

Planning application 129020/FO/2020

I am writing on behalf of the Withington Ward Councillors (myself, Councillor Becky Chambers and Councillor Rebecca Moore) regarding the above planning application.

While the proposed development is in Fallowfield ward, the site is very near to the north west border of the ward that we represent. If approved, it would have a significant impact on our shared district centre, local amenities, public services and most importantly on many residents in the South-East Fallowfield part of Withington ward.

We have always had a positive relationship with USDAW. Their presence in Fallowfield has been a real positive for over a century. While we were sad to hear they were leaving their site on Wilmslow Road, we fully appreciate that their existing offices are no longer fit for purpose, and that they need to seek appropriate remuneration for the site. Securing good value for their members should of course be a priority for USDAW. We understand this and would reiterate that we appreciate USDAW's ambition to leave a positive legacy in the local area. However, these proposals put forward by the developers are wholly unsuitable for the local area.

Our main concerns are as follows:

- 1) The proposed accommodation is for 425 student bedrooms. This is a high-density development that would exacerbate existing imbalances in the local community. The Planning Department and Committee will be very familiar with the issues our communities face due to imbalance, and be familiar with the policies and strategies that the council has put in place to mitigate over-studentification.
- 2) The height of the proposed tower block would make it by far the tallest building in the local area, once the existing Owens Tower is demolished. This would have a negative impact on visual amenity for nearby residents. It would also impact on visual amenity for users of Platt Fields Park.
- 3) The high density of this development would have a detrimental impact on local residential amenity and public services - including transport, parks and primary care facilities.
- 4) There is very minimal parking provision on site. While the developer states that this is to encourage tenants to use sustainable transport, the reality is that it will cause pressure on existing parking, with overspill onto residential roads, which already face traffic blight from student properties and local schools.
- 5) As Councillors, we are acutely aware of ongoing issues with crime, antisocial behaviour, litter, and community cohesion caused by over-studentification. All of these risk being exacerbated by the addition of this high-density new development. We are by no means anti-student. We strongly value the contribution that students make to our city. But our

communities must be sustainable and more balanced. Furthermore, the potential for increased noise and antisocial behaviour is not acknowledged in the Noise Impact Assessment.

- 6) The proposed development runs counter to Policy H6 of the Council's Core Strategy. This states that "High density development in South Manchester will generally only be appropriate within the district centres of Chorlton, Didsbury, Fallowfield, Levenshulme, and Withington, as part of mixed-use schemes." Clearly this development does not meet this requirement. Nor does it meet the other requirement of this policy: "Outside the district centres priorities will be for housing which meets identified shortfalls, including family housing and provision that meets the needs of elderly people, with schemes adding to the stock of affordable housing."
- 7) The proposed development also goes against the established trend of students moving away from Fallowfield and Withington, towards purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) on and near the campuses around the City Centre and Oxford Road Corridor. The site is nowhere near the Oxford Road Corridor, the south boundary of which ends at Whitworth Park.
- 8) For this reason, it also goes against Policy H12 of the Council's Core Strategy. Any proposed PBSA must meet a number of clauses. In particular, we do not believe the proposed development meets the following clauses in the policy:
 - a) "High density developments should be sited in locations where this is compatible with existing developments and initiatives, and where retail facilities are within walking distance. Proposals should not lead to an increase in on-street parking in the surrounding area."
 - b) "Proposals that can demonstrate a positive regeneration impact in their own right will be given preference over other schemes. This can be demonstrated for example through impact assessments on district centres and the wider area. Proposals should contribute to providing a mix of uses and support district and local centres, in line with relevant Strategic Regeneration Frameworks, local plans and other masterplans as student accommodation should closely integrate with existing neighbourhoods to contribute in a positive way to their vibrancy without increasing pressure on existing neighbourhood services to the detriment of existing residents."
 - c) "Proposals should be designed to be safe and secure for their users, and avoid causing an increase in crime in the surrounding area."
 - d) "Consideration should be given to the design and layout of the student accommodation and siting of individual uses within the overall development in relation to adjacent neighbouring uses. The aim is to ensure that there is no unacceptable effect on residential amenity in the surrounding area through increased noise, disturbance or impact on the streetscene either from the proposed development itself or when combined with existing accommodation."

- 9) Councillors and the residents that we represent want to see a more balanced community, with former HMOs going back into family ownership. The developers have claimed that students would move into the PBSA from existing HMOs in Fallowfield. However, the proposed rents for these flats are significantly greater than the rent that students are currently paying in HMO accommodation. There would therefore be no incentive for them to move to the PBSA. What might instead be seen, however, would be a drift back into Fallowfield from students currently living in PBSA in the City Centre. This would thereby reverse the positive trend we want to see continue.
- 10) Fundamentally we believe that mixed tenure would be far more suitable. The site does present an opportunity for the provision of affordable housing, social housing, and retirement housing. There is a chronic shortage of all of these types of housing in South Manchester. Disappointingly, none of these alternatives appears to have been properly explored by the developers.
- 11) There is concern regarding potential environmental damage that would be caused to established mature trees at the boundary with Platt Fields Park: both in terms of damage to the roots, and the blocking of sunlight caused by the tallest building in the development. There is also a lack of clarity regarding the impact of these proposals on both tree numbers, and on the boundary of Platt Fields Park.
- 12) The development would cause harm to the setting of Oakley Villa. The last surviving example of a number of 19th century villas, it is not currently a listed building. However it should be seen as a local heritage asset. Under these proposals it would be overshadowed, and overwhelmed, by the surrounding development.

In summary, we do not believe the application in its current form is appropriate. We therefore ask that the application is refused.

Councillor Chris Wills
Withington Ward