



FRAME PROJECTS

## **Report of Quality Review Panel Meeting: Blenheim Shopping Centre**

Friday 1 April 2022

Hawthorn Centre, 56 Hawthorn Grove, London SE20 8LB

### **Panel**

Hilary Satchwell (chair)

Shaun Ihejetoh

Sally Lewis

Mike Martin

Simon Tucker

### **Attendees**

Ian Drew

Ben Terry

Agnieszka Nowak-John

Deborah Denner

Hanako Littlewood

Bromley Council

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### **Confidentiality**

This is a pre-application review, and therefore confidential. As a public organisation Bromley 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.

### **1. Project name and site address**

Blenheim Shopping Centre, Penge, Bromley, SE20

### **2. Presenting team**

Dan Green	FCB Studios
Jason Cornish	FCB Studios
Alex Portlock	Hadley Property Group
Danielle Torpey	Hadley Property Group
Hanna Williamson	Farrer Huxley
Juan Jose Sarralde	The Townscape Consultancy
Sean Tickle	Rolfe Judd Planning
Chris Marner	ESD

### **3. Planning authority briefing**

The site is situated to the west of Penge High Street, behind numbers 126-154, and is currently occupied by a part three / part four storey shopping centre with roof-top car parking facilities. To the south, the site adjoins a surface carpark, while to the north, it adjoins the Royal Mail Sorting Office carpark and delivery / service yard for the shopping centre. Residential properties adjoin the site to the west. It falls within the Primary Shopping Frontage of Penge District Centre; Crystal Palace, Penge and Anerley Renewal Area; and the London Plan Strategic Area of Regeneration (reference 82).

Penge High Street Conservation Area adjoins the site to the north-west and there are a number of statutory and locally listed buildings in the vicinity of the site. The site lies within a View of Local Importance from Crystal Palace Park towards Beckenham, Bromley, West Wickham.

The site has not been identified as a site suitable for tall buildings in the Local Plan and has a PTAL rate of 4-5, with the High Street forming part of the Strategic Road Network.

Planning officers asked for the panel's views on:

- the height and scale of the proposal: massing development / townscape justification, markers, infills and edge, as well as the response to the surrounding context
- the ground floor layout: the positioning of block B and C in relation to proximity to existing homes and whether the building line should be consistent, forming a sense of enclosure along Evelina Road and commercial uses
- the quality of the new public realm and the relationship with the existing 'back of house' service yards.



#### 4. Quality Review Panel's views

##### *Summary*

Whilst the panel supports the principles of the site layout, it recommends a reduction in the quantum of development to achieve a scale and massing appropriate to Penge's centre. It does not support the proposal for 3 linked tall buildings of up to 20 storeys, in a context which is currently two to four storeys. The panel questions whether it will be possible to achieve sufficient amenity and play space, without a reduction in the number of flats? It supports the proposed central space but thinks this will have the character of a route, rather than a square, because of its proportions. Podium gardens could be valuable for residents, but the panel suggests these would benefit from better sun and views facing south-west. Wind and sun path analysis will be essential to test the quality of spaces, and their suitability for proposed uses, such as a market. The proportion of single aspect homes should be minimised. The panel also asked for more exploration of the scheme's relationship with the Royal Mail site, both in terms of residential quality for Block A, and this neighbouring site's future development potential. The panel would encourage further thought about how the architecture can respond more specifically to the character of Penge. The current drawings suggest a 'New London Vernacular' type of architecture that doesn't yet seem to be at all rooted in its location, and which the panel thinks needs further development to avoid being generic. The approach to environmental sustainability and low carbon design appears convincing, and the panel would encourage the applicant to go beyond policy compliance as the scheme evolves.

##### *Site layout and movement*

- The panel is supportive of the site layout and movement routes, which promise to improve permeability for pedestrians and cyclists.
- It supports the creation of a new focal space at the heart of the site, but questions the description of this as a square? Because of its width and the scale of buildings either side, the panel thinks this will primarily function as a route.
- The panel would encourage further exploration of how this route connects with green spaces to the north of the site.
- At a detailed level, the panel queries whether there is sufficient space for vehicle turning in front of Block D on Evelina Road?
- Movement diagrams will be needed to demonstrate how delivery, servicing and emergency vehicle access are accommodated. These should also show how conflicts between vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists will be avoided.
- The panel recommends gating the mews, allowing access during the day and security at night.



### *Public realm and open spaces*

- The panel questions whether it will be possible to provide sufficient amenity space and play space for the quantum of development proposed? It cautions that 'double counting' amenity and play space is unacceptable to many planning authorities.
- Blenheim Square is the only new public realm within the red line boundary, and as noted above, the panel think this would primarily function as a pedestrian movement route, rather than as residential amenity space.
- Sun path diagrams are needed to show how much of the public realm within and around the site will receive daylight, and for how many hours at different times of day.
- Activities such as the proposed market would have the best chance of success if they occupied a sunny space. The panel thinks this is unlikely with the massing currently proposed and the narrow width of the space between the two main buildings.
- Similarly wind tunnel testing will be essential to ensuring that the central space is an enjoyable place to be with taller buildings on either side.
- The panel is not convinced that the podium gardens should be placed on the north east side. These would benefit from more sunshine and attractive views if relocated to the south west. The panel appreciates this change would need testing in key views, and may increase the visual impact on the High Street.
- The panel also recommends omitting the houses with podium access as the front doors onto the podium would make it a publicly accessible space e.g. for deliveries. The podiums would have greater value to residents as shared private space. The panel suggests exploring duplex units at penthouse level as an alternative.
- Podium gardens will need to be designed with sufficient soil depth to enable rich planting, and the edge condition will need careful thought.
- The art strategy, incorporating street art characteristic of Penge, is to be applauded and would be beneficial to continue through into the built scheme.

### *Scale and massing*

- The panel does not support the proposal for 3 linked tall buildings of up to 20 storeys, in the context of Penge's centre, which is currently two to four storeys.
- Whilst there are existing tall buildings of up to 17 storeys further afield, the panel does not think a case has been made for buildings of a similar height on this site, especially given that it is located behind the High Street.



- The panel understands that analysis of visual impact has informed the proposals. However, except for some close-up views this information was not shared with the panel.
- Long distance views are needed to understand the impact of the scheme on surrounding areas, including the conservation areas and listed buildings.
- Cross sections through the site, taking in the surrounding context, are also needed to fully explain the scale and massing of the proposals.
- It may be possible to make a case for a single taller element, but this should be below the current maximum height of the scheme. A cluster of tall buildings seems wholly inappropriate to the context.
- The panel questions the proximity of Block C to the site boundary and neighbouring residents. It suggests that some extra space here would benefit the scheme overall.
- It also feels Block A may be too tall at seven storeys right on the edge of the site. It asks the team to consider what an appropriate height might be if the Post Office site was redeveloped in future?
- The views of local residents, informed by accurate visualisations in nearby and distant views, should underpin decision making about what scale and massing is appropriate for this site.
- Overall, the panel thinks the quantum of development will need to be reduced to achieve scale and massing appropriate for this site.

#### *Residential quality*

- The current scheme would provide 70% dual aspect flats. Every effort should be made to increase and maximise the proportion of dual aspect units.
- It would be helpful to measure the proportion of single aspect north facing homes. With quality of life for residents in mind, the panel think these should be minimised.
- The podium houses would compromise daylight, sunlight and outlook to the flats facing them in Blocks B and C.
- Whilst the Royal Mail car park and service yard is a challenging neighbour, the panel would encourage further thought about daylighting and cross ventilation for Block A.
- For example, Block A could be designed with an open deck to the North.
- Detailed residential layout plans were not presented, and the panel would welcome an opportunity to comment on these at a future review.



### *Architecture*

- The panel would encourage further thought about how the architecture can respond more specifically to the character of Penge and feel more rooted in the place.
- The current drawings suggest a 'New London Vernacular' type of architecture, which needs further development to avoid being generic.
- This will be a significant development for Penge, demanding high quality place specific design.
- The proposed ground floor uses seem to be working well. However, the panel felt that the base of the buildings and the simplified two storey expression of the architecture at street level may feel incongruous to the area.
- Further consideration of the floor to ceiling heights at ground level and a stronger scale relationship with surrounding buildings could be used to create a sense of generosity in the buildings' base in a subtler way.
- A variety of brick colours are proposed to differentiate the three tall buildings in views from the surrounding area. The panel does not think a cluster of tall buildings is appropriate for Penge's centre, and questioned the oversimplicity of the contrasting approach to the colour and tone of the blocks.
- As noted above, the panel recommends a reduction in the quantum and massing of development, and as part of this process, would encourage a simpler palette of materials.
- The panel thinks the darker brick currently proposed for lower levels could create an oppressive feel, and thinks that a lighter colour brick could be more successful.
- It also suggests that a greater variety of windows may be needed, to strike a balance between construction efficiency and response to internal amenity, orientation, and townscape quality.

### *Sustainability*

- The approach to environmental sustainability and low carbon design appears convincing, and the panel would encourage the applicant to go beyond policy compliance as the scheme evolves.



- Air source heat pumps are proposed. It will be important to identify where these are located. If placed at roof level, these may be prominent in long distance views and should therefore be part of any visual impact assessment or testing.
- The noise that heat pumps generate should also be considered in terms of their proximity to residential units.

*Next steps*

The panel would welcome an opportunity to review the scheme again, before a planning application is submitted.

