

## CONFIDENTIAL

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Our reference: DCC/0899

### **Royal Borough of Greenwich: Ravensbourne Wharf**

Dear John Smart,

Thank you for providing the Greenwich Design Review Panel with the opportunity to advise on this proposal at the Desktop Review on 23 November 2018. The scheme has been reviewed three times previously, most recently in September 2018. We continue to recognise the architectural ambition of the scheme and the scheme has seen positive refinements and improvements since the last review. We welcome the incorporation of the car lift into the building footprint and the re-introduction of the barge which was in doubt at the previous review. Both of these initiatives increase the quantity of public realm considerably. We also note the engagement of a new landscape architect and new landscape proposals; the improved layout of the flats, which addresses the concerns around the fire strategy; and comprehensive analysis of issues raised previously, such as noise impacts and views, along with proposals for dealing with these issues where required.

Our reviews to date have noted our concerns as to whether a building of this height, form and density is appropriate for the context of a small site adjacent to a working wharf. Our concerns have consistently been addressed but we note that this has been through further detailed work, rather than design-led responses. This has led to a highly refined but also very complex and costly building. This increases the concern that the building when delivered will not reflect the quality implied in the proposals, thereby undermining the scheme's key strength.

Our previous advice noted our concern that this density is possibly unprecedented and raises concerns as to the quality of life for residents. We recommended a significant reduction in density and/or the change of the end user/use class. These changes have not been made and we maintain our concerns about the impact on the proposed residents' quality of life and the precedent this sets, particularly for residents of affordable or social dwellings. The amenity space has been increased but we still do not think it adequately supports children living here. We continue to advise that the tenancy is designed and managed for alternative end users, such as an elderly population, who do not require amenity space of the same kind as children do.

## CONFIDENTIAL

### **Density and tenure**

The proposed density of 1,018 units/Ha is probably unprecedented for the Royal Borough of Greenwich and we continue to think that a scheme approved at this density sets a precedent for development that is likely to pose a risk for the long-term quality of life and health and wellbeing of residents and users. While we are aware that the generous proportions of the individual apartments contribute to a better quality of life, we are not convinced that this is adequate to counteract the overall concerns about impacts on quality of life here. We are particularly concerned by the impact on children and the limited external amenity space available.

We suggest that limiting the demographic of users to those who don't require as much support in terms of amenity space as children, such as an elderly population, and managing the tenancy might present a solution to the density. We continue to recommend that the project team work with the Council to explore whether alternative end-users can be accommodated here instead. Alternatively, we continue to recommend reducing the density.

### **Height**

Based on townscape views, the existing and anticipated tall buildings within the wider neighbourhood and the building's architectural quality, articulation and slender form, the proposed height of the building does not pose a concern. We advise, however, that the quality of the architecture must be maintained through to delivery to ensure its contribution to the area is positive.

### **Design response and viability**

Previous reviews have highlighted the significant design challenges associated with this constrained site adjacent to a working wharf, such as size, overlooking, noise and limited amenity space. We have expressed concern that the proposals are not appropriate to this context. Many of the responses are well-considered and detailed. However, we are concerned that some of these solutions and some of the original design assumptions work in isolation from each other. Delivering the proposed scheme to the envisaged high level of quality will be expensive and challenging. The result is likely to be a highly complex building of a high cost. For example, we think the Vision Control Film presents further concerns about cost, maintenance and permanence; the continuing use of timber, steel and concrete in the structure lead to greater cost and risk that the dimensions shown cannot be achieved; and the large areas of glazing will require solar shading and/or thermal insulation. We recommend the design team take a step back to check the technical solutions are fully resolved, realistic, deliverable and do not have negative impacts or undermine other aspects of the proposals. We note that good design proposes simple solutions rather than increased complexity.

In addition, the high cost of the building in combination with the proportion of affordable housing and space set aside for amenity, gives rise to concerns about viability and whether this building can be delivered to the quality shown in the proposals. Given the quality of the building is the key aspect in its favour, we are concerned that value-engineering will have significant negative consequences for the success of this scheme. As part of this we recommend considering the opportunities to maximise floorspace and that this includes considering the height of the atrium space. The height currently creates

## CONFIDENTIAL

voids on the upper levels that could be usable floorspace, especially as they do not appear to serve a purpose, such as bringing in light.

### **Accuracy and consistency of plans and drawings**

The design of this scheme involves a lot of technical detail and is complex as a consequence. However, despite the information provided, it is not always clear how it works based on the plans and drawings and we advise that the technical responses need to be incorporated into the visualisations. There are instances in which the drawings and CGIs create confusion and we recommend that these inconsistencies are rectified so that the appearance of the scheme when built can be understood accurately. For example, work carried out since the last review implies the building is Part L compliant, but this seems at variance with the extent of glazing shown in the drawings. Similarly, we recommend that the trees are represented within the red line boundary of the site, so their location is clear.

The proposals involve highly complex architecture and intricate technical work to resolve functional issues. This makes it crucial that the building's functionality and resilience is communicated as clearly as possible across all of the drawings and statements, but we do not think this is the case yet. For example, we suggest providing clear details on the material for the balconies and how they will be waterproofed; where the supporting columns are located; how acoustic separation will be achieved between the flats etc.

### **Landscape**

The landscape proposals have been enhanced considerably through incorporating the car lift into the footprint of the building and we welcome the increase to the public realm. We recommend that the lift door and the side of the car park should be incorporated into the base of the building and designed accordingly. Cars that are waiting to enter the lift may block the public realm and we recommend exploring with Highways that steps are taken to ensure they can wait on the street instead.

This site is strategically important as it represents the entrance and termination of the creek walk. We recommend that both of these roles are given more emphasis and reflected in the design of the space. For example, we think that the placement of planters could play a stronger role on the border to Babbage Point, which could be reinforced with taller planting to draw the eye and emphasise the entrance route to the creek walk. At present the position and extent of planters frustrate use of the creekside and reduce the usable area of public realm. We recommend that recognition of the termination point should be achieved in a way that allows for flexibility, particularly in the northwest corner, so that if the use of the adjacent safeguarded wharf were to change the opportunity to extend the creek walk can be taken.

We welcome the re-introduction of the barge to the plans and think it is integral to the success of the scheme. We recommend that the Council and the project team take the necessary legal or planning steps to ensure that the barge is realised and maintained as a community use.

The revised planting strategy is an improvement and the choice of trees and species is good, as is the choice of Corten steel for the planters. We advise that a robust

## CONFIDENTIAL

maintenance strategy, including irrigation systems and drainage, is required for the planting to ensure its quality is not compromised over time.

The edge to the barge, however, warrants a decrease in planting, especially if there is vegetation on the barge itself, to allow for clear views to the creek. The public realm is constrained and has to work hard on this site. There is a risk of overcrowding it with planters and furniture, and we recommend that the design team is mindful of this and focus on maximising the usable space. Overall, we recommend that the locations of the planters are reviewed to complement the function and views of each space, while also minimising the potential for clutter.

While we understand that alternative locations for the café have been explored, we advise that users will be attracted to the rear of the building, where they are exposed to the sun and are near the creek. We suggest that the location of the café continues to be explored, to ensure that the limited space is organised to best serve users.

### **Architecture and internal layout**

We continue to support the strong aesthetic quality of the building and its elegant façade is a particular strength. We think there is a risk of clutter, such as aerials or similar, being added over time and recommend that protections are put in place to ensure the building is not compromised.

We think that the fire strategy has been improved through revising the layout of the flats and the wayfinding issues from the central core, which was highlighted at the previous review have been addressed in part. We also think that the steps taken to achieve close to dual-aspect appears to work.

We recognise that work has been carried out to address the noise, ventilation and heating issues. With regard to noise, we appreciate the advice from the London Port Authority regarding the external balconies but think the noise levels of 61dB during the day and 54dB at night is very high and may compromise quality of life. Winds and microclimates may also present challenges on the balconies and we advise that the amenity space on the balconies might better be incorporated within the flat. Strong winds may also pose an issue on the roof garden and recommend that suitable steps are taken to create a comfortable and usable space for users.

The plans for the ground and first floor are ambitious and will include a lot of activity. We advise that the acoustics of the void must be given careful consideration and that the spaces on these floors need to be carefully curated and managed to make sure noise doesn't leak and/or to avoid reverberations becoming an issue. The drawback of a void is to reduce the potential flexibility of the building and the amount of usable floorspace and we suggest that alternative options for the design of this area are explored, such as decking over the void at higher levels or subdividing the space.

We think that a single lift access and lobby for all residents is a positive feature of this scheme and suggest that the security aspect of this is worked out in detail while keeping the egalitarian nature of the single lift and lobby consistent across the building.

## CONFIDENTIAL

Thank you for consulting us and please keep us informed of the progress of the scheme. If there is any point that requires clarification, please contact us.

Yours sincerely



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**Review process**

Following discussions with the design team, the local authority and the Greater London Authority, the scheme was reviewed on 23 November 2018 by Alex Lifschutz (chair), Michael Coombs and Tony Edwards. These comments supersede any views we may have expressed previously.

**Confidentiality**

Since the scheme is not yet the subject of a planning application, the advice contained in this letter is offered in confidence, on condition that we are kept informed of the progress of the project, including when it becomes the subject of a planning application. We reserve the right to make our views known should the views contained in this letter be made public in whole or in part (either accurately or inaccurately). If you do not require our views to be kept confidential, please write to [dc.cabe@designcouncil.org.uk](mailto:dc.cabe@designcouncil.org.uk).

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