

London Borough of Camden Design Review Panel

Report of Formal Review Meeting: 135-149 Shaftesbury Avenue

Friday 10 November 2023
Camden Council, 5 Pancras Square, London N1C 4AC

Panel

Hari Phillips (chair)
Amber Fahey
Barbara Kaucky
Chloë Phelps
Ty Tikari

Attendees

| | |
|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Bethany Cullen | London Borough of Camden |
| Kevin Fisher | London Borough of Camden |
| Victoria Hinton | London Borough of Camden |
| Edward Jarvis | London Borough of Camden |
| Tom Bolton | Frame Projects |
| Shona Henry | Frame Projects |

Apologies / report copied to

| | |
|----------------|--------------------------|
| Colette Hatton | London Borough of Camden |
| Alex Kresovic | London Borough of Camden |
| Daniel Pope | London Borough of Camden |
| Daren Zuk | London Borough of Camden |
| Deborah Denner | Frame Projects |

Confidentiality

This is a pre-application review, and therefore confidential. As a public organisation Camden Council 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.

CONFIDENTIAL

1. Project name and site address

The former Saville Theatre, 135-149 Shaftesbury Avenue, London WC2H 8AH

2. Presenting team

| | |
|------------------|---------------|
| Trevor Morriss | SPPARC |
| Dom Fanning | SPPARC |
| Gareth Fox | Montagu Evans |
| Louisa Smith | Montagu Evans |
| Chris Ray | Yoo Capital |
| Andrew Thorpe | Yoo Capital |
| Charlotte Dutton | Horley |

3. Planning authority briefing

The existing building, seven storeys in height, including a double-storey basement was originally constructed as the Saville Theatre and is currently in use as a four-screen cinema operated by Odeon. It is a steel-framed building clad in red-brown brick with an artificial stone plinth and frieze to the front. Along the top of the façade are a series of plaques, which represent 'art through the ages'.

The building is Grade II listed. The site is not located in a conservation area but sits in between the Seven Dials Conservation Area (to the south) and the Denmark Street Conservation Area (to the north). There are no listed buildings immediately adjoining the site, but there are a number nearby including the Grade II listed Phoenix Theatre 50 metres to the north-west. To the north of the site is the Phoenix Community Garden public open space.

Planning permission was recently refused for the comprehensive refurbishment of the listed building and the addition of a two-storey roof extension with a new four-screen cinema and spa at basement levels, a ground floor restaurant and bar, a 94-bed hotel and a roof terrace and bar. There were 14 reasons for refusal including land use, harm to listed building, and design. This scheme was reviewed twice by the panel, in February and April 2018.

The current scheme adds a five-storey roof extension plus setback plant room, and four levels of basement. The roof extension will incorporate a hotel with approximately 200 rooms, and the basement will deliver the reinstatement of the former theatre use, with a capacity ranging from 350 to 500 seats.

Officers asked for the panel's comments on the height, scale, and massing of the proposals; potential harm to the listed building from the proposed extension; impact on the two adjacent conservation areas; overshadowing of Phoenix Community Garden; impact on neighbouring daylight and sunlight; noise disturbance from roof plant; how to retain the significance of the theatre as the primary use; and the sustainability of the proposals, including basement excavation.



CONFIDENTIAL

4. Design Review Panel's views

Summary

The panel supports the principle of bringing the building back into use as a theatre, but thinks that the designs require reassessment and further design development to ensure the quality required for redeveloping a listed building. Full information is needed on the historic fabric being removed. A more comprehensive justification is required for excavation of a basement, including showing that the existing building cannot host a different type of auditorium, and making the case for its carbon impact. While the height proposed can be justified for a high-quality design, more work is needed to show that the proposed massing is the right approach for the listed building and its setting. The panel is concerned that the massing will have a negative impact on The Phoenix Garden to the rear, and asks that options to mitigate the impact including stepping back are considered. Detailed analysis of the overshadowing impact on the garden and on residential properties is needed.

The panel asks for design development to provide greater clarity on architectural approach and the intended relationship between old and new elements. The materiality and detailing of the extension must be of exceptional quality, and further detail is therefore needed to demonstrate that this will be the case, including full representation of the way the building will look. The panel suggests the building should be more publicly accessible, and asks for thinking on how to activate the rear elevation at ground floor level. The front entrance should be opened out to provide a dramatic foyer experience, and an upper bar level bar considered. Sustainability should drive design decisions, with the embodied carbon of materials revisited, a circular economy strategy developed, and if a double skin façade is proposed it should contribute to the energy strategy. Innovative ways to reduce the hotel's operational carbon impact should be considered. The hotel should be designed to allow for future adaptation. Construction impact on residents should be mitigated.

These comments are expanded below.

Overall approach

- The panel strongly supports the principle of bringing the site back into use as a theatre. However, it does not feel it has the information needed to reach a judgement on the impact the proposals will have on the internal fabric of the listed building. A full survey of the listed fabric should be presented to show what exactly remains of the original interiors, so the impact of the loss can be balanced against the benefits the scheme will deliver. Without survey information, it is not possible for the panel to reach a conclusion on whether the proposals provide public benefit that offsets their impact.
- With both the hotel and the new theatre predominately extending beyond the fabric of the existing structure, the space being added is much greater than the volume of the current building. The panel would like to see more information showing why a theatre cannot be incorporated within the existing fabric, and that the space that already exists cannot be used differently.



CONFIDENTIAL

- The panel also finds the extent of the proposed basement excavation problematic. The amount of digging and construction required below ground will consume a significant amount of carbon. More work is needed to justify the project's environmental impact and to justify this approach.

Height and massing

- The panel does not consider the proposed height of the building to be a problem in principle. However, it has doubts that the proposed additional of extra storeys above the existing theatre is an appropriate strategy for redeveloping the building. There is a risk that the extension will overwhelm the theatre below, detracting from its identity.
- The current proposals needs further justification to show that they represent the best solution, including massing studies to show how the approach was developed, and how the extension responds to its setting. The panel asks for further explanation of why the proposals represent the best solution, especially for the listed building.
- The panel is also concerned that the rear façade of the building will create an oppressive presence next to The Phoenix Garden. The bulk and scale of the sheer elevation on this side of the building seem out of scale with the garden, and does not reflect the stepped massing of neighbouring buildings, which establishes a lower cornice line. This rear massing will have a negative visual impact on an important community asset. If the building is to have a positive relationship to local communities, this should be reflected in design principles. The panel asks for more thinking on how the impact of the extension on the garden can be reduced, for example by narrowing it or by stepping additional storeys back from New Compton Street to mitigate their height.
- Stepping the massing back would also create the opportunity for roof terraces to provide amenity space for the hotel, potentially incorporating gardens.
- The panel is also concerned that the building will overshadow The Phoenix Garden. Information is needed to show what the overshadowing impact will be at different times of day and year but, as this was not presented, the panel is unable to judge whether the impact of the building will have an excessively damaging impact on an important community amenity. More extensive daylight and sunlight test results are needed to address this concern.
- Tests should include an assessment of the building's impact on the planting in the garden, and on the viability of the green roof of The Phoenix Garden Community Centre. The daylight and sunlight impact on New Compton Street residential properties should also be considered.

Architecture

- The panel emphasises that the architectural quality of the extension must be exceptional to match the quality of composition and form in the listed building,



CONFIDENTIAL

and to enhance and complement its qualities. The panel thinks that further design development is needed to achieve the level of quality required.

- The panel is also unclear about the intended architectural relationship between the old and new elements: whether the extension is intended as an extrusion of the existing building, appearing light and glassy, or a separate pavilion sitting above it and drawing attention. Further thinking is needed about the conceptual drivers for the architectural approach.
- There is a risk that the extension will look heavy, especially during the day, rather than sitting lightly above the theatre building. The success of the design will depend on the balance between old and new massing. More detail is therefore needed on the design and materiality of the façade to show exactly how it will appear. For example, the panel is concerned that the inner façade skin is not fully shown in illustrations and will be a more significant part of the building's appearance. Likewise, hotel room curtains will make a substantial contribution to appearance in reality.
- An extension to a listed building must immaculately detailed and considered. The panel therefore asks that a greater level of detail is provided to give it confidence that it can fully consider the way the extension will appear.

Ground floor

- The panel thinks, although the ground floor is public, it currently feels private. With only one entrance on Shaftesbury Avenue, it will be difficult to provide the restaurant with visibility and attract customers. To counter this more could be done to create public accessibility at ground floor level on the rear elevation of the building. Thought should be given to how the layout can be rearranged to activate the back of the building, and offer more to The Phoenix Garden frontage.
- The panel feels that more could also be done to reinterpret or reference the original theatre foyer and create a dramatic entrance experience. The stairs are currently close to the entrance, but the space would be improved if the volume of the space could be opened up in plan as well as in height.
- The panel also suggests that jump lifts could connect directly to a public terrace lobby and bar with a view, at the point where the new extension springs from the existing building. This would help to give the building more public presence and offer greater public benefit. Herzog & de Meuron's Elbphilharmonie building in Hamburg provides a useful precedent.

Sustainability

- The panel would like to see carbon reduction objectives driving the overall design approach more clearly. For example more consideration should be given to reducing the project's embodied carbon impact. A range of material



CONFIDENTIAL

options should be presented to demonstrate that the double-skin glazed façade approach is the optimum approach in terms of its carbon impact.

- A material reuse and recycling strategy should be developed, as an important part of the environmental strategy where significant amounts of the existing building are being removed.
- The panel suggests that the extension's pleated glass outer skin could contribute more to the building's thermal performance. Variations in the pleats should be driven by façade orientation to help manage overheating, as part of the building's energy strategy.
- Options should be developed to replace existing windows at the rear of the building to ensure their u-values align with those in the triple-glazed extension.
- The panel notes that the environmental strategy should also consider the operation of the hotel as well as the theatre. This could include an innovative wastewater heat recovery system, as hot water use will be large part of the hotel's operational carbon.
- The panel suggests that space within the front façade of the existing building could be used for plant, reducing the amount of basement space required.
- The panel asks for more consideration of how the public realm around the building could be improved as part of the project, for example by introducing sustainable drainage systems to improve water management.

Flexibility

- The panel asks about the future flexibility of the building. As well as ensuring the theatre can adapt to a different tenant if needed, consideration should be given to how the hotel can adapt. The requirements of the proposed operator are specific, and the panel is concerned that the double-skin façade design and the floor-to-ceiling heights will mean it cannot be converted to an alternative use. More consideration is needed of how the building can be designed with the flexibility to enable a long life.

Construction

- The panel notes that the construction of this proposal on a tight and busy site will be complex and is likely to have an impact on surrounding residents in terms of noise, vehicle movements and vibration. The panel notes the need to showing how a construction management strategy will mitigate these impacts.

Next steps

The panel would like to review the scheme again, once the applicant has had the opportunity to respond to its comments.

