



Grace Mollart
WSP
Aldemary House
10-15 Queen Street
London EC4N 1TX

28th January 2021

Scheme: Homebase, Syon Lane

Full planning application for the demolition of existing building and car park and erection of buildings to provide residential units, a replacement retail food store with additional commercial, business and service space, and a flexible community space, and ancillary plant, access, servicing and car parking, landscaping and associated works.

Review Date: 18th January PM

Review Type: Chair's review

Panel: Jane Briginshaw (chair), Jo van Heyningen, David Ubaka

Agent: Grace Mollart, Simon Roberts Matthew Mainwaring WSP

Client: Duncan Matthews, Tom Fox, James Young, St Edward, Berkley Group

Architect: Pankaj Patel, Andrea Cesati, Patel Taylor

Landscape Architect: Tom Baigent, John Wickham, Murdock Wickham

Dear Grace,

We were pleased that this very important strategic scheme in Hounslow's Great West Corridor has returned to the Design Review Panel for a Chairs' review. We found the presentation very helpful and appreciated the focus on issues that were highlighted in the previous review. We are fully supportive of the aims of the project to provide much needed housing here and agree that improvements to the site are necessary to accommodate the proposed increase in population. Although the design team have tackled several issues that were raised at the previous DRP relating to the clean air route, the scale and massing of the proposal and the linked vision for the two sites, the design evolution has focused on mitigating these issues rather than solving them. Ultimately, we still believe that the brief to accommodate a Tesco Superstore of equivalent size to the existing located on the opposite side of the road on this site has made it virtually impossible for you to achieve a scheme of the quality that you and Hounslow are aiming to achieve here.

Overall footprint

As raised in the previous review, the size of the Tesco store, associated back of house areas and servicing bay has resulted in an overly large footprint that occupies most of the ground floor of the scheme. This issue remains, constraining the public realm to the edges of the site. Despite your efforts to mitigate this with landscape design; we are still not convinced there would be sufficient space to accommodate the movements of 1200 new residents and people walking to and from Syon Lane station. At the previous review we questioned whether Tesco's brief had been interrogated to produce a more compact plan. You have provided a diagrammatic study that illustrates how the deep plan car park could be turned into offices, suggesting there is some flexibility in Tesco's requirements. We were disappointed not to hear more about how the design strategy could respond to future changes in retail habits. We reiterate both to Hounslow and the applicant that the site will only be able to successfully accommodate a mixed-use development if the brief is challenged at ground floor.

Form and Character

The panel understood that the current massing strategy was to increase the height of buildings above the podium along Syon Gate Lane (block B) to reduce heights of buildings above the Syon Lane frontage (blocks D and E). Although there has been an improvement since the first review both in massing and the architectural language, we still had real concerns about the overall quantity of development above the podium.

We agree that it is correct for the 17-storey tower to be the high point that steps down to a lower block at the corner, however we feel that the tower does not have adequate space around it to be comfortable. In addition, its proportions appear wide from certain viewpoints, emphasised by how it adjoins the 10 storey infill blocks. In general, we think most of the proposed buildings are of good design, however this tall building, in a prominent location could be of much higher architectural quality. We would support a more elegant taller tower to help redistribute some mass from elsewhere, subject to appropriate view testing.

It was felt that the 7 storey blocks fronting Syon Lane were too close together. Removing one of these blocks could supply some much-needed breathing room to the podium gardens. We were not yet convinced that it is workable to have a podium four storeys above ground level with areas of blank frontage along Syon Lane. This does not give enough back to the public realm and would not create a pleasant environment at street level.

Aspect of units

It was noted that the massing of the scheme resulted in a high number of single aspect units due to the wrapping of residential around Tesco. However, the use of infill blocks in between the taller elements in block B also result in high number single aspect units which we think is unacceptable. We do not think 'semi dual' aspect units are a solution as they do not provide the true benefits of dual aspect dwellings. This issue can only be resolved by altering the massing of these blocks.

Clean Air Route

We are pleased that you have accepted Hounslow's aspiration for a clean air route parallel to the Great West Road and welcome the changes you have made to introduce well designed landscaping proposals here but believe the location of Syon Gate Way and Syon Gate at the periphery of the site compromises their quality and usability. The route will also function as an essential service route and even with careful management of delivery vehicles we fail to see how this can also provide a safe and clean route for pedestrians and cyclists. We also note that the lack of separation between cycles and pedestrians as fast-moving bicycles can compromise pedestrian safety and that the extent of built form along the north eastern edge would create an uncomfortable microclimate for pedestrians along Syon Gate Lane due to prevailing wind direction. We do not consider that Syon Gate Way is sufficient in size to deal with the huge volume of activity created by servicing Tesco and the residential development.

The high proportion of inactive frontage that wraps the building at ground floor level along Syon Gate Way and Syon Gate Lane is not in accordance with secure by design principles. Despite some overlooking from first floor balconies, the lack of activity on both sides of this route and the way the significant height is handled, leads to an unpleasant 'cliff edge' feel, encouraging anti-social behaviour and should be designed out as a priority.

Public Realm & Landscaping

We welcome the development of amphitheatre public space at ground floor level and think it is a good solution to deal with the level change although it is not big enough to serve the development in relation to the footprint of the building. It would have more purpose if it led to a safe level crossing point on the Great West Road. Referenced precedents such as Bishopsgate are not relatable due to the scale difference. We are concerned that its location, subject to noise and pollution from the Great West Road will result in the space being unusable and whether the materiality and landscaping is robust enough to deal with such tough environmental conditions. If the building footprint had been set back further, a solid wall could have been provided to acoustically protect this space.

We appreciate that you have gone to much effort to develop the character of the landscaping and make it of high quality, in particular the podium gardens. However, we feel that a sense of place is still lacking here as there isn't enough space between the built elements to truly dwell.

Linked vision

We were disappointed not to see a drawing that show both schemes together highlighting the opportunity of the sites to deliver a key part of Hounslow's Masterplan for the Great West Corridor. We welcome your commitment to bring forward an at grade pedestrian crossing across the Great West Road. Currently the landscape drawings show the retention of the underpass, which is unworkable in terms of the quality of environment it provides and its capacity to accommodate increased pedestrian flow. This solution must be pursued more urgently with TfL and we advise LB Hounslow that the scheme is contingent upon this safe crossing point being delivered first.

Conclusion

In summary we would like to thank the applicant team for the huge amount of work that has gone into developing the proposals and welcome your response to our previous comments. We are very supportive of the aims of the project to deliver a significant amount of housing here ; however we are still certain that the footprint of Tesco is compromising your ability to provide public realm that is good enough in character or scale for this quantum of new housing. We would have liked to see a clearer vision for the two sites and commitment to delivering the at grade crossing, which is the first essential piece of the wider masterplan.

Yours faithfully,



Panel Chair
Jane Briginshaw



Panel Manager
Amanda Rashid