



**MITCHAM SOCIETY**

Web: [www.mitchamsociety.org.uk](http://www.mitchamsociety.org.uk)  
Email: [TheMitchamSociety@gmail.com](mailto:TheMitchamSociety@gmail.com)  
Twitter: @MitchamSociety



## **22/P3620 Mitcham Gasworks Site Western Road Mitcham CR4 3FL**

FULL PLANNING APPLICATION FOR THE ERECTION OF NEW BUILDINGS TO PROVIDE RESIDENTIAL ACCOMMODATION (CLASS C3) AND FLEXIBLE COMMERCIAL/COMMUNITY SPACE (CLASS E AND/OR CLASS F2), WITH ASSOCIATED ACCESS, PARKING AND LANDSCAPING ARRANGEMENTS, INCLUDING THE DEMOLITION OF THE EXISTING TELECOMMUNICATIONS MAST AND RE-PROVISION OF NEW TELECOMMUNICATIONS MAST  
N.B - THE APPLICANT'S PROPOSALS AS CURRENTLY SUBMITTED ARE FOR A SCHEME COMPRISING 595 FLATS IN 6 BLOCKS RANGING BETWEEN 5 AND 9 STOREYS WITH 135 PARKING SPACES, VEHICLE ACCESS FROM WESTERN ROAD AND PORTLAND ROAD AND WITH 363 SQ.M OF FLEXIBLE COMMUNITY/COMMERCIAL FLOORSPACE.

### **Mitcham Society comments**

**March 2023**

Mitcham Society has considered this planning application and has the following comments.

1. Mitcham Society supports the use of the Gas Works site for housing, and has no objection to this being combined with retail or office space. Indeed we believe that development on this site should include significant community uses and comment on this further below. We are fully aware of the need for homes, and would be delighted if this site were used to provide truly affordable housing for some of the 10,000 people on the council's waiting list. Sadly, this proposed development has the potential to make only the most minor dent in that figure, if it has any effect at all. Any arguments put forward that this proposal will provide "much needed" housing for people on the waiting list are, in our view, misleading.
2. We struggle to believe that the current proposal of almost 600 homes is a density the site can accommodate. We are incredulous at the vacillation in determining the site's capacity in Merton's emerging Local Plan. When submitted to the Secretary of State in December 2021 the allocation was for 200-400 homes. By May 2022 it had become up to around 650 homes, with blocks up to 10 storeys. In May 2022 a Statement of Common Ground between Merton Council and St William was published which also stated that up to 10 storeys was appropriate for the site. Discussion around producing the Statement of Common Ground has

taken place behind closed doors. No valid public justification has ever been presented which can account for an uplift from 200-400 to around 650, a rise which is 225% higher than the lower allocation of 200, and 62.5% higher than the upper allocation of 400. Is it really possible that with all its skills and abilities, Merton Council's own in-house professional team were so very wide of the mark in initially calculating site capacity? If that is the case, what faith can we put in any of their calculations? The increased density of this proposal is the root cause of its problems, and without going back to the drawing board, these can not be adequately dealt with.

3. Height and massing. The height and massing are entirely inappropriate for Mitcham Village. The introduction of four blocks rising to nine storeys and a further three blocks rise to seven storeys, with seven storey portions also on three of the nine storey blocks on this site would bring an entirely new level of density, height and massing that is entirely out of character with Mitcham Village and its surroundings. There is just one block which is five storeys in its entirety, and a relatively small number of five storey sections on other blocks. From ground level, which is, after all, where the human scale view will be taken, the overall effect will be of great density, height and massing entirely out of keeping with the local surroundings. The net result is a completely unfamiliar, overly urbanised design which is utterly out of step with the character of Mitcham Village and its surroundings. It lacks any grounding in existing building design, and is most certainly neither design-led nor inspired by the locality.



Design and Access Statement p56

4. The visual impact would be significant, and harmful. There are no blocks of nine storeys in or around Mitcham Village, and even five storeys – the minimum height proposed – is rare in the locality which is primarily made up of low-rise, streets based housing. The actual number of blocks belies their density with large footprints the norm in the design. In the Townscape and Visual Impact Appraisal the developer presents 21 views illustrating how the proposed development would be visible from different locations, including looking from Mitcham Village centre along Western Road, (a view whose open aspect would be decimated), and as

far away as Mitcham Common, Mitcham Parish Churchyard and Cricket Green. It beggars belief that 16 of these views are considered “beneficial”, and in our view by far the more appropriate term is “harmful”. Some examples follow.

#### Townscape and Visual Impact Appraisal Part

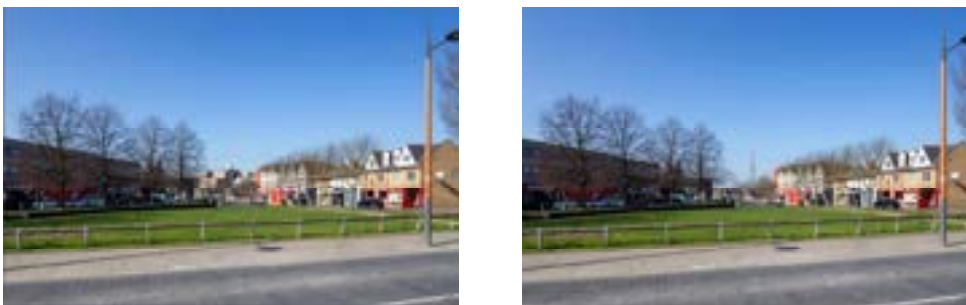
##### Representative view 8 – view from Love Lane looking along Westfield Road



This view is 115 metres from the development site, and even at this distance it is clear that the blocks loom over the cottage style housing in Westfield Road. As you get closer to the site, the looming effect would increase, creating a visual appearance which is depressing and overbearing.

#### Townscape and Visual Impact Appraisal Part

##### Representative view 9 – view from Mitcham Village Centre



The view is 300 metres from the development site, taken from the far side of Mitcham Village centre. Unsurprisingly, at this generous distance, it is difficult to see the development, and the wide angle used in the photograph plays its part in drawing the eye away.

These two devices are used in several instances in this document to give an impression of minimal effect.

However zooming in to the part of the image that contains the proposed development reveals the true nature of the impact it would have on views across Mitcham Fair Green towards and into Western Road:



Townscape and Visual Impact Appraisal Part  
Representative view 7 – view along Western Road



Even using the trickery of distance it is impossible for the developer to hide the massive, incongruous and disjointed appearance of the proposal to anyone approach it along Western Road when leaving the village centre.



Zoomed into this image, the significant and harmful visual impact is even more apparent:



5. Open spaces. The developer does itself no favours by hijacking the open space at Hay Drive as if to give the impression that it is part of the development. One example of many from the provided documents is in the image below, showing people using the area as a recreational space, as though it is part of the development.



In fact, the Hay Drive open space is fenced off from the proposed development and not joined to it as imagery suggests. Nor is it as the above image indicates, a flat space whose entirety is suitable for play and leisure. It is a SUDS area, some of which sits in a depression designed to be a soakaway – for the absence of doubt an image is below.



6. Greening. The applicant seems incapable of settling on a single greening score. The Design and Access Statement p145 claims an Urban Greening Factor (UGF) score of 0.32, while the table on the same page offers a UGF of 0.31345293. Standard rounding would make this 0.31. The planning statement offers this lower figure. Both figures on offer, 0.32 and 0.31 are unacceptable. The London Plan expects a UGF of 0.4, as does Merton's emerging Local Plan. Starting work on a site which is a primarily a rubble field it beggars belief that it is not possible to at least meet and preferably exceed the London Plan and Merton emerging Plan requirement. Central to this failure is the applicant's shocking self-confessed inability to deliver enough sunlight to ground level. There is only one cause of this: the height of the blocks and the overall massing of the development.
7. The applicant acknowledges the abysmal access to sunlight that is a characteristic of its proposal for 9 storey blocks which will group in the centre of the site, when it says in the Planning Statement (para 10.1.95) that it has had to use shade tolerant plants in the centre of the site due low access to sunlight. "due to restricted sunlight hours within the central part of the site, a variety of shade tolerant planting and other species have been incorporated with a lower greening score, but still contributing to a highly biodiverse green space." The latter part of this sentence is an exercise in clutching at straws in the face of abject failure to meet the required greening standard.
8. The Planning Statement para 10.1.95 contains the following phrase "as the Biodiversity Report and DAS confirms" – (DAS = Design and Access Statement), and yet while the DAS is provided, the Biodiversity Report is not. This application cannot be fully assessed without the publication of the Biodiversity Report. When this is published, the consultation period should be extended.
9. Open spaces in surrounding developments put the applicant to shame. The tallest nearby buildings at Sadler Close are separated by significant open spaces, with plenty of access to sunlight in which a wide variety of plant and animal life can thrive. Further away, Glebe Court, which also has tall blocks, is built into what has become mature landscaped parkland. There is plenty of open space between the blocks, so that the blocks appear appropriate in height and massing. There are mature trees, people who live on this estate have an open

outlook rather than looking out of their own windows immediately onto another block of flats, a wide range of flora and fauna can thrive and bird nesting is supported. These are the standards to which this site should aspire.

10. Daylight and sunlight. The final Daylight and Sunlight report provides a sorry tale both for residents of the proposed development and those already living nearby. Key points from this report present an unacceptably poor picture. We do not accept any of the statements variously made that bedrooms and kitchens are less important than other rooms in terms of access to daylight and sunlight. These rooms are used in many ways including for socialising, homework, quiet private space away from others, etc. – and in flats as small as those proposed here are likely to be in demand for uses other than sleeping and food preparation. Indeed, the kitchen / dining / living areas are intended precisely with multiple uses in mind.

Within the development:

- a. 15% of 1608 rooms assessed do not comply with daylight standards (table p32)
- b. 36% of 583 living rooms, living / kitchen / dining rooms, and studios do not comply with sunlight standards (table p33)
- c. Within the garden and amenity areas the rather appalling statement is made at para 7.4.3 that “all of the proposed amenity areas will receive at least two hours of sunlight across more than 50% of their area on 21 March” – the date chosen on which the daylight and sunlight assessment is relevant.

Existing dwellings (outside the development):

The Daylight and Sunlight report notes that all of the below will experience some loss of daylight / sunlight. Para 7.1.4 “The daylight and sunlight assessments have shown that the remaining properties will experience a noticeable impact as a result of the Proposed Development (sic)”.

- a. 40-46 Westfield Road
- b. 27-39 (odds) Pear Tree Close
- c. 8-12 Taffy’s How
- d. 79-93 (odds) De’Arn Gardens
- e. 13 Brickfield Road
- f. 15 Hay Drive
- g. 4,5,15,16 and 25 Portland Road

11. Affordability. The developer proposes just 35% affordable homes by habitable room, 32% by unit. The breakdown, from the Planning Statement (p29) is for 188 affordable homes, across 69 1-bed, 76 2-bed, 34 3-bed and 9 4-bed homes. The affordability criteria has been subdivided to a split of around 30% intermediate and 70% social rent by habitable room. To be absolutely clear the development would have just 124 homes at social rent, and 64 homes at intermediate rent. According to the [Mayor of London](#): “An intermediate rented home where rent is set at or below a third of local household incomes. Residents have the

opportunity to save and purchase the home on a shared ownership basis within 10 years.” Shared ownership is widely regarded as a challenging scheme, locking people into paying a mortgage, rent and service charges, and some people have scant prospect of buying more share in their home. In addition, those in shared ownership homes can experience difficult selling.

12. In the September 2022 revision of Merton’s emerging Local Plan policy H11.1 is clear that there is a “strategic target of 50% of new homes built in Merton between 2021/22 – 2036/37 to be affordable” and where 10 or more homes are in a development, this required provision is to be on site unless exceptional circumstances pertain. We do not believe the evidence of exceptional circumstances stacks up for this site, and the proposed provision of 32% affordable by unit falls woefully short. Merton Council should insist on its 50% target being achieved within this application.
13. Exceptional circumstances. In its Planning Statement the developer cites exceptional circumstances which would allow a 35% affordable housing threshold to be applied. It quotes the London Plan, “some surplus utility sites are subject to substantial decontamination, enabling and remediation costs” as justification. However, at the time of writing the applicant provides no substantive evidence of these costs. The Preliminary Geo Environmental Risk Assessment is precisely that – Preliminary. Without a detailed study it is impossible to determine whether this application qualifies for the Mayor’s exemption on affordability. A decision on that can not be made without a complete and comprehensive survey being published for the whole site.
14. Berkeley Homes (which owns the applicant, St William), is a national, volume housebuilder, with a significant business stream developing former gas works sites. It is well aware of the potential contamination issues which may arise and the potential cost of mitigation. Affordable housing provision should not be the flexible factor. If the site is not able to accommodate 50% social homes and derive an adequate profit, then its allocation for housing may need to be reconsidered. That notwithstanding, affordable housing should be a priority for this site, not a bargaining chip.
15. Tenure – affordable homes. It is shocking that the developer proposes to group all of the ‘low cost rent’ and intermediate rent units together rather than spread them across all of the blocks, as shown in the Design and Access Statement p73 (below). This is blatantly contrary to both Merton’s emerging Local Plan policy H11.1 and H11.2 requiring socially mixed development, and the current Local Plan policy CS8 and CS9 for the same reason. The London Plan Policy D6 also requires new housing not to differentiate between tenures.





16. Furthermore, the 'low cost rent' and intermediate homes are set to be built in phases 2 and 3 of the development, with phase 1 consisting entirely of 'private dwellings'. It is unacceptable that private developments should come before lower cost, and the phasing should be changed to reflect this.
  
17. Single aspect homes. The Design and Access statement p66 has examples of one bedroom, one bedroom accessible, and two bedroom homes which are single aspect. Fully 35% of homes are proposed as single aspect- more than 200 homes. This is simply unacceptable. Merton's emerging Local Plan policy D12.3 is clear that single aspect homes are "strongly discouraged", and the London Plan policy D6 is equally unequivocal that developers should "normally avoid" the provision of single aspect dwellings. That more than a third of dwellings in this proposed development are proposed as single aspect is further evidence that too much is being crammed into the site. It beggars belief that such strong direction against single aspect homes from both the London Plan and Merton's own policies could be ignored.
  
18. Vehicular access. This is proposed from both Portland Road and Western Road. Portland Road is currently a quiet residential street. We have stressed in comments on earlier iterations of the plans, both at public in-person events and in writing, that there should be no vehicular access from Portland Road. We stress that point again here. In the current proposals vehicular access will be available to residents, refuse collection, delivery vehicles and visitors. Such access would alter the nature of Portland Road and the public realm experience of those living there very significantly. The only vehicular access from Portland Road should be for emergency services.

19. Parking and CPZ. We note the provision of 135 car parking spaces – 0.23 spaces per unit (Design and Access statement p162). It is a fact of life that that it is not possible to stop residents from owning a car, and any that do will either use the on-site parking provision or try to use the surrounding streets. This is immutable. There will also be visitors, delivery vehicles and others who will need to park. The applicant has committed to funding a consultation on a potential controlled parking zone (CPZ) (Planning statement page 15). The creation of a CPZ would not be a solution to the problem of the growth in a requirement for parking:

- a. The imposition of a CPZ on the residents of surrounding streets would immediately create an expense for these residents, which under other circumstances they may not choose. It is a poor solution to a problem that's not of their making.
- b. The possession of a parking permit does not guarantee a space, just the right to park within a zoned area. Overselling of permits relative to the number of spaces can occur. Residents both existing and in the development, may find there are no spaces available when they want to park.
- c. A policy of not providing parking rights to residents on the development (apart from disabled residents), is the only way to ensure surrounding streets can retain some semblance of their existing state with regard to parking.

20. Non residential uses. The allocation of less than 1% of the site for non-residential uses is unacceptable. We believe the site should make substantial provision for community uses given the number of people expected to be in residence, and the location of the site so close to Mitcham Village centre. A higher proportion of the space should be allocated, with specific commitments to certain types of community use such as community hall, appropriate retail such as a café, crèche and other uses. The inclusion of such facilities should be a planning condition, with no option for the applicant to row back on commitments at a later stage. These facilities should be required to be built early, and in use early.

21. Borough Character Study. We are aware that Merton Council is citing the Borough Character Study as justification for supporting tower block and flats based development for this site. For example the [Topic Paper](#) on the Gas Works Site drawn up as a submission to the Local Plan inspection, contains this wording:

The Character Study SPD is a borough wide assessment that demonstrates potential growth themes within the borough. Below is the growth theme diagram for Mitcham. It highlights the Gasworks site (circled in blue) as a site that is considered to be 'reimagined' which is defined as having the opportunity for 'more fundamental intervention through the redevelopment of larger sites or centres to be bolder about the level of change, using the prevailing character from surrounding areas to influence re-design.' This is

Source: [LBM19 - Mitcham Gasworks Mi16 Topic Paper - September 2022](#), page 7

We were involved in the ‘consultation’ around the formulation of the Character Study, and made a formal submission, in which we were very clear that neither Mitcham Village nor its surroundings is appropriate to be ‘reimagined’ and we continue to hold to this view. It is unacceptable that Merton Council arranges to publish wording in its Character Study in order to justify its support for high rise tower blocks. In doing so it creates an open door for developers, who, as we can see from this particular example, can proceed with no regard to local context.

Below is an extract from our detailed submission.

### ***Re-examine, reimagine and repair***

*We do not support the location of each neighbourhood on a linear scale of ‘Repair’, ‘Re-examine’ and ‘Reimagine’.*

*This is a simplistic approach which can’t take account of the diversity and complexity of the defined areas. The definitions provided for each of these three points on the scale are based entirely on development sites and new build, completely failing to define an approach to other aspects of character such as green or blue infrastructure, public realm more generally and access and accessibility (e.g. pedestrian, cycle, public transport, private car). We reject this approach as narrow and confined, and lacking the ability to reflect the subtlety of each neighbourhood.*

*We also reject the positioning of Mitcham on the scale presented on p39 under ‘Reimagine’. It is certainly not an appropriate area for “Fundamental intervention through redevelopment of larger sites or centres to be bolder about the level of change”. This level of intervention will only achieve the destruction of the delicacy and human scale of Mitcham.*

*If this simplistic classification must be used, then Mitcham is better positioned somewhere between ‘re-examine’ and ‘repair’. From those two definitions it would benefit from interventions which reflect existing character (re-examine) and reuse existing building fabric and development that is sensitive and context led (repair).*

*To be clear, Mitcham has vibrancy, diversity and strength. It has a rich history and a culturally rich present. These characteristics should be understood and celebrated, used as the building blocks for what comes next. The danger of seeing Mitcham, Mitcham centre and other Mitcham neighbourhoods which appear at the ‘reimagine’ end of the scale (Mitcham Bridge, Figges Marsh, Church Road, Pollards Hill, Eastfields, Shannon Corner) as a ‘blank canvas’ suitable for a ‘re-imagine’ approach is that their character is lost. This must be avoided.*

Source: [Merton Character Study 2021 Mitcham Society Comments](#)

22. Archaeology. We are aware of comments made by Merton Historical Society pointing out failure in the Historic England representation to note the Roman well found on site in 1882, and a complete Roman urn which is now in the British Museum. The Merton Historical Society representation states: “The construction type, with wood frame lining still intact and signs of ritual closure including deposition of animal bones, indicated that there might well be a high status roadside Roman settlement in the area.” Too little is known about Roman

activity in Mitcham, though what there is suggests there is more to be learned. Merton Historical Society is clear that the GLASS response does not suggest that there will have been “total destruction of any archaeology present” by previous works on the site, and says “the site might still contain some undisturbed archaeological deposits which could be of considerable significance”. Merton Historical Society concludes “We feel that Mitcham has already lost far too much important archaeology without adequate record for their not to be some provision for this site” We concur. Detailed, comprehensive and full archaeological investigate across the site is required, such that the entirety of the site is fully examined and any finds investigated thoroughly and in detail.

23. This proposal has generated some of the most vociferous and numerous objections we have seen to any planning application in Mitcham. Local people are incensed that such an inconsiderate development is proposed for the site. At the time of writing all three Lavender Ward councillors have submitted comments, making clear some fundamental failings. Of the six councillors in the adjacent Cricket Green and Figges Marsh wards, three are on Planning Committee and have understandably declined to comment, but the other three have also submitted comments expressing significant concerns. The Mitcham and Morden MP Siobhain McDonagh is also on record with her own significant concerns. This level of public expression of unease by elected representatives at the proposals is unprecedented in our experience in Mitcham. It mirrors the significant strength of feeling among local people, and it is evidence that the proposals seriously overstep the mark. They should not be ignored.
24. This proposal has multiple failings across the spectrum. It fails on the provision of adequate homes, including in proposing a massive 35% single aspect. It fails on affordability meeting the absolute bare minimum of standards, which will do nothing to alleviate our borough’s considerable housing waiting list. Tenure is not mixed, as is best practice. The greening achievement is shockingly poor, and the developer even admits that poor sunlight access to the green spaces is the driver of its failure in this respect. Tower blocks including four rising to nine storeys have no resonance with the local area, and the plans are not, in our view, design led, but rather led by profit motive. The uplift from 200-400 homes in the original new Local Plan submitted to the Secretary of State to around 600 now has not been put forward with any substantial justification. We can support the Local Plan allocation as submitted to the Secretary of State but do not support later amendments. It is this uplift which is the cause of the failings of this proposal. A development of homes suitable to the site in number would result in a more appropriate scale and massing, higher quality green spaces, and larger dwellings able to meet the target of zero single aspect. It would adopt a design which is far more appropriate to the local area, and which harmonises with and extends the successful new neighbourhood created in the previous gasworks redevelopment.
25. With multiple and significant failings, this application should be refused. The refusal should make it clear that anyone coming forward with a revised scheme should do so with a clear understanding that failures to meet key policies will again result in refusal.