

Camden Design Review Panel

Report of Full Review Meeting: 140 Highgate Road

Friday 6 October 2017
5 Pancras Square, London, N1C 4AC

Panel

Jane Dann (chair)
Ian Chalk
Barbara Kaucky
Richard Lavington
Adrian Wikeley

Attendees

Rob Tulloch	London Borough of Camden
Richard Wilson	London Borough of Camden
Katrina Cristoforou	London Borough of Camden
Deborah Denner	Frame Projects
Tom Bolton	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.

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1. Project name and site address

140 Highgate Road, ASF Garages, London, NW5 1PB

2. Presenting team

Daniel Woolfson

Richard Washington Young

The DHaus Company Ltd

Washington Young

3. Planning authority's views

The site is located within a green strip that runs along the east side of Highgate Road. It contains a former petrol station now used as a repair workshop, recorded as a negative influence on the Dartmouth Park Conservation Area to which the site belongs. The space to the north is protected as part of the Grove Terrace Squares, and the space to the south, while not protected, is designated as public open space.

A previous application for a three-storey building was refused by Camden, and dismissed at appeal. The inspector concluded that the proposal would be significantly detrimental to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, and to the setting of the listed buildings overlooking the Grove Terrace Squares. Camden supports the principle of removing the petrol station, but asked the panel for its advice on the scale, form and design quality of the proposed replacement.

4. Design Review Panel's Views

Summary

While the panel appreciates the creative approach taken to a difficult site, it feels that the proposed quantity of development is too high and undermines the scheme's urban design quality. It also raises fundamental questions about the proposed uses, questioning whether this location is appropriate for a café, and suggesting that residential units at ground and lower ground level so close to the busy Highgate Road would not be pleasant places to live. It suggests that the number of flats on the site should be reduced, and a more linear, less complex design approach used. A land swap with the space to the south owned by Camden could improve the overall quality of green space and create a more viable site. The panel recommends that a fresh approach be taken to the site, and new options explored to ensure a development is delivered at an appropriate level of design quality.

Architecture

- The panel supports the principle of building a contemporary structure in the conservation area, but thinks the volume of the proposed development has resulted in a structure that is inappropriate for the site. A complicated design approach has resulted from the number of units required by the brief, which is at odds with the desire to retain continuity of the green strip in which the site sits.



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- The panel suggests reducing the number of units may improve the viability of the development by allowing for a simpler design, with less excavation and roof planting.
- The visualisations produced by the architects simplify the appearance of the building. It will require extra features that are not shown, such as signage to the café and railings on the outside steps. Details such as these will influence the way the building fits into the landscape, but the information needed to judge this aspect of the designs is not available.
- Visualisations show pristine surfaces and finishes, but these will quickly become dirty beside a busy main road. Issues of maintenance and the resilience of materials have not been addressed, but will be important to the success of the building.

Landscape

- The panel feels that the designs do not succeed in their aim of integrating the development into the landscape. The principle of designing a structure that connects the green spaces either side of the site is good, but in practice it does not work because it will not be possible to see over the top of the proposed building to the spaces on either side.
- Locating a café on top of the building results in too much hard surfacing for the building to be integrated into the green context. The steps to the café intrude into the green view from the north, and the outside café space becomes a dominant aspect of the building's presence.
- The proposed landscape treatment is too complex and too Italianate for the site. It is not appropriate for a setting next to the hard edge created by a busy road, or for the conservation area context of simple, grass and tree-dominated spaces.
- While the existing petrol station does not add to the conservation area, it does retain a sense of openness. It is important that this is maintained, but the current proposals appear to close the site off and create more of a visual obstruction that is currently the case.

Layout

- The decision to locate residential accommodation below ground and the café at the top of the building, compromises the quality of the residential units. It will be very difficult to design flats below ground, next to the busy road, that are pleasant places to live. Passers-by will be able to see directly into the flats, and the basement lightwell spaces overlooked from the street will feel vulnerable.



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Suitability of the site

- The architects are not proposing a standard building, so the designs will need to be costed very carefully, and clean-up costs for the petrol station site will also need to be factored in. The combination of experimental designs and decontamination costs are likely to prove expensive.
- A simpler, more linear design solution incorporating fewer units is likely to represent a more suitable approach for the site.

The green space to the south of the site, owned by Camden, is not part of the current application. However, the panel suggests that talk should be held to explore the possibility of a land swap. This site has potential for a simpler building that could be more effectively integrated with the surrounding streetscape, and enabling an uninterrupted green strip along Highgate Road to be created.

Next steps

- The panel is happy to review new designs once the fundamental issues it identifies have been addressed.

