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Our Ref: Q2019/1407/DRP 6th Review

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Dear Mr Kelway

ISLINGTON DESIGN REVIEW PANEL - MEETING NO 6 - SEPTEMBER 13TH 2022 NEW BARNSBURY ESTATE, N1

This is the summary note from Islington's Design Review Panel following the meeting held in person, in the Barnsbury Community Centre, on 13th September 2022. It was the 6th Review of the proposed development scheme at New Barnsbury Estate.

The scheme is for the complete redevelopment of the New Barnsbury Estate with an increase in homes from 389 to in the region of 925.

A separate scheme for the refurbishment of the adjacent Old Barnsbury Estate was not considered at this review.

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 Dominic Papa (Chair), Cordula Zeidler, Philip Cave, Sarah Featherstone, Alec Forshaw, and Richard Portchmouth.

The views expressed below are a reflection of the Panel's discussions as an independent advisory body to the Council.

In summary while The Panel noted many positive moves and improvements to the scheme since the earlier reviews, there was still concern about the height and massing of the development overall including in particular to the Caledonian Road frontage, the canal side towers, and to the Lanes.

Concern was also expressed about the under-provision of children's play space on the site together with the quality of much of the open space including the minimal sun on ground standards being achieved.

The Panel welcomed the accompanied site walkabout at the start of the event and found the development model to be a highly useful accompaniment to the assessment process. The Panel thanked the applicant for both the guided walk and the model.

Panel Queries

Would there be any fixed play equipment on the site?

Response: This is located within Carnegie Street Park.

In the previous DRP, the applicant was asked to remove a floor from the Lanes and reduce the height in Caledonian Road. The Panel queried if either had been achieved?

Response: No. The Caledonian Road blocks remain at 9 storeys. They are however now below 30m in height including all protrusions. Reduction of a floor from all four of the Caledonian Road blocks would result in a 25 unit loss. The Lanes are also to remain at 7 storeys. A reduction to 6 storeys within the lanes, (the equivalent of 5 storeys + a setback floor), would result in the loss of 40 homes. The priority for reduction was considered to be the Canalside where there has been unit loss.

The Panel requested a typical floor plan from the outline for Caledonian Road blocks.

Response: Cores are located opposite the gable ends of the adjoining blocks

The Panel asked if there any potential for a canal side layout that maintains the Category A tree, given it was retained in an earlier iteration?

Response: The design team has modelled many options but this tree has to be lost to achieve the 18m spacing between the blocks. The tree loss is what unlocks the development.

The Panel requested clarification with regard to what's happening with the sun on ground for the deficient courtyard. Is it still deficient?

Response: Yes - still below the 50%. The only way to get to 50 would be to have a three-storey building which fails in terms of urban form.

The Panel noted that the 50% equinox requirement is a very low bar, and the applicant should understand it is the absolute minimum requirement. Given Pultney Park is only achieving 51% (which excludes the existing shadowing of the existing trees) and the courtyards not much more, with one considerably less, this is considered a real failing in the quality of the scheme. The Panel requested an update with regard to the provision of playspace as assessed against the GLA standards.

Response: The scheme achieves the requirement with regard to doorstep play but is not able to meet the requirements in regard to active play. This 'need' will need to be met within the adjacent Barnard Park. There is however a re-provided MUGA planned for Carnegie Park.

The Panel noted there had been an earlier commitment about providing for allotment gardens within old Barnsbury yet queried why there is no reference to this in the presentation. What has happened in this regard?

Response: It is still Newlon's aim to utilise the allotments on Old Barnsbury.

The Panel queried whether the allotment plots on Old Barnsbury were not already oversubscribed and even if not how could they cope with the huge increase in population?

Response: not currently oversubscribed.

The Panel noted that there appears to be a lot of buffer planting to parts of Pultney Park including the north-eastern corner and queried the need for it as well as how realistic it is given the dense existing levels of shade.

Response: the dense planting is designed to separate the resident communal garden to the north from the publicly accessible Pultney Park.

The Panel queried who would have responsibility for maintaining the landscape and whether a detailed landscape management plan had been submitted as part of the application, noting that the proposed trees and other landscape elements were going to be placed under great stress growing above the two concrete podiums and would therefore be maintenance 'heavy'.

Response: No maintenance management plan with the detailed application.

The Panel queried whether the pedestrian desire lines have been adequately responded to within the residential courtyards.

Response: The applicant team consider that these have been thoroughly considered and where there is no critical movement mass there is no path provided.

The Panel queried whether the generous double height entrancing could instead be reduced to capture more units and whether Block B2 could be lowered further to also provide more residential units?

Response: The land levels and floor levels are fixed to accommodate the podium and to reconcile with the levels of the Lanes. Improved entrancing to block B2 and other double height entrancing devices were requested by the Council. The applicant team consider these to be better solutions than the previous iteration.

The Panel queried what the unit loss has been through the recent changes.

Response: 36 flats

The Panel queried whether wind studies have been undertaken in relation to the tall and narrow Lanes to determine the microclimate and whether there are sunlight and daylight deficiencies in the Lanes.

Response: there have been studies which demonstrate no ill effects to the microclimate of the Lanes however there are some failings with regard to sunlight and daylight. The applicant stated that there has been a re-modelled layout to ensure better receipt of daylight and sunlight for example LKD have been pushed out to the facades and there have been some changes to the heights of windows to optimise the receipt of DLSL.

The Panel also inquired about levels of overheating.

Response: This has been resolved.

The Panel asked whether there has there been resolution on the convoluted routes from entrance to the stair and lift core including repositioning the stairs in blocks C6 and C7.

Response: Needing to balance land levels which determines the position of entrances. It needs to be noted that the cores go right up to the roof which also determines their locations. With

regard to turning staircases, the applicant has explored that but it creates more circulation space.

The Panel asked about choices of mansard roof colour, and the proposed materials

Response: The material is to be zinc. Looking at a dark red colour to complement lighter brick and darker mortar

The Panel requested the townscape argument for a taller tower to the canal side instead of all three towers being 9 storeys.

Response: Such a unique part of the site that warrants variety and also that responds to the sloping nature of the street. The varying heights also create a more interesting skyline.

While this part of the site is on the edge of the Regent Canal conservation area it is also outside of it, reducing the degree of impact on setting. There exists a sense of separation due to the levels, dense screening by trees, and the oblique line of sight. The varied heights add interest to the townscape and are considered a better solution than a uniform set of buildings.

The Panel queried whether there has been an ongoing carbon assessment.

Response: Trying hard to address this. The existing homes are poor – if you do nothing there's a higher carbon impact in the next 60 years compared to the new build scheme.

Commentary

The Panel expressed ongoing concern about the low levels of sun on ground being achieved and accept that while there have been some improvements the 2-hour 50% equinox requirement is a low bar. Concerned that some of the open spaces will be dark and dismal and that the number of trees being retained will in some instances add to this lack of light. The arboricultural officer was said to be amenable to removing more trees and this should be taken up. Canopy reduction should also be explored as a means to allow more sunlight in.

The loss of the Cat A tree to Carnegie Street is unfortunate but accept that if it really does unlock the site for redevelopment then its loss is acceptable.

The three canal courtyards look too similar. They should look different one from the other to create a stronger identity and add interest. There is some concern that the existing trees to the southern edge will give rise to shading on the courtyards. Any new trees within the courtyards may also create excessive shading and more thought is recommended as to the impact of trees in this location.

The Lanes are very narrow. Trees are indicated as being located with their canopies a mere metre from front façades. There are considered to be too many trees to the Lanes which would struggle to thrive given limited sunlight and narrow constraint and they would become a nuisance with regard to reduction of sunlight and daylight to the homes that are located in such close proximity. Only small upright trees should be considered.

While Play space for the 0-4 year olds is said to be satisfied, play space for older children is required off site. However the design team need to be clear as to the area measured as play space (as opposed to general amenity space), and justify the calculations. The funding for this off-site provision (to Barnard Park) needs to be taken into account as part of this development. The preference is for all required play space to be onsite, within the scheme.

Particularly like the re-alignment of Copenhagen Street to allow for more green space and the designs for the Charlotte Terrace gateway.

A landscape management plan really is important and will be needed and should be considered in outline/draft form at the planning design stage.

With regard to heritage matters, the Panel considers that there continues to be two serious harmful impacts. First, the canal. There is a real problem about having tall buildings however you orientate them. This is in part because this is a very unusual part of the canal, the section between the portal and Caledonian Road, mirrored at the eastern Portal to Duncan Terrace. These are sylvan enclaves where buildings are largely invisible. The introduction of strong urban elements breaches this characteristic. There appears to be a misunderstanding of this part of the canal – it did not have an industrial character and it was a relief from it. The minor reduction and re-orientation of the three blocks doesn't change anything. There should be low rise development only to this edge.

Secondly, the Caledonian Road frontage is still far too tall, almost as high as Orkney House opposite which should not be a precedent or a scale setter. The opposite forms on the west side of Caledonian Road provide that function and therefore the applicant needs to reduce the scale.

The double dormers are not convincing given they are not an 'Islington' style, and they are likely to adversely impact on Old Barnsbury as well as Caledonian Road.

The Lanes are far too tall and are going to feel claustrophobic and canyon like. They 'break the rules' of acceptable street width to building height ratios given they are just too tight.

The Panel considered that the verified view of the proposed increase in height and mass to Caledonian Road shows how punishing and dominant these blocks would be and that the setting forward of the blocks exacerbates the problems. There do not appear to have been any changes to this edge and it remains very oppressive and harmful.

The Panel queried whether the minimal gains in affordable housing are worth such harmful impacts.

Other issues contribute to the harm and are therefore of concern to the Panel including the reliance of offsite play provision, the lack of demonstrable replacement for the community/allotment gardening that currently takes place on New Barnsbury, and the fact that the open space provision will not be exemplary. The development will be very dense, and the failings of the quality and quantity of open space is therefore not really good enough.

However, the Panel noted that there are some positives of the scheme, particularly the variety of the typologies and sizes of units as well as the well-considered hierarchy of spaces and routes. The scheme is also achieving a good level of permeability and responds well to the topographical challenges, making use of the slope.

The key issues that arise to determine quality relate to scale and massing. Reiterating what was said at the last review, there remain several key areas where the case has not been convincingly made. Caledonian Road was an issue last time and it hasn't been reduced which is surprising. Caledonian Road is the public frontage of the scheme and is where it is announcing itself. Architecture and scale have yet to be resolved and more work to this edge is required.

On the canal side towers, The Panel appreciates that there has been a revisit resulting in substantial improvements from the last time. The changes to this part of the site work with the geometry of the masterplan and help with its permeability. The realigned courtyards are good

and the change in orientation is positive. The 'straight on' views are better, but the oblique views may still be difficult. The entrances and the spaces between have been improved. Some reservation was expressed about the use of the arches including how they relate to the other buildings and elements within the masterplan. The blocks appear unconvincing in the images presented as though they are top heavy and balancing awkwardly on thin stilts at the ground floor rather than robust loadbearing brick arches.

Similarly, the interweaving of the front boundary wall and the entrance elements appears unresolved and requires further modelling and integration to create a strong accompanying sculptural element.

The changes from double to single storey mansards to Copenhagen Street and Charlotte Terrace is welcomed. Changes to Block B2 entrance is better but still consider that more could be done with the communal circulation and that more inviting entrances are an important consideration for the Mansion blocks to create enhanced amenity.

Lanes: These still require careful investigation of scale in relation to their width as they threaten to be canyonised spaces.

The more organic design changes to the residents' communal courtyard gardens are welcomed as a big improvement but need to demonstrably respond to important desire lines.

The Panel reiterated that it is primarily the issues relating to scale and massing that remain of concern. The scale of the Caledonian Road frontage and the Lanes remain of concern, and it was reiterated that the Panel was disappointed no reductions have been made to these two key locations. The reduction in height of the canal blocks is useful and welcomed and there was some support for having different heights to this edge. While acknowledging the existing residents do not support a new connection to the canal edge through this part of the site, future proofing the southern boundary to respond to greater activity in the canal area is advised.

While it is noted that trees cause shading, the Panel also supports as many trees as possible although advises that both their 'role' and their location should inform the selected species.

There will be a lot of pressure on the two small parks which don't materially increase in size relative to the increase in population density. The Panel had previously mentioned the benefits of roof terraces to meet open space and play demand and is disappointed that this too has not been further explored. The reliance on Barnard Park to meet need generated by the scheme remains problematic.

Chair's Summary

The Panel acknowledge that there have certainly been some good moves made around some of the details including buffers, edges, and the canal side. But there remains a lot of concern about the impact on the canal side in relation to their height.

The canyonisation of the Lanes and the imposing heights on the Caledonian Road are also of significant concern to the panel.

The mansion block with mansard roof typology may have become a noose to the scheme design and has exacerbated the situation around bulk and massing. The constraints of a consistent and extended mansard roof doesn't allow a finer grain block morphology to be achieved and hence doesn't allow the buildings to step with the landscape and level changes. Additionally the mansion block typology doesn't incorporate the traditional mansion block characteristics in their relation to generous entrances, quality of the journeys home, and the

communal spaces. They aren't yet working as well as they could be. A rethink of the typology may unlock a lot of the challenges that the design team are facing.

The Panel has been clear – very considerable key concerns remain.

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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.

Yours sincerely

Linda Aitken

Principal Design Officer

