

London Borough of Camden Design Review Panel

Report of Chair's Review Meeting: Land between Gondar House and South Mansions, Gondar Gardens

Friday, 26 March 2021
Video conference

Panel

Catherine Burd (chair)
Nimi Attanayake

Attendees

Richard Limbrick	London Borough of Camden
Jonathan McClue	London Borough of Camden
Lavinia Scaletti	London Borough of Camden
Angela McIntyre	Frame Projects
Kiki Ageridou	Frame Projects

Apologies / report copied to

Daniel Pope	London Borough of Camden
Bethany Cullen	London Borough of Camden
Richard Wilson	London Borough of Camden
Edward Jarvis	London Borough of Camden
Kevin Fisher	London Borough of Camden
Deborah Denner	Frame Projects

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 between Gondar House and South Mansions, Gondar Gardens,
London NW6 1QD

2. Presenting team

Ty Tikari	Tikari Works
Nicola Tikari	Tikari Works
Lewis Westhoff	Iceni Projects

3. Planning authority briefing

The site fronts the eastern side of Gondar Gardens and forms the rear garden of 1 Hillfield Road. It lies between South Mansions and Gondar House, which are both three storey buildings, with South Mansions fronting Gondar Gardens and Gondar House facing Hillfield Road and Gondar Gardens. The site slopes up with the road from south to north and has an area of 328 sqm, which consists of concrete hardstanding and landscaped areas.

To the south of the site is Hillfield Road, which mostly contains three storey terraced buildings and is characterised by relatively long rear gardens. On the western side of Gondar Gardens, opposite the site, are the rears of properties on Sarre Road. Some of these frontages are open, others have single storey garages and a number have recent two storey mews type developments to provide residential accommodation. Further to the north of the site is the Gondar Gardens Reservoir, which has a lengthy planning history.

The site is not located within a conservation area and there are no listed buildings in the immediate vicinity. It is within the Fortune Green and West Hampstead Neighbourhood Area.

Planning permission was recently refused for the construction of a part two, part three storey, plus basement, residential building to deliver six residential flats on the site. Some of the reasons for refusal included the proposal's height, mass, scale and detailed design. The applicant has reconsidered the proposals and sought a new architect to develop a more considerate scheme. The revised scheme has been reduced to four units, including two family houses.

Officers support the general principle, height, scale and massing, and consider the development to sit well within the street scene. They asked for the panel's views, in particular, on how the proposal would be viewed from the rear, and how imposing it would be from rear gardens and windows of neighbouring properties; as well as on the details of design and materials.



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4. Design Review Panel's views

Summary

The panel finds much to admire in the proposals, which are significantly improved from the design submitted as part of the previous application. The panel supports development of the site and suggests some minor refinements to ensure that the scheme is of the highest possible quality. The building narrative creates a considered contextual design, which contributes positively to the street scene, and the panel would like to see the existing architect retained to ensure that the quality currently shown is delivered. The panel would welcome greater permeability at ground floor, and suggests further testing of opening sizes, as well as of active uses to ensure the public realm is overlooked and of a high quality. While the simplicity of the material palette is commended, the panel suggests drawing the detail of the façade's fenestration and functional elements, such as downpipes, to help bring some richness as well as realism to the elevations. Consideration should be given to an opening to the building's southern gable. The mix of unit types and thoughtfully considered home layouts is commended. The root protection zone of the existing street tree must be properly assessed to understand its impact on the proposed basement design and slab levels. The rear elevation appears to minimise overlooking, although more variety in the fenestration is suggested. The panel also advises revisiting the storage arrangements for bikes and bins at House 1. These points are expanded below.

Overall approach

- The panel commends the considered narrative which generates the building form and helps tell the story of a contextual development on this sensitive site.
- While the panel finds much to admire in the current proposals, it emphasises the importance of ensuring this level of detail and refinement is carried through to delivery. As a result, it would suggest the existing architects are retained throughout the project, potentially through the use of planning conditions.
- In the panel's view, the proposed mass and height appear appropriate for this location.

Street scene

- The panel considers that the proposals contribute positivity to the street scene, creating a clearly articulated frontage with three well-considered bays.
- In light of the importance of good quality public realm in a post-pandemic world, it would like to see greater permeability between the building's ground floor and the street.
- It suggests ground floor windows facing the street could be more generous, both to enhance the public realm and to increase overlooking and the feeling of safety for pedestrians.



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- While taking note of internal design considerations, the design team should explore whether lowering window sills could improve the building's connection to the public realm.

Building elevations

- The panel appreciates the clarity, simplicity and rigour of the building plans, but feels further thought is required to ensure the same subtlety is translated to elevations.
- Further consideration of the building's fenestration, particularly at ground and second floor levels, could help add richness.
- The panel would like to see studies looking at the potential for dividing the second-floor windows, and clarity on openable areas of glazing.
- In the panel's view, sharply pointed window tops do not feel domestic. However, this could be resolved by adding horizontal glazing bars and by detailing those elements of the window are openable and those that are fixed.
- The panel suggests the design team should not be overly concerned about designing the elevation of House 2 as a rigid mirror version of House 1, and should instead ensure each elevation responds to its specific plan and context.
- There may be justification for using smaller window openings for House 2, to add to its 'cosy' attic feel.
- The panel encourages the design team to show the realistic 'nuts and bolts' of the elevation, to make it more convincing. For example, thought should be given to how downpipes will be articulated on the building elevation, with the panel suggesting recessed brickwork detailing.
- The panel welcomes the simplicity of the proposed material palette. The choice of brick is critical, and should be conditioned in any planning permission.
- The panel considers the most recent iteration of the street elevation to be the most successful. The incorporation of structured planters works well with the pieces of otherwise leftover space created by the building's sinuous edge, and speaks to the history of traditional front walls.
- The panel welcomes the thought given to the roof and balcony soffits, which should be made of a high-quality material.



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- The panel finds that the south-facing building gable, visible from Gondar Gardens, appears quite blank. The applicant, in discussion with officers, should explore whether a window in this location could offer a moment of delight to House 2, allowing an outlook over the new green roof. Failing this, recesses or other decoration could help break up the elevation.

Residential accommodation

- The panel welcomes the mix of unit types, which will bring much-needed family homes to this part of Camden.
- Thoughtful home layouts with moments of delight, such as the open staircase with perforated brickwork, are commended by the panel.
- The panel welcomes the grouped entrances, which work well and will help to build a sense of neighbourliness.
- Careful consideration should be given to the threshold between homes and the public realm, and the panel welcomes the inclusion of street planters to help navigate this.
- In the panel's view, House 1, with its north-facing garden, will require further thought to ensure it feels open and airy. The design team should explore ways to allow light to transfer from the front of the property to the back.
- Careful attention must be given to the root protection zone of the existing street tree. The panel encourages the design team to carry out investigative works, as soon as possible, which are specific to their proposals, to understand the impact of this tree on both the proposed basement and ground floor slab levels.

Rear elevation and overlooking

- The panel considers that the proposals appear to deal cleverly with overlooking issues, creating minimal impact on neighbouring properties.
- It enjoys the brick screen to the rear of the homes, which allows light into the homes but minimises overlooking.
- The panel suggests there is a careful balance is needed between minimising overlooking and creating an animated elevation. It would like to see the rear elevation become a little less uniform. For example, the windows here could be more generous, perhaps with lower sills.
- There is room for more difference to the rear elevation of each property to allow each to feel more individual. It suggests this could take the form of subtle differences dictated by the building plan and level changes.



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- A more relaxed rear elevation will sit well in the context of the rear of Victorian properties.

Bikes and bins

- The panel feels that the communal bin store could be problematic, with no clear responsibility for managing and maintaining the space. This could have an adverse effect on the public realm if households dispose of their waste via the street.
- It suggests further exploration of a solution for the storage of bikes and bins for House 1, as the current proposals seem convoluted. As this is a family home, children's bikes and scooters and bins will be regularly taken out, so a more convenient solution should be found.
- One option could be to look at a more flexible use for the study at the front of the plan, which could allow for the practical storage of bikes and bins.

Green roof

- The panel would like to ensure that any proposed green roofs do not become 'brown' roofs, and would encourage wild flower meadow-type planting rather than a sedum roof.

Next Steps

The panel offers its enthusiastic support to the proposals, subject to incorporation of minor detail refinements. It would like to see the existing architects retained to deliver on the detail proposed.

