

London Legacy Development Corporation Quality Review Panel

Report of Formal Review Meeting: Neptune Wharf

Thursday 15 November 2012, 14.30 – 16.00

Level 10, 1 Stratford Place, Montfichet Road, London E20 1EJ

Panel

Peter Studdert (chair)

Adam Khan

Liam Bond

Julia Barfield

Alex Ely

Catherine Burd

Planning authority and stakeholder attendees

Anthony Hollingsworth

Legacy Corporation PPDT

Allison DeMarco

Legacy Corporation PPDT

Tim Ross

London Borough of Tower Hamlets

London Legacy Development Corporation

Eleanor Fawcett

Fortismere Associates

Deborah Denner

1. Project name and site address

Project name and site address: Neptune Wharf, Wyke Road, London E15

Planning Application Reference: 12/00210/OUT

2. Presenting team

Owen O'Carroll	Stock Woolstencroft
David Morton	Stock Woolstencroft
Emily Read	Stock Woolstencroft
Joanna Ede	The Landscape Partnership
Austin Mackie	Austin Mackie Associates

3. Planning authority's views

The LLDC Planning Policy and Decisions team welcomes the efforts made by the design team to understand the particular context of Fish Island, where the scheme is located. They also welcome the proposed employment space, and safeguarding of part of the site for school use. However, they think it may be challenging for a newbuild development to live up to the vision described by the design team. In assessing the application, they will refer to the recently adopted Hackney Wick and Fish Island Area Action Plan. This gives clear guidance about land use and suggests heights of 4 to 6 storeys.

4. Local authority's views

Tower Hamlets have identified Neptune Wharf as an opportunity site in their recently adopted Hackney Wick and Fish Island Area Action Plan. They see the provision of a school as being essential, given the amount of residential development envisaged for the site and surrounding area. However they are not convinced that the land set aside for a school in the application is in the right location, because it is adjacent to the A12. They would also like to know more about how air quality and noise issues are mitigated for new homes close to this busy road. They welcome the creation of new routes through the site, and improved access to the canal. However, they are not convinced that the development will provide a good environment for children living in the family housing proposed.

5. Quality Review Panel's views

Summary

The panel does not support this scheme for planning approval in its current form. The design team has described an attractive vision for development responding to the unique context of Fish Island, in terms of both character and use. However, the panel does not think that the development will succeed in making this vision a reality, because of its excessive scale, poor quality public spaces, and architecture lacking in robustness. The location of the school next to the A12 is unlikely to create an acceptable environment for children or staff. Although no financial information has been submitted, the panel also thinks that the extent of planning obligations may need to be reconsidered, to achieve a viable scheme without overdevelopment of the site. The panel recommends a fundamental rethink of the scheme, to set a higher standard for the quality of future development in this part of Tower Hamlets.

Scale and massing

- The panel supports the guidance provided by the Area Action Plan that development of 4 to 6 storeys would generally be appropriate for this site.
- The model of the scheme presented at the review meeting is misleading, because it shows imagined development, of a scale much greater than exists around the site.
- The canal frontage may be one area where it may be possible to make a case for development of greater height at some points if the design quality of the new buildings is of exceptional quality, but the lower height range should certainly be respected on the Wyke Road frontage.

Public spaces

- The panel welcomes the creation of several new public routes through the site, including access to the waterfront on the Hertford Union Canal.
- The ratio of height and width for Wansbeck, Ripboth and Neptune Yards will create dark and unpleasant courtyard spaces.
- It is unlikely that these spaces will foster the type of cultural activities envisaged by the design team in their vision for Neptune Wharf.
- In their current form these three yards seem primarily designed as light wells, with Wansbeck and Ripboth yards also accommodating bin stores and servicing activities.
- Lofthouse Square is likely to be cold and shady, because of the 8 and 10 storey buildings to its south and west.

- The panel thinks that to foster the performance or market activities described, Lofthouse Square would need a more sunny and protected location.
- It may not be necessary or desirable to give continuous public access to the waterfront as the tow path is on the northern side of the canal. A scheme that limits access to a few places could also create attractive artists' studios fronting directly onto the canal.

Architecture

- The architecture proposed for Neptune Wharf does not reflect the robustness of surrounding existing buildings.
- A more calm and consistent architectural expression, better rooted in the character of the surrounding area could be more successful
- The panel does not think that the aspiration to support cultural diversity at Neptune Wharf implies a need for architectural diversity.
- In terms of the quality of residential accommodation, the 3.1m floor to ceiling heights proposed is welcome. However, the scope to achieve a majority of dual aspect homes should be explored.
- Floor to ceiling glass shown for many of the employment spaces does not seem suitable for use as studios or workshops. These uses are likely to require greater privacy and enclosure.
- Shops and restaurants are also likely to require greater enclosure. Where these uses move into accommodation with too much glass, they often blank out windows creating an unattractive street environment.

Primary School

- The location of the primary school site next to the A12 means it will suffer from noise and pollution.
- Relocating the school may have an impact on the economics of the development because it currently occupies the least valuable area of the site. Nevertheless we think this should be considered, particularly as the primary school will provide an important community focus for the new residential community of Fish Island.
- An option for development of the school with residential development above is included in the planning application. However, this leaves the school with little outdoor play space.
- The panel thinks that if a school is to be provided on the site, its integration into the design should be encouraged, and that other ways of achieving this could be explored.

Planning obligations

- The recently adopted Area Action Plan for Hackney Wick and Fish Island is a well considered planning document, providing a good basis for high quality development at Neptune Wharf.
- In response to the Area Action Plan, the scheme currently proposes both a site for a primary school, as well as a substantial amount of subsidised employment space.
- In the process of rethinking the excessive density of development proposed, it may also be necessary to reconsider the extent of planning obligations, subject to an 'open book' approach to testing the viability of the development.

Next steps

- Overall, the panel has significant concerns about the quality of development proposed at Neptune Wharf, and recommends that planning approval should not be granted.
- An opportunity to comment on amended proposals before the submission of a revised application would be welcomed.