

Ropers Walk, London SW2 2QN, 20/02406/RG3

Objection on behalf of the Herne Hill Society

1. The NPPF, London Plan and Lambeth's own policy on the historic environment

Ropers Walk is part of the Cressingham Gardens Estate, built by Lambeth using the talents of the team led by the Borough Architect Ted Hollamby. It is a very fine example of social housing that applies enlightened and imaginative standards of communal space and high quality design and architecture. It has been identified by both Historic England and the Twentieth Century Society as worthy of inclusion within the Brockwell Park Conservation Area. The Herne Hill Society support that view and would indeed regard the Estate as deserving listed status.

It is very disappointing to read how the heritage statement relied on by the applicant fails to attach value to the important and innovative social origins of the estate and its contribution to social housing reform and downplays the significance and completeness of the estate's architecture and layout. The true value of the estate, in our submission, can be found in the report by English Heritage (Historic England): *Housing in Lambeth 1965–80 and its National Context, a Thematic Study* (2014) at pages 9, 11, 13 and 22, and featured on the front cover of the report. At page 22 the estate is cited as the first in the finest Top 5 of the scores of housing developments by Lambeth completed in the Hollamby era.

We also agree with the view of the Twentieth Century Society in their letter to Lambeth dated 21 December 2020 that the buildings at Ropers Walk are "notable non-designated heritage assets which ought to be conserved". Having regard to paras 192 and 197 of the NPPF, London Plan Policy 7.8 and Lambeth Policy Q18 the proposed demolition and redevelopment of Ropers Walk is not justifiable.

2. Lack of Masterplan for Cressingham Gardens

Bringing forward this application before any Masterplan for the whole estate has been published and consulted on is unacceptable. It fuels the suspicion that consent for redevelopment of part of the estate is sought in order to facilitate subsequent redevelopment of other parts and to remove Ropers Walk from the proper scrutiny and controls that inclusion in a Masterplan would entail. We have seen the letter dated 22 December 2020 from solicitors acting for Cressingham Gardens residents and note with concern the attempted "salami slicing" that this application reveals. Such an approach by a public authority is at best incoherent and at worst disreputable. Further, given the strong arguments and wide local support for including Cressingham Gardens within the Brockwell Park Conservation Area, the enlargement of which is currently being consulted on, this application is premature. It wrongly seeks to prejudice a fully informed decision on that issue and should not therefore be pursued until the issue has been decided.

3. Architectural design and local context

The London Plan (Policy 7.6) speaks of the need for buildings to be "of the highest architectural quality, to be of a proportion, composition, scale and orientation that enhances, activates and appropriately defines the public realm, to comprise details and materials that complement, not necessarily replicate, the local architectural character and not cause unacceptable harm to the

amenity of surrounding land and buildings, particularly residential buildings, in relation to privacy". Lambeth Policy Q7 refers to the need for new development to have "a bulk, scale/mass, siting, building line and orientation which adequately preserves or enhances the prevailing local character". Lambeth Policy Q5 emphasises "local distinctiveness" and responding to "positive aspects of the local context and historic character in terms of: (i) urban block and grain, patterns of space and relationship, townscape/landscape character; (ii) built form (bulk, scale, height and massing) including roofscapes; (iii) siting, orientation and layout and relationship with other buildings and spaces".

The proposed scheme, we submit, fails to adhere to these policy principles:

- (i) far from enhancing the prevailing local character or responding to local context and historic character, it imposes a building with bulk, scale and height damaging to its surroundings, both in terms of neighbouring houses and Brockwell Park;
- (ii) the addition of a fourth floor creates an increase in height, compared to the present building, of 4m at the upper end of the block on Trinity Rise, out of any reasonable scale with the 2-storey terraced neighbouring housing and in its excessive dominance harming the streetscape;
- (iii) bringing the block forward and reducing the depth of the present front garden land on Trinity Rise increases the excessive dominance of the block;
- (iv) the proposed roofline is poorly articulated and does not relate to its context;
- (v) the 4-storey extension along Hardel Walk builds over existing green space, an important attribute of the special character of the Cressingham Gardens Estate; it is also built right up to the flank wall of the 2-storey houses on Upgrove Manor Way and creates an unattractive imbalance, damaging to the amenity of those houses and to the Estate more generally.

4. Conservation Areas: Lambeth's Policy

Under Lambeth Policy Q22 it is a requirement of development affecting conservation areas that it should preserve or enhance the character or appearance of conservation areas by protecting the setting (including views in and out of the area). The boundary of the Brockwell Park conservation area runs immediately to the east of Ropers Walk. The value of Brockwell Park as a Lambeth heritage asset cannot be overstated. Currently Ropers Walk is visible from the park itself, but the taller element on Trinity Rise is furthest from the park and in any case well screened by a mature English oak some 20m high (proposed to be felled under this application). The proposed block is substantially taller than the present building and its four storeys on Hardel Walk will be considerably closer to the park than the current two storeys. This cannot but impact negatively on views out of the park. We note that the application offers no visualisations of how such views will be affected. A particular quality of the Cressingham Gardens Estate is that it respects the setting of the park and in its design draws on the character of the park itself. The proposed scheme fails to do so; it is a design that could be found anywhere.

A particular loss under the proposed scheme is the view from the Estate of the tower, clock and spire of Holy Trinity Church (1856, grade II listed), which stands within the conservation area. Protection of views to and from listed buildings is also a factor that requires to be considered under Policy Q20.

5. Lambeth's policy on loss of trees

The proposal requires the loss of three mature trees, an oak, a lime and a yew. These trees provide significant amenity, not least from the English oak, which screens Ropers Walk from the park and in itself constitutes a historic tree of intrinsic value

We note the erroneous description of the oak in the applicant's Tree Assessment. The letter dated 22 December 2020 from solicitors acting for Cressingham Gardens residents explains the misleading nature of the argument advanced by the applicant based on the misdescription of the tree as a Turkey oak. Lambeth Policy Q10 draws attention to trees with "significant amenity, historic or ecological/habitat conservation value " and the need to retain them in new developments. The original Ropers Walk development retained these trees. This proposal does not, contrary to Policy Q10.

6. Sustainable development and climate change

Lambeth has declared a climate emergency and has committed to ensuring that its operations are carbon neutral by 2030. An overarching objective of the new Lambeth Plan provides for "using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy". Demolition of Ropers Walk contravenes such objective. We submit any redevelopment should be assessed against the RIBA Climate Challenge 2030 which sets targets to retrofit existing buildings to ensure the embodied carbon is retained. No thought appear to have been given to how, for example, adapting and retrofitting the undercroft at Ropers Walk could in fact provide additional residential/community use.

For the reasons given above we submit that consent for this application should be refused.

Laurence Marsh
62 Fawnbrake Avenue
London SE24 0BZ

Vice chair Herne Hill Society
Co-ordinator of the Society's planning group

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