

WESTMINSTER DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

Date: 17 January 2024

Dear Ms. West,

Westminster Design Review Panel – *Westbourne Park Bus Garage*

Please find enclosed the report of the Westminster Design Review Panel following the review of Site Allocations for Westbourne Park Bus Garage on 11 Decemeber.2023. I trust that this information is helpful to you.

On behalf of the panel, I would like to thank you for your participation in the review and offer our ongoing support as the policy develops, should this be required.

Yours sincerely,

Catherine Burd and Vinita Dhume

**Co-Chair
Westminster Design Review Panel**

Cc All meeting attendees and Planning Case Officers

Report of the Westminster Design Review Panel

Project Name and Site Address Site Allocations: Westbourne Park Bus Garage

Planning Reference N/A

Review Date 11th December 2023

Venue 64 Victoria Street

Attendees

Applicant Team *Kimberley West; Marina Molla Bolta, Ailish Ryan, Sarah Little*

Panel *Catherine Burd (Chair), Vinita Dhume (co-chair), Timur Tatlioglu, David Ogunmuyiwa, Lorna Sewell.*

Westminster City Council *Jennie Humphrey; Jane Hamilton; Tom Burke; Adam Summerfield*

Confidentiality - Please note that while schemes are not yet in the public domain, for example at pre-application stage, this report will be treated as strictly confidential. In the case of an FOI request the City Council as a public body may be obliged to release project information submitted for review.

SUMMARY OF PANEL COMMENTS

- The site has the potential to provide a significant number of new homes and other activities, including commercial, leisure, and community uses.
- The Councils overarching vision and aspirations for the site should be made clearer.
- There is scope for the scheme to deliver meaningful biodiversity net gain.
- The panel discussed the importance of considering the massing of tall building(s) against established development nearby.
- The impact on wider views needs to be considered when planning the location of tall buildings on the site, including not undermining the townscape status of Trellick Tower.
- The panel highlighted the importance of improving the public realm, connectivity, and permeability around and through the site.
- The panel recommended being more specific about the footprint of the tall building and testing it against the views if the policy is to have criteria around building height.
- The panel recommended considering the socioeconomic needs of the area to define the appropriate mix of uses for the site.

Report of the Westminster Design Review Panel

1. Summary of the Proposal and Relevant Context

Four locations have been identified as unique sites – the majority of which have either a significant proportion of underutilised land within the site where development could occur without the need for large-scale demolition of buildings, or which can deliver significant new infrastructure.

Westbourne Park Bus Garage is such a site. The site lies within the northwest corner of the Borough and is bound by the Great Western Road to the east, the Grand Union Canal to the north and the railway to the south. The area being considered for site allocations is to the north of the Westway and is currently occupied by a 2-4 story red brick building and car park used by bus garage staff. The bus garage is located within the southern half of the site.

2. Stage of Proposal

The Planning Policy team are currently gathering evidence and drafting policies as well as undertaking informal engagement to work towards regulation 19 consultation and examination in 2024.

3. Site Visit and Conflicts of interest

A site visit took place ahead of the review. The review was held in person and the Chair, Co-Chair and all panel members present confirmed they had no conflicts of interest in relation to the proposal. The Planning Policy team delivered a presentation, and comments of the panel are set out below.

4. Westminster Design Review Panel Comments

Principle of redevelopment:

There was general support for the consolidation of the bus garage, however it was felt there was a greater need to understand the impact of its consolidation of the wider bus network. Also, it was raised that such consolidation should not limit the future capacity or expansion of bus services and should consider the potential requirements for a more sustainable bus fleet.

Whilst it is appreciated that TFL's future requirements are unknown, the panel felt it prudent to consider allowing development of the airspace above the retained garage, therefore supporting additional height, to accommodate existing uses to the north of the site and future proof the use of the garage. It was noted that development above TFL's assets has been successful elsewhere.

The panel considered that potential redevelopment proposals could raise road safety concerns with more people expected to use the area and that further consideration should be given to pedestrian and road safety issues around the retained bus access and any additional servicing and potential vehicle use in and out of the site.

Building heights:

The panel felt the cylindrical form used to depict heights in the draft Building Height Study prepared to explore the site constraints and opportunities to be a limited and inadequate method of testing and conveying potential development concepts. In terms of height, a more sophisticated approach would be to extrude height from an optimal floor plan if the policy is to reference appropriate heights on the site. A drawn-up concept plan which encapsulates the

Report of the Westminster Design Review Panel

Council urban vision for the site and its surroundings, and includes broad parameters about where the buildings and public realm can sit and potential new routes through the site, would be more beneficial and could be interpreted by a project team.

There was a consensus that tall building/s would be appropriate for this site, particularly given its location with the NWEDA, which supports growth, and in relation to the emerging context of other tall buildings on the north of the canal (Taxi House and Hathaway House). [Tall buildings were confirmed as being defined in adopted policy as more than twice the prevailing height of the area, among other factors]. The panel considered that the development should stay predominantly 6 storeys, with a limited number of taller element/s that reflect maximum local height parameters (14-16 storeys). Location of tall buildings should respond to the orientation of Hathaway Houses and Taxi House to the north.

The Panel agreed that a tall building/s would need to respect Trellick Tower in terms of its heritage value and townscape status. Likewise, the impact on wider and more immediate views from along the canal, should be a key consideration.

Whilst the form and design of the buildings cannot be described, details of how any new building meets the ground and will be anchored, were considered of the utmost importance by the panel, and should be clearly defined.

Work carried out to date on behalf of the council on building heights takes a narrow focus of looking at the impact of various theoretical building heights on a range of views. As this is only one factor when considering potential building heights, and the study does not fully consider how the site functions as whole, or the relationship between buildings, it is not considered to provide robust support for the inclusion of guidance on what heights are appropriate within the site allocation. It is therefore recommended that work is either supplemented to provide a more thorough assessment of the full range of impacts of different heights across the site, or in the absence of this, policy does not set out parameters for building heights.

Legibility and Layout:

The canal presents a key opportunity, and whilst an active edge against the canal would be beneficial in offering surveillance, it should provide a place of calm and tranquility. As such the canal edge should facilitate more permeability and movement as opposed to activation.

The panel considered that creating a strong physical and visual connection towards the canal from Great Western Road was crucial and could be achieved along the western edge of the site.

The panel felt that new routes through the site to the canal would be beneficial as would improvements to the layby along the slip road. Connections through the site and a permeable frontage along the canal should be encouraged to enhance pedestrian safety in this relatively long and disconnected section of canal path. A new defined wider cycle route could be explored to remove pressure from the canal edge.

The bridge was highlighted by the panel as being physical barrier, as such a connection up to the bridge should be required, and ideally a new connection made beneath the bridge to connect through to the park to the west.

Movement and access into and through the site and conflicts between vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists will need to be carefully tested and resolved.

Great Western Road with its heavy traffic, lack of trees and crossings in the wrong places makes it a hostile environment for users. The panel felt a healthy streets approach to its redesign would be beneficial.

Report of the Westminster Design Review Panel

Proposed Uses:

The panel appreciated that whilst a residential led development is an appropriate use for the site, the ground level would offer a poor residential environment, and as such the lower stories (approximately to the height of the Westway) could be allocated to commercial or light industrial uses, with residential positioned away from the harsh environment created by the surrounding roads, Westway and railway.

The panel agreed that the existing auto repair garage beneath the arches appeared central to unlocking the full potential of the site, including a new route through to Meanwhile Gardens. They suggested that the provision for retention of existing uses within the development site may help unlock the full potential of the site.

The panel acknowledged the canal edge offered a great opportunity for activation, and to improve public safety along the tow path. Opportunities for natural surveillance should be explored. However, a highly animated commercial frontage would be inappropriate, and such intense uses should be restricted to maintain the tranquil character of the canal edge.

Whilst the mix of intended uses appears appropriate, they should support the socioeconomic needs of the local area and that light industrial uses should be explored.

Public Realm:

The panel questioned the siting of a green strip of public space along the canal edge. This could be too restrictive, and would fare poorly due to the potential overshadowing effect of any new development. There could also be a conflict with the uses of the tow path.

The panel felt the team should explore siting public realm beneath and to the east of the bridge, to enhance the connection to Great Western Road and create a green link through to Meanwhile Gardens. Also raised was the concept of creating a route and green infrastructure beneath the Westway which would provide more space for pedestrians and cycling along the towpath and improve the aesthetics of the Westway itself.

The panel agreed that biodiversity needed to be up front and centre in any vision, with meaningful aspirations clearly outlined. These should be going beyond the percentage improvement required, particularly given the site is carpark, as should be more ambitious. SuDs infrastructure should be a requirement and could be incorporated into the public realm as part of strengthening the local ecology and links to the canal.

The panel felt that a drawn-up concept plan which encapsulates the Council vision for the site and includes broad parameters about where the buildings and public realm can sit, would be more beneficial and could be interpreted by a project team.

Other points:

The panel raised the issue of sustainability and suggested that the circular economy needed to be pushed and any wording around this strengthened.

There is also a need to consider the canal barges/homes as part of any public realm and any changes to the canal frontage to ensure that no additional constraints or barriers to movement and placemaking are created along this stretch.

Careful consideration of parking, deliveries and servicing is needed to ensure that it doesn't have a detrimental impact on operations, road safety and the public realm.