

London Borough of Camden Design Review Panel

Report of Chair's Review Meeting: Lamorna, Dartmouth Park Road

Friday 12 April 2024 Camden Council, 5 Pancras Square, London N1C 4AC

Panel

Hari Phillips (chair) Kaye Stout

Attendees

Sophie Baldwin	London Borough of Camden
Kevin Fisher	London Borough of Camden
Victoria Hinton	London Borough of Camden
Tom Bolton	Frame Projects
Hanako Littlewood	Frame Projects

Apologies / report copied to

Alex Bushell	London Borough of Camden
Bethany Cullen	London Borough of Camden
Colette Hatton	London Borough of Camden
Edward Jarvis	London Borough of Camden
Richard Limbrick	London Borough of Camden
Joy Mulandi	London Borough of Camden
Daniel Pope	London Borough of Camden
Daren Zuk	London Borough of Camden

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.

1. Project name and site address

Lamorna, Dartmouth Park Road, London NW5 1SU

2. Presenting team

Katerina Dionysopoulou	Bureau de Change
Billy Mavropoulos	Bureau de Change

3. Planning authority briefing

The site, on the south side of Dartmouth Park Road, contains a two-storey singlefamily dwelling dating from the 1920s known as 'Lamorna'. The existing building on site is not statutorily listed, but is located within the Dartmouth Park Conservation Area. The conservation area statement does not include the property, which results in the building having a 'neutral' contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area.

The proposal comprises a residential scheme to provide six new self-contained residential units on the site within a new five-storey (plus basement) building. The scheme requires the full demolition of the existing building. The architecture is a modern addition to the street, but with proportions and articulation that aim to fit it into the context. The building uses a façade system of prefabricated parts, to reduce construction waste and time, with glass fibre reinforced concrete the preferred option. Each flat would have a private outdoor space in the form of a balcony or terrace.

The panel previously reviewed the scheme in September 2023. Since then, the proposals have been amended from a fully contemporary approach to a building that contextually re-imagines traditional elements and techniques. The top floor has also been reduced in size to minimise its visual impact; and the ground floor flat has been reduced in size and set back to provide more privacy, and to allow for more daylight to the below-ground flat.

Camden officers asked for the panel's views in particular on how the building relates to the surrounding conservation area; on roof form; on whether the massing is sufficiently modulated; on fenestration detail; and on ground floor expression, and the way the proposed ground floor arches relate to the street scene.

4. Design Review Panel's views

Summary

The panel considers that the proposals have progressed in a positive direction since the previous review meeting. It supports the scheme in principle, but asks for some further refinements to ensure a high-quality building that is appropriate for the conservation area. While the proposed height can be justified as part of the scale change along the south side of Dartmouth Park Road, the panel asks that more recessive materials are tested for the set-back upper storey, to reduce the impression of height in views from the east. Illustrations should show building height more clearly in context.

The panel thinks the architecture is inventive, enjoyable, potentially exciting and more strongly related to the surrounding context. It would, however, benefit from some simplification to achieve a calmer effect. Stronger horizontal elements could reduce the impression of scale and connect the building to the proportions of the buildings on either side. The ground floor arches seem out of place in relation to neighbouring houses, and should be reworked, potentially becoming taller. The panel suggests using a single material for the front elevation to drive a more coherent and elegant architectural language.

The rear elevation needs further work to mitigate overlooking. The panel suggests removing the blank bays, taking measures to prevent overlooking to the rear, demonstrated using sections. The use of waste-based bricks is positive, but the panel would like to see how the carbon saving balances against the carbon impact of basement excavation.

These comments are expanded below.

Massing

- The panel thinks, on balance, that the proposed height of the building could be acceptable, but suggests that further measures are needed to mitigate its impact. The set-back top storey fits well with the rhythm of the neighbouring rooflines in views along Dartmouth Park Road from the west. However, in views from the east the top storey appears too dominant in relation to No. 1 Dartmouth Park Road.
- From the east, a greater proportion of the setback bays can be seen, making the top storey appear larger than the floors below, although it is not. The top storey also looks dark, making it more conspicuous. This may be partly due to the visualisation. However, rather than responding to the slate roofs of the neighbouring buildings, the panel suggests that more recessive material options should be tested, and other measures to help it sit more comfortably in views from this direction.
- Illustrations showing the view from the east would also benefit from a perspective that show more clearly the datum the scheme shares with No. 5

and No. 7 Dartmouth Park Road, which is currently obscured by a tree. An elevation of Dartmouth Park Road showing the proposal within the wider street setting would be helpful in justifying the height.

Architecture

- The panel thinks that the proposals are characterful and enjoyable. The architecture has the potential to produce a high-quality building that will add interest and pleasure to the street. It particularly likes the detailing around the top storeys, the arched profile of the fourth-floor windows and the way the design has been tethered to an analysis of the surrounding buildings.
- However, the panel considers that some elements of the proposals would benefit from adjustment. The panel thinks that the dominance of vertical elements in the front elevation increase the impression of scale, and give the building an appearance that suggests a commercial character. The adjacent houses, from No. 1 eastwards, have façades based around strong horizontal separation between floors. Introducing stronger horizontal elements would help the scale of the building to match that of its neighbours.
- As part of this, the white balconies between the second and third storeys could be more pronounced and brought forward. This would help to connect the building to both No. 1 and to the roofline of, First House, to the west.
- The panel also thinks the ground floor arches need further work. Neighbouring buildings are flat-fronted at ground floor, and recessed arches seem incongruous alongside. Although the tableaux above the arches and the glazing that extends below ground level are interesting features, the panel suggests the arches require reworking. This could include making them taller, as they appear compressed in comparison to the ground floor openings on the neighbouring buildings to the east.

Materials

- The panel suggests that the front elevation would benefit from a stronger material identity, based around the use of a single material rather than both brick and stone. This would help to simplify and calm the architectural language. The panel notes previous Bureau de Change projects, such as The Interlock, that play very effectively with a single material. Bricks could be given a greater presence, or alternatively the frontage could be entirely stone.
- If stone were used, the brick datum could be removed from the top of the third storey, and a softer roofline created using the curve of the window arches.
- The panel also thinks that the brick piers which terminate on top of the ground floor arches, should provide support down to the ground. Extending these would give brick a greater presence in the front elevation, and make the stone elements less prominent.

- The panel notes that the structural approach will have a significant effect on the building's architecture. If the building were to use load-bearing masonry, as suggested, it would have an impact on the architectural language of the design. The panel suggests that this decision should be taken before a planning application on which structural approach to use, to help determine the architectural approach.
- The panel also recommends reworking visualisations of the front elevation. It thinks that they underplay the three-dimensional qualities of the upper storey glass bays and the balcony recesses which are important aspects of the building's quality.

Rear elevation

- The panel thinks that the rear elevation feels significantly less resolved than the front elevation. The visualisations do not convey the building's material qualities well, for example in relation to obscured glass in the bathroom, so it is difficult to understand how the building will actually appear. Further visualisations should be developed.
- The rear elevation could be simplified by removing the blank bay on the west side, as it is decorative rather than functional.
- The panel emphasises the need to represent the relationship between the new building and its neighbours clearly. Sections should be produced to show the scheme alongside neighbouring properties.
- The main impact from overlooking is likely to on properties to the rear, on Chetwynd Road. Bedroom windows currently look directly out towards these properties. It will be important to take measures to prevent overlooking, including careful design of windows and viewing angles and obscuring of the bathroom window; and to show that what has been done to mitigate any impact on privacy.
- The panel also notes the risk that large, south-facing rear windows will cause overheating. Rear elevation designs should also address this.

Internal layouts

- The panel thinks that the internal layouts have improved significantly since the last review, and are now more generous.
- However, it cautions that internal servicing, particularly air source heat pumps and mechanical ventilation and heat recovery systems, will take up significant space. These systems must be planned in before the ultimate quality of the flats can be assessed, and to demonstrate that the proposed approach to climate control can be delivered. The noise and visual impact of the air source heat pumps should be understood and mitigated.

Sustainability

• The panel has some concerns about the carbon impact of basement excavation. However, it is intrigued by the proposed use of Stonecycle's waste-based bricks, and a loadbearing stone structure, which have the potential to rebalance the project's embodied carbon footprint.

Next steps

The panel is available to review the proposals again, if required by Camden officers.

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