

# Statement by Stop MSG Sphere Residents’ Group (representation reference number PRN.057.)

## in response to: Matter 12: Section 12 – Sub Area 3 Central Stratford and Southern Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park

This is a statement in support of our representation to the Reg. 19 Draft Local Plan in respect of **Policy 3.1** and **Site Allocation SA3.1: Stratford Town Centre West, Development Parcel 2.**

You will be aware that a planning application for a large scale entertainment venue (accompanied by an advertisement consent application) on the site, was submitted earlier this year.

We are fully aware that this Examination is an examination into the soundness of the Draft Local Plan rather than an assessment of, or an inquiry into, the MSG proposal itself. However, given that we know the detail of the proposal, coupled with the fact that the Developer has bought the site and are promoting their proposal through the Draft Local Plan as well, it is important to refer to the planning applications in the context of assessing the soundness of the Policy 3.1 and the Allocation for Development Parcel 2.

The proposal involves an 80,000+sqm multi-use entertainment and leisure venue with a total capacity of 25,000 people, within a monolithic structure reaching 97m in height and 120m in width. The venue comprises the main sphere with capacity of 21,500 people as well as a podium, a plaza, smaller music venue/night club, another restaurant / members’ lounge / nightclub, and external terraces with cafés, bars and open air entertainment facilities.

Opening hours: The venue would operate up to 365 days per year, with approximately 300 ‘event days’ (i.e. when events will be held within the main venue –the MSG Sphere) per year. It is expected that there would be more than one event per day in the main arena, and for smaller events (the night clubs, bars, restaurants and other ancillary commercial spaces to run simultaneously). Planning application documents state that “The timing of the events in the main venue will vary, but will typically be matinee, evening and overnight events.” The opening hours are set out below.

<b>Event Type</b>	<b>Indicative Doors Opening Time</b>	<b>Indicative Event Start Time</b>	<b>Indicative Event Finish Time</b>
<b>Matinee Event (Monday – Sunday)</b>	11:00 – 14:00	12:00 – 15:00	15:00 – 18:00
<b>Evening Event (Monday – Thursday)</b>	18:00 – 19:30	20:00 – 21:00	23:00 - 00:00
<b>Evening Event (Friday – Saturday)</b>	18:00 – 19:30	20:00 – 21:00	23:00 - 00:15
<b>Evening Event (Sunday)</b>	18:00 – 19:30	20:00	22:30 - 23:30
<b>Overnight Event (Monday- Sunday)</b>	18:00 – 19:30	20:00 – 21:00	00:30 – 05:00

Page 18, MSG’s Concept of Operations document.

Music club/Night club with 1,500 people capacity - Opening hours until 4.00 am.  
 Restaurant/Members’ lounge/night club/bars- capacity of 1,000 people, Opening hrs until 3.00 am.

Further, the whole surface of the main Sphere would be an LED advertising surface, projecting moving images, video feeds, commercial adverts and so on. This would be the biggest advertising surface in the UK and in Europe, and one of the biggest in the world. In addition, a large number of other structures around the site including new bridges, lifts, and billboards around the edges of the site even closer to homes, would have illumination, flickering lights and tickertape. Due to the intensity and type of light pollution, if allowed, the advertising element of the proposal would have unprecedented detrimental impacts on residential amenity of nearby residents and on public safety. It would seriously harm the quality of life and the health and wellbeing of thousands of residents facing the site.

Stop MSG Sphere Residents' Group has come together to oppose the MSG Sphere proposal, which is completely unacceptable on a site surrounded by housing on three sides. We believe that, if approved, this development would blight the lives of thousands of local people. The proposal would result in many adverse planning impacts, each of which would individually warrant a refusal of planning permission. The worst impacts would be forced upon the residents who live immediately around the site, including those living in the nearby social housing estate, who are some of the most deprived communities in Newham. Our group's detailed objection to the planning applications is set out in **Appendix 1**.

For brevity, we will not reiterate our detailed objection to the planning applications here. However, the key points set out in our objection to the planning applications, such as the scale/capacity of the proposed entertainment venue and its key impacts, are very pertinent to the assessment of the soundness of the draft Local Plan policy 3.1 in Sub Area 3 and the Site Allocation SA3.1 (Development Parcel 2).

This is a very large scale proposal, which would have severe detrimental impacts on the immediate and the wider area. We are aware that it would be possible to design a scheme differently to reduce some of the harmful impacts. However, even if there was a different proposal, for instance one which did not involve the advertising element an entertainment venue of this size/capacity would still have unacceptable impacts on the area. These are wide ranging but, for the purpose of this Examination, we wish to highlight the following impacts in particular:

- Impacts on public transport network, in particular the impacts on Stratford Station, and Maryland Station;
- Significant increase in vehicular traffic resulting in further congestion and pollution, as well as increased parking pressures;
- Impacts on residential amenity/the living conditions of existing and future residents, due to noise and disturbance from large crowds attending the venue, particularly late at night. Unworkable and unsustainable crowd management.
- Potential increase in crime and anti-social behaviour;
- CO2 emissions/environmental sustainability .

Our concerns are echoed by a number of key stakeholders, who have submitted strong objections to the MSG planning applications. We have not included objections from all the relevant agencies, but have selected those from key bodies who are well placed to evidence a range of harmful impacts of the MSG proposal. For details please see:

- Stage 1 report by the GLA/Mayor of London – **Appendix 2**
- Objection by Network Rail - **Appendix 3**

- Objection by MTR Crossrail - **Appendix 4**
- Objection by Southeastern Railway - **Appendix 5**
- Response by E20 Stadium LLP – **Appendix 6**
- Objection by LB Newham – **Appendix 7**
- Response to MSG proposal from Stratford City Business District Ltd - **Appendix 8**
- London & Continental Railways, Site Development Options Appraisal by Drivers Jonas Deloitte - **Appendix 9**

When taken together, draft Policy 3.1 and the Site Allocation SA3.1. in respect of the Development Parcel 2, would be supportive of a large scale entertainment venue in this location, subject to compliance with other policies. But any large scale entertainment venue in this location would have unacceptable impacts on public transport and other infrastructure, and unacceptable impacts on local residents, given that the site is surrounded by housing on three sides.

Therefore, the policy and the allocation, which are permissive of a proposal of this scale and nature, which would have very significant negative impacts (regardless of the detailed design of any proposal), are not sound. The draft Policy and the Allocation fail to meet the tests of soundness as follows:

- a) **positively prepared – providing a strategy which, as a minimum, seeks to meet the area’s objectively assessed housing and other needs; and is informed by agreements with other authorities, so that the unmet need from neighbouring areas is accommodated where it is practical to do so and is consistent with achieving sustainable development;**

The evidence base behind the draft Local Plan (including some of the evidence prepared by the Mayor of London/GLA) identifies development needs to be met over the plan period, such as housing and affordable housing, office floorspace etc.

Newham’s new housing target, set by the Mayor of London, is by far the highest in London. Between 2019/20 and 2028/29 Newham is required to deliver 38,500 additional new homes. In addition, the LLDC is required to deliver a further 21,600 homes within the small area currently under their jurisdiction. That is a total of 60,000 new homes over the 10-year period. Such large scale of housing growth would place immense pressures on Stratford Station (and other local stations) as tens of thousands of new residents would use Stratford on a daily basis, either as their main station or as an interchange.

Similarly new office development will place further pressures on Stratford Station. In terms of future jobs growth in London, the majority of growth will be in office based jobs and Stratford is identified as one of the key future office growth areas in London.

In addition to the new large-scale offices and housing, many other developments will be built in the area, including a whole new cultural complex. East Bank will include a new 550-seat Sadler's Wells theatre and a new choreography/hip-hop academy, a new large UAL's London College of Fashion campus (accommodating 6,500 students), a new UCL campus (for around 4,000 students), a new V&A gallery and a new museum, a BBC music studios hub, and a range of other supporting facilities. East Bank alone will bring an additional 1.5 million visitors to the Park and surrounding area each year.

Stratford Station is already extremely busy, and very stressful and unpleasant to use, particularly at peak hours, even when there are no large scale events taking place at venues in the area. The station

is also becoming increasingly unsafe. There have already been incidents where people were trampled in the station tunnels due to heavy overcrowding following an incident.<sup>1</sup>

The capacity of Stratford Station would need to be increased significantly to cope with all the new housing, offices and other developments in the area. It is simply unrealistic to expect that Stratford Station, and the wider public transport network, could also cope with the impacts of an additional 25,000 capacity venue, even if the station were to be extended significantly.

MSG have sought to set a case of “need” for their proposal, based on their questionable conclusion that there is an undersupply of such venues in London when compared to other cities such as Berlin, Paris, Madrid and New York City. There is no need for an additional large scale music venue in London. Even if there were such a thing, there is no need for it in this part of East London given the existing large scale music and other venues in the area. The MSG’s case for justifying “need” for their proposal should be dismissed in its entirety.

The policy and the allocation in the Draft Local Plan are supportive of a type of development for which there is no need and which, by the virtue of creating unacceptable impacts on the public transport and other infrastructure, would potentially jeopardise the delivery of other types of development which are demonstrably needed (housing, offices). The proposal for a large scale new entertainment venue would also jeopardise the continued unfettered operation of the existing large scale venues in the area such as the London Stadium. Therefore, we believe that the proposed policy and the allocation are not positively prepared in terms of their approach towards meeting the range of development needs in a way that is consistent with achieving sustainable development.

**b) justified - an appropriate strategy, taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence;**

The policy and the allocation which would be supportive of a large scale entertainment venue of the size/capacity and the type as the one being proposed by the MSG, are not justified and are not an appropriate strategy when taking into account reasonable alternatives.

Reasonable alternatives for the policy and the site allocation could be to seek other types of development, for which there is a real need, but which would not create such severe impacts as the proposed MSG venue. In our original representation we have suggested a number of alternative uses, such as affordable workspace for SMEs and start-ups/”maker space”, production space for creative industries, artists’ studios or similar uses.

Further, there is a very strong support in the local community for the site to be used for housing and social housing, for which there is a desperate need in the area. At the time of submitting our original representation, we did not suggest housing as an alternative use, because there was a question mark over the suitability of the site for housing raised by local councillors. Since then, we have established that there are no constraints to building housing on the site, and that the site was considered as suitable for housing by the previous owner.

Whilst we understand that the site has not been purchased with the view to build housing, the site could be developed for residential uses, to help exceed the new minimum housing requirement.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/stratford-station-commuters-being-trampled-amid-overcrowding-following-serious-police-incident-a3100606.html>

It is worth noting that until recently the site was in public ownership. The site was owned by London & Continental Railways (a company owned by the Department of Transport), and therefore public land. In 2012 property consultants who advised London Continental LTD on the sale of the site estimated the value to be £6 - 10 million. An appraisal of potential development options was undertaken in which housing was identified as the main use suitable on the site (See brief extracts from the Appraisal document in **Appendix 9**). Westfield Shopping Centre initially secured an “option” to buy the site. Land Registry records show that in 2015 London & Continental sold the site to Westfield for £9 million, and in 2017 Westfield’s sold the site to MSG for £60 million.

The site could accommodate a large amount of housing, potentially well in excess of a thousand homes. Given the low *existing use value* of the site, it would be financially viable to provide a large proportion of homes as social housing. This would make significant contribution towards meeting acute local housing need.

In addition, the site which is surrounded by housing on three sides, is simply not appropriate for a large scale entertainment venue due to the impacts on local residents resulting from noise and disturbance from tens of thousands strong crowds arriving to and leaving the venue, particularly late at night.

Further, the venue of this capacity would result in very significant additional vehicular traffic and the associated additional congestion and air pollution as well as significant additional parking pressures. Evidence from LB Newham states that Stratford area is already experiencing poor air quality, the worst in the whole borough. It is therefore difficult to see how this policy and the allocation, which would inevitably make the existing problems significantly worse, can be considered as an appropriate strategy when taking into account other reasonable alternatives.

Further, the Stratford area suffers from high crime rates and a large scale entertainment venue is likely to lead to an increase in crime, as set out in our objection to the planning applications. (See Appendix 1). According to the Metropolitan Police “Newham currently has crime figures above average for London and suffers from high levels of crime and disorder to both residents and business communities.” The response from the Police to the planning application also states: “It is our opinion that certain features promoted within the design are likely to facilitate opportunities for criminal activity and ASB. The site has several function and entertainment areas, all within close proximity. Areas where conflict of interests overlap are prone to regular confrontational disorder situations and violence. This is often fuelled by alcohol and substances misuse associated within the late night club/bar/music venues”.

Finally, it is worth noting that MSG have not undertaken a proper assessment of other potential alternative sites in London and/or elsewhere, in line with the relevant legislative requirements on Environmental Statements.

- c) effective - deliverable over the plan period, and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic matters that have been dealt with rather than deferred, as evidenced by the statement of common ground; and**

We believe that the policy and the site allocation are not effective. Given the severity and the range of impacts which a venue of this scale and nature would cause, they are not deliverable. Also, if a large scale venue were to be built, this would undermine the deliverability of other policies and objectives in this plan, including the policies promoting safe and sustainable transport, health and well-being of current and future occupiers, environment sustainability and many others. We also question whether the impacts of the LLDC’s Local Plan policy 3.1 and this

particular site allocation on Newham's residents (and other cross-boundary issue such environmental impacts on Newham) have been fully explored as part of the cross borough working.

**d) consistent with national policy - enabling the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in the Framework**

The Policy 3.1 and the site Allocation, which would be permissive of a development of the scale and type as the scheme being proposed by MSG, which would have such extensive negative impacts, do not enable the delivery of sustainable development. The policy and the allocation therefore fail against the NPPF's definition of sustainable development and other relevant policies in the Framework.

We urge you to recommend modifications to the draft Local Plan along the lines of the wording suggested in our original representation and in this statement.

**CHANGES SOUGHT**

**Site Allocation SA3.1:**

The current text in relation to the **Development Parcel 2** which refers to large scale town centre use should be deleted and replaced with the following wording:

"Development parcel 2 could provide a small scale town centre use, with the maximum capacity of no more than 1,000 people. Uses suitable on the site include, but are not limited to: Housing with a large proportion of social rented housing; offices, affordable workspace for SMEs and start-ups/"maker space", production space for creative industries, artists' studios or similar uses. Any future proposal must not add additional pressure on the already stretched public transport network. Given that the site is surrounded by housing on three sides, any future proposal must not result in any negative impacts on residential amenity and living conditions of local residents."

Similarly we request that the **Policy 3.1 : Metropolitan Centre**, and the supporting text as well as any other relevant parts of the plan (where related to this particular area/site) should be amended to remove all references to "large-scale" town centre use, and replace the current text with the wording which reflects our comments above in respect of Site Allocation SA3.1.

Point 5 under Policy 3.1 should also be amended as follows:

After " Supporting and enhancing a range of cultural and night economy uses" add the following text "providing that they do not create any additional pressure on the already stretched public transport network, do not result in any negative impacts on residential amenity of existing and future residents living nearby, do not led to increased noise and disturbance, and do not lead to potential increase in anti-social behaviour and crime ."