

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

### **Report of Planning Application Review Meeting: Duncan House**

Thursday 14 January 2016

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

#### **Panel**

Peter Studdert (chair)  
Catherine Burd  
Lindsey Whitelaw

#### **Attendees**

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| Rachel Gleave   | LLDC Planning Policy and Decisions Team |
| Erin Byrne      | 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 |
| Pippa Gueterbock      | London Legacy Development Corporation   |

#### **Note on process**

The Quality Review Panel comments below follow on from three pre-application reviews of the scheme for Duncan House. Panel members who attended the previous meetings were: Peter Studdert (chair); John Lyall; Catherine Burd; Neil Deely; Tom Holbrook; Tom Lonsdale; Lindsey Whitelaw; Peter Stewart; Lynne Sullivan; Dan Epstein; and Peter Lainson.

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

Duncan House, Stratford High Street, London E15

Planning application reference: 15/00598/FUL

## **2. Presenting team**

|                 |                                       |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------|
| Jim Davies      | Watkin Jones Group                    |
| Stephen Hodder  | Hodder+Partners                       |
| Stephen Levrant | Stephen Levrant Heritage Architecture |
| Tim Buykx       | Gillespies                            |
| Chris Benham    | GL Hearn                              |
| Ben Wrighton    | GL Hearn                              |

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

The scheme for Duncan House had been reviewed twice by the Quality Review Panel before a planning application was submitted in late 2015.

Modifications to the design have improved the scale and massing, and also the plan and layout. Some concerns remain, however, in respect of the height of the tower – at 33 storeys – and its relationship to a significantly lower podium.

The planning authority had, in previous reviews, noted that Local Plan Policy BN.10 is an important consideration in assessing any application for a tall building on this site. This policy provides guidance that the 'prevailing height' of development along Stratford High Street should be 27m. Since the proposed scheme significantly exceeds this height, Policy BN.10 – which includes a requirement for 'outstanding architecture' – applies.

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

### *Summary*

The Quality Review Panel broadly supports the proposal for this development: the scheme – with some refinements – has the potential to meet the test of 'outstanding architecture'. The panel stresses, however, that this will depend on exceptionally high quality materials and detailing. The revised scheme improves the scale and massing of the development, including the relationship between tower and podium. The landscape design strategy also shows promise; the panel suggests some improvements, including to the central courtyard, the residents' amenity space and the public realm at the entrance to student accommodation. These comments are amplified below and those from previous reviews that remain relevant are repeated for clarity.

### *Scale and massing*

- The panel finds merit in the elegant and intriguing form of the tower element. The proposed scale is, however, at the absolute limit of acceptability, and a reduction of up to three storeys could mitigate the tower's impact on the surrounding area without jeopardising its architectural quality.
- While the panel thinks that the tower's upper storeys meet the sky successfully, it would also be helpful to consider how it might relate to other developments planned for Stratford High Street.
- The panel had previously questioned the scale of the podium elevation along Stratford High Street, particularly in the context of the tower, existing buildings and the policy suggesting a 27m datum. It felt that the podium could become a stronger element of the scheme.
- The revised scheme, however, appears to resolve this satisfactorily – while maintaining acceptable daylight and sunlight levels to the central courtyard.

### *Mix of uses*

- The proposal demonstrates a skilful response to a brief incorporating several uses: residential, academic, student housing, commercial and artists' studios.
- Earlier concerns that the scheme's quality might be compromised by the complex mix of uses and density proposed have been mitigated by the revised layout – in which the amount of residential accommodation has been reduced.
- The panel notes that 50 per cent of residential units are designed to be dual aspect. It repeats its recommendations that single aspect apartments be avoided and that access corridors benefit from natural light wherever possible.

### *Architectural expression*

- The architecture demonstrates a welcome legibility and structural coherence – and has the potential, with some refinement, to be judged 'outstanding architecture'.
- While the panel broadly supports the architectural treatment of all components of the scheme, the exceptional quality sought for this development – not least to justify the scale of the tower – will only be achieved by the highest quality materials and detailing.
- With a scheme of this scale and complexity, the panel would expect to see more detailed information on the treatment of elevations, materials and detailing – although it understands that this has been included in the submitted planning application.
- The panel agrees with the decision to substitute pre-cast concrete for the bronze cladding initially proposed.

- As stressed above, careful thought must be given to the quality of materials. For example, concrete must be of a sufficiently high quality to withstand weathering and discolouration – especially given its location in the heavily trafficked environment of Stratford High Street.

### *Landscape design*

- The panel welcomes the proposed improvements to the public realm along Stratford High Street – which is currently of particularly poor quality.
- It broadly supports the landscape design strategy – but thinks that it could be improved with some refinements. A highly successful public realm strategy is also required to meet Policy BN.10 requirements.
- The panel is particularly encouraged that the landscape design strategy looks beyond the site's 'red line' boundary to ensure that it connects successfully into the surrounding environment.
- Some reservations remain about the public realm at the entrance to student accommodation, at the corner of Stratford High Street and Lett Road.
- This will be a busy space where many students congregate. The panel asks how well this will fit with the proposed planting of a significant number of trees in this area – as well as planters. It may appear cramped and could benefit from more generous planning.
- For example, the panel questions the location and form of the raised planter at this point: this may have the effect of directing movement up into Lett Road rather than encouraging people to linger and enjoy the space.
- There are also some reservations about the central courtyard – which is partly inspired by a traditional academic quadrangle. This space could benefit from being slightly larger.
- In particular, the panel questions whether it is necessary to concentrate movement around the sheltered perimeter of the courtyard, rather than also making use of the centre, where it is proposed to plant trees.
- While the trees might provide an attractive outlook for residential and student accommodation, this space will be heavily shaded and could become rather dark and dank.
- The panel thinks that more could be made of this space. This might include using it as an external teaching area, incorporating a sustainable urban drainage system, or planting wild species to encourage biodiversity.
- The size of the amenity space for residents – the terrace on Level 06 – could also benefit from being more generous, especially as it is intended to include children's play space.

- The approach to surfacing throughout is considered appropriate and effective. Careful consideration will, however, need to be given to areas used for servicing – for example, where bins are brought out for refuse collection – so that they are robust enough to resist damage and staining.

#### *Sustainability*

- More information about the scheme's expected environmental performance, including, for example, its anticipated BREEAM rating would be welcome.
- Equally, further information about the scheme's flexibility to respond to future changes of use, if required, would be helpful.

#### *Inclusive design*

- The panel would encourage the provision of storage for mobility scooters, as well as cycles – bearing in mind the future needs of an ageing population.
- In general, any assessment of 'outstanding architecture', as required by Policy BN.10, should include the extent to which the LLDC's aspirations for diversity and inclusion have been addressed.

#### *Next steps*

- The panel gives broad support for the proposed scheme for this site. With refinements – including in response to the comments above – it thinks that it has the potential to meet the requirement of Policy BN.10, in particular that for 'outstanding architecture'.
- This will depend heavily, however, on materials and detailed construction of exceptionally high quality. The panel therefore strongly recommends retention of the current design team throughout construction.