



**London Borough of Camden Design Review Panel**

**Report of Formal Review Meeting: Murphy's Yard**

Friday 4 September 2020

Video conference

**Panel**

Catherine Burd (chair)

Ian Chalk

Jane Dann

Eleanor Fawcett

Mike Martin

**Attendees**

Edward Jarvis

London Borough of Camden

Kevin Fisher

London Borough of Camden

Alex Bushell

London Borough of Camden

Victoria Hinton

London Borough of Camden

Jonathon McClue

London Borough of Camden

Kristina Smith

London Borough of Camden

Deborah Denner

Frame Projects

Tom Bolton

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Kiki Ageridou

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**Apologies / copied to**

Bethany Cullen

London Borough of Camden

Richard Wilson

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**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

Murphy's Yard, Highgate Road, London NW5 1TN

## 2. Presenting team

David West	Studio Egret West
Daniel Mahony	Studio Egret West
Heidi Au Yeung	Studio Egret West
Stephanos Georgiou	Studio Egret West
Cassidy Reid	Studio Egret West
James Berk	Studio Egret West
Paul Brosnahan	Murphy
Kate Macmillan	Murphy
Jo Drane	Hoare Lee
Steven Farthing	Curtins
Peter Stewart	Peter Stewart Consultancy
Alexandra Milne	DP9
David Morris	DP9

## 3. Planning authority briefing

The proposals for Murphy's Yard are for an employment led mixed-use re-development of the site including the provision of industry, residential, office, retail, community and other supporting uses. The Kentish Town Planning Framework includes the Murphy's Yard and Regis Road sites, as well as areas immediately adjacent. A hybrid planning application is scheduled for Spring 2021, largely for outline permission but including a detailed application for Blocks C and F, and landscaping.

The site currently contains J. Murphy & Sons Limited headquarters, industrial uses, open yard space and parking. There are three locally listed locomotive sheds. The O2 Forum Kentish Town, which is Grade II listed, is in the developer's ownership and makes use of Greenwood Place for access. The site lies to the west of Highgate Road and is bounded to the north, west and south by railway lines. The northern part of the site borders Gordon House Road and lies opposite Hampstead Heath. Access is restricted to three entrances, one each on Gordon House Road, Sanderson Close and Greenwood Place.

Surrounding uses include predominately residential to the north; a council-owned housing estate on Sanderson Close; residential and commercial on Highgate Road; employment as part of Highgate Studios; community uses in the Greenwood Centre; the Regis Road site to the south and residential Gospel Oak. Policy D1 of the Kentish Town Neighbourhood Plan includes a view across the site to Parliament Hill from the area adjacent to Kentish Town station. A 'Protected Corridor' and 'Peripheral Corridor' are required to be maintained as far as possible.



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The site is a Locally Significant Industrial Site within the Draft New London Plan. This emerging policy seeks to retain, enhance and provide additional industrial capacity. There must be no overall net loss of industrial floorspace capacity and potential industrial and warehousing floorspace must be accommodated on-site at a 65 per cent plot ratio. The council's relevant Local Plan policies seek intensification of industrial uses, with the inclusion of housing and open space where this does not prejudice the operation of businesses in the area. The site also needs to provide 50 per cent affordable housing to comply with the Local Plan.

The proposals were first reviewed by the Camden Design Review Panel in April 2020. Planning officers asked for the panel's views, in particular, on the northern quarter of the site which it considers challenging, especially in terms of height and mass, and on the healthcare use in this part of the site. It also asked for views on options for locating the Regis Road bridge, and future proofing both this bridge, and a link to Kentish Town Station; on routes and connections; and on the role of circular economy and sustainability thinking as a fundamental part of the vision.

## **4. Design Review Panel's views**

### *Summary*

The panel supports the aspiration of the Murphy's Yard development which has the potential to create an exciting new neighbourhood, providing much needed new living and working accommodation in the borough. It fully recognises both the complexity of the site and the ambition of the brief. However, it has significant concerns about a number of aspects of the proposals, many of which were raised at the previous review. The design for Shed 3 has developed and is impressive, and its position at the heart of the development should be celebrated with public-facing uses. The Heath Cliff promises to be an exciting public space. However, routes into and through the site remain a key challenge given the limited existing access points into the site. A clear diagram of streets and connections into and across the site should be produced to clarify hierarchy of spaces, and to recognise connections that currently appear to be outside the developer's gift. The panel's view is that the provision of a bridge across to Regis Road is a minimum requirement to unlock the development potential of the site. As noted in the previous review, the bulk, height and massing of residential blocks is excessive and, whilst these respond to the protected Kentish Town viewing corridor, they have a significant and unacceptable impact on important views from Parliament Hill to the north. The amount of accommodation should be reduced or redistributed, potentially through reduction of other uses on the site. The panel is also concerned about the quality of public spaces across the scheme, some of which seem constrained and undefined. Developing their character will help improve overall legibility. The panel feels a development partner should be brought on board as a matter of priority to help resolve issues, including delivery of links. A comprehensive sustainability strategy is also needed. These comments are expanded below.



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## Masterplan

### *Height, massing & townscape*

- The panel considers that the proposed residential blocks to the north of the site are oversized, and that their height and massing are excessive. It is concerned by views of the development from the north, particularly from the lower slopes of Parliament Hill Fields, as well as from the south. The cluster and bulk of these tall buildings forms a substantial and intrusive presence in these views.
- The panel acknowledges the site layout and massing respond to parameters set by the protected Kentish Town viewing corridor, but is concerned this results in the scheme having an unacceptable impact on views from Parliament Hill, which are arguably more significant.
- The mansion blocks in particular – Blocks J, K, L and M – appear unwelcome on the skyline, because of their width as well as their height. The panel considers their volume should be reduced. The presence of a limited number of tall buildings on the site is not necessarily a problem, but these blocks appear together as a cluster which means they are more intrusive than other towers nearby that appear separately in views. In addition, as these do not mark a town centre, their massing lacks hierarchical logic.
- The panel suggests the design team investigate whether other types of floor space could be reduced, for example B1 uses, to allow residential accommodation to be distributed more evenly across the site.
- More modelling should be carried out to assess the impact of different options in townscape views, especially those from open spaces. More variation in the height of buildings may help to reduce the impact and distribute mass more sympathetically.

### *Urban design strategy*

- The proposed scheme rationale of buildings as ‘objects in landscape’ linked by pedestrian and service routes, rather than as a more readily understandable piece of city with streets and squares, has the effect of reducing the legibility and hierarchy of the public spaces.
- Improvements have been made to Shed 3 since the last review meeting, and the more generous Heathline connection through its centre has the potential to create a dynamic centre to the development.
- The panel is concerned by the decision to split use types between buildings, which it suggests is contrary to the qualities of Kentish Town, which has a high street characterised by flats above shops. It suggests that opportunities are explored to bring more residential use into the southern quarter of the site,



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if at all possible. In the northern quarter there is a large amount of residential accommodation, and almost no other uses.

- The overall result is an environment that does not stitch into the wider Camden context or provide urban variety. The panel asks that further thought is given to how a sense of interaction and activity can be generated, and a sense of belonging created.

## *Routes and connections*

- New high quality connections between the site and its surroundings will be fundamental in making the site developable. Very clear high-level diagrams and clarity over a robust set of connections are needed to give structure to the masterplan. Without these the panel is concerned that the essential armature of the scheme is not yet in place.
- It is not yet clear which links into the site will be delivered, as most are not in the gift of the applicant. The masterplan does not show connections beyond the site boundary, and the panel feels this is not an acceptable approach. The key routes required for the site to function must be identified to determine whether the masterplan can work without securing routes that are not in the gift of the developer. The applicant should work closely with Camden officers and Network Rail to develop and agree viable connections that should be conditions of a consented scheme.
- The relationship with Network Rail is crucial to the development, both to allow proposed construction beside the railway, and to open up the Heathline route to Kentish Town Station. The panel feel provision of a bridge over the railway to Regis Road is essential, and is encouraged that the applicant has scoped options for this. This now needs further testing so it can be incorporated as a fully accessible and realistic component of the masterplan.
- In the short term, as the viability of a new Kentish Town square has not yet been established, it is imperative that an alternative high-quality, generous route is created from Greenwood Place into the site from Kentish Town, and that the siting and uses of buildings in this area respond appropriately.
- The panel feels two pedestrian routes are needed into the site from Highgate Road, to connect the development to its footfall and activity. Rather than being a vehicle-only route, Sanderson Close should form a pedestrian entrance route as well as Greenwood Place. It asks the developers to work with Camden officers to assess how this can work as a front door to the scheme.

## *Landscape and public realm*

- The panel feels that more clarity is required in the public realm proposals. It is not yet clear how the character of public spaces changes across the site to support different uses, or what the particular character of each will be.



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- The Heathline through-route dominates, and there is less clarity about which spaces people would use to gather, or which provide places to pause. A stronger narrative is required to explain the spatial and landscape hierarchy, and show the different purposes and uses of each space.
- As the site will not have a large number of entrance points, it is particularly important that the public realm these areas provide is attractive, and that they are designed to suit the needs of all potential users.
- Clearer identification of public, private and shared private spaces is required. The threshold conditions for residential blocks should be tested to ensure adequate privacy between domestic and heavily used public spaces.
- Clarity of ownership and maintenance of public spaces is needed. The panel notes there is potential, which should be explored, to allow residents to take ownership of areas outside their front doors, to help create a place that people feel part of.
- A further level of analysis is needed to show how vehicle access to the site will work, including gradients, manoeuvring routes and parking. This is not included at the moment, but is important to understand how vehicles will affect the character of proposed public spaces.
- The panel are concerned the service route adjacent to the railway is too narrow and lacks quality. For people arriving by car, this will be their main route into and through the site.
- The panel has concerns around the quality of the microclimate that will be created. This is particularly important given the proposed density of development: spaces should be tested in terms of sunlight, daylight and wind to ensure open spaces are enjoyable and useable.
- It will be important to select the right species for planting along the Heathline and elsewhere, to deal with restricted light levels.

## *Delivery and phasing*

- The panel recommends early discussions with potential joint venture partners. The involvement of partners is likely to provide other options for solving problems and unlocking routes to ensuring the site is as developable as possible. The scale of the site requires the participation of a large cast of professionals to help ensure the best is made of a very complex development.
- The panel is concerned about the proposal to use Gordon House Road as an early access route to the site as it already congested. It asks that a full assessment of its capacity is carried out.
- It would be helpful to see phasing drawings showing how spaces will be managed for vehicles and pedestrians during construction. For example, how



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will the infrastructure needed to service the initial phases of the development be provided? The development will take several years to construct, and it is important that it operates successfully as a place throughout this period.

## **Northern quarter**

### *Routes and connections*

- Further work is needed to define the character of the route between the railway and Blocks J, K, L and M. This should explore the nature of the street that will be created, including how cyclists will join the proposed fast route and how refuse collection and servicing will be managed. Care should be taken to prevent it feeling like a back alley.
- Because Blocks J, K, L and M are so large, overshadowing and wind effects are likely to become problematic on the Heathline route, and on the route between the blocks and the railway line.
- A variety of options should be explored for the way residential units bordering the Heathline address the route. They could open directly on to the Heathline, have private spaces in front of them or commercial ground floor uses with residential above. These options should be assessed to determine the best approach.

### *Northern site edge*

- The northern end of the site, at Blocks M and O, has the potential for a strong connection to Gordon House Road and Gospel Oak Station, reinforcing the existing neighbourhood centre. A cluster of active ground floor uses here, alongside a public space, could make a significant contribution to improving the currently hostile public realm, and help strengthen the entrance to Hampstead Heath. The panel encourages the design team to view this as a location for neighbourhood scale uses, potentially moving community space and bicycle storage to the south side of the Block M to make space for public-facing functions.
- The panel suggests further thought should be given to the treatment of the site boundary around the northern edge around Blocks P and Q, where it borders the gas compound. Edge conditions here will be particularly important to creating a pleasant place to live.

### *Amenity spaces*

- The panel notes the importance, with a scheme of this density, of meeting play space and amenity space requirements, and of testing the microclimate and sunlight levels to ensure it is useable and of good quality. The limited amount of outdoor private space for residents is a concern, and it urges the design team to think carefully about how this can be incorporated.



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- Communal spaces should be considered, particularly in the light of people spending more time working from home. Communal gardens would be beneficial, perhaps with space to store garden tools or furniture so they are useable, social spaces. Communal workspace is also an option, and could form part of the ground floor uses along the Heathline.

## Centre of the site

### *Shed 3*

- The panel is impressed with the proposed design for Shed 3. It feels that taking the Heathline route through the building is the right decision, and will provide the project with a heart, both spatially and conceptually. Its importance to the scheme should be recognised, and the panel therefore suggests it should be submitted as a detailed rather than an outline planning application to fix the proposed approach in place.

### *Building H*

- Currently, Building H partly obscures the elevation of Shed 3. The panel considers that its eastern façade should be moved back to reveal the whole frontage and provide it with a more generous setting.

### *Building I*

- The future Regis Road connection could be constrained by the positioning of Building I, and the panel asks whether the massing could be cut back to allow more space for this connection.

## *Programming of uses*

- The panel feels that Shed 3, as the centre of the development located on a key public route, would be better suited to more public-facing uses. It suggests that the workspace it currently contains could be moved to Shed 2 or Building I and public facilities planned instead, perhaps with health uses on lower floors.
- The panel are keen to understand more about the nature of the healthcare building to be delivered, and those who will need to access it, to ensure it is in the best location for such a facility.
- Generating diversity of uses will be important to the success of a such as large development, as at King's Cross Central where early occupation by Central St. Martin's was important factor in its success. The panel suggests there are opportunities to work with a third sector partner to create a combination of uses not usually found in new developments, for example artists' studios and workspace for third sector organisations. These could be located in Shed 2.





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## *Landscape and routes*

- The panel suggests that the routes around Sheds 2 and 3 are potentially too narrow, especially the routes to the south of Shed 2 and Building I. As it is an important building, a more generous space would provide a better setting.
- The positioning of Building S impinges on the space beside Buildings J1 and J2, which has potential to be the most substantial area of landscape on the site. Moving the Building S to the north, or removing it altogether, would free this space and provide a green view along the Heathline through Shed 3.
- The panel also asks whether there is any option to deck over part of the railway cutting north of Building S to create additional public space.
- The landscape of the Heathline seems to change as it enters Shed 3 from the east. The panel asks whether there are ways to create more continuity along the route and a create stronger landscape connection. This could include considering bridges across the route through Shed 3, rather than a single, solid roof, to introduce views of the sky and contribute to a greener feel.
- The panel feels that the Heath Cliff is an imaginative response to the topography, and promises to be an enjoyable, original landscape.
- The panel agree that landing the Regis Road bridge at a higher level may work best, allowing the route to take a downward path towards the Heath Cliff.
- Sanderson Close and the Regis Road bridge will be linked by a new connection through the side/rear of Shed 3. The panel recommends making this cross route more legible, for example by skewing the opening through Shed 3 or by opening up its eastern end to incline the route towards Sanderson Close and away from Building H. It is important this reads clearly as a strong, continuous route, so it is used by as many people as possible.

## **Southern Quarter**

### *Public realm*

- The proposed multi-generational use of public space is a good approach in principle, but more detail will be needed to show how this will work in practice.
- The space at the Kentish Town corner of the site, east of Block F, will have good sunlight and has the potential to be an important node. Activity levels will need to be managed to ensure it does not cause problems for residents of Block C.

### *Routes and connections*

- It is very important that Greenwood Place works well as an entrance to the site. The panel suggests more attention should be given to the way it will



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connect all the way to Highgate Road, and how it relates to flank views of the Forum and Christ Apostolic Church buildings.

- The service route between Blocks F, G, H and the railway looks narrow. The panel suggests that there is flexibility to rearrange units and create a more flexible, useable space.

### *Blocks A and B*

- While the existing units that form Blocks A and B would be good locations for meanwhile uses, the panel questions whether the buildings are of a quality worth retaining in the longer term. It may be preferable to demolish them and rebuild, perhaps on larger scale.
- The panel feels that it is not yet clear how the space in front of Blocks F, G and H will operate as a working yard and a residential front door. A messy space that combines residential and employment uses can work, but potential for conflict should be assessed. In particular, outdoor working fronting on to a main public space is unusual, and may need to be moved around the other side of the blocks.

### *Block C*

- Care should be taken to ensure adequate privacy for the affordable units in Block C which are located on what could be the main entrance to the site, facing onto one of its largest squares. They could benefit from vegetation to give them a greener setting, and help to protect them from vehicular movements on Greenwood Place.

### *Sustainability*

- The panel supports plans to maintain yard spaces in the south of the site, but suggest that they are kept as hard surfacing, appropriate to industrial spaces, with tree planting primarily along the Heathline.
- Construction will require a large amount of infrastructure, and it is important that work is done to understand how circular economy principles can be applied to materials.

### *Next steps*

The panel would like to review proposals for the Southern Quarter of the site at another session, as it was not able to consider them in full at this session. It is also available to review other elements at an appropriate stage, once designs have developed.

