

King's Cross Development Forum

Planning reference number 2014/1455/P

“Reserved matters relating to alterations & refurbishment works to facilitate a proposed restaurant (Class A3) to Development Zone D as required by conditions 6, 9, 12, 14, 16-22, 27, 28, 31-36, 45-46, 48-49, 50A, 51, 55-56, 60 and 64-67 of outline planning permission granted 22/12/2006 subject to a S106 agreement (2004/2307/P) for a comprehensive, phased, mixed-use development together with revisions to the landscaping of Clarence Passage and the northern half of Battle Bridge Place (as approved within 2010/0872/P).”

Response by the Forum

The King's Cross Development Forum considers that the following matters merit further design work:

- *The entrance canopy.* The visualisations in the reports show the canopy to be slim and fairly elegant, but they are at variance with the drawings, so they give an incorrect impression of its appearance. On the scale drawings, the canopy is 0.25m deep, twice as much as in the visualisations; it will be too ‘chunky’ when seen from the side and will appear as a stark rectangular block. Its depth may be to conceal drainage falls towards the rear, but the effect is alien to the building. The canopy needs to be slimmed down, as perhaps the creator of the visualisations also felt; to achieve that we suggest it be tapered with the soffit sloping. Then it might appear more like a carrier for signage than an unadorned slab.

We question how the drainage from the canopy is to be arranged without redesign, if external pipework is to be avoided, since there is so little area of contact between the canopy and the solid wall to conceal pipework besides the structural support.

Overall the canopy jars with the lines of the building without providing much protection from the weather. We are unconvinced that its utility justifies its presence in any form.

- *External signage.* The visualisations show this to be discreetly modelled, but the details are not included in the application. Firm and clear conditions should be made to ensure that this intention is respected.
- *External seating areas.* All of the seating and associated objects should be made removable, to avoid unnecessary urban clutter when not in use. The clipped evergreen hedges screening the southern seating from the traffic are an element that is alien to the streetscape and their massing is quite intrusive; fences with a more sculptural quality should be considered instead.
- *Interior space.* The interior is a great disappointment: it should be a wonderful space but far too much is being crammed into the building. The spatial design entirely lacks grace. The lavatories confront the visitor, being located on the ground floor opposite the main entrance, behind a solid wall that is almost flush with the face of the well above. They prevent the interior from having its rightful visual impact, when it could be a fully open ground floor with its rows of columns supporting the open well and soaring roof spaces. The stairs, by extending to the back of the hall, lose any grandeur and further obscure the colonnades. The provision of a basement, ruled out in the brief, ought to be reconsidered so as to accommodate plant and toilet space. Further possibilities worth considering are the use of spiral stairs and the reconfiguration of the staff changing rooms to provide space for the public lavatories.

- *The balustrades.* In the visualisations the balcony parapets appear to be of structural glass; the details require clarification to ensure that they are not too clumsy. The staircases are shown as solid and opaque, which will obstruct the view of the space from the ground floor. Such substantial staircase parapets would be required by a long clear span; however, if there were discreet intermediate pillars, the parapets would not need to be structural and a more graceful solution could be produced. The stair parapets could then be unified with the balcony parapets, to beneficial effect.

The historic views show open balustrades. We understand the stairs in the now demolished forebuilding had cast-iron railings that were salvaged. They should be used as models for new work if they are not reusable themselves.

- *The mirror front of the box on the first floor.* Care will be needed to ensure that the mirror enhances the effect of the interior instead of diminishing it. As these details (and those relating to the balustrades) are not included in the application, they should be made subject to firm and clear conditions.
- *The roof tie-bars.* The roof tie-bars form a major intervention in the most significant and iconic aspect of the historic fabric. They change the impression of how the designer conceived the arches. Moreover they are visually obtrusive, the more so from being in pairs and therefore doubled in number. They should not be inserted unless a very thorough study has shown that stability is really a problem and that there is no better solution. In the reports there is no evidence of such a study.

There is existing cast-iron bracing at eaves level, but this is mentioned only incidentally in sketches in the appendices to the Listed Building Supporting Document. Being mostly hidden in the brickwork, it does not seem to have been investigated. It will have been purposefully provided by the original designer to restrain the arches. If it is shown to be inadequate, then it should be strengthened or supplemented rather than superseded, thus avoiding the need for tie-bars.