



The Hammersmith Society

Richard Winterton *Chairman*
chairman@hammersmithsociety.org.uk

30 April 2020 (*amended from 29 April issue*)

Director for Planning & Development
Development Management, Planning and Growth
London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham
Town Hall
King Street
London W6 9JU

For the attention of John Sanchez

Dear John

2020/00915/FUL
Redevelopment of the former Hammersmith Magistrates Court site
181 Talgarth Road

We refer to the planning application for the redevelopment of the site of the former West London Magistrates Court facility at 181 Talgarth Road, ref 2020/00915/FUL.

The Hammersmith Society has been involved in a number of pre-application meetings, and attended the public consultation exhibition, concerning the development proposals; we have now reviewed the principal documents included in the application and note the following comments:

Background:

Site context: the application site is on the south side of the Talgarth Road approach to Hammersmith Broadway, adjacent to the Ark and the Lilla Huset building on the west side, and the petrol garage on the east side.

Site procurement: the existing building was built in 1990; the court facilities were closed in 2017 and the site was sold for commercial use. It is regrettable that this site asset was taken out of public ownership without returning any benefit to the community it served. We understand the site was sold for £43M.

Planning history – development density: the excessive development density of the application scheme is based on the January 2019 application scheme, which, despite vociferous public objection and Hammersmith Society comment at the time, LBHF now advise to be an acceptable standard for

An Amenity Group concerned with Planning and Conservation in Hammersmith since 1962

Patron: The Mayor of Hammersmith & Fulham
Member of the London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies Founder Member of The West London River Group
President: Professor Hans Haenlein MBE Chairman: Richard Winterton
Secretary: Annabel Clarke, 42 Greenside Road, W12 9JG Tel: 07940 575590

the current scheme. This backward step allows the overriding fault of the earlier application to be repeated in the current proposals.

HTC Masterplan: indicative proposals describing a vision for the development of Hammersmith Town Centre were prepared by outside consultants to assist LBHF in the development of a Special Planning Guide, which has been in preparation since 2015. The SPG has yet to be issued, and the masterplan has not been reviewed through public consultation. The masterplan sets out analytical and strategic studies to provide a basis for future development, and suggests the application site is developed for residential use, with a proportion of commercial use at lower levels, and rising to a maximum height of 62 metres.

With the continuing delay in the issue of the SPG, LBHF are losing the opportunity to influence important developments such as this to accord with their vision for the town centre.

Outline description:

The redevelopment proposals provide for two hotels: the 442 bedroom primary-grade north hotel within a 23-storey (76 metre high) building on the north side, incorporating a 7-storey (29.4 metre high) building on the east side; and the 440-bedroom tourist-grade south hotel within a 10-storey (38.3 metre high) building on the west side, incorporating a 5-storey (20.8 metre high) building on the south side. The buildings are each set back from the perimeter boundaries, accommodating the drive-in to the north hotel on the Talgarth Road side, and a service access road and landscaping around the other three sides. The hotel buildings face into a landscaped open space, with promenade and sitting areas, and a single-storey 'tempietto' central feature building providing for restaurant and bar facilities, beneath a 4 storey high pitched roof with stepped external planting.

Design

Hammersmith skyline: the development would introduce a prominent addition to the borough skyline; at 76 metres high, the north building is similar to the height of, but nearly twice the width of, the approved Landmark House on Hammersmith Bridge Road nearby. The images included in the application report *Townscape Heritage and Visual Impact Assessment* reveal the dominance of the building in the views from the residential areas on the south of the tube lines, and the stark isolation of its bulk in views from around the town centre. This isolation could offer a pretext for further tall developments to form a cluster alongside, and it is critical that statutorily enforceable planning policy is put in place to control development densities in this respect.

In the view from Hammersmith Cemetery a dominant presence of the hotel profile invades the background to the war memorial, where the *Townscape* report commentary finds this, and other views sometimes revealing a brutal visual invasion into the view, to be '*...beneficial...it announces the town centre – it signals on the skyline a different urban context beyond the enclave of the cemetery..*'. And concerning a view offering a breathtaking juxtaposition with the Ark: '*...in a far more direct and effective way than the Ark, the development will signal the entrance to Hammersmith town centre and create a striking landmark to assist in place-making and way-finding...*'.

These CGI views are invaluable, but discredited by the commentary: the character and environment of Hammersmith is its own marker, and the borough needs no monuments to announce its boundaries.

Talgarth Road: along the busy kerbside of Talgarth Road, the Ark, the Lilla Huset building, and the existing courthouse together create a loose fit on the street frontage, and offer a welcome sense of space and refuge from the hostile road environment. In the application proposals, the Talgarth Road frontage includes the ground floor set-back at the north hotel entrance, and the landscaped entry to the promenade, and these openings could provide the same qualities of refuge - if landscaping and humanity is allowed to prevail over vehicle and tarmac.

The neighbours: the distribution of the development massing on the site offers a reasonable response to the sensitivities of the site context. The major proportion of accommodation is contained in the tallest building, in a position as distant as possible from the residential areas of Yeldham Road and Biscay Road to the south. The building along the west boundary appears to rise to approximately 10 metres below the crown of the Ark curved roof, but further illustrative detail is needed to demonstrate this juxtaposition in street views.

Hotel campus massing: The application scheme is shown to offer the optimum massing layout, balancing the demands of the excessive development volume with the constraints and adjacencies of the site. The first illustration in the *Design and Access Statement (page 2)* presents a useful picture of the overall site composition, but offers an unappealing and unrealistic drone view of the project, which could mistakenly suggest a random array of cladding choices, difficult building junctions and unresolved mix of roof levels. We draw some reassurance from a crucial section of the *Design and Access Statement (pages 17-21)* which illustrates a site analysis with a range of massing options, which explain the origin of the application scheme. We were drawn to Option 1 in the *Concept Development* section, which reduces the massing to two elements, a slender tower and a block on the north boundary, bringing an appealing simplicity but unviable due to the impact on the residential areas to the south.

Hotel campus design: on the south and west blocks, the warmer more textural cladding responds to both the smaller scale of the brick terraces south of the railway, and the contemporary brickwork of Lilla Huset house and the Ark. The contrasting bold elevation treatment of the north and east block needs further design explanation; in place of the usual applied grid of curtain-wall framing and window openings, the cladding appears to be finished as a sheer, taut outer skin, sometimes transparent sometimes textured, over a deep inner wall surface, which incorporates a pattern of recessed panels and windows set behind splayed external reveals. Stair towers and lift shafts each end capture the expanse of glass cladding between. The Talgarth Road streetscape is already overshadowed by the flyover and the dreary elevations of Novotel, but it is saved by the playful elegance of the Ark – and it could be uplifted or crushed by this bright, uncompromising and huge elevation: the application illustrations offer little clue. Further design information is needed to explain the detail, the context and the scale of this critical part of the scheme – including any façade modifications necessary to respond to the differing solar exposure on the north, east and south elevations.

Inside the hotel campus: the tempietto and the extensive landscaping provide a welcome relief from the corporate surroundings, some reassurance of human scale beside the 23 storey north block, and include a facility for the possible future pedestrian route from the petrol station site across the campus, as identified in the masterplan.

Community benefits:

The scheme includes a public viewing gallery at the top of the north hotel, and controlled public access to meeting rooms at mezzanine level of the courtyard building. The external space within, the promenade, sitting area, bars and restaurant, is open to the public.

Whilst any community benefit is welcome, the viewing gallery needs a café or similar public facility alongside, and unwritten restrictions are likely to limit public use of the external spaces. The community deserve facilities on a site which formerly provided for a public service, but in the circumstances consideration might be given to a financial contribution *in lieu* for a community benefit elsewhere - such as re-turfing and maintaining Ravenscourt Park, the token outdoor amenity space so often cited in residential developments nearby.

Environmental control

The application documents provide detail of the energy performance and sustainability aspect of the scheme, referring chiefly to compliance with current standards including the London Plan requirement for a 35% reduction in carbon emissions over a Building Regulations Part L (2013) development, and these important details should be reviewed by independent professional assessment. Any façade modifications required to modulate solar exposure should be included at planning application stage. The commitment to achieve BREEAM Excellent rating should be secured by planning condition. It would be fitting for LBHF to engage with the applicant in the context of the Council commitment to zero CO2 emissions from council buildings by 2030.

Other issues

External spaces within the hotel campus: the tempietto and the extensive landscaping provide a welcome distraction from the corporate surroundings, and include a facility for the possible future pedestrian route from the petrol station site across the campus, as identified in the masterplan; this should be secured by planning condition regarding access and legal title.

Route to the Broadway: the commitment to enhance and landscape the route to the tube station and town centre is noted, and occupation of the buildings should be conditional on implementation of this work.

Talgarth Road and the flyover: changing traffic modes, the phasing out of the combustion engine, the replacement of the fly-over by a road tunnel, are all changes which individually or collectively would transform the context of the development, and are issues which should be addressed in the LBHF SPG.

Design team: the application proposals involve complex and pioneering design ideas, and technical development of the ideas requires the retention of the application design team to realise the concept; this should be endorsed through planning condition.

Conclusion

The Hammersmith Society with many others members of the community raised fundamental objections to the January 2019 application for this site, and the borough is fortunate that the Dominus Group, the applicant, has shown unusual public spirit by setting aside the first application and working closely with LBHF and a new design team to create a design more responsive to community concerns.

We are supportive of the application design concept, but have identified the need for further work required to progress the proposals to a stage which describes the buildings sufficient for planning consideration. This might be managed either by deferring the planning decision until additional information is available, or by granting consent conditional on the subsequent approval of a more detailed and fully illustrated scheme design.

We are dismayed that that the proposals still overload the site to the detriment of the surrounding residential areas, the nearby conservation areas and the borough townscape. We have identified a number of important issues including the finalisation of the town centre SPG together with the completion and endorsement of the town centre masterplan, and the putting in place of planning policy pre-empting future proposals by reference to the development densities precedent of 181 Talgarth Road. We have referred to the LBHF pledge towards zero CO2 emissions, and to planning conditions associated with the route across the site, the route to the Broadway, the BREEAM rating, and the retention of the application design team in the implementation of the project.

Yours sincerely

Richard Winterton

Chairman

The Hammersmith Society

cc. Councillor Stephen Cowan, Leader of the Council
Councillor P J Murphy
Councillor Patricia Quigley