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Our ref: Q2019/ 2051/DRP 6th Review

Date: September 24th 2021

Dear Ellen

**ISLINGTON DESIGN REVIEW PANEL – CHAIRS’ REVIEW
MEETING NO 6 – September 21st 2021**

**FORMER HOLLOWAY WOMEN’S PRISON SITE, PARKHURST/CAMDEN ROAD
LONDON N7 0NU**

This is the summary note from Islington’s Design Review Panel, Chairs’ review, following the meeting held on 21st September 2021, the 6th Review of the proposed development scheme at the former Holloway Women’s Prison site. (Please note that the 4th Review that had been scheduled for October 2020 was cancelled by the applicant prior to the Review occurring).

The scheme under consideration remains for demolition of existing buildings and a comprehensive redevelopment of the site to provide a residential led scheme of approximately 985 homes of which 60% are affordable, the provision of a women’s services ‘building’, commercial uses to the (ground floor) front of the site, and a public park to the centre.

A Chairs Review was agreed upon whereby the applicant was invited to present for final consideration and discussion the changes that have been made to the scheme reflecting the advice of the panel at the July 2021 Review.

The Chairs were also invited to assess and comment on the materiality of the scheme including the indicative approach to the draft materials palette.

Review Panel

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 Islington Design Review Panel Chairs Richard Portchmouth and Dominic Papa.

The Panel Chairs made clear to the applicant that there has been a good level of consistency in attendance throughout the review process over the past 2+ years. Dominic Papa has chaired all but the July 2021 review (Review 5) and Richard Portchmouth has attended the last 3 reviews, including chairing the July 2021 review.

The views expressed below are a reflection of the Chairs' discussion as an independent advisory body to the Council.

Queries and Clarifications

Clarification was sought as to the timing of the most significant change from the 'big block' scheme to the current finer grain approach with its 'families of buildings'. The applicant advised that this substantive change was commenced late 2020 with significant refinements from summer 2021 onwards.

The Panel queried whether the landscape and public/private realm to all the edges had been fully considered and subject to detailed designs – not just that to the central park.

The applicant advised that the design of all edges and interfaces has now been undertaken in detail. They have been discussed with and assessed by planning, design and access officers within the council who have supported the approach and the detail.

The Panel queried whether the detailing of the edges to the 'internal' street' have also been considered in as much detail as those to the public park given they are also of critical importance.

The applicant advised that they too have been designed in detail and shared with and supported by officers.

Clarification was sought as to who has access to the communal gardens located between the blocks and is access to take place off the street edge.

The applicant advised that the communal gardens are secure and are only accessible to the residents whose buildings back onto them. They are, in part, visually 'accessible' to the general public, from the street and park edges, but physically inaccessible. Other than to the southern side of Block A1, where some primary access is via the communal garden, the main entrances to each building are off the street, via a communal entrance lobby. Secondary access is provided from within the core out into the semi private residential courtyards. A number of homes at ground floor are also individually accessed directly off the street

The Panel raised concern about those flats to the lower ground floor to the 'D' buildings, facing the park, and sought confirmation that they would enjoy appropriately high levels of residential amenity and not suffer from overlooking and a lack of privacy.

This response was demonstrated through a landscape section which shows a design that capitalised on the level changes and provided for a deep planted buffer.

The Panel queried whether space for teenagers had been considered within the landscaping given areas are clearly demarcated for the under 5s, 5 -11s, and the over 11s.

The applicant advised that the Council's Youth Service also recently asked the same question and that the designs are now being reconsidered to better accommodate this cohort.

The Panel commented on the lack of consistency with the imagery in respect of the use of different colours of materials across the site. And while there was support for the palette presented there was also some confusion as to how it related to the contextual palette presented given this shows a predominance of a two tone material palette to local typologies while the scheme presents a monotone palette per building.

The applicant explained that brick is the dominant contextual material and is to be the dominant material on this site. It was stated that while the buildings were more mono-tonal, variation would come from a change in tonality that would be read through shadows, setbacks, and brick detailing rather than a change in materiality at, for example, ground or upper floors.

Chairs' Observations

The Panel Chairs commented on the following issues:

1 Connections: The Chairs considered that the pedestrian and cycle connection to Trecastle Way/Dalmeny Ave has now been satisfactorily resolved.

The failure to deliver the Crayford Road connection is considered regrettable but the Panel accept that this crosses 3rd party land and that it has not as yet been possible to secure necessary agreement from the City of London Corporation as landowner.

The applicant was advised that the Design and Access Statement should nevertheless set out the parameters and ambitions for the accommodation of this route from Crayford Road into this part of the site.

2 Communal Residential Facilities: The Panel had previously expressed concern that the on-site facilities to the base of the three 'D' buildings was intended for occupants of market sale flats only which was not supported. The Panel therefore sought the provision of similar facilities elsewhere on the site to be accessible to all tenures.

The applicant has subsequently confirmed that this large 1400sqm space is indeed to be available to all residents living on the development, regardless of tenure. This is supported by the Chairs who also noted that this communal central facility would give added emphasis to the communal nature of the public central park.

3 Building Edges to the Park: The Panel had queried how successful the interface would be between the residential buildings and the public park stressing the importance of achieving a high standard of residential amenity.

The applicant provided sections and landscaping details demonstrating how this edge has been designed including a creative use of the level changes and the provision of generously deep planted buffer zones separating adjacent pedestrian routes and recreational spaces from the residential frontages.

However there was some concern as to the proximity of bike stands to the same residential frontages on Block D. This might cause people to congregate and therefore be detrimental to resident's privacy. Due to the scheme's complexity and topography all interfaces should be clearly set out in the DAS

4 Building Edges to the (internal) Street: The Chairs noted that the landscape and entrancing edges as they address the street appear successful but commented that the most challenging edges in this respect are where the servicing is positioned. They therefore encouraged the applicant to pay the highest regard to this specific interface which, if poorly designed, risks undermining the high quality interfaces that the scheme is demonstrating elsewhere. Due to the scheme's complexity and topography all interfaces should be clearly set out in the DAS.

5 Block B – Parkhurst Road Frontage: The Chairs commented that the earlier requested changes to break up this previously long, large block, to this highly prominent edge, are now successful and that the bulk and massing has been suitably mitigated. In particular, the creation of two separate buildings was strongly supported, as was the stepped response to the building heights, the animated elevational treatments, and the introduction of landscaped spaces including between the two buildings. The Chairs noted the proximity of the buildings B5 & B6 and requested that the balcony design to these adjacent blocks be further explored to further reduce the potential of overlooking between properties.

6 Landscape Design: The Chairs were supportive of the landscape design, highly commending the proposed ‘Garden of Memory’ but also the provision of such a variety of landscaped and recreational spaces in general.

The Chairs raised an issue in relation to a perceived absence of specific areas/activities for teenagers while acknowledging that the recreational needs of all other age groups of children have been amply and ably responded to.

The Chairs advised that the use of visual vignettes showing the journey through the landscape should be included in the DAS for clarity.

7 Materials: The Chairs considered there was a lot of complexity in the simplicity of the materials as proposed which was supported – describing this approach as one of ‘intricate simplicity’. The importance of providing diagrams that clearly explain the rationale behind the material strategy across the scheme along with a comprehensive drawing giving an overview of the materiality of the entire proposal was noted by the Chairs.

There was considerable discussion about the approach to the balcony design and the contribution these elements make to the character of the buildings and spaces they address. The Chairs supported the design approach of more solid and formal balconies to the squares and streets and softer more informal balcony detailing to the semi-private and private spaces between the blocks. Again this rationale requires clear graphic explanation within the DAS and the drawings.

The materials and materiality of the 3 ‘D’ buildings fronting the park, and the two ‘C’ buildings, including the women’s building, facing Camden Road with its reference to Lutyens, were considered to be particularly successful.

There was some caution expressed about the predominance of brown brick work to the base of the women’s building, querying whether this could be construed as somewhat unwelcoming.

Similarly, the apparent weightiness of the deep pre-cast concrete parapets to the top tiers of these buildings could give a heaviness to their reading in the townscape. The Chairs suggested these may be more successful with added detail or by a reduction in depth and allowing the decorative brick to extend higher. The materials of the two E buildings, to the top edge of the site, were considered perhaps to be a little too urban for this context and might benefit from being ‘toned down’.

The Panel advised that, should planning permission be granted, a materials condition should require the production of 1:1 scale sample panels on site, for each building (or family of buildings), to aid in the determination process, the assessment of which could beneficially include the DRP members alongside officers. Typical panels might include brick wall, bonding, mortar, pointing; window frames, glazing, panels, sills, head lintels; mastic joints, metal work/balcony balustrades, concrete/stone finish for the different blocks.

Confidentiality

Please note that since the scheme is still 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

Linda Aitken

Principal Design Officer