Emergency motion re the referral to the Court of Common Council of the decision of the Planning and Transportation Committee re the proposed redevelopment of 115-123 Houndsditch

This Branch Labour Party:

NOTES:

On 16 November 2021, City Corporation’s Planning and Transportation Committee (P&TC) approved the grant of planning permission for a 24-storey office block at 115-123. This block, if built, will overlook City Corporation’s Middlesex Street Estate, reducing significantly the amount of sunlight currently enjoyed by residents of the Estate as well as adversely impacting on their amenity.

Following P&TC’s decision to approve the grant planning permission, 28 elected members of the Court of Common Council, including five of Labour CCs – Munsur Ali, Helen Fentimen, Natasha Lloyd-Owen, William Pimlott and Jason Pritchard - as well as at least one Independent CC Labour Party member, Rehana Ameer, gave formal notice of referral to the Court for decision of the Officer’s report to the P&TC;

The referral is on the agenda for Court on 9 December – tomorrow - and due to be voted on then;

In support of the referral, the Chairs of Middlesex Street Estate Residents Association, Golden Lane Estate Residents Association and Barbican Association wrote a joint letter to all Members of Court (see copy letter below), which was forwarded to them by Jason Pritchard; and

Lana Joyce, the Branch’s selected candidate for Portsoken, has organised a protest by City residents to begin outside the entrance to Guildhall West Wing at 11.45am on 9 December (see copy poster below).

AND RESOLVES:

1. To support the protest at the Guildhall;
2. To endorse the letter from the Chairs of the three residents’ associations;
3. To congratulate both Jason Pritchard and Lana Joyce on their initiatives; and
4. Calls upon all six Labour CCs to support the referral of the decision of the P&TC;

Proposed: Fred Rodgers

*To All Members of the Court of Common Council

The recent decision of the City’s Planning Committee to approve a 24-storey office tower at 115-123 Houndsditch adjacent to a designated residential area only reinforces our opinion that the planning processes of the City are not fit for the purpose of assigning due weight to the needs of the residents of the City.

The Planning Department seems overly focussed on establishing channels of communication with developers at an early stage in the developers' process but accepts no responsibility for establishing an equivalent channel of communication with residents potentially impacted by the developers plans.

In the application at issue here, a pre-planning Officer was assigned to the developer in 2019. When the Middlesex Street Estate Residents' Association asked Planning about which Officer had the responsibility to establish an equivalent channel to residents, the answer was that it was up to the developer to inform the residents. Hence the true height and mass of the planned development was not disclosed to residents until summer 2021.

The Planning Department seems overly reliant on BRE Guidelines, writing off residents' concerns about loss of sunlight on the grounds that the hours are still within BRE Guidelines. One such guideline says that a development is acceptable provided an adjoining property or amenity still enjoys a minimum of 2 hours of sunlight a day. If residents currently have much more sunlight, it's not surprising that they are concerned about both the number of hours lost and the time of day of the remaining sunlight, neither of which are covered by BRE Guidelines. Guidelines are just that and need to be applied with intelligence and sensitivity. The draft City plan needs to be reviewed and its policies regarding protections to designated residential areas need to be strengthened.

The Planning Department also seems to be partial and selective in applying its policies to this application. For example, the proposed building would be taller than the nearby Can of Ham (70 St Mary Axe) and more distant from the core of the Eastern Cluster, yet is described "as part of the foothills which step down northwards from the main City Cluster". Additionally, the location of the development is excluded from the City Cluster as defined in the Draft City Plan.*

 *In conclusion, our position is that it is unacceptable for the City’s Planning Committee to continue to grant permission for developments that contravene many of the City’s own planning policies and do grave harm to the City’s residents.

We ask that this particular application be rejected and that a review be commissioned to recommend changes to the City's Plan and planning processes to make them fit for the purpose of taking due account of the needs and rights of residents in discharging its planning responsibilities.

Roger Way
Chair, Middlesex Street Estate Residents' Association

Tim Godsmark
Chair, Golden Lane Estate Residents' Association

Adam Hogg
Chair, Barbican Association*

*SAVE OUR SUNLIGHT*

*FOR THE CHILDREN OF THE MIDDLESEX STREET ESTATE*

*We need you on Thursday to demonstrate to the council that our community, and in particular our children, cannot lose the benefit of sunshine to a building that is not needed.*

*On November 16, the City of London approved the building of a 24 storey tower to replace several smaller buildings between Houndsditch and Devonshire Square, running the full length of Cutler Street. This huge building will reduce the sunlight on the podium considerably, particularly during the time after school when children play. It will also very adversely affect the light entering flats on Harrow Lane, the north and west sides of Petticoat Tower and the businesses on Harrow Lane. In addition, it creates a precedent for more large developments like those proposed at 33 Creechchurch Lane and 31 Bury Street, overshadowing and boxing in the Middlesex Street Estate.*

*Three residents and six councillors spoke against the permission to build setting out the negative social and environmental effects of this huge building. But their views were not taken on board. Now 28 councillors have petitioned the Common Council to reverse the permission. The Common Council meets on Thursday 9 to consider reversing it.*

*We are hoping that all those residents available will come together at the Guildhall to support those councillors who are calling for a reversal of the permission.*

*Meet at the (corner of Gresham Street and Aldermanbury) entrance to the Guildhall West Wing*

*THURSDAY DECEMBER 9 AT*

*11.45 am*

*Make and bring you own ‘Save our Sunlight’ (SOS) banners.*