



Mr John E Major
Chief Executive
The Dulwich Estate
The Old College
Gallery Road
London
SE21 7AE

22 February 2016

Dear Mr Major

RETAIL RENTS IN HERNE HILL

I am writing to you, as Chair of the Herne Hill Society, on behalf of our Committee, our members and many residents in Herne Hill.

You will, I am sure, have noticed the storm of protest that arose in the last two or three weeks about reportedly very high rent rises. This resulted in a torrent of comment in social media channels, coverage in local newspapers, and a protest about rent rises held outside the premises recently vacated by Just Williams, the popular local toy shop. I scarcely need to repeat what people were saying then, and are still thinking, about the Estate and about the charitable and educational foundations which you support. Whatever the details of any particular negotiation, the rents now being sought do appear hugely excessive to many of us and seem bound to raise an impossibly high barrier to any normal small business. I should add, perhaps, that none of us here wants to see any more estate agents in Herne Hill.


The Herne Hill Society, whilst not wishing to repeat some of the more provocative and perhaps hurtful comments that were put about, shares the underlying concerns that were exposed in the course of these recent protests. We are deeply attached to the gentle and useful diversity of the shops in our small “town centre”. Most of these premises are individual, distinct small businesses, often family-owned, family-operated and long-established, thriving on the hard work and vision of their owners and staff, and succeeding - or at least surviving - by serving our community. The community does not wish to see these replaced by larger retail brands who may be the only businesses which can either afford the high new rents or tolerate the risk of trading at a loss until their shop generates enough business to be solvent.

Of course, the Dulwich Estate is by no means the only landlord operating in Herne Hill. We recognise, too, that it is the natural instinct and economic right of any freeholder to generate a reasonable and realistic income from the properties held by his/her company or, in your case, charity.

Nevertheless, it is widely believed that a conscientious and responsible landlord, one that is concerned about its reputation among local residents and the wider well-being of the community in which he or she operates, would want to exercise this right in a way that contributes in the long run to the success and sustainability of that community. And we would argue that the direction of travel, in this respect, is as much to be shaped by the community itself as by its landlord, if he/she wishes to retain their respect.

We would be grateful therefore if we could meet you as soon as possible to hear how you are proposing to proceed when further rent reviews fall due on your premises in Herne Hill. We would be glad to visit your offices for such a discussion at your earliest convenience. Our well attended Annual General Meeting will be held on 9 March and it would be good if we had been able to have this discussion with you before then.

Yours sincerely



Colin Wight
Chair
The Herne Hill Society

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