

Camden Design Review Panel

Report of Formal Review Meeting: Great Ormond Street Hospital

Friday 11 March 2022
5 Pancras Square, London, N1C 4AC

Panel

Catherine Burd (chair)
Kiru Balson
Neil Davidson
Barbara Kaucky
Chloë Phelps

Attendees

Kevin Fisher	London Borough of Camden
Patrick Marfleet	London Borough of Camden
Neil McDonald	London Borough of Camden
Rose Todd	London Borough of Camden
Tom Bolton	Frame Projects
Hanako Littlewood	Frame Projects

Apologies / report copied to

Alastair Crockett	London Borough of Camden
Bethany Cullen	London Borough of Camden
Daniel Pope	London Borough of Camden
Richard Wilson	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

Great Ormond Street Hospital Children's Cancer Centre (GOSH CCC), Great Ormond Street, London WC1N 3JH

2. Presenting team

Mark Brown	BDP
Benedict Zucchi	BDP
Gabriela Bayliss	BDP Landscape
Mark Harris	BDP Sustainability
Rory McManus	Turley
Crispin Walkling-Lea	Great Ormond Street Hospital
William McCready	Great Ormond Street Hospital
Tessa O'Neill	Trust Planning Advisor

3. Planning authority's views

Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) is a campus of buildings occupying most of a perimeter block bounded by Guilford Street, Lamb's Conduit Street, Great Ormond Street and Powis Place. The frontage elements of the hospital site fall within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area, and the Paul O'Gorman Building is considered to contribute positively to its character and appearance. As identified in the London View Management Framework, the hospital lies within the protected vista from Primrose Hill to St. Paul's Cathedral.

GOSH is the UK's largest paediatric hospital and has been the subject of on-going phased development. The objectives of Phase 4 (the current scheme) are to replace the majority of the buildings along the Great Ormond Street frontage with new building to house the Children's Cancer Centre, which will be a national resource for children with rare and difficult-to-treat cancers. A single, nine-storey, purpose-built clinical building is proposed to create a welcoming main entrance and arrival experience; and to provide flexibly-designed accommodation, including outpatient consulting rooms, inpatient wards, and teaching and education space.

The developing designs for the Children's Cancer Centre build on the themes of 'House', 'Hospital' and 'Garden'. The 'House' is representative of a reassuring sense of home away from home. The 'Hospital' refers to GOSH as a special place with a serious clinical purpose. The 'Garden' relates to indoor-outdoor spaces that provide relief from the clinical environment and the potential for play and interaction.

The project has been reviewed on two occasions by the Camden Design Review Panel, most recently in November 2021. Camden officers asked for the panel's advice, in particular, on the building's response to the character of the terrace opposite and to the wider character of Bloomsbury; on whether improvements could be made to the front entrance, including ensuring it as welcoming as possible for children; on activating the ground floor elevation; and on roof garden maintenance.



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4. Design Review Panel's views

Summary

The panel considers that the proposals have progressed well since the previous review, but that further work is still needed to ensure the building relates well to its setting, and has a stronger, more coherent and sophisticated architectural identity. Many aspects of the design are positive, and the panel's comments relate to where it considers design development is needed. Massing should be adjusted to create a less abrupt transition to the Paul O'Gorman Building at roof level. The panel would like to see more evidence of contextual studies informing the façade design, to deliver a building that feels less corporate and homogenous, and more sympathetic to the fine grain of its conservation area setting. Cues should be taken from Bloomsbury buildings, for example in relation to windows and planting. The balcony bay seems both dominant and visually separate from the rest of the façade. It would benefit from refinement, and from a stronger connection to the overall architectural concept for the building. Balconies need careful planning to prevent noise from affecting bedrooms. More varied and specific planting could be used for distinct characters. The main hospital entrance is developing well, but the structure would benefit from further refinement. The panel finds the use of colour in the ground floor overly simplistic and suggests the use of textures as well as, or instead of, colour could make the building inviting for children. More work is needed to connect the ground floor frontage with the public realm, alongside conversations to integrate designs with street improvement work. The roof garden proposals are innovative and exciting, but additional maintenance skills will be needed to manage the new roof and balcony spaces. The panel asks for a complete justification of the carbon impact involved in demolishing the current building, and an assessment of design-led solutions to reducing embodied carbon in the façade. It makes comments on refining the glazing strategy, and suggests the risk of thermal bridging should be thoroughly explored. The panel also emphasises the importance of recording design detail, through bay studies and drawings, to help maintain the design quality that is essential to the success of the building through to delivery. These comments are expanded below.

Massing

- The panel considers that the overall massing of the development is acceptable in its context. While the building is large, it does not dominate in key views, and the expression of different 'houses' in the Great Ormond Street elevation has the potential to contribute a sense of variety and depth to the street.
- However, it suggests further work is needed to manage the massing where the new building meets the Paul O'Gorman Building. It appears large in relation to its neighbour at top storey level, and the panel suggests this element is reduced in size to create a more sympathetic relationship.
- Whilst the large balconies are successful in helping break up the mass and the long façade, their dominance contributes to a sense that the building is overscaled for its setting.



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Architecture

- The panel considers that some elements of the architectural approach have developed well, including the expressive use of chimneys, the roof gardens and the entrance.
- However, it feels that the central section of the building that contains the balconies has not yet reached a successful design resolution. While the concept of a bringing greening to patient and staff areas is strong, the balcony bay contrasts too much with the architecture on either side. The use of large slabs and columns presents too great a contrast with the form and materials on either side. The panel feels that more depth and finesse is needed to help ensure this section reads as part of a single building, and appears more connected to the 'house' bays.
- The panel suggests that the building's architecture should reflect more of the townscape character of the surrounding conservation area. The building's façade has a commercial quality, partly driven by the use of floor-to-ceiling glazing, which feel inappropriate to the area.
- The panel encourages the design team to think further about the character of Bloomsbury and to consider how features, such as mullions, could be used to reduce the impression that this is a corporate building. Introducing solid panels to cover the lower parts of windows could help to provide the elevation with a more appropriate scale, and provide more options to add texture to the façade. Vertical fins could perhaps be extended over the tops of windows.
- Further engagement with local communities will help inform the architectural approach, to ensure the building responds to the material grain and historic character of its setting.
- The panel also asks for finer detail on the way the façade will be treated, including bay studies and details of bricks and other materials. It is very important to illustrate design detail to ensure the level of quality required by both the client and Camden Council can be included in a planning application, and retained through the delivery phase.
- It suggests that the coloured fins do not feel well-integrated with other façade elements and appear overly simplistic. The design should not rely on colour to help the building appear welcoming to children, but should have greater detail sophistication, and could include the use of texture. The panel is pleased to hear that the team has already engaged with children, but suggests that further engagement can help to develop aspects of the design such as this.

Entrance

- The panel considers that the design of the main entrance has improved significantly, and that working with an artist is an important step towards developing a successful solution.



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- However, it asks for further refinement to introduce greater design subtlety. The columns on either side of the entrance opening seem too large and intrusive. The panel suggests the Mary Ward Centre on Queen Square as a local example of an elegant, unified formal entrance design, which the design team could potentially draw from.

Ground floor frontage

- The panel is not yet convinced that the ground floor frontage designs are successful. The façade appears flat, lacking in texture, and overbearing in relation to the street.
- The panel feels that the relationship between the ground floor and the public realm is unclear, with some areas on a plinth, and others defined by railings and lightwells. The combination of the lightwells and the external café space create a defensive barrier between the building and the pavement. The panel feels that this separation does not reflect the way buildings in Bloomsbury generally meet the ground, and asks for further thought on how a simpler threshold can be created.
- The school's external play space will also be in shadow, which suggests it is in the wrong location to provide the quality of amenity required. The panel asks whether there is an opportunity instead to provide rooftop play space – in which case there could potentially be benefit in relocating the school to the upper level.
- The panel feels that the external expression of the window seats feels unrelated to the rest of the façade. It is also concerned the window seats, while an interesting idea, may not be accessible to children in wheelchairs.
- The street works proposed for Great Ormond Street will have a significant influence on whether the new building can relate successfully to the public realm. However, these are being planned and implemented separately, on a different timescale. The panel is therefore concerned that an important opportunity is being lost to integrate the two projects, and to maximise benefits for both hospital users and the public, particularly in relation to the main hospital entrance. Equally, the street works could cause problems for GOSH if their objectives conflict. The panel asks the design team to make contact with those responsible for street improvements, and to discuss how a beneficial relationship can be developed between the projects.

Balconies

- The panel feels that the balconies are too large for their setting. It notes that small window boxes are characteristic of the neighbourhood, in contrast to the size of the balconies. Breaking landscaping down into smaller elements, as window boxes do, could help to address scale contrast and help the building to appear more sympathetic to its surroundings.



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- The panel emphasises the importance of ensuring bedrooms are effectively screened from staff and family balcony spaces outside their windows. It is concerned that it will be difficult to prevent impacts on patients from noise.
- The panel expresses some concerns about whether conditions at the rear of balconies will allow plants to thrive. The selection of appropriate plants for these locations will be crucial if they are to succeed.
- While the idea of secret balcony gardens is promising, the panel suggests that a more diverse range of plants should be considered than those illustrate. Planting could change with each level, reflecting changing relationships to the sun. The panel encourages the selection of a multi-functional palette of plants to create excitement and distinct characters in different areas.
- The panel suggests the GOSH infection control team should be consulted to understand why some existing external spaces at the hospital cannot be used. It is important to learn lessons from these to ensure new spaces can be accessed as anticipated by the design team.

Roof garden

- The panel is pleased to see how well the designs for the roof garden have developed. The proposals now appear both imaginative and useable, offering an exciting range of different character areas. The overall concept for these spaces is strong.
- The panel also emphasises the importance of ensuring the roof and balcony spaces are practical and deliverable. The amount of planting that will require maintenance is much larger than anything in the existing hospital, and maintenance expertise will need to be increased in proportion to this extra responsibility. A thorough ecological and biodiversity management plan should be produced to demonstrate that these spaces can be successfully managed. A head gardener is likely to be needed to implement a step change in maintenance skills.
- The issue of fire risk identified by the project team in relation to the proposed vertical planting should be resolved in conversation with a fire engineer, as it could have a significant impact in planting proposals.
- The panel encourages the design team to explore the scope for including blue roof elements in the building, and potentially to transfer water between levels as part of the management strategy, while also creating visual interest.

Embodied carbon

- A demolition feasibility study should be provided, as discussed at the last review meeting. This is needed to make the case that the carbon impact of



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demolishing the existing building can be justified. This should include a statement on how demolition uses circular economy principles.

- The panel suggests that the proposals should be strengthened to reduce embodied carbon impact through a low carbon design approach, as well as rigorous specification of materials. An embodied carbon study should be carried for the entire façade, so design options can be assessed, and potential gains explored. For example, the use of coloured, non-natural materials in the façade should be considered carefully in relation to its carbon impact.
- Materials used in the landscaping will require environmental product declarations, to ensure their carbon impact is not excessive.
- The panel also asks for assurances that the embodied carbon impact of the building's services strategy will be assessed.

Operational sustainability

- The panel is pleased to hear the detail that has been developed on an operational sustainability strategy for the building, including the positive response to the suggestion that Passivhaus standards should be considered.
- It questions whether using double glazed windows with low u-values is the right strategy, and suggests assessing the benefits of triple glazing and of a different coating specification for double glazing.
- The panel also suggests that a homogenous approach to ventilation may not necessary, and that openable windows could be considered for some spaces, perhaps on a single floor.
- The panel supports the use of the glazing proportions recommended in London Energy Transformation Initiative (LETI) guidance, but suggests benchmarking these against peak heating and cooling load to check that they will be effective.
- The panel expresses some concern that both the balcony slabs and the chimneys could act as thermal bridges, and asks for further assessment to prevent this.

Next steps

The panel is available to review the proposals again if required, when the design team has been able to respond to its comments.

