



Camden Design Review Panel

Report of Formal Review Meeting: 20-23 Greville Street

Friday 8 September 2017
5 Pancras Square, London, N1C 4AC

Panel

Catherine Burd (chair)
Sara Grohmann
Juliette Scalbert
Luke Tozer

Attendees

Laura Hazelton	London Borough of Camden
Richard Wilson	London Borough of Camden
Deborah Denner	Frame Projects
Tom Bolton	Frame Projects
Farzana Yasmin	Frame Projects

Apologies / report copied to

Bethany Cullen	London Borough of Camden
Edward Jarvis	London Borough of Camden
Frances Madders	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.

Declarations of interest

Sara Grohmann and Juliette Scalbert asked that it is noted that their practices are working with Tibbalds on projects unrelated to Greville Street.

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1. Project name and site address

20-23 Greville Street, London, EC1N 8SS

2. Presenting team

Tyler Goodwin	Seaforthland
Amin Taha	Seaforthland
Alex Cotterill	Amin Taha Architects / Groupwork
Jennifer Ross	Tibbalds Planning & Urban Design

3. Planning authority's views

Camden is broadly supportive of the current proposals, including the principle of adding two storeys to the existing building and improving the relationship of the offices with Bleeding Heart Yard at the rear. The panel's views were sought on: whether the site can support the additional bulk proposed; whether the roof should be pulled back further from the building line; and whether the proposed dormer windows are too large. Views were also requested on: the durability and maintenance of the proposed cladding; whether a two-storey double frontage is appropriate; and whether the extension to the site boundary at the rear would dominate the yard and create an excessive sense of enclosure.

4. Design Review Panel's views

Summary

The panel is very supportive of the design approach proposed for the site, and feels could become a remarkable project, but it requires more information to judge whether it can be delivered as proposed. The ephemeral nature of the designs will require exceptional handling, and it is therefore very important to know how the design will work in considerable detail. As Amin Taha Architects have experience of delivering similarly ambitious designs elsewhere, the panel has more confidence than would otherwise be the case that they this project can succeed. However, this would depend on their involvement being maintained throughout detailed design and construction.

The panel supports the proposed height increase, as long as the cladding material can be shown to create the intended appearance, and maintenance and electrical equipment is not allowed to intrude above the roofline. It questions the relationship between the rear of the building and Bleeding Heart Yard, with concern that the scale of the colonnade and the extensive glazing proposed to this façade will be out of keeping with the low-key mews character.

The panel raised questions about the appearance of the perforated bronze cladding, asking that a model be produced and more information presented to show how solid it will appear. Further testing is also needed to demonstrate durability. The recladding should also deliver improved environmental performance for the building. Designs should be developed further to provide assurance on appearance, detail, and relationship to the existing structure.



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Architecture

- The design concept for the building is complex and sophisticated and, while the panel is sympathetic to the basic proposition, it finds it difficult to judge whether it will succeed on the basis of the information provided.
- A clear narrative is needed to explain the design approach, perhaps in diagram form, so individual design decisions can be tested against it.
- The fenestration in the new façade will be an important part of its appearance, including the way the windows relate to the perforated cladding. More detailed drawings and models are needed to show how this will work in practice.
- The panel does not feel the mansard roofline needs to be pulled back further, but suggested further exploration of the design of the dormer windows to achieve a more balanced composition. The panel sees no problem in taking greater license with historical accuracy to adjust the position of these windows.
- Alternatively, the dormers may not prove necessary, and the mansard could instead incorporate more glazing. It is difficult to make a judgement without more detailed information on what the proposed façade material will look like, and how the mansard will therefore appear.

Materiality

- The concept for remodelling the building is both bold and evocative. However, without seeing more detail of how the proposed cladding material will look, it is impossible to judge whether these provocative design ideas will succeed.
- The panel needs to be able to gauge the way the building material will appear when it is overlaid on the existing 1970s structure. At the moment it is difficult to understand the extent to which the new façade will appear solid, whether a void will be apparent behind it, and how light will influence the appearance of the structure.
- There is not yet sufficient information on detailing and construction to convince the panel that the building will really appear the way it is shown in the illustrations. The cladding material sample is highly perforated, but images show a façade that appears to be made from a solid material such as pre-cast concrete. The panel asked how the building could appear so solid if a perforated material is applied over the very dark brick of the existing structure.
- A larger - full scale - model of a key detail would be useful to both test and illustrate how the new and existing structures will combine, and how far the existing building will be visible.



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- A model would also provide details on how the bronze panels will meet one another. The joints between panels need to be carefully designed as they will have a significant effect on the overall appearance of the structure.
- The durability of the façade material is crucial, so it is important to know that it will maintain its appearance over time. Further testing will be needed to provide this assurance.
- The panel suggested that the bronze panels may require greater solidity, and a lower level of perforation at street level. A thicker gauge could provide more durability where it will be exposed to pedestrian traffic, as adding aesthetic interest.
- The mews character of Bleeding Heart Yard, at the rear of the building, depends on the everyday materials and appearance of a working yard. The panel are concerned that the extensive use of glazing and the elaborate metal skin proposed on this elevation will introduce an inappropriate sheen and a commercial character to the yard. The cladding of this façade should be simpler and less glossy to ensure it suits the yard. The rougher structural timber cladding used elsewhere may be a more appropriate material than glass.
- The panel felt there could be justification for expressing the existing and new volumes more explicitly, with the new volume perhaps wrapped in structural timber panels in places. This may also give scope for increased insulation where needed, and should be tested through detail and models.

Height and massing

- The proposed height of the new building, recreating the scale of the nineteenth century buildings formerly on the site, is appropriate. However, further testing is required to ensure that the mechanical and electrical service equipment does not protrude above the roofline and can be concealed effectively. Whether this can be achieved will also depend on how 'transparent' the extension appears.

Sustainability

- The new cladding should provide an opportunity to improve environmental performance of the building, for example by providing solar shading. This should form part of a comprehensive strategy for improving the environmental performance of the building.
- More environmental analysis will also be needed to test both heat loss and the potential for overheating associated with the large areas of glazing.



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Public space

- Animating Bleeding Heart Yard is an important part of the project, but there are no drawings of how the yard will be used, or how it will work and be managed in terms of vehicle access, turning circles etc.
- The building has a formal frontage on Greville Street but an informal rear on Bleeding Heart Yard. The double-height colonnade risks confusing these proportions by bringing a civic scale into this back street space.
- The set-back of the building behind the colonnade is a useful device for creating generous public space in the yard at ground floor. However, the panel consider that the end bay should not be infilled, and that any awnings should not project further into the yard than the line of the new building.
- The panel thinks the design of the extension into Bleeding Heart Yard should be revisited, with consideration given to creating a more intimate scale, and robust straightforward character.
- The way in which the entrances to the building are articulated would also benefit from further thought.
- Signage, as shown in the drawings, will be integral to the way the building appears. Detailed designs will be needed to demonstrate how this will be integrated into the façades.

Next steps

The panel supports the ambition of the proposals, and recognises that they could result in an exceptionally high quality building if delivered successfully. To be sure they can be delivered as intended, and that the materials used will create the anticipated effect, the panel asks that further design development and testing is undertaken. It looks forward to reviewing the designs when they have reached the next stage.

