



London Borough of Camden Design Review Panel

Report of Formal Review Meeting: Abbey Road Phase 2

Friday 13 March 2020
5 Pancras Square, London, N1C 4AC

Panel

Catherine Burd (chair)
Harriet Bourne
Scott Grady
Jane Wernick

Attendees

David Fowler	London Borough of Camden
Lavinia Scaletti	London Borough of Camden
Rose Todd	London Borough of Camden
Tom Bolton	Frame Projects

Apologies / report copied to

Kevin Fisher	London Borough of Camden
Bethany Cullen	London Borough of Camden
Richard Wilson	London Borough of Camden
Edward Jarvis	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

Land surrounding Snowman and Casterbridge Houses, Belsize Road, Camden

2. Presenting team

David de Sousa	AHR Architects Limited
WaiLun Ho	AHR Architects Limited
Mark Bell	Fabrik Landscape Architecture
Joseph Wilson	CBRE Limited
Laura Morris	CBRE Limited
Bonnie Chu	Wates Group
Karen Honey	London Borough of Camden
Kate Cornwall-Jones	London Borough of Camden

3. Planning authority's views

The proposals form part of the wider, three-phase Abbey Road estate regeneration scheme which was approved in 2014. This application forms Phase 2, and will deliver the community infrastructure. The proposals are for a two-storey building housing a health and community centre, to be located to the east of Casterbridge House. The proposed community centre is located at ground floor level, and the health clinic at first floor. An area of dedicated play space will be included for the creche, and an accessible community garden for all users. The proposals include relocating the existing car park to a site between Snowman and Casterbridge House. The proposals include a comprehensive landscape design, which delivers a holistic landscaping strategy for the wider Belsize Open Space. The proposals will provide a high-quality replacement for the existing health and community centre in Phase 3, as well as wider community benefits.

Camden Council plays the role of client and developer on the project, as well as planning authority. The design team is appointed by Wates Construction. The project is subject to time constraints in relation to the take-up of Greater London Authority funding, which require completion by 2022. The area has no relevant designations in the immediate vicinity, and Belsize Open Space is private open space.

Camden officers asked for the panel's views, in particular on the success of the proposed architecture, proposed materials, the building's interaction with the street, and its relationship to the park.



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4. Design Review Panel's views

Summary

The panel considers the proposal is a beneficial combination of uses in a good location, but that the designs do not yet reach the standards required for projects in Camden. The building as currently proposed combines concepts of a park pavilion and a continuation of the existing Belsize Road terrace. The panel feels that the design approach should take one approach or the other – either connecting the building more clearly to the terrace, or separating it further within the park. The scheme should draw on innovative, world class healthcare design in Camden and beyond, bringing together the community centre and clinic functions in a single building that is more than the sum of its parts. This will require an entrance space that brings users together and moments of delight, for example through the staircase design. A sheltered space at the entrance would be also be valuable. The design team should aim to bring light and views into windowless rooms in the health clinic. The architecture could be simpler and lighter, improving sustainability through reduced material use. Timber should be seriously considered as an option both for the cladding and for the structure, and a clear carbon reduction plan developed, including the possibility of a building that can be deconstructed at the end of its life. Whilst the landscape proposals are ambitious, they must be achievable. The panel is concerned that they currently lack a strong, driving concept, that they do not consider desire lines and connectivity within the estate, and that planting will be expensive to maintain and therefore liable to failure. It also feels the public space should be lockable at night. The number of good quality mature trees to be removed as part of the development should be significantly reduced. It suggests that the community garden should continue to be visible and publicly accessible, and that it could be located to the south of the building, near the entrance. These comments are expanded below.

Site layout

- The panel supports the combination of a community centre and health clinic in the same building. Consolidating the parking area in the centre of the site between the two towers, and of expanding the public space between the existing and new buildings, is a generally positive approach that will create a more useable layout, that offers more to residents.

Architectural approach

- In the context of successful developments already delivered by Camden's Community Investment Programme, this project should deliver high design quality. The panel considers that a stronger concept is needed to drive the co-location of the community centre and health clinic functions in the same building. At the moment the two functions occupy the same building but are completely separated internally and more should be made of possibilities for overlap, for example between entrance and reception spaces. The design should draw on advanced thinking in healthcare architecture, including examples from Scandinavian countries, and aim to develop it further. The



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building should create benefits that would not exist without the co-location of the two facilities.

- The architectural approach seems overly complicated and should, instead, aim to deliver clarity and simplicity and a refined, elegant result. The panel suggests AHMM's Kentish Town Health Centre as an example of a building in Camden that has achieved these qualities in recent years.
- The current architectural approach seems driven by the landscape setting. In this context the idea of the building as a pavilion would seem more logical, surrounded on all sides by gardens. However, the building is also arranged to relate to the adjacent terrace. The panel feels the design should focus on either one approach or the other.
- If the building is intended to relate to the Belsize Road terrace, it could have a stronger, more solid appearance that connects to the street. It could be taller to match the neighbouring house, or staggered, higher at the front and lower at the back.
- The current narrow separation from the terrace introduces a problematic gap between buildings, which looks unattractive and could attract anti-social behaviour. This should be avoided.
- If the design build on the concept of a pavilion in a park, it should be set further away from the terraces to create a clearer separation and all its edges could be activated. This would also allow the building to be placed in a way that would require the loss of fewer trees.

Internal layout

- An innovative health clinic design should aim to design the future of building such as these. It should, for example, aim to avoid corridors which are inherently depressing spaces, and meet generous space standards. It should introduce moments of delight into the design, for example through the staircase design.
- The entrance to the building needs to be more open and inviting. It is the key to connecting the two functions through a single space and a shared entrance experience. At the moment, patients will simply walk up the relatively narrow stairs to the upper floors, without a ground floor space designed to receive them. A shared entrance route would bring the two floors together. The entrance would also benefit from a sheltered area where people can gather.
- The panel asks the design team to consider whether administration rooms in the central core upstairs can be redesigned, so that the people working in them have access to daylight and view. The window size in the health clinic seems small, and the southernmost clinical room has a smaller window than the other rooms. It would make sense to make more use of the south-facing frontage, to introduce light wells and to increase window size.



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- The proposed ground floor cloister, which runs along the north and west sides, should be given a stronger relationship with the interior, to ensure it benefits the rest of the building.

Landscape design

- The panel feels that the landscape design approach requires a stronger overriding concept. The current approach does not provide a clear rationale for creating winding paths and, if these do not relate to existing desire lines, they will not be used as intended. The estate has very poor pedestrian access, and the panel suggests the landscape design should focus on improving this by connecting directly with the two towers, providing easy access for residents to the new building. The landscape approach can then be developed from this underlying rationale.
- The panel is very concerned that the proposals involve the removal of too many good quality Class A, B and C trees. The loss of these trees can only be justified by a remarkable architectural and landscape concept. The design team should reassess opportunities to retain more mature trees, particularly along the Belsize Road site frontage.
- The panel suggests that the community garden which, in its current location, is visible to passers-by, should be in a more public setting rather than hidden behind the building. Part of the garden could be moved to the front of the building, so people can pass through it as they enter. The current site is also in shade, and a south-facing location in front of the building would be more likely to attract users.
- The community garden area behind the building could, perhaps, provide an outdoor waiting area for patients which would connect it more strongly to the building as a whole.
- The proposed design for the gardens will require significant levels of maintenance. If a full-time gardener can be employed, that may be possible. If not, a more self-sufficient planting scheme should be considered involving, for example, grass or prairie species, to prevent plants from failing.
- The panel is also concerned about the consequences of leaving the public open space unprotected, and suggests that the space will need to be locked overnight to prevent anti-social behaviour, as other public spaces are in Camden. Existing railings could, perhaps, be reused in some form. Ideally the new building would provide a boundary to, and surveillance of, the open space.

Sustainability

- The panel emphasises the importance of reducing energy use and embodied carbon as far as possible across the development, and asks for further



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information on how this will be achieved. The design team should also consider circular and regenerative economy issues, including whether the building could be designed as demountable structure, to be dismantled in future.

- The panel questions the sustainability of cladding the building in metal. It suggests that options should be explored that reduce the volume of material required to a minimum and, in the process, related to a simpler architectural concept. Timber should be considered seriously as a more sustainable option and, conceptually, could be used to connect the building to its landscape setting.

Next Steps

The panel would welcome the opportunity to comment on proposals further at the next stage of design development.

