

London Legacy Development Corporation Quality Review Panel

Report of Formal Review Meeting: McGrath Site

Thursday 16 April 2015

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

Panel

Peter Studdert (chair)
Adam Khan
Tom Holbrook
Dan Epstein
Peter Lainson

Attendees

Rachel Gleave	LLDC Planning Policy and Decisions
Sarah Jones	LLDC Planning Policy and Decisions
Hannah Lambert	London Legacy Development Corporation
Esther Everett	London Legacy Development Corporation
Deborah Denner	Fortismere Associates
Tessa Kordeczka	Fortismere Associates

Apologies / report copied to

Anthony Hollingsworth	LLDC Planning Policy and Decisions
Allison De Marco	LLDC Planning Policy and Decisions
Amy Thompson	London Borough of Tower Hamlets

1. Project name and site address

'Wickside' (McGrath Waste Transfer Station), Hepscott Road, London E9 5HH

Planning reference: PREAPP/13/00024

2. Presenting team

Guy Forrester	BUJ
Roger Castle	BUJ
Frank Green	BUJ
Robert Sakula	Ash Sakula
Cany Ash	Ash Sakula
Bridget Snaith	Shape Landscape Regeneration
Philip Chadda	TC Developments
Austin Mackie	Austin Mackie Associates Ltd
Sven Munder	creative industry consultant

3. Planning authority's views

Since the scheme for the McGrath site was first reviewed by the Quality Review Panel in March 2014, there has been a series of pre-application meetings with the planning authority. LLDC officers welcome the progress made and generally support revisions to the scheme, particularly in relation to the public realm.

The planning authority is keen to ensure that the scheme is consistent with the broader masterplan for Hackney Wick, which includes a new north / south route anchored by Hackney Wick Station and connected to Neptune Wharf by a new bridge across the Hertford Union Canal.

Detail of the design for the eastern part of the site will be dependent on the exact configuration of the bridge and its approach, plans for which are still evolving.

It will be important that the proposed mix of uses for the McGrath site complements the planned new neighbourhood centred around the station.

4. Quality Review Panel's views

Summary

The Quality Review Panel is encouraged by the significant progress made since its previous review of the development of this large and complex site. It thinks that the proposals presented provide the basis for a successful scheme. At this stage the panel has addressed broader strategic questions and recommends further reviews to consider in detail the various blocks and public realm across the site. The panel also suggests that expanding the design team to include other architects could add to the richness and quality of the development.

Comments are provided below on the development character, site, management, accessibility and sustainability strategies.

Development character

- The panel welcomes the approach taken to developing a characterful development on the site, including a coherent narrative and naming various components of the scheme such as the squares and quarters.
- It welcomes the analysis undertaken of the character of the area, including streets and yards, which is reflected in the strong juxtaposition of scales in the proposed scheme.
- The panel supports the retention and re-use of Victorian industrial buildings.
- The scheme introduces considerable diversity in the form, massing and architectural expression of its many elements. The panel agrees that this is appropriate for a large mixed use site, but suggests that some aspects of the scheme would benefit from a more rational and restrained approach.
- For example, the panel thinks that the proposed block along Wansbeck Road could be improved by fewer changes in height, and a simplified building form.
- The panel also suggests that – given the scale and diversity of the site – additional architects could add to the richness of the scheme.

Site strategy: A12 / Wansbeck Road

- At a strategic level, the panel thinks that much could be done to improve the quality of the streetscape of Wansbeck Road which is vulnerable to air pollution and noise from the adjacent A12.
- For example, extending the verge opposite the site and significantly increasing the planting could help to create a less hostile and more attractive street.
- Because of proximity to the A12 the lower storeys of buildings along Wansbeck Road have been designated for industrial / commercial use.
- For industrial / commercial uses to be accommodated, service and delivery access from Wansbeck Road will need to be resolved.

Management strategy

- The panel emphasises the importance of effective management of the development through a management company.
- This will be as important for the social and economic success of the scheme as it is for the buildings and landscape.

- The strategic approach to accommodating creative industries is welcome. For this vision to be realised, however, it will be essential to ensure that workspace is affordable. This will need to be secured by a S106 agreement.
- It is encouraging that some industrial / commercial uses – for example a brewery – have already been identified.
- The panel supports the strategy of distributing a mix of uses across the site.
- Effective management will be equally important for ensuring the quality and maintenance of the public realm.
- The ambition of the landscape design means that it is unlikely that the London Borough of Tower Hamlets will have the resources to maintain it.

Landscape strategy and public realm

- The panel notes that detailed proposals for the landscape strategy, including the canal frontage, have yet to be developed.
- At this stage, however, it suggests that it may be preferable to maintain a clear demarcation between the towpath and the proposed linear park. This would indicate a clear route for pedestrians and cyclists along the towpath.
- Along the towpath, considering separation between pedestrians and cyclists will be important, if this is likely to be used by commuting cyclists travelling at speed.
- Further information on parking, servicing and refuse collection would also be welcome at a future review.

Accessibility

- Although detailed proposals for streets and the public realm have yet to be produced, the panel stresses the importance of adopting a consistent accessibility strategy across the site.
- The panel would like more information about how the landscape design achieves accessibility given the significant changes of level.
- The panel is concerned that visually impaired users may find Lock Road confusing if it changes from a traditional street to a shared surface midway through the site.

- The panel thinks that a traditional street continuing to the canalside could be successful, and may feel less like private space.
- Finally, in terms of accessibility, the panel suggests a cautious approach to the use of strongly patterned paving, which can cause confusion for people with visual impairments.

Sustainability

- The panel would like further information on the sustainability strategy for the development, including energy, water and biodiversity.
- Air pollution and noise are significant issues for this site and will need to be addressed.
- Considering how the development can be designed for 'long life and loose fit' could also contribute to its long term sustainability.

Next steps

- The panel looks forward to reviewing detailed designs for the different components of the scheme, including the various blocks and the public realm, as well as the sustainability strategy, before a planning application is submitted.