



FRAME PROJECTS

Epping Quality Review Panel

Report of Chair's Review Meeting: Land North of Dowding Way

Friday 22 January 2021

Video conference via Zoom

Panel

Peter Maxwell (chair)

Andrew Beharrell

Attendees

Alison Blom-Cooper	Epping Forest District Council
Lydia Grainger	Epping Forest District Council
Krishma Shah	Epping Forest District Council
James Rogers	Epping Forest District Council
Anna Rowell	Epping Forest District Council
Deborah Denner	Frame Projects
Carolina Eboli	Frame Projects
Lana Elworthy	Frame Projects

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1. Project name and site address

Land north of Dowding Way
Waltham Abbey, EN9

2. Presenting team

Dominic O'Rourke	Next plc
Jonathan Landeman	pHp Architects
Tim Rainbird	Quod

3. Planning authority's briefing

The site is located on the southern edge of Waltham Abbey, separated from the central urban area by the M25 to the immediate north. Dowding Way is a major A road located directly to the south and currently does not offer vehicle access to the site. Junction 26 of the M25 is approximately 700m from the eastern edge of the site, and a small housing estate is located on Lodge Lane and Beechfield Walk in the north-west corner. A large Sainsbury's distribution warehouse is located to the west of the site, separated by Sewardstone Road. The site is currently located within the Metropolitan Green Belt boundaries, but upon adoption of the Local Plan, the site will be removed from the Green Belt.

Following the previous QRP review in August 2019, a two-part hybrid planning application was submitted in October 2019. In this original version of the application, Phase 1 was a full planning application for the erection of a large distribution warehouse, including an integrated photo studio and associated infrastructure. Phase two was an outline planning application for B1, B2 and B8 uses, with all matters reserved. Phase two has now been withdrawn by the applicant and only Phase one is being considered by the council.

Officers recommended that planning permission be granted, subject to Section 106 planning obligations and planning conditions. The District Development Management Committee meeting took place in December 2020. Members recommended that planning permission be refused and referred the application to Full Council for a final decision. This chair's review was sought before the application being considered by the Full Council for determination.

There were two key issues that officers requested this review to focus on concerning design and quality, both of which were raised by members during the committee meeting:

1. The height, length and bulk of the warehouse and possible mitigation strategies.
2. The adequacy of walking and cycling provision to the south-west and its integration with the proposed development.



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5. Quality Review Panel's views

Summary

The panel feels that this scheme is a high-quality example of a distribution warehouse, successfully addressing the challenges of this necessarily large scale building type. It welcomes the care with which the architectural expression has been developed. The inclusion of additional uses and the layering of different materials on the façade successfully reduces the bulk of the building, an inherent quality of the warehouse typology. The scheme's scale and massing are further mitigated by its successful integration with the topography. Careful thought is also apparent in the landscape design, which helps to integrate the warehouse into the site context and provides outdoor amenity spaces for workers and visitors.

Whilst offering its support to the architecture and landscape design of the scheme, the panel highlights two aspects of the planning submission that could be strengthened. Firstly, it encourages the design team to investigate complementary solutions to address the M25 façade that will be more exposed in parts of the year, when the deciduous trees are without leaves. A partial green wall could help soften this frontage and ensure an attractive year-round appearance. There is also a need for a maintenance and operation plan for the car park's green walls to ensure their long-term health and continued viability. Secondly, the panel reiterates the need for a western cycle and pedestrian connection to the existing and proposed active travel network. It recommends that the applicant and the local authority have further discussions to define the new route's best location and how it will be delivered, so that it is safe and secure, with proper lighting and signage.

The panel would also support the use of planning conditions, to secure high quality construction materials and detailing. This could give confidence that the design quality presented is maintained throughout the procurement, tender and construction phases. This includes specification of the perforated metal screening, bay studies of each part of the façade, and details of the soft and hard landscape. Branding, signage, and fencing treatments should also be part of the application or subject to planning conditions. These comments are expanded below.

Architecture and massing

- The panel commends the design approach presented, particularly the inclusion of additional uses in the proposal, such as the photography studio, as well as different amenity spaces. These bring variety, animation, and a human scale to the building.
- The panel feels that the layering of different materials and the individual treatment of each façade is successful. In particular, the banding contributes to reducing the apparent bulk of the building. It is incredibly important that this is not removed at a later date by any subsequent planning amendments.
- The use of the topography to help mitigate the building's large scale and massing is a strong feature of the proposal. The design team should ensure



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the roof is not visible from the ground, or nearby properties, including any potential roof plant.

- The panel would support the use of planning conditions, to secure high quality construction materials and detailing.
- It is essential that the architectural quality presented should be secured throughout the procurement, tender and construction phases.
- To this end the panel would encourage materials and construction details to be well described as part of the application. This should include the provision of annotated bay studies for the key conditions around each elevation. It should demonstrate the quality of the detailing, junctions between different planes and materials. It should further include references to the proposed specification and materials e.g., perforated metal screening.
- Planning should condition mock-ups as part of the approval. The authority should agree parts of the building and these should be constructed on site for approval prior to construction.
- Further details regarding signage and branding should also be part of the application with final details conditioned.

Landscape

- The panel praises the team for the significant progress made in the landscape design along the main pedestrian approach route on the west side.
- The panel supports the use of deciduous trees for the boundary treatment along the M25. However, during winter, this frontage might be exposed, revealing the bulk of the building. Complementary solutions, such as using green walls on the lower portion of the volume, could soften the frontage and ensure an attractive year-round appearance.
- There should be clear definition of the proposed soft and hardscapes and street furniture to ensure the landscape's quality is delivered. More details regarding material palettes, planting choices and their layering should be provided. Fencing treatments should also be developed, taking into consideration security requirements.
- The use of green walls on the car park façades is a positive design approach. However, there needs to be a robust maintenance and operational plan to ensure they function and grow long-term.
- The panel supports the intention of achieving BREEAM 'excellent'. However, it encourages the team to use opportunities to pursue the 'outstanding' level of certification.

Connectivity



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- The panel reiterates the need for a western cycle and pedestrian connection to the existing and proposed active travel network. It feels that there is a strong argument for a route along Dowding Way, subject to investigations into land ownership and the feasibility of delivery.
- The panel recommends that the applicant and the local authority have further discussions to define the new route's best location and process for delivery. It also suggests the applicant could contribute financially to the route along Dowding Way, beyond delivering the envisaged path via the existing housing estate.
- Regardless of its location, but especially if via the existing housing estate, the proposed route should be safe and secure, with proper lighting and signage. Its wayfinding and branding should be discussed with the local authority to ensure it is attractive and useful.
- The council should coordinate any later development plans and access points, particularly those to the east, and ensure a cohesive approach for the wider area.

Next steps

The panel supports the architecture and landscape design of the proposals and trusts that its comments on softening the M25 elevation, western cycle and pedestrian connections, and construction quality can be addressed in collaboration with the council.

