

**REF: MR/BH/DB/R00129**

**BY EMAIL ONLY:** [programmeofficer@carmeledwards.com](mailto:programmeofficer@carmeledwards.com)

9<sup>th</sup> October 2020

Dear Sir / Madam,

**DRAFT REVISED LAMBETH LOCAL PLAN 2020-2035  
ROK PLANNING ON BEHALF OF UNITE GROUP PLC (RESPONDENT NUMBER R046)  
HEARING STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS (MIQ) RAISED BY THE INSPECTOR IN  
DOCUMENT MF3 REGARDING MATTER 4 'ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, RETAIL, AND TOWN  
CENTRE USES' AHEAD OF LAMBETH'S LOCAL PLAN EXAMINATION IN PUBLIC (EIP)**

I write on behalf of our client, Unite Group Plc, to submit a Hearing Statement in response to the Matters issues and questions (MIQ's) (Matter 4) raised by the Inspector within document MF3 dated 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020 regarding the Lambeth Local Plan Examination in Public (EiP).

Unite Students is the UK's leading manager and developer of purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA), providing homes for around 74,000 students in more than 177 purpose-built properties across 27 of the UK's strongest university towns and cities.

This hearing statement has been prepared further to the representations made throughout the preparation of the draft Local Plan, and specifically the representations made to the pre-submission version of the plan dated March 2020. This statement responds to the MIQs in relation to Matter 4 'Economic Development, Retail, and Town Centre uses'.

**MATTER 4 – ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT – 4.2 OFFICES**

Unite in their previous representations have objected to the onerous requirements included within policy ED1 and ED2. These are detailed in turn under each of the following relevant questions.

**Should policy ED1 be more flexible in relation to allowing development proposals involving a complete loss of floorspace, for example to enable the delivery of improved healthcare facilities?**

It is clear that the policy requirements have become more onerous regarding the loss of Use Class B1a. It is acknowledged that there has been a loss of this type of floorspace in respect of the permitted development rights.

However, the Council have enforced a number of Article 4 directions to manage this. The further updates to the draft policy are particularly onerous in terms of increasing the marketing period to 2 years and the inclusion of having to demonstrate that it is not viable/feasible to redevelop sites for office use. These requirements have not been sufficiently justified in the supporting topic papers and should be removed to enable flexibility for other town centre uses.

Furthermore, in terms of flexibility, it is important to consider the new Use Classes Order 1987 (as amended) and the fact that Use Class B1a is now referred to as Use Class E, which also includes for research and development of products or processes and light industrial processes.

Furthermore, the draft policy fails to acknowledge employment generation beyond the quantum of office floorspace. The Council are effectively protecting office buildings which could be incredibly inefficient and could become more efficient through redevelopment proposals which deliver a reduced level of floorspace, but the same employment generation.

Whilst not currently a planning policy consideration, the inflexibility of this draft policy should be reviewed in light of Covid-19 and the effects on the office market this is predicted to cause. Notably, in terms of the demand for large offices being predicted to decline.

It is therefore recommended that the draft policy is reverted to the policy wording as adopted (2016) and is flexible in its approach in re-providing other suitable town centre uses as set out in the Use Classes Order 1987 (as amended).

**Is the marketing requirement to demonstrate that there is no demand for offices over a period of at least two years justified and in line with national policy? Why has this been increased from one year?**

Unite believe that the increased marketing requirement is unsubstantiated for the reasons set out above and this should be reduced to 1 year as per the previously adopted planning policy.

**Is the 'no net loss' stance critical to Lambeth's local economy or is it unduly restrictive which could get in the way of economic progress in the Borough?**

Unite believe this policy stance is onerous and should be flexible for the reasons set out above. It should also have clear consideration to employment generation to ensure re-provided floorspace is used efficiently in development schemes.

London Plan Policy E1 - A is clear in that *"Improvements to the quality, flexibility and adaptability of office space of different sizes (for micro, small, medium-sized and larger enterprises) should be supported by new office provision, refurbishment and mixed-use development"*.

This strategic planning policy position therefore allows for flexibility in the re-provision of office floorspace in redevelopment/mixed use schemes and on this basis it is considered that the policy stance of 'no net loss' is unduly restrictive.

## **MATTER 4 – ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT – 4.3 AFFORDABLE WORKSPACE**

Unite are supportive overall of the provision of affordable workspace and recognise the importance of this for London's ecosystem in terms of creative and technology innovation. However, Unite object to the onerous requirements of policy ED2, as detailed in earlier representations. These objections are set out in turn below in respect of the relevant questions.

**Is policy ED2, which seeks to promote affordable workspaces, sufficiently responsive to sensitive viability considerations, or are there soundness issues with its application, for example in relation to applications for redevelopment and refurbishment of office space?**

Unite maintain their strong objection to rental level dictated by location and the fact that there is an onerous requirement for the way in which the affordable floorspace is managed as set out in their representations dated 17th December 2018 to the Regulation 19 consultation. Unite do not believe that

this policy is sufficiently responsive to viability considerations and is contrary to the strategic planning policy position set out in the London Plan which, whilst it supports the provision of affordable workspace, does not dictate rental levels based on locations or the management of this. The further justification is set out in the following paragraphs.

### **What is the justification for the proposed rent levels?**

Unite maintain their strong objection to rental level dictated by location for the following key reasons:

1. Whilst it is acknowledged that the Council have tested the affordable rental levels and discounts based on CIL charging zone locations, it is clear that planning policy should not dictate rental levels. London Plan Policy (E3) is clear that affordable workspace should be at 'rents maintained below the market rate', and, whilst it encourages local authorities to identify areas suitable or in need of affordable workspace for certain uses, it does not stipulate the requirement to include further discounted rental values. Therefore, this is contrary to the strategic position;
2. Topic Paper 3 identifies the anticipated duration for which these discounted rental levels can be maintained whilst remaining viable (circa 15 years with the exception of 'the remainder of the borough'). However, this has no consideration to specific sites and other viability factors;
3. The viability testing of each of the discounted rental levels based on location only clearly does not have consideration to wider factors which influence the development of sites and, on this basis, is not justified;
4. Therefore, part a. of draft policy ED2 should be removed in its entirety and this should reflect the strategic London Plan position (E3) that "rents are maintained below the market rate"; and
5. In addition, the policy wording (part c) goes on to state that the affordable workspace will be managed by a council-approved workspace provided and there is a requirement to submit evidence to demonstrate this with any major planning application. This adds a further onerous requirement in addition to the rental level requirements, and the further departure from strategic planning policy is not sufficiently justified by the Council.

We trust this Hearing Statement will be considered for the Examination in Public. If you should have any questions in the meantime please do not hesitate to contact Bethan Hawkins on 07849 848236 or (bethan.hawkins@rokplanning.co.uk), or myself at this office.

Yours sincerely,



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