

London Legacy Development Corporation Quality Review Panel

Report of Planning Application Review Meeting: Mandeville Place

Thursday 14 August 2014, 13.15 – 14.15

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

Panel

Adam Khan (chair)
Lindsey Whitelaw
David Bonnett

Attendees

John Gardener	LLDC Planning Policy and Decisions
Allison De Marco	LLDC Planning Policy and Decisions
Kathryn Firth	London Legacy Development Corporation
Vince Bartlett	London Legacy Development Corporation
Vicki Austin	London Legacy Development Corporation
Yuan Chen	Legacy Youth Panel
Deborah Denner	Fortismere Associates
Tessa Kordeczka	Fortismere Associates

Report also copied to

Anthony Hollingsworth	LLDC Planning Policy and Decisions
Paul Buckenham	London Borough of Tower Hamlets

Note on process

The Quality Review Panel comments below follow on from a pre-application review of Mandeville Place. Panel members who attended the previous meeting were: Peter Studdert (chair); John Lyall; Lindsey Whitelaw; David Bonnett; and Mark Brearley.

1. Project name and site address

Mandeville Place, Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park

Planning application reference: 14/00282/AOD

2. Presenting team

Maria Smith	Studio Weave
Amber Alferoff	Urban Orchard Project

3. Planning authority's views

The planning authority is supportive of the proposed scheme in principle. Mandeville Place should be considered in the context of other development approved as part of the Legacy Communities Scheme, in particular the future Sweetwater and Belvedere developments. Mandeville Place is conceived as one of an eventual series of connected open spaces, rather than a separate, self-contained component of the public realm. There is therefore an aim to achieve a degree of consistency.

4. Legacy Youth Panel's views

The Legacy Youth Panel welcomes the scheme – in particular the development of the orchard – which it believes will be an attractive and popular local resource. It is optimistic that the space created will open up opportunities for a variety of community projects.

5. Quality Review Panel's views

Summary

While the Quality Review Panel welcomes some of the amendments made to the scheme since its previous review, it thinks that the fundamental questions that it raised about the design concept remain unresolved. In particular, the panel feels that the proposed scheme continues to be over-ambitious and complicated. The panel remains unconvinced that it will successfully convey the spirit and memory of the 2012 Paralympic Games – which is the principal purpose of Mandeville Place. The panel does not therefore support the planning application for approval. It offers more detailed comments below, and comments made at the previous review that remain relevant are repeated for clarity.

Design concept

- The panel thinks that the design strategy is over-complex. While the ideas behind the design are interesting, the panel does not think that their connection to the 2012 Paralympic Games will be evident to visitors.

- The panel does not feel that the ideas of liberation and inspiration – which define the Paralympics story – shine through in the design. Rather, it finds the design rather sombre, with something of the feel of a ‘garden of remembrance’.
- It suggests that a much more obvious reference to the Games is needed; otherwise, it is unclear what will draw people – and in particular Paralympians – to Mandeville Place.

Detailed design and materials

- The panel repeats its view that the many elements concentrated in the central ‘lens’ result in a lack of coherence and clarity.
- In its previous comments, the panel had suggested reducing the number of materials proposed and had questioned in particular the use of concrete in the pavilion in the central ‘lens’, including a pigmented concrete canopy.
- The panel questions the need for the concrete canopy, which will be obscured as the trees grow, while its low height may encourage people to climb onto it, with potential safety risks.
- The panel is also unconvinced by the proposed use of acrylic bricks. This is a material likely to chip and blemish over time, and will be vulnerable to graffiti.
- The acrylic brick columns will also have limited transparency, given the need for a steel structure at the centre of each column, and frequent mortar joints.
- It is proposed that the names of Paralympic athletes be inscribed on the clay bricks; this seems an invitation to visitors to engrave both the clay and acrylic bricks.
- The panel also questions the rationale of the proposed ‘grid’ over the site; it accepts its relevance to the layout of the orchard but it is unclear why it extends beyond into areas characterised more by a flow of people.
- The panel is unsure that the ‘grid’, as expressed by reflective studs, will be read as a grid by those using the space. In addition, testing will be needed to establish whether the studs will be illuminated by ambient light at night.
- The panel welcomes the introduction of ‘gold top’ surfacing to the ground plane as a significant improvement.
- It does not think, however, that the proposed defining square of ‘gold top’ surfacing is successful. Thought needs to be given to how this meets adjacent edges.

- The panel recommends that the ground plane be kept as simple as possible.
- As a detailed comment, the camomile lawn proposed is unlikely to be successful, as it will be very vulnerable to wear.
- In general, the panel questions whether the scheme should include lawn. Where benches are located on lawns, grass around them will become scuffed and worn away, and mulch will be required under trees. This will break the lawn up into patches of green that will not achieve the unifying effect suggested by the current drawings.

Potential use for events

- The panel accepts that the 'lenses' and the wider open space around them may be used as a venue for events but suggests that the proposed pavilion in the central lens, with its myriad elements, does not lend itself easily to being used as a venue.
- A much simpler composition and structure would be more successful in creating a setting for events or other activities, such as art installations, that would capture and recreate over time the exuberance and energy of the Paralympic Games.

Next steps

- The panel does not support approval of the planning application for Mandeville Place as presented at the review.
- One possible way forward would be to implement the orchard, and improvements to the ground surface, in the short term. This could allow time for a fundamental rethink of the architectural elements – that could support events or installations as described above.