

London Borough of Camden Design Review Panel

Report of Formal Review Meeting: Charterhouse Street

Friday 11 October 2024

Camden Council, 5 Pancras Square, London N1C 4AC

Panel

Hari Phillips (chair)

Abigail Batchelor

Attendees

Sam Fitzpatrick	London Borough of Camden
Joy Mulandi	London Borough of Camden
Tom Bolton	Frame Projects
Shona Henry	Frame Projects

Apologies / report copied to

Bethany Cullen	London Borough of Camden
Victoria Hinton	London Borough of Camden
Edward Jarvis	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

19 Charterhouse Street, London EC1N 6SA

2. Presenting team

Lucy Browne-O'Sullivan	Morgan Capital
Alex Morgan	Morgan Capital
Agnieszka Kolacinska	DSDHA
Lee McKinley	DSDHA
Deborah Saunt	DSDHA
Natalie Rowland	Gerald Eve LLP
Monika Timska	Sweco

3. Planning authority briefing

The site is located on the junction of Charterhouse Street and Farringdon Road, where the boundary of the London Borough of Camden, Islington and the City of London meet. The building is not listed. However, there are several listed buildings in the surrounding area, including 25 and 27 Farringdon Road to the north, and the 1960s Poultry Market to the south-east. The building is five-to-six storeys in height with an additional floor on part of the roof.

Proposals are for the redevelopment of 19 Charterhouse Street, from its existing use as an office building, into a gateway building for Hatton Garden and Camden. The project comprises of retail space, activating Farringdon Road, Saffron Hill and Charterhouse Street.

The site falls within three protected vistas: Parliament Hill summit to St Paul's Cathedral; Kenwood (viewing gazebo) to St Paul's Cathedral; and Blackheath Point to St Paul's Cathedral. Additionally, the site is within the Hatton Garden Area and Archaeological Priority Area.

The proposal is for façade alterations and upper floor alterations, including a double height ground floor, cut-back at the Charterhouse Street and Saffron Hill corner. External terraces, landscaping, planting, and a five-storey bridge above the Saffron Hill steps is included. Balconies will front onto the Saffron Hill elevation.

In line with the Local Plan, proposals in Hatton Garden that increase the total gross internal floorspace by more than 200 square metres, must designate 50 per cent of the additional floorspace to affordable premises suitable for the jewellery sector.

Camden officers asked for the panel's comments, in particular, on the impact of the proposals in townscape views; the grain of the ground floor experience; the affordable jewellery workspace; the impact on nearby residents; the Saffron Hill façade, including the relation between balconies and the space; materiality, including whether the ground floor experience can be softened; transport issues; and sustainability.



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4. Design Review Panel's comments

Summary

The panel supports the overall approach to the project. The strategy for reusing the existing structure, and the addition of extra storeys, promise to deliver a high quality, sustainable building.

However, the panel thinks the impact of the extra height on Saffron Hill should be reduced. It encourages greater emphasis on vertical elements in the southern and eastern elevations, and the introduction of façade depth to reduce horizontality, and create more shading. The panel also thinks that the open rooftop lantern should be reconsidered. The plinth needs further refinement, including greater variation, so it is more responsive in scale to that of neighbouring buildings on Farringdon Road, and to the smaller scale of Saffron Hill.

The panel thinks the south-east corner of the building should be more public, including a retail entrance if possible. The ground floor cut-back to Saffron Hill creates a dead-end, and in the panel's view should be removed. Balconies projecting over Saffron Hill should be reconsidered. The existing column should be removed from the Saffron Hill stairs if at all possible. Balconies bridging the steps need a clear design rationale. The Saffron Hill ground floor should have windows with to introduce an active frontage. The concrete used should be as sustainable as possible. High quality materials included in the existing building should be reused wherever they can.

These comments are expanded below.

Height and massing

- The panel thinks that the addition of extra storeys to the height of the existing building is acceptable in principle and that the site, on an important junction, is suitable for a taller building.
- However, it thinks that the additional height creates too sheer a wall on the building's Saffron Hill frontage. The street here is narrow, and the proposals risk creating a canyon effect. The panel thinks that this elevation should be refined to reduce the impact of the additional height. A more sensitive treatment is needed, with the impact of the additional massing reduced. Options to help achieve this could include the addition of another roof garden, or extending the existing ninth floor garden to double height.

Elevations

- While the curve of the eastern façade along Farringdon Road is elegant, the panel thinks that the horizontal orientation of the windows undermines the effect. It suggests breaking up the horizontality of this elevation, emphasising the vertical elements to celebrate its curve.



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- The southern and eastern façades would also benefit from greater variation in their depth. The use of heavy masonry provides an opportunity to recess windows further. This can help to provide verticality, and more façade depth will also support the shading strategy for the building.
- The southern elevation in particular, would benefit from greater façade depth to provide more shade and reduce overheating. This would also improve its appearance in key views from the south.
- The panel suggests Wilkinson Eyre's 8 Finsbury Circus as an example of a building that uses vertical elements well on a curved façade.

Roof

- The panel thinks an inhabited roofscape, and the addition of green space at roof level, are very positive proposals, making up for the lack of green space at ground level. The size and shape of roof garden is also a positive factor, promising to create useable space.
- The panel is not convinced that the open lantern structure on the south-east corner of the building is a successful approach. It detracts from the stepped form of the building's upper storeys and feels like too insignificant gesture in relation to the scale of the building. It could be removed altogether, as the fluted upper elevations already give expression to the building's skyline.

Plinth

- The panel thinks more work is needed to develop the building's plinth. While it is designed to be rugged, it appears thin and two-dimensional. The balance between its span and weight should be refined further.
- The panel likes the way the upper storey additions are broken down into freer, more organic forms. It thinks that a similar approach could be applied to the plinth, to introduce more variation, as seen in buildings to the north on the same side of Farringdon Road.
- The scale of the plinth should also be reassessed, to create a more response relationship to the public realm. It could step down to ground floor level, allowing the building to engage more freely with the ground plane, and reflecting the lower shopfronts on the same side of Farringdon Road. The plinth line could also vary in response to the level change on the site and in relation to use, for example stepping up to highlight the entrance.
- The panel also thinks the plinth has an awkward relationship to Saffron Hill, and that triple height is too dominant on a narrow lane. It thinks the plinth should step down to the alley in response to its scale.



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Ground floor

- The panel thinks there is a tension between the architectural focus of the building on the corner of Farringdon Road and Charterhouse Street, and the location of the main entrance further north on Farringdon Road. It understands the rationale for locating the entrance, but asks for more thought on how the corner can be as public as possible. It would make sense to include an entrance, for example to a retail unit, at such a prominent location.
- The panel questions the decision to cut the ground floor of the building back at the south-west corner. This creates a dead-end triangle of space which does not provide access to Saffron Hill and has no clear function, which could attract anti-social behaviour.
- The panel also thinks that cutting the building back undermines the tightness of the entrance to Saffron Hill – an important part of the alley's surprise quality. The colonnade will open it up sufficiently without altering its character.

Saffron Hill

- The panel thinks the balconies projecting over Saffron Hill interrupt the flow of the narrow street. It asks for further thinking on the best way to ensure the elevation suits the character of the alley.
- While the panel thinks the balconies bridging the Saffron Hill stairs are an improvement on the existing structure, they may appear out of context unless clearly related to the buildings on either side, with a clear design rationale.
- The panel thinks that removing the central column from the Saffron Hill stairs would be very beneficial. It encourages discussions with the column's owners, De Beers, on how this can be achieved.
- The panel asks that the Saffron Hill ground frontage is as active as possible, with windows into useable spaces rather than stairs and lifts.

Materials

- The panel supports the use of a structural stone façade at upper levels to reduce the amount of metal required. It notes the need to ensure that if concrete is used, it is as environmentally friendly as possible.
- The panel notes the high quality of materials in the existing building, especially the Portland stone alongside the Saffron Hill stairs. It encourages the design team to reuse materials wherever possible.

Next steps

The panel is confident that the applicant can respond to its comments, in discussion with Camden officers.

