

Searching for a Response to the Third Masterplan

Board Discussion 17th April 2025

A discussion paper regarding the imminent decision by Hackney Council over planning permission for the regeneration of phases 5-8.

It is likely that this planning application will come before the Council for a decision in May. This makes it necessary for the Board to urgently formulate a response that can be used to lobby for its priorities. The aim of this discussion paper is to promote active debate within the board so as to enable clear points of concern to be agreed.

Your comments from the Board meeting will be formulated into the official WDCO Response document. This document is not the WDCO Response.

The Constraints for comments

Given the huge complexity of the regeneration (there are hundreds of pages of reports) and the likely wide variety of concerns residents might have, it is impossible to voice all of these individually. This paper, hence, aims to compress into general themes the main areas that have so far been raised for discussion. To streamline the discussion, the debate about the total number of social homes and the cost of rents etc., is being dealt with elsewhere.

However, this issue is important because the masterplan is about the replacement of social housing and these new homes are becoming difficult to afford and the increase in service charges will affect all tenures (see below).

Our New Community

The WDCO Board now represents a wide mix of residents on the estate. Some have lived at Woodberry for many years, some were born here and more recently an influx of private residents of many nationalities have moved here.

Although older residents were sorry to see their homes demolished the general view is that the regeneration so far, incorporating the reservoirs and the New River into the site together with the new river path, has made Woodberry a delightful and sought after place to live. In our response to the Masterplan we should hold the Delivery Partners to account, give credit where it is due and at the same time raise honest and reasoned objections where improvements can be made. In doing this, we need to be seen to respond to the widest audience to maintain credibility as a Board.

Distilling Down the Areas for Debate

Back in February 2024 the results of a public consultation to the Masterplan's proposals were revealed by the Delivery Partners. These included comments on; **Wind, Sunlight, Amenities, Affordability, Health, Wildlife, Transport and Connectivity (Plans for SSR or**

even Manor House Tube), Loss of Green spaces, Density of Homes, Heights of Blocks, Use of Podiums and finally a Strategy for Combined Heat and Power. We need to whittle these down to about 6 main topics to make any impact.

Broad Subject areas for Discussion

It was suggested by Clare Devine that limiting comments or objections to roughly no more than a few main areas will enable the Board to have the greatest chance of impact to the planning process.

1) Escalating costs:

Can the Board agree a general point along the lines?

Throughout the remaining phases of the redevelopment, strenuous efforts need to be made to the interior architectural design within blocks and the exterior landscaping to mitigate the escalating service charges and rental costs of the new properties.

2) Density (to include Amenities, Health)

The increase in density of homes on the Estate has implications for Transport, Amenities, Massing and Height just to mention a few. The new Masterplan provides for the construction of about 6500 homes, roughly three times the number of dwellings on the original estate.

Many factors come into why this number is so large but it won't be reduced.

If there are too many homes the place may become less desirable to move into. Does the Board feel that the numbers of homes is about as high as we would like (6500)?

We can perhaps, suggest that there might be a mechanism that will place a ceiling on this figure, as it is very likely that this won't be the final version of plans for the regeneration.

What beneficial aspects can we find as evidence to support such a cap? For example, the demand for places in schools, GP surgeries etc., overcrowding on the Tube given that other developments further up the line also increase passenger numbers.

Do we feel confident that utilities and waste management are adequate to meet the needs of the extra homes? Any issues with some Blocks as evidence?

3) Heights of the towers. (to include wind, sunlight)

The general planning consensus is to replace any local authority houses with increased density new homes. This inevitably will mean more high-rise buildings.

The original estate did have tower blocks, these ranged from 5-8 storeys

The Masterplan in 2014 allowed for buildings of between 4 and 31 storeys

Phase 4 allows buildings of 1-26 storeys

The Third Masterplan suggests;

Phase 5 buildings of 3 to 18 storeys.

Phase 6 buildings of between four and 18 storeys

Phase 7 buildings of between six to 16 storeys

Phase 8 buildings of between 3 to 21 storeys

Phase three has the blocks very close to one another. Walking around, many ground floors seem to be quite dark even in March close to noon?

The increase in height and the necessity of having buildings fairly close together as a result of the increased density in the proposed Phases 5 to 8, is a major concern to many residents, when compared with the existing Phases. Not only do the heights negatively impact the light within the dwellings, making some homes feel less pleasant to live in but externally they create an impression of being squeezed in, rather than the feeling of space as in the completed Phases 1 and 2.

Does the board think that the present heights of the proposed Masterplan are ok? What if they need to be increased in the future for viability reasons to the detriment of other factors such as sunlight and wind etc. Would we prefer higher blocks (for private homes) if it allows more open space and enables viability?

Should we ask for transparent wind mitigation to be included in this masterplan.
Do we want to limit building heights to the present proposals?

Some homes will undoubtedly lie in the shadows from other buildings and have reduced sunlight available. Should we accept that some of the spaces do not fully comply with the BRE Guidelines.

Is the Board happy with phase 3 and what lessons should we learn?

4) Transport and Connectivity

The policy of Hackney Council is to reduce the numbers of cars on the estate and persuade residents to cycle, or walk and use public transport.

However to get into town there are many times when Manor House tube station is overcrowded and at peak times the platforms can be closed.

A small town in the UK would have a population over 5000, which makes Woodberry a small town.

In the London Plan it suggests

In Development Plans and development decisions, priority should be given to delivering upgrades to Underground lines,

Do we need to ask for some investigation into the impacts of increased demand on public transport from extra residents before completion? Get TFL, Hackney and Berkely involved?

Note (TFL) that there is not a decision yet on the plans to change Seven Sisters Road and the idea of Step free access to Manor House Tube? We could still push for step-free access down to the ticket office?

5) Podiums

WDCO made objections to phase 4.

The erection of the podium “three times the size of a football pitch”, which will have a significant impact on service charges for residents.

the use or possibly over-use of podium gardens and lack of public access thereto,

The lack of clarity over what will be in the central square. The aspiration that a new library here has not been firmed up. At the moment, residents are being asked to accept a central hub, with no confirmed details relating to what will be in there.

Is the Board happy with phase 4 in terms of podiums (or other) and what lessons do we learn from that?

The new Masterplan Planning design review noted the need for podiums but said there should be no more than required as identified in the Design Code.

The application says that

Where podiums have frontage to the reservoir edge, mounding and screen planting should be used to minimise impacts on the New River walkway.

There seems to be use of planted banks to connect a podium in phase 5 to the new river path. Not clear if there is a barrier to the podium area if this is private?

6) Green Spaces, play areas Environment, Diversity etc, Youth

It was claimed in the masterplan review of 2013 that the new vision would produce, “A 30% increase in public open space compared to the existing masterplan”. It also included “Bigger Courtyard Gardens” and a “commercial centre” to the neighbourhood providing a range of retail facilities for residents.

Density of homes was increased by 15%. Private open space increased by 13% on 2009 plans to Principal Open Space increasing from 3,270 sqm in 2014

The new plans (2025) claim that: there is a 400% increase in Principal Open Space to 13185 sqm. Note Wembley stadium football pitch 7250 sqm. Podiums area for phases 5-8 will be 9089 sqm.

It is still unclear what is the status of the provision of a library in phase 4. This new plan suggests:

including a possible new library,

The Edge youth club in the new plans suggest

an opportunity to re-provide and improve upon the existing offer provided by the Edge Youth Club and Community Club.

Does the Board ask for clarity on these offerings, as the increased housing density means more community amenities will be needed?

The new Masterplan has an average Urban greening Factor close to 5.5.

Policy G5 of the London Plan sets a recommended target that residential led developments achieve an Urban Green Factor (UGF) score of 0.4 ahead of the LPA's introducing their own targets. Policy LP48 seeks at least 0.4 where feasible.
reflecting on previous phases the estimated scores are:

Phase 5 – 0.50 , Phase 6 – 0.47, Phase 7 – 0.66, Phase 8 – 0.56
Overall Average of 0.55.

A score of 0.5 only will include groundcover planting.
Amenity grassland (species-poor, regularly mown lawn) has a score of 0.4.

Are the podiums in phase 5 appropriate to be next to a nature reserve and could the urban greening scores be improved closer to the New River path and the nature reserve.

The plan commits to biodiversity net gain of 10% (not sure where the base line is?)
Any comments on space and greening or environment, given the changes in climate does the new landscaping need to factor this in?

Comments on play areas or access to communal areas - can the multi-use play area on the metropolitan land in phase 5 remain in phase 5?

Are there any other burning issues to be added?

Tactics

Whatever responses the Board decides over particular aspects of the plans, a decision needs to be made on how the Board's responses are framed if presented in public to the Council.
Does the Board agree to the Masterplan subject to conditions or should the Board's policy be outright opposition on stated (TBA) grounds. Or Neutral with objections?

Note that at the May 2024 planning subcommittee meeting WDCO did not support the phase 4 plans as they stood and presented reasons why (see above).