

# **ROYAL BOROUGH OF GREENWICH**

## **PLANNING BOARD**

**4 MAY 2021 AT 6.30PM**

### **MINUTE**

#### **PRESENT:**

#### **Members’:**

Councillor Stephen Brain (Chair); Councillors Norman Adams, Olu Babatola, Gary Dillon, Denise Hyland, Clive Mardner, Geoffrey Brighty and Nigel Fletcher.

#### **Officers:**

Assistant Director Planning & Building Control, Planning Manager (Major Developments), Planning Officer, Assistant Head of Legal Services and Committee Services Officer

At the commencement of the meeting (conducted remotely) the Chair announced the procedure which the Meeting of the Board would be followed for considering the item(s) before the Board.

#### **Item No.**

#### **1. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received for Councillor Ian Hawking.

#### **2. Urgent Business**

The Planning Board noted and accepted the Planning Officers Addendum Report, circulated in advance of the meeting, in relation to;

Item 4 – Land bound by Beresford Street and MacBean Street, Woolwich.  
SE18 6BG – Ref: 19/2498/F

### **3. Declarations of Interest**

#### **Resolved –**

That the list of Councillors' Memberships as Council appointed representatives on outside bodies, joint committees and school governing bodies be noted.

### **4. Land bound by Beresford Street and MacBean street, Woolwich. SE18 6BG – Ref: 19/2498/F**

The Planning Board Members' noted the Planning Officers addendum report, with revised Conditions, which had been circulated in advance of the meeting, and accepted an illustrative presentation of the application from the Planning Officer.

In response to Members' questions the Planning Officer confirmed the 20% affordable housing was not policy compliant but was considered as acceptable by the Independent Viability assessor as the most that could be achieved.

A Member raised specific concern at the viability of the application noting that 595 flats rented at an average of £1,500 pcm would create an annual return in excess of £10.5mil pa and questions the viability decision that only 20% affordable was possible. They questioned how it was possible that developments of a similar size and location were able to offer 35% affordable housing and if there was difference, in value, between Build to Rent and Build to Sale schemes.

The independent Viability Officer responded that the viability assessment was undertaken in line with National and Local Policy and guidance for a 'build for rent' scheme. He detailed the specifics of the financial calculations used to assess the viability of the scheme and confirmed that the valuation was planning compliant. The applicant would see a real shortfall of £7 million and, on that basis, the scheme would be £4.5 million under its factored in growth; 20% would be the maximum affordable offer that could be financially made.

The Independent Viability Officer confirmed that standard build cost information for schemes across London was used with input from an experienced quantity surveyor. He noted that developers may weigh up the impact on profit against the possible failure to gain consent and make a higher offer of affordable units than could not be financially supported, to make a scheme more attractive for planning consent.

The Independent Viability Officer continued that the costs for the proposal were benchmarked and in line with the average, advising that a late stage viability review was conditioned, which would consider actual cost and benefit. He noted that, whilst he had not assessed the development on the basis of a lower height development, the fixed costs would be diluted across fewer properties which would have a significant impact on the viability.

In respect of possible implications on the Conservation Area, the Planning Officer advised Members' that the site adjoined did not fall within the Conservation Area. Historic England had raised concerns at the visual impact on designated heritage assets, including the Royal Brass Foundry (Grade I), and Royal Artillery Barracks (Grade II\* listed). The Council's Conservation Officers had expressed concerns relating to the setting of the Equitable House and the impact on the view from the Love Lane area. He noted that it was unlikely that it would be possible to deliver a scheme on the site that did not impact on heritage assets in some way and advised that it was for the Planning Board to determine whether the benefit of the scheme outweighed any potential harm.

In response to Members' concerns at sunlight and daylight levels, particularly in relation to Block C, the Planning Officer confirmed there was an issue which, in part, arose from the use of the winter gardens impacting on the average daylight penetration into the room, referred to as average daylight factor. An average daily daylight factor was 1.5% per living room, kitchen or dining room, (LKD) and in block C 78% of the LKD's achieved a level of 1.5% with the remainder achieving 1.1% to 1.4%. Every bedroom achieved 1.5% and each unit would receive good, overall, levels of daylight.

The Planning Officer confirmed that a land assessment survey was required under Condition and would pick up on any a land contamination.

The Planning Board accepted an address from the representative for Speak Out Woolwich who stated the group supported the build to rent model and welcomed some positive changes to the original plans, however, concerns remained

- The flats would not be affordable to most residents in the area or the Borough, including keyworkers, as the average income of £50,000 would be required.
- This appeared to be another development of, predominantly, studio and one bed flats and would not meet the need of local people who were having to move away from London to buy houses with gardens.

- The height of the proposal would have an adverse impact on historic buildings and the Conservation Area, as supported by Historic England and the Councils Conservation Officer's comments.
- The design did not respond to the Conservation Area.
- It would contribute to the trend for taller and taller buildings, creating a long dark road, particularly in winter, which would not be inviting to pedestrians or cyclists.
- It breaches the London Plan maximum density whilst simultaneously failing to meet the Councils 35% affordable housing offer policy.
- No housing at ground floor level would mean that no ground floor housing would be available for disabled people.
- There were many vacant commercial units in the area and shopping habits had changed. Were the proposed commercial units viable or would they remain vacant for a long time? However, it was welcomed that the commercial space could not be used as a gym.

In response to a Members' question's the representative for Speak Out Woolwich noted that whilst a lot of the flats had been designed to meet accessibility standards, they were on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor and above and if there are issues with lifts would leave those with mobility issues unable to get out or into their homes. There was a large ground floor area which could be better utilised for accessible homes. In respect of conservation issues, they noted Woolwich contained many historic buildings and history which the proposal would abut directly, and both didn't fit in with and would increase the level of overshadowing of historical buildings in the area. Woolwich was increasingly becoming a Town of tower blocks rather than developments design in keeping with the history of the area.

The Planning Board accepted an address from the applicant's agent who advised the proposal was the culmination of work with Greenwich Council, local stakeholders and residents and he welcomed the Planning Officers recommendation to grant consent. It would revitalise a long vacant site and support the Council's aspiration to rejuvenate MacBean Street whilst providing a connection to the Royal Arsenal site and draw people from the riverside to the high street.

In response to the points raised by Speak Out Woolwich, the applicant's agent welcomed their support of the tenure blind pepper potting of affordable housing across the development. He noted that the at the GLA no longer required adherence to the density matrix and there was no upper density threshold. Whilst Historic England considered a decrease in height would reduce any potential in harm, they had not objected to the development. He understood the concern regarding wheelchair accessible

apartments, however, in line with the Grenfell Tower regulations, a secondary power supply would be installed, safe refuge areas and fire resistance within apartments would be integral within the development.

The applicant's agent advised that the development would be tenure blind with all residents benefiting from high quality fully furnished accommodation with free ultra-fast broadband 24/7, an on-site management team and health & well-being facilities available to all residents. The affordable discounted homes would be secured in perpetuity and available for nomination by the Council. Tenancies would be from six months to five years, with capped rent increases, no upfront fees and secure tenure with the automatic right to renew at the end of the tenure period. Residents would also be permitted to redecorate and have pets.

He continued that a proportion of the affordable and private rent homes would be marketed, for three-months, exclusively to key workers who would also be exempt from deposits and be in the range of NHS staff as well as keyworkers, such as teachers, prison and police staff.

The applicant's agent believed the development would provide a major economic lift to Woolwich Town Centre, providing new office and shop spaces which would be targeted at local businesses and start-ups; new full-time jobs aimed at local residents, as well as construction work and apprenticeships. It was estimated that residents would generate £9.5 million expenditure per annum, and it was anticipated a significant proportion of which would be spent in the local economy. New permanent provision for the existing market traders' storage would be provided and was secured through a legal agreement. Every apartment would have a balcony or winter garden in addition to access to large external and internal amenities, including new tree planting and enriched public realm. A unique play experience would be provided including swimming facilities and health and wellness benefits.

He noted that the proposal met the Council's policy as a car free development and saw significant investment in clean energy including the use of photovoltaic solar panels, electric car charging ports and heat pumps which would reduce the whole life build impact on carbon emissions with an aim of zero carbon by 2030.

In response to a Members' concern that the report indicated that Historic England and the Council Conservation Officer held objections, the Planning Officer clarified that Historic England did not use the phrase 'we object to

this development' but had set out a list of concerns and that most, if not all, of which would be resolved by the reduction in height of Blocks B & C by four floors.

The applicant's architect responded to a Member that the height of the development was discussed with the Planning Officers and the applicant's townscape consultant and the proposal was considered to define the right height that maximized the potential of the site whilst mitigating any impact on the Conservations area. The Townscape Report assessed views, both close to and at distance from the site and there was separation of the blocks to mitigate the impact of the development and achieve the best skyline, massing distribution and height that could be achieved on the site.

With regard to the 20% affordable offer, the applicant's agent re-iterated that this was supported by the independent viability assessment and, as a build to rent development, the 'sales' level would be much lower than that of a build to sell development. He noted that there was a third party right of way across the site which constrained the design of the development.

In response to a Members' question at the affordability of the units and the likelihood of attracting residents and business away from the Woolwich Arsenal area, the applicant 's agent felt that one of the main advantages of the development was the genuine tenure blind pepper potting of affordable housing across the site and the units would be accessible to people on the Council waiting list.

The applicant's housing consultant added that the rents would be a mix of London Living Rent and discounted rent. In terms of affordability, he re-iterated an example given in the applicants Housing Statement based on official Government data on income levels. He considered teaching, policing and health workers would be able to afford units, some on a single income some on a dual income, and those on benefit support would also be able to access units.

A Member noted that the average joint income of couples on the Council waiting list was £42,000, which was below that of the expected £50,000.

The applicant's housing consultant responded to a Member that the application had been developed in consultation with the Council Housing Officers and the majority of family units formed part of the affordable homes offer. It was considered appropriate to develop a larger proportion of single units in which would free up family housing elsewhere by reducing the requirement for shared housing.

In respect of build costs, the applicant's housing consultant advised that this equated to £2,800 per sqm, which a Member noted was average rather than high, as claimed.

A Member noted that it had been implied that the land had been abandoned but it had been owned, for some time, by financial institutions and questioned if the area had been land-banked, waiting for the completion of Crossrail, when the commercial viability would increase. Further, if any iterations of the design had been considered that would offer 35% affordable housing.

The applicant's agent responded that, whilst aware the Council had sold the site 20 years ago, he was unable to comment on the long-term history of the site, as they had only been working with the vendor on the current scheme for the past three years. Further, no iteration of the design, offering 35% affordable housing had been designed as they had struggled with the viability of the scheme from day one as confirmed in the independent viability assessment.

Members' moved to determining the application;

A Member noted Speak Out Woolwich and Members' concern at the low affordable housing element and the viability of the development. They expressed concern at the height and massing, noting that in line with the report and the London Plan 'the visual impact on the environment should be carefully considered, including the cumulative impacts of the developments in the vicinity' and considered the CGI, forming part of the Planning Officers presentation, demonstrated another 22 story tower would spread the cumulatively impact in an excessive way. Further, the Council's Policy and the London Plan required demonstration of a positive contribution to the built and natural environment and respect of the scale height, bulk and massing of adjacent townscape. Noting this was not in the Conservation Area and tall buildings had become acceptable on the Royal Arsenal Site, they felt the proposal did not respect or positively contribute to its surroundings, even in the Town Centre area. They noted the Councils Conservation Officer and Historic England considered that, whilst less than substantial harm, the development would still have an impact and clearly preferred a reduction in height, by four stories. Therefore, the development did not positively contribute to the Conservation Area and would detract from it. They retained concern at the actual impact on the view from as far away as the Barrack site.

The Member continued that this was a significant scheme and Members' had to carefully consider the potential merits of the development against any potential harm caused and having read the report carefully, noting that it did not state that the development was acceptable within the terms of affordable housing, and they considered that the potential harm caused by the height and massing, the calmativ impact of a further tall building and the potential impact on the heritage assets would not be outweighed by the benefits of the low level of affordable housing offered. They would not be supporting the application.

In making their comment another Member noted that they were generally pro-development, but in this case completely supported and concurred with the comments of the previous Member (above). They appreciated that the applicant had made strives to accommodate the public right of way and was providing rental accommodation but, of the 595 homes only 20% would be available at an intermediate rent, of which 10% only would be social housing and they could not support the application.

A Member noted that the Board Members' did not always agree but he did agree with the summation of the previous Members'.

At the request of and on behalf of the Chair, the Committee Officer sought confirmation from all Members' that they had maintained zoom connection to the meeting for the entirety of the presentation and discussion on this item. No Member indicated that they had experienced any loss of connectivity.

The Planning Officers recommendation to grant planning consent was put to the vote with -

0 Member in favour of the officer's recommendation;

7 against consent;

0 abstentions.

**Resolved unanimously -**

That planning consent be refused for the proposed development, which by reason of its size, height and massing, both individually and cumulatively with other consented developments in the area, would have a significant adverse impact on the setting of designated heritage assets including the Royal Arsenal Conservation Area and Woolwich Conservation Area, and the nearby Grade I listed Royal Brass Foundry and the Grade II listed Equitable House.

That such harm of which would not be outweighed by the public benefits of the scheme, including the low level of affordable housing. As such, the proposal would be contrary to Policies DH1, DH2, DH3, DH(h) and DH(i) of

the Royal Greenwich Local Plan: Core Strategy with Detailed Policies (2014) and Policies D1, D2, D3, D4, D9 and HCI of the London Plan (2021).

The meeting closed at 8:25pm

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Chair