

**Development Site: Alfa Laval Tower Great West Road Brentford
Response to plans – from Dr David Dewhurst, 17 Challis Rd. 18 5 08**

Residents were notified of the latest plans in a circular dated 28 April 2008 and told of the need to respond within 21 days. The circular stated that plans were available at Brentford Library. Last weekend (9 5 08) I identified that two crucial documents were missing from the plans there; *Landscape and Public Realm Proposals* (24pp A3) and *Part 1: Design and Access Statements* (47pp A3). (The only other documents were the A1 plan sheets and a 2½ page basic submission.) In other words the most substantive part of the revised plans was missing. On notifying the Planning Department these documents arrived some time on Tuesday 13th May. The library is closed on Wednesday and Friday. Therefore residents have only had two days, Thursday 15th and Saturday 17th, to look at the revised proposals.

The least a responsible Local Authority can do to redress this is to re-circulate residents with an apology and give them another three weeks for Comments from the arrival of that letter.

The use of the site for a mixture of affordable and private dwellings is welcome; they embody a variety of attractive design features. However the rooms and (for the houses) gardens are small. The density at 560 hrha equates to less than 18m² ground space per resident on the site. The fact that slightly worse has been permitted in the Wallis House scheme is an argument for reducing it, rather than claiming that two excesses of suburban guidelines and surrounding densities, make a right. While the current plans do not seem to state the potential population, the 560hrha x the stated area (1.95ha) equates to 1092 people – a lot and pretty tight.

I sympathise with both Carlton Properties and the Planning Department in having to address various local, London and national guidelines and plans which are neither fully consistent nor up to date with our latest understanding of priorities and in any case very liable to revision.

The employment targets for the site are questionable and the solutions spurious. We are short of accommodation in London because people (like me) move in due to the higher level of employment. Crude targets and “take a step forward in all directions” strategies will just exacerbate a vicious spiral.

In a far more favourable market Carlton commissioned CBRE to identify viable trends for employment on the site. They recommended, “no more than (*my emphasis*) 40 – 50,000 net sq. ft. of office premises,” The plan proposes 7,598m² (i.e. 81,785 sq.ft.) of office space. This, of course, allows both parties to claim they are hitting targets for employment provision which are utterly implausible to achieve. At best it will displace employment from the perfectly good, but more than half empty, locations nearby along the Great West Rd and reduce employment at sites in other areas.

It was also claimed that the Travelodge hotel and serviced apartments would generate employment at the rate of one job per two occupants. The developers referred to a certain government published estimate to justify this. The fact that the estimate is nonsense does not legitimate their claims. After the last-but-one application I talked to hotel owners and managers and bet the developer’s PR officer that he could not come up with a guarantee by Travelodge or the serviced lets owners to employ at that rate. I have had no response.

Motorway noise demands that the hotel, “short term” lets and offices be “sealed environments.” This would be neither pleasant nor healthy for the inmates.

The main changes to the plan are to the south side which now (says section 2.0 of *Part 1 Design and Access Statements*) “responds to the more local scale to the south of the site.” They are an improvement. However the streets to the north are just as local and residential yet have always been faced in Carlton’s plans by a commercial wall 12 or 13 times the width of the existing Alfa Laval tower.

At the end of section 2 of *Pt 1 Design and Access Statements* the developers note the previous objection that, “the scheme was too tall” and respond that there is now a “reduction in height of the buildings facing Layton Rd, Brook Lane North and York Rd.” This is where the buildings were lower already.

While many smaller issues are dealt with well the main height and width impact is almost ignored. It is a case of the developers (and perhaps the Planning Department) ignoring the ‘elephant in the living room,’ scaled up to 170 feet.

At present we live with a stream of lorries and other traffic passing our bedroom windows. The developers state that the scheme there “takes on the scale of the motorway by rising up to 12 stories”. It is true that one problem may appear relatively to diminish by the arrival of an even greater one, but at least above the motorway now we can still see the sky. Just because residents have suffered from a motorway degraded environment for 40 years does not make further degradation acceptable.

After the previous plan (which presents the same north frontage) I approached 36 Challis Rd and Clements Place residents in a quick petition (copy forwarded and original offered) against the multi-storey wall of buildings which would overlook us. 34 signed, two were simply suspicious of petitions and signing their name. *At least 94% local opposition demands a real change.*

In Appendix B, the plans indicate the potential outline of the north face from York Parade and Challis Rd. (Confusingly the new [red] outline is mislabelled ‘March 2007’ instead of ‘March 2008’. Photo 31 from Challis Rd is on sheet ASK1343. Photo 17 from York Parade is on ASK1345). While the outlines shown are daunting enough I believe they understate the impact by being close up to intervening structures, masking more of the impact than will generally be the case. In the case of York Parade this is the motorway – the real impact for these residents will be (above the shops) from the first floor windows, which must be hell already. The photo also leaves out the eastern third of the north face. For myself and others on the north side of Challis Rd it looks as if half of the north face will be blocked out by the houses on the south side of Challis Rd whereas it will continue to rise ten stories above them.

The multi-storey north wall is justified as a sound barrier for the new residents. In fact it rises up to twice as high as some of the top apartments behind it and overall several stories higher. Thus the height is unjustified as far as the noise mitigation argument goes as well as for the invalid employment creation claims.

Higher real employment would probably be provided by enlarging the dwellings to provide scope for home and garden offices – at lower ecological cost.

Satellite and TV aerials locally point south; thus the wall of buildings would damage TV reception, as has already happened recently at the smaller new building by the Phoenix estate.

With respect to the fear that motorway sound would be reflected off the north wall further north the developers say, “.. buffering the north side of the M4 .. possible that some of the Section 106 funding could be used for this. It would be a decision of the Council.” Whatever happens and whatever Section 106 funding is, could we have some concrete proposals, consultation and action on this from the Planning Department (or relevant section)?

Section 12.5 also states, “The design team will explore the possibility of providing sound absorbent materials at the car park levels.” What is the consequence of this exploration?

The proposed north face of the development would present a radical change of character to the area and a visual insult. The recent incursions of high rise developments beyond the eastern and western ends of Challis Rd/ Eastbourne Rd have already riled residents. But these developments have not been so directly in the face of residential properties. To proceed with this gratuitous challenge would be incompetent and irresponsible. As people started to experience it there would follow a holding to account; this should be averted by thoughtful, responsible and considerate decision making now.