

Date: Sunday, 28 June 2019

Location: Chamber, City Hall

Hearing: Kensington Forum Hotel Mayoral Representation Hearing

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** On 23 April 2019, I directed that I would act as the local planning authority for the purposes of determining this application. The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) resolved to refuse the application against the advice of their professional officers. RBKC subsequently challenged my original decision to recover this application; hence my consideration of this application has been delayed.

I am going to begin by asking my legal officer, Lucy Paterson, to set out some procedural formalities for today's hearing. We will then move on to the planning officer's presentation of the case before hearing representations from the Council, objectors and the applicant. I will then ask some questions before retiring to consider my decision and I hope to reach a decision this morning.

A member of the Greater London Authority (GLA) support team will ensure that all speakers stay within the allotted time to ensure everyone has a fair and equal opportunity to address the hearing in accordance with the published procedure. Lucy.

**Lucy Paterson (Senior Associate, Transport for London Legal):** My name is Lucy Paterson and I am the legal adviser to the Mayor today. I would like to start by setting out some formalities. This is a public meeting and is open to anyone to attend. We are following an agenda this morning and I hope you all have a copy of this. If not, you will find copies of this, together with copies of the Mayor's reports and addendum, on the desk on the way into the Chamber.

The Mayor made a site visit to the application site this Tuesday, 18 June [2019]. The Mayor was accompanied by officers, representatives from Kensington and Chelsea, and the applicant. The site visit was conducted in accordance with the GLA's procedure for representation hearings.

All speakers today have been given an allotted time to speak, as set out in the agenda. When it is your turn to speak, you will be asked to come forward to the table. A transcript of the proceedings is being produced today, so it will be helpful when you come forward if you could clearly introduce yourself before you begin to speak. Speakers should make sure they confine their comments to material planning considerations and ensure that all comments do not conflict with the GLA's diversity and equalities statement. All speakers will be notified 30 seconds before their time is due to run out.

When they have finished addressing the Mayor there is no further opportunity to speak unless the Mayor asks you a direct question. If a member of the public interrupts the meeting at any point the Mayor will warn them or may order their removal. On this occasion, the Mayor has

used his discretion to extend those time limits to ensure, as far as possible, that he hears from as many interested parties as possible.

As the Mayor has said, having heard all the representations, he may decide to make the decision today. However, if he decides he needs more time, he has five days within which to make his decision and this will be posted on the GLA website.

Finally, we are not expecting an evacuation alarm today but in the event of the alarm sounding, you will be directed towards the nearest evacuation route.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** Thank you. The GLA planning officer, Andrew.

**Andrew Payne (Senior Strategic Planner , Greater London Authority):** Thank you, Mayor, and Lucy. For the purpose of the record, my name is Andrew Payne and I am a Senior Strategic Planner at the GLA.

This presentation will set out the applicant site and its surroundings and the spatial policy context followed by the proposed development, the response to public consultation, the Council's reasons for refusal, key issues raised by the application which the Mayor must consider and, finally, the recommendation to the Mayor.

The site and its surroundings: the site highlighted here in red is bounded by Cromwell Road to the north, which is part of the Transport for London (TfL) road network, Ashburn Place to the east, Courtfield Road to the south and Ashburn Gardens to the west. Gloucester Road London Underground Station, which serves the Circle, District and Piccadilly lines, is approximately 50 metres from the site. The Natural History Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) and the Royal Albert Hall are within a 10-minute walk.

The area surrounding the site is a mix of residential, commercial and retail uses in buildings of varying scale and architecture. With regard to the immediate vicinity, the site is bounded by five-storey terraces typical of the Kensington area to the west and south, comprising private residential properties, serviced apartments and hotels. To the east of the site is a 12-storey apartment hotel building and the Gloucester Road Underground Station with a local supermarket attached. To the north on the adjacent side of Cromwell Road and railway cutting is a seven-storey office building.

The historic grain and scale in the local area are periodically interrupted by modern development. The site is close to several conservation areas but is not within one itself. The closest conservation areas are Cornwall and De Vere Conservation Areas to the north, Queensgate Conservation Area to the east and, to the south and west, Courtfield Conservation Area.

Nearby listed buildings include the Grade II\* listed Church of St Stephen, Church of St Jude, numbers 35 and 37, 39, 41, 43 and 45 Harrington Gardens, and a Grade II listed Gloucester Road Underground Station, 20 and 22 Harrington Gardens and 24 and 26 Harrington Gardens.

The application site is a single urban block measuring 0.76 hectares and is currently occupied by a 28-storey Holiday Inn Hotel, with 906 rooms, built in the early 1970s and identified as a metropolitan landmark by the borough. Sections of the building can be seen in long views from public vantage points, including Kensington Gardens and Battersea Bridge, and a public garden which is designated as a London square under the London Squares Preservation Act forms part of the western section of the site. There are 22 trees on the site.

Prior to the existing hotel, the site was occupied by original Victorian terraces that fronted Ashburn Place and Cromwell Road. These photos show existing views around the site, including Cheval Serviced Apartments on Ashburn Place, and residential properties to the immediate south of the site on Courtfield Road and along Ashburn Gardens to the West.

I will now address the relevant spatial policy context. As I indicated earlier, the site is located approximately 50 metres from Gloucester Road Underground Station and in the proximity of major visitor attractions. The Central Activities Zone (CAZ) is also nearby. The Local Plan designates the nearby attractions in South Kensington as a strategic cultural area. The public transport accessibility level of the site is 6A on a scale of zero to 6B where 6B is the most accessible.

I will now take you through a brief planning history of the application site. Planning permission for the existing Holiday Inn Hotel was granted in 1970, followed by the approval of an extension in 1990. A full extension to provide a two-storey casino was refused permission in 2015. The current application was submitted in June 2018 following pre-application discussions with RBKC and the GLA. The Mayor issued a stage 1 response to the proposal on 20 August 2018 and, on 27 September 2018, RBKC resolved to refuse permission. Following a consent order quashing an earlier direction on 23 April 2019, the Mayor decided to take over the application for his own determination.

It should be noted that the Council's officers' report to the Planning Committee, prior to the Mayor calling the application, recommended approval. On the amended scheme the report provided three options to the Committee. Two recognised the benefits of the scheme. The Committee resolved to object to the revised scheme.

Since the Mayor made the decision to assume the role of planning authority, the proposed development has been amended and additional information submitted to address concerns raised by the Mayor at stage 2. The number of housing units has increased from 46 to 63, affordable housing has been increased from 46% to 100% genuinely affordable housing. The height of the southern block containing the residential units has been increased from seven to nine storeys and design changes were made to address the increased quantum of the units, additional requirements for private amenity space and mitigation. These revisions were subject to a 34-day consultation ending on 5 June 2019.

I will now set out the current proposal. The proposed development is a full plan application which would redevelop the site to provide 62 new homes, 749 hotel bedrooms, 340 serviced

apartments, ancillary facilities including restaurants, conference and syndicate rooms and gym, an improved public garden square and car and cycle parking and landscaping.

Before presenting the proposed site plan, it is useful to compare the site's historic site plan with what exists and is being proposed. This is a site plan prior to the existing hotel. The buildings are contained to the north and east of the site, with the garden occupying the majority of the western half. The current layout is very different, comprising a cruciform building that does not align with any of the surrounding roads and irregular areas of open space.

The proposed site plan introduces a new building contained within the eastern side of the site, stretching along most of Ashburn Place from Cromwell Road to Courtfield Road with a public garden square occupying most of the western side. The building would be a seven-storey podium with two towers and a two-storey attic above. A coach drop-off and off-street loading bays would be provided on Ashburn Place and a taxi drop-off off Ashburn Gardens. Pedestrian routes through the public garden would be provided.

The podium would contain hotel bedrooms and ancillary uses, serviced apartments and a majority of the residential units on floors one to six. Restaurants would be provided on the ground floor with additional restaurant space provided at mezzanine level. The tallest tower A, as shown, would be located on the northern edge of the site and would contain the remaining hotel accommodation; B would be more centrally located and would accommodate serviced apartments. The two-storey attic, annex C, would provide additional residential units. This addition of two storeys is the main design change to the scheme since the Mayor's decision to take over the application.

The following is computer-generated imagery (CGI) of the proposal. The northern and western facades of the building are shown in this image. This image shows the lower levels of the western facade of the proposed building. The arrival point is visible and the animated ground floor is evident. The building's northern and eastern facades are shown in this image. Its relationship with Cromwell Road and Ashburn Place, with well-activated frontages, is evident.

This image shows the western and southern facades of the building. The townscape views towards Gloucester Road Underground Station and the relationship between the residential block and the existing residential properties on Courtfield Road are illustrated. This image is a close-up view of the residential block on Courtfield Road. The amended height is visible.

We will now look at a summary of the responses to the consultation process. The full details of consultation responses and representations are set out in the hearing report and addenda.

The Mayor was initially consulted at stage 1 of the process on the original scheme and on 20 August 2018 he responded with his views on the scheme's compliance with the London Plan. The Mayor's response concluded that the principle of development, namely the intensification of the site to deliver enhanced visitor accommodation and affordable housing, was supported. The high percentage of affordable housing was strongly supported.

In relation to heritage, it was concluded that the impact on the surrounding Conservation Areas and listed buildings is considered less than substantial harm and would be sufficiently outweighed by the public benefits that would be delivered by the scheme.

On design, it was determined that the layout was an improvement on the existing situation and responded positively to all the public facing edges. Additional information on materials and visuals was requested. Further information on mitigation was requested on matters relating to climate change and transport.

This is a summary of statutory consultee responses. It should be noted that Historic England raised no objection. This summarises the responses from local councillors. Scale, height and bulk of the building and impact on local infrastructure were raised in objection. The impact on local amenity and impact on heritage assets were also raised. Plans for the public garden and public realm improvements were supported.

Objections to the original proposal considered by the Council were received from several residents' associations in the surrounding area, including Ashburn Courtfield Gardens Residents Association, Kensington Society, Cornwall Gardens Residents Association, Kempsford Gardens Residents Association, Victoria Road Residents Association, Onslow Neighbourhood Association, Chelsea Society and Prince's Gate Mews.

Objections to the revised scheme have been received by the GLA from Emma Dent Coad MP, Councillor Linda Wade, Royal Parks, Ashburn Courtfield Gardens Residents Association, Cornwall Gardens Residents Association, Courtfield Gardens (East) Garden Committee, Grenville Place, Southwell Gardens and St Stephen's Walk Residents Association, Point West Leaseholders' Association Committee, the Onslow Neighbourhood Association, the Kempsford Gardens Residents Association, Cromwell Mansions Residents Association, Kensington Society, and Victoria Road Area Residents Association.

In response to the initial consultation - and as reported in the stage 2 report - RBKC received 794 objections and four letters of support. Since the decision to take over the application, 346 objections have been submitted directly to the Mayor. Four responses supporting the application have been received, including the Director of Tourism, Conventions and Major Events at London & Partners, and the Chairman of the United Kingdom (UK) Government's Events Industry Board and of Business Visits and Events Partnership (BVEP).

A summary of the key points of objection raised in relation to RBKC through the consultation process is listed here, and further details are provided in the hearing report. These include concerns over height, scale, design, impact on designated heritage assets, traffic congestion, health issues linked to air pollution and local amenity.

A summary of key points of objections raised in response to the GLA consultation on the revised scheme is listed here and further details are provided in the hearing report. Generally, the objections restate the majority of previous concerns. The Mayor's involvement in the scheme is also raised as an additional concern.

In relation to the Council's reason for refusal, RBKC's Planning Committee resolved to refuse the application, against officer's recommendations, in September 2018, citing two reasons for refusal. It should be noted that amendments have been made to the scheme following RBKC's resolution to refuse, mainly the addition of two storeys to the block containing the residential units.

The main reason for refusal relates to the visual impact of the proposed development on the nearby heritage assets, especially in near views and a lack of high design quality. It also states that the public benefits delivered by the scheme would not outweigh the identified less than substantial harm to heritage assets that would be caused.

As part of the GLA's re-consultation exercise, the Council submitted an objection to the scheme which in summary concludes that the amendments made worsen the negative impacts of the proposal and weaken the design rationale. The Council consider the public benefits are still insufficient to outweigh the harm.

Given the consultation comments and the Council's reasons for refusal, the Mayor should consider the following key issues. These are: land use principles, housing and affordable housing, urban design, heritage, neighbouring amenity impacts, environmental issues, transport and parking, mitigating the impact of development through planning obligations.

I will go through each in turn, highlighting the key aspects of the scheme and why officers consider the scheme to comply with relevant policies. Please note that my presentation does not include a full outline of each policy relevant to these matters. The full assessment of relevant policies and the scheme's compliance with those policies is set out in detail within the hearing report.

Turning first to the land use principles, the site is currently occupied by a hotel and has been for over 45 years. The principle of hotel use is therefore already established on this site and this is a significant material consideration. In addition, as previously stated, the site is near to major tourist attractions, the CAZ and is easily accessible by public transportation. It is within the broad locations identified for new and expanded hotels in the London Plan, draft London Plan and the Local Plan. Given the chronic shortage of housing delivery, especially affordable housing across London and within the Borough, the inclusion of housing intensification of uses on this site is justified in line with the London Plan, draft London Plan and local planning policies.

As set out in the hearing report, the proposed redevelopment would re-provide 1,089 serviced visitor accommodation units, an uplift of 183 units of high-quality modern visitor accommodation, 62 new generally affordable housing units, and re-establish a public garden. In summary, the land use principles are policy-compliant and are strongly supported by GLA officers.

I would first make some brief remarks about the proposed public garden square. Due to the layout of the site the accessibility and usability of the garden would be enhanced, providing

open lawn elements that could be used for informal play and other activities associated with open spaces of a similar scale. Seating will also be provided. In addition, all of the existing trees along the boundary of the garden on Courtfield Road and Ashburn Gardens are to be retained and net additional trees will be planted within the garden. The garden square also improves permeability across the site. The transformation of the existing garden, which re-establishes its historic purpose is therefore strongly supported in line with the London Plan, draft London Plan and local planning policies, and its management and maintenance, which is to be undertaken at the expense of the developer in partnership with local residents, has been secured under a section 106 agreement. It should be noted that the applicant is required to make an application under the London Squares Preservation Act to rearrange the garden square, which is a separate matter to the planning considerations for the proposal.

I will now present the proposed housing and affordable housing offer that will be provided. Since the call in, the number of housing units has been increased from 46 to 62, and the percentage of genuinely affordable housing units has gone up from 47%, by habitable rooms, to 100% through the intervention of GLA officers. Whilst this differs from the London Plan, draft London Plan, the Mayor's Affordable Housing and Viability Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) and local policy tenancy split requirements, the absence of intermediate housing is accepted in this instance given the pressing need for low-cost rented housing in RBKC. The absence of private market housing is also acceptable, given its predominance in the housing stock in the local area and the provision of London Affordable Rent units would assist in achieving a mixed and balanced community in line with London Plan policy 3.9. The proposed tender is, therefore, acceptable.

The scheme would provide studios, one, two and three-bed flats. As outlined in the hearing report, the scheme would provide housing of a good quality which meets relevant standards. Although the density exceeds the thresholds in the London Plan and draft London Plan, the proposal optimises development, will deliver 100% genuinely affordable housing, good design and residential standards. Given this and a highly accessible location, the density is acceptable.

The standard of design and residential quality is also high and provides appropriate levels of play and amenity. As such, the high-density nature of the scheme represents optimal development and is therefore in accordance with the London Plan, draft London Plan and local planning policies.

The housing units would be let at London Affordable Rent levels, which are set annually by the Mayor. As is evident in the table, the rents are significantly less than 80% of market rent. The housing mix is acceptable given the characteristics of the site including its urban location, the mixed-use nature of the scheme, 100% affordable offer and the high demand and lack of supply within RBKC.

Moving to urban design principles, the simple planned form of the proposed building responds positively to all four public-facing edges of the site and, as such, the ground floor is well-activated. The lobby for the hotel, serviced apartments and residential units would be provided on the ground floor. The entrance to the residential element would be via a large

lobby facing onto a proposed private garden along Courtfield Road. Regarding the hotel and serviced apartments, a shared main entrance will be provided on Cromwell Road on the northwest corner of the podium block, with access points from Cromwell Road and from the proposed drop-off point. A second entrance will be located on Ashburn Place.

The scheme demonstrates a unified approach to each building element, joining together the tower elements, attic levels and lower portion of the block through simple detailing and material treatment. The podium block shown on the bottom left is primarily curtain wall glazing that is transparent and exhibits, through subtle changes in framework detailing, laminated glass fins that express the different functional uses. The towers would be defined by a combination of stonework and fritted metalwork panels that fold to give the facades a detailed saw-tooth profile. The residential element maintains a townhouse-style appearance and now has a two-story attic consistent with the historic architectural language nearby.

The building would act as a landmark, and the height and mass of the scheme is considered appropriate as the tallest building is positioned in a more suitable part of the site than existing, adjacent to Cromwell Road. The massing of the proposal responds sensitively to the proximity of the conservation areas by reducing in scale to the south in view of the residential properties along Courtfield Road. The visual impact of the proposal is considered in more detail later in the presentation, but the massing strategy is considered to be an appropriate response to the site circumstances.

The proposed residential quality would be high with no issues arising in relation to noise, overlooking, privacy, inadequate private amenity space or compliance with internal housing standards.

To summarise, the layout and massing is well considered. The proposed tall building is appropriately sited and meets the criteria for tall buildings set out in local policy and London Plan policy. The materials and detailing of the proposed buildings are high quality and well considered and is a significant improvement on the existing building. Residential quality would be high and details would be secured through conditions to ensure high-quality design is delivered.

The impacts of the proposed development on heritage and townscape have been set out in detail in the hearing report. I will provide a summary of the scheme's impact on surrounding heritage assets.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that the extent and importance of the significance of the heritage assets is integral to assessing the potential impact, and therefore acceptability. The definition of "significance" in this context is the value of the heritage asset in relation to its heritage interest and this may be archaeological, architectural, cultural or historic. It may also derive from a heritage asset's physical presence as part of the townscape or its setting.

*"Where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm (or total loss of significance of) a designated heritage asset, local planning authorities should refuse*



*consent, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh the harm or loss.”*

*“Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm ... this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.”*

The site is neither within a Conservation Area nor contains any listed structures. It is, however, in proximity of Conservation Areas and listed buildings and structures, including Cornwall, Queensgate, De Vere, Courtfield and Kensington Palace Conservation Areas and Grade II\* listed Church of St Stephen, Church of St Jude, numbers 35 and 37, 39, 41, 43 and 45 Harrington Gardens, and a Grade II listed Gloucester Road Underground Station, 20 and 22 and 24 and 26 Harrington Gardens.

A townscape visual and heritage impact assessment and an addendum were submitted with the application, which test the impact of the proposal on the setting of identified heritage assets and townscape, including sensitive views from neighbouring Conservation Areas, listed buildings and registered parks and gardens. The views chosen for this presentation are based on a site visit conducted with representatives of various residents' associations in the area and comments raised by RBKC in its consultation response. Although not part of the site visit, Kensington Palace Conservation Area is also included. The views are accurate visual representations.

The Grade II\* listed Church of St Jude is prominent in this view, with an entrance and the lower elements visible including a distinctive roof. The existing hotel is in the background and appears joined to the church's roof. The proposed development, although more prominent, would appear separate, recessive and distinct from the church in terms of its position and articulation. This enhances the setting of the church and therefore causes no harm to its significance.

The Grade II\* listed Church of St Stephen, which is in the Cornwall Conservation Area, is prominent in this view. The top of the existing hotel can be seen above the tallest point of the church. The proposed development would be taller and more prominent in the background of the church, but with its muted colour pallet would appear recessive, resulting in less than substantial harm to the significance of the church or to the Conservation Area.

In this view, which is taken on Gloucester Road looking westwards, the Grade II listed London Underground Station is visible. To the front of the listed station is a large mature tree and in the background the Gloucester Road Serviced Apartments to the left and the Point West Serviced Apartments on the right. A small part of the Kensington Forum Hotel is visible behind the serviced apartments.

The proposed development would be more visible owing to the increase in height and extension northwards and southwards towards Cromwell Road and Courtfield Road respectively. This change, however, would cause no harm to the significance of the listed station.

This view is taken on Courtfield Road and includes view into the Courtfield Conservation Area. The existing Kensington Forum Hotel is dominant. The proposed development would be more prominent in terms of scale and bulk. However, given the layout, this would enhance the streetscape and the quality of architecture. GLA officers conclude that the proposed development would cause less than substantial harm to the setting of the Courtfield Conservation Area.

This view is within Cornwall Conservation Area and looks south towards Cromwell Road. The existing Kensington Forum Hotel is prominent. Most of the eastern and partial views of the northern elevation of the proposed building are shown in this view. The building would appear bulky and prominent in this short range view and would have a harmful impact. However, this harm is considered to be less than substantial to the significance of the Cornwall Conservation Area.

This view is also taken within Cornwall Conservation Area, slightly further away from the application site than the previous view. The full height of the existing hotel is now visible. Similarly, the proposed building would appear bulky and more prominent looking out of the Conservation Area towards Cromwell Road and its full height will now be visible and would have a harmful impact. However, this is also considered to be less than substantial harm to the significance of the Conservation Area.

This view is also on Launceston Place but further north and within the De Vere Conservation Area. The Grade II listed 23 to 34 and 5 to 22 Launceston Place is not clearly visible. Like the existing building, the proposed building will appear in long range views and would not cause any harm to the significance of the De Vere Conservation Area or listed buildings.

The Grade II listed 20 to 22 Harrington Gardens is visible on the left in the foreground of this view. The existent hotel sits just to the right of the listed building in the background of the view. The impact of the proposed development would be negligible or slightly beneficial to the townscape view given its layout, which better defines Ashburn Place.

This view is looking east towards Gloucester Road Underground Station. The Cheval Serviced Apartments are prominent in the mid-range view and part of the existing hotel and a taxi drop-off are visible. The proposed building would be more prominent due to extension southwards and the resulting bulk. However, in terms of height, a similar view is experienced. The high quality architecture and landscaping, including the retention of mature trees, would aid in reducing its impact. There would therefore be less than substantial harm.

This is a view within Courtfield Conservation Area looking northerly towards the application site. The existing hotel appears prominently in the distance. GLA officers are of the view that there would be an improvement in the townscape with the proposed building appearing at a similar height but in a slender form due to its orientation.

In this existing view, the Kensington Forum Hotel and other buildings are visible in the distant view from within Kensington Palace Conservation Area and the Grade I listed Kensington Gardens.

The proposed development would be visible in a similar manner and, although taller and of increased scale, its impact would be negligible. Officers consider that no material harm will be caused to the significance of the heritage assets.

In concluding on the heritage and townscape principles, the scale and mass and strategy of the scheme in local heritage views has been well considered and responds well to the site's location, which is suitable for a replacement landmark building. The taller elements of the building would have a noticeable visual impact on the townscape and surrounding area but, owing to the high quality design, this would not always be harmful. The building is also positioned appropriately with the 30-storey tower fronting onto Cromwell Road and creating an animated frontage while stepping down in height to respect the residential properties on Courtfield Road. It is considered that increasing the height of the seven-storey element by two storeys as part of the amendments received since RBKC's refusal does not result in a material change to the impact of the scheme.

As discussed, in some instances there would be no harm to the significance of the heritage assets identified above, and in instances where there would be harm it would be less than substantial. In some views, the settings would be enhanced. Historic England did not raise any objections.

Considerable weight to identified harm must be given by the Mayor when making his decision on the application. The harm identified must be clearly outweighed by the public benefits delivered by the scheme. These will be discussed later in this presentation.

The impacts of the proposal on amenity have been set out in detail in the hearing report. I will provide a summary of the amenity considerations.

The daylight and sunlight impacts on neighbouring, existing and emerging residential properties have been assessed using accepted Building Research Establishment assessment criteria. This analysis concludes that the majority of rooms assessed would meet the relevant criteria for daylight and sunlight. The losses of daylight and sunlight that would occur to certain windows in adjacent residential properties result in residual impacts within the levels of acceptability in an urban environment and which are not unusual for the local context. An independent assessment of the proposal concluded similarly.

The separation distances are considered to be adequate to mitigate any concerns about overlooking, loss of privacy or overbearing impact on existing residential properties. As set out in the hearing report, and subject to the conditions recommended, the impact from solid layer, noise and construction activities would also be acceptable.

To briefly summarise the key environmental issues, the proposed development is not within or close to ecologically sensitive areas. The proposed scheme includes proposals to protect

wildlife and the natural environment throughout the construction period, and the completed development would include measures aimed at enhancing biodiversity on the site, which would be secured by condition.

In terms of sustainability and climate change, the proposals achieve a 40% reduction in carbon emissions compared to the baseline building regulation standards for the commercial element as required by London planning policy. The residential element achieve a 53% reduction, which falls short of the zero carbon target and, in accordance with policy, the shortfall will be met through an offsite contribution. The scheme has been designed to mitigate flood risk and acceptable measures have been put in place to ensure that the proposals do not increase flood risk and contribute positively to sustainable urban drainage.

Subject to mitigation, measures to reduce dust emissions during construction and to safeguard future residents against poor air quality, the scheme is considered acceptable and will be air quality neutral. The scheme would provide acceptable wind conditions in the public realm and outdoor amenity areas. A site waste management plan will encourage resource efficiency and sustainable material management during construction. Details of noise mitigation measures will be secured by condition.

Moving lastly to transport issues, the impact on the local and strategic highway network would be acceptable. Short and long stay cycle parking provisions meet the high requirement of the draft London Plan. Various transport-related plans will be secured. Car parking is to be provided at basement level and a proposal is considered car-light. Car parking has been reduced from 100 to 31 spaces. This is supported, subject to a car parking management plan.

In summary, the proposal would comply with the London Plan and Local Plan transport policy subject to mitigation measures recommended.

I will finally outline the heads of terms for the section 106 legal agreement which have been agreed. Obligations will be secured in relation to the delivery of the affordable housing, rent levels as well as the nomination rents. Approximately £1.3 million will also be secured towards local employment and training. A package of transport mitigation measures, including Legible London and cycle hire scheme financial contributions amounting to about £70,000, will be secured. Contributions toward public realm improvements, carbon offsetting and tree protection will be secured, as well as a final management plan for the proposed garden square.

I will now set out the planning guidance. As discussed, there would be some harm to the significance of heritage assets, albeit that this would be less than substantial. The proposal would deliver a number of public benefits as discussed in this presentation: modern visitor accommodation that will provide between 243 and 617 net full-time jobs, 62 London Affordable Rent units, which is almost double the number of social rented homes granted planning permission by the Council between the years 2015/16 and 2017/18, and a public garden square to be managed and maintained in partnership with local residents in accordance with a management plan secured by legal obligation. The public benefits that would be

delivered by the scheme are considered to be significant and clearly outweigh the identified less than substantial harm to designated heritage assets.

Having now covered the key issues associated with the case I can confirm the GLA officer's recommendation to the Mayor, which is that the Mayor agrees with the recommendation as set out in the officer's Representation Hearing report and grants planning permission for the application at Kensington Forum Hotel, Cromwell Road, for the reasons set out in the report and subject to the conditions set out within the addendum and prior completion of a section 106 agreement.

Thank you, Mayor. That concludes my presentation.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** OK. I now invite somebody from RBKC. Is there a councillor present or is there an officer? Who is doing it?

**Female Speaker:** An officer.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** An officer, OK. Are there any councillors present?

**Female Speaker:** (several inaudible words)

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** You are wearing your MP hat, so later on. Fine. Sure. OK. You have how long?

**Sue Foster (Interim Director, Planning and Place, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea):** Five minutes. My name is Sue Foster. I am the Interim Director of Planning and Place in RBKC.

The proposed building does not comply with the locational criteria for tall buildings in the Local Plan or the London Plan. Policy and guidance states that tall buildings of this scale should be in a location and use of significance to the Borough as a whole. Also, policy CL12 of the Council's Local Plan resists building significantly taller than the surrounding townscape, other than in exceptionally rare circumstances where the development has a wholly positive impact on the character and quality of the townscape.

This development would have a negative impact because of its height, excessive massing of its two towers and the bulky silhouette. Furthermore, the GLA officer's report suggests that being near South Kensington Museum gives this building meaning. However, it is half a mile from the museums. It does not landmark them. The building sits outside of the CAZ. It is located outside of any designated centre and is in fact only near a fourth-tier centre in the town centre hierarchy. The building would not, therefore, define a location of importance, either at a local level or at a London level. Furthermore a hotel is not a use of such public importance to justify a building of metropolitan scale.

A tall building on this site is clearly contrary to policy but the GLA officer's report suggests the existing building is a significant material consideration that justifies it. However, this

building is acknowledged in the Council's built height Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) as being an eyesore and a building completely out of scale and not relating to its immediate context.

In all respects, the proposals materially exceed the characteristics of the existing development: a 65% increase in floor space, doubling in volume, and a 23 metre increase in height, plus the introduction of a second tower. Therefore, the development would significantly depart from the baseline position. The presence of the existing building cannot justify an even larger one.

Furthermore, and really importantly, policy CL1 and CL2 of the Local Plan require developments to take the opportunity available to improve the quality and character of the area and are very reflective of paragraph 130 of the NPPF. In designing this considerably larger building the applicant has failed in this case to take this opportunity and, therefore, permission should be refused.

In terms of height and massing, the proposed development does not relate to its surroundings. The podium block would tower over surrounding historic buildings. The towers, at 102 and 76 metres respectively, would be excessively tall, and because there are two towers immediately adjacent to one another they would have no singular clarity but be seen as one bulky mass.

Turning very specifically to the particular views, this slide shows the views where the Council considers the development to have an adverse impact on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and the setting of listed buildings. Views 9 and 10 demonstrate just how intrusive the development would be to its immediate setting and completely out of context with the historic townscape, which is generally five storeys. View 16 further demonstrates the intrusiveness of nearby views, and for the two listed churches views 6 and 26 shows the harmful impacts the development would have on the settings of both of those two Grade II\* listed churches. It would visually compete with the churches because of height, breadth and massing.

It is the Council's view that the benefits of the scheme just do not outweigh the harm. There is no doubt that the affordable housing is of considerable benefit and would assist the Borough in meeting its need of affordable housing. The Council recognises that past delivery of affordable housing has fallen short of what it would like. However, the applicant is seeking to justify an overly large hotel development by including a proportionately small amount of affordable housing. In fact the residential floor space is just 9% of the overall floor space in total. It is erroneous to suggest that is a credible mixed-use redevelopment for the site.

To help ensure a proper plan of supplied housing, the Council has committed to building 600 new homes on its own land including 300 for social rent. This commitment is in the Council Plan. The Council were successful in securing a GLA grant to deliver those homes. The Council has taken a significant 106 contributions towards affordable housing, £27 million since 2015, and has spent £90 million previously to buy affordable housing. The other benefits of the scheme do not outweigh the harm.

Can I just end by saying that the Council considers this proposal causes harm? The benefits do not justify the harms in this case. We recommend the Mayor respectively refuses planning permission on that basis.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** Thank you very much. The objectors should have some more time to make sure their views are heard. There are quite a few of you. You have all been told your time allocation, I am hoping. I have Lubna Sumara from the Ashburn Courtfield Gardens Residents' Association. I have Philip Gumuchjian, local resident, Michael Bach, Laure de Preux Gallone, Alan Lester and Emma Dent Coad. The officer will let you know when you are approaching your time. If you could try to keep within it, please, that helps. Thanks, Lubna.

**Lubna Samara (Ashburn Courtfield Gardens Residents Association):** Thank you. My neighbours and I are speaking on behalf of some 30 residents' associations around the Gloucester Road, South Kensington and Earls Court neighbourhoods which have actively opposed the plans for this development. Together, they easily represent over 8,000 residents.

When Soundings first approached residents in 2016 on behalf of the developer, it was to outline a reasonable scheme to develop the site which has had a chequered history and we were happy to entertain that. However, the scheme has since then ballooned into the solid wall of building set on this tiny garden square we see now. The proposed scheme is massive, of poor design and will be visible from as far as Kensington Gardens to Battersea Bridge. It is out of context with the extended conservation areas surrounding it in all directions.

The building would exacerbate damage to the local environment and increase the already high pollution levels of Cromwell Road. The area between Gloucester Road and Earls Court Road was, until a few years ago, the most densely populated in Western Europe. Far from animating the area as is the developer's contention, the building would be claustrophobic and intimidating to all those in close proximity to it. We will be discussing these issues in more detail during our presentation.

We welcome the 62 units of affordable housing; it is the rest of the building that is overblown. The benefit of affordable housing cannot justify the harm this building would inflict. Instead of harmonising the site, this proposal has transpired to be another example of a development of excessive bulk and massing and poor design quality which offers little more than to maximise the profits of large investors to the detriment of all else.

The Natural History Museum, the V&A and Brompton Artery just down the road from the site are more than national treasures. They are at the heartland of Britain's cultural centre and the impact of these two towers on these monuments should be carefully evaluated. If we have to replace the present building, let us get it right this time and have a building we can be proud of.

This development has galvanised the extended community to oppose it. Sir, we are asking you, as the Mayor of London, to protect these Conservation Areas and to protect the wider local community and refuse this application. Thank you. I now hand over to Philip.

**Philip Gumuchjian (Local resident on behalf of Grenville Place, Southwell Gardens, St Stephens Walk and the Convent Religious of Mary Immaculate):** Good morning, Mr Mayor. My name is Philip Gumuchjian. I co-wrote Richard Rogers' *Leith Lectures on Sustainable Urban Development*. I have twice won the Stephen Lawrence Prize [for architecture]. I was Chair of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) Awards Group. I live under the shadow of the current tower but to the north.

Our case against the scheme is a simple one. The harms grossly exceed the benefits. We question every claim of public benefit made for this project and we will show why the scheme on this site is not the appropriate vehicle for the laudable drive to increase provision of affordable housing in London.

The reality is that we are all wrestling with the consequences of a broken housing policy and this scheme illustrates it perfectly. A public rejection today could and should herald a watershed public rethink. The current policy envisages the provision of affordable housing as a by-product of commercial enterprise. Today, it is being used to justify an inappropriate development on an unsuitable site. What of the 62 housing units that will be located in a tourist area surrounded by hotels with a segregated playground on the ninth floor under the shadow of a 26-storey tower? Surely this is not the vision of community housing that the Mayor is championing. Nor does a permission today guarantee delivery of those units any time soon. A grant today will, on the other hand, leave a legacy permission for an inappropriately large building.

We challenge the huge environmental cost that underpins the offer of 62 free units, namely the construction of some 80,000 square metres of new development. If this ten to one ratio of commercial development to affordable housing becomes a precedent, and it will do, we can expect an exponential increase in the commercial exploitation of London's heritage districts and the systematic undoing of four decades of conservation work.

Whilst we fully support the provision of more affordable housing in pockets surrounded and properly integrated, this scheme is not the way to do it. We ask the Mayor to consider the negative impact on the very same tourist industry he is committed to promote. Tourists are drawn by the highly desirable visitor experience unique to this part of London. Unique because its heritage townscape, communal gardens and street pattern has been protected and enhanced since the heady days of the 1970s and the slide shows propositioned for this site some 40 years ago when the currently inappropriate large tower on the right was built. The applicant now proposes to double this in size.

Tall buildings in the wrong places deter the very same tourists the Mayor is seeking to attract. Following those disastrous projects, the policy changed, and the site is now the heart of one of the densest concentrations of Conservation Areas and listed buildings in the UK. They are indicated on the right.



We are told that the new proposals are equivalent to the building in mass, bulk and height but that they provide a better, more sensitive architecture and that negligible harm, additional harm to the heritage assets and our environment will be caused. These claims are false. Here are four reasons to refuse the permission.

The precedent argument, that this is a precedent, is false. The promised townscape benefits, benefits to four sides in all ways around - better townscape, new garden - are false. The architectural quality is uncorroborated. The applicant and the GLA have not employed appropriate heritage experts to assess the damage to the heritage assets. We have said this, and we said it in our very nice meetings with the officers.

This view on the left is the original building. The new building is twice the volume. The areas in red represent the additional volume over the existing building. All the existing building could be decanted in the blue areas on the right.

The applicant claims to rely on the existence as a precedent, but the scheme materially exceeds it in every conceivable way. Its volume and bulk have more than doubled in size. Its floor area has increased by 63%.

Height comparison. We are told it is the same height or similar. It is not one tower but two towers. Its height is six floors of accommodation taller. Its podium is 100 metres wide, nine storeys high, almost as tall as this building here.

The footprint. In order to achieve this double volume, 63% of extra floor, the footprint of the building has to increase, which means that the open space left around the building, which has a fundamental urban impact, is reduced by 30%. In terms of its local context, it totally overpowers it. You can see it from the model in front of you, which just sits out like a tourist liner in a heritage site.

What are the townscape benefits claimed? Better townscape legibility, we are told. Better wayfinding, better landmarking, better positive relationships to each of its four edges. This is taken with a wide-angle lens, which is how we do it in the industry, which means that the building in real life is much bigger. Every image we show is a wide view to see the context, but the building impact is much bigger in real life.

At the bottom of this building, what is interesting about this building is that it is a cruciform plan which means that it leaves edges all the way around it which means it is well set back from Cromwell Road, well set back from Courtfield Road, therefore, you can see the garden with sun in it even though it seems miles away.

This is the additional building. We have seen it with the presentation of Sue [Foster]. This is the architecture we are told is very high quality and integrates well with the existing heritage.

This slide is the most unbelievable slide and people do not understand that it is the same size. The one on the right is Ashburn Gardens and that façade faces this façade, the one on the left. They are the same scale. The streetscape of Ashburn Gardens is completely alien.

I am going to flick through because I have run out of time. Just to show, the garden is not a gift. It is protected by an Act of Parliament. The new garden is not like a traditional garden with four storeys. It is dominated by a skyscraper. Overshadowing, we are told, does not exist. Look at the shadows on the right, going across the conservation area in a grade 2 stylistic church. Grenville Place on the north is not considered as we know it. The massing is entirely done to the south. Thank you very much. I have run out of time.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** Mr Bach.

**Michael Bach (Kensington Society):** Thank you very much. I have lived in this area for the last 50 years and I have watched this hotel go up. I am looking forward to the hotel coming down. I think I must make a declaration of interest. I met Jules Pipe [CBE, Deputy Mayor for Planning, Regeneration and Skills] and **James Merry**(?) immediately after the publication of *A City for All Londoners*. We discussed the impact of tall buildings on communities. The one thing that this is not talking about is the impact on communities. Your document said, “Communities need to be comfortable with the scale of change”. That is what I would like you to consider, although it is not the planning reasons I am going to give you.

In pure planning terms, this is much too big. It is in the wrong place for tall buildings, as we have heard. It is in the wrong place for intensification of hotels and it is not strategic. Whilst the existence of the current building is a material consideration, you should think of the exceptional circumstances on which it was granted, which was an acute hotel shortage and time-limited Government grants to help build more hotel space. That is not the case now.

The current proposals bear no resemblance to the existing building - you have heard that from Philip [Gumuchjian] - either in terms of shape, height, mass, bulk, floor space, or footprint. You cannot use the existing building as the starting point. They are quite different and separate.

The opposition toward it is that it is, I think, wrong in policy terms. The scheme is most definitely not consistent with the London Plan and the Local Plan, and that is the development plan that you have to judge it against. The proposal is not in an appropriate location for tall buildings but is in an area which would be adversely affected. However, your new London Plan policy, which we have not talked about yet, is that the location of tall buildings requires boroughs to identify appropriate sites. The Council has done that and there are very few sites in the Borough where it is possible to do it. This site is in a buffer zone between Conservation Areas and is therefore highly sensitive to tall buildings.

The third point I would like to make is this is not an appropriate place for further significant hotel accommodation. The Plan talks about outside the houses, putting things in town centres or in Opportunity Areas. This is not either of those things. This is not a site identified in the London Plan for hotel growth.

It also says you want to avoid further intensification within existing concentrations. This area has one of the highest concentrations of hotels in London. There are 70 hotels within a one-kilometre radius.

In terms of need, the GLA has assessed the need for more hotel rooms in the Borough up to 2041, and because there is no space and it has a lot already, it only requires 150 extra bedrooms. This scheme has 183. This is not a strategic development; it is just a redevelopment of a hotel. It does not meet the legal test that justifies the call-in. I think I will stop there.

**Laure de Preux Gallone (Local resident and Lecturer, Imperial College London):** My name is Laure de Preux. I am a lecturer in health, environment and economics at Imperial College London. I am also affiliated to the Grantham Institute of Climate Change. In the past, I have been commissioned by Public Health England among others to assess the impact of pollution on the health outcomes and the cost to society. I have presented this research at the World Economic Forum, among others. I am also a resident of Earls Court and I am a mother.

I would like to give you some facts about RBKC and its air quality. On average, nitrogen dioxide exceeds its legal limit by more than 36% on Cromwell Road and 73% on Earls Court Road, which is located only a stone's throw away from this project.

Earls Court, as you know, is the most polluted place in the whole country and 80% of these emissions come from traffic. In the RBKC, 90% of our schools are located in areas above the legal limit. The fraction of mortality attributable to long-term pollution has been estimated by the GLA to be 48% higher in our Borough than the UK average. We are facing an air quality crisis, yet traffic, dust and other emissions from this project are considered to be negligible. In other words, the impact on our population and our health is estimated to be zero.

This is mainly justified by the introduction of the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) in 2021. Although the ULEZ is a great achievement, our experience is that previous environmental policies - the Low Emission Zone, the Congestion Charge - have not delivered the full anticipated benefit. One of the reasons is because we have underestimated the future demand. This will happen to the ULEZ if we pass projects like this that do not have a negligible impact on our environment. We are in a pollution hotspot.

There is also an environmental justice argument. You cannot roll out policy that requires each of us to make an effort and often hits the most deprived hardest while, on the other hand, you grant permission to developers to worsen our air quality even by a small amount. Our air is toxic and we can expect it to remain so if you are not fully committed to tackling every additional emission.

The open space will be reduced by 30%. It will be overshadowed. The traffic and the location is terrible and the air will be toxic. The building sustainability is not better and certainly not aligned with your own zero carbon plan published last December, which tells us

that all new buildings by 2019 should be zero carbon. The numbers that we have shown before are achieved by offsetting carbon at a cost of £52,000. It is a low cost for a sustainable future.

I am just wondering how all these harms can be considered as negligible. Therefore, I am urging you, Mr Mayor, to question the figures that the applicant has projected, to use your critical judgement, to stick to your values, to clean our air and to protect our future and make London a place where we can live healthily and be proud of. I would be happy to take questions afterwards. Thank you.

**Alan Lester (Chairman, Cornwall Gardens Residents Association and the Cornwall Gardens Committee):** Hello. My name is Alan Lester. I am Chairman of the Cornwall Gardens Residents Association and Secretary and Key Secretary of the Cornwall Gardens Committee.

We applaud the objectives you are pursuing, particularly on greening the environment. We welcome your initiative to provide more affordable housing, to consolidate healthy, safe and thriving communities from all backgrounds, living and working together, not separated by visible or invisible barriers. We want to see your mayoralty succeed and leave a legacy of which future generations can be proud. Sadly, this scheme is not the vehicle for your visionary objectives.

The Forum tower was part of a brave new world that was stopped dead in its tracks thanks to a change in policy that saw Conservation Area status granted to all the surrounding land. This preserved the character of the area and today underpins an existing and thriving mixed residential and tourist community. That townscape is once again under threat.

It would be a rare case indeed if, having called in this application, you decide not to take it further. This, we all hope, will be that rare moment. Thank you.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** Thank you.

**Emma Dent Coad (Member of Parliament for Kensington):** Emma Dent Coad, Member of Parliament (MP) for Kensington. Mr Mayor, I object in the strongest possible terms to this new iteration of the application. It is clearly worse in terms of height and massing than the previous proposals.

The Local Plan has stated that the current building is of no architectural merit. Well, aesthetics are a matter of taste but the building by Richard Seifert was carefully planned to reduce impact on neighbouring terraces by the clever cruciform plan.

No one today would allow the demolition of Victorian terrace houses for a building of this size and scale, but a replacement building and development are supposed to improve upon what they are replacing and to attribute to the architectural legacy. This plan does none of those things. It is unrefined, it is out of place, it is out of scale and it contributes nothing to the nearby listed terraces or Conservation Area.

The proposals are contrary to London Plan policy 7.4, local character; 7.6, quality of architecture; and especially 7.7, location and design of tall buildings. It is also contrary to RBKC Local Plan policies CO2, public realm; CO5, renewing the legacy; CP3, enhancing local characteristics; CL2, positive contribution; design quality; also heritage assets, listed buildings, enhancing views and respecting the setting of the Borough's valued townscapes.

Much has been made of 62 affordable flats that are to be added. I imagine no one is more aware than I am, Mr Mayor, of the extreme shortage of affordable housing in Kensington but this can be no excuse to allow construction of what I believe to be a monstrosity in Gloucester Road.

I would respectfully invite the Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Housing to closely question RBKC about its land banking strategy. This is not only in small grotty areas of North Kensington near the Westway, where they hope to use GLA money to put in some housing, but along the western side of Lots Road, Chelsea, and the whole of Lots Road Power Station on the river. There is space enough there for hundreds of new council homes for social rent, if only there was the political will to build them. They also have £17.6 million in section 106 funds for affordable housing and in 2017/18 not a single additional affordable home was granted permission. We should review that, Mr Mayor, and not use this as an excuse to build. Thank you.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** Thank you. Can I thank all the objectors? I know you could have spoken for much longer. I will come back to ask you questions in a while but if you could vacate the area for the applicant, who has five minutes, I would be grateful. We will make sure there is a microphone so that when I have questions after the applicant, we can go around with the microphone.

The applicant, please. Could you let everyone know who you are for the purposes of the record as well, please?

**Jonathan Manns (Rockwell Property Group):** Thank you. My name is Jonathan Manns. I am a board director at Rockwell Property. We are bringing these proposals forward with Queensgate Investments, who own the Kensington Forum Hotel. It is a privilege to introduce the scheme to you today. The design team are exceptionally proud of them and they are here to answer any questions you have.

This is, of course, a matter of planning balance. The Borough Planning Board concluded that the benefits do not outweigh the impacts on nearby heritage. Borough officers recommended approval. Your officers recommend approval. Specialists at TfL and your third-party daylight and sunlight advisers support approval.

We have worked hard with your officers since you called in the application and believe the benefits are clearer than ever before, as evidenced by the almost 60% reduction in objections to your recent consultation.

World-class visitor and conferencing accommodation is vital to London's role as a global city and a clear demonstration that we are open for business post-Brexit. The draft London Plan calls for the visitor economy to be strengthened and infrastructure enhanced. Our proposal replaces the existing 906-room hotel, recognised as a local eyesore, with a sustainable 1,100-room hotel and serviced apartment building of exceptional quality costing £300 million to build, designed to last at least 150 years, using the highest quality materials, including Portland stone and bronze. Ian Simpson, the architect, is here to answer any questions.

Philip [Gumuchjian] mentioned the square. Adjacent to the new building will be a new publicly accessible 2,700 square metre garden square, more than doubling the existing accessible green space. Again, the draft London Plan calls for the creation of new public green space in areas with the potential for change. It replaces a fragmented, unusable and unused space created in 1971 with the only publicly accessible green space within one kilometre of the site. We have even agreed a draft garden square management plan with local residents and owners.

The wider public realm improvements are equally substantial. The draft London Plan recognises streets as fundamental to the character and functioning of the city. We have agreed to contribute over £2.8 million to enhance the streets beyond our site in the area around Gloucester Road Tube Station, an area where the Borough's own emerging Local Plan seeks to improve quality and legibility.

The draft London Plan also identifies a need for tens of thousands of new jobs each year and for this success to be shared amongst all Londoners. The current building employs 200 people whilst the proposal will employ over 800, an increase of over 300%. This is particularly significant in the Royal Borough which has the highest income inequality in London and has seen the least positive change to unemployment levels in the past three years.

Michael [Bach] mentioned communities. Almost a quarter of the Borough's residents are amongst the 20% most deprived in England. We are contributing almost £1.4 million to training initiatives to ensure that jobs are available to those most in need. The London Training Centre are here today and have agreed to expand Rockwell's existing hospitality training initiative in support of this.

These benefits, Mr Mayor, have been evidenced from the beginning. I am proud to say we are now able to provide 62 homes onsite worth £90 million, all of which will be social rented. It is believed to be the first time that any private sector development in London has proposed 100% of new homes to be genuinely affordable to Londoners. This chimes clearly with the draft London Plan's calls for good growth which we support wholeheartedly. These homes will be delivered in the community of greatest need. The Borough has the least affordable housing in London, 3,400 people are on its waiting list and over 70% of those in temporary accommodation are found homes beyond its boundary. That is the most of any borough.

Average house prices are now almost 45 times average annual earnings yet the Borough's most recent figures, published this year, make clear that no affordable homes were approved in the period 2017 to 2018. We believe this scheme rectifies the mistakes of the pasts by

replacing a local eyesore with a world-class hotel of exceptional quality. It rectifies the mistakes of the past by reinstating public open space that has been lost for over half a century to an exceptional standard, it revitalises an area identified for marked improvement with extensive new public realm, but most importantly, it delivers on the aspirations and objectives of the draft London Plan to deliver a city which works for everybody: a 300% increase in employment to over 800 jobs and the first private development to deliver 100% genuinely affordable social rented homes.

We believe passionately, as I hope is clear, in these proposals. We are eager to deliver them and we are very clear in our minds that the benefits are self-evident. The full team are here and they will be delighted to answer any questions that you may have. Thank you.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** Thank you very much. I have a few questions which I will go around and ask various people. The first one is for Philip Gumuchjian. Somebody will pass you a microphone rather than me coming over and going back.

You know this site better than I do, I suspect. Are you saying that the urban design of the plans is worse than what is currently there?

**Philip Gumuchjian (Local resident on behalf of Grenville Place, Southwell Gardens, St Stephens Walk and the Convent Religious of Mary Immaculate):** Very much so. Can I point to the model?

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** Yes, why not?

**Philip Gumuchjian (Local resident on behalf of Grenville Place, Southwell Gardens, St Stephens Walk and the Convent Religious of Mary Immaculate):** First of all, I would like to point out that of these two models are not at the same scale. Whilst this model gives an impression of the overall scale of the thing, 45 storeys, this one is a completely different scale; it is twice as big. It gives a false impression that there are big buildings around.

I live in this particular square here. We were not consulted ever on the proposal. I am within about 50 metres of the thing. North of Cromwell Road was not considered at all. The emphasis was looking to the south, hence they have stepped it up this way and created a brand-new massive building that completely overshadows a Grade II\* listed church. Two hundred people live in a beautiful residence here.

As you enjoyed the other day, the urban plan of Kensington is walking within four to six-storey buildings. We see gardens and we are going from garden to garden to square. This thing blocks out the garden and the proportions. This is really key. The fabric of the whole Borough is this beautiful architectural relationship between height of buildings, width of roads and pockets of gardens. This creates something quite unique. Professors come to me from France and this, that and the other to come and study how we integrate gardens to create visionary urban sites that are so dense. We get so many people into our Borough without any tall buildings.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** Are you saying that the amenity space in that hotel is well-used by local residents?

**Philip Gumuchjian (Local resident on behalf of Grenville Place, Southwell Gardens, St Stephens Walk and the Convent Religious of Mary Immaculate):** The spaces around the hotel at the moment act as a buffer. That is the first thing. They hold the building away from people. The actual space, I do not live next to. There is a railing around it but it is meant to be accessible. That is a management issue. The garden at the south, obviously facing the sun, is quite a big and open space where there is a café associated with the hotel.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** So the purpose of the amenity space is a buffer rather than for use by residents?

**Philip Gumuchjian (Local resident on behalf of Grenville Place, Southwell Gardens, St Stephens Walk and the Convent Religious of Mary Immaculate):** From my perspective it is a buffer as we walk around. As you walk, as a visitor, a lot of the communal gardens are not accessible in the area but they are enjoyed as part of the townscape. That is a very important feature. I think the difficulty is this: is it a forecourt space now to these twin towers or is it truly a garden square? It bears no resemblance to any garden square in the whole borough.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** I know, because people can use this one, unlike the garden squares in your Borough. Can I just ask you about the quality of the architecture? You do not like what is currently there and you do not like this. What is it you are expecting?

**Philip Gumuchjian (Local resident on behalf of Grenville Place, Southwell Gardens, St Stephens Walk and the Convent Religious of Mary Immaculate):** I have lived in this area all my life, so I have lived with the current building forever. It actually does hold that street. The key thing about it from --

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** You do not think it is an eyesore? Because Michael [Bach] thinks it is an eyesore.

**Philip Gumuchjian (Local resident on behalf of Grenville Place, Southwell Gardens, St Stephens Walk and the Convent Religious of Mary Immaculate):** My point is that the building is too tall in the context. I am not going to compare architecture as such but I can compare masses. The mass of the new building is very damaging compared to the mass of the existing one because of its overshadowing impact, an expected downdraught, the way it sits on Cromwell Road, and from Earl's Court Road it becomes a ceremonial entrance to London. All the white terraces along there are effectively restored and in conservation areas. This thing borders conservation areas. It is not in proximity.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** No. It is not in one though, is it?

**Philip Gumuchjian (Local resident on behalf of Grenville Place, Southwell Gardens, St Stephens Walk and the Convent Religious of Mary Immaculate):** Absolutely not, because



they specifically did not want to make the building on the site a precedent for the future. That has sort of backfired in this kind of argument. The existence of the building is a material consideration, as you know, which means which part of it is immaterial: how big it is, how tall it is, that it is a hotel, the footprint, how much open space there is, which part of that? You cannot use a precedent and say, "I am a man". You get somebody twice as big as me next to me and you say, "They are the same because they are a man". These are two completely different animals.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** Just going back to my original question, what are you seeking here?

**Philip Gumuchjian (Local resident on behalf of Grenville Place, Southwell Gardens, St Stephens Walk and the Convent Religious of Mary Immaculate):** What am I seeking? The refusal of this building. Eventually I think that, for a start, we should not be exceeding the volume of the building on the site. I have done projects along the river where there was an existing building. We take the volume, we distribute it, we make it a modern building, we redevelop. We do not say, "There is a building. Now we are going to double it in size". That, on this site, is a recipe for disaster.

They are very good architects. If they worked really hard using the existing volume, they could do a brilliant scheme and make a liveable garden, a garden that people would like to actually be in. It is perfectly possible. The only problem with this scheme is that these poor guys have been struggling with a brief that says, "Make it 63% more floor space, make it twice the volume". That is a real challenge for anybody on this site. It does not work. It is like parking a liner in the middle of a heritage site with loads of tourists going around and saying, "Oh, isn't this quaint?" and then suddenly there is this ship. It is inappropriate.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** Michael, I have a question, please. A sort of nod or shake of heads in relation to the eyesore of the current building. What are your expectations for what you would like to replace this - in your words - eyesore of a building?

**Michael Bach (Kensington Society):** Well, you have the difficulty of making this decision. If this does not go ahead, there is the opportunity of a rethink. If it goes ahead, we have had it. We are not here to redesign it for you because that is not the appropriate place to do it. We need something that respects the area much better than this does. We have not said we have a unified view as to what it should be, but this certainly is not it and it is not it by such a large magnitude that people actually say, "We would rather keep the building we have for the time being".

We want to get a better scheme. We are not against redevelopments. We are in favour of something that is smaller and less intrusive than this, and it can be done. Do you know Marsham Street and the three towers that were there? Terry Farrell was asked to redesign it so it could not be seen from anywhere. He got more floor space on the site than was there before and you cannot see that building from anywhere.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** Sure.

**Michael Bach (Kensington Society):** It is a task for the architect to do something far more creative than what we have here. This is just piling it up and it has paid no attention to what residents want.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** Do you use the amenity space that is currently there?

**Michael Bach (Kensington Society):** No, I live to the north. I see this as I come out of my front door and look south. You have seen the pictures. If you take it with a wide-angle lens it looks small; if you see it with your eye, it is something totally different. This dominates our area, even nearly half a mile away, and as you get closer, it looms above it. All the pictures that you have seen are done with wide-angle lenses. You saw for yourself but I do not know whether you had a comparison of what had been submitted. It just dominates the area. So, yes, we would like to see something better on that site.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** OK. Can we pass the mic to the MP? Can I just check, are you also in agreement you want status quo, no additional affordable housing?

**Emma Dent Coad (Member of Parliament for Kensington):** Yes. I mean, I do not have a problem with the current building myself. Some people would prefer it to this. There are people I worked with in my former life [in architecture] who would actually have the current building listed because it is by Richard Siefert, very high quality. As I explained, the way it was designed and laid in this cruciform shape, it paid respect to the local buildings.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** Would you also be happy with this staying as it is with no changes at all, which means no affordable housing at all?

**Emma Dent Coad (Member of Parliament for Kensington):** Yes, I would, Mr Mayor, because of the reason I gave, which is that the Council has banked land all across the Borough. One of the places that they are proposing using your money, Mr Mayor, is in such a polluted spot that the area has to be completely enclosed. They will not be able to open a single window and they have to rely on air conditioning because it is one of the high pollution spots, right next to the Westway. They are putting people in social housing in the most polluted spot in the Borough. They have land all up and down Lots Road which they have banked and they are not even considering using that for social housing. They have, as I said, section 106 money as well as your money.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** I am sure that residents will know no councillor from the majority party bothered to turn up, so I cannot answer those questions, can I?

**Emma Dent Coad (Member of Parliament for Kensington):** No.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** Can I just ask you, are you aware of the current amenity space being used by the residents?

**Emma Dent Coad (Member of Parliament for Kensington):** Of the garden?

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** Yes. You were talking about the cruciform plan and how wonderful it is but it seems to me that nobody uses it.

**Emma Dent Coad (Member of Parliament for Kensington):** It has the railings around it --

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** It is just a buffer.

**Emma Dent Coad (Member of Parliament for Kensington):** -- rather than being open, but there are people who use it. It is not my area, I live out to the north, but it is certainly used.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** Fine. Last question to the air quality expert, who is here as a resident, as I understand, who happens to be an air quality expert, rather than the other way around.

**Laure de Preux Gallone (Local resident and Lecturer, Imperial College London):** It can be both, yes.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** Have you been commissioned to --

**Laure de Preux Gallone (Local resident and Lecturer, Imperial College London):** No, I have not been commissioned by Imperial College.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** You are a resident?

**Laure de Preux Gallone (Local resident and Lecturer, Imperial College London):** I use my own knowledge of the problem to discuss this issue here.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** We are very grateful. Can I just ask you about the number of car parking spaces in the hotel as it exists? How many are there?

**Laure de Preux Gallone (Local resident and Lecturer, Imperial College London):** Carpark spaces? I believe they have the opportunity to put a few hundred.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** No, but how many are there now?

**Laure de Preux Gallone (Local resident and Lecturer, Imperial College London):** In front of the building, I am not aware -- 60 downstairs and a few outside.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** So you are saying there are 60 spaces at the moment?

**Laure de Preux Gallone (Local resident and Lecturer, Imperial College London):** I do not know how much in the basement. I never entered this --

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** I thought you were talking about your expertise in air quality. I thought the amount of cars that go to and from may be a factor.

**Laure de Preux Gallone (Local resident and Lecturer, Imperial College London):** I do not count cars as part of my expertise. I measure pollution on the streets.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** Michael, do you want to help? Do you know the numbers?

**Michael Bach (Kensington Society):** Can I try to answer it? The main clientele at the moment for the hotel is contract work from airline staff. They arrive in coaches in bulk. The proposal is to make the main front building a high-quality hotel, even a six-star has been mentioned. Those people will largely come in individual vehicles, so vehicle generation will be higher. The people in the serviced accommodation might well come by Tube.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** I will let the applicants respond, because I think that is not right. I think the coach drop-off point at the moment, as I understand it from various documents I have read, is by the residential properties. That is going to change, according to the plans.

**Laure de Preux Gallone (Local resident and Lecturer, Imperial College London):** Yes, I think it is a good point that you mention. It is changing on the other side, so in order to drop someone from Heathrow, you have to go all around the garden, and then to bring another person to Heathrow, you go again around the garden, so not only are you increasing the guests, but you are doubling the trips because they have to go twice around the garden, which already has a level of pollution that exceeds the legal limits, so it is not going to improve. I can go on and on. They have a conference centre of 1,500 individuals. They are estimating peaks of traffic of about 139 cars during peaks. I have attended a conference of 1,500 people. You see many more cars, many more traffic.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** You are not aware how many car parking spaces there are now. Are you aware how many there are going to be in the future?

**Laure de Preux Gallone (Local resident and Lecturer, Imperial College London):** From what I remember, a couple of hundred in the basement.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** So your expert advice on air quality is based on car parking spaces going up?

**Laure de Preux Gallone (Local resident and Lecturer, Imperial College London):** Sorry?

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** You think the car parking spaces are going up?

**Laure de Preux Gallone (Local resident and Lecturer, Imperial College London):** I think the car parks are going up, but my point is around the traffic.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** OK, thank you. Questions for the Council. Can I just check, Ms Foster, there are no councillors here, am I right, from the majority party?

**Sue Foster (Interim Director, Planning and Place, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea):** That is my understanding, there are not.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** Have I understood from the GLA officers that the officers from the Council - in other words, maybe you - recommended to the Planning Committee to grant permission but the councillors declined the advice and refused permission?

**Sue Foster (Interim Director, Planning and Place, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea):** It was not actually me - I was not at RBKC at that point - but yes, you are right. This was --

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** Are any of those officers here who wrote the paper granting permission?

**Sue Foster (Interim Director, Planning and Place, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea):** It was initially an officer recommendation but we are clearly representing the Council's view today that it should be refused for the reasons that the Council set out.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** All right, fine. Can you tell me, in the year 2017/18, how many affordable homes were given permission by the Borough you work for, social rented homes?

**Sue Foster (Interim Director, Planning and Place, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea):** Social rented? There were --

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** 2017/18.

**Sue Foster (Interim Director, Planning and Place, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea):** Yes. There were actually no homes.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** What about in 2016/17?

**Sue Foster (Interim Director, Planning and Place, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea):** There were 17.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** Seventy?

**Sue Foster (Interim Director, Planning and Place, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea):** Seventeen.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** All right, so 2017/18 zero and 17 in 2016/17. What about in 2015/16?

**Sue Foster (Interim Director, Planning and Place, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea):** There was actually slightly more, 25.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** All right, so 25 plus 17 plus zero in three years.

**Sue Foster (Interim Director, Planning and Place, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea):** That is absolutely correct. As I said, we absolutely recognise that there is an absolute need in RBKC for more affordable homes coming forward. We are actively looking at how that can happen.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** The MP does not agree with you, does she? But let us not go there, because nor do I.

Can we talk about the appropriateness of the development on this site? The position of the officers now is you think this development is inappropriate for the site. The officers have changed their minds, from what you are saying. Is that correct?

**Sue Foster (Interim Director, Planning and Place, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea):** I am not saying that. What I am saying is that I --

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** So the officers of the Council got it wrong?

**Sue Foster (Interim Director, Planning and Place, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea):** No, what I am saying is that I have come into the Council. I am representing the Council's position on this scheme and consider there is a very credible argument why the balance between the benefits on the site and harm that it creates do not justify approval of the scheme.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** We will try again. The officers who wrote the paper that went to the Planning Committee thought the development was appropriate for the site. Are we in agreement so far?

**Sue Foster (Interim Director, Planning and Place, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea):** Not entirely. It was very much a balance about the less than substantial harm of the building that was recognised in the officers' report compared to the benefits that would be brought forward.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** Let us try again. What was the recommendation from the officers to the councillors? Did you work for the Council at the time?

**Male Speaker (Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea):** I did, yes.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** Do you want to answer the questions rather than the poor officer who has been sent here to hold the brief? Were you the officer that drafted the paperwork that went to the Committee?

**Male Speaker (Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea):** I was not the officer who drafted it but I was part of the --

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** So we have no councillors from the majority party and no officer who drafted the paper? It is a bit odd, is it not?

**Male Speaker (Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea):** I was part of the signing off of the officers' recommendation at the time.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** All right. Let me start again then. You were part of the officers who wrote the paper that went to the Committee. Did you think that this application was appropriate for the site?

**Male Speaker (Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea):** On balance, the officers' recommendation was to approve the scheme.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** Great, we got there. So the officers recommended permission to the councillors?

**Male Speaker (Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea):** Yes. However, we are here today representing the Council's formal decision.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** Well, no, they cannot be bothered to turn up. My question to you is this: do you accept that you were wrong and the councillors were right or are you simply here because the Council have told you to come along and say that your original advice was wrong?

**Male Speaker (Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea):** I am not here to represent myself. I am here to represent the Council so that is the position we are putting forward.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** OK. Can you explain, in relation to whatever person you are speaking on behalf of today, what development would be appropriate in relation to scale for this site?

**Male Speaker (Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea):** The Council's position in particular is that the increase in size of the development on this site, the second tower in particular, creating additional high-level massing, is identified as being an issue. You have heard several facts about a 65% increase in floor space and a doubling of the volume. This building that exists on the site is already identified in the Council's building height SPD as being completely out of context. The point is that in replacing that building that is an eyesore, you should not then put a much larger building back on the site because that just increases the harm that exists from the existing building.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** The councillors you are speaking on behalf of here think that any future development should be smaller than what is currently there now?

**Male Speaker (Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea):** No, that is not what I am saying, but it should be assessed in the context of what is there at the moment. This being very much larger than the existing building and having much more high-level massing, being taller - the main tower is bigger than the existing building, the second tower is only 3 metres smaller - that increase in massing and high-level massing is not the contextual approach to redeveloping this site.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** You are happy with one 30-storey building but not one and the other one next to it?

**Male Speaker (Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea):** I cannot answer that today and tell you what would be acceptable.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** I thought you said the problem was the second tower.

**Male Speaker (Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea):** The additional massing from the second tower clearly is part of the issue but I cannot outright today say that if you got rid of that second tower it would be fine because that is a not a scheme we have considered any form of.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** Can I ask you if you are aware whether the amenity space is used by residents?

**Male Speaker (Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea):** Residents have advised me that they do use the existing space, yes.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** Can I ask you whether you are aware of how many people are currently waiting to be rehoused by your Council, who you are here on behalf of? What are the current numbers on the housing waiting list?

**Male Speaker (Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea):** There are 3,304.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** There is no point in me asking you the further questions I had. I will ask the applicant some questions.

Can I ask you to comment on the questions about the car parks? The air quality expert said that the number of car parking spaces goes up by, she said, 60 to 100-plus.

**Male Speaker:** Yes, I can confirm that the existing site has 100 spaces in terms of car parking spaces and the proposals will allow a total of 31 car parking spaces, so there will be a significant reduction.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** A reduction?

**Male Speaker:** Yes.



**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** OK. Can I ask you about the coaches that currently come to the hotel, where they currently drop off and collect and what the plans are for the future?

**Male Speaker:** At the moment the coaches drop off on Courtfield Road, so it is very close to the residential part of the area. In the future they will be dropping off on Ashfield Place -- sorry, Ashburn Place. That will be for a limited time of the day. The other thing is that the profile of visitors to the development is going to be slightly different to what happens currently, so we will be expecting a significant reduction in the number of coach traffic movements.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** That is also inconsistent with what I have just heard from the expert.

Can I just ask you about the issue of the conversations you have had with the Council? I am a bit confused in relation to who is in favour of what. When you were involved in discussions with the Council before this went to the Planning Committee, what concerns were raised with you in relation to the height, the density and scale in relation to the comments we have heard from the Council today?

**Ian Simpson (Architect, SimpsonHaugh):** My name is Ian Simpson. I am the architect for the project. Right at the very beginning of this exercise we did a viability study and agreed with the Council the quantum of accommodation that would be required. That was the starting point for us as architects, and to then go through a series of 13 pre-application design sessions, two design review panels over 18 months, developing our ideas and thoughts, 80 different iterations around the scheme we explored, all of them supporting and retaining the garden and all the plane trees that sit around it. We are very, very proud of this solution that we have come up with and very excited to want to deliver it.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** Thank you for that. Can I just ask you about the various iterations? We have heard there is a crisis in this Borough in relation to a lack of affordable housing, a crisis. I am assuming they must have been lobbying you aggressively and extensively to have affordable housing, for it to be in social rent and all the rest of it. What was their approach in relation to getting affordable housing on the site? We have managed to get you to 100%. I am assuming we are just better negotiators. What was their approach to you?

**Jonathan Manns (Rockwell Property Group):** We felt that the inclusion of a residential use within the site was an appropriate response to the residential properties which exist at the moment along Courtfield Road. As part of that proposal we sought to offer a policy-compliant mix of housing, with local policy seeking 50%. That is what we were offered and we were never asked to provide any more.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** Can I ask about the trees? We have seen from my office a presentation that some trees are going to be lost. Can you just talk about that? What are your plans?

**Sam Martin (Director, Exterior Architecture Limited):** I am Sam Martin, landscape architect. There are nine trees being removed. I think there was mention of ten, but I think there are nine trees that are being removed from the site. They are predominantly in the centre of the existing garden but they sit above the existing basement, so in order for the redevelopment to occur of the hotel, we need to remove those trees in the centre. We are keeping all the ones around the perimeter and all the mature plane trees.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** While you are speaking, hopefully with a mic that works --

**Sam Martin (Director, Exterior Architecture Limited):** Sorry about that.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** It is not your fault. There has been conflicting experience of the amenity space and what it is used for. Some are massive fans of it and the cruciform form of the development stuff. I have been past the hotel a number of times, not just last week. How used is the amenity space and what are the plans for the future amenity space?

**Sam Martin (Director, Exterior Architecture Limited):** Yes, you are aware of the current situation. By definition of what the garden square by covenant in the area is, of that existing covenant, 1,700 square metres is accessible, in terms of you can actually walk on it or get on it. A lot of the existing is raised or behind a fence. The new garden will be 2,700 square metres of accessible space. Lawns, we have --

**Male Speaker:** We have 100 different species of shrubs and herbaceous plants and we have about 6,000 bulbs mainly as well.

**Sam Martin (Director, Exterior Architecture Limited):** Thank you very much. So what we have endeavoured to do is to recreate the Victorian garden square. We have gone into great depth and research into what sort of plants might be in that, but fundamentally this is for everyone, not just for the benefit of the residents who live immediately around it, so --

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** It will be a square in the Royal Borough that everyone can use?

**Sam Martin (Director, Exterior Architecture Limited):** Yes, which is unusual.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** That is a novelty, is it not?

**Sam Martin (Director, Exterior Architecture Limited):** Yes. That was the exciting thing for us, to actually reimagine what a public garden square could be in the traditional London garden square movement, which was for the residents only. We feel that everyone, not just in the immediate vicinity, but in the Borough and visitors alike, can enjoy it.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** Thank you. I think it is probably the person who spoke here, but you talk about jobs. Can I just ask you about what the scheme will deliver in relation to jobs?

**Henry Middlebank(?):** Hi, my name is Henry Middlebank. We did the environmental impact assessment, which included the socioeconomic assessment. There are a range of jobs that we calculated based on current guidance. With the facilities that we are going to be providing in terms of the restaurants, the gym, the conferencing facilities, as well as the luxury high-scale hotel, it is most likely to be at the higher range of the estimate, so over 800 jobs net.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** How can I be assured that some of those jobs will go to local people?

**Male Speaker:** Yes, we have an employment and recruitment strategy which we are going to be signing up to as part of the section 106 agreement, so we are going to be working very closely with RBKC's economic development team. We have come up ourselves with a programme of how we are going to invest in training, as Rockwell has other hotels. There is a representative here from the London training centre who has put forward a bespoke programme about how we go about targeting local people. They would be accredited training courses to try to get people into the hospitality and catering sector.

There will be apprenticeships that we will be signing up to as part of the scheme and there will be long-term monitoring to ensure that that strategy is implemented both in the construction phase, which will deliver about 600 jobs, and then in the operational phase, which will deliver 600 net additional jobs. So we will be looking forward to talking to RBKC more about that. We are delivering funding of around £1.4 million into that, so we expect to deliver a significant number of jobs for local people.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** Just so I am clear, aside from the jobs for local people, the amenity space local people can now use and the homes that local people can afford, what are the benefits the local people get from your scheme?

**Male Speaker:** In addition to that, there is wider public realm improvements. We are looking at improving the streets around the site, more tree planting, better way-finding signage and there will be new paving. It is £2.8 million that we are putting forward to that.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** OK, no further questions from me. I am going to retire now for a while, thank you.

I would like to thank everyone who has attended today, the objectors, the applicant and the Council, for the contributions they have made, ensuring that before I make my decision I am as fully informed as I can be about the issues surrounding this application. I called in this planning application to be subjected to further scrutiny.

London's population is booming. We urgently need more visitor accommodation and housing and particularly more social rent homes. The 2016 London Plan seeks to achieve 40,000 net additional hotel rooms by 2036, but more recent research in support of the draft London Plan suggests that 58,000 additional bedrooms are required by 2041. The analysis suggests that

London needs 66,000 new homes a year through to 2030, the majority of which should be affordable, to address the existing shortfall in housing and accommodate London's projected population growth. I am serious about tackling London's housing crisis and it is one of my top priorities. Delivery is dependent on the approval of well-designed schemes with good levels of social rented and other genuine affordable housing. This needs to be understood at a national level by Ministers and at a local level by Council planning committees.

This means we must take all opportunities that are available to build more affordable housing and particularly homes for social rent. There is a desperate need for social housing across London. In the RBKC alone, we are told there are currently over 3,000 households on the housing waiting list. Between 2015 and 2018, the officers today from the RBKC told me that the Council had approved just 42 homes at social rent levels. The current scheme alone exceeds that figure. This represents not only a significant contribution to the Borough's supply of housing, but also a significant improvement since we took over the application.

When the application went to RBKC's Planning Committee it had 47% affordable housing. The Committee refused planning permission, against officers' advice. Since being called in by City Hall, GLA planning officers have managed to increase the number of total homes and have secured 100% at social rent levels. This means the number of social rent level homes has more than tripled. The lack of homes at social rent levels given permission by the RBKC is shocking. This was raised also by the local MP, Emma Dent Coad, who spoke today. Emma Dent Coad also raised the issue of land banking and concerns about the Council's own delivery. These are matters that cannot be considered today but I will ensure these are followed up.

If we are to deliver affordable homes and other benefits for London, we must ensure that we make the best use of our land. We must optimise the development of previously developed sites so that we can accommodate our growth, while protecting the green belt. As was clear to me during my visit, the current building on the Kensington Forum Hotel site does not offer high-quality public space or public realm, nor does it relate well to the streets that surround it. These plans are for much improved and genuine public space, not just a buffer or a space inaccessible to the public. The site is highly accessible and close to major visitor attractions and there is already a metropolitan scale tall hotel building on the site.

In my view, therefore, the main consideration here is the impact of the additional height and massing on local townscape views and heritage assets. I have carefully considered the visual impact of the development. It is a matter of judgment whether the harm caused outweighs the benefits. I agree with the GLA officers that whilst the increased scale and prominence would cause some harm in close-up views, there would also be a considerable enhancement in others. The development includes other benefits, such as a reconfigured public garden space, additional jobs and public realm improvements.

Overall, attaching considerable importance and weight to the heritage impact of the proposal, I consider that there are clear and convincing public benefits that outweigh the harm. I also consider that the other impacts, including on daylight and sunlight, are not sufficient to refuse

the application. For these reasons, I agree with the GLA planning officers' recommendation and grant planning permission for this development. Thank you.