllr Chris Best
- Cllr Sophie Davis
- Cllr Liam Curran
- Cllr Leo Gibbons
- Cllr Peter Bernards

Forest Hill Society/ Michael Abrahams

Sydenham Society/ Annabel McClaren
Lee Neighbourhood Forum/ Sarah McMichael