



Councillor Ravi Govindia
Leader of the Council
Wandsworth Town Hall
London SW18 2PU

27 January 2014

38 Disraeli Road
London SW15 2DS

Dear Councillor Govindia

Loss of offices in Putney

Thank you for your reply to our letter of the 20th December 2013. We have yet to receive a response from Justine Greening MP concerning the difficulties arising from government planning policies but considered that we needed to respond to a number of the points in your reply.

We are pleased to see that you state that the Council are concerned at the loss of office employment in Putney. Unfortunately, when it comes to actual planning decisions, we do not feel that the Council demonstrates any real commitment to defending the retention of office space, in those aspects that *are* under your control. We know that this view is shared by some members of the Putney Town Centre Partnership.

Your response seems to make much of the idea that Core Strategy PL14 trumps DTMS13. However policy DTMS13b states that the net loss of offices “will not be permitted unless there is compelling evidence which clearly illustrates that there has been no demand”. Significant providers of higher grade employment have been forced to leave Putney because office property owners and buyers were encouraged to believe that they would be allowed to build significant quantities of high value residential. No sensible owner would then seek to re-let a property for office use and thus the “no compelling evidence” criteria thus became self-fulfilling. The gifting of a miniscule office replacement percentage to St James, as the first developer, set a standard to which the others aspire. We do not accept that homeworking, hot desking and flexible hours have changed the demand for office space in the 5 years since the policies were developed. These practices have been the norm in most commercial offices for many years, if not decades, and we do not think that the policies should be discounted further.

Further, DTMS13b states that in judging office re-provision, “account will be taken of the number of jobs being created”. Your letter identifies a loss of office square meterage of a massive 60% (not including 111 Upper Richmond Road [URR]) but makes much of the volume of retail space created. Your officers will be very well aware that per m.sq, retail space creates a very small proportion of the jobs that offices generate. Additionally, low

The Putney Society

The amenity society for Putney and Roehampton. Registered Charity No. 263242
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grade retail jobs are no substitute for the calibre of the jobs and contribution to the local economy of companies Putney has lost such as Capsticks. The Core Strategy specifically identified the support provided by office workers to the local retail trade. The failure on this front is already being demonstrated as local shops close.

Next we would pick up your comment that the Putney Society made “limited representations in relation to the Council’s policies on offices” in 2013. This is correct and the reasons for this are twofold. Firstly the Society considered the policies to be broadly correct but that their interpretation and implementation is skewed and woefully wanting. Secondly the Society considers that further engagement is increasingly a waste of energy as the Council is widely perceived to be deaf to the contributions of local residents on planning issues and only concerned with ticking the “consulted” box.

You refer to the recent circumstances at 111 URR where the developer submitted a second application as “encouragement” for the Planning Applications Committee to agree their primary application. We agree with your interpretation of this situation and it is for our MP to answer for her Government’s legislation that encourages developers to engage in this type of behaviour. We would note, however, that even the shadow application would have provided Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) money.

One further point we raised, but to which we do not believe you have responded, was illustrated by Centrus Apartments in Felsham Road. In this illustration the owners require planning permission but seek this on the basis of inability to let as offices. The offices are newly built but yet again the owners have no incentive to find tenants. We believe that officers fail to demand strong evidence of inability to let, instead, being willing to accept the word of owners, supported by complicit agents.

In summary, we would be grateful for your view on (a) how the Council will challenge and ensure that office owners in Putney provide honest and substantiated information concerning attempts that they have made to let offices and (b) how current planning policies will be applied with integrity and not be subverted by pre-determination.

We wish to protect the ability of Putney to attract medium size, high quality employers as well as small employers, as assessed by DTZ in the work commissioned by the Council themselves for the early versions of the Local Plan. In short we are asking the Council to uphold its own policies.

We would be pleased to have your response to the points that we have raised above.

Yours sincerely,

Carolyn McMillan PhD
Chairman, The Putney Society

Cc: Councillors, Wards for Putney and West Hill; Stephen Wallace, Putney Town Centre Manager