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ERITH TOWN FORUM RESPONSE TO SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT ERITH WESTERN GATEWAY

Erith Town Forum support the idea that a new Bexley College campus should be built on the old tramshed site in Walnut Tree Road. Associated parking would be essential and limited food retail would also be good.

The old Erith Swimming Pool site which has been fenced off since the demolition would be an excellent extra green leisure space for the community but we do appreciate that this is a brown field space and would therefore recognise that it will be used for housing and perhaps retail at ground level. Again Erith Town Forum is realistic in its approach to the area, and pleasant good quality housing is needed. However we do not agree that high rise buildings are the answer and would expect that Bexley Council will learn from the mistakes of the past (Larner Road) and not allow developers to build any higher than the 5 storeys set out in the document.

The two tower blocks in Saltford Close, as detailed in the document have a very successful record and this is surely due to the fact that there are only two. Further introduction of this kind of building could totally ruin this record. The low rise block currently occupied by many pensioners and those with mobility needs is marked for demolition but no information given on where those displaced will be housed either on a temporary or permanent basis. A long period of uncertainty over the future of all three blocks gives serious worry to all those living there. Leaseholders looking to sell their property will have extreme difficulty in finding a buyer who will offer a realistic price, and tenants looking to exchange homes will have difficulty in finding an exchange.

PARAGRAPH 10.5

Building on the Riverside Gardens has been a very contentious subject from the very first time Erith Western Gateway Regeneration was mentioned many years ago. The

community feel as strongly now, as we did then, that this ground should not be considered for any kind of development apart from re-design to make the river more visually accessible whilst still maintaining flood protection for the Town and surrounding area. We call it the GARDENS but in real terms it is probably too small an area to have this illustrious name and therefore to consider taking away any part of it is totally unacceptable, particularly since that part chosen for a high rise building, was gifted to the people of Erith for open green space.

The other green areas in front of Saltford Close (site I1 and 12 and J), are set down for retail and housing. The Forum are not in favour of this, particularly if the buildings should go higher than 5 storeys. Erith does not have many areas of green for relaxation and enjoyment and the sites close to the river are highly valued by the community. The loss of any green park areas would be detrimental to all sectors of the community.

The Forum also believe more attention needs to be given to the density of the proposed buildings within the plan and the road layout, bearing in mind public safety in densely laid out housing areas.

FLEXIBILITY

We note that the SPD is extremely flexible and understand from our meeting with Council officers, that this is to allow developers to have a pretty free hand when submitting designs. This does no favour to the community who would like to set down some rigid ground rules, particularly with regard to height of buildings and density of building.

We think it essential to have safeguards against large purchases of properties for subletting as has happened in the past, with the subsequent disastrous affect on community building and furthermore the introduction of unsociable behaviour.

PARAGRAPH 10.6

By offering developers the opportunity to cherry-pick the easiest and most financially rewarding sites we may find that those which are most in need of development will actually still be left on the Council's hands with no carrot to attract further developers. We note the reference to each site not being reliant on any subsequently developed site. How will this piecemeal approach ensure the planning gain money to redesign the Riverside Gardens and provide other community necessities?

PARAGRAPH 11.5

The importance of the railway station for existing and new commuters is not stressed sufficiently by the phrase “provision of disabled access to the London bound platform

MAY ALSO BE SOUGHT WHERE APPROPRIATE” Surely we need a more assertive position on this matter.

Finally we appreciate this is a document to give developers guidance as to proposals they may make and we trust and expect Bexley Council to be open with the community when more detailed plans come forward, giving us ample time to consider such plans and make further observations.

We are the people who live in the Town, who will have to accommodate the turmoil of further development and then bear the consequences of the decisions made!! We trust and expect the members and officers of Bexley Council to keep this very much in mind.

DOREEN IVES
CHAIRMAN ERITH TOWN FORUM