

LONDON

REVIEW PANEL

Peter Bennison,
Meadow Residential
50 Great Marlborough Street
London
W1F 7JS

February 2019

Dear Peter,

London Review Panel: Pentavia Redevelopment

Please find enclosed the London Review Panel report following the review of the proposals for Pentavia Redevelopment on 6th February 2019. On behalf of the Panel, I would like to thank you for your participation in the review and offer the Panel's ongoing support as the scheme's design develops.

Yours sincerely,



Claire Bennie
Mayor's Design Advocate

cc.

All meeting attendees

Jules Pipe, Deputy Mayor for Planning, Regeneration and Skills

Debbie Jackson, Executive Director of Development, Enterprise and Environment, GLA



**Report of London Review Panel meeting
Pentavia Redevelopment**

Wednesday 6 February 2019
City Hall, Queen's Walk, SE1 2AA

London Review Panel

Claire Bennie (chair)
Russell Curtis
Irène Djao-Rakitine

Attendees

Pooja Agrawal	GLA Regeneration
James Keogh	GLA Planning
Nick Ray	GLA Planning
Carl Griffiths	LB Barnet
Konstantinos Kalogeropoulos	LB Barnet
Tom Bolton	Frame Projects

Report copied to

Debbie Jackson	GLA
Jules Pipe	Deputy Mayor for Planning, Regeneration and Skills

Confidentiality

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.

Project name and site address

Pentavia Retail Park, Watford Way, London NW7 2ET

Presenting team

Peter Bennison	Meadow Residential
Lee Goldberg	Meadow Residential
Earle Arney	AFK
James Cheung	AFK
Richard Broome	Outerspace
Ben Ford	Quod
Sophia Rainsford	Quod
Neil Wells	Quod

Introduction

The site is currently occupied by a large low-rise retail unit and a smaller restaurant unit, formerly operating as Pentavia Retail Park and now in temporary use. It is bounded by major infrastructure, with the A1 to the east and the M1 and Thameslink railway to the west. To the north, the site is bounded by Bunns Lane and Dove Close, a residential cul-de-sac, and to the south is a petrol filling station. There is no pedestrian access to the site, which can currently be reached only via a slip road from the A1. Redevelopment is proposed, including the demolition of all existing buildings and the construction of 843 residential units along with commercial units and residential facilities. Buildings will range in height from 5 to 15 storeys, and form two blocks surrounding central public space. A new pedestrian access route will be created from Bunns Lane, and the development will also deliver open space, landscaping, car parking, acoustic mitigation and highway and pedestrian improvements. A planning application for the site was refused by Barnet Council in December 2017. The application was called in by the Mayor of London in December 2018 and GLA officers have since worked with the applicant to optimise the scheme's density, increasing heights across the development by one to two storeys, with the exception of the 15-storey tower at the south of the site. A Mayoral hearing is scheduled for May 2019.

Planning authority views

Barnet officers noted that their recommendation for refusal was based principally on the height and scale of the scheme and the way it relates to its context, as well as on insufficient affordable housing provision and the lack of a Section 106 Agreement.

GLA officers asked the panel for its views, in particular, on a number of key areas: the urban design of the block, including layout, massing and architecture; the quality of the proposed residential units; the accessibility and connectivity of the development; landscaping of the site, including pedestrian access routes, and the quality of public spaces.

London Review Panel's views

Summary

The panel understands the exceptionally difficult nature of the site. However the panel is concerned that the design approach, in its current form, will not provide a sufficiently high quality and liveable residential environment for future residents. While it supports the Mayor of London's urban intensification policies, the panel notes that these depend upon development taking place in sustainable locations. The panel suggests the planning authority should decide whether the constraints on this site permit the building of homes of an acceptable quality.

The panel heard the design team state that the proposed built form is the only possible approach to managing noise and pollution. The panel was unable to determine, due to lack of any other options being shown or any technical information being shared, whether any other basic layout arrangements would be possible on this site. Further evidence needs to be provided on this matter, as well as further thinking being given to the architectural expression, form and massing to achieve higher quality placemaking.

A development of acceptable quality on this site will depend on improved urban integration. The site must be connected to its broader neighbourhood to attract the footfall needed to support commercial units, and to link residents with transport and the wider area. The panel suggests that more research, for example using pedestrian movement analysis tools, is needed to understand how the development can be connected to movement networks across the neighbourhood to ensure it is not segregated. Closer connections should be considered in particular at the northern site boundary, and the option of a connecting public space at the southern end of the site considered as part of a vision for the petrol station site. Non-residential uses should be clustered to help attract a critical mass of people.

The panel also raises concerns that high service charges will be needed to cover maintenance costs for multiple lifts, unadopted landscape, underground car parking and podium planting. It asks the applicants to produce a management plan to demonstrate that the quality of the development will not be undermined by these costs, and can be maintained in the long-term. These comments are developed in more detail below.

Form and massing

- The panel makes the point that, if site constraints allowed, a tighter street pattern with more, smaller, buildings would be preferable to the proposed approach of two very large buildings around a single central space. The panel considered that such an arrangement may produce homes and spaces which were sheltered from the hostile boundary environments. The panel noted that the design team has explored alternative approaches, and noted their assertion that air quality and noise issues mean that a defensive plan is required to create acceptable living conditions. The authority should insist on incontrovertible evidence on this point.
- Nevertheless, the panel is concerned that this design approach, born of necessity, is not guaranteed to result in a successful, liveable or pleasant place. It questions whether there is a positive precedent for developments of this nature, with such large blocks surrounding a long, publicly accessible central space with a road.
- The panel does not feel that the proposed building heights represent a problem in this location, but thinks that more sophisticated thinking is needed about the way that form and massing create townscape quality.

- Currently the scheme relies on three basic façade types: framed positive; recessive; and tower elements. The panel thinks that a more creative and nuanced approach to architectural expression is essential to relieve and humanise a development in this challenging context.

Residential units

- The panel raises concerns over the quality of residential accommodation in the development, particularly the large number of north-east facing, single aspect flats, and those with west-facing bedrooms overlooking the M1, with windows that do not open.
- While it understands the site and policy constraints that have led to this design approach, it questions whether it will result in flats of acceptable quality. It feels that it is important that the development is a place that residents can enjoy, and that it can provide them with a good quality of life.
- At a more detailed level, plans should be adjusted to remove corner to corner overlooking between buildings, which will impact on privacy in flats.

Accessibility and connectivity

- As the site is currently an island, with no pedestrian access, it is particularly important that the development connects to surrounding communities and forms an active part of a movement network. It is therefore essential that analysis is carried out, for example using pedestrian movement analysis tools, to consider how its layout would function as part of the wider street network.
- Connections should be considered from the southern end of the development to the petrol station. There is the opportunity to create an entrance into the development at this point, such as an urban square. While the applicant does not have control over the petrol station site, it has future development potential and should therefore be included as part of the wider vision for the project.
- The panel suggests more work should also be done to ensure the northern edge of the development creates a stronger relationship with the residential area to the north of the site. The potential of this edge should be explored to assess how it can be directly related to the development.
- The scheme requires a pleasant route connecting residents to bus stops on the A1, which will be the closest transport link to the site but currently passes through a dark underpass. Particular attention should be paid to ensuring public realm improvements are made to this route, beyond the site boundary.

Non-residential uses

- Connections beyond the development will also prove critical to the viability of businesses. The ambition should be to create a new centre for the wider area, not just for the development, to maximise its chances of success.
- There is a risk that the commercial units on the site will only be used by residents, but only around 1,500 people will live on the site, which is a low number to sustain the non-residential uses proposed. It is crucial that these uses, which are integral to the development, are inherently viable. A plan is needed to ensure that businesses remain open, and also that they open from the first day of occupation. This should include consideration of whether businesses will require subsidy.

- The non-residential uses in the development are currently spread along the central spine, but the panel suggests they should be clustered at either end of the central space to focus activity and help generate footfall.

Public realm

- The panel considers that the design of the central public space for the development will not meet the needs of residents for private or shared private amenity space. Consideration should be given to how spaces can be designed to provide residents with locations dedicated to their use, rather than creating a large public space. Play space of various kinds should also be included.
- Clustering non-residential uses will require designs for gardens and building edges to be adjusted. The landscaping approach could be varied more to suit adjacent uses, for example with waiting areas around shops, and private as well as public spaces.
- A programming strategy should form part of the public space design approach, with events and temporary uses integrated as part of an activation concept.
- Consideration should be given to how the development can be as generous as possible to the wider area through public realm design. For example, the scheme could contribute to improvements to Mill Hill Park to the north of the site, to maximise its amenity value for neighbours and development residents.

Management and maintenance

- The panel is concerned that the service charge requirements for the site, which have yet to be analysed, will be very high and could undermine its potential to create a successful place.
- The combination of a very high lift-to-flat ratio, unadopted streets, planting on a podium, and an underground car park will make the development expensive to manage, and could undermine its medium and long-term sustainability. A management study and resulting plan is essential to demonstrate that this development can work.
- The landscaping is currently sophisticated, and will require high levels of maintenance, but the panel suggests this approach should be reconsidered. A less formal approach would be cheaper to maintain, while still delivering a high quality residential environment. Higher impact expenditure, for example on trees, should be prioritised.

Next steps

- The panel asks that the design team, local planning authority and GLA give consideration to its comments – to help achieve a new neighbourhood that can support a good quality of life. It is available to review future iterations of the designs as they develop.