

13 February 2023

Lee Green Assembly: Galliard Homes' planning application to redevelop Leegate Centre **Response from the Assembly's Leegate Steering Group**

The Steering Group submitted its response to the Galliard planning application (DC/22/126997) in August 2022. This has already been circulated.

It is worth stating that the Steering Group, formed over 10 years ago to get something done about Leegate and ensure local people have a say in its future, has long advocated that its redevelopment be for the benefit of the community. Indeed, it was the Steering Group which persuaded St Modwen (the site's former owner) to abandon plans for a superstore and focus on more housing, and were happy that Galliard's initial ideas seemed to accept a limit on the height of the taller buildings.

While welcoming some aspects of the proposal – namely, the substantial amount of genuinely affordable housing, the improved public square and space layout, and the more appropriate allocation of commercial/retail and community space – we said there were strong grounds for rejecting the plans and, if it were to be approved, there needed to be strong conditions attached to ensure the most adverse effects were overcome.

In particular, the height and massing (density) will dwarf the surrounding area, including nearby heritage buildings, setting a bad precedent and anticipating very large numbers of new residents whose needs would overwhelm already stretched local services and infrastructure.

Since then, Lewisham's Mayor and Cabinet have approved under the Lewisham Tall Buildings Addendum to the Local Plan that buildings in the Leegate District Centre be limited to 12 storeys – significantly less than the 15 storeys proposed for the corner block. Any revised plan aimed at maintaining the 35% affordable housing and limiting that building's height would inevitably result in an even greater density in the other buildings and considerably reduce the amount of public space, one of the best features of the current plans.

The Steering Group is therefore now calling for the current application to be rejected and that Galliard be asked to resubmit its plans to meet the Steering Group's concerns.

In asking for the Assembly's endorsement, we cite the following issues:

- **Height and massing** – The proposal is based on an over-development of the site. It is too high, too bulky, and too dense. One block at 15 storeys, one at 12, two at 10 and the remainder at 8 together make up a development more suited to Lewisham town centre. We want to see the scheme go back to the original Local Plan height limit of 12 storeys. This is not just our view. The highly-respected urban planning team at Allies and Morrison Urban Practitioners concluded in their original May 2022 Tall Buildings Study Addendum: "The redevelopment of the Leegate Shopping Centre is a major opportunity. Heights in this sustainable and unconstrained location could be expected to rise to a maximum of approximately 12 storeys."
- **The proposals do not comply with the London Plan requirements on dual-aspect units (windows openable windows on two external walls)** – Over 200 new homes (42%) mainly one bed units will be single-aspect. The London Plan only accepts single-aspect units where they offer a more acceptable design solution. These will be at risk of solar gain and overheating. If Lewisham's climate emergency means anything, then Galliard should be asked to redesign the blocks to increase the percentage. Other concerns raised by the GLA include the lack of an active travel zone, a substantial street wall along Burnt Ash and Eltham roads, queuing on Burnt Ash that delay buses, safety issues about the car park exit, and that four servicing bays for the supermarket and the other retail provision are inadequate. The GLA also wants conditions on various construction-related matters.

- **A duty to consult** – Galliard’s consultation provoked considerable frustration, with the strength of community opposition consistently misrepresented. While minor revisions to the plans were achieved in the pre-application stages – the inclusion of a community centre and a health facility, a graffiti wall and a basketball court, and a bus stop was set back – Galliard resisted all substantive objections over height and design, and we were unable to see how much of the Design Review Panel’s views they took on board.
Further, Greenwich Council has objected to the plans on the grounds that the solid block of tall towers along Eltham Road adversely affects listed buildings on the north (Greenwich) side of Eltham Road, a view shared by Lewisham’s own heritage officer who also raised concerns with regard to listed buildings in Lewisham.
- **A commitment to the existing traders, services and charities** – Considerable resources and energy in extremely difficult circumstances, including during the Covid pandemic, by the existing traders deserves recognition. Without mitigation, 1,000-plus jobs, and 52 businesses and services could be lost to the area. Lewisham Council and Galliard Homes are now talking with Leegate Traders about the impact of the redevelopment on their businesses and services and the community they serve.
The redevelopment plans considerably reduce retail and commercial space on the site, as well as the loss of an accessible service yard, and there is insufficient detail in the current offer to businesses and services for them to be able to plan realistically for mid- to longer-term operations on this site or nearby.

In conclusion, we ask for the Assembly’s endorsement of our proposed rejection of the plans as they stand, and its support for any contributions we can make to working meaningfully with Galliard Homes and Lewisham Council towards an improved plan that meets the economic and social needs of the local community.