



The Heath & Hampstead Society

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The Society examines all Planning Applications relating to Hampstead, and assesses them for their impact on conservation and on the local environment.

To London Borough of Camden, Development Control Team

Planning Ref: 2019/4937/P

Address: Land at Southern Car Park, Royal Free Hospital, NW3

Description: Erection of new building to provide a Maggie's Centre non-residential institution (Class D1) - and associated landscaping works.

Case Officer: David Fowler

Date: 4 November 2019

Dear David

Overall, we find this to be a positive proposal, both architecturally and as a facility. We don't find it harmful to the immediate site. We have some observations about the architecture, and detailing. We think with some adjustments and refinements, a potentially good building could become an excellent one.

It is certainly a challenging site and we can see how the design tries to respond to the restricted space, difficult site shape and a backdrop of the rear of the hospital building and its carpark.

Much emphasis is put on gestural sketches to justify the shape of the building; which we suggest is more a swirl of a cape than a butterfly. Whereas Libeskind's LMU building on Holloway Road has a dynamic form which syncopates with a vertical tower and the passing traffic, here the form seems somewhat arbitrary; a concept flown in from elsewhere. The opening out of the shape as it ascends is a useful device and does help to distinguish a comparatively small object within the site, but could give a overbearing impression to patients as they approach the building.

The presentation doesn't show the site context very clearly and whitewashes it out in the renderings. This is obviously to highlight the intended 'calming' effect of the project, but it would be helpful to see how the building sits against the challenging background.

Exterior materials are too vaguely described and need more explanation. The renders show a very abstracted suggestion of timber, it is not clear what exactly the fins are made from (some form of laminated timber we assume) or the tapering infill panels between; are these perhaps a composite panel, or is the timber to have a natural finish? It is a strong and energetic concept but will need a high level of technical

resolution to pull off successfully and deal with weathering of the timber over time. We recommend Camden ask for more detail and submission of samples for approval.

The loss of trees is a significant negative and will impact on the quality of the local environment, in particular the neighbouring housing, and to a lesser degree the Rosary school, which were both screened from the hospital by these trees. Our tree officer will be submitting comments separately on this.

Otherwise, the landscape design is potentially very successful, though we would hope that the amount of private external space to sit in could be increased. It would be good to explain the arrival sequence for patients, ie what they experience, to understand how the proposals mitigate the immediate environment. The roof garden is seems to be a wonderful space to be in, providing a liberating connection to the sky and gardens below, but it is not clear how the potentially overbearing presence of the hospital building is controlled.

Much is made of the interiors in the presentation and though these are not strictly a matter for the planning application, it would be interesting to see these populated with furniture and activity. The fenestration is deliberately dramatic but it is unclear how this actually serves the interiors, nor does it seem to respond to the context, e.g. to control views and the visual connection to the exterior. For a Maggie's centre, we are surprised that from within, the window design is quite discordant and potentially unsettling.

As a final positive note, it is good to see the designers ignore the drab and overbearing hostility of the host buildings architecture with an overall brave and refreshing approach to a minor new building. As the intention is clearly to create a positive experience of the site and the medical facility, then if these matters can be addressed then support should not be withheld.

Planning Sub-Committee