



FRAME PROJECTS

London Legacy Development Corporation Quality Review Panel

Report of Formal Review Meeting: The Yard Theatre

Thursday 2 February 2023

Via Zoom

Panel

Hari Phillips (chair)

Russell Curtis

Jayne Earnscliffe

Jonathan Hagos

Nathan Millar

Attendees

Rita Fumi Aeoye

London Legacy Development Corporation

Pippa Henshall

London Legacy Development Corporation

Paul Taylor

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Hilary Wrenn

LLDC Planning Policy and Decisions Team

Jasmine Low

Greater London Authority

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Apologies / report copied to

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Catherine Smyth

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Frances Madders

London Legacy Development Corporation

Jerry Bell

London Borough of Tower Hamlets

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London Borough of Tower Hamlets

1. Project name and site address

The Yard Theatre, Units 1, 2a & 2b, Queen's Yard, London E9 5EN

2. Presenting team

Takero Shimazaki	Takero Shimazaki Architects
Jennifer Frewen	Takero Shimazaki Architects
Oliver Reynolds	Takero Shimazaki Architects
Karabo Turner	Takero Shimazaki Architects
Ashleigh Wheeler	The Yard Theatre

3. Planning authority briefing

The current Yard Theatre is a music and theatre venue occupying a converted warehouse space. The proposal is to extend into two adjacent commercial units to provide an improved theatre space and a young artist and community space.

Full planning permission was granted in 2021 for housing and commercial redevelopment and, a reserved matters scheme was approved in March 2022 for a replacement theatre in another part of the Queens Yard site. However, the landowner Hatton Gardens Properties, has subsequently advised it does not intend to implement the full redevelopment scheme and, as an alternative, has offered space in the adjacent units to the existing Yard Theatre.

The proposal is largely within the existing interiors of Units 2A and 2B Queen's Yard. Interventions to the existing fabric will mainly take a light-touch approach, it is proposed to provide activation to White Post Lane and Rothbury Road with a new public entrance on the building's west façade. The proposed new auditorium volume forms the bulk of new building fabric. The two-storey extension has been designed to fit between existing masonry walls forming Unit 1 Queen's Yard. A pitched roof form matches the pitch of the existing building's gable end, while the proposed chimney, which provides natural ventilation to the auditorium, provides an anchor to Queen's Yard and a beacon to the wider context of roads and railway adjacent.

Planning officers support the principle of the proposal which fits with the planning designation for the site. They asked for the panel's comments on overall design, massing, heights, materiality, the theatre entrance layout, access, signage, lighting wayfinding, the way the development relates to public space, how well it incorporates urban greening, and on the sustainability of the construction approach.

4. Quality Review Panel's views

Summary

The panel supports the overall approach to the scheme, and finds much to admire about the proposals. It is pleased by the careful way in which the designs have evolved to respond to the new site. The proposed materials are characterful, and the use of recycled brick has the potential to be very successful. The panel encourages the team to make the theatre as bold and joyful as possible, to distinguish it as a public arts building. It is important that that the theatre can be identified from the main access routes to Hackney Wick Station and the Olympic Park, and the panel suggests that more thinking is needed on how to achieve this, including through both pavement level and roof signage. Coloured polycarbonate could be used more selectively to make entrances more distinctive. The panel suggests the chimney would be more effective as marker if it were positioned on White Post Lane. The White Post Lane elevation could be less defensive, with a clearer entrance in the western façade and a view into the bar from the south. Signage could create a stronger roofline presence.

The panel suggests that internal circulation should be simplified, including potentially relocating the box office to avoid congestion around the western entrance and looking for a more direct route from bar to auditorium. The orientation of the auditorium should be revisited to ensure it enables the optimum internal layout. The panel is also concerned that backstage toilet and shower provision is inadequate. The panel supports the use of natural ventilation, but asks for further testing to demonstrate that the design will work, and to ensure the materials used will provide the necessary insulation. Roofs should be used for power generation, if possible. Further greening would also be beneficial for Queen's Yard.

These comments are expanded below.

Architecture

- The panel supports the overall architectural approach to the scheme, which it considers to be both sensitive and appropriate to the character of the site. It is pleased to see the way the designs have evolved to address the new location, and the way the theatre is designed to emphasise the presence of Queen's Yard.
- However, the panel encourages the design team to consider what it can do to increase the emphasis on joy in the architecture, which it feels was more apparent in the previous version of the scheme. Any further adjustments that help the building to appear bold, and distinct from neighbouring residential buildings, would be welcome.

- The panel enjoys the proposed form of auditorium, and the material palette used across the scheme. However, while it supports the use of coloured polycarbonate, it suggests that it could be used more sparingly to help signify entrances, and make access points as visible as possible.
- The panel supports the proposal to reuse materials. It also feels that the K-BRIQs proposed for the building could be aesthetically interesting, as well as offering a more sustainable option.

White Post Lane frontage

- The panel considers the chimney to be an integral part of the scheme, and likes its proposed height and design. However, it suggests that it could be better positioned on the site's southern White Post Lane frontage where it could be more effective as a marker for the theatre. Its current position on the Queen's Yard side of the theatre is likely to mean it will not be visible from streets close to the building.
- The panel also notes that the chimney's position does not correlate with the theatre entrance. The panel points to the design of basilicas as examples of the way towers can be positioned to indicate entrances.
- The panel feels that the southern and western elevations create too defensive a presence in the streetscape. It is not convinced that the entrance on the western White Post Lane frontage will be prominent enough. This doorway should be given more prominence in the façade.
- The panel also asks for further thought about the relationship between the bar space and the southern White Post Lane frontage. Although there is a window connecting to the street, this will need to be kept clear rather than obscured with bar fittings, if it is to make the theatre visible from this side.

Movement and orientation

- The panel feels that, although most of the footfall to the theatre is likely to come either from Hackney Wick Station to the north, or the Olympic Park to the east, the building does not seem to express itself or to be signposted in either of these directions. It suggests that more views and plans should be produced to show how the theatre will be seen and accessed from these directions.
- The panel suggests that the roofline feels incomplete on the south and west sides, and that more substantial signage could help to resolve it. Billboards could be an option, using angled forms to address the street in a more playful way.

- The roof signage currently shown is facing south-west, but the panel feels that it should be facing towards the principal route from Hackney Wick Station. It appreciates that the adjoining building to the north is outside the site boundary, but suggests that it would be worth discussing with the owner whether a sign could be positioned on its roof to achieve this.
- The panel also asks for thinking on how signage can be provided at street level to direct people to the entrances, including consideration of visually impaired users.

Internal layout

- The panel questions aspects of the internal circulation, which it feels is potentially convoluted. The route from the bar to the theatre, crossing the backstage area to reach the stairs and then leaving the building, seems counter-intuitive. Space is constricted, but the panel asks whether a simpler solution is possible. This could include considering again whether the orientation of the auditorium could be reversed to improve circulation.
- The route via the western entrance could lead to people queuing on the ramp to reach the box office. The box office may need to be positioned differently, for example facing the bar, to create a more spacious entrance.
- The panel feels that design of the ramp from the western entrance should be looked at carefully to be sure that it provides enough space for wheelchair users, despite the doors that will open onto it.
- The panel notes that there is only a single shower and toilet provided in the back of house area. It suggests that this provision is insufficient, and that the single unit is also undersized in relation to Building Regulation Part M requirements. Further thought should be given to toilet provision.
- The panel also raises the possibility of an alternative entrance to the theatre from the southern White Post Lane frontage. This could provide a more direct route into the building, although the level change from White Post Lane may mean it is not feasible.

Sustainability

- The panel strongly supports the proposed approach to the building's sustainability, including the use of natural ventilation and low carbon materials.
- It encourages the design team to ensure the building's energy performance is as passively designed as possible. The use of timber and retention of as much of the existing structure as possible are positive moves, but a plan should also be provided for the thermal performance of these elements. The naturally ventilated internal area will need to be as thermally controlled as possible, and insulation will be key to making it work. Each element of the building will need to contribute as much as possible to thermal performance.
- Although the panel supports the use of natural ventilation, more information should be provided to show that the proposals will work. Confirmation is needed that the ventilation rates needed for the occupants of the auditorium will be met by the size of intake proposed. Studies should also confirm that the ventilation under the auditorium seats will be effective across the full auditorium space, and that the stage area will not overheat. The size of the intake area should be tested to ensure it is large enough to be effective.
- The panel suggests that the roof of the studio and bar area on White Post Lane, which are currently shown as empty, could be used for energy generation.
- The panel asks whether more landscaping can be included in the proposals. There is current a lack of biodiversity in the vicinity, and anything that can be done to soften and green Queen's Yard would be welcome.

Next steps

- The panel would welcome the opportunity to comment on the scheme again at a Chair's Review once the design team has been able to respond to its comments.