



Kensington and Chelsea Quality Review Panel

Report of Chair's Review Meeting: Barlby Road

Thursday 1 July 2021
video conference

Panel

Catherine Burd (chair)
Jay Gort

Attendees

Ibrahim Buhari	Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
Joe Whitworth	Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
Tom Bolton	Frame Projects
Penny Nakan	Frame Projects

Apologies / report copied to

Sarah Buckingham	Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
Martin Lomas	Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
Amanda Reid	Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
Jonathan Wade	Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
Deborah Denner	Frame Projects
Cindy Reriti	Frame Projects

Confidentiality

This is a pre-application review, and therefore confidential. As a public organisation the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea 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.

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1. Project name and site address

Barlby Road (current school site and land to the rear of 341-351 Ladbrooke Grove, located between Barlby Road and Treverton Street).

2. Presenting team

Lance Routh	Stiff + Trevillion Architects
Tom Johnson	Stiff + Trevillion Architects
Rupert Buckland	Stiff + Trevillion Architects
Antony Geddes	Outerspace
Helen Nally	CBRE Planning

3. Planning authority briefing

The site is the former site of Barlby Primary School which is currently being rebuilt at the west end of the site. When the school is completed in late 2021, it will free the east end of the site for residential redevelopment.

The site is bounded by Barlby Road to the north, the rear of Victorian homes on Ladbrooke Grove to the east, Treverton Street to the south, and the boundary with the reprovided Barlby Primary School to the west.

The proposals are for four new buildings (Blocks A-D) of between three and eight storeys in height focused around a central open square, with a new pedestrian link between Barlby Road and Treverton Street. A sports facility will be provided at ground and basement levels of Blocks A and B.

Residential-led redevelopment is subject to the Council's housing policies and Community Housing SPD. Provision of social and community use on the site is required by Policy CK1, given the existing social and community designation of the site.

The site is not located within a conservation area. Consultation undertaken to date includes: engagement with ward councillors; and early engagement with local residents through a residents survey, for which the results are pending.

Planning officers asked for the panel's comments in particular on three key issues: ensuring the approach to massing is on the right scale for the site; providing activation on the Barlby Road frontage; and achieving the right balance between open and restricted access to the community garden space.



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4. Quality Review Panel's views

Summary

The panel is pleased by the response to comments made at the previous review, and considers the scheme to be of a high quality. Further comments on entrances, façade activation, architectural detail and access to open space are intended to ensure the development makes the most of its site, and becomes a landmark scheme for the borough. The panel considers changes and simplifications to the massing are successful, helping to clarify building forms. The panel supports the public route through the development, but asks for further clarification on the courtyard boundary treatment, and thoughts on how direct access to the central courtyard can be provided for social rented tenants, to avoid any impression of tenure inequality. This should include an assessment of whether building cores or entrances can be moved to the garden side of Blocks A and B. The new corner garden at Ladbroke Grove end of Block C has the potential to be a lovely space. However, the panel asks whether entrances to Block C units might work better on Barlby Road, to introduce activity into the blank façade. The residential entrances to Blocks A and B should be given greater prominence and stronger architectural expression, to ensure a high quality threshold experience. There would be advantages in moving the Sports Hall entrance to Block B, on Barlby Road, focusing public activity and opening up more space for residential entrances. Thought should be given to alleviating the blank elevation at the western end of Block C on Barlby Road, ideally by introducing front doors. Illustrations should be provided of the western elevation of Blocks A and B to ensure it makes a positive contribution in views looking east along Barlby Road. These comments are expanded below.

Architectural approach

- The panel considers the architecture of the development to be developing well. The banded brickwork approach helps to unify the four buildings. The lightness of the balconies introduces a delicate contrast with the brickwork.
- The idea of a change of colour on the gable walls could be a successful way to introduce moments of difference into the blocks. The panel encourages the design team to test further ways to create difference between the four blocks to enrich the architectural language and, potentially read as individually distinct blocks. This could involve using different colours on each, or using colour around entrances and corners.
- The panel suggests that the concrete lintel above the windows may need further thought, as it reduces the clarity of the horizontal brickwork bands.
- The cornices could also benefit from being lightened, to reduce thickness and weight at the top of the buildings.



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- It is important the quality of design of boundary walls and railings matches the material quality in the rest of the development, and that brickwork detailing is as good on walls as on the blocks.

Massing

- The panel considers that the changes to massing made since the last review have introduced greater clarity to the development. Simplifications to the massing of Blocks C and D are a particular improvement.
- The blank Block C frontage on Barlby Road remains, however, problematic. The panel asks that options are explored to alleviate this by introducing front doors, which would break up the elevation and improve the streetscape.
- The panel has not seen illustrations of the western elevation of Blocks A, B and the Sports Hall and suggests that drawings are provided to show how this will appear. This façade will be prominent in views along Barlby Road from the east because of the level change, and it is important that the elevation makes a positive contribution. The panel would encourage some fenestration on this elevation, even if this needs to be obscure for privacy. Partially screened corner balconies could soften the edge.

Entrances

- The open spaces introduced either side of Block C and the Community Garden appear very promising. The views provided from the street into the courtyard beyond are beneficial, and the extension to the dentist's surgery on Ladbrooke Grove is a subtle piece of design.
- The revised corner massing and the Block C entrance space between the dentist's and Block C is a particular success. However, the disadvantage of locating a singular eastern entrance to Block C on the end of the building is the blank façade on Barlby Road. The panel continues to think this needs to be re-thought to provide more active frontage onto Barlby Road, and the possibility of individual entrances to lower floor units or maisonettes at the west end of Block C.
- The panel asks for further consideration of the design of the residential entrance to Block A. The current design privileges the Sports Hall entrance, but the panel feels that the balance should be different. The residential entrance should be more celebratory, for example with a larger front door to create a better threshold experience. The entrance space should be of the same quality as the eastern entrance to Block C.
- Changing the location of the Sports Hall entrance from Block A to Block B remains the panel's preference, bringing all the public use activity together in one location.



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- Consideration should also be given to increasing the prominence of the residential entrance to Block B. This could be achieved through a greater level of architectural expression, and perhaps an external covered space.
- The panel questions the way the studio space in Block B will operate alongside the leisure centre. Detailed discussions will be needed with the operator, Greenwich Leisure Limited, to agree how this space is accessed and ensure it is well used. The space could be more successful if it were run separately from the Sports Hall. Thought should be given to whether the space could house other types of use required in the area.
- The trees introduced at the entrance areas are a positive addition. They should be as large as possible, to ensure they are in scale with the development.

Courtyard access

- The panel welcomes amendments made to the units facing the courtyard so that front doors are all now street facing. However the new location of accessible units needs to be considered in relation to disabled car parking, which might be problematic on Barlby Road.
- The boundary treatment between the public route through the site and the residents courtyard needs to be carefully handled, so it is legible, safe and secure.
- The panel considers it important that the residents of Blocks A and B have direct access to the central courtyard space from their flats through private space, rather than via the public street. This open space is the heart of the development, and residents of the social housing units should have access arrangements that feel equal to those for Blocks C and D. The panel suggests the design team considers options to achieve this, including potentially flipping the cores of Blocks A and B to provide direct garden access via the stairs, or relocating entrances so they open into the new public route. A bridge could also be considered across the public route through the development.

Next steps

- The Quality Review Panel is available to provide further advice if required, but is confident that the design team can address its comments in discussion with officers.

