

Perceval House Ealing, design review, 17 December 2019

Introduction

What follows is a note on the consensus views of a design review panel on the detailed design proposals for the redevelopment of Perceval House and adjacent land. This review was a follow-up to an earlier review of the principles and strategies behind the proposal. In attendance were LB Ealing, Galliford Try, Dp9, Patel Taylor, Cameo & Partners, and representatives of local tenant groups.

Design review panel: John Lyall, Jeremy Melvin, Paul Finch (chair)

What the panel noted

- A very comprehensive series of designs for the multiple elements in this project
- Materials and how they are articulated have been identified for every part of the proposal
- The materials have been chosen partly to reference the palette of neighbouring and other Ealing buildings, and partly to introduce a contemporary element
- A hierarchy of ground-floor public spaces has been identified
- The ground floor is animated by uses which will be curated as part of a six-year programme starting with 'meanwhile' uses
- Three sorts of uses are envisaged: office/workspace; retail/leisure; and artisanal/maker space
- The civic building and adjacent public space have been designed to act as a link between the 18th century/town hall historic buildings and the 20th century office type moving down the street
- Detailed designs differentiate between different uses and conditions
- Façade design changes as appropriate, rather than replicating
- Materials referencing local tradition include red brick, red-and-white elements, textured stone
- Articulated elements reference, for example, town hall windows
- Additional 'contemporary materials include precast concrete, patterned brickwork, terracotta, curtain walling, metal panels and brise soleil elements
- Colours have been carefully chosen for different parts of the project and to give variety to individual buildings and facades
- The residential parts of the development reference mansion block layouts
- Linear blocks have 11 units per core, while the 'square-ish' model has seven rising to four at upper levels

- The 'feature' tower has seven units per core at the lower levels, four in the middle and two at the upper levels

What the panel liked

- The thoroughness of the presentation, which reflected the very detailed thought which has gone into the architectural treatment of each element of the project
- The convincing analysis which has underwritten decisions about plan, materials and articulation
- The detailed thinking about public realm routes, visual markers and 'magnets', and use of landscape to define and enliven
- The thoughtful and stimulating way with which colour has been deployed throughout the project – this will give the project a sense of identity and delight
- Combining different elements of this hybrid project in ways that give each building or zone a specific identity, creates a differentiated but integrated ground plane and skyline
- The use of materials and colour in a way which both relates to local context in a convincing way while providing an unashamedly contemporary development
- The contrasting combination of materials, which creates a very distinctive feel and avoids the potential blandness of a group of residential blocks
- The variation on a theme – for example the treatment of balconies to accentuate identity, or the patterned materials for gable ends
- The commitment to preserving as many trees as makes sense
- The commitment by Ealing, Galliford Try and the designers to making every (bar one) apartment double or triple-aspect
- This is setting the bar at a very high, and very welcome, standard compared with many house-builder proposals we have seen recently
- The tenure-blind pepper-potting of the 50 per cent affordable element, is a welcome commitment to creating a real community rather than a housing monoculture
- While the detailed choice of plants and trees is not yet finalised, the landscape strategy is firmly established and is complementing built form in the way one would expect
- The rooftop terraces at various heights are a welcome feature

What the panel had concerns about

- There were no fundamental concerns expressed about the detailed designs to date. The comments/suggestions below, on matters of detail, should be read in that light

Some comments for consideration

- We commented in July about the significance of the library and help centre as being the key civic element in the project (along with public space)

- We continue to feel that some form of signage would be helpful so that there is no ambiguity about the nature of the 'glazed box'
- The announcement of the Library/Ealing Council, and the nature of the foyer space which is part of the entrance sequence, should have the gravity one associated with a local authority headquarters
- We think that the current reflective metal materials chosen to clad the columns and line the soffit may look dated quite quickly, and do not seem to provide the necessary gravitas
- The design team has no doubt looked at various options for the columns and we suggest they might be revisited
- This leads to a wider consideration of the glazed box, with its magnificent window onto the historic centre – the Queen of suburbs!
- Currently this appears to be the only significant element of the project, because of the curtain walling element, where one would assume three or four replacements over the next century, that is to say it is like any other commercial office design
- The question (and this is clearly a choice for clients and users) is whether it would be preferable to choose alternative materials which would age in the manner of the old town hall
- We raise this because of the general environmental policies adopted by the Ipa, which are reflected generally in the overall and detailed design proposals, which involve designing for longevity rather than replacement
- The thought arising from the presentation, as stated in the meeting, was the beauty and robustness of the terracotta elements, and the extraordinary way in which they change colour depending on lighting conditions
- We wonder if this could be examined as part of final design thinking
- It may also be that the location of the Library entrance, and its design, might also be reviewed to ensure that the most is made of the entry sequence to what might be considered the Palace of the Queen of Suburbs
- In respect of the feature tower, we suggest that the roof element needs to be lighter in colour, a celebration of the rich colour palette which informs the design
- There is a clue in the gold lines running up the building, perhaps the topmost element could reference this
- This feature, and this applies to other rooftop elements, could feel lighter in design as well as colour, giving a feeling of receding rather than 'landing'
- At the base of the residential buildings, except for the tower and building 01, there is a sense that the pale brickwork at ground level only gives a rather squashed feel
- We wonder if the architect might consider extending the colour to the first floor

Final thoughts

- In thinking about the uses informing the ground plane, attention could be given to the nature of the town plans introduced by Alfred the Great, creating

'burghs' based on three streets (religious, commercial, community) rather than the Roman grid

- What is being created in the Perceval House scheme is a piece of townscape rather than just a development
- We continue to be hugely supportive of, and enthusiastic about, this project and the approach of the client and design teams
- We have been impressed by the commitment to high-quality outcomes shown by Ealing's planning team in a series of very different projects we have recently reviewed in the borough
- We have every confidence in the Perceval House design team and offer the comments above for constructive consideration, not as complaints

Paul Finch, 19 December 2019