



CONFIDENTIAL

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Dear Mr Rinsler

ISLINGTON DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

RE: [Land west of Lamb's Passage and north of Sutton Way], Service Yard at 11 Shire House, Whitbread Centre, Lambs Passage, London EC1

Thank you for attending Islington's Design Review Panel meeting on 9 March 2021 for a first review of the above scheme. The proposed scheme under consideration is for a 7 storey building (plus basement level accommodation) for Class E(g)(i) Offices and associated cycle storage, changing facilities and M&E plant.

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, Richard Brown, Philip Cave, Tim Ronalds and Jonathan Ward on 9 March 2021. The presentation from the design team was followed by a question and answer session and deliberations conducted by video conferencing. 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 welcomed the transformation of the existing low grade service access road area with the provision of the public realm to the south of the building. This will be a challenging environment in which to create good amenity space and the panel recommended that the sunlight analysis should lead the design. The design could also signal the entrance and create a sense of arrival missing from the current scheme. The panel thought the planters unrealistic for the size of tree shown and too many trees risked creating a shaded area. As trees always grow better in the ground, the possibility of planting them over the vaults should be properly investigated. The quality of the materials and an emphasis on detail was important to achieving success, especially given the close proximity of the supermarket loading bay to the public space. Encouragement was given to considering the interaction of the building with the public amenity space, allowing the ground floor, including the reception, to open into the area. The avoidance of a "corporate sealed box" in favour of an open building with connection to the city was considered to be an interesting opportunity, particularly given likely changes to working requirements.

The use of green roofs was welcomed and a more bio-diverse mix than sedum encouraged. An evergreen outlook from Shire House was encouraged, including greening the blank walls facing west. The panel reminded the team that green roofs and PVs were not incompatible and that a blue roof might also assist in storm water attenuation measures. It was encouraged to

explore external amenity space to one of the roofs, subject to mitigating privacy and overlooking concerns.

The bike storage route seemed too convoluted and difficult and might lead to occupiers taking alternative routes to the basement with bikes, which should be avoided.

The panel considered that the size of the building provided an interesting opportunity for mixed mode ventilation. The floor to floor height was noted as being constrained and an alternative façade treatment could allow servicing to be relocated in the floor zone. This would also be an opportunity to moderate the amount of glass and an upstand could accommodate services. The panel queried the likely discomfort of glare and were concerned about potentially using tinted glass as a result. Opening the windows at high level would allow general cooling and a low level opening could be operated for individual comfort. Another benefit of a different service strategy would be to pare back the equipment on the ceiling to give a greater sense of height. It might also help structural considerations which seemed to be currently unresolved. The embodied carbon for the proposal should be calculated.

More generally, the panel considered that the height and massing of the proposed building seemed to be within the allowances of the extant permission and was supportive of the ambition of the scheme. However, they were unconvinced by the purported contextual approach. The panel noted the context as being modern buildings from the 1980s onwards and that the proposed design made the building look semi-period with unexplained detailing. The chiselled and hewn massing of this building undermined the warehouse as a typology, since Victorian warehouses were considered to be robust regular buildings. It was noted that the illustrations and drawings needed to include neighbouring buildings, in particular sections through Shire House and the new building.

The design risked having been driven by setbacks and daylight and sunlight considerations so that the clarity of the architecture had been compromised. The site and the outlook was considered to be difficult and suggestions were made to make the building as light and high quality as possible and to have a brick base and a more honest response above.

The 'zipper' of glass on the south façade was noted not to be related to the building's programme and it would be more convincing if related to the core. The images appeared to show sealed glass which was problematic and related poorly to the claimed loading bay inspiration. Concern was raised with the disjuncture of the grid and the unresolved structure of the building and the two dimensional effect at the moment of a façade wrapped around a frame.

Obscured glazing was suggested for the west facing elevations (which could also facilitate access to the green roofs) and to the service areas including the WCs. The additional window openings would increase delight and sustainability and the panel welcomed the light already provided to the core.

Summary

In summary, the Chair felt that the proposal was an encouraging response to the site and that it dealt responsibly with the adjacent site to the north. The panel was supportive of the ambition of the scheme on this difficult site. The driver for the design should be the existing context and environmental quality. The Chair emphasised that the drawings do not tell the story of the site, as its context is missing, or of the building structurally, in character and amenity. The massing of the building sits incongruously with the idea of a robust Islington warehouse and given the modelling of the building, careful thought should be given to how this is taken forward. Cycle access was important as were the green credentials of the building. Attention was drawn to the brickwork on Sutton Way appearing as a veneer when approached from the west. Whether the decorative spandrels were fussy or fundamental would become clearer once functionality and structure were dealt with. Clarity of thinking was required in relation to putting office space in the vaults and natural lighting to them would be preferable and more sustainable. In conclusion

the Chair recommended a review of the context and reconsideration of how that is expressed with an open mind on the architectural direction of the project.

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,

Rachel Godden

Design Review Panel Coordinator
Design & Conservation Officer