

SOUTHWARK DESIGN REVIEW PANEL REPORT

12th NOVEMBER 2012

(Confidential in advance of a planning application)

Chair: John Burrell

Panel Members: Reinhold Schmaderer, Justin Nicholls, Tim Quick, Je Ahn

Architects: Rolfe Judd

Case Officer: Laura Webster

Design Officer: Norman Brockie

Client: Universities Superannuation Scheme

Project Description:

The site is surrounded by residential dwellings, a mixture of flats and houses and range in height from 2 to 12 storeys. There is no predominant style of architecture or form to the buildings but the common material is brick or render.

The proposed massing is in 2 parts. One part consists of Weston Street, the corner (Weston Street / Long Lane) and the central “link” element of Long Lane. The second part consists of the east wing. The Weston Street heights start by referencing the heights of the Leather Market buildings and rises to the corner of Long Lane. The corner has been given additional height as this element is seen as a “marker” for the crossroads junction at Weston Street / Long Lane. The Long Lane heights show the east wing referencing the adjacent eastern development and also mark the beginning of a more modern denser townscape. There is also a “link” element to the centre of the Long Lane elevation which is lower in height to provide a transition between the corner and the east wing.

INTENTIONS

The Chair thanked the architects for their clear presentation which included typical plans, an elevational strategy, precedent images, sketch-up views and a sketch massing model in its context. Sections showing the scale of the buildings in relation to the adjacent built form were not presented. The Panel raised a number of questions about the ambitions of the design. These questions related to the nature of the amenity spaces around the site as well as the distribution of mass in the development, the proposed mix of uses and the servicing strategy. Whilst they acknowledged the efforts of the architects, they felt the scheme raised a number of significant concerns relating to the arrangement of the development on its site, its proposed scale and massing and the design of the public realm which meant they were not able to support the scheme at this stage and invited the designers to revise their proposals to address these issues.

SITE LAYOUT

The arrangement of buildings on the site is an important aspect of this design. The Panel questioned the U-shaped arrangement on the site which effectively divides the site into two separate spaces: one at the heart of the development which includes private residential amenity, disabled parking, and servicing for the site; and one along

the eastern edge which is a little more than a corridor to the rear of the site leading nowhere in particular. Whilst they applauded the instinct of the architects to create a route through to the listed Leather Market to the north they felt this was perhaps over-ambitious and created an ambiguous space on the northern edge of Long Lane which would be poorly used and could create a longer term issue in the area. They felt more could be achieved by a development that addressed Weston Street and Long Lane more deliberately; that will reinforce these important edges, and maximise the private amenity space at the centre of the site. Such an arrangement could potentially release the northern edge of the site for a more appropriate intervention. They also encouraged the architects to reconsider the servicing of the site, to minimise the need for turning within the curtilage and minimise its impact on the communal amenity.

SCALE – EFFECT ON ADJACENT FLATS

In terms of the scale of proposed development the Panel were satisfied that the corner of Weston Street and Long Lane has some significance. They noted the importance of Weston Street in the future of the area as it will lead to the new southern entrance to the re-developed London Bridge Station and felt that the scale of the scheme could rise to the corner to reflect this. However, they felt that this corner piece should be the tallest element on the site and should be articulated as a distinct corner element. They questioned the arbitrary nature of the stepped arrangement on Long Lane and felt the set-back at the upper floors lacked conviction. They felt the scale of the block along the eastern edge of the site was excessive in height; it overwhelmed the open spaces within the site and would intrude on the sensitive historic context of the conservation area and the listed buildings immediately to the north. They also questioned the plan arrangement which proposed bedrooms on the busy street frontages which receive full sun and living rooms on the courtyards which would receive very limited or no sunlight.

SIZE, LOCATION AND ARRANGEMENT OF PUBLIC AND SHARED PRIVATE SPACE

The Panel felt the public realm for the site, whilst appearing generous, had been poorly articulated and ambiguous in its character. The ambiguous nature of the two spaces, the dominance of parking and servicing and the left-over character of the landscaping raised serious concerns over the quality of the design. They questioned why these two spaces needed to be separate and felt that the dimensions of the site did not offer the designers the luxury of two separate spaces. Further, they questioned the quality of the central space which includes parking, servicing, and communal amenity. They noted and noted that such communal amenity will need to meet current daylight and sunlight standards which had not been presented.

MIX AND GROUND FLOOR USES

Finally, the Panel welcomed the mix of uses proposed for the site especially at the ground floor where it acts as a 'buffer' to the public pavement and felt more could be delivered by way of commercial space to compliment the commercial character of Weston Street and could be accessed from a generous and well-considered central court. They suggested that the scheme could benefit from a reinterpretation of the local characteristic of the area which includes 'yards' accessed through narrow routes which offer glimpses to the spaces beyond and lead to a courtyard arrangement of residential and/or commercial accommodation.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Panel were not able to endorse this scheme at this stage. They raised significant concerns over the arrangement of built form on the site, the height and scale of the proposed development especially the block on the eastern edge of the site and the ambiguous and poorly defined public realm which is divided into two poorly designed and articulated spaces. They challenged the architects to review their design and to revise their proposals to address their concerns.