

## **PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE MINUTES**

**Tuesday 25 August 2020 at 7.00 pm**

**PRESENT:** Councillor Ben Kind, Councillor Jessica Leigh, Councillor Mohammed Seedat, Councillor Joanne Simpson (Vice-Chair), Councillor Becca Thackray and Councillor Clair Wilcox (Chair)

**APOLOGIES:**

**ALSO PRESENT:** Councillor Scarlett O'Hara

### **1. DECLARATION OF PECUNIARY INTERESTS**

Councillor Ben Kind stated that while not a pecuniary interest, St Matthew's Church was inside his ward.

Councillor Mohammed Seedat stated that while not a pecuniary interest, he was a member of Impact Brixton, which was one of the organisations in consultation with the applicant as a possible operator of the affordable workspace.

### **2. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the previous meetings held on 26 May, 23 June and 14 July 2020 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record of the proceedings.

Guillotine arrangements

The Chair announced a provisional timetable for the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 9.9.1.

### **3. 20-24 POPES ROAD (COLDHARBOUR) 20/01347/FUL**

Case No. 20/01347/FUL (agenda item three, page one of the agenda pack, page one of the addendum and page one of the second addendum).

The Planning Officer gave a presentation which included a summary of the report and subsequent addenda that had been published on Friday 21 August 2020 and further representations received on the day of the meeting. Members were advised of the key material planning issues for consideration and noted that the proposed development would bring forward regeneration of a site currently containing a single storey building used as two retail stores. The scheme proposed to provide three buildings varying from five to 20 storeys, a mix of retail, restaurant, community and office floor space (of which 10% would be for affordable workspace) and cycle store and facilities in the basement. There would be a contribution towards lift access, cycle parking, improvements to Brixton Station and Atlantic Road and a potential link to Brixton Village through the arches in the future. The proposed new civic square in Popes Road would increase the public realm by 962 sqm, with further details to be secured through the S106 agreement. Members were shown images of the site, its context, proposed materials and

design, and existing and proposed views from various angles. The separation distances between the scheme and neighbouring residential properties were between 13 and 17m to the south and would not have adverse impacts on outlook or privacy of neighbouring residents. Due to the site context, with minimal existing massing in the urban context, there would be adverse effects to the daylight of flats in 368-372 Coldharbour Lane which would be facing the proposed nine-storey building. A breakdown of these effects was given by floor and room. Both the GLA and Historic England agreed with the Council that the scheme would cause 'less than substantial harm' to the nearby heritage assets as set out in the officer report.

Following the officer's presentation, the objectors raised the following concerns:

- The application had an exceptional number of objectors stating that it was not the right place for the key site.
- Historic England had pointed out that the proposed tower was one third higher than the guidance for the less sensitive Pop Brixton site on Brixton Station Road. It was also twice the height of any other building in the conservation area and was mediocre, bland and would not enhance the character of the conservation area.
- The dark brick and repetitive window pattern would only reinforce the impression of size and bulk.
- The scheme did not meet the highest possible environmental standards in the context of the climate emergency.
- Working patterns had changed due to the Covid-19 pandemic and there was no evidence that there was a demand for building office space in Brixton. If no businesses took up the office floor space the building could potentially be converted into luxury flats with no social housing provided.
- There were a number of serious transgressions in the daylight and sunlight report which were justified by applying alternative target values, which had no scientific basis. There were a large number of windows and rooms within the neighbouring properties that would not meet the alternative target values should the development be built as planned.
- It was requested that the overshadowing test be applied on Electric Avenue and historic outdoor markets in the local area.

The applicant and agents then provided the following information in support of the application:

- The site was currently underperforming. The scheme would create office workspace that would allow local businesses to grow and maintain themselves in Brixton. It would generate 2000 jobs, create £2.3m in business rates and produce £2.8 million a year in extra spend for the local economy.
- There would be a dedicated community space, programmed by the local organisation Brixton Projects, which would include a focus on jobs, skills and employment training and would support an endowment worth over £1.5 million. This would fund 25 years' worth of these programmes for the local population.
- The scheme would provide a workspace, market, food and drink, leisure and community hub for the location and the first new indoor market since 1935.
- The scheme was designed by David Adjaye, an architect known amongst other projects for the Smithsonian African American Museum in Washington DC and the National Cathedral of Ghana. The building design had been set back further to expand the public realm; the materiality and tonality of the brickwork had been lightened to draw stronger reference to the local materials of Brixton.
- The project would deliver new public toilets, free to use by the public, which would

remove the maintenance cost from Lambeth.

- Improvements to the local transport and streets network would comprise of £300,000 in local streets improvements, £300,000 for Brixton Station improvements, up to £450,000 in local bus service contributions and £20,000 in cycle parking for Lambeth and the local community.

Councillor Scarlett O'Hara then spoke as Ward Councillor for Coldharbour Ward, stating the following:

- The tower would dominate the streetscape and change the downtown Brixton forever.
- The development deviated from the Local Plan, was too tall and would overshadow many of the heritage assets, including St Matthew's Church, the Town Hall and the Library.
- It would be an unneighbourly development, particularly for adjoining homes in Carney Place where many residents were working from home.
- The development did not achieve the highest standards of sustainability and only offered the required amount of affordable office space, in an area of the borough with high unemployment and levels of deprivation.

Officers then provided the following information in response to questions from Members:

- The 10% affordable workspace secured would be to assist small and medium enterprises, would be managed by Impact Brixton and would assist the Council's objectives to increase provision for new employment opportunities. It was proposed to have a large anchor and various medium businesses, which would create an office ecosystem that would allow young entrepreneurs and businesses to grow and stay within Brixton.
- The applicant's market intelligence suggested positive interest for an anchor business to pre-let early in the scheme.
- A study from Savills had been conducted to ascertain changes in working patterns since the Covid-19 pandemic. 89% of the respondents stated that office space would remain a necessity. Furthermore, younger workers found it challenging to work from home due to their living circumstances and that their development would be stunted if this continued. There were further discussions on the quality of the survey.
- The condition to enforce the 25 years of affordable workspace had been applied to previous applications, but none had got to the stage of enforcement. This would be through the S106 agreement, with specific monitoring information to be provided by the Council.
- The policy did not specify how the calculations for the 10% affordable workspace should be done, but that it needed to be from the internal net area. The Committee could attach an informative or condition to ensure that the calculations were within a specified parameter.
- The exact location of the community floor space would be ascertained in the commercial and community use strategy. An engagement was taking place to determine the community needs. The community liaison would help to inform how the space was used.

*At 9:00 pm the meeting was adjourned for 10 minutes. Upon Members' return, officers continued to provide information to questions from Members.*

- The second addendum updated condition 30 to strengthen its wording to restrict the

change of use of the proposed office use on floors two and above to residential use. If the Committee sought further security in the matter, there was the option to secure the affordable workspace through the S106 agreement, rather than a condition. Should the applicant seek to vary this aspect and the Council did not agree, the applicant would have to wait five years to appeal.

- The letting strategy statement from the applicant was read out and confirmed that there was a clear commitment from the applicant to ensure independent and local market retailers were considered with the development facilitating local businesses as set out in the second addendum. These details would be secured by the S106 agreement.
- The Council's tall building studies indicating where height could potentially go in this part of Brixton had been undertaken to support the emerging draft Lambeth Local Plan. The canyon effect was mentioned as it was next to the railway line.
- The scheme embodied a contemporary and distinctive design influenced by local characteristics in Brixton. Policy Q26a, part 3 of the tall building study quoted that the building should be deemed excellent. The scheme had been designed by an internationally renowned architect and in officers' view this would ensure design excellence.
- The size of the scheme was reached through market intelligence that a critical size of business of 200,000 sqft would be required to sustain the mix of uses proposed which were supported by the Lambeth Local Plan. It would allow small businesses to grow within the scheme and maintain their presence in Brixton. A smaller scheme would not make the same contribution to public realm as the current scheme or provide the same package of benefits.
- The scheme would be most visible from Brixton Station Road and Brixton Market. The railway lines prevented the scheme from being widely visible from other angles. The majority of the plant was in the basement, but there would be a visible treatment at the top of the tower.
- The design and conservation officer explained in detail the fenestration on the side of the proposed building. The internal balconies would span the area of two floors and be open on three sides to allow a 180 degrees view of Brixton.
- The colour had been conditioned and would be a lighter brick.
- There were various mitigation options for the possibility of pedestrian wind microclimate, which included banners and columns along the footway or projected glazing. Modelling had been carried out in various locations and it should not create increased adverse impacts.
- The majority of support was from local addresses. A few were from outside the borough, but believed to be from people who worked in Brixton.
- There had been no representations from neighbouring residents that incorrect layouts had been used in the daylight/sunlight assessment.
- BRE guidance was that daylight/sunlight impact on bedrooms had less importance.
- There would be a Vertical Sky Component daylight reduction of 50% for apartments at 268-372 Coldharbour Lane, but many of the nearest apartments were shown on the plans of the neighbouring building to be dual aspect with their living rooms facing south away from the site.
- The uplift of the servicing vehicles was not considered to have an undue impact on the air quality. The scheme would meet the policy of carbon reduction as it was designed to

be electric.

*At 22:00 the Committee elected to proceed with the meeting for a maximum of a further 45 minutes in order to conclude the remaining matters of business.*

The Committee considered points raised by speakers and information provided by officers in conjunction with the report before making the following observations:

- Some Councillors were aware that the National Planning Policy Framework emphasised the need of office space for business needs but were not convinced that sufficient information was known on current business needs in this locality.
- Another Member understood the need for office space and stated that it was the applicant's risk on whether the scheme would survive a post COVID-19 pandemic world.
- There were huge merits of the application, including community benefits, such as job uplift, provision of a public square, commissioning of local artists and the renewal to Pope's Road and the station. However, there were no heritage benefits and the impact on the character of the area for residents showed room for improvement, as identified by Historic England and those who had small independent shops.
- Some Members were concerned with the scale and dominance, height and bulk, external appearance and architectural prominence of the application, particularly the colour of the brickwork and the level of the proposed building above the established Brixton skyline. They believed that the application was a direct conflict with sections two, three, four and five of policy Q26 and that the harm against the package of benefits were sufficient to refuse the application.
- Some Members welcomed a revised application.
- A Member thought the design was unacceptable and that the height, scale, bulk and massing were excessive. She believed that the lighter brick would not mitigate the harm of a dominant and looming structure and would negatively impact on the conservation area and the nearby listed buildings.
- A Member submitted that the scheme would be contrary to BRE guidelines, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and its effect on working patterns, the importance of bedrooms as an office space had changed and should receive a stronger weighting. There were major adverse impacts of VSC on bedrooms which did not have secondary windows, which would affect those working from home.
- One Member expressed concern that the uplift of jobs would increase bus services in a location where the transport infrastructure was already at saturation capacity.
- A Member was pleased that the applicant was showing faith in Brixton. He was not averse to the height as the perception of tall buildings from 2015 were now considered mid rises. However, he was concerned about the massing and section behind the towers.
- A Member was concerned that the affordable workspace would be used inappropriately along with the utility space, and therefore increase the net space of the full market rated floor space.

The Chair explained that due to the nature of the application and the time constraints, and to enable the applicant the opportunity to provide further information and to respond to the issues raised by Members, the item would be deferred to a future meeting within four weeks' time.

It was MOVED by Councillor Wilcox, SECONDED by Councillor Thackray, and

RESOLVED, by five votes for to two against

To defer consideration of the application.

#### CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting ended at 10.45 pm

CHAIR  
PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE  
Tuesday 22 September 2020

Date of Despatch: Thursday 15 October 2020

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