

I am writing to you on behalf of the Caterham Business Improvement District (BID) which represents 230 businesses from all sectors located in Caterham valley.

Over the past 18 months we have been consulted on the proposed Church Walk Development. In principle, the BID supports the development recognising it as a much needed catalyst to regenerate the town centre. However, we reluctantly submitted an objection to the first application, the sole reason being the absence of guaranteed, affordable, **business parking** (lack of parking being identified as our absolute priority by the members we represent). The developer, BP Ropemaker, had allocated 45 spaces (in addition to the current 24 free spaces) but unfortunately there was no mechanism in place to ensure that the allocation would be guaranteed under the planning process.

There is a growing demand for business parking so that guarantee is an absolute minimum. The developer capped the number of spaces at 45 in order to meet the request made by Councillors that the allocation of spaces for the Private Rental Sector (PRS) flats be increased from 0.5 per flat to 1 per flat. Based on the experience of other PRS schemes, this is considered excessive as the usual ratio is 0.5 spaces per flat.

The developer has advised there is now another issue impacting the proposed development, as a Tree Protection Order has been placed on a tree located to the right of the entrance to the car park. Please note, this is not a vintage tree, nor a rare species. If the TPO is not lifted the proposed deck, providing 45 additional spaces, will be struck from the plan; therefore, either business parking will be lost or the allocation of spaces to the PRS flats will need to be reduced.

It is important to note that the tenants of the PRS flats will be renting an allocated car parking space separately to their flat (i.e. a space will not be automatically included). These flats are targeted at young professionals between the ages of 20 – 30, an age group where taking a driving test and car ownership is in decline, so we anticipate that the uptake for renting car parking spaces will not exceed 0.5 spaces per flat. Young professionals are unlikely to own a car for occasional journeys and they are now established as an Uber or 'car club' generation. Tenants have a choice where they choose to live; if they own one or more cars then this will not be the development for them and they will choose to live elsewhere.

The developer's original proposal of 0.5 spaces per flat followed extensive research by them and, based on that allocation to residents, their model was economically viable. We believe that you should have similar confidence in that scheme.

We now ask that Councillors and Officers take a more balanced view of the needs of the whole community including the needs of businesses. Residents are complaining vociferously that shops are closing in Caterham and lack of footfall in the town is noticeable. The proposed new development would bring in much needed footfall and the provision of business parking would support businesses and help attract tenants to take up empty office space, including within Quadrant House, and to occupy empty retail units. This is critical to the local economy.

We ask you to consider whether the TPO can be set aside, with the proviso that other trees are planted in the immediate vicinity or that imaginative planting schemes (including vertical) are incorporated to compensate for the loss of the tree and allow the provision of the much needed additional business parking spaces.

Alternatively, you could agree that the PRS scheme would be acceptable with the original proposal of 0.5 spaces per flat or as a compromise, 0.75 per flat. This would then release the additional business spaces needed. **Above all, we request that the allocation of business parking is made a condition of planning.**

In summary, having met with the developer's representatives this month it is clear to us that following continued opposition to their proposal, Ropemakers are about to walk away from this scheme and will take their £50m investment elsewhere. Church Walk is the only shopping centre that Ropemakers own and this was to be a 'model' development; understandably they are surprised that such an opportunity for substantial private investment is not being welcomed with open arms.

The Masterplan is a Statutory Planning Document adopted by Tandridge District Council last year and is a key planning document to facilitate the regeneration of Caterham which is undeniably in decline. The document highlights the importance of the Church Walk development as a corner stone of that Masterplan. Therefore, we urge you to take a bold decision to secure the future of Caterham and allow this 'once in a generation' investment to be made in the town centre. There is unlikely to be another such opportunity – this scheme is now on the table and we urge you to support it.

If you would like to discuss this further with the BID, please do not hesitate to contact me via sue@caterhambid.co.uk

Kind regards

Andrew Browne
Chairman – Caterham BID