

Clapham Junction Action Group

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Richard Stanway-Williams,
Peabody,
45 Westminster Bridge Rd,
London, SE1 7JB

Dear Richard,

Following the two days of consultation last week, we are now writing to you to submit our "official" comments on the proposal.

The current Peabody Estate is architecturally undistinguished, badly laid out, and poorly integrated with the rest of Clapham Junction town centre. So there is plenty to be said in principle for a redevelopment and the proposed new scheme has many good points. It will conform with new government criteria regarding repair/redevelopment of estates; it will open up the estate to the wider locality; and it will deliver much more diversity in terms of size, shape, texture, and colour in the new buildings.

But we do have criticisms. There is no escaping the fact that, if the plans are implemented as they stand, the new estate will have a transformatory visual effect on the whole neighbourhood. The height of the current buildings is five storeys, higher than most local buildings, but not substantially so. Yet it seems that several of the proposed new buildings will be ten storeys, and at least one twelve storeys, more than doubling the height of much of the estate.

When coupled with the fact that the estate lies at the top of St John's Hill, on comparatively much higher ground than the rest of the town centre (something which, incidentally, the exhibition model failed to illustrate), there can be no doubt that the proposed scheme will create a looming, architecturally distinct, presence, dominating the locality in a way that the existing estate simply does not. The eight storeys of the Granada/Lumiere building nearby, which were permitted by the Council against local opposition as an exception to existing planning guidance (in order to maintain/sustain the old auditorium), are already an eyesore. One or more of the proposed new Peabody buildings will be fifty percent higher than that.

History and experience suggest that multistorey blocks, which are significantly out of kilter with the rest of Clapham Junction, will simply become the new normal (at least for developers, if not for Council officers). Five years ago, the area consisted almost exclusively of 3-5 storey buildings. Within a few years we have moved to 8 and now potentially to 12. Yet two years ago a thousand local residents expressed their opposition to tall buildings in Clapham Junction. When the much needed redevelopment of Clapham Junction station takes place almost anything could be put forward. Who can credibly argue that 12 storeys on the Peabody will not set a new precedent for height in what is currently still a stylistically cohesive and relatively low rise environment?

During the consultation we have heard voices expressing similar concerns about the size of the proposed construction. Although we acknowledge and support the idea of redeveloping the current site, we believe that some minor amendments could allow the new Peabody Estate to integrate in a more sympathetic way with the local environment.

For example, you should consider lowering the tallest tower(s) with or without change to other buildings. The residential capacity lost from one or two planned twelve storey buildings can very easily be redistributed with increases elsewhere around the estate. This is indisputable. However many opponents may argue that this will somehow damage the alleged design integrity or architectural vision of the scheme, such alterations won't create any major new difficulty in terms of shadowing or bulking, but will certainly show more respect for the character of Clapham Junction and the Northcote area.

The height (but not density) reduction will plainly create a less intrusive, more harmonious presence that also significantly reduces the potential for development excess elsewhere in the future.

Addressing and not ignoring the worry of many local residents in Clapham Junction would demonstrate an undeniable concern for the inhabitants of the area. This should be the purpose of your consultation, before you make a definite submission for planning permission in a few months. We look forward – with optimism – to your response.

Yours sincerely,

David Hargreaves & Cyril Richert

Clapham Junction Action Group – <http://cjag.org>