



**CONFIDENTIAL**

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Our ref: DRP/93

Date: 02 August 2016

Dear Rosemarie Jenkins,

## **ISLINGTON DESIGN REVIEW PANEL**

**RE: Hathersage & Besant, Newington Green, London N1 (pre-application ref. Q2015/4128/MJR)**

Thank you for attending Islington's Design Review Panel meeting on 12 July 2016 for a second review of the above scheme. The proposed scheme under consideration is for the retention of Hathersage Court, the T-shaped building fronting onto Newington Green and the demolition of the 5-storey L-shaped building making up part of Besant Court on the southern end of the site. The proposed development comprises of 5 new-build elements across the estate to deliver between 70 and 80 new dwellings (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), Lee Mallett, Neil Williamson, Simon Carne and Stuart Piercy on 12 July 2016 including a presentation from the design team followed by a question and answer session and deliberations at the offices of the London Borough of Islington. Richard Portchmouth and Stuart Piercy made a site visit prior to the meeting as they had not attended the first review, other panel members had visited the site at the previous review. The views expressed below are a reflection of the Panel's discussions as an independent advisory board to the Council.

### **Panel's observations**

The Panel was again supportive of the concept of bringing improvements to the estate, providing additional and mixed-tenure housing within a well-designed landscape and better functioning open space was strongly supported. Panel members acknowledged the design team's attempt to address their comments, however, felt that more needed to be done. The Panel made the following observations.

#### Masterplan

The Panel questioned the approach taken by the design team in relation to future proofing the proposals and thinking about the wider masterplan of this site. They felt it was not clear from the presentation which elements of the proposals were to be commented on as part of an upcoming planning application and sought clarification on this. Panel members felt

that the Masterplan as presented to them seemed to have derived from the development of the proposals that had been previously presented to the Panel, whereas the Panel's recommendation had been to develop a comprehensive site masterplan to inform the phasing of the project including the works proposed at this stage. Concerns were raised that the refurbishment of Big Besant was not currently proposed as part of the estate improvement works. Movement through the site and how it relates to future development needed to be clearer. Future options for peripheral sites adjoining the master plan area should not be forgotten even though they are not immediately attainable.

#### Hathersage Court

At the first review the Panel commented on the strategic importance of the site with Newington Green and raised concerns regarding the area between Hathersage Court and Newington Green including how this area could be improved to better address the surrounding context, Newington Green itself and the wider conservation area. Panel members felt that more work was required to successfully develop this space and to bring greater improvements to the public realm and the site's relationship with Newington Green.

#### Public/Private spaces

One of the key concerns raised by the Panel was the distribution and legibility of public, private and semi-private spaces and how they related to the proposed new buildings on the site. The proposed route through the site was supported however it was felt that this needed to be better defined and integrated into the public realm. The Panel had difficulty in comprehending the spatial orientation of the various proposed spaces when viewing the vignettes presented for the proposals. Panel members felt that, although there were a number of different types and areas of outdoor space proposed, the balance between those which were public and those which were private (for use by the residents only) was not right, being skewed too heavily towards private space. The Panel considered the distribution of buildings throughout the site and their relationships with the various outdoor spaces to be unresolved and that the site needed to be considered in conceptual and detailed terms within an overall model. This might lead to re-considering the positioning of the proposed buildings and spaces to create a larger public space within the site.

#### Heights and massing

The Panel felt that the rationale and presentation of massing was difficult to follow and seemed to have been derived purely from rights of light constraints as opposed to a response to a conceptual urban design and the wider context. There may be scope for more height to some buildings i.e. Block C, but this needed to be part of a strategy, for example to create a more generous central public space. The Panel commented that it was difficult for them to fully understand the relationship of all the different areas and buildings as no sections were provided. They also suggested that a simple block model of the site including existing buildings would have been helpful for them to properly assess the proposed scheme within its context.

The building elevations were not discussed in detail as it was felt that other more fundamental issues still required resolving however the Panel commented that the proposed building massing appeared bulky and lacked articulation or architectural expression. The proposal to use brick was generally supported.

#### Street frontage

The small site between Newington Green Road, the retained brick wall, Besant Court and new block was highlighted as being unresolved and lacking a clear design rationale.

## **Summary**

The Panel appreciated that the design team had attempted to address their comments from the first review, but were not convinced that the response had been successful. One of the main comments made last time was in relation to the concept of using landscape as a cohesive framework. But from the questions that were asked and the lack of clarity at the second review session, it seemed that it is still very unclear. Panel members felt that the landscape design and the hierarchy of spaces in relation to the buildings had not yet been adequately resolved. They also commented that the design as currently proposed did not relate well to the public and private spaces or unify the site and did not provide a positive response to the edge of Newington Green.

The Panel felt that the masterplan required a cohesive landscape framework and that should inform each stage of the proposals, rather than the current proposal informing the masterplan. The masterplan should be led by the spatial and landscape proposals, with any new buildings defining and integrating with the landscape design. The Panel were supportive of the ambition of the project and the potential contribution the proposals could make to Newington Green and the wider area, but felt that the design team needed to develop the design to expand the potential of the scheme. The Panel encouraged the scheme to return for a third review.

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,



## **Luciana Grave**

Design Review Panel Coordinator  
Design & Conservation Team Manager