

London Legacy Development Corporation Quality Review Panel

Report of Planning Application Review Meeting: 304 – 312 Stratford High Street (The Collective)

Thursday 11 February 2016

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

Panel

Peter Studdert (chair)
John Lyall
Lindsey Whitelaw
David Gilpin

Attendees

Rachel Gleave	LLDC Planning Policy and Decisions Team
Pippa Gueterbock	London Legacy Development Corporation
Deborah Denner	Fortismere Associates
Tessa Kordeczka	Fortismere Associates

Report also copied to

Anthony Hollingsworth	LLDC Planning Policy and Decisions Team
Allison De Marco	LLDC Planning Policy and Decisions Team
Eleanor Fawcett	London Legacy Development Corporation
Erin Byrne	London Legacy Development Corporation
James Bolt	London Borough of Newham
Ben Hull	London Borough of Newham

Note on process

The Quality Review Panel comments below follow on from a pre-application review. Panel members who attended the previous meeting were: Peter Studdert (chair); Adam Khan; Tom Lonsdale; and Dan Epstein.

Declaration of interest

Panel member David Gilpin, project director at Arup, has worked with PLP Architecture on separate projects, unrelated to the scheme for 304 – 312 Stratford High Street. Arup is not involved in this project.

1. Project name and site address

The Collective Stratford, 304 – 312 High Street, Stratford

Planning application reference: 15/00515/FUL

2. Presenting team

Lee Polisano	PLP Architecture
Jin-uk Lee	PLP Architecture
Robert Tavernor	Tavernor Consultancy
Reza Merchant	The Collective
Sarah Christie	The Collective
Sam Hine	DP9
Anthony Plumbly	DP9
Arthur Gelling	HED

3. Planning authority's views

The planning authority's serious reservations about the appropriateness of a development of this density and height on the site of 304 – 312 Stratford High Street remain. Although reduced from 33 to 22 storeys, its height still greatly exceeds the 27m datum specified in planning guidance as generally appropriate along this part of Stratford High Street.

It considers that the proposal will result in significant overdevelopment of the site – which, being outside the Stratford Metropolitan Centre, is not designated in planning guidance as a suitable location for a tall building. It also stresses the importance of responding to and preserving the character and setting of the St John's Conservation Area.

The provisions of LLDC Local Plan Policy BN.10 relating to tall buildings apply. In addition to requiring 'outstanding architecture', Policy BN.10 specifies that tall buildings should add significantly to public amenity as well as contributing positively to the setting of heritage assets, including conservation areas. The planning authority does not consider that the proposal demonstrates the exceptional qualities required to meet the requirements of Policy BN.10.

4. Quality Review Panel's views

Summary

The Quality Review Panel continues to have serious reservations about the principle of a development of this height in this location. Although it remains supportive of the concept underpinning 'The Collective', and finds merits in some aspects of the design, it does not think that a convincing case has been made for departing from the 27m datum specified by planning policy – which seeks, as far as possible, to preserve and enhance the setting of the conservation area and the few remaining buildings of historic interest on this part of Stratford High Street.

Policy BN.10 applies and, while there may be scope for further adding to the public amenity offered by this development, the panel is not convinced that it currently meets the tests set by Policy BN.10. These include issues relating to microclimatic conditions and environmental sustainability.

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

Conceptual design

- The panel remains supportive of the concept of creating a community within a single building, combining shared living accommodation with commercial and cultural space.
- This is an innovative and creative approach that could be an effective response to housing needs.
- The panel commends the ambition of the scheme, but remains unconvinced that it exhibits the exceptional features required by Policy BN.10 to justify a building of this scale in this location.

Scale and massing

- Serious reservations remain about the appropriateness of a residential tall building on a site of this size on Stratford High Street. There is particular concern about the impact on the conservation area.
- This street has suffered from unsympathetic high density development, resulting in a fragmented, incoherent townscape.
- The panel therefore supports the aspiration of the LLDC Local Plan to create some cohesion along Stratford High Street by creating a 27m datum height.
- The site is tight and constrained, which restricts significantly the amount of space at ground level that can be provided as public realm – and the extent to which the scheme can mitigate the draughts characteristic of tall buildings.
- The constrained nature of the site will make it difficult to meet the tests of Policy BN.10.

Architectural expression

- The panel finds much to admire in the proposed architecture, which is well considered and results in an elegant building. The revised proportions – lower and slimmer – work well, but would be equally successful if the height were further reduced.
- Positioning the recessed floors at the haunch of the building's higher and lower elements, and the proposed materials, appear to be sound choices.

- The panel thinks, however, that the scheme could be improved by creating a more domestic feel; the building currently appears rather office-like, lacking in warmth.
- Incorporating a limited number of – possibly inset – balconies may be one way of achieving this.

Public realm

- The area available for public realm at ground level is limited. The panel, however, welcomes initiatives taken – including setting the building further back at ground level – to create an attractive and animated indoor and outdoor public realm.
- It will be important, however, to foster a perception that this is a genuinely public space – welcoming all – rather than a more managed public space. It will need to be demonstrated that the public realm will be accessible to all.
- There is concern, however, that for much of the day – apart from 12.00 to 15.00 – most of this public space will not benefit from sunlight and will be in shade.
- The panel is, however, encouraged by the approach taken to the landscape design to the west of the Builders Arms public house – at the approach to Lett Road.
- The potential to create a significant asset from the remnants of the Channelsea River, a historic water course, partly within the development's 'red line' boundary, is identified. This is currently a neglected dry basin retained as a flood relief channel.
- The panel suggests that discussions be pursued with the London Borough of Newham to explore rehabilitation of this channel – in its entirety, not restricted to the 'red line' boundary.
- This could significantly enhance the public realm associated with the development, by creating an attractive green, waterside space, encouraging biodiversity. An effective management and maintenance strategy would, however, be essential.
- While potentially contributing to a significantly improved public realm – and going some way towards fulfilling the requirements of Policy BN.10 – the panel does not think that, of itself, this would be sufficient to justify a development of this scale in this location.

Microclimatic conditions

- Policy BN.10 also points to the fact that tall buildings are likely to have a significant adverse impact on microclimatic conditions – especially downdraughts and lateral winds over public spaces.

- Landscaping at the base of the tall building proposed may be susceptible to downdraughts, and, in addition, public amenity spaces at roof level may be vulnerable to gusts of wind eddying around the building.
- No wind canopies are proposed to mitigate downdraughts, and deciduous trees would only contribute to addressing this in summer.
- While the building frontage is set back at ground level, the upper floors step forward – creating a risk of high wind speeds on the pavement below.
- The panel would welcome a more detailed analysis of microclimatic conditions, including wind, daylight / sunlight levels and overshadowing.

Sustainability

- The proposal clearly has benefits in relation to social sustainability.
- More information about the environmental sustainability strategy for this development – including the energy strategy – would, however, be helpful.

Next steps

- The Quality Review Panel repeats its serious reservations about the principle of a building of this scale on a tightly constrained site at this location on Stratford High Street.
- While the scheme has merits – both in its concept and its design – and there may be scope to enhance its contribution to public amenity, overall the panel remains unconvinced that it demonstrates the exceptional qualities required to meet the tests of policy BN.10 applying to tall buildings in this location.