

London Legacy Development Corporation Quality Review Panel

Report of Formal Review Meeting: McGrath Site

Thursday 17 September 2015

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

Panel

Peter Studdert (chair)

Neil Deely

Tom Lonsdale

Tom Holbrook

Dan Epstein

Attendees

Rachel Gleave

LLDC Planning Policy and Decisions

Hannah Lambert

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

Esther Everett

London Legacy Development Corporation

Tim Ross

London Borough of Tower Hamlets

1. Project name and site address

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

2. Presenting team

Robert Sakula	Ash Sakula
Cany Ash	Ash Sakula
Wayne Glaze	Material Architects
Bridget Snaith	Shape Landscape
Guy Forrester	BUJ
Frank Green	BUJ
Roger Castle	BUJ
Sven Munder	Creative industry consultant
Austin Mackie	Austin Mackie Associates Ltd

3. Planning authority's views

Proposals for the McGrath site have evolved over a period of several years. They have been subject to a series of pre-application meetings with planning officers and considered at three previous Quality Review Planning meetings.

The planning authority supports a development providing a wide mix of uses. The massing proposed is supported in principle; it will, however, be important to assess detailed design for the development's various components and the quality of townscape that this creates across the development.

Proposals for the new bridge across the Hertford Canal and its approach – which will continue the new north / south route through the site – have now been formulated and will need to be taken into account in designs for the eastern part of the site.

The projection of the separate 'Gold' site – which is under different land ownership – into the northern boundary of the site adds to its complexity.

The planning authority stresses the importance of this particularly large and significant development delivering 35% affordable housing. It will be key to the planning authority's ability to meet its overall target on affordable housing.

4. Quality Review Panel's views

Summary

The Quality Review Panel thinks that proposals for this large, complex and challenging scheme have progressed significantly. Generally, the approach to the overall scale and massing of the development is successful – but much work remains to be done. The challenge will be to meet aspirations for high quality design. The panel continues to think that expanding the design team to include other architects would contribute towards achieving this. The presentation at this review provided a broad survey of various 'character areas' across the development. However, further reviews will be needed to assess detailed design proposals for different elements of the development, before a planning submission. As this work continues, the panel offers the following comments on: the masterplan; architectural expression; public realm; and landscape design.

Masterplan

- The panel continues to think that the masterplan proposals for the McGrath site have the potential to form the basis of a successful scheme.
- At a strategic level – including movement around and within the site –the proposals appear sensible and have the potential to work well. The panel supports the decision to locate the underground car park at the western end of the site.
- More detailed information about vehicle and pedestrian routes through the development, including for servicing would, however, be helpful.
- The panel also supports the overall scale and massing.
- It strongly supports the planning authority in seeking a high proportion of affordable housing in this large development.
- The panel finds much to admire in the broad proposals for the different 'character areas' identified across the site – but would like more information about how this will be followed and secured through to detailed design.
- It therefore stresses the importance of protecting quality – and welcomes the proposed detailed planning application.
- The panel notes that PH+ Architects are developing proposals for the 'Gold' site and encourages continuing cooperation between the design teams for both sites.

Architectural expression

- The scheme offers exciting opportunities for innovative and creative architecture, based on the masterplan 'character areas'.

- Some of the designs presented, however – albeit at an early stage of development – appear rather generic and uninspiring.
- The panel continues to think that – given the scale and diversity of the development – additional architects would add greater creativity and variety.
- The panel welcomes the addition of Ash Sakula and Material Architects to the design team but thinks that still further injection of talent and skills from other architectural practices could greatly contribute towards meeting the design quality aspired to.
- The panel welcomes the revised design of the blocks along Wansbeck Road, to achieve dual aspect flats, with an increased number of circulation cores.
- The architectural expression of the Wansbeck Road blocks has also been refined, based on a concept of winter gardens, capitalising on views across the A12, whilst shielding apartments from noise.
- The panel repeats its support for the design of the Bear’s Head building – which provides an interesting and characterful response to a challenging triangular site.

Public realm and landscape design

- Generally, the panel supports the approach to the design of the public realm. It thinks, however, that further work is required to satisfactorily integrate the hard and soft landscape.
- Careful thought will need to be given to the maintenance of the soft landscape, including water and drainage – for example where planted troughs are proposed on roofs.
- While the idea of community allotments is attractive, these will require effective management.
- The panel expressed concern about the concrete ‘cliff’ and the extent to which it would attract graffiti.
- Also, the panel is not convinced by the proposal to plant trees at basement level in the underground car park, to rise up through to the Wansbeck Square courtyard. It considers this to be impractical.

Next steps

- As detailed designs are developed for individual areas / blocks, the panel would welcome the opportunity to provide further comments, before a planning application is submitted.