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**Our Ref:** Q2022/2906/PPA 3<sup>rd</sup> Review

March 30<sup>th</sup> 2023

Dear Mr Messenger

**ISLINGTON DESIGN REVIEW PANEL - MEETING NO 3 - MARCH 3<sup>RD</sup> 2023**  
**99 CITY ROAD, EC1**

This is the summary note from Islington's Design Review Panel following the meeting held in person at Islington Town Hall, on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2023. It was the 3<sup>rd</sup> Review of the proposed development scheme at 99 City Road.

The scheme is for the retention of the majority of the existing structure together with major alterations and extensions including a tower rising to the height of 151m AOD.

**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 the same panel as the previous reviews with Dominic Papa as Chair and Cordula Zeidler, George Saumarez-Smith, and Richard Portchmouth as Panel members. Apologies were received from Martin Pearson.

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

In summary, while there were many positive attributes presented, including the beneficial impacts on the more immediate local environment and neighbourhoods, the impact on heritage assets from more distant vantage points was not yet clear and was not sufficiently presented.

There remains some concern about massing, and some concern about the combined impact of height and massing.

The simplification of the architectural language to the Old Street and Cowper Street elevations at podium level was welcomed.

The Panel would like more detail to be presented and suggested the scheme be returned for a 4<sup>th</sup> review.

### **Panel Queries**

**Heritage and views of tower** – how have the changes impacted on the heritage and views? Were these refinements and judgements informed by these assessments in any way?

**Response:** Heritage consultant Montague Evans has prepared an initial heritage impact which is now being formalised. The DRP has previously seen the vast majority of the view points and the impacts remain and are largely confined to these views. An updated heritage and views report will be sent to panel for additional comment.

**Accuracy of Animation and Renders** - helpful as are the renders the Panel queried how accurate they are in terms of the angle of the sun and therefore sunlight. The Old Street colonnade view for example appears as though the sun is shining from the north. The Panel advised that these need to be more accurate and therefore realistic.

**Response:** The renders are accurate however the animation may have taken some 'artistic' liberties. The applicant team will assess this matter.

### **Is there an updated model?**

**Response:** The updated model was assembled which the Panel then considered for reference.

**Top of the building** – The Panel noted that this has been remodelled to achieve a better refinement as it terminates against the sky and that it now includes some terraces. Is the top of the building for people or for plant?

The Panel requested floorplans and elevations to help understand the relationships with terraces and plant.

**Response:** The terraces are free of MEP and are for people only. They are collective amenity spaces for the commercial occupants of the scheme. Publicly accessible and dedicated space – external and internal - is located to the base of the building at ground floor and within the associated public and semi-public realm.

At the very top of the tower, the floorspace space is utilised some 50% for plant and 50% for people.

### **Has the building got any wider?**

**Response:** No.

**Modelling of Old Street Station buildings and structures** - From the west looking east the Old Street station entrance pavilion (on the former roundabout) should be included in views as they will form part of the overall composition. It has been presented as though one can walk straight across to the main station entrance but in reality there will be 'clutter'.

Interested in how the roundabout/station environs relate to the Great Room elevation and how you bring the curtain of the tower down – so important to include that.

Bit confused on some of the imagery in terms of the hierarchy and relationship of opaque to glazed – and solid to glaze. Are some of the spandrels the same colour as some of the glass?  
Is the spandrel going the full depth of the structure.

**Response:** The spandrel does include a partial glass element. This to prevent the elevation turning into a grid. On testing, once the spandrel became too deep, the verticality of the elevation got lost. Did test the 1100 spandrel but it too overruled the verticality. The objective was to keep the vertical wider and the horizontal slimmer.

**View from St Marks Gardens in Luke Street** – in relation to the before and after views, while the additional refinement and articulation at the top of the tower is evident it is difficult to assess because of the inclusion of the trees in the imagery.

**Response:** Noted.

**Urban Greening Factor** – At the last DRP the panel encouraged you to surpass the .3 factor required for commercial developments. Have you achieved this?

**Response:** It is still at .3 which is the compliant level but we have managed to inch a little above this. So it is better, but only marginally. We have increased planting including more to the front of the Great Room; introduced SUDS to the Cowper Street edge which will deal with storm water run off in a more sustainable manner; and intend to source mature trees from the outset rather than saplings which will also help boost the urban greening factor.

**Wind sunlight and daylight** – have issues around those elements been developed?

**Response:** Yes – these have been previously presented to the Panel and generally demonstrate a compliant scheme. CFD wind testing has now been undertaken and modelled with no planting or canopies. It 'passes' with sitting and standing around the site and we are of the view that this will improve when trees are factored in. The majority of the wind comes from south west and this face of building has been crafted to help disburse the wind as it makes its way around the building. The articulation of the fins and the stepped features have all been crafted to help with wind mitigation.

Sunlight and daylight levels are satisfactory. Given the size of building there is a minimal impact in this respect. Social housing flats in the Bezier are improved. Homes to the north within Hackney's boundary are showing some impact but this is generally low. More sunlight to the public realm including the Old St 'Square-about' is achieved largely as a result of lowering and reducing the podium level. Overall, we think the results are positive.

**Degree of public access to the Great Room?** Assume the cut through between Old Street and Cowper Street will necessarily be closed at night-time but what about the hours of access to the Great Room.

**Response:** Intention is that it will be open with agreed period of time - likely 8am – 8pm, and that a number of dedicated days per year are bookable for local groups while a period of time will be for cultural programmes. To be set and agreed as part of the S106.

**Cowper Street Planting** - showing substantial planter beds to the Cowper Street edge which are welcomed but are they positioned in the public realm and if so who maintains them?

**Response:** 40% of the area lies within the applicant's ownership and it is anticipated that a S276 agreement will be entered into whereby the applicant will be required to maintain them in their totality.

**Louvres** – do they appear in the visualisations?

**Response:** There is no plant on the west elevation given it is the most primary frontage. Plant has been refined since the last DRP. It is largely positioned to the lower levels, to the rear of the building, and mostly screened from view. It will never occur in publicly visible spaces.

The very top of the building is open to the sky so not louvered. Louvers have been included in the verified views. However, a 'glass shuffle' (staggered panelling), sits to the fore of the louvers screening both them and plant behind. So there are no metal louvres now visible on the façade.

**Arcade on Old Street** – Why a double height space to this edge?

**Response:** The datum of this base is consistent all the way around in order to achieve the earlier DRP advice to achieve more consistency to the base. The heights promote the importance of the public realm and to create high quality spaces whilst capturing the Shoreditch warehouse language.

**Affordable workspace** - Is it cat A or B?

**Response:** Still working with LBI – still for discussion. LBI has a specification document. Will be tied to a 106.

**Makers' Space** – It is not really a 'Makers' Space which is one that is associated with, for example, metal working, jewellery making, shoe making etc. Unclear what it would be used for. What is the governance model of the organisation that will be taking control of the space?

Has there been a reduction in sqm since the last DRP, as a result of straightening out of access route?

**Response:** We are in dialogue with LBI and have confirmed the applicant is happy to operate the space but will work closely with the council to meet need.

The Makers' Space has got slightly smaller in order to achieve a more legible and direct pedestrian link.

**Materials** – are you not quite sure of the materials palette?

**Response:** There are a range of materials being considered but terracotta is the definite choice – it is to be a terracotta building. We are refining colour and texture etc. and are also considering the degree of terracotta use throughout the building particularly to the top. This remains undecided at this point.

We propose very minimal metal fixing to building to aid in the visual design quality.

**Great Room** – what happens when it's cold and it's closed?

**Response:** There are doors within the folds that open so it will be accessible in all weather conditions.

**Bike Stair** – what are the dimensions of stairs in relationship to the overall width of the passageway?

**Response:** 6m corridor – bike stair 3m. The passageway is also 3m for the most part but in one section, due to the retained existing columns, the passageway narrows to 2.5m.

A staircase to the first floor office space rises above the bike ramp/staircase. We are designing this to read as thin/visually sparse as possible to maintain good levels of visibility through the passageway.

The staircase is also considered an additional animator of the through route. This is considered beneficial in terms of pedestrian movement and safety.

**Where does the servicing come in?**

**Response:** Goods lifts take goods down to the basement where they are distributed and brought up. This avoids any need for any goods to be transferred at the ground level which again aids in movement and placemaking.

### **Panel Commentary**

**Heritage and Townscape** – The Panel were disappointed that the impacts on heritage and views were not presented again given the Panel stressed the importance of these impacts at the previous DRP. Concerned that these impacts are not being taken seriously enough and that there had been no townscape justification for the tower's proportions.

The changes to the height and massing should be shown to have been led by an analysis of the heritage impacts and how the building is seen in long distance views.

It would appear that changes have been made to the materials and the building's articulation but not significantly in terms of its height and massing. Whilst there is much to commend in the proposals, there are still fundamental issues that have not been addressed.

When viewed from the south, southwest and east, the Panel generally considered that it's not the height but it's the bulk of the tower, its presence because of its girth, that is of concern.

The design approach and building form is very reliant in how you disguise bulk in terms of depths of elevations, how the fins work to break down mass and the resulting shading patterns – and how these all work together with light and colour. The presentational imagery needs to be very true to that.

The Panel advised that it is very important for the credibility of the scheme that the renders and verified views are accurate including the direction of sunlight. It was noted (slide 83) in the presentation that the sun appears due north which cannot be accurate.

It is likely that the harmful view impacts, with regard to heritage settings, will be largely experienced to the longer views and therefore at some distance from the site, such as Lowndes's House and the Artillery Grounds while the 'benefits' of the scheme will be local. It is therefore important to demonstrate that these local benefits really do outweigh harm as experienced from further away.

Also, assessing heritage impacts, the Panel had sought more detail with regard to the impact of the detailed designs of the landscape terraces. Are there really trees at upper terrace levels etc?

### **Architecture**

**Tower** - In broad terms the Panel considers the design development to the top of the tower is positive, including the more filigree appearance created by the expression and detailing of the mullions & fins, resulting in a more delicate relationship with the sky. The additional detail and scale of fenestration is positive.

The revised work undertaken to the body of tower is also helpful. There is now a better relationship between the folds and planes. With more solid and opaque elements, there is a beneficial lessening of the reading of the glazing which is helpful and creates a more coherent architecture. This greater consistency has proved beneficial.

However, the Panel expressed some confusion as to how this building will actually appear and queries the consistency in the imagery and drawings. Are the drawings representational and if so it is hard to see how the building sits in the context in reality, including how the architecture responds to the light and how successful the details of the façade will be. A more accurate representation of the tower visually is sought.

**Podium** - The Panel queried whether the scheme can really deliver retention of so much of the existing structure and if so then that is an important 'win'. The Panel suggested that this needs confirmation at the time of the application.

The Panel are generally supportive of the podium response. However, there is a very delicate relationship where the façade is dropped to first floor level. How does that work next to the Great Room frame for example. It is the successful articulation of these sorts of details that will be very important to the success of the design.

More detailed elements often follow on from planning consents but the Panel advises that much of the detailing (to both the tower and the podium) should be tied in to any consent. Mocks ups on the site where they can be reviewed by the Design Panel would be welcomed to help ensure that through the detailing of the materiality the scheme will achieve its high quality design intent.

The greater architectural and material consistency to the podium as advised at earlier DRPs has proved beneficial and the podium has improved with each iteration. This is very welcome, and the Panel consider the podium interface will offer a tangible benefit to this part of Old Street.

The Panel consider that the referencing to the language of the Shoreditch warehouse – if the designs can achieve the richness as suggested – will work well.

While there was some reservation that the south and north facades were still interrupted by the tower coming towards ground and the entrance to the great room, overall it is considered that the podium, including the Old Street arcade, works well and will result in a high quality of the spaces that surround it.

### **Public Realm**

Overall, the work that has been done in terms of strengthening the argument for public benefit is convincing.

As a result, the Panel considers that good headway has been made in terms of public realm and movement and acknowledges that the designs have responded well to previous comments. The work on the cut through makes it a much more convincing and useable route which is now a real benefit of the proposal.

The video is helpful to understand what the perception as to how and what this new building, its uses and facilities will bring to the local area. The level of enhancement is convincing.

The Panel all support the approach to the public realm but advised that it be more embedded into the evolving context to include the new pavilion to Old Street station etc and show convincingly how it relates to the new and emerging public realm to the west of the site.

### **Public Benefits**

The Panel considers that the Great Room is a good proposition and, if can be made to work as a community asset, then that too weighs in favour of the scheme. But if it becomes more commercial, and related closer to the office use of the interior of the building, it will have less benefit. The applicant needs to be really clear that the public have good, prolonged access to what could be a fantastic space.

Affordable workspace, Makers Space, and Great Room all need more information, such as likely funding streams, as to how these will be managed and including indicative institutional structures that would help prevent them becoming 'corporatized'.

The Panel would encourage the applicant to steer the 'Makers Space' more toward the productive light industrial as opposed to the more passive exhibition space which is where it would appear to be heading.

The Panel queried whether the affordable workspace would be fitted out to Cat A or B, would it include small spaces to rent out – or an entire floor? While the Panel noted the applicant is committing to the 10% requirement it would be good to understand how it is to be divided up to ensure it is a good 'fit' for affordable workspace.

The Panel noted that the local benefits of the scheme are immediate, apparent and welcomed. Because the Panel do not have the full information on the public benefits of the scheme, then it cannot weigh these against the wider concerns on impact of the scheme on views and townscape.

### **Chair's Summary**

The Panel acknowledge the positive moves coming forward including the evolving detail in terms of public realm and movement, the strengthening of public benefits, and modifications to the tower and its top and noted that there was a lot to commend.

The Panel has concern however that there is still information missing. Including in particular the impact around bulk and massing and the impacts this may have on the setting of heritage assets.

The accuracy of the drawings and rendering are really important and the Panel would appreciate sight of more plans to help understand areas and floorplates.

The Panel notes that because of proposed bulk and height, detailing of the tower is paramount and the materials palette and their application will also be important. These can only be assessed through more detail which the Panel would like before firming up our commentary on the detailed designs. We therefore would welcome the scheme back for a further review.

The Chair also notes that subsequent additional material was briefly looked at but not reviewed in detail and therefore it (and/or further updated material) should also be part of a further review.

### **Confidentiality**

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.

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

Linda Aitken

**Principal Design Officer  
Islington Council**

***The Panel requested sight of further information prior to commenting on and issuing the written response.***

***The Applicant subsequently provided the following:***

- ***Townscape Views document***
- ***Plans and elevations including wall types***
- ***The revised presentation***
- ***Time of day of visuals***
- ***Details of the terraces***

**The Panel considers that this additional information is informative and substantiates the remaining concerns expressed in the meeting and report surrounding the bulk and massing of the tower.**