



**London Borough of Camden Design Review Panel**

**Report of Chair's Review Meeting: Mary's Youthwork**

Friday 9 September 2022  
5 Pancras Square, London N1C 4AG

**Panel**

Catherine Burd (chair)  
Mary Duggan

**Attendees**

Kevin Fisher	London Borough of Camden
Adam Greenhalgh	London Borough of Camden
Edward Jarvis	London Borough of Camden
Richard Limbrick	London Borough of Camden
Neil McDonald	London Borough of Camden
David McKinstry	London Borough of Camden
Jane Wylie	London Borough of Camden
Eva Papai	University College London
Tom Bolton	Frame Projects
Abigail Joseph	Frame Projects

**Apologies / report copied to**

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.

**Declaration of interest**

Catherine Burd is the chair of the Camden Design Review Panel. The Church of St Mary the Virgin is her local church, but she has no formal involvement with the organisation.

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## 1. Project name and site address

Mary's Youthwork, St Mary the Virgin Church, Elsworthy Road, London, NW3 3DJ

## 2. Presenting team

Mary Jane Roberts	Mary's Youthwork
Biba Dow	Dow Jones Architects
Wyn Jones	Dow Jones Architects
Rebecca Mason	Iceni Projects

## 3. Planning authority briefing

St Mary the Virgin Church is located on Primrose Hill Road, lying between Elsworthy Road and King Henry's Road. The proposed extension to the church will sit on the site of the existing St Mary's Centre and the sacristy store at the eastern end of the church, on Primrose Hill Road and Elsworthy Road.

The church is Grade II Listed and is within the Elsworthy Road Conservation Area. The proposal is to demolish the St Mary's Centre and sacristy store at the front of the church, and replace them with a new two-storey front extension for Mary's Youthwork. Mary's Youthwork is a charity based at the church which provides support for young people affected by knife crime and gang violence in the borough.

Camden officers consider the proposed use appropriate, as it complies with policies for facilitating community uses and would constitute a public benefit. The existing extension, which will be replaced by the proposed building, does not enhance the setting of the listed building and has harmed it to a less than substantial degree through its height and location which partially obscure the apse of the church. The proposal also involves demolition of what appears to be the remainder of a 1904 extension to the church.

Planning officers asked for the panel's views on the impact of the proposed development on the fabric of the listed church and on the conservation area, including the height of the proposals.



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## 4. Design Review Panel's views

### *Summary*

The panel supports the development proposals for the Grade II listed Church of St Mary the Virgin, and the well-considered and elegant use of the limited space available on the site. The panel recognises that the proposed pitched roof will obscure part of the apse from view. However, the new roof will not be visible internally, and the panel's opinion is that the proposed design is overall of a high enough quality to balance any potential harm caused to the listed building by providing significant public benefit. Architecturally, the panel considers the proposed use of brick will complement the character of the church. It suggests that there is scope for greater variation in the materials, including the use of different types of brick, to create a varied aesthetic and avoid a monolithic appearance. The applicant team should also explore whether materials from the existing buildings could be reused post-demolition. The panel asks whether the new entrance might be located in the north wall of the extension, where it would overlook the external space and provide space for a larger threshold. The panel encourages the applicant to explore, either as part of this project or in preparation for future phases, more efficient use of other areas of the church including creating access via the base of the incomplete spire, and building in the nave or above the church hall. The panel suggests that SMC Youthwork's impressive projects should play a greater role in the design narrative to help demonstrate the full value and public benefit of the proposals. The panel asks that the Camden officers consider extending street widening to improve the public space outside the church. These comments are expanded below.

### *Impact on the listed building*

- The panel considers that, although the proposed extension conceals more of the apse than the building it will replace, it promises to be a higher quality design than the existing extension and adds to the setting of the historic building. As one of a number of accretions which have been added to the original structure, it remains subservient to the building behind but also adds greater sequence and stronger hierarchy to the overall architecture.
- The panel considers that, while the proposals will cause a subjective degree of harm to the setting of the listed building they offer a significant improvement in comparison to the current building, which wraps around the apse but does not celebrate it.
- Importantly, the hip of the new roof means it cannot be seen when viewed from within the church through the large apse window.
- As little remains of the 1904 sacristy, the panel is comfortable with this being removed by the applicant during development.
- The panel appreciates the importance of providing a detailed design narrative to explain how the proposals have been developed, and alternative options considered and excluded.



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- The panel also feels that the impressive breadth and impact of Mary's Youthwork's programmes should play a greater role in the design narrative to help demonstrate the full public value of the proposals.
- The panel recommends that a clear, programmatic justification is provided to demonstrate why it is important for the new building to be larger than the building it replaces.

### *Architecture*

- The panel supports the architectural approach, which it considers to be of a very high quality.
- It supports the applicant's decision to use copper cladding and brick as the main materials. The latter complements the church's character and provides a suitable solidity to the new extension.
- The panel suggests that refinements should be made to the scheme's materiality. To reduce the potential for a smooth, monolithic appearance and respond more closely to the materiality of the church, two or more different types of brick could be used to create a more varied aesthetic and texture. A relevant example of variation in brickwork can be found in the Lambeth Palace Library by Wright & Wright Architects.
- The panel also suggests that elements the copper used for the roof could potentially be extended to the base of the building to vary textures further.
- The panel notes that the execution of detail will be important in securing the quality, and encourages the applicant to retain the design team to completion. The local authority may want to condition this.

### *Church entrance*

- The panel questions the location of the new entrance, which will result in a smaller threshold. It suggests potentially relocating the entrance to the north wall of the extension where it would open out onto public space, providing a larger threshold and connecting to other existing uses on this side of the building.
- The panel also suggests that the double height space makes the entrance appear a little large in relation to the church. While a double height entrance provides generous internal space, the nature of the charity's work also means a more subtle entrance could be preferable. Relocating the entrance could reduce its impact and make it a more subtle feature for those wanting to access the building discreetly.
- In any case the panel considers it is important that the extension has a generous aspect onto the external space at the north, to provide surveillance over this space and a more welcoming aspect.



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- The panel suggests that the pavement widening work currently underway on Primrose Hill Road south of Elsworthy Road could be extended to the area outside the east end of the church, where the pavement is narrow and constrained by guard rails. Providing a more generous area of public realm outside the church would significantly improve its setting. It urges the applicant and local authority to review whether this would be possible in light of the recent and ongoing road alterations.

### *Development options*

- The panel commends the applicant's skilful use of the limited space available on the site. However, even with the new extension, space to support the range of activities and services offered to the community will still be limited.
- It suggests that the scope of the proposals be widened to include development options within the main part of the church, either as part of this project or as potential future phases. It encourages the applicant to retain the design team through all areas so a 'golden thread' – a consistency in design detail and quality – runs through the works.
- The panel encourages further considerations of options to build in the nave, the transept or above the church hall.
- Building within the nave, although potentially controversial with users, could allow significant extra space. Building above existing offices in the north transept is also an option that would create more space.
- The panel also suggests that the base of the unfinished spire in the north aisle might be developed to include access into the church or potentially into the crypt and upper levels. It may be worth revisiting option of building above existing hall.
- The panel wonders if there is potential for development of the (unbuilt) spire to provide a beacon celebrating the church and its exemplary community work.

### *Sustainability*

- The panel encourages the applicant to explore the potential to reuse any materials from the existing building in the development.

### *Next steps*

The panel is confident that the design team can address its comments in discussion with Camden officers.

