

# WESTMINSTER DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

Date: 17 January 2024

Dear Ms. West,

## **Westminster Design Review Panel – Grosvenor Sidings**

Please find enclosed the report of the Westminster Design Review Panel following the review of Site Allocations at Grosvenor Sidings, on 11 December.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: Grosvenor Sidings

**Planning Reference** N/A

**Review Date** 11<sup>th</sup> 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;*

**Confidentiality** - Please note that while a draft policy is not yet in the public domain, 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 information submitted for review.

## SUMMARY OF PANEL COMMENTS

- The panel agreed that the site has the potential to provide a mix of homes and new public realm to support local need.
- The Council's wider and overarching vision and aspirations for the site and how it responds to wider Victoria / city ambitions should be made clearer.
- The site has two distinct characters and could be broken up to enable the Council's aspirations for the eastern and western sides to be better defined.
- The panel discussed that varying building heights across the site may be suitable, with taller buildings most appropriate to the north and south on the eastern side, and less problematic along the western side. The panel felt in the immediate context of the Peabody Estate, the building heights should be more restrained.
- The panel also discussed the importance of improving connectivity, and permeability around the site and links to the wider area.
- The panel recommended that the heritage assets were enhanced and re-purposed and could influence the character of future development proposals, particularly along the eastern side, where a more contextual street based approach would be more appropriate.
- The panel also recommended considering the socioeconomic needs of the area to define the appropriate housing mix.

# 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.

Grosvenor Sidings is located south of the city, bound by the Peabody Estate and Peabody Avenue Conservation Area to the east, River Thames to the South and Ebury Bridge regeneration scheme to the west. The northern section of the site is shown to span the railway line to the north of the area parallel with Ebury Bridge.

The site, on both sides of the railway, is currently owned by Network Rail, with the British Transport Police occupying the south-western end as lease holders (the length of lease was unknown)

There are a number of constraints, including the active railway which runs through the site, the risk of contamination which will possibly entail remedial costs, flood zone 3, which will require mitigation.

## 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 policy team delivered a presentation, and comments of the panel are set out below.

## 4. Westminster Design Review Panel Comments

The east and west side of the tracks have very different urban conditions. The panel felt that it may be beneficial to break the site up, to reflect the evolving character of the west side and the more modest fine grain townscape present in the east. However, there may be need to link the two in order for viability reasons - e.g. for a taller development at the west to support a lower scaled scheme to the east.

### **Is a residential-led scheme with some elements of commercial/community floorspace appropriate and accord with land uses within the local area?**

The panel agreed that a residential-led scheme with some elements of commercial/community floorspace would be appropriate and in accordance with land uses within the local area. However, the restrictive nature of the site on both sides of the tracks raised concerns over the quality of housing that could be provided, and will require imaginative, site-specific urban response.

It was considered that the eastern side of the site presented a very different context to the west, where taller developments had been established. The panel felt that more modest scaled housing would be best suited here, given the tight urban grain and relationship to the Peabody Estate. Connectivity to the surrounding streets is critical to unlocking the site. Creating a connection through the site from Victoria in the north to the river was felt important - a spine

## **Report of the Westminster Design Review Panel**

which could accommodate green and blue infrastructure.

Allocating public open space into the City Council's aspirations for the site was considered an important aspect of any redevelopment proposal and would provide an opportunity to remediate the site naturally.

The panel also discussed the benefits of activating the southern edge of the site along Grosvenor Road. Due to its connection with the water side, it was felt that this could potentially accommodate a hotel or Civic use, which would in turn support food and beverage uses.

### **We want to balance growth with heritage considerations, do you think the current policy wording addresses this?**

The panel discussed the importance of considering heritage assets, not only on the site but also adjacent to the site, as part of any development proposals. Enhancing and improving the amenity of the area should include reinvigorating its heritage assets.

Development proposals that responded to the site's railway history could be beneficial. Though reusing/repurposing the sidings buildings would be aspirational, the enhancement of designated assets on the site would be more beneficial.

The views of Battersea Power Station from within the eastern side of the site and from Ebury Bridge were discussed. Whilst not protected, the views of the power stations were considered significant and worthy of maintaining.

### **It is agreed that proposals for new buildings are graded down in height towards the River Thames?**

The panel felt the cylindrical forms 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 Council vision for both sides of 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.

The Panel felt there may be opportunities for taller buildings to the north and south on the eastern side, whilst taller buildings on the west would be less problematic given the evolving context of the Ebury Regeneration Site. They suggested a street based, 6-8 storey mansion block style development would be more comfortable adjacent to the Peabody Estate.

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.

### **How can the policy seek to increase permeability, public realm and the creation of new open spaces?**

Establishing a north south connection through the western side of the site (from the British

## **Report of the Westminster Design Review Panel**

Transport Police building to Grosvenor River Side) was considered important and highly beneficial in improving the permeability of the site. Likewise, new route through to the Ebury Regeneration Scheme would improve connectivity and avoid seeing the site in isolation.

The panel considered it essential to create new connections and routes through to improve access and enhance the amenity of the area for both the Peabody Estate and future occupiers of the site.

The panel discussed the possibility of bridging over the railway for public realm, however this would be subject to viability and may only be deliverable alongside a 30+ storey building. To avoid this outcome, it was suggested that the strip spanning the railway was removed from the site allocation or at least substantially reduced.

### **What design considerations could be implemented to reduce amenity impacts on the Peabody Estate and future occupiers of this site?**

There are several design considerations that could be implemented to reduce amenity impacts on the Peabody Estate and future occupiers of this site. Some of these considerations include:

Increasing permeability and public realm creation that enables / future proofs links to the wider area. This could be achieved by responding to the lineality of the Pimlico Grid, through to the Peabody Estate. Also, creating new connections and routes through the site to improve access and enhance the amenity of the area for both the Peabody Estate and future occupiers of the site as well as providing and future proofing links to the wider Victoria area (see wider masterplans including The Victoria BID People Wanted Vision / Placemaking Plan).

Responding to the heritage context: Ensuring that any new development is sensitive to the heritage assets on and adjacent to the site, particularly the listed Peabody and Churchill Gardens Estates adjacent, and enhances the character of the area.

Balancing growth aspirations with heritage concerns: Ensuring that any new development is designed to balance the need for growth with the need to protect and enhance the area's heritage assets.

Incorporating green infrastructure: Incorporating green infrastructure into the design of the site to improve the amenity of the area, address issues such as contamination and flood risk, and enhance the area's environmental sustainability.

### **What else needs to be considered in policy drafting?**

The panel felt that further consideration was needed in relation to access, deliveries, servicing and parking (including cycle parking) provision as access seems restricted to the southern end of the eastern side of the site and from the slip road off Ebury Bridge for the western side. Lack of consideration of these elements is also likely to have a negative impact on placemaking / public realm objectives.

It was felt that responding to the industrial character and heritage of the site could be articulated more strongly in the wording. Also, the types of connections could be defined and opportunities for taller elements described rather than assigned.

A big vision would be to define the housing and block typologies to be allocated on this site, which could respond to the social housing needs of the locality.

# Report of the Westminster Design Review Panel