



CONFIDENTIAL

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Our ref: DRP/121

Date: 28 April 2017

Dear Mary Power,

ISLINGTON DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

**RE: Laser House, 123-140 Goswell Road, Clerkenwell, London, EC1V 7DY
(planning application ref. P2017/1103/FUL)**

Thank you for attending Islington's Design Review Panel meeting on 11 April 2017 for a first review of the above scheme.

The proposed scheme under consideration is for the part single, part two storey extension at roof level to existing buildings fronting Goswell Road and Pear Tree Street (with plant enclosure above), and refurbishment of existing buildings including alterations to the facades, windows, doors and the provision of cycle storage, updated access arrangements and ancillary works, along with a new three storey building to the corner of Goswell Road and Pear Tree Street to provide a new entrance to office accommodation and lifts, plus 144sqm of gallery/event space (Use Class D1/D2), the change of use of part of the lower ground and ground floors of Laser House to provide 729sqm of retail/restaurant/office floorspace (Use Class A1/A3/B1), and the provision of 7,679sqm of Office (Use Class B1(a)) floorspace (officer's description).

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), Alec Forshaw, Ben Gibson, Ludwig Tewksbury and Phil Coffey on 11/04/2017, including a site visit, presentation from the design team followed by a question and answer 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 Panel found much to commend about the scheme and recognized that the rejuvenation of the building would be highly beneficial to the street as a whole. Panel members welcomed the activation of the dead service frontage along Pear Tree Street with entrances to B1 space for SMEs. Realigning the upper 2nd storey of the building with the lower floors along this street was also seen to bring benefits to the street morphology and relationship with adjoining buildings.

The proposed new 'Art House' on the corner site was also welcomed by the Panel as was the overall conceptual design – reinforcing the building form and bringing continuous street frontage to Goswell Road and its junction with Pear Tree Street. However, the Panel raised various concerns about the detailing of the design and the identity of the public space that is being created.

Some Panel members considered that the corner block should be bolder, particularly when viewing it as part of the Goswell Road elevation where it almost appears as if it is a change in wall finish owing to the continuation of the same parapet level. Questions were asked whether it should be aligned with the existing building. It was felt that currently the design was ambiguous as to whether the gallery is an extension or an object in itself and that this relationship needed clearer resolution and expression.

The materiality was also queried, with some panel members suggesting that if the corner block visually felt heavier it would add to the intended effect of a heavy object precariously balancing or floating. The Panel emphasized that the finish of the jointing would be as important as the cladding material – so that they are read as distinct panels. Some Panel members felt that the external lift core was somewhat an anomaly in that it is a tall, dominant feature in terms of its volume, but in terms of its positioning it is very recessive.

The Panel recommended that the idea of cutting out or punching through a motif to the supporting pier at ground floor level should be re-visited. Some signage would be required to announce and draw members of the public into the building and a strong motif would help to address this by giving the space more of an apparent identity.

Finally, some Panel members raised concerns about the presence of the bus stop on Goswell Road at the front of the site and the implications of this when changing over new exhibitions etc for the gallery space. As the manoeuvring of large art pieces into the building may require a crane, some scenario planning was advised in order to properly understand the impact that this would have on traffic should it be a relatively frequent occurrence. On this point, the Panel also wondered whether a more efficient arrangement would be to introduce a floor or wall panel that could open or swing out to allow larger pieces of art to enter the building, rather than through the roof.

Summary

The Panel generally responded very positively to the scheme, commending the overall refurbishment and extension approach, particularly in comparison to the previous proposals that the Panel saw for a replacement building on the same site. The creation of activate frontages along Pear Tree Street, reinforcing the corner of the building in the streetscape by connecting two blocks with a community space and the overall synergy of the building and its mixed uses are all strong positives that appear to meet a considerable number of strategic policies.

The focus of the Panel's discussion centred on the proposed new corner element, with differing views expressed and questions asked of it. Whilst panel members appreciated that there may be no 'right' answers, they felt that responding to this sort of high level design analysis and resolution could produce and reinforce a successful design. In particular, to ensure that the idea of a heavy floating object is successful, rethinking the solidity of the pier and connection with the ground could help make it feel more ethereal. The Panel felt that the relationship between the corner box and the lift shaft could also be investigated further and suggested that the design team explore one element with a matt finish, rather than both being polished, so that one is expressed more than the other. The Panel recommended the pursuit of a conceptually bolder, rather than 'louder' design.

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

Please note that since the scheme is at planning application stage, 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' or 'Luciana', written in a cursive style.

Luciana Grave

Design Review Panel Coordinator
Design & Conservation Team Manager