

LEWISHAM DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

DESIGN REVIEW REPORT

Project Willow Way, Upper Sydenham

Status Pre-application: 1st DRP Review

Review Date 28th February 2023

Issue Date 10th March 2023

In attendance:

Applicant Design & Planning Team

Applicant Team Applicant

Kitewood

Sara Sweeney
Will de Cani

Architect

DC Architecture + Design

Charles Dunnett
Chris Fletcher

Planning Consultant

Carney Sweeney

Poppy Westwood

LDRP Panel Members

Keith Williams (Chair)
Martha Alker
Jason Cornish
Dorian Crone

Local Planning Authority

Gareth Clegg : Principal Planning Officer
Kate Harrison : Principal Planning Officer
David Robinson : Major and Strategic Projects Manager
Konoya Kabir : DRP Coordinating Officer

This report forms the response of Lewisham Design Review Panel (LDRP) to the design review held virtually on 28th February 2023.

DECLARATIONS

No declarations were received or made.

CONFIDENTIALITY

This report and the advice given herein will not be confidential as the planning application for Plot A is live.

VIRTUAL SITE VISIT

The DRP was virtual and did not include a formal site visit. A virtual walk through on 'Google Maps' was held prior to the review and the Panel had studied the material submitted in advance of the review by the applicant team/LBL officers. Therefore, all Panel Members were familiar with the site, its context and constraints.

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SITE AND ITS CONTEXT

The Willow Way LEL site comprises various land ownerships.

- Plot A – Kitewood
- Plot B – LB Lewisham ownership
- Plot C – Kitewood
- Plot D – Third party ownership
- Plot E – Third party ownership

Plots A and C comprise a number of two storey buildings in mixed employment use together with associated external yard spaces. Plot B is vacant and largely cleared. Plot D comprises a single storey building operating as a vehicle repair and MOT service centre together with areas of hardstanding. Plot E, Willow Business Park, comprises a series of two storey purpose built light industrial buildings set around a central parking court.

The site lies within a Public Transport Accessibility Location (PTAL) of 4; bus stops are close by on Kirkdale and Sydenham station lies approximately 10 minutes walk to the south east and Forest Hill station is approximately 10 minutes walk to the north east.

The proposal site lies to the east of Kirkdale Local Centre (proposed to be designated as a local centre through the emerging Local Plan) which comprises a range of ground floor retail, food and drink, and associated commercial uses focused along Kirkdale, extending onto Dartmouth Road.

With the exception of Kirkdale Local Centre and its associated uses, the surrounding area is predominantly residential in nature. William Wood House, a residential care home, directly adjoins Plot A to the south and east. Residential properties within the Sydenham Park Conservation Area are beyond. There are residential properties within Kirkdale Local Centre at both ground and upper floor levels. The surrounding area is characterised by a range of residential accommodation types, including dwelling houses, apartments and various forms of supported accommodation.

There is a series of designated and non-designated heritage assets within the vicinity. These include Sydenham Park Conservation Area which directly adjoins the proposal site to the south and east, the Halifax Street Conservation Area which lies to the west of Kirkdale, the Jews Walk and Cobbs Corner Conservation Areas which lie to the south, and Sydenham Hill Conservation Area which lies beyond to the north west. There are a number of listed and locally listed buildings within the vicinity of the proposal site, including The Bricklayers Arms public house which lies to the north east of the proposal site at the junction of Dartmouth Road and Willow Way, directly adjacent to Plot D.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL

Demolition of existing buildings and redevelopment of Plot A comprising a block rising to 5/6 storeys accommodating 1,401m² of employment floorspace (Use Classes E(g)(i)(ii)(iii)) at ground and mezzanine floors and 60 residential units (Use Class C3) above, with associated landscaping, amenity areas, cycle, car parking and refuse/recycling stores.

STAGE OF THE PROPOSAL

The project (Plot A only) has been submitted to LB Lewisham as a formal planning application which is live.

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The Panel welcomed the opportunity to engage with the project and thanked the team for their pre-submission and thorough presentation, before inviting LBL planning officers' view.

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LOCAL AUTHORITY PLANNING OFFICERS' VIEW

The Council asked the Panel to consider the following key issues:

Two early concept pre-application meetings with officers took place during 2020. A scheme proposal was then presented to officers in September 2022, who had a number of concerns with the emerging approach. The applicant team sought to develop the emerging scheme further prior to application submission, in order to seek to address officers' concerns.

The proposed affordable housing provision is 50% with a 70/30% split in favour of affordable rent and this is not reliant on grant funding, which accords with the policy requirement. Furthermore, the proposed heights and massing, whilst potentially needing some redistribution, are more in keeping with the surrounding context than the pre-application scheme presented in September 2022, and the open space provision on site is compliant. The urban greening factor and energy statement (although in need of detailed review from consultees) appear to be compliant with relevant policy.

KEY ISSUES

The key concerns with the site relate predominantly to the fact the designs have not been progressed as part of a comprehensive masterplan involving all relevant stakeholders and so questions remain as to whether the wider site allocation will be able to come forward if the employment uses, homes, open space, public realm and highways and servicing needs of the area are not apportioned across the plots in a balanced manner.

In particular, LBL officers need to understand:

- Whether the allocation of uses and distribution of density across the site have been optimised based on the site context
- Whether the 'heavier' (and lower income generating) employment uses make the surrounding sites unviable. Likewise, will the apportionment of public realm and transport requirements make surrounding sites unviable. A pooling strategy may have to be agreed upfront to ensure deliverability.
- Whether the development will be able to meet its own requirements, particularly in relation to the existing road layout in terms of transport, servicing and delivery needs.
- Whether this site coming forward will impact road and servicing requirements later down the line when the adjoining sites come to be developed. It is noted the masterplan envisages reinstating a pedestrian path off Dartmouth Road and road widening to create a new central public realm which are welcomed.

In addition the Council's design team's initial comments raise concern with:

- The lack of baseline analysis of the local context which results in a design that fails to provide a responsive and distinctive character.
- The need for a stronger ground floor identity that anchors the scheme to the public realm.
- The relationship to William Wood House. Officers consider the relationship as proposed is poor with the height and massing having an overbearing impact on the care home.
- The absence of townscape views.
- The amount of single aspect units (40%), even if they are dual outlook.

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- Daylight/ sunlight standards which may be below BRE guidelines.
- General concern over the lack of development of the hard and soft landscape design and detail to both public and communal realms.
- A masterplan which shows ground floor amenity space which relies on third party land coming forward in order to be deliverable.
- concern that play space will not be accessible for all residents.

Officers welcomed Panel's comment on height, scale and massing and the masterplan in addition to the points raised above.

POINTS OF CLARIFICATION

Following the presentation by the Applicant team and after Panel enquiry, the applicant team stated the following:

- Balconies to each flat provide private amenity spaces for residents with communal amenity space provided by the roof gardens. The provision of amenity space exceeds policy requirements.
- A Heritage, Townscape & Visual Impact Assessment (HTVIA) was prepared in outline to support the initial pre-app in September 2022. It needs to be brought up to date to reflect the design of the application scheme.
- The site is not in an area of archaeological sensitivity.
- Kitewood consider it is likely though not confirmed that Lewisham Homes would be the service provider for the affordable housing element of the project.
- Consultants BDLA have undertaken daylight/sunlight studies evaluating the impact of the scheme on the care home William Wood House and have confirmed that the proposals do not create additional daylight/sunlight concerns. The existing blank boundary wall creates an adverse sense of enclosure, which is one of the reasons for pulling the proposed new building back from the shared boundary.
- The street parking is believed to be random, unmanaged and not largely related to the existing industrial units on the site/s. The proposals include the appropriate amount of parking and blue badge spaces.

Initial market advice has been taken with regard to viability of the business units. Several local agents have indicated demand for more agile work-spaces with flexibility over time and the spaces have been designed accordingly. The emphasis is likely to be on the provision of maker spaces.

DESIGN REVIEW PANEL COMMENTS

The Panel thanked the applicant team for their clear presentation. The Panel appreciated the complexities of the scheme and land acquisition, as well as the context of the site. In principle, the Panel supported the site coming forward for development and the uses proposed.

The Panel noted that the project was a live planning application, and that for complex reasons had come to LDRP post-application when normally Panel would engage with the project early in the design process, and significantly in advance of application. The Panel reviewed the project on its merits as presented.

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MASTERPLAN

The Panel recognise that the applicant team are dealing with a number of unknowns in terms of land parcels coming forward whilst trying to make some sense of place and cohesion.

The approach to the wider masterplan seems rational and well thought through, albeit that the case for the scale and massing for later phases is untested in terms of the HTVIA including local and distant views and the impact on the heritage assets.

The Panel endorsed the team's attempt to outline concepts for the massing and development of the majority of the major plots.

The positioning of blocks is dictated by the site and the layout is well resolved leading to an orientation which also seems to be very good in terms of basic access to sunlight and daylight.

The Plot A buildings establish a strong edge to Willow Way with the potential to create strong street frontage.

Relinking the site into Dartmouth Road is a positive move. Given its design, the Panel questioned whether the proposed space, which is faced by the rear of the commercial buildings on Dartmouth Road and the single storey mezzanine units on Plots B & C, would be successful as a public route and whether it would sufficiently surveilled. The Panel also questioned the contribution that the rear/mezzanine level would make to the quality of this urban space. The Panel noted that some sketches show some taller buildings along this edge and greater clarity of intent is advised.

The widening of the public realm to 20m was welcomed by the Panel as were the proposals for shared surface and more limited vehicle movements. However, a considerable amount of further detail is required to convince that this space will prove successful.

The tree planting whilst welcomed needs to be supported by a more detailed approach to ground level planting, balancing hard and soft landscaping with clear deliverable net biodiversity, UGF and SUDS objectives as part of a site wide landscape strategy.

The Panel welcomed the podium roof garden above the double height commercial spaces to Plots B & C. The Panel questioned how daylight and ventilation will be brought through the podium gardens into the deep plan commercial units beneath. This is essential for sustainability reasons. The Panel also challenged the sectional sketches which indicated mounded earth and large trees on the podium roof and whether there is likely to be sufficient structure to support the gardens. This is a good idea but does need much design development.

The Panel commented that a sitewide environmental energy strategy should be clearly stated, to maximise sustainability and CO₂ reduction.

SCALE AND MASSING

The Panel noted that the project was more urban than suburban in character and somewhat counter to the prevailing scale and nature of the immediate context. Thorough testing was required of views and impact on the heritage assets through the HTVIA. Subject to those studies, the Panel commented that it was reasonably comfortable with the scale proposed for Plot A.

The Panel were more concerned by the greater heights proposed for the remaining plots including B&C, where the case for the scale proposed of 8 storeys (double height commercial + six residential) had not been made, nor the assumptions tested in the context of the HTVIA.

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PLOT A

Compositionally the project (Plot A) seems quite calm and well mannered.

The Panel challenged the parapet heights proposed, questioning whether at the heights proposed, that they were sufficiently tall to screen lift over runs/ pvs/ air source heat pumps etc. It was noted as important that all rooftop equipment is screened from local and distance views to protect the quality of the skyline.

The Panel felt that there should be a clear strategy to define which areas of the public realm can be delivered as part of the current Plot A submission as this was at present unclear. The Panel were concerned that with Plot A being brought forward in advance of any of the other land parcels, then the public realm will not be deliverable placing greater stress on the already stressed streetscape. It was not clear to Panel that the applicant team had an interim proposal to demonstrate how this would work.

The headline Urban Greening Factor is shown to be good but it was not clear to the Panel how this would be achieved.

Whilst supporting the principle, the Panel suggested that further work will have to be undertaken with registered housing providers to ascertain the viability/acceptability of roof garden amenity space. If rooftop amenity space is not acceptable to registered providers there is limited scope for alternative provision at ground level given vehicle movements to the rear of the block.

The Panel challenged the roof garden design. The raised planters will in effect reduce the balustrade/parapet height leading to one of two options:

- An increase in the height of the parapets/balustrades to the roof garden which will affect the elevational and sectional design.
- The area of planting is reduced to allow the parapet/balustrade heights to remain as designed.

In the latter case, this would have a significant effect on the quantum of available amenity space.

Passive design measures should be employed to shelter the roof gardens from wind to ensure that they are usable by the residents.

Removing the boundary wall and giving light to William Wood House, the care home, is a positive one. Whilst noting the improvements proposed to this boundary, which it supported, elsewhere, the Panel challenged the narrow slot external spaces between the ground level commercial units and the rear boundaries. There is a strong risk that these will be difficult to manage and become failed spaces. The commercial units should either be brought to adjoin the boundary or be set back sufficiently to create worthwhile external space which makes a clear positive contribution to the quality of the development.

The Panel criticised the long corridors which for floors 1,2 and 3 have no access to daylight or ventilation. This, though efficient, produces an unacceptable living environment, and energy input in that access corridors will have to be entirely artificially lit and ventilated. These should be redesigned. At level 4, access to daylight and the roof gardens is provided which is likely to be much more successful.

The Panel suggested deploying bike stores on a floor by floor basis as this would reduce the size of ground floor bike storage freeing up further space for commercial units.

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DETAIL & MATERIAL : SECURING QUALITY

The refinement and development of materiality and detailing appeared promising, if not fully developed. The comments above on material and detail notwithstanding, the applicant team should note the Panel's general guidance on material, quality and detail. At planning application stage the quality of the detailing needs to be demonstrated through large scale drawings 1:20 and 1:5 of key elements of the building and landscape, and should be accompanied by actual material samples which should be secured as part of any planning approval.

LIGHTING

Although not discussed in detail at this review, the applicant team should note the Panel's general advice that the proposals need to be developed to consider the diurnal/nocturnal aspects of the public realm and should include high quality lighting design work integrated into the landscape and architectural strategy.

SUSTAINABILITY

Discussed only in outline at this review, the Panel encouraged the highest levels of sustainability and noted the emerging intentions in the Design Team's statements to that effect. The design team should establish clearly to the satisfaction of the LPA, their intentions toward sustainability, carbon reduction and energy use targets for the development.

SUMMARY

The Panel supported the site/s being brought for development aiding the regeneration of what is clearly an area under some stress. The Panel endorsed the principles behind the project, the concepts behind the wider masterplan, the reprovion of commercial makers' spaces, and the approach to the quantum of affordable housing being proposed.

The Panel understands that issues in relation to land acquisition have forced the pace of the project. Nevertheless, the Panel was obliged to observe that the project should have come to LDRP during the pre-application design process as a considerable number of issues remain unresolved which ordinarily would have been addressed at an earlier stage.

The Masterplan

The masterplan is ordered and logical, albeit that the scale and massing proposed will, if implemented, urbanise a semi-suburban environmental context, and change its scale significantly.

The Panel were not convinced that the considerable amount of parking currently in the street could be made to disappear as currently proposed and it is recommended that a detailed transport/parking strategy forms part of any proposals. This is fundamental as the vision for the public realm which is a good one in principle, relies for its deliverability on this issue being resolved.

The Panel stated that there is much greater opportunity to develop urban greening with rich tree planting and other forms of low to mid height of planting than is being proposed. Many aspects of SUDS, UGF and CO2 reduction seem far too vague at this stage.

Clarity is needed on the extent of the public realm deliverable if Plot A comes forward in isolation or in advance of the other plots.

Whilst the massing for Plot A seems reasonable, the acceptability of the proposed height, scale and massing generally is unproven as these issues have not been tested in the current designs through an HTVIA. The impact on the heritage assets needs to be properly understood and evaluated.

The Panel endorsed the relinking to Dartmouth Road, but questioned the quality of the public space created, its surveillance and the quality of its facing architecture which seem to be largely the rear of the existing commercial properties (Dartmouth Road) and the mezzanine elements of the new

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commercial units (Plots B & C). It is noted that some sketches show greater development along this edge as part of the masterplan sketch proposals.

The Panel, whilst encouraging its inclusion in the project, felt that further work needs to be done on the podium gardens design above the commercial units to Plots B & C to properly develop it in the context of supporting structure and daylight penetration to the units beneath.

Plot A

The architectural expression is calm and well mannered. The project would have benefitted from a much greater relationship with the HTVIA. The proposals seem rather generic rather than responding to the immediate varied context of the locale.

The ground level to the Plot A commercial units have a poor interface with the site boundaries creating a sliver of narrow external space to the rear which will be difficult to manage and use. Potentially these areas could become failed space. The layout should be redesigned to either create more generous useful space that contributes positively as a resource for the development, or the commercial units are brought to interface directly with the rear boundaries.

The apartment building layouts are well ordered, although the Panel was concerned over the number of single aspect units, even if some are dual outlook. The internalised lightless corridors are too long, and do not give access to daylight and sunlight, (below level 4).

The Panel challenged the roof level parapet heights at the tops of the buildings which are too low to successfully mask equipment, lift overruns and the like.

Further work is needed to evaluate the impact of the proposals on the heritage assets including locally listed Bricklayers Arms.

The Panel supported the principle of greening as much of the rooftop area as possible but further work is needed to resolve the design of the rooftop gardens, to protect from wind, and to ensure that they will be supported by registered providers for the affordable units.

This report constitutes the formal response of Lewisham Design Review Panel to the project as presented at review on 28th February 2023.



Keith R Williams FRIBA MRIAI FRSA: Chair LDRP