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Our reference: DCC/0407

## **LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN: CENTRE POINT**

Dear Gavin Miller,

Thank you for coming to Design Council Cabi's review meeting on 20 February 2013. We applaud the design team and the client for the sensitive approach taken to redeveloping the Centre Point complex that should breathe new life into a much loved London landmark. We welcome the aspiration to create a world-class square at St. Giles Circus and think the design team's proposals for this space show promise; their continued involvement in the design of this crucial element of the project will be critical to its success. A convincing case is made for the change of use of the tower to become a residential building. We welcome the decision to bring forward an affordable housing component on the site, the design of which appears well-considered. We appreciate the efforts to maximise the environmental performance of the buildings and would encourage continued exploration of this to ensure the scheme achieves as high an environmental target as possible.

### **A new public space for London**

We welcome the planned closure of St Giles High Street (North) to allow for a meaningful public space to be created at the heart of the Centre Point complex, an important step in reclaiming the area for the pedestrian. We acknowledge the challenge of transforming the traffic-dominated environment at Centre Point into a convivial place to enjoy and pass through, while maintaining its functional role as one of London's key public transport hubs. We also understand that the design team's plan for the public realm adapts the proposals developed for the site by Gillespies. We think that the emerging design for what will become one of London's major public spaces shows much promise. In particular, the bold geometry of the paving design, which evokes the era in which Centre Point was built, helpfully alludes to local pedestrian desire lines. However, given the historic association of Centre Point with its fountains, we think the opportunity to introduce an element of water in the design for the square could be explored. The proposed space should be capable of offering a mix of passive and active functions to give it life throughout the day. While serving as an attractive sun trap and counterpoint to the space fronting the busy Charing Cross Road, we think that additional tree planting to provide sufficient shade is worth considering. The design team



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should assure itself that the design manages the effects of down draughts from the tower at its base and under the bridge link. The scheme should also take into account the potential impact of development on the Denmark Place site, which will form an important southern edge to the space. The large numbers of people using the adjacent Crossrail exit potentially causes a pinch point in this location.

We support the decision to introduce a retail unit of a lightweight design underneath the bridge link. Equally, we understand the rationale for introducing a pedestrian route through Centre Point House to Bucknall Street. However, in our view, it should be wider, well lit and sufficiently animated by retail to ensure it becomes an attractive and well-used route.

### **A new life for Centre Point**

Situated at the confluence of two of London's major arteries, Centre Point is one of London's most iconic buildings. The design team has shown commendable sensitivity in its approach to redeveloping this London landmark. We think the case for the tower's change of use to residential is a strong one, helping to ensure this listed building has a life for many years to come. We find the planning of these units particularly well-considered.

We welcome the client's commissioning of a study to consider the potential for public access to the tower, which has determined that such access would not be viable. In light of this, we are pleased to note the inclusion of affordable housing elsewhere on the site in this scheme.

The decision to remove the east and west staircases from the base of the tower will clearly benefit the public realm by de-cluttering this space. However, the client should assure itself that in their new position these grand stairs will not become redundant as residents favour the lifts to reach their apartments. Further, a semi-public ground floor incorporating an element of retail would help the building confront the unique challenge of locating a private residential use at the heart of one of central London's principal public spaces.

### **Affordable housing**

We welcome the client's decision to acquire and redevelop the Intrepid Fox Public House site to provide affordable housing to help deliver a mixed community at Centre Point. In our view, the larger of the two schemes proposed (Option B) is the more successful in design terms, although it will be important to ensure it can be read as a new element in relation to Centre Point House. We think a modest increase in height could help in this regard. Its architectural expression shows promise. In townscape terms, it should work well to draw people into the square from High Holborn.





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### Sustainability

We acknowledge the challenge of ensuring that the environmental performance of Centre Point meets both current building regulations and more stringent standards in the future while preserving the architectural integrity of this listed building. We appreciate the moves to address overheating in the tower, in part, through the use of high performance glazing. We would encourage continued exploration to ensure the scheme achieves high environmental targets. Lastly, the design team should consider whether the green roofs proposed could become functional amenity for residents of this scheme.

Thank you for consulting us and please keep us informed of the progress of the scheme. If there is any point that requires clarification, please telephone us.

Yours sincerely,



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### Review process

Following a site visit, discussions with the design team and local authority, the scheme was reviewed on 20 February 2013 by Robin Nicholson (Chair), Gerard Maccreanor, Peter Neal, Richard Coleman, Marcus Lee, and Justine Leach. These comments supersede any views we may have expressed previously.

### Affiliated panels

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### Confidentiality

Since the scheme is not yet the subject of a planning application, the advice contained in this letter is offered in confidence, on condition that we are kept informed of the progress of the project, including when it becomes the subject of a planning application. We may share confidential letters with our affiliated panels only in cases where an affiliated panel is taking on a scheme that we have previously reviewed. We reserve the right to make our views known should the views contained in this letter be made public in whole or in part (either accurately or inaccurately). If you do not require our views to be kept confidential, please write to designreview@designcouncil.org.uk.

