



FRAME PROJECTS

Camden Design Review Panel

Report of Formal Review Meeting: Godwin and Crowndale

Friday 1 February 2019
5 Pancras Square, London, N1C 4AC

Panel

Peter Studdert (Chair)
Abigail Batchelor
Mike Martin
Robin Nicholson
Paddy Pugh

Attendees

David Fowler	London Borough of Camden
Edward Jarvis	London Borough of Camden
Frances Madders	London Borough of Camden
Jane Debono	Somers Town CIP
Deborah Denner	Frame Projects
Tom Bolton	Frame Projects
Adela Paporisto	Frame Projects

Apologies / report copied to

Bethany Cullen	London Borough of Camden
Richard Wilson	London Borough of Camden
Elaine Quigley	London Borough of Camden
Alan Wito	London Borough of Camden

1. Project name and site address

Godwin Court, Crowndale Road, London NW1 1NW

2. Presenting team

Holly Porter	Surface to Air
Jonathan Stewart	Surface to Air
Ryan Watkins	Surface to Air
Alex Massey	LUC Landscape Architects
Mark Hopson	LB Camden
Charlotte Orrell	Iceni

3. Planning authority's views

The site is currently home to a MUGA (Multi-Use Games Area) and a car park, built on part of Chalton Street, at the rear of the Godwin and Crowndale housing blocks, to the north, set in open space. The King's Cross St. Pancras Conservation Area lies to the east of the site and terraces to the south on Charrington Street are Grade II listed. A terrace of ten houses is proposed for the site, as part of Camden Council's 30-year Somers Town Community Investment Programme.

Camden Council plans to roll out modern methods of construction (MMC) on housing sites across the borough. It hopes that using MMC can provide repeatable, standardised, but customisable architecture, with significant cost savings. This site is acting a prototype for this approach, to test both the practicality and the viability of this approach. As well as the potential of the MMC approach, the panel was asked for its views, in particular, the appropriateness of scale and height, the relationship of the proposals to the existing blocks, and its potential to improve the existing amenity space and streetscape.



4. Design Review Panel's views

Summary

The panel is impressed by the proposed designs, and offers its support both for the proposed scheme and for the use of modern methods of construction. It sees his prototype as having significant potential on this site and elsewhere in Camden. The panel considers the scale of the houses to be appropriate, and the form impressive. It points out that the roofs, gable ends, and components such as downpipes have an important role to play by introducing variation to the houses, and should therefore be carefully considered. It is keen that the residential layouts should maximise the feeling of generosity and quality of the new homes, which requires further work. It asks that the design of the southern frontage of the houses, facing the Chalton Street alley, is given more thought to ensure natural surveillance. Good lighting and garden boundaries that will be easy to maintain will also contribute to a feeling of safety along this route. It suggests that the design team should explore how public space improvements resulting from the development can be extended as far as possible along Chalton Street, to deliver maximum community benefit. Further detailed design comments are made, and these are expanded below.

Construction method

- The panel considers that Camden Council is to be applauded for investigating new ways to design and provide housing in the borough. The concept is at an early stage with significant flexibility, so comments on the application of MMC are not at the level of detailed design. However, the panel supports the approach which is felt has the potential to deliver high quality houses.

Height, massing and materials

- The panel feels that the proposed scale and height of the terraces is appropriate to the location, and will create significant benefit through improvements to the open space behind the Godwin and Crowndale blocks.
- The form of the individual houses is simple, but there is an inventive approach to providing articulation through roof form, terraces, projecting bays and recessed entrances.
- The use of yellow brick is a classic 'New London Vernacular' material, but the design team could consider a redder colour to reflect the appearance nearby mansion blocks, to help the houses feel part of the place.

Design details

- The panel is impressed by the design detail included in the proposal, for example the way that alternating terraces and roof pitches give a sculptural quality to the terrace of houses.



- It notes the importance of special elements in the overall success of the development. In particular, the end gables and the roof will have a significant impact on the appearance of the scheme, and therefore need to be carefully designed to introduce variation, texture and detail.
- Design detailing will involve the addition of components such as copings, gutters, downpipes and flashing which will prove crucial to the appearance of the houses. They should be specified to ensure they form parts of a coherent whole, and that they help the houses to become specific to their location.
- The panel suggest that the proposed valley gutter could prove difficult to access for maintenance, and that their design should be re-examined.

Southern frontage

- The panel suggests that the combination of relatively deep front gardens and either small or opaque windows at ground floor may not provide the surveillance needed to ensure the Chalton Street alley feels safe. It suggests that further discussions are needed with the Camden City Learning centre on the southern side of the alley to explore the potential for larger windows with a more direct view of the street.
- A street lighting strategy is needed to ensure the alley is well-lit, but that lights are placed to direct light away from the houses and towards the Camden Learning Centre building. Ideally this should be achieved without the use of lighting poles to avoid cluttering, possibly attaching lights to the school wall.
- The attractiveness of the southern frontage will rely in part on how well front gardens are maintained. This may mean that walls and railings are a better option for the boundary than hedge planting.
- Currently bike and bin stores are not integrated into the house designs. The panel think this should be considered, in preference to accommodating them separately in front gardens, where they may look untidy.
- Access for rubbish collection and for fire vehicles will need to be considered, as it will influence the design of the alley.

Amenity space

- The panel supports the proposal to re-open blocked access points from stairwells in to the open space behind the Godwin and Crowndale blocks. Activation of the existing amenity space will be an important catalyst in helping the area to be less defensive.
- The ideas to introduce food growing space and a play area could both add public value. The play area should be placed in the middle of the open space, so that no flats are disproportionately affected by noise.



- A strategy will be needed for managing dog access to the open space, so it can be used by a wider range of people, particularly children and families.
- There is a risk that people using the space will feel under observation from the large windows on the north frontage of the new houses. This issue should be explored and resolved through public consultation.

Public realm

- The project has important potential to give something back to local residents by improving the surrounding public realm. While the argument for the loss of the MUGA is acceptable, the Draft London Plan principle that there should be no net loss of green space should be addressed.
- The panel suggests exploring the opportunity to expand the development boundary to include more public realm at the east and west ends of the site. The sections of road immediately adjoining the site would benefit from improvement, and the section to the east may no longer be needed for vehicle access once the car park is removed.
- The panel accepts the need to remove some trees from the site, but supports the intention of taking extra measures to ensure the largest plane tree at the west end of the alley is protected, as this is particularly distinctive.

Internal layout

- At the moment, it is not clear how internal space will be deployed to maximum effect, and further work is needed to ensure this happens.
- Creative thinking about the design of elements such as bathrooms, kitchen and utility cupboards can help maximise the feeling of spaciousness and quality.
- Direct access from rear terraces to back gardens externally is a welcomed - and will help make the most of both spaces.
- The projecting first floor window element could be a successful feature, but care should be taken to ensure it creates an internal space that is large enough to be useable.
- The front doors to the accessible units have no transition between interior and exterior, and greater protection would help those using a wheelchair.
- While the intention is to locate bin stores in front gardens, the panel would encourage the design team to consider how these could be integrated into the building envelope.



- The storage spaces in living room and bedroom should be standard depth wardrobes, as these are more practical than deeper cupboards.

Next steps

The panel feels confident that the detailed design issues raised can be resolved in discussion with case officers, in advance of a planning application.

