

# Design Review

## North London Business Park

**Date** Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> April 2021, 09:30 – 12:30  
**Venue** Online via Zoom

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### Design Advisors

Fred Manson	Chair
Mellis Haward	Archio
Heike Neurohr	Hawkins Brown
Esther Kurland	Urban Design London
Paul Dodd	Urban Design London

### Guests

Des Twomey	Plus Architecture
Dafydd Coe	HED
Charles Mills	Daniel Watney
Nadia Shojaie	Daniel Watney
Paula Cullen	Stomor
Simon Young	Stomor
Jack O'Brien	Comer Homes
David Donnellan	Comer Homes
Brian Comer	Comer Homes
Paul Kerwood	MKPQ
Andrew Dillon	LB Barnet
Konstantinos Kalogeropoulos	LB Barnet
Athina Gkremi	LB Barnet
Syndsey Ballet	LB Barnet

### Observers

Matilde Migliorero	Urban Design London
Susan May	Urban Design London
Michela Leoni	WCC

### Introduction

The Chair welcomed the Design Team and the Panel to the Design Review. The Panel confirmed there were no conflicts of interest. The Review was undertaken online.

Des Twomey (Plus Architecture) and Dafydd Coe (HED) presented the scheme.

The site is located in the London Borough of Barnet, c.8 miles to the north-west of Central London. The scheme comprises the redevelopment of North London Business Park, converting c.17 Hectares of Brownfield land to residential use. The site is currently predominantly undeveloped, with c.13 Hectares of the site occupied by grassland, a lake and unplanned vegetative cover. Principle structures on site include office buildings, an above-ground car-parking structure and an office building currently in use as a secondary school. Other structures on site include security huts, a banqueting hall and unoccupied office buildings.

The redevelopment will provide 2 to 3 storey dwellings, open spaces and landscaping improvements. New Brunswick Park will be at the heart of the development and will provide 7525m<sup>2</sup> of open space. The Masterplan is said to be designed around existing trees to maximise retention and a number of Tree Preservation Orders are in place. Biodiverse living roofs would be provided to help create multi-level green coverage. A substantial lake occupies the lower section of the site and the Masterplan proposes that this remains and the lake becomes an attractive site feature for both residents and local habitat. The most striking feature of the site is its topography.

The Design Team are currently preparing a planning application to revise a scheme granted planning permission at appeal in February 2020. The original consent was for 1,350 residential units, commercial space and a new 5 Form Entry Secondary School.

The revised scheme seeks to deliver circa 2,500 residential units, through additional height, changes to internal layouts and reduction of building access cores. When presenting the revised scheme, the Design Team focused on Phase 1 (Block C to F).

## **Design Review**

The Chair thanked the Design Team for their presentation. The Panel discussed the scheme. The following Note summarises the Panel's view in relation to Masterplanning and Architecture.

## **Discussion**

### The Masterplan

The Panel noted the importance of the site's topography and urged the Design Team to consider how the scheme responds to this and fits in the surrounding area. The site is unique and can offer future residents a high quality of life - if designed well.

The Design Team were encouraged to consider how people will move through the new neighbourhood, the quality of the pedestrian experience, and people will get to and use the proposed open spaces. The masterplan is primarily composed of tall continuous perimeter blocks enclosing podium courtyards and the Panel queried whether this typology addresses the needs of people looking for a suburban experience taking into account what people may look for in a post-pandemic era (such as more flexible homes with working from home spaces and local working hub facilities, an increased connection to private amenity and generous public open space ).

The Design Team were encouraged to set high standards for urban greening given the opportunity for integrated green and blue infrastructure the site offers. The Design Team were asked to demonstrate how they will create and maintain a biodiverse landscape across the masterplan area, linking the open spaces. They were also asked how they would response to climate change, for example by ensuring both internal and external spaces do not overheat in the summer.

The Panel welcomed the new public spaces and highlighted the need to further develop the character and intimacy of the spaces and invited the Design Team to develop a stronger interface between the new buildings, streets and spaces. For example, there is potential to remodel New Brunswick Park to provide a better quality public realm to the frontage of the proposed ground floor commercial block.

The Panel encouraged the Design Team to provide streets that; provide inclusive access for all, focus on active travel and prioritise walking and cycling over vehicle movement and access. Although the proposed street layout is both rational and connected, the Design Team should now consider how the street design will create a 'slow speed' walkable neighbourhood were vehicle traffic is subservient to pedestrian movement.

It was noted that although long uninterrupted views (along the Parkway for example) aid legibility, the Design Team should provide detailed layout plans in plan and section that demonstrate how the street design will maintain slow speeds. The Design Team were encouraged to explore the different character and function of separate streets and parts of streets, for example creating some very quiet or event vehicle free sections that relate positively to the topography, building entrances and landscaping.

The Panel stressed the importance of having a sustainable water management strategy for the entire site. The current approach to conveying surface water to the existing pond does not reflect best practice and the designer was encouraged to provide a detailed SuDS strategy that responds to the site topography and determines a SuDS management train for the site. The Panel strongly advised the Design Team to work with an experienced SuDS designer to develop a strategy which is fully integrated into the streetscape and green spaces. This approach can reduce costs and help create beautiful biodiverse neighbourhood that attract residents and increases value.

The landscape can be used to bring people together through community uses and increasing neighbours' connections. The Design Team was encouraged to carefully think about how that might manifest here in 21st century modern suburbia through green spaces, a peaceful and quiet environment and a personalised space as well as productive landscapes such as fruiting trees and allotments. The Panel thus invited the Design Team to consider how their scheme can be made into an exemplar modern suburban neighbourhood. Further exploration of opportunities to increase provision of non-residential uses which will enrich local living is encouraged.

The Design Team was asked if the existing car park could be retained to reduce the carbon footprint of the development. The Design Team should also consider how the proposed internal parking courts will be designed to allow for reuse in the future.

### Architecture

The Panel advised the Design Team to carefully consider what type of housing is appropriate for this area, taking into account demand and how residents will use their homes. The Panel were not convinced that the proposed buildings would provide the most appropriate the type of homes people for this particular site. The Panel underlined the importance of homeworking – widely adopted during the Covid-19 pandemic – which is a key aspect to consider here. Housing design should be flexible enough for people to personalise their space. The Panel noted the large size of the site and suggested the creation of a variety of flexible housing typologies which could include multi-generational housing.

The Panel welcomed the simplicity of the buildings' façades and the fact that these are not overdesigned. However, comments regarding the importance of creating a positive character in this suburban location, and concern over the type and variety of homes provided, also relate to the architecture. The architecture should contribute to clear aspirations on the character to be created.

The Panel would like to see more detail on the vehicle entrance points, how servicing works and the impact on the quality of street. The ground floors of the buildings need more work – with clarity as to how internal privacy alongside overlooking of public areas will be achieved. Entrances should be clear, welcoming and good focal points for local residents. The way level changes are accommodated across the blocks should be clearly set out, ensuring views through to internal open spaces, inclusively accessible entrances and access to bin and bike stores without blank walls to streets. The panel were not convinced these issues had been resolved.

### The Revised Scheme

The revised scheme seeks to increase the quantum on the site to circa 2,500 units through; improved internal efficiencies, changes in fire strategy and alterations to core arrangement and additional height. It was noted that detailed layout plans for the blocks were not provided.

The Panel were concerned with the quality of internal and external spaces that would be created. For example the blocks' internal courtyards would not be easy for people to get to would lack privacy and could be overshadowed and noisy due to the nature of the perimeter blocks proposed. As such they are unlikely to provide useful amenity space.

The reduction in cores and revised internal layouts have resulted in long internal corridors that; result in numerous single aspect units, and reduce potential for residents to access the courtyard from ground floor units and reduces the ease that all residents can both access the space and overlook it.

The Design Team was invited to refer to the GLA's recent Housing Supplementary Planning Guidance for further advice on internal layouts and different building typologies that can be used to create blocks.

In order to address these problems the Panel encouraged the Design Team to consider alternative typologies. Separate mansion blocks for example arranged as a discontinuous perimeter block would provide multiple benefits vis a vis sun lighting /daylighting to the courtyards and ground floor units, greater potential for dual aspect, greater variety of units and architectural response which in turn would provide greater value.

### Summary

The current planning approval application was considered to be rationally laid out, but it will need to be thought about in fine detail going forward. The scheme should reflect people's needs and what has changed in the last few months due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Design Team must carefully think about how the open and private spaces within the scheme respond to the existing topography and how they will be used by the residents on a daily basis.

The Chair stressed the importance of putting any possible improvements from the previous Masterplan forward without hesitation to the Borough to consider.

With respect to the revised scheme the Panel is concerned about the quality of the proposal and does not consider that the proposed changes to the internal building layouts and the increased density across the site are currently justified on design grounds.

The Panel look forward to seeing the Scheme again as it progresses.

UDL April 2021