

Ropemaker Place

in the London Borough of Islington

planning application no. P031422

Town & Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended); Greater London Authority Act 1999; Town & Country Planning (Mayor of London) Order 2000 – strategic planning application stage 1 referral.

Redevelopment of an existing commercial building to provide 67,984 square metres B1 (office) space together with 23 car spaces and 710 square metres A1/A2/A3 (retail uses) on ground floor level.

Context

1 On 14 August 2003 Islington Council consulted the Mayor of London on a proposal to develop the above site for the above uses. Under the provisions of the Town & Country Planning (Mayor of London) Order 2000 the Mayor has the same opportunity as other statutory consultees to comment on the proposal. This report sets out information for the Mayor's use in deciding what comments to make.

2 The application is referable under Category 1B and 1C of the Schedule of the Order 2000: "*Development (other than development which only comprises the provision of houses, flats, or houses and flats) which comprises or includes the erection of a building or buildings in Central London (other than the City of London) and with a floorspace of more than 20,000 square metres*", and "*Development which comprises or includes the erection of a building [which] is more than 30 metres high and outside the City of London*".

3 If Islington Council subsequently decides that it is minded to grant planning permission, it must first allow the Mayor an opportunity to decide whether to direct the Council to refuse permission.

4 The Mayor of London's comments on this case will be made available on the GLA website www.london.gov.uk.

Site description

5 The 0.6 hectare site is located on the borough boundary between the City of London and Islington, and lies within the Central Activities Zone (CAZ), as defined by the draft London Plan. The site is on land bounded by Chiswell Street, Ropemaker Street, Moor lane and Finsbury Street. Moorgate and Liverpool Street mainline and underground stations area short walking distance away.

6 The existing building on site currently provides 33,400 square metres of office accommodation, up to eleven storeys. The surrounding built context is largely office developments, typical of a City location.

Details of the proposal

7 DB Real Estate Investment GmbH and Helical Bar PLC are seeking full planning permission for redevelopment of the site to provide 67,984 square metres of B1 office accommodation together with 710 square metres of retail (A1/A2/A3), at ground floor level. The architects for the proposals are Gensler. The proposed building is between eight and twenty storeys and includes 23 car parking spaces, 73 motorcycle spaces, and 200 cycle spaces, at basement level.

Case history

8 Proposals on this site by different architects were presented to the Mayor at pre application stage on 13 June 2001. However the scheme has since been replaced by the present proposals.

Strategic planning issues and relevant policies and guidance

9 The relevant issues and corresponding policies are as follows:

- Economic development *draft London Plan; London's Economic Development Strategy (LDA)*
- Mix of uses *draft London Plan*
- Urban design *draft London Plan: PPG1*
- Access/equal opportunities *draft London Plan*
- Transport *draft London Plan; the Mayor's Transport Strategy; PPG13*
- Parking *draft London Plan; the Mayor's Transport Strategy; PPG13*

Economic development

10 The Mayor has identified a Central Activities Zone (CAZ) as defined by Map 2B.2 of the draft London Plan. Policy 2B.1 states that *"within the Central Activities Zone, boroughs should accommodate commercial development associated with business, tourism and retail, subject to the protection of housing and identified special policy areas. Taking account of local amenity, land use mix and transport capacity, developments will be expected to maximise plot ratios"*. In line with Policy 3B.2/3, the Mayor will resist the net loss of office space and seek renovation and renewal of the existing stock, to increase and enhance the quality and flexibility of London's office market.

11 Located within the CAZ, this site currently represents an under-utilised resource. The site's central location and close proximity to public transport supports intensification and improvement and would be in keeping with the policies of the draft London Plan. The proposals will result in a net gain of office floorspace of 34,584 sq.m, from 33,400 sq.m (existing) to 67,984 sq.m (proposed).

Mix of uses

12 Policy 3B.5 states that within the CAZ, wherever increases in office floorspace are proposed, they should contain a considerable amount of residential floorspace (proportions defined in the to-be-completed sub-regional frameworks).

13 The draft London Plan states that exceptions to this policy *“will concentrate on areas where such a mix would demonstrably undermine strategic policy for other developments, including parts of the City and the Isle of Dogs”*. Although this site is not in the City, the site is on the boundary to the City and the surrounding built context is typical of a City location. The draft London Plan clearly establishes the need to develop London’s economy and the importance to increase office stock. The important role of the CAZ is also stated with the Plan; *“Sustaining its role as the core location for international business and finance... is crucial”*.

14 The sub-regional framework for the Central London area that would identify where and how residential provision could be provided has not yet been completed. Therefore, on balance, given the qualitative improvements in office provision, the incomplete policy direction offered by the sub-regional framework, and the current draft status of the London Plan, office development on this site is considered appropriate. Nevertheless, a s106 agreement is expected for contributions to housing provision within the borough in lieu of meeting the mixed use policy on-site. The details of this should be agreed by the Council.

15 The proposal to include 710 square metres of retail within the development does introduce an element of mixed use in the site. This is in line with the Council’s Unitary Development Plan for B1 schemes to incorporate appropriate non-B1 uses.

Urban design

16 The proposals are unlikely to harm strategic views of St Paul’s Cathedral and would only be marginally visible from London panoramas, townscape and bridge views. Therefore, the application is unlikely to harm views of strategic importance and does not fall within any of the designated strategic viewing corridors.

17 It is regrettable that the earlier tower proposal has not been pursued. The revised proposals now lack a dynamic presence on the City skyline and have foregone the opportunity to provide a landmark building for London within the City cluster. This is a missed architectural opportunity, and an increase in the height of the existing scheme, which would provide for a more elegantly proportioned building and more clearly articulated skyline, would be appropriate. However, the buildings relate reasonably well to adjacent townscape in so far as they respect plot lines and cornice height when viewed from oblique angles from surrounding streets. With good quality cladding materials, there would be the potential for a satisfactory appearance. These matters should be addressed by the Council.

Access/equal opportunities

18 Full provision for access for disabled people should be incorporated into this scheme. Policy 4B.5 of the draft London Plan expects all future development to meet the highest standards of accessibility and inclusion. An Access Statement, demonstrating how principles of inclusive design have been integrated into the proposed development, should form part of these proposals. The access statement should be treated as more than a commitment to meet the minimum standards of Part M of the Building Regulations.

Transport for London

19 The site is located in the south of Islington, near Moorgate and Liverpool Street Tube Stations. Liverpool Street Station also provides access to WAGN and First Great Eastern overland rail services. There are 10 different bus routes provided within 400 meters of the site. The site has a Public Transport Accessibility Level (PTAL) of 6, where 1 is poor and 6 is excellent.

Public transport

20 TfL has reviewed the Transport Assessment (TA) and is satisfied that the proposal will have no significant impact on services at Moorgate or Liverpool Street Underground Stations or local bus services.

21 TfL is concerned with the effects the construction phase of the development will have on pedestrians and the operation of localised bus routes, in particular the 153. In order to mitigate any effects, TfL would like to see a construction method statement for the development. This should identify:

- The number, size and time of lorries visiting the site.
- The likely routes to the site including possible turning circles.
- The possible temporary alterations to signal timings to accommodate HGV movements.

22 A taxi rank presently exists in Ropemaker Street, on the north side of the carriageway. The proposed development may require a larger taxi rank.

23 Good permeability of the site to those on foot and on cycle is recommended. These modes should, where possible, be segregated from other traffic accessing the site/parking/servicing. Priority to pedestrians and cyclists at points where these modes interface with other traffic is recommended. Cycle routes to the site from the existing cycle network should also be improved.

24 TfL would encourage the development and adoption of a Travel Plan that provides travel information and advice in order to encouraging safer and more efficient journeys by foot, cycle and public transport.

Car/Cycle Parking

25 TfL supports the provision of 23 car-parking spaces, which is in accordance with the Mayors strategy to promote sustainable forms of transport. TfL also supports the on site motorcycle provision, but would like to see the number of spaces increased to 80 to reflect the anticipated modal split.

26 TfL commends the provision of 200 cycle parking spaces and would like space allocated for possible future increase to 540 spaces in accordance with the London Cycle Network Design Manual. TfL is pleased the cycle parking spaces are covered, secure, well lit, observed and at ground floor level. However it is not clear in the Transport Assessment where the cycle parking is located and how the spaces are accessed.

Public Transport Improvements

27 TfL would like a contribution to improvements of the bus stop serving route 153 in Ropemaker Street.

28 TfL is also concerned about the cumulative impact of proposed development in the area and the subsequent increase in trip generation on existing public transport capacity. Although it has been demonstrated that the proposal is likely to have relatively limited impact, there will, nonetheless, be an impact on the ability of the public transport network to absorb the increase in demand. TfL is keen to support the borough of Islington in securing funds to mitigate the collective impact of future developments.

London Development Agency

29 The LDA supports the proposal, which should result in a qualitative and quantitative improvement in office accommodation on this site within the CAZ. The Council should, through s106 agreement, secure training and employment opportunities for local people and the use of local business and services, both during construction and subsequently. The applicant should also consider addressing all other barriers to employment. The LDA will, if required, discuss the details of these further with the Council and the applicant.

Local planning authority's position

30 In pre application the local authority did not provide clear support for a landmark tall building on this site.

Legal considerations

31 Under the arrangements set out in article 3 of the Town and Country Planning (Mayor of London) Order 2000 the Mayor has an opportunity to make representations to Islington Council at this stage. If the Council subsequently resolves to grant planning permission, it must allow the Mayor an opportunity to decide whether to direct it to refuse planning permission. There is no obligation at this present stage for the Mayor to indicate his intentions regarding a possible direction, and no such decision should be inferred from the Mayor's comments unless specifically stated.

Financial considerations

32 There are no financial considerations at this stage.

Conclusion

33 This proposal will result in an intensification of an existing office use site within the Central Activities Zone, and will better maximise plot ratio. The application should result in both a qualitative and quantitative improvement in office accommodation and in this respect is in keeping with draft London Plan policies.

34 Previous proposals for a landmark tower on this site were supported in pre application discussions and an increase in the height of the existing scheme which would provide for a more elegantly portioned building would be appropriate.

35 The mix use policies outlined with the draft London Plan are not met by these proposals. Giving allowance for the improvements on site and the status of the sub-regional framework on residential provision within office developments, in this case financial contributions to housing within Islington borough would be acceptable. This should be secured by the Council.

36 A travel plan, access statement and construction method statement should be produced as part of these proposals.

for further information, contact Planning Decisions Unit:

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