The least sustainable housing proposal of the year?

Planning application no: P101448,
Northview, Tufnell Park Road, Islington, London N7 0QB

An application to build a row of flats on top of a classic 1930s estate in Islington, London, has failed to meet criteria for sustainable homes to an extraordinary extent.

The proposed homes will not be sustainable for environmental reasons and because they will not be homes that stand the test of time.

All matters listed below relate to official guidance, best practice and/or minimum standards. The arguments behind each statement and how they show the proposed flats are unsustainable are contained in Northview Residents' Association's response to Islington council.

Northview consists of two blocks: 1-12 Northview, known as front block, which faces Tufnell Park Road; and 14-43 Northview, the U-shaped back block. The flats are arranged around a courtyard, with grassy areas and mature trees. The proposed extension will run the length of 14-43.

Light and privacy

• The proposed storey will blot out all direct sunlight and most natural light to at least one flat in the front block, with others seriously affected.

• People on a balcony of a new flat will be able to see into neighbours' kitchens, bedrooms and bathrooms, from 5-6m away.

• A report accompanying the application implies that, because urban locations do not always receive recommended levels of direct sunlight, making them even darker is acceptable.

• The block to be built on will lose light but this is not considered in the daylight study.

• The extension will cut daylight and direct sunlight to flats and houses around the estate.

• The storey is to be built on the block to the south of the estate – it will cast a shadow over the courtyard.

• Houses and gardens backing on to Northview will lose light – one room will lose light from two aspects.

• Some flats in Northview are arranged so windows are aligned to maximise daylight. This has not been taken into account.

• Blocking the light will, in effect, make some flats single aspect.

• It could also make a proposed block of affordable homes on the estate next door less sustainable by overshadowing and overlooking them.

Flat design and occupation

• Occupiers of the new flats will be able to see into existing residents' bedrooms, kitchens and bathrooms/wcs just a few metres away.

• Seven of the eight the flats will have their living/dining areas above bedrooms. One has an entrance hall is over a main bedroom.

• Five flats have combined kitchen/living/dining areas, against council policy. Four combined living/dining are smaller than London Plan minimum standards, in one case $21.37m^2$ against the standard of $29m^2$.

• Seven of the eight flats have a gross internal area below the minimum stipulated in the London Plan (room widths, door turning areas and turning circles are not given)

• None of the homes meet lifetime, inclusive or flexible homes standards,

• No homes have been designed to meet the needs of anyone with a mobility or sensory disability (one household in every five in Islington includes someone with a long-term limiting illness.)

• None of the homes are intended to fill known gaps in supply, nor are any affordable

• None of the homes are suitable for families - all are on the fourth floor and there's no lift

• The community will become less mixed, with the vast majority of residents here for the short term

• The proposed bike store may block an emergency fire exit for the flats and neighbouring commercial premises.

Environment - transport

• The assumption that no new residents will be able to keep a car is spurious

• The cycle rack will provide eight spaces for 23 proposed residents. The drawing shows five space. There is no space for visitors' bikes.

Safety and community cohesion

• There will be more short term residents so less community cohesion and more unfamiliar faces every year

• More people will be sharing the same stairwells.

• Nuisance, crime and the fear of crime are likely to rise

• Many Northview tenants are flat-sharers and transitory occupiers. The new development will increase this and make the community less mixed.

• The proposed bike store will create a deep hidden recess with no natural surveillance where intruders could lurk.

• The bike store is also insecure, and could act as an open invitation to thieves.

• Antisocial behaviour, criminal activity and fear of crime could all increase

Environmental - green building

• Fuel consumption will rise because of the loss of natural light and solar warmth

• The communal hot water system at Northview is being taken out of use rather than extended, despite policies supporting combined heat and power

• The following do not merit a mention: eco-friendly materials; offsetting rises in CO_2 emissions and water use caused by increased occupancy; use of grey water; and energy efficient heating/lighting.

Environmental - waste

• The drains are barely adequate for current use – but the application says they can take additional soil and waste water from the new homes.

• No recycling facilities will be provided (although the rubbish bin shed will be extended in a strange manner – none of us has been able to work out how an extra paladin will fit there).

Environment - trees and gardens

• The applicant says there are no trees or hedges that are important as part of the local landscape character. Yet Northview has several mature trees in its grounds, a number of them protected.

• Findings from a tree report commissioned by the applicant have not found their way into the main application statement.

• Light to gardens in and around Northview will be reduced. This will mean less grows in the gardens and the estate will be less attractive to live in.

The lack of sustainabiilty is underlined by the woeful lack of attention to detail in the application. Other highlights include out of date maps, showing layouts and buildings that have not existed for decades, and misleading drawings, with inaccuracies and omissions.

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