

# CROYDON PLACE REVIEW PANEL



PANEL REPORT

# CONFIDENTIAL

Scheme Address: 2-6 Sydenham Road, Croydon, CR0 9XE

## Project Description

The project is a 34 storey tower comprising 232 one bedroom and 64 two bedroom flats. There is associated ground floor amenity space, refuse and cycle stores, pedestrian and vehicular access. Within the site curtilage is the PD conversion of Canterbury House, an 11 storey building, which has been converted from office use to residential. Adjacent to the site is the approved but not yet built 68 storey tower at 1 Lansdowne Road.

## Place Review Date & time

Thursday 23rd November 2017, 10:15 – 12:15

## Review Location

BWH, Room 6.02, Fell Road, Croydon, CR0 1NX

## Attendees

### Applicant Team

Client / Developer: Unable to attend due to illness  
Planning Consultant: Ian Buzza – Savills  
Julian Carter – Savills  
Architects: Billie Lee – Horden Cherry Lee Architects

## Place Review Panel

### Chair

Angels Brady OBE (Brady Mallalieu Architects) Architect

### Panelists

Jo McCafferty (Levitt Bernstein) Architect  
Richard Lavington (Maccreeanor Lavington Architects) Architect

## Croydon Council

Pete Smith	Head of Development Management
Matt Duigan	Team Leader, Development Management
Michael Cassidy	Planning Officer, Development Management
Guy Rochez	Project Officer, Placemaking

## Conflicts of Interest

None declared, however, the following working relationship should be noted:

Maccreeanor Lavington work on projects where Savills is the planning consultant, but not with the individuals who are working on this project.

Levitt Bernstein are working on a project with Croftus Communication. Jo McCafferty is not involved in this project.

## Panel Response

This report provides a summary of the proposals presented for the site. The panel in discussion with the agent resolved that the forum provided by the Place Review was not to judge whether failure to meet space standards was acceptable on point of principle, but to carry out an interrogation as to whether the scheme could be considered exemplar, highlight any failings and indicate how it may be improved.

### Summary

The panel thanks the applicant's team for presenting the scheme.

Following the material presented, the panel does not support the scheme and does not consider it to have demonstrated exemplar design in any respect. The panel recognises the potential of the site to accommodate new development of some height, however there are a range of concerns about the quality of the submitted scheme on fundamental levels and in all aspects, from the scale of the amenity space through to the size of the dwellings, the public realm, microclimate, material palette and elevational treatment. All of these elements are considered to fall well below an exemplar quality. The panel makes the following recommendations:

- The panel refers the applicant to the earlier schemes that incorporated Canterbury House into the proposal and advises that a more comprehensive approach to the site should be taken. The current relationship with Canterbury House is unacceptable and unresolved.
- Angled windows applied to the façade of the existing Canterbury House would provide a better opportunity to resolve the overlooking issue than the screen (as submitted) if the current scheme is pursued further. The panel notes that this solution would need significant design development to be acceptable.
- The number of single aspect units needs to be reduced, especially those that are north facing and overlooking Canterbury House. The panel notes the quantum currently proposed is unacceptable and is exacerbated by the small size of the units and lack of sufficient good quality shared amenity spaces to compensate.
- Further interrogate the size of the units and explore all opportunities to increase these as the current sizes are below space standards. The design of the units themselves and the scheme as a whole fail to demonstrate exemplar qualities that could be considered to offset the failure to meet space standards.
- The layouts of the units need to show an understanding of specific domestic functions to demonstrate how falling below the spaces standards may be acceptable. Currently there is little demonstration that the design of the units has been carefully thought through. The panel advises that the living rooms should be more generous at the expense of the bedrooms and

that further work is required to devise space efficient design solutions to make the plan work harder to provide the living, cooking and eating spaces needed.

- An increased area of shared amenity space is required to offset the lack of private amenity space and sub-standard size of the units. The panel refers the applicants to European models of microflat developments that have significant shared amenity and that the architects should consider devoting every 5<sup>th</sup> floor to shared amenity spaces.
- Further work is needed to demonstrate the quality of the public realm and play spaces, and how the findings from the microclimate technical reports have been incorporated into the design to ensure the spaces are usable. The panel remains unconvinced about the quality of the public realm and play spaces, and the microclimate in these areas.
- The servicing and refuse strategy need further resolution to be effective, with more generous internal basement refuse storage, as well as more direct access between the internal basement refuse and the external grade stores. The current provision is considered inadequate and access routes between the service spaces are convoluted.

## **Layout of Units**

The panel questioned whether the layouts of the various unit types were well planned. It is unclear whether they are strictly compliant, but nonetheless their internal layout could clearly be improved and therefore could not be considered exemplary.

The living room and bedroom are currently the same width at 2.7m wide. A living room of only 2.7m wide is considered ungenerous and it is advised that more space should be given over to the living room, at the expense of the bedroom. This will require considered and innovate design resolution in terms of access in to the bedroom and around the bed. Similarly the panel notes that it has not been adequately demonstrated whether there is sufficient storage for residents within the units or elsewhere within the building and that storage for sundry items (suitcases etc.) needs to be well considered and demonstrated through greater design analysis by the applicant team. The panel remains unconvinced by the current storage provision for residents.

The panel notes that the proposed kitchen is cramped and it has not been demonstrated how this space would function to allow residents to prepare a meal. The panel also notes that the hob is less than 1.8m from the route of escape and would therefore fail to meet building regulations. The panel recommends that greater consideration be given to the spatial arrangement of the kitchen, including effective storage solutions, to allow smaller sized kitchens to function properly.

It is recommended that the applicant review similar microflat proposals and Pocket Living schemes, which have invested significantly in creating well-planned internal layouts to maximise available space in smaller sized units.

## Size of Units

The applicant presented the panel with a floor plan comparison of the submitted scheme against a space standard compliant scheme, demonstrating the growth of the footprint of the building. This comparison was not included in the Design & Access Statement. The panel notes that if providing space standard compliant units meant that fewer units would be provided on the site then the viability argument may have some validity, however the panel notes that the scheme as submitted has a higher percentage area of core than a scheme with a larger footprint - designed to accommodate space standard compliant units - would have. The panel notes that such an arrangement is inefficient in construction cost terms and therefore advises the client team to investigate a larger space compliant footprint.

The panel has concerns that there may be psychological and physiological impacts on the future residents of such small units. The panel questions what it would actually feel like to live in these units, particularly those that are north facing and with limited views over Canterbury House. The panel also notes that such small units present servicing issues with regards to ventilation and lack of natural light and that the applicant team failed to demonstrate clearly how these issues had been resolved. The panel advises that a better design response to these issues would be required for the scheme to be acceptable, and that the design currently fails to be exemplar in this respect.

The panel notes that the scheme proposes units that are smaller than other micro-flat developments within Croydon and across London. The panel recognises that similar sized units already existing in Permitted Development (PD) schemes but respond that most PD schemes are far from exemplar, are generally considered by Croydon Council and others to be poor quality and that their failure to meet space standards and deliver quality accommodation risks creating the 'slums of the future'. The panel highlights that PD developments should not be used as a barometer for design quality and that minimum space standards have been set based on extremely efficiently planned units after extensive consultation and research by a range of professionals. Given this, the panel has concerns that units fail to provide kitchens big enough - or sufficiently well designed - to cook a healthy meal in or living rooms to relax in. The panel notes the applicant team's argument that people will 'live in the city' and therefore eat out and find places elsewhere to socialise and spend time. The panel finds this argument flawed and a weak excuse for designing inadequately sized spaces, as the affordability of the units disappears if the saving on rent becomes consumed by the expense of needing to eat out and use facilities elsewhere. In addition, these designs rely on infrastructure existing elsewhere for them to work as living environments, which is neither resilient nor sustainable.

The panel remained firmly unconvinced about the size of the units being acceptable and note there was no demonstration of any mitigating factors within the proposal that could be considered to offset this failure. The panel advises that the sizes of the units needs to be revisited and that this may require the floor plates of the building to increase.

## **Access**

The panel notes the proposal to include adaptable units, however they consider this to be a token gesture within a PRS scheme as they are unlikely ever to be adapted. The panel advises a better approach would be to provide a number of units already adapted to cater directly to a market that exists.

## **Shared Amenity Space**

The panel notes that the communal spaces on the ground, first and roof level could accommodate somewhere between 10 – 20% of the residents, but that their generosity and positioning within the building is unconvincing. The panel advises the applicant team to consider how the manner in which people use shared amenity space is different to how private amenity space is used, and that this is crucial regardless of whether the overall areas provided are similar. The panel highlights concerns that the failure to provide well-designed and generous shared spaces (including the corridors to the lifts on the ground floor) risk cramped conditions contributing to potential mental health problems amongst the occupants. The panel refers the applicant to European models where developments containing small sized housing units are provided with extremely generous shared amenity spaces and that it would be advisable to introduce communal floors on every 5<sup>th</sup> floor. The panel notes there is potential to explore how the proposal, and in turn the shared amenity spaces, are devised to accommodate particular demographics. Providing smaller private accommodation balanced by generous shared spaces, including kitchen facilities, and other communal activities could form a strong rationale to the scheme in catering to a Silver Singles market for elderly people. The panel also notes that shared amenity / service spaces could provide more storage spaces, given the lack of storage space within the units themselves.

## **Floor Plate & Orientation**

The panel has considerable concerns with 6 out of 10 units on each floor being single aspect. Further to this a significant number of these units are north facings, with those on the first 10 floors being only 9m from the existing Canterbury House and having a view of the proposed screen 4.5m away. The panel deems this to be unacceptable and notes that it should have been possible to plan the building to avoid this. The panel advises that there should be only two units along the northern elevation so that each unit could reach a corner, thus avoiding the single-aspect north facing units, particularly at lower level facing onto Canterbury House.

## **Townscape**

The panel accepts the height in principle, given the location of the scheme within the tall building zone defined in the adopted OAPF. The panel notes there is relatively limited visual assessment to demonstrate that potential coalescence with 1 Lansdowne Road had been adequately dealt with. The panel notes that the residential units are set nearly 50m from the tower of 1 Lansdowne Road and that the other neighbouring buildings are all currently occupied by commercial uses and that as such overlooking is not an issue on the South, East and West Elevations.

## **Relationship to Canterbury House**

The panel has considerable concern that the relationship with Canterbury House is not acceptable and is far from exemplar. The panel notes the applicant's proposal to deal with the 9m distance between the proposed tower and the existing building with a screen, but that this is a poorly conceived device to resolve an issue that has emerged out of a lack of thought about the relationship between the two buildings during earlier design stages.

The panel raises concerns that there is insufficient detail provided to give confidence regarding how the proposed screening device would be fixed. The panel notes that this is a full planning application and as such there should be more detail provided on this matter given that it will have a significant impact on the experience of future occupants, microclimate and the appearance of the building. The panel highlights that the site suffers a strong east-west wind that would be exacerbated by the proposal and risks having significant impact on the stability of the screen and associated noise disturbance caused by the screen moving and wind moving through the structure. This would be disruptive to residents. The panel notes the lack of studies to demonstrate how this would be managed. The panel also notes issues of glare and bird strike as a result of the screen. Further to this, the panel has concerns regarding the impact on the future residents of the proposed tower and the existing residents of Canterbury House. The lack of light and outlook could have significant impact on the mental health of the residents. Given the nature of these impacts further detail and investigation should have been included in the application to demonstrate how these impacts would be resolved. The panel does not consider this to be an exemplar piece of design and does not recommend pursuing this solution.

The alternative approach of introducing angled windows to the existing Canterbury House is considered by the panel to be a better solution. However, the panel notes that this would still not be an exemplary design as it is a retrofitting move being pursued to resolve a design issue that has emerged out of poor planning of the site by the applicant team. Further to this, the panel has concerns about how the retrofitted windows would affect the daylight and sunlight provided to the habitable rooms in Canterbury House. This situation is exacerbated given that these rooms currently enjoy an unobstructed southern aspect. The panel notes that lighting studies would need to be provided for a



full judgment to be made on whether this proposal is acceptable and reinforce that everyone has a right to quality light. The panel advises that the angle of any such windows may be varied depending on position on the façade.

The panel remains unconvinced by the positioning of the tower, being on axis with Canterbury House. The exact positioning chosen is considered to have maximum impacts on the proposed and existing building in terms of microclimate, lighting and overlooking and had the building been moved off axis and further south in to the site, these impacts would have been reduced. The applicant was unable to provide the panel with technical design rationale with regards to these issues to explain the positioning of the building. The panel advises the applicant to pursue a comprehensive approach to the site, including the existing building of Canterbury House, incorporating this into the building form. The panel refers back to the earlier schemes where the proposed tower adjoined the existing building, noting that the current approach of bringing the tower to the ground on its own presented a range of overlooking and microclimate issues that haven't been resolved. Further to this, the panel recommends that a more comprehensive approach would investigate positioning a prominent exemplar tower directly onto Sydenham Road, in place of the existing Canterbury House.

### **Microclimate**

The panel has concerns that there is a lack of detail as to how the building responds to microclimate issues. They note that the architects failed to demonstrate how the orientation of the building, internal layout or elevational treatment, were responsive or dealt with sunlight, daylight, overshadowing or overheating issues in an appropriate manner. Similarly the panel remain unconvinced that the entrance canopy, proposed trees on site and trees on neighbouring sites would be sufficient to mitigate down draught. The panel advises the architects to take a more active engagement with the microclimate studies that have been completed and demonstrate a design response to them. Until this is pursued the scheme cannot be considered to have dealt with the microclimatic conditions in an exemplary manner.

### **Public Realm**

The panel does not consider the proposed public realm to be exemplary. The panel remain unconvinced that the visualisation of the play and entrance spaces would be achievable in the microclimate conditions. The play spaces are considered to be extremely important in light of the unit sizes and the likelihood that there would be families occupying some of the 2 bed units. The panel notes there is currently little detail behind the design development of the play spaces and their positioning, capacity, proposed use, age ranges of equipment, microclimate and general usability as a play space. Further material detail to the play spaces and the public realm as a whole is needed to demonstrate durability and convince the panel of how the building would meet the ground.

The panel also raises concerns over whether there is sufficient space around the building that prioritises pedestrians, given the vehicular loop and space given over to servicing. The panel recognised that it would be unreasonable for all sides of the site to become active but that the relationship between the bin and cycle stores and the public realm was poorly designed.

The panel notes that the current level of detail and consideration of these matters was unacceptable for a full planning application of this scale, particularly in terms of considering whether the scheme could be considered exemplar.

### **Service Spaces**

The panel's view on the provision of servicing spaces and associated strategies is that they are confused, limited and convoluted. Access to and from the service areas and bin stores in the basement is considered by the panel to be unnecessarily complicated, as is the relationship between the bins at grade and the refuse stores provided in the basement. The panel has concerns about sufficient lift capacity to accommodate bicycles moving from basement to grade during rush hour. The panel raised further concerns that if the units are unfurnished and have a turnover of occupants, there is need to accommodate a significant amount of furniture coming and going, and associated packaging. As such, an over-provision of service access and bin stores is encouraged.

The panel advises that a clearer strategy on these issues is needed and should have been resolved more thoughtfully in the scheme submitted.

### **Public Consultation**

The panel has concerns that the communications undertaken in advertising the public consultation may have been poor considering only three members of the public attended. The panel notes that the residents in Canterbury House may have been reluctant to object given the scheme is being brought forward by their landlord. The panel notes that these residents would need to be consulted if angled windows are retrofitted to Canterbury House.

## **Conclusion**

The panel thanks the applicant team for presenting the submitted scheme. The site presents the opportunity to take a comprehensive approach to a central piece of urban fabric, which has unfortunately been missed. The proposal not only presents an unresolved and difficult relationship with Canterbury House but is exacerbated further by a number of issues that demonstrate the scheme as a whole and the proposed units are not exemplar. Issues include: limited design consideration regarding the design, layout and functioning of the units; quantum of single-aspect units (particularly those that are north facing and in close proximity to Canterbury House); lack of resolution of the public realm and shared amenity space. As such the failure to meet space standards is not offset by exemplary design quality of the units themselves, and in addition is also not offset by other mitigating factors within the design of the overall scheme. The panel strongly advises revision of the scheme to incorporate the existing Canterbury House to take a more holistic approach to the site. This redesign should resolve to remove the problematic units through reconfiguration and provide a more considered approach to shared amenity, the public realm, servicing and microclimate.

The panel urges the Architects to question the brief given to them and to advise the client to ensure that the brief enables them to propose a scheme of exemplar quality, which it currently fails to do. The panel notes that whilst there were some good design moves, the scheme is fundamentally compromised by the brief and that this has been played out most notably in the relationship with Canterbury House. The panel remains unconvinced about the applicant's commitment to design quality. The existing PD conversion of Canterbury House undertaken by the same developer is of low quality and sets a poor precedent. The panel also notes that the architects were unable to respond effectively to questions on some key issues and that a far more considered approach is needed for a building of this scale and ambition.

The panel concludes that the scheme is not of the quality and standard that Croydon needs and expects and that such a scheme would set a dangerous precedent. The panel remains unconvinced about a significant number of aspects of the scheme as submitted and presented, and do not consider it to be exemplar design in any aspect. The panel notes that even with the proposed revisions (such as the angled windows), that unless the scheme is revised to take a more comprehensive approach to the site, it is unlikely to be able to be considered exemplary.

*Panel members are to provide independent, non-statutory and impartial place critique and design advice for development proposals; such advice (verbal or written) to be provided on the basis that Applicants are strongly advised by the Place Review Panel that the panel feedback is not actioned until officially fed back into the application process by Council officers and that any advice which is actioned before this is fed back into the application process will be done at the Applicant's own risk.*

