



ATT: Thomas Darwall-Smith
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Our ref: DRP/60

Date: 5 May 2015

Dear Thomas Darwall-Smith,

ISLINGTON DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

RE: Islington Art's Factory, 2 & 2A Parkhurst Road, London, N7 0SF – planning application reference P2015/0330/FUL

Thank you for attending Islington's Design Review Panel meeting on 14th April 2015 for an assessment of the above scheme. The proposed scheme under consideration was for the redevelopment of the site consisting of demolition of the existing garage structure and verger's cottage, refurbishment of the Sunday school building to provide 2 private residential units (2 x 2-bed), refurbishment of the Church building to provide 7 private residential units (3 x 1-bed, 2 x 2-bed and 2 x 3-bed) and construction of a new 5-storey building with basement below to provide 695 square metres of community floorspace (Use Class D1), 52 square metres of office floorspace (Use Class B1) and 20 affordable residential units (10 x 1 bed, 8 x 2 bed and 2 x 3 bed), resulting in a total of 29 residential units (13 x 1-bed, 12 x 2-bed and 4 x 3-bed), along with associated landscaping, access, parking and public realm works.

Review Process

The Design Review Panel provides expert impartial design advice following the 10 key principles of design review established by Design Council/CABE. The scheme was reviewed by Richard Portchmouth (chair), Stephen Archer, Steve Burr, Kate Graham, Richard Lavington and Ludwig Tewksbury on 14th April 2015 including a site visit and a presentation from the design team followed by a question and answers session and deliberations at the offices of the London Borough of Islington. The views expressed below are a reflection of the Panel's discussions as an independent advisory body to the council.

Panel's observations

The existing buildings

The Panel considered the existing Victorian church to be an important landmark building that would benefit from restoration and that the former Sunday School and Verger's Cottage were characterful buildings that make an important contribution to the significance of the conservation area. It was felt that although each building is important each contributes to the importance of the other through their relationship as being part of a satisfying group within a prominent location.

The loss of the Verger's Cottage

The panel felt that no convincing justification had been provided for the demolition of the Verger's Cottage and that the starting point for any redevelopment proposals should be the retention of all buildings, which make a positive contribution to the conservation area. The internal spaces are of such quality; with art nouveau tiles and cast-iron staircase that every attempt should be made to incorporate these spaces and their detailing within the new development. If approval is being sought for the removal of the building a convincing case needs to be made that the harm resulting from its removal is outweighed by the benefits to the overall development layout. The Panel did not feel this was evident in the presented scheme.

Residential use of the Church and former Sunday School

The Panel were informed of the project ambition to design and construct the project whilst allowing the Islington Arts Factory (IAF) to remain on site throughout. The panel questioned the logic behind converting two prominent community buildings to housing and re-providing the community use within a new residential building of which no part signifies a community use. The Panel wondered whether a temporary home nearby could be found for IAF whilst the new project is constructed and if this might allow the refurbishment of the church and neighbouring buildings to accommodate a revitalised IAF facility. The church and upper Sunday School hall in particular have very special internal spatial qualities and any conversion, whether residential or community, needs to use these to best effect. It was felt that it would be unacceptable to utilise the ground floor of the church for bin and cycle storage and that this should be reconsidered. Generally it was considered that the detail design for the Church & Sunday School needed to be fully resolved to demonstrate that the quality of the existing buildings would not be compromised.

The reinstatement of the church spire is welcomed but must be secured by legal agreement, conditions and construction management plan. The exterior of the church should be restored and any new openings should better reflect the character of the building.

The Panel raised concerns that the redevelopment of the church itself would not be designed to the same level of detail as the wider scheme due to it potentially being sold to a third party developer and suggested that the Council may be able to prevent this through conditions/legal agreement.

Further information was required on how the spaces between the buildings will be treated and how any newly revealed elevations will appear. The Panel felt the project presented the opportunity to significantly enhance these aspects of the scheme with greater hierarchy of public space, routes and servicing.

New residential building

While there was some concern over the height and massing of the proposed building and that such a lengthy parapet line without a step-down could be overly dominant towards the heritage assets, generally it was felt that the proposed building has an acceptable relationship with the heritage assets and allows views of the spire to remain prominent.

However, concern was raised over the defensive appearance of the building and the lack of interest to the apex of the site, the latter possibly calling for a more innovative solution. Concern was also raised over whether the proposed winter gardens will be constructed to sufficient quality and whether these and floor to ceiling height windows will reveal visual clutter behind them. The layout and quality of accommodation of the apartments at roof level in the new building was also questioned.

Summary

The Panel welcomed the principle of re-developing the site however considered that insufficient justification had been provided for the demolition of the Verger's Cottage and that it would bring richness to the scheme if incorporated within the redevelopment proposals. Any proposals showing its removal will need to clearly demonstrate this is to the overall benefit of the development of the site. The Panel also suggested that it might be better for the community use to remain within the church and former Sunday School buildings. The Panel considered that the relationship between the buildings and quality of the external spaces requires improvement as well as internal planning of the existing Church & Sunday School buildings. Concern was raised over the defensive appearance of the proposed new building and the lack of interest to the apex of the site and that these issues need to be resolved.

Thank you for consulting Islington's Design Review Panel. If there is any point that requires clarification please do not hesitate to contact me and I will be happy to seek further advice from the Panel.

Confidentiality

As the scheme is the subject of a planning application, the views expressed in this letter may become public and will be taken into account by the council in the assessment of the proposal and determination of the application.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lucy', written in a cursive style.

Luciana Grave

Design Review Panel Coordinator
Design & Conservation Team Manager