

LONDON
REVIEW PANEL

[REDACTED]
Head of Development
AXA REIM
22 Bishopsgate
EC2N 4BQ
London

Wednesday 6th June 2024

Dear Robert,

London Review Panel: 63 St Mary Axe (Camomile Court)

Please find enclosed the London Review Panel report following the design review of 63 St Mary Axe on the 17th May 2024. I would like to thank you for your participation in the review and offer ongoing Mayor's Design Advocate support as the scheme's design develops.

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
Mayor's Design Advocate

cc.

All meeting attendees

Jules Pipe, Deputy Mayor for Planning, Regeneration and Skills

Philip Graham, Executive Director of Good Growth, GLA

Louise Duggan, Head of Regeneration, GLA

LONDON REVIEW PANEL

Report of London Review Panel meeting for 63 St Mary Axe

Friday 17th May 2024

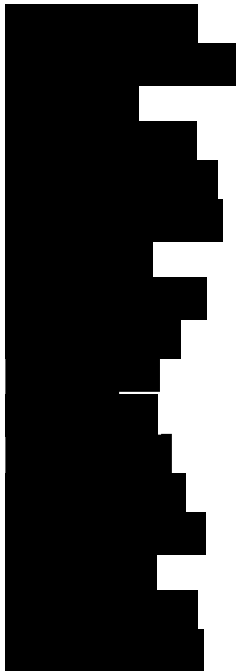
A site visit took place ahead of the review with a tour and briefings given by the client team and the Design Team.

London Review Panel



MDA (Chair)
MDA
MDA
MDA

Attendees



AXA REIM
City of London
City of London
City of London
Fletcher Priest
Fletcher Priest
Fletcher Priest
DP9
DP9
The Townscape Consultancy
CBRE ESG
GLA Development Management
GLA Place Unit
GLA Design Unit
GLA Design Unit
GLA Design Unit
GLA Design Unit

Report copied to

Jules Pipe
Philip Graham
Louise Duggan

Deputy Mayor for Planning, Regeneration and Skills
GLA Executive Director of Good Growth
GLA Head of Regeneration

Confidentiality and publication

Please note that while schemes not yet in the public domain, for example at a pre-application stage, will be treated as confidential, as a public organisation the GLA is subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOI) and in the case of an FOI request may be obliged to release project information submitted for review. Review reports will target publication to the London Review Panel webpage six months following the review unless otherwise agreed.

Overview

The applicant team proposes a new workspace-led, mixed use development on the sites of 63 St Mary Axe and 23 Camomile Street in Bishopsgate. This will provide state of the art office space with a range cultural, and community uses at lower levels. This project aims to the demand for office space in the City of London, with active public realm and public uses that align with the 'Destination City' strategy.

London Review Panel's Views

Summary

The panel begins by acknowledging the detailed development of the proposal so far. It commends the integration of new public space, which seeks to activate the area with additional retail and cultural uses.

The panel believes that the applicant team are proposing something quite unprecedented in the City of London, in terms of accessibility and provision of public amenity and space to local communities. However, the quality of the public realm and lower floors in particular will be critical to the success of the scheme, and the panel supports the ongoing development of inclusive spaces which are truly accessible to a range of different users including the local community. This will help realise the social impact benefits that the scheme promises to deliver.

The applicant has gone to considerable lengths to engage with local communities and in doing so has built an expectation that the building will offer something to them. This delivering on this commitment needs to be at the heart of the project going forwards. The design of the architecture, land use and accessibility of lower floors of the building need to be developed together to ensure a powerful offer that delivers true public benefit.

The panel holds no strong views on the formal and architectural principles of the building, but it suggests exploring some changes to the facades which could enhance the articulation of the forms.

The integration of planting and trees on terraces throughout the building is supported in principle if the structural and embodied carbon implications of providing it are considered in balance with the benefits.

Overall, the panel supports the approach to sustainability and recognises the economic, social, and health benefits of delivering a green building.

Further investigation is needed to strengthen the proposal, as outlined thematically below.

Form, massing and architectural expression

- The panel acknowledges that townscape views are being assessed in greater detail in forums beyond the London Review Panel, however, it comments that the proposed

sculptural form of the building would be a successful addition to the Eastern Cluster as seen in the long views from the site, particularly from Tower Bridge.

- The panel suggests that improvements to visual appearance and proportion could be made with a more significant crown of 3 to 4 storeys, instead of the single floor as shown.
- Additionally, the panel recommends investigating how the proposed form sits within its immediate context, considering its proximity to and the consequential impact on surrounding buildings and vice versa.
- The panel suggests that the massing would be better articulated if the flat roofed element of the building were visually decoupled from the tower with a different elevational treatment.
- The panel is concerned that the overhanging structure would compromise the health of planting of the proposed park. Further assessments are strongly recommended to ensure that a successful microclimate can be delivered at the base of the building suitable for the proposed planting to thrive in.

Building Uses

- The panel acknowledges the building's potential to transform the experience of the public realm in this location, noting the ambition for openness and a sense of welcome in the design at this stage. However, there are concerns about the lack of clarity on the positions of entrances, thresholds and distinctions between public and private/controlled space, and how servicing areas and logistics are organised for the successful operation of a multi-purpose space. The panel advises that a greater degree of clarity around the various modes of the building is needed to support the desired flexible uses.
- The panel challenges the necessity of five publicly accessible floors and encourages the team to explore whether having fewer floors could allow for more accessible and better functioning, lower floors.
- The principle of mixing different community uses within the building is highly commendable, albeit there will be challenges associated with this ambition. Accessibility is critical in this scheme, and the design needs to promote and provide cues that will make the public spaces feel genuinely inclusive and inviting. The design team must ensure that the public areas do not feel like corporate office lobbies, and that a suitable low-key approach to security, with limited use of smart phone technology needs to be established.
- The panel believes that flexible retail space at ground level could be successful, but it is not convinced that the proposed location and layout is the right solution. To enhance the sense of place, viability and longevity of the commercial spaces, the panel advises that the retail offer is curated by the client, and not let as individual units on the open market. The panel encourages the applicant team to study relevant precedents, like Leadenhall and Spitalfields markets, to understand how best to achieve a serviceable solution in this location.
- The panel advises that the proposed glazed elevations to the auditorium may create detrimental limitations for the use of this space. The specification of spaces like the auditorium should be explored and locked in as early as possible, as particular spatial

and technical requirements will need to be met to deliver a state-of-the-art facility such as the Outernet in Tottenham Court Road.

Energy Efficiency

- The panel commends the design team's target of 55kW per sqm, as it represents best practice for this typology.
- The panel is comfortable with the façade design principles, such as the glazing ratio, a number of bay types based on environmental analysis and the inclusion of opening windows for ventilation. It advises that further wind analysis is carried out to assess the potential issues at higher levels.
- The panel notes the higher embodied carbon than benchmarks, partly due to being a tall building, and partly due to the relatively small scale of the structural grid. While this requires more material and is therefore more carbon intensive, the panel concedes that it is an appropriate solution to achieve the form, with floorplates that get smaller towards the top of the building.
- The panel is concerned that the extent of planting proposed, and the requisite substrate to support it, will add significant weight to the terraces. The panel recommends that if the inclusion at upper levels is not to appear tokenistic, the right balance needs to be struck between quantity of planting, its structural, servicing requirements and maintenance demands, and the additional embodied carbon involved in its provision. The panel is unable to discern whether this balance has been struck at this early stage, but it is generally positive about the approach and ambition.
- The panel strongly encourages the team to assess the efficiency of constructing the small floorplate upper levels of the building, ensuring that it would not be more efficient in carbon use terms to reduce the height of the tower element.

Circular Economy

- The panel notes that the approach to circular economy is still in development, indicating that further work is needed in this area.

Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity Net Gain

- The panel questions whether enough rainwater can be harvested to sustain the planting scheme and support its resilience through dry spells. Further analysis is needed to ensure confidence in the water management system for the planting and trees on each floor.
- The panel questioned the resilience required of trees and planting at the higher levels of the buildings but has been reassured that this is technically feasible.

Public Realm

- The proposal seeks to enhance the public realm of this island site, a goal firmly endorsed by the panel. The panel appreciates the intention of openness in the design of the ground plane, but it has concerns about how the ground floor

interfaces with the public realm and pavements, and the lack of clarity between the functionality and management of public and private space.

- The panel supports the inclusion of large glass sliding doors, or in fact no doors where practicable, as this would enhance the accessibility and avoid the corporate impression that revolving doors give.
- The interface between internal ground floor spaces and the public realm should be more carefully considered to create a space that feels unique and engaging.
- The panel suggests a more resolved layout is required for the ground floor and linear park. The panel questions the accessibility of the linear park in its current form. It suggests exploring how replacing the ground floor auditorium with additional green/public space and relocating the retail units to the eastern side of the plan, could expand public realm areas and create a unique selling point that differentiates this public space from others in Bishopsgate.
- The panel encourages the team to reinforce the design of the southern colonnade to provide shelter from rain, and to carefully specify the ground surface, levels and routes through for the linear park to ensure that it is accessible for all users.
- The panel thinks that the pavement on the northeast boundary is too narrow as shown given the height and scale of the building. The footway as drawn could be creating a challenging environment for pedestrians, pram and wheelchair users.
- The panel strongly advises the team to consider and include more permanent features in the public realm. For example, seating, sculpture and/or water features potentially commissioned by local artists. This would be the infrastructure that ensures spontaneous activation of the space. It not only creates an identity, but also fosters a sense of ownership among the local community and regular users. Without this, the panel is concerned that the scheme relies too heavily on programming for activation, which could be vulnerable to financial pressures.
- The panel finds the proposition of trees at every other level of the building compelling and urges the team to pursue this to a level of detail such that it can be realised.

Heritage and Conservation

- The design team is committed to continuing the development of the archaeology report to fully investigate and protect heritage assets, ensuring that historical elements are preserved and respected.
- The panel identifies an opportunity to use the public realm to connect the ecclesiastical spaces in this area, creating an additional sense of place and narrative for this part of the City.
- The panel is unable to comment on archaeological proposal as it was not shown in presentation, but comments that in principle, interpretation of the archaeology in the public realm is encouraged.

Future Reviews

The panel thanks the design team for its clear presentation of the scheme and is available to review the scheme again if requested to do so by the GLA.

Declaration of interest

Panel member [REDACTED] practice, AHMM are currently commissioned by AXA REIM on a separate project.