



London Borough of Camden Design Review Panel

Report of Formal Review Meeting: Murphy's Yard

Friday 23 July 2021

Video conference

Panel

Eleanor Fawcett (chair)

Amber Fahey

Richard Lavington

Mike Martin

John McRae

Attendees

Alex Bushell

London Borough of Camden

Bethany Cullen

London Borough of Camden

Kevin Fisher

London Borough of Camden

Victoria Hinton

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Edward Jarvis

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Wen Quek

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Tom Bolton

Frame Projects

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Apologies / copied to

Daniel Pope

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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

Heidi Au Yeung	Studio Egret West
Sarah Brooks	Studio Egret West
Stephanos Georgiou	Studio Egret West
Daniel Mahony	Studio Egret West
Duncan Paybody	Studio Egret West
David West	Studio Egret West
Paul Brosnahan	Murphy
Kate Macmillan	Murphy
Jo Drane	Hoare Lee
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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, and areas immediately adjacent. The proposed application for full outline planning permission is for employment-led mixed-use re-development of the site, including the provision of industry, residential, office, retail, healthcare, and other supporting uses.

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. 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, on Gordon House Road, Sanderson Close and Greenwood Place.

Surrounding uses include predominately residential to the north; 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. The Kentish Town Neighbourhood Plan includes a view across the site to Parliament Hill from the area adjacent to Kentish Town Station.

The proposals have been reviewed twice by the Camden Design Review Panel, in April and September 2020. Planning officers asked for the panel's views on how the design code and parameter plans should be used to deliver Camden's priorities for a new neighbourhood. In particular, officers asked for the panel's advice on heights and massing; views and townscape impact from surrounding areas, including those with and without neighbourhood plans; future-proofing through delivering a zero carbon neighbourhood; ensuring a liveable place for residents; and on how the parameter plans and design code can provide a clear understanding of what will be built.



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4. Design Review Panel's views

Summary

The panel considers that the masterplan for Murphy's Yard has the potential to deliver a high quality new neighbourhood, but it is essential that the design code and parameter plans lock in the key elements of the site vision, while allowing room for design development that can improve quality of place. The three central towers in Plots J and S appear too high in views from Parliament Hill and should be lowered, and also considers Plots F, G, H and I to be excessively bulky. It is concerned that the Design Code includes maximum parameter volumes that permit even higher development of this and other blocks, and alterations to massing, which would not be acceptable. It also feels it is essential that maximum parameter volumes do not permit building volumes to be filled out, creating excessive massing. The Design Code should capture the essential features of the design vision, distinguishing them clearly from illustrative content, leaving no doubt about what is required and what is only suggested. The Parameter Plans should back up these essential elements by providing not only key dimensions wherever necessary, but linking clearly to an explanation of the design thinking they represent. More thinking is needed on how to free up the raised cycle route around Plot S, where it is constrained and awkward, on increasing connections to it, and on its routing through Shed 2. Further development of thinking on movement hierarchies, and a stronger commitment to the delivery of future site connections are both essential. The panel emphasises the need for delivery of the 369-377 Kentish Town Road link as a fundamental requirement. The panel presses the team to increase sustainability ambitions, and to set a net positive environmental impact target. The panel asks the applicants to consider a number of other issues further, including transition between character areas, the definition of active frontages, workspace flexibility, the role of the health centre, greening, the character of the Heath Cliff. The success of the scheme will be determined by the quality of the design teams employed to oversee delivery of the design code and parameter plans, and to design individual sites. A robust process of design scrutiny will also be needed to ensure the scheme is delivered as proposed. The panel asks for assurances that a full design review programme will be put in place, using appropriate mechanisms. These comments are expanded below.

Masterplan

Heights and massing

- The panel notes that positive changes have been made to the scheme since the previous design review. These include the development of the Plot C block, which knits the scheme in well behind the O2 Forum, and the overall arrangement of the residential blocks which relate better to one another.
- However, the panel remains concerned that the heights of the three central towers, in Plots J and S, appear too high in views from Parliament Hill. It considers that their height should be reduced by one or two floors, from their proposed heights of 17, 18 and 19 storeys. This would help the buildings to appear less dominant in the view and sit better in the sensitive context.



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- The panel also considers that the commercial development beside the railway line on the west side of the site, Plots F, G, H and I, appears dense and bulky. It feels that this volume of development has not been architecturally justified, and seems excessive in this location.

Character and uses

- The panel supports the decision to change Plot S from a healthcare to a residential building.
- The panel also understands the decision to segregate uses in predominantly standalone typologies. However, it suggests that the development's character areas seem separate from one another, and that a stronger sense is needed of the way transitions are made between areas. It asks for further thinking on how each character area meets and relates to its neighbours.
- The panel also notes the importance of ensuring that workspace is flexible, so it can be converted or adapted to meet changing future needs. Similarly, residential accommodation should be designed to enable homeworking, responding to the changes already taking place in working practices and requirements.

Routes and connections

- A clearer diagram is needed to illustrate hierarchies of movement around the development, where different modes cross one another or routes are shared. It is important to show what the priority will be on all routes, to provide a clear picture of movement across the development.
- The panel is pleased to see that potential future links from the development into surrounding streets are recognised in the masterplan. However, it would like to see stronger commitments made to the future delivery of these links, beyond aspirations. The potential connection to Carker's Lane, in particular, would be very beneficial. As noted at the previous review meeting, the panel believes that a delivery partner is required to ensure all links to the site can be provided.
- In particular, the panel considers the entrance to Murphy's Yard via 369-377 Kentish Town Road (the car wash site) to be a key element of the scheme. If access from Kentish Town Road is only available via Greenwood Place, it will create a challenging situation. It is very positive that the applicant is collaborating with DMFK, architects for the consented scheme on this site, on a connection. The scheme should be presented with this link as an integral part of the proposals, whether or not the site is fully within the ownership red line.
- The panel suggests that a further connection to the south-west is explored, linking the development to Regis Road or Kentish Town City Farm. Although



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beyond the ownership red line, a link here would create a green corridor connection as well as connecting an area currently separated from the site.

Raised cycle route

- The decision to move the raised cycle route to the east of the site, and to elevate it, is a positive change. The panel believes there is the potential to create an enjoyable, high quality public space at the Upper Sidings, above Plots A and B. However, currently the raised route risks being overly segregated with few physical connections between the route and the ground level or adjacent buildings. Potential to contribute to a lively public realm is therefore reduced.
- The points at which people join and leave the raised cycle route should provide an experience, as well as the route itself. The design approach to entrances and exits should be captured in the Design Code and the Parameter Plan, showing how they will be treated to ensure this is achieved.
- The panel feels that the elevated cycle route proposed through Shed 2 lacks connections with the surrounding public space. The route will be separated from the shed space below, at ground floor level, and the panel suggests that a connection linking the two spaces would create a more successful public space. This could be achieved by moving the cycle way from the centre of the shed, and aligning it with the south side of the building instead. A feasibility study should be carried out to assess options for including a vertical connection between the cycle way and ground level.
- The panel suggests that the adaptations needed to incorporate the raised route into Shed 2 may leave little of the existing structure remaining. If this is the case, the space could work better as an external rather than a roofed area. However, more of the existing structure may need to be retained to ensure the conservation integrity of the building.
- The panel has concerns about the way the cycle route passes around Plot S. The route feels very constricted at the north side of the tower, particularly where the northernmost part of the building envelope projects directly into the cycle path. The route is also required to follow an s-bend curve to pass around this plot and the railway cutting. This section of the route appears problematic, and the panel feels that Plot S should be repositioned to respond to the cycleway, and create more room. The Parameter Plans should incorporate flexibility in their definition of the cycle route, to allow this section to be widened and improved.

Plot I

- The panel asks for more consideration of the role the health centre could play in the development. As the heart of a new neighbourhood, the panel would like to see it delivering community wellbeing benefit as well as providing more traditional Primary Care Trust services.



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Sustainability

- The sustainability strategy for the site is a welcome addition, and should form a fundamental part of the framework needed to guide the design approach. Proposals to prevent overheating, and the analysis of embodied CO₂, are particularly positive. While embodied carbon projections meet good practice targets, the panel presses the team to set higher ambitions, referring to the London Energy Transformation Initiative (LETI) guidance on embodied carbon, aiming for a 2030 target of 300g per m² rather than the current 400-500g per m².
- The panel also encourages the applicant to set a target to ensure the development delivers a net positive, rather than a neutral, environmental impact. Areas for further examination should include considering how the development can significantly enhance biodiversity, how it can improve air quality, and how it can provide benefits by improving wider connectivity.
- All opportunities should be taken to deliver blue infrastructure across the development, including substantial sustainable urban drainage. Standalone drainage should be developed that does not rely on local networks, which already suffer from overloading.
- Areas of hard surfacing, especially in the southern half of the site, should be designed with a permeable substrate below hard standing where possible, for example in areas where vehicle movements are limited.
- The panel also encourages the inclusion of green and brown roofs across the site, to provide ecological and environmental benefit.

Phasing

- The panel suggests that the delivery of Sheds 2 and 3 should form the first phase of the development. The masterplan is anchored around these buildings, and there is an analogy with the King's Cross Central development which used the restoration of the Granary Building as a catalyst for the remainder of the development. A stronger emphasis on this element of the site, rather than on the three tallest towers at Plots J and S, would set the tone for the site and establish these structures as the development's core and rationale.

Landscape

- The panel is pleased to see the ambition, quality and level of detail contained in the landscape proposals. It feels the landscape will play a major role in bringing the site to life.
- The detail and depth of the landscape will be essential to the success of the landscapes proposed. While an impressive level of detail has been included but, unless included in the Design Code and the Parameter Plans it will simply



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be illustrative. It is important to understand which aspects of the proposals are requirements, encoded as such, and will therefore be locked into an outline planning permission, and what will not.

- Management and maintenance of the site will be essential to realising the required public realm quality. This thinking should be built in early on, with mechanisms specified to ensure the long-term future of the development.

Gospel Oak Gate and Murphy's Mews

- The landscaping in the northern parts of the site is well resolved and will significantly improve the area. However, more work can be done to differentiate between the Gordon Gate, Heath Street North and Heath Street South areas, which seem to be of a similar character, to ensure they are distinctive places.
- Defining the edge treatment where Murphy's Mews and Heath Street North meet the gas valve compound will be important ensuring the quality of these areas of the site.
- The footpaths on Gordon House Road are very narrow where the road passes under the railway bridge, to the east of Gospel Oak Station. The panel understands that the applicant's ability to make changes outside its area of ownership is limited, but it asks that all efforts are made to improve this important connection to the station. The panel also asks the team to ensure key areas beyond the site boundary, such as this, are included in its application.

Murphy's Yard and Upper Sidings

- The panel also feels that the proposals for Murphy's Yard and the raised Upper Sidings space above Plots A and B are promising. It is important that latter feels like a raised ground level rising from the Yard, rather than a roof walk.
- The transition from Kentish Town across Murphy's Yard to the sheds is significant, and the panel suggests that a stronger sense is need of the intended character of this space. It could be a calmer, more formal and more civic space, to provide a stronger transition through the scheme.
- The Upper Sidings space does not include any trees, unlike other public spaces on the site. Despite the constraints of the deck, it would be beneficial to includes trees here, even if they cannot be large.

Heath Cliff and Heath Line

- The proposals for the Heath Line are impressive, and have the potential to be very successful. The panel supports the concept for the Heath Line to draw the character and ecology of Hampstead Heath through the site.



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- The panel also considers the Heath Cliff to be a positive, engaging aspect of the site's landscape design. However, at the moment it feels self-contained, and the panel suggests it would be beneficial if its character could permeate into the spaces around it, to make it less of a set piece and more part of the wider landscape.
- The panel suggests that, with the addition of the elevated, accessible cycle route, there is less pressure for the Heath Cliff to incorporate a winding, accessible ramp. The landscape could be simpler, less engineered and more useable if less of its area was occupied by the path.
- The panel suggests that more thinking is also needed about the way the Heath Cliff space will work. It is a distinctive space, but will be surrounded by the three tallest buildings on the site. Conditions in the public realm, the type of space this will be, and the way the space is expected to be used all require further consideration, to ensure this area will be a pleasant, and function well.
- The panel feels that the Heath Line should be integrated more strongly with the surrounding buildings and landscape where it passes behind Plot S. This is a key section of the site, where the retained sheds relate to the Heath Cliff, and more is needed bring it together as a coherent space. This could be achieved partly by broadening the Heath Line to engage more with Plot S, to avoid any sense that it follows a route around the back of the building.

Amenity spaces

- The panel encourages the inclusion of more allotments and community garden spaces beyond those already proposed, potentially through the inclusion of roof gardens.
- A rooftop park could also be a positive addition, providing outdoor space for those working in the office blocks. The panel encourages the further development of this proposal.

Design Code

- Design Codes work well if they can capture the essence of a scheme by identifying the elements that are indispensable. The code should specify the features that make the development distinctive, such as key corners, or the way buildings are positioned at important intersections. The code should aim to provide a design brief for each site, but avoid being prescriptive about materials or form.
- However, the key factor in delivering design quality via the Design Code will be curation of the masterplan, which will require the supervision of a high quality team of architects. The panel asks for guarantees that supervision of the masterplan will be put in place.



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Site-wide codes

- The Design Code is comprehensive, but would benefit from being more selective to avoid confusion over what is specified, and what is not. The panel notes the need for clarity throughout on which elements are illustrative, and which are required. For example, the street sections shown include planters, but these are illustrative and their width is not included, while the width of the carriageway is shown. This leaves some doubt about which aspects of the scheme are required by the code.
- The panel asks that a requirement is included for the overall proportion of green space across the site, or the proportion required for each area of site. This will help to preserve the design vision by ensuring public space is not dominated by paved areas and carriageways, which will be cheaper to build and maintain.
- The urban greening factor required by the London Plan must be delivered across the whole site, but is difficult to measure and validate for each plot. The panel suggests that the design team identifies measures that are crucial to the landscape character of each area. For example, a particular area might require a minimum number of trees, while for others the location of planting might be more significant. Design codes for neighbourhoods in the Olympic Park may provide some guidance on how to achieve this.
- These measures should be used to encapsulate the role the landscape should play in each area at outline planning stage, and safeguard delivery of the essence of the proposals. It is important that Camden officers are able to understand the green space target that each reserved matters application needs to meet, so they can control delivery of the overall green space commitment for the development.
- This principle applies not just to green space, but to the delivery of requirements across the development. An outline application should explicitly safeguard provision for all requirements, such as energy strategy or floorspace, that will be calculated on a site-wide basis but delivered via individual applications. A development specification should set out maximum and minimum levels for commitments that cannot be captured on drawings because they could be located anywhere on the site. It is important that these requirements are established and apportioned at outline stage.

Massing codes

- The panel is concerned that the maximum parameter volumes included in the Massing Codes are higher than the current illustrative building heights, and that breaks in the illustrative massing could be filled out to the maximum extent of the parameters when plots are developed. The panel understands the need for some flexibility in the building envelopes so the illustrative scheme can be improved upon by individual architects, but openings included in individual blocks across the scheme are very important to the character and



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quality of the overall development. The panel therefore asks that controls are included to determine the maximum extent of massing permitted within each building envelope, and to prevent voids being filled. This could be expressed as a percentage of the volume of each building envelope that can be filled, which may differ between character areas.

- It is also important that the maximum parameter volumes do not allow completed buildings to be taller than the illustrative heights shown in the masterplan, as this would have damaging effects on sensitive views. Existing maximum volumes include room for additional height, which would not be acceptable.

Character area codes

- If Camden Council's objectives for the site are to be delivered, it is essential that the quality of the scheme does not deteriorate after outline planning permission stage. It is also essential that designs can be improved as applications come forward for each plot. The Design Code must therefore identify what is non-negotiable in each character area, providing Camden officers with guidance on how to conduct discussions as the scheme progresses.
- Mandatory requirements ('musts') should be used for aspects of the scheme that are essential. For example, the use of warehouse fenestration to inform the character of Murphy's Yard should be a requirement. In other areas, requirements should be specified with more flexibility to allow for design improvement.
- The Engine Depot character area is particularly difficult to capture in the Design Code, because it requires a bespoke response to existing structures. There is a risk that the introduction of a large structure on top of Shed 3 could be a poor addition in the wrong hands. Care is therefore needed to tightly specify the essential characteristics of this proposed building, to eliminate room for error, whilst also allowing scope for design refinements as the accommodation is planned in more detail.

Sustainability

- Sustainability requirements are integrated well in some areas of the Design Code, but some fundamental aspects such as carbon impact, energy, and water strategies are missing. There is also no acknowledgement of the climate emergency or the need for climate change resilience. The code should demonstrate how these objectives will be met, and it is important that the documents make it clear what the sustainability requirements mean for each plot. A separate section may be needed to ensure this.
- The building fabric section should include discussion of its impact on overall energy performance, and should identify a 'fabric first' approach to the development



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- Sustainability objectives could be signposted throughout the document using icons, to make it clear how they form part of overall design objectives for the development.
- The panel suggests that assessments should be carried out, informed by pre-demolition orders, to determine whether materials from demolished buildings can be reused. It is important to retain and reuse materials if at all possible.
- More guidance should be included on how materials can be sourced so circular economy principles can be applied, and on how the material palette will be informed by embodied carbon assessment. Local sites should be identified where materials can be taken and repurposed.
- The Design Code would benefit from a clearer stance on façade retention for existing buildings. It should explain whether this is considered an acceptable approach for retained buildings, or a last resort.
- References should be included to the health benefits for occupants of using biobased materials, to encourage this approach.

Parameter Plans

- The Parameter Plans should include mandatory requirements ('musts'), explicitly referenced to the sections of the Design Code that explain why these are required. It is important to protect the vision for the site by capturing essential aspects of the design, and providing absolute clarity about what is needed to make the development a success. Further detail should be added to the Parameter Plans to describe these essential elements.
- The Parameter Plans should not include preferable, but optional, requirements ('shoulds'), which should be set out in the Design Code. Together, the plans and the code should provide clarity on elements of the scheme that do not provide room for adjustment, and those where there is scope for further design development, as long as the overall intentions of the Parameter Plans and Design Code are respected.
- However, wherever an option represents the best approach it should be mandatory. Every aspect of the Parameter Plans and the Design Code should be treated as mandatory unless there is a good reason not to do so, and this assumption should be captured in the documents.
- Further thinking should be carried out to identify areas of the plans where intentions could be misconstrued or requirements met in ways that are not desirable. Areas where there is unintentional room for doubt should be clarified.
- The panel asks that the Development Zones Plan key includes greater clarity on the meaning of the critical distances shown between buildings. There



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should be no ambiguity about whether these are minimum, maximum or absolute distances.

- The panel also asks that critical distances are added to the Development Zones Plan where they are not currently included. For example, distances should be specified between Plot S and Building 2, and between Plot S and the railway cutting.
- Where the distance between buildings, and the corner type created by the shape of the building, are essential aspects of the design these should be identified in the Parameter Plans. This will prevent the envelope of buildings from being changed in ways that would undermine the relationship between plots. For example, critical distances should be included between Plot K and Plot P to maintain the relationship between the two buildings, and the relative shapes of their corners.
- The panel considers it important that the Development Zones Plan includes the minimum offsets between Plots F, G and H that are contained in the massing plans, to avoid any impression that plots could be linked together.
- The team should identify locations where it is necessary to specify dimensions to ensure routes can work as intended. Key routes where dimensions should also be added include the shared route between the railway and Plots H and I, and between Plot S and Building 2, to show how the routes relate to retained Network Rail access routes; and the elevated cycle route where it runs free from buildings.
- The panel suggests including dimensions in the Parameter Plans for the cut-through in Shed 3, to show where it should be located within the building footprint.
- The reasoning behind the dimensions included in the Parameter Plans should be explained in the Design Code and in submission supporting documents, rather than allowing design intentions to be interpreted solely in terms of dimensions. Where dimensions are provided, it must be possible to also access the design thinking that explains what they are intended to achieve.
- The panel asks that a more precise definition of active frontages is developed to accompany the Key Frontages Plan. For example, workspaces often have windows but no visibility into private interior spaces. The definition should also differ between residential and commercial areas, to ensure it is accurate and achieves the intention of delivery real activity.
- The panel also asks that the Key Frontages Plan sets out both the amount of active frontage required, and a maximum distance – for example, 5m – without activity on primary frontages.



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- Further clarity is need on what is included within building lines and what is excluded. For example, the plans should show that defensible planting is not included within building lines.

Design quality assurance

- It is important that the Parameter Plans and Design Code do not provide the only mechanisms to provide assurance that the design vision will be delivered. High quality architecture cannot be ensured by plans and codes alone.
- The impact of all height and massing on sensitive views across the scheme will be highly dependent on design detail, which is not available at this stage. The panel therefore notes the need for Camden Council to ensure any outline planning permission provides the tools to address design uncertainty on the most sensitive parts of the site, and ensure the quality of the vision is delivered by design teams with the required expertise.
- The process going forward should therefore include mechanisms, such as planning conditions or a planning performance agreement, to ensure a commitment to a full design review programme for reserved matters applications as they come to planning, and measures that allow Camden officers to ensure architects employed on the scheme in future deliver the required design quality.

Next steps

The panel asks for a comprehensive design review programme to be agreed to ensure reviews are held of all reserved matters applications, as they come forward.

The panel is also available to review the Design Code, Parameter Plans and masterplan again, if required, as they develop.

