



## **London Legacy Development Corporation Quality Review Panel**

### **Report of Planning Application Review Meeting: Madison Square Garden Sphere**

Thursday 25 July 2019

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

#### **Panel**

Peter Studdert (chair)

David Bonnett

Russell Curtis

Mike Martin

#### **Attendees**

Catherine Smyth	LLDC Planning Policy and Decisions Team
Daniel Davies	LLDC Planning Policy and Decisions Team
William de Cani	LLDC Planning Policy and Decisions Team
Richard McFerran	LLDC Planning Policy and Decisions Team
Steve Tomlinson	London Legacy Development Corporation
Ruth Holmes	London Legacy Development Corporation
Hannah Lambert	London Legacy Development Corporation
Matthew Halsall	London Legacy Development Corporation
Rajvinder Kaur	London Borough of Newham
Tessa Kordeczka	Frame Projects

#### **Apologies / report copied to**

Anthony Hollingsworth	LLDC Planning Policy and Decisions Team
Ben Hull	London Borough of Newham

#### **Note on process**

The Quality Review Panel comments below follow on from two pre-application reviews of the Madison Square Garden Sphere. Panel members who attended the previous meetings were: Peter Studdert (chair); David Bonnett; Jane Briginshaw; Russell Curtis; David Gilpin; Mike Martin; and Sue Rowlands.

## **1. Project name and site address**

Madison Square Garden Sphere, land off Angel Lane, Stratford

Planning application reference: 19/00097/FUL; 19/00098/ADV

## **2. Presenting team**

Garry Reeves	Populous
Chris Goddard	DP9
Paul Hillier	ME Engineers
Michael Rivers	Momentum Transport
Lois Weller	Tavernor Consultancy
Andy Young	MP3D
Juliette Callaghan	Trium
Nicola Hensey	Point 2

## **3. Planning authority's views**

The planning application for the Madison Square Garden Sphere was submitted in March 2019. A significant number of responses were received during the public consultation period. The planning authority continues to pursue a number of issues with the applicant including: external appearance and visual impact, including when illuminated; extent of advertising; design of the proposed bridge connections; and public realm strategy, including permeability and accessibility.

## **4. Quality Review Panel's views**

### *Summary*

The Quality Review Panel repeats its support in principle for the Madison Square Garden Sphere. This is a hugely complex project and many details remain to be fully addressed. One of the Sphere's most significant benefits will be improved connectivity and permeability. Providing safe, accessible routes through the site for the maximum amount of time should be a priority – and secured through the planning permission. The design of the Sphere is compelling – but meticulous detailed design and execution will be critical to ensuring its quality. Illumination of the Sphere – and luminance levels – must be effectively controlled. A major concern is the extent to which the Sphere will be exploited for commercial advertising: stringent controls over the duration and content of advertising must be put in place. Some uncertainty remains about how inviting and accessible routes through the site will be and how well public spaces will be used. The panel recommends further thought to accessibility, including adequate provision of Blue Badge parking. The panel considers that the Sphere has the potential to meet the requirements of Local Plan Policy BN.10 on tall buildings, including for 'outstanding architecture'; this will, however, depend on effective responses to its comments.



These comments are expanded below and those made at previous reviews that remain relevant are repeated for clarity.

#### *Strategic approach*

- The panel repeats its support in principle for the Sphere – which it considers appropriate for this currently unused, but pivotal, site.
- Public benefit has to be an overarching consideration in assessing the quality of the Sphere. One of its most significant potential benefits is unlocking an inaccessible site and establishing new connections, notably between Leyton and Stratford.
- Creating accessible, safe routes through the site, for as many hours of the day as possible, should be a priority. The planning authority needs to be confident that this will be achieved – and the panel recommends that this be secured through a mechanism included in the planning permission.

#### *Plan and layout*

- In the context of connectivity and permeability, concern remains about the narrowness of ‘pinch points’ on level 02, which are shown as 4.7 metres wide. The panel recommends continuing attention to both how this might inhibit movement through the site and also how it might be managed, especially when major events are taking place.

#### *Architectural expression*

- The panel repeats its support for the form and overall concept of the Sphere – as a spectacle, the geodesic dome is compelling. The panel also considers the proposed scale of the Sphere to be appropriate for its location, given the large space within which it will sit surrounded by railway cuttings and the established scale of the surrounding buildings.
- Meticulous detailed design and execution will be paramount to ensuring quality – including over the long term. There needs to be confidence that this complex piece of geometry can be successfully realised and maintained. It is essential for planning officers to again see samples of proposed materials, including for the panels that will form the Sphere.
- The panel stresses the technical complexity of the design, the details of which will require rigorous scrutiny by those with appropriate expertise.



### *Illumination of the Sphere / advertising*

- The illumination of the Sphere – including luminance levels – must be effectively controlled in order to avoid both a negative impact on the surrounding environment and also nuisance to neighbouring residents.
- There is a considerable amount of residential accommodation close to the Sphere and exceptional care will be needed to ensure that residents are not disturbed by light levels. The panel suggests that a strong argument could be made for precluding any illumination of the Sphere after 23:00 hours.
- A principal concern is the extent to which the Sphere will be exploited for commercial advertising and the impact of this on the surrounding environment. The panel would regret an outcome where the Sphere itself becomes largely anonymous, animated only by advertising. Rather than being perceived as an object of beautiful simplicity, there is a risk that the Sphere could become a canvas for brash advertising.
- It is critical for the quality of the Sphere – and for the wider public benefit that it should bring – that there is stringent oversight of both the duration and content of commercial advertising. It is incumbent on the applicant to ensure that these are acceptable and remain so over the long term.
- The panel strongly advises the planning authority to exercise caution in relation to permitted commercial advertising. It recommends serious consideration of the amount of time that the Sphere will be used for commercial advertising, for this to be restricted initially and then subsequently reviewed.
- The Sphere is an architecturally unique building and, to maintain its particular quality and attraction, there must be an equally innovative control mechanism.

### *Public realm and landscape design strategy*

- As stressed above, delivering public benefit should be at the heart of the Sphere – and this will depend enormously on the extent to which the Sphere is open and accessible to all.
- Large numbers of people are expected to be attracted to the Sphere during peak times. Further clarification of how visitors to events and the wider public taking advantage of the connections created by the Sphere might interact would be helpful.

- Some uncertainty remains about how inviting and accessible routes through the site might be, and also how well the public spaces created at each level – the Plaza at level 01; the Square and the North Hub at level 02; and the South and North Terraces at level 03 – might be used. How far will spaces be used as routes through the site and how far as places to linger and enjoy? The objective should be to create destinations for those not necessarily attending events.
- The panel suggests that the design of the North Hub could be over complex – and that a simpler, more pared back approach might increase its value as a community asset.

#### *Environmental sustainability*

- No information has been provided to the panel on how much energy will be used for the external illumination of the Sphere. An indication of anticipated energy use – both when fully illuminated and when simply ‘glowing’ – would be helpful.

#### *Accessibility and inclusive design*

- The panel considers the proposed Blue Badge parking provision to be inadequate and recommends that this be looked at seriously again. It supports the intention to introduce a shuttle service from car parks to the Sphere but would welcome clarification of how the shuttle service aligns with lifts at street level.
- The panel points out that there is no lift access to the North Hub on level 02. It also raises a question about access if breakdowns occur where there is a single lift.
- Continuing cooperation with access consultants is recommended.

#### *Next steps*

- The Quality Review Panel repeats its support in principle for the Madison Square Garden Sphere, but encourages continuing refinement to the design in response to its comments, in consultation with planning officers.
- The panel again stresses the importance of stringent controls to ensure that the design quality and public benefit anticipated for the Sphere are effectively delivered.
- Subject to further refinement to the design, and effective control mechanisms, the panel considers that the Madison Square Garden Sphere has the potential to meet the provisions of Local Plan Policy BN.10.