

London Borough of Camden Design Review Panel

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

Friday 15 September 2023

Camden Council, 5 Pancras Square, London N1C 4AC

Panel

Hari Phillips (chair)

Kaye Stout

Attendees

Victoria Hinton

London Borough of Camden

Daren Zuk

London Borough of Camden

Tom Bolton

Frame Projects

Shona Henry

Frame Projects

Apologies / report copied to

Ewan Campbell

London Borough of Camden

Bethany Cullen

London Borough of Camden

Kevin Fisher

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Colette Hatton

London Borough of Camden

Edward Jarvis

London Borough of Camden

Richard Limbrick

London Borough of Camden

George McKenzie

London Borough of Camden

Daniel Pope

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.

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1. Project name and site address

Lamorna, Dartmouth Park Road, London NW5 1SU

2. Presenting team

Katerina Dionysopoulou
Billy Mavropoulos

Bureau de Change
Bureau de Change

3. Planning authority briefing

The site, on the south side of Dartmouth Park Road, contains a two-storey single-family 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.

Camden officers asked for the panel's views on the height and massing of the proposals, and their presence in views; how well the architecture fits within the conservation area and with buildings either side; architectural detail; the relationship of the building to houses at the rear; the number of flats; and the size of the flats, especially bathrooms and kitchens.



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4. Design Review Panel's views

Summary

The panel considers there is potential for a high-quality contemporary development on the site of Lamorna, but thinks that the current proposals are too tall for the context. The building looks like a mini-tower rather than a house, and is a storey higher than would appear comfortable in the conservation area setting. While the architecture of the top storey could be rethought to reduce the impression of height, the building may need to be lowered to fit into its setting. The panel is also unconvinced that a basement will provide good quality living space, or that the extra embodied concrete that it requires can be justified. Internal layouts need to be developed to meet space requirements and to include all necessary elements before the panel can judge whether the proposed number of flats can be successfully accommodated on the site.

The panel supports an ambitious, contemporary architecture for the building but considers that current designs, especially the wide balcony openings in the front elevation, emphasise the bulk and horizontality of the building. An architectural approach should be developed that reflects the scale and verticality of surrounding buildings. Materials should be reconsidered to identify options that can provide more texture. More thinking is needed on how overlooking impacts can be mitigated for gardens to the rear of the property while still providing good quality bedrooms.

These comments are expanded below.

Height and massing

- The panel thinks that the proposed building is a storey too high for its setting. Although the roofline is at a comparable height to the taller of the semi-detached houses to the east, it appears larger because the top floor replicates the materials, detailing and similar footprint of the floors below. This means that it looks like a short tower, rather than a house that belongs alongside its neighbours.
- The panel suggests that varying the architecture of this floor could reduce the overall impression of bulk. However, it may be the case that the building should simply be a storey lower, stepping down towards the neighbouring building to the west to create a more comfortable relationship with the street context.
- The panel notes that the energy strategy for the building, which is yet to be developed, is likely to have a further impact on height. If air source heat pumps are included on the roof, with access arrangements and guardrails, the building will be taller than shown in current illustrations. These elements should be shown on drawings to illustrate the full impact of the proposals.



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- The panel also suggests that the floor-to-floor heights may need to increase to include the infrastructure that will be required in ceilings, which would also increase the overall height.
- Because these details are yet to be resolved, the panel is not in a position to comment on whether the number of flats proposed can be successfully accommodated on the site. Further design development is needed to provide a clearer understanding of the scale proposed.

Architecture

- The panel supports the principle of designing a contemporary building for the site. It likes elements of the proposed design, such as the corner windows on the front elevation. It considers there is potential to produce a high-quality piece of design, and encourages an innovative architectural approach.
- However, while the panel does not wish to diminish the design team's architectural ambition or suggest a pastiche approach, it feels that the scale and proportion of the current proposals appears out of place. In comparison with the semi-detached villas to the east the scale is jarring, with balconies the width of three bays in these houses. The balcony spaces also emphasise the horizontality of the building, in contrast to neighbours which emphasise verticality. The panel suggests more thinking on how these spaces can relate to the scale of openings in neighbouring buildings.
- The panel also notes that the design of the front elevation adds to the overall impression of bulk. The balcony cut-outs create large volumes which reinforce the overall impression of a large building. In comparison, the scale of the rear elevation works better because the inclusion of solid bays creates a vertical scale that fits with the conservation area.
- It also notes that each floor is the same height, unlike neighbouring houses which have smaller floors at upper levels, which also contributes to the impression of relative bulk.
- The panel asks for more thinking on how a contemporary architectural language can be developed that feels more related to the place, taking more cues from the scale of the Dartmouth Park Conservation Area.
- While the aspiration to use panels manufactured off-site is understood, the panel thinks that the results appear too plastic in illustrations and that more texture is needed. It encourages further thinking about the way materials can be used to give the building character.
- The panel also suggests that delivering the slender floor lines in the front elevation will be a challenge. The designs should be tested in detail to ensure all aspects can be delivered.



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Layout

- The panel is concerned that the apartment layouts, especially the bathrooms, do not meet Building Regulations M4(2) accessibility standards. These are minimum requirements and need to be incorporated into plans before the effectiveness of internal layouts can be judged. The panel feels that layouts may not work less well when adjusted to meet the required standards.
- The panel also asks for more work to incorporate interior details, for example storage, and mechanical ventilation and heat recovery systems. Considerations such as these could compromise layouts, and should be included so the quality of accommodation can be judged more accurately.
- The panel thinks that the inclusion of basement is problematic in terms of both quality of accommodation and sustainability. It queries the quality of daylight to this dwelling and is not convinced that basement space is appropriate for a family dwelling. It also questions whether the amount of concrete required to build the basement can be justified. If the lower ground were lifted in a similar way to the semi-detached houses to the east, the quality of the basement space could be more acceptable.
- The panel is concerned about the relationship of the flats to the rear gardens of houses in Chetwynd Road. Some units look directly onto gardens, and will be closer to properties than neighbours on Dartmouth Park Road. This will have a negative impact on the amenity of neighbouring properties and is likely to attract opposition from residents. It is also the case that master bedrooms at the rear of the building will have smaller windows than would be ideal. It is also important to achieve minimum daylight requirements for these rooms. The panel encourages more thinking on how to mitigate the impact of overlooking while providing high quality accommodation.
- The panel thinks that the proximity to the pavement of the main ground floor flat living space poses a privacy challenge. Elsewhere on the street residents use plants to screen windows at street level. Consideration should be given to how privacy can be provided.

Next steps

The panel is available to review the proposals again once the applicant has been able to respond to its comments.

