

1 DETAILS OF THE DEVELOPMENT

Ref: 18/01011/PRE
Location: Queen's Garden, Park Lane, Croydon, CR9 3JS
Ward: Fairfield
Description: Proposals for the layout and landscaping for Queen's Gardens (discharge of Condition 4 attached to permission 17/05158/CONR)
Applicant: Alex Hall, HUB
Agent: Kevin Watson, Gerald Eve
Case Officer: Diana Phiri-Witty

2 BACKGROUND

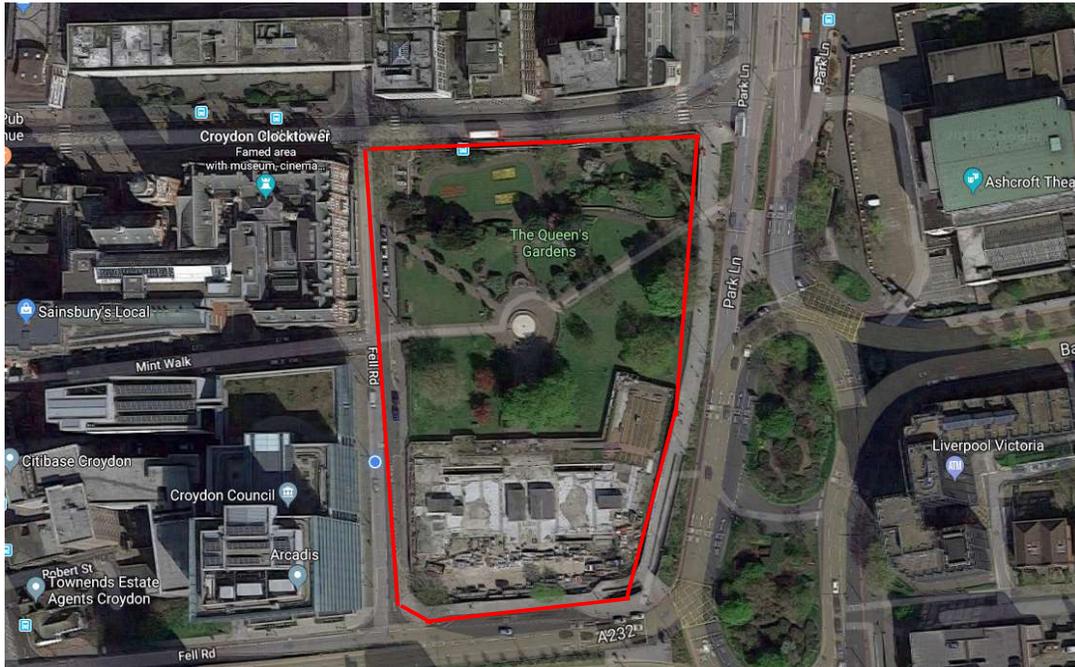
- 2.1 This proposed development is being presented by request of the Planning Committee. The re-landscaping of Queen's Garden is a condition for the wider Taberner House development which was granted permission in 2017 (LBC Ref 17/01046/FUL). A tree condition was later varied and the planning permission re-issued under LBC Ref 17/05158/CONR. At the time of the original determination, Members requested for the landscaping plan to come back to Planning Committee (at pre application stage) in order to further engage in how the spaces might come forward alongside the Taberner House redevelopment (focussing on the location and form of the various spaces comprising the re-modelled Queens Gardens - including areas of play).
- 2.2 The development does not constitute an application and any comments made upon it are provisional and subject to full consideration of any subsequent application. It is important to note the future submission will be for a discharge of condition, which does not require formal notification in the same way as an application for planning permission.
- 2.3 Condition 5 requires details of the café in the gardens to be submitted; this is being designed in conjunction with a remodelled Queens Gardens but is not for consideration.
- 2.4 It should be noted that this report represents a snapshot in time, with negotiations and dialogue on-going. The plans and information provided to date are indicative only and as such the depth of analysis provided corresponds with the scope of information made available to Council officers. Other issues may arise as more detail is provided and the depth of analysis expanded upon.

3 LOCATION DETAILS AND THE PROPOSAL

Site and Surroundings

- 3.1 Queen's Garden is located on the western side of Park Lane and is bound by Katharine Street to the north, Fell Road to the west and the Croydon Flyover to the south. The former Taberner House was substantially demolished some time ago, with the site now fully hoarded and with only the baseplate and basement remaining. Works are underway on site pursuant to the planning permission granted last year.

- 3.2 The surrounding area is mixed, and predominated by civic functions. Bernard Weatherill House is situated to the west, whilst the Grade II Listed Town Hall is to the north-west. Segas House to the north (a currently vacant former office/showroom building) and the Friends Meeting House to the southern side of the Flyover (a place of worship) are also Grade II Listed Buildings. Fairfield Halls (a cultural venue currently undergoing refurbishment) lies to the east and is locally listed. The Central Croydon Conservation Area includes the sunken part of the Gardens which extends to the west of the site.



- 3.3 Queen's Gardens is a civic amenity space which is predominantly laid to lawn with several established trees and a historic sunken garden area to the north. The Gardens are designated as Local Open Land. The site is also within an Archaeological Priority Zone and an Area of High Density. The northern part of the Gardens is also a Locally Listed Historic Park and Garden. The character of the sunken gardens is reflected by the change in levels, the rockery and the layout of pathways which officers consider to be an important constituent of its heritage significance.

- 3.4 Part of the Gardens were established in the 1890's as part of the Town Hall Gardens and were created by a late-Victorian Borough Engineer. The Gardens were renamed 'The Queen's Gardens' following their extension and formally re-opening by Queen Elizabeth II on 21 June 1983. The lower (sunken) level of the Queen's Gardens retain their Victorian design.

Relevant Background

- 3.5 The proposals for Queen's Gardens should be designed to cater for the large number of current and future users and activities that will need to be accommodated in the space. One of the key requirements at the time the substantive planning permission was the need for play space to serve the development, with the added benefit of being fully accessible for members of the public.

- 3.6 The scheme has developed proactively and collaboratively through a series of pre-application meetings including formal engagement with the Council's Place Review Panel (PRP). Given the significance and value of the space, the applicant has also undertaken extensive public consultation which treated users of this space as 'co-designers'.
- 3.7 As part of the planning permission, a set of design codes for the Gardens were agreed - to guide the further development of the remodelled Gardens (design, landscaping, routes, character and appearance and heritage references).
- 3.8 It is important to note the planning permission consented the footprint of the café and the location of the stairs; finer details of these aspects are controlled by condition, not the subject of this presentation.
- 3.9 Furthermore, the principle of integrating public play facilities into Queen's Gardens is in line with Mid-Croydon Masterplan.
- 3.10 The developer of the Taberner House site is obligated to implement the remodelling of Queens Garden. Following the completion of the works, the Gardens will be handed back to the Council – which will then be responsible to maintain the space. The Council has prepared a brief for the Gardens – which the applicant is interpreting and seeking to deliver in parallel whilst respecting its community consultation processes. The Council's brief was produced and issued collaboration with Parks, Heritage, Contracts, Asset Management and Streets tTams in order to achieve a scheme which the Council will be able to service, manage and maintain.

Relevant planning history

- 3.11 The following planning decisions are relevant to the proposal:

14/00196/P: Demolition of existing building; erection of 5 buildings ranging from 6 to 32 storeys comprising 420 residential units and 2 retail units; provision of landscaping (new and re-landscaping of Queens Gardens), servicing and new access. The application proposed 15% affordable housing. *Approved, but not implemented.*

16/03857/PRE: Pre-application engagement - the residential led redevelopment of the site. The emerging scheme was considered by Planning Committee on 20 October 2016, at which point it proposed 503 residential flats within four buildings of 34, 21, 13 and 17 storeys. 14 basement disabled user car parking spaces were proposed, and 30% of units were proposed to be affordable.

The matters relating to Queens Garden that were raised by Members at the Committee were:

- Use of gardens for events
- The café space was supported
- Community garden and play space well received
- Retention of as many trees as possible
- Relationship working well with regards to heritage assets
- Community engagement was welcomed

17/01046/FUL: Erection of four buildings ranging in height from 13 to 35 storeys comprising 514 residential units (use class C3), flexible A1/A2/A3/A4/B1/D1 space at

ground floor level of the buildings, new basement areas (including demolition of parts of existing basement), landscaping (including re-landscaping of Queens Gardens), new pavilion café in Queens Gardens (use class A3), access, servicing and associated works. *Permission Granted 18/08/2017*

17/05158/CONR: Variation of condition 6 ((tree protection) to allow for the removal of 2 trees (T10 and T11)) of planning permission 17/01046/FUL (redevelopment of the site of the former Taberner House to provide 514 residential units in 4 buildings, including commercial space at ground floor level). *106A - Permission Granted with legal agreement 26.01.2018 and this scheme is now being implemented with works well underway*

Proposal

- 3.12 The proposed scheme would involve re-landscaping of the Queen's Gardens to include the provision of new east-west route, play space, café and steps down from Katharine Street to the north- western corner of the Gardens.



- 3.13 The location of the play-space (dotted in pink above) is considered further below.

4 DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

- 4.1 The overarching narrative for the space is based on an integration of the Gardens whilst reflecting its historic significance. The multi-level character of the Gardens

would largely be retained, whilst incorporating play-space and an accessible route for all across to the café at the lower (sunken) level.

- 4.2 The subway to the north-east of the site is proposed to be closed off; consequently, the resulting space would need to be carefully designed as the north eastern section of the Gardens would become relatively enclosed with limited footfall. Emerging design interventions would need to allow for a quiet enclosed space for respite that is also safe, visible and well-lit at night.
- 4.3 Space that could be used for events and performances has been incorporated into the design as a flexible space which could also be used for park activities and play when not required for events.
- 4.4 The number of park benches has been retained, although the proposed benches would be placed across the site allowing for more opportunities for sitting. Some of the seating has been placed in areas from which specific views around the gardens can be seen.

Place Review Panel (PRP)

- 4.5 The scheme was presented to the PRP on the 21st June 2018. In summary the following observations were made:
 - There is an important balance to be struck between contemporary design and sensitivity towards the significant heritage of the site.
 - The Panel supports the ambition to provide such diverse purpose for the site; however the site is limited in size to fully cater for all desired functions, e.g. significant public play space, a café, events venue and historic park etc.
 - The Panel encourages the inclusion of play designed for all ages.
 - The variation and successful delivery of uses for the site need to be carefully considered, including maintenance issues.
 - From a heritage perspective there is a significant story with The Queen's Gardens that should be told through the designs and enhancements. Surviving elements of the train line followed by the Victorian sunken garden all form part of the site's narrative. The Panel considered that selective retention of the key elements of the site's history can be incorporated into a sensitive re-design to form a successful space for modern use. The success of the scheme will be in the detail and The Panel note that this has not yet been developed.
 - The Panel requested that something more interesting could be done with the south facing wall regarding planting and landscaping, to also tie into the story of the site.

Playspace

- 4.6 The sunken garden would be integrated with the central area through the provision of a café and play space to the western corner (making use of the natural enclosure of the retaining walls, the link with the café space and the natural play opportunities of the level changes). The emerging proposal:
 - Separates the play-space into two areas with one space located in the sunken gardens by the café and the other a level up to the south of the site. Whilst this is considered to cause some harm to the character of the sunken garden, the approach is supported in view of its close association with the café space. Separation of the play space across two levels provides an opportunity to

incorporate different levels into the play design, allowing for more incidental play uses. It also means the bulk of the play is not isolated to the sunken garden area which frees it up for more flexible uses and landscaping opportunities that could re-interpret the historic character of the gardens. Officers continue to work with the applicant to work up further details around how incidental play is incorporated into the spaces and how the form and function of the play areas might suitably interpret the heritage associations.

- The LBC brief and comments from early community engagement has focused on natural play/bespoke play elements with sculptural qualities, which is supported. How this will be incorporated has been shown indicatively through the use of precedent photos. However, officers have yet to be fully satisfied that the play areas have fully embraced this approach. Officers would prefer to see to see more be-spoke abstract or natural play objects to more closely reflect the precedents discussed.
- The LBC brief and the PRP also emphasised the idea of incorporating heritage features as part of the play-spaces (bearing in mind that the sunken garden operated as a railway terminus during the 19th Century. Officers feel more could be referenced as part of the emerging designs, potentially referencing railway related themes. Officers therefore see opportunities for the scheme to further reference railway heritage and part of the play-spaces associated landscaping.

Materials

- 4.7 The materials proposed for hard landscaping that were presented to officers have been selected from a palette that has been utilised in the immediate area - surrounding the gardens. Whilst the approach is broadly supported, officers believe that the palette could be simplified – thereby reducing the number of material changes on site whilst seeking to deliver greater consistency.
- 4.8 The default position is for footways on either side of any given street to match and with the footway on the western side of Fell Road being in Yorkstone, officers believe the eastern side should utilise a similar material.

Planting

- 4.10 During community engagement workshops three planting options were shown to the residents; the preferred option was for a 'native woodland' concept. Whilst this is somewhat at odds with the heritage character of the site, specifically the character of the Victorian sunken garden, further work was undertaken alongside the Councils Contracts team to ensure an acceptable appearance at all times of year and to ensure ease of maintenance. The current planting strategy presented has an overarching theme with different character areas to reflect the differences across the site (differing planting in play-spaces -paces, the sunken garden and across the rest of the site). This approach is generally welcomed.

Heritage Assets

- 4.11 Key aspects of the existing layout of the gardens have been retained; specifically the retaining wall along Katharine Street, the different levels and the 'figure of eight' path configuration in the sunken garden. The applicant has worked hard to accommodate

these requirements – which is to be welcomed. This has been achieved despite changes to the levels of some of these paths.

- 4.12 As raised above, officers feel that greater emphasis should be given to the railway and Victorian history of the site itself within the integrated interpretation. Whilst it is recognised that the community discussed crocus as a historic association and concept (which might well be able to be integrated into a piece of the play equipment) officers feel that this particular site has closer associations with the railway and later a Victorian sunken garden. Some form of interpretation board might well be a worthwhile addition to the space - maybe situated above the café space at the top of the steps down into the sunken garden
- 4.13 There is an opportunity to use the retaining brick wall as a means to highlight the heritage of the site. Some options could be:
- Vertical planting on parts of the wall
 - Brick relief with a train/railway theme

Memorials

- 4.14 There are a number of memorial plaques on benches across the existing gardens. The aim is to re-purpose these and locate them in the new site. The emerging proposal suggests relocating the plaques to the retaining wall of the sunken gardens. Whilst the location of the plaques could be acceptable, this is on the basis that more consideration is given to what could be achieved to activate the rest of the wall. Currently the plaques on their own with the scale of the wall appear insignificant. The design team has proposed to incorporate planting onto the wall as a means of activating it.

Queens Garden East

- 4.16 The plans for the subway, situated towards the north-eastern corner of Queens Garden (as of 28 June 2018) is for it to be closed off. The narrow steps that serve the Gardens in this location would be retained which would be acceptable bearing in mind that there are very limited options to influence changes in this area.
- 4.17 Whilst the access to the subway will be closed to the public, access may be required for the storage of equipment for maintaining the site. Current maintenance of the site requires street cleansing barrows and 4 x electric vacuums which are required to be accessed daily. The storage of equipment in this location would have the benefit of freeing up the café space which is currently the proposed location for storage of maintenance equipment.
- 4.18 As this part of the site will be enclosed, work needs to be undertaken to reduce the risks of anti-social behaviour within this particular area of the Gardens. A lighting scheme to address the feel of the space at night and a planting strategy would need to be properly considered.

5 SPECIFIC FEEDBACK REQUESTED

- 5.1 In view of the above, it is suggested that Members focus on the following issues.
- How the scheme addresses the changes in levels – whilst delivering step free access into the sunken garden.

- Location of the play-space
- The design of the play-space/play equipment and the extent to which it adequately reflects historic associations
- The proposed materials palette
- The landscaping and planting proposals
- Interpretation of the heritage generally
- Degree of activation of the retaining wall of the sunken gardens