



16th August 2018

Re: Redevelopment of 562 Mile End Road, 1a,b,c Burdett Road

This submission is a condensed, revised compilation of the speeches I gave at the planning meetings regarding this development, with some additional details regarding the current dispersal of patrons from The Backstreet

The proposed development, it seems to me, fails in many ways. It is not just that it's too large, dominating the views of the park, and setting a precedent that could destroy Mile End. The design, it's claimed, "emphasizes verticality," which surely will only make it more of an eyesore.

The affordable units are on the lower floors - where the planning report indicates NO2 levels are excessive; richer tenants literally rise above the pollution, while the rest will suffer each time they open a window. London certainly needs homes - but does it need homes with poisonous air? And can we even guarantee, if the works required by TFL prove expensive, that there will still be those affordable units?

Few details have been provided of what mitigation measures can be put in place for air quality, beyond expecting some tenants to do without balconies. The proposed CHP plant, when new, will already have an emissions rate exceeding GLA limits. So what will it be like in ten years time?

With three stories lopped off the top, compared to the original version of the plan, the proposed tower will still loom over the park, the bridge and the junction. Far from adding "visual interest" I fear the use of different colours on different parts will simply look a mess; Mile End doesn't need another Lincoln Plaza.

In terms of density, at over 1400, this development is over twice the sustainable residential quality in the London Plan; that would be bad enough, surely, but to achieve that trick while providing just eight homes for affordable rent - and those with poor air quality - surely can't justify granting permission.

The applicants make much of their consultant's report on servicing, but the need for a traffic management plan is surely going to be tricky for residents seeking deliveries, and the suggestion that there are other bays 100 metres along the road is unlikely to satisfy people wanting deliveries from DFS or Ocado. There is still also inadequate provision for disabled parking.

This plan will add more retail space - but the recently built unit in Wentworth Mews remained empty for a considerable time; given the economic uncertainty of Brexit, will these too remain empty?

I would specifically like to address The Backstreet club. It is a unique space for the gay community and has run for over thirty years, with no disturbance to the neighbours, as several of them attested in the hearings.

Speaking as someone who organises events there, there is no equivalent elsewhere in the UK, and very few similar venues in Europe. Events at The Backstreet attract visitors from many countries, as well as locals, and its loss would be a serious blow to a section of the LGBT community. The type of events - with a strict leather or rubber dresscode - that are held at The Backstreet cannot simply be replicated in other venues.

It is vital that the club be protected, either through a Section 106 agreement providing for relocation, or through a binding legal agreement to re-house it in the new building, as is currently proposed.

While I welcome the proposal to re-create the club in the basement - a plan with which the operator of the venue also agrees - I would like to raise some points.

Firstly, as was noted at the planning meeting when relocation was on the agenda, it is still important to ensure that the commitment to re-provide the club is monitored - it should not become a condition that is waived aside should it prove inconvenient to the developer.

I would like to see a condition be imposed for a number of years, requiring this to be a nightclub for the same section of the LGBT community, rather than more generally. Without this, what is to stop rental rises or similar means effectively resulting in the very loss that we are trying to avoid?

One point raised at committee regarding the club was the potential of it "being set up to fail" with noise complaints from residents who subsequently moved in to the development. This is a potential concern, and the view was expressed that a dispersal plan would have to be put in place.

In fact, dispersal of patrons from The Backstreet is not as imagined by the committee member who raised it, on the assumption that it would be like other venues, with a large number of people leaving at closing time.

Typically, The Backstreet empties over a much longer period, so that by closing time there are relatively few people left. The club has a radio link to a local taxi service, and calls cabs for people. As many patrons are leaving while wearing fetish clothing, they tend to be quiet and not draw attention to themselves - most wait inside until their cab arrives. In short, noise from patrons arriving or leaving is seldom an issue.

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