

SOUTHWARK DESIGN REVIEW PANEL REPORT

(Confidential in advance of a planning application)

Chair: Chris Williamson

Panel Members: Wayne Glaze; Julie Greer; Nial Monaghan; Ken Taylor

Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre and UAL site

Architects: Allies & Morrison

Clients: Elephant and Castle Properties (BVI) Co. Limited (Delancey)

Planning Agents: DP9

Project description

Elephant and Castle Properties (BVI) Co. Limited is seeking to obtain detailed planning permission for the mixed-use redevelopment of Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre and the London College of Communication (LCC) (a constituent college of the University of the Arts, London (UAL)), in Elephant and Castle. This land comprises of two distinct areas separated by Newington Butts and covers an area of approximately 2.8 hectares (ha).

The Applicant's design team, led by Allies and Morrison Architects, are designing proposals for both the site of the Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre and the site of the existing LCC. It is envisaged that the development could include a number of buildings up to maximum of 40 storeys, with a maximum of 145,000m² Gross External Area (GEA) of residential floorspace, including a maximum of 20,000 GEA of student residential accommodation, a maximum of 45,000m² GEA educational floorspace, a maximum of 15,000m² GEA office space and a maximum of 45,000m² GEA of retail and leisure floorspace, car parking and cycle parking facilities. A new LUL ticket hall and station entrance would also be provided as a part of the development.

The Development would include a new building for the LCC to consist of educational space and office space which would be located within the Shopping Centre area. The Shopping Centre area would be developed first allowing LCC to relocate to their new building before demolition works commence on the LCC area to ensure continuity of college activities at all times.

The Panel welcomed the opportunity to review these significant sites which will play a key role in the regeneration of the Elephant and Castle area. They thanked the design team for their clear and comprehensive presentation which included: a contextual block model; an analysis of the historic context; the masterplan response to the sites and proposed land-uses; as well as the overall public realm, 3D visualisations of the development, typical floor plans of the UAL building, the East Site residential, the West side residential and the Music Venue. The presentation did not include the phasing and timescale of the development nor the micro-climate assessment of the scheme.

The Pavilion in 'Elephant Court'

The Panel retain significant concerns about the proposed 4-storey building adjacent to 'Elephant Court' in front of the railway station. They noted that they had raised

these concerns at the previous review and felt this revised proposal did not resolve the issue. Their concerns are two-fold. Firstly, the scale of the building and how it affects the generosity of Elephant Court which is severely restricted as a consequence and does not have the proportions of a civic square which a scheme of this scale will require. Secondly, 'Elephant Court will be an importance entrance point for the railway station at the Elephant and Castle from the west. This includes the interchange from the new underground station at the Elephant and Castle peninsula. The Panel felt the current proposal does not demonstrate how this important transport interchange will be facilitated by the scheme and remained concerned that the new building will impede access to the railway station. They were concerned that movement to and from the station was not adequately described and they felt it should be properly integrated into the scheme at this stage. The Panel felt that the current proposals do not acknowledge the civic importance which the station could add to the urban realm.

Public realm

In respect of the public realm, the Panel felt the current proposals lacked generosity. They noted that other significant schemes provided appropriate civic spaces and public realm on their sites and felt that the current proposal did not strike the right balance between public realm and built form to mitigate against the enormous scale of the proposal. In this regard they raised a detailed concern about the permeability along the western edge of the viaduct. They appreciated that this edge of the viaduct was utilitarian in appearance and noted the applicant's efforts to engage Network Rail in discussions about this scheme. Nevertheless they challenged to designers to consider this edge in a positive way in the same way as the railway viaduct at Hoxton behind the Geffrye Museum, to seek opportunities to improve the appearance of the viaduct, and to bring Network Rail into the conversation where possible in order to enable permeability along this edge. This is especially important given the significant size and scale of the proposed UAL and the shopping centre buildings adjacent to the viaduct which block off access to the station from the north or south along the viaduct.

Permeability

The Panel welcomed the increased permeability introduced across these two sites. They also enjoyed the design team's approach to permeability with views and glimpses to local landmarks helping to orientate visitors to the area. However, they were concerned about the poorly designed access and the presence of the railway station at the centre of the site. They stressed that this is a 'must' for this proposal. It is imperative that the station remains a prominent and accessible feature of the site, visible on the main approaches and a destination for the public. They challenged the designers to review their proposal especially in respect of Elephant Court including its main approaches and to revise their proposals to address their concerns. The Panel would like to see explored a route alongside the railway viaduct which could be brought to life in the same way as the east London line viaduct between Hoxton and Haggerston

Landscape

The Panel felt the proposed landscape at grade was inadequate and lacked generosity. They asked for more detail about the landscape and for this to take be more meaningful: groups of trees instead of lines of trees; and larger green spaces with a clear sense of purpose. This was especially true of the the public realm at Site D (Elephant Court) where they felt the proportions of the space were inadequate and there was currently no provision for landscape. Whilst there are more significant

areas of landscape in the vicinity, the Panel felt it was important that this development maximised the opportunity for publicly accessible landscape within its curtilage both at Elephant Court and on the West Site.

Servicing

The Panel raised a detailed question about the servicing of both sites. They were concerned about the amount of servicing proposed to Block E on the west site which involves a significant increase in the number of service vehicles along Oswin Street which will affect the residents in this location. They noted that negotiations had not been concluded between the applicants and the council in respect of servicing of the east site – currently shown from New Kent Road at the northern edge of the site. The Panel and asked the designers to bring the proposal back to DRP if the main servicing routes are revised as a consequence of further discussions with the council.

Height scale and massing

The Panel generally endorsed the proposed distribution of tall buildings across the site but felt the tower on block F at the northern edge of the west site – corner of Oswin Street and St Georges Road – was too tall in the context of these two streets. They asked the designers to review their proposal and to reduce the height of block F to better reflect the transition in scale from the taller buildings on the peninsula, to the residential scale of Oswin Street.

UAL Building

The Panel welcomed the advances made in the design of this important building. However, they questioned how the inbuilt flexibility of this building could be affected by the internal programmatic requirements of the college removing double-height spaces and affecting the external appearance of this important civic building. They requested 1:20 scale bay studies of the detailed design should be included in the planning submission to demonstrate how the internal floors will relate to the external façade to ensure that it is not affected by internal changes.

The UAL Building will present a ‘fifth elevation’ at the roof which will be visible from the existing adjacent buildings and new towers in the area as proposed. The Panel encouraged the designers to consider the roof of the UAL Building as an important ‘elevation’, a space that has a sense of purpose to be utilised and enjoyed by UAL Staff and Students and a visual amenity to occupiers of the towers nearby.

Quality of accommodation

On the West site, the panel questioned the quality of accommodation in the ‘mansion blocks’ especially in respect of the kitchens which are set deep into the plan and don’t benefit from any natural light. They noted that the development achieves a high level of dual aspect units and encouraged the designers to resolve these issues and improve the quality of the units especially those that only benefit from a single aspect.

The new Northern Line Entrance

The Panel raised significant concerns about the presence of the new Northern Line entrance. They supported the location on the peninsula and understood the access arrangements. However, they felt this important transport interchange lacked visual presence on the street and is currently proposed as a simple single-storey shopfront – no different to a retail unit. Whilst they understood that the entrance on the street does not lead into the ticket hall but to the escalators, they felt the current

design for the station entrance lacked the presence and visibility that was necessary in this location. They challenged the designers to review their proposals for the entrance and to amend the design to address their concerns.

Diversity of retail

The Panel noted that the current shopping centre has a vibrancy that is sustained by the range and diversity of retail found on the site. They were concerned that the current proposal proposes a single type of retail offer and does not encourage a range of businesses to remain in the E&C. They noted that the client controlled these sites and the Elephant Road proposal including Elephant Square and was in a position to influence the range and types of businesses. They encouraged the architects to work with their client to develop a more sophisticated retail model that encourages a range of businesses and seeks to support the vitality and diversity of the Elephant and Castle.

Environmental conditions

The Panel reiterated their concerns about the microclimate effects of this proposal. They noted that they had not been shown the evidence that they requested at the earlier review. The Panel stressed the importance of understanding the environmental impact of the proposed designs. The Panel asked the design team to test their proposals for microclimate, wind and sunlight/daylight and to present their findings to them.

Public art

Finally, the Panel encouraged the designers and their client to consider incorporating public art into the proposal. Whilst every effort has been made by the architects to develop a varying aesthetic across the site, public art in prominent locations could help to reinforce the sequential experience of the development and introduce an artistic vitality for which this area is famous. The panel mentioned the art billboard controlled by students along the lines of the Ingelby Gallery in Edinburgh.

In conclusion, the Panel generally endorsed many aspects of this proposal and welcomed the involvement of A&M on these two important sites. The Panel retained significant concerns about the inadequate scale and design of Elephant Court, the permeability across the shopping centre site and the presence of the transport hubs – the Underground and the Station – and the height of the tower on Oswin Street. They asked the designers to review their proposal in the light of their concerns and to amend the scheme accordingly. They welcomed further dialogue with the applicants especially in respect of information that had not been presented to them.