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Our ref: **DRP/46**

Date: 12 January 2015

ATT: Georgina Church
GVA
10 Stratton Street
London
W1J 8JR

Dear Georgina Church,

ISLINGTON DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

RE: 68 - 86 Farringdon Road, London (pre-application ref Q2014/3634/MJR)

Thank you for coming to Islington's Design Review Panel meeting on 9 December 2014 for review of a proposed development scheme at the above address. The proposed scheme under consideration was for Redevelopment of the site comprising the demolition of existing multi-storey car park and the erection 6/7 storey building providing hotel (Class C1), office (Class B1a) and retail uses (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 Dominic Papa (Chair), Paul Reynolds, Stephen Archer, Charles Thomson, Stafford Critchlow on Tuesday 9 December 2014 including a site visit in the morning, followed by a presentation by the design team, question and answers session and deliberations in the afternoon at Islington's Municipal Offices 222 Upper Street. The views expressed below are a reflection of the Panel's discussions as an independent advisory body to the council.

Panel's Observations

Concept

The Panel welcomed the contextual studies and general design concept in particular in relation to distribution of massing subject to further assessment of impact on daylight and sunlight. Panel members appreciated the constraints of the site including the tightness of the plot, the finer grain of 2/3 storey housing at the rear, the loading on tunnels amongst other factors but felt some aspects of the scheme needed to be better resolved. As with most hotel proposals (due to floor to ceiling heights), the panel questioned the proposed building's potential for conversion and therefore the long term sustainability of the structure. Although the panel understood the challenges of delivering residential on site there was some discussion over the amount of hotel compared to the need for small floor plate office space in the area.

Height and massing

No concerns were raised in relation to the proposed heights particularly fronting Farringdon Road in terms of townscape impact. However, panel members indicated appropriate daylight sunlight studies would be necessary and evidence presented.

Privacy & Amenity

Panel members were of the opinion that there would be significant impact on neighbouring amenity and privacy of the residential properties to the rear in particular. Although there may be no direct view onto bedrooms, the impact of a great number of rooms looking onto gardens must be taken into account and mitigated through considered design development.

Elevations & materiality

The Panel appreciated there had been development of materiality and appearance on the Farringdon Road frontage but thought further resolution of the rear elevation was required. Given that the rear elevation is also very exposed, it should be treated as a front elevation in terms of architectural refinement. The panel acknowledged the references to the 19th Century buildings that previously occupied the site and commended the coherence, articulation and rhythm of those elevations with a limited pallet of materials which made a positive contribution to the streetscape. The panel suggested that these characteristics might inform the elevations of a new building on the site. Some concerns were raised in relation to the impact of the room layouts on the façade. They felt that the default solution in hotels for the appearance of glazing with most of it opaque should be avoided. Further detailing to demonstrate the quality of the elevations was required.

Servicing & Landscaping

The Panel had concerns about the managing of the servicing of the site in general and between the two uses in particular. Panel members felt that a strategy which depended on the manoeuvring of service vehicles on the public highway to access the service bay was both impractical and detrimental to the functioning of the immediate area. They stressed the importance of more dialogue with Islington regarding the vacant/un-used piece of land at the rear and also encouraged the consideration of a lay by. It was felt that resolving the ownership of the land at the back could unlock some of the issues particularly surrounding servicing.

Environmental performance

The Panel felt that more information was required in relation to BREAM and required plant as this may have an impact on massing, materiality and overall appearance of the proposed scheme.

Summary

The Panel was generally supportive of the concept of replacement of the existing building and raised no direct objections to the proposed height and massing. However, Panel members felt that further work was required in relation to a series of aspects particularly in relation to servicing, landscaping, treatment of elevation, plant, environmental performance requirements and impact on amenity. They also debated the suitability of proposed uses on site and encouraged the design team to continue discussions with the local authority to ensure compliance with aspirations of adopted policy.

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 pre-application stage, the advice contained in this letter is provided in confidence. However, should this scheme become 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