

MOUNT PLEASANT FORUM

Notes of the meeting held on Wednesday 10th July 2013 in the Margery Street Estate Community Room

Present: Attendance List Attached at the end of the report.

Introduction: **Edward Denison** chaired the meeting and started by introducing the Mount Pleasant Forum (MPF) and its role as an enabling group to facilitate communication and information sharing among local residents and businesses and the landowners, developers, and Camden and Islington Council planning officers. Membership of the MPF was open to anyone interested in the Mount Pleasant development. The purpose of the meeting was to give MPF members a final opportunity to discuss their reaction to (and preliminary assessment of) the Royal Mail's recent planning application before submitting private or group responses to Council planners.

Calthorpe Street Residents' Association

Judy Dainton started by explaining the work the Calthorpe Street Residents' Association have done to distil their objections to the proposal and disseminate these objections among their community, and to raise awareness and generate discussion. These objections had been compiled in a document titled '*AMENDED planning letter re HCG Area Action Meeting May 21st.docx*'. It was agreed this would be circulated to the group for their reference after the meeting (this was done on Thursday 11 July). Judy also raised the question of appealing to the Councils for an extension to the time the community has to review the application, which received almost unanimous agreement.

Prominence of TRA comments in Final Report to Council

Graeme Weston notified the group that he had been advised by a former planning officer of a separate section in the final report presented to Councillors for comments submitted by formal residents groups. He urged all residents groups therefore to submit comments and objections not only as individuals, but also collectively so that these objections will feature prominently in this separate section of the final report.

Importance of realistic objectives and Section 106

David Lonsdale reminded members to clarify and reference their opposition in relation to the stated guidelines (especially the *SPD*). He also suggested members should focus on the aspects of the application that we *can* change rather than being too idealistic or unrealistic. One example he cited was the use of Section 106 funding, suggestions for which, Matt Harmer (Indigo) later said could be sent to him and he would forward suggestions to Royal mail or, alternatively, they could be sent to the Council Planners:

Sarah Ricketts (Islington - Sarah.Ricketts@islington.gov.uk)

Richard McEllistrum (Camden - Richard.McEllistrum@camden.gov.uk)

Judy Dainton countered David's position by proposing that we should ask for absolutely everything on the basis that the final outcome will be a compromise anyway.

Community participation and awareness

Darian Mitchell, in reference to the final planning application, claimed that certain features had been amended since the previous exhibition, including heights of buildings. This sparked debate and it was agreed that where heights had indeed been reduced in some areas, they had also been increased in others.

Mike Franks announced that he had submitted a list of questions to the Council Planners and the responses had been inadequate. In response, **Judy Dainton**, announced that she had submitted a letter to Camden's Councillors, which had been adequately acknowledged and had gained their support. In response, **Mike Franks** expressed concern at the short period of time the community has to assess the

enormous quantity of information. In an attempt to assist the community he suggested a small public exhibition of material from the planning application be made available on boards in local libraries, asking whether the Royal Mail can pay for this? **Matt Harmer** suggested they could if it was only a matter of publishing a selection of the documentation, as a bespoke exhibition would be impossible given the time available. This request will be followed up.

Development scenarios

Mike Franks also highlighted the problematic scenario of there being no assigned developer and the potential for the land to be parcelled up for development in separate lots. **Judy Dainton** suggested the land was owned by the Post Office and not Royal Mail. While this was not confirmed, **Matt Harmer** did clarify that ownership and planning were separate issues. **David Lonsdale** stated that once planning permission had been granted the land could not then be parcelled up. **Matt Harmer** agreed.

A view from Farringdon Road

Oliver Bennett stated his objections, which included the failure to reduce building heights along Farringdon Road; the increase in pollution and noise; the question of the building process and timetable; Section 106 and the use of the funds on site; and asked why Mount Pleasant Sorting Office had been refurbished on its north elevation and a new structure recently built on Farringdon Road when this was going to be superseded by the forthcoming development.

Noise, pollution and Royal Mail's accountability in the long term

Christina Lorima expressed concern that noise, pollution and vibration were issues that had been inadequately addressed in the planning application. A suggestion was made that Royal Mail be made to convert their fleet (which are estimated to be conducting 3,000 movements a day from the site) of delivery vans to hybrid or electric vehicles. **Christina** pointed to the fatuous attempt to address Noise and Pollution from page 14 onwards in the *Non-Technical Summary*. **Matt Harmer's** response was to suggest members to go to the technical documentation and dispute the findings/statements with the Council planners. **Oliver Bennett** reiterated the need for complaints to be focused and referenced, citing the example in the SPD Section 4.2.13 which states that 'Building heights will be assessed against a range of design issues, including: Not creating a detrimental impact on views...'

Referencing objections

Oliver Bennett also suggested members analyse *The London Plan* (www.london.gov.uk/thelondonplan) and look for inconsistencies with the planning application. Other policy documents and guidelines worth referencing include:

- The Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)
- National Planning Policy Framework
- Islington's Development Management Policies booklet
- Camden's Local Development Framework

Unintelligibility of planning documents

Frances Thornton drew attention to the verbose language used in the *Non-Technical Summary*, citing Section 2 (EIA Methodology) and its unintelligible vocabulary and methodology – the baseline conditions being indefinable because of ongoing works on site.

Darian Mitchell raised the issue of buildings heights and the convoluted and unintelligible language used by the authors of the *Justification for Tall Buildings* document.

Development timetable

David Lonsdale suggested that if permission is granted the building process should be expedited to avoid unnecessarily long periods of inconvenience for the local community.

Mount Pleasant as part of a bigger picture of asset management

Sally Galletti suggested Mount Pleasant was related to Royal Mail's other sites currently being proposed for sale or redevelopment, notably Rathbone Place and Nine Elms.

Sonny Tan asked about the expiry date for planning applications. **Graeme Weston** confirmed it was 3 years.

Mount Pleasant as part of a bigger picture locally

Mark and Rachel from the Wren Street Creative Hub explained the scenario facing 24 businesses and purported 250 workers on the site owned by Camden Council who plan to redevelop the land for a Secondary School and/or housing. Mark claimed there was a significant need for artisan space in the area, with 24% of B1 spaces in Camden being lost in recent years. **Mike Franks** highlighted how B1 allows studio office space, the result being that 'makers' were being neglected at the expense of 'designers'. Employment and appropriate workspaces are highlighted in the SPD (sections 3.4.3 (p19) and section 4.2.4 (p21) and Appendix A1.1.5) and the Councils and Royal Mail should be made to honour this commitment, especially in the light of the Wren Street site being redeveloped.

Sally Galletti suggested that the sale of the Wren Street site linked it unavoidably with the Mount Pleasant development and that both developments should be seen holistically rather than as independent neighbouring sites. **Christina Lorima** raised the point that Royal Mail and the Council officials never responded to her comments and questions. The only person to engage in any form of discussion was Councillor Julian Fulbrook who had previously proposed the idea of swapping the Wren Street site with equivalent size and value of land on Mount Pleasant so that the school could be built on a more appropriate site and Wren Street could be developed for housing. It was confirmed that this suggestion was also made in the previous MPF meeting (14 January 2013) and is recorded in the Minutes. It was suggested that this proposal's potential to create a win-win scenario ought to demand its consideration at the necessarily high levels of Royal Mail and Camden Council.

Community Frustration at previous comments and suggestions being ignored

Christina Lorima criticised the Royal Mail's attempts to engage the public and emphasised how comments to previous exhibitions had been ignored. Despite overwhelming opposition to various aspects of the proposal, little has changed since the first exhibition. **Mike Franks** reiterated how absurd it was that the local community was being asked to respond to an extremely complex project and myriad detail, and the need for conditions to be attached to the proposal (e.g. safeguarding artisan space and the Royal Mail's use of zero-emissions delivery vehicles) and the need for an extension to the timetable for responses.

Rona Tunnadine called for a greater degree of militancy in the campaign against the proposal and those paid to support it. **Matt Harmer** responded by explaining his role at Indigo.

The Terry Farrell Master Plan

Oliver Bennett suggested we revisit the original plan for the site by Terry Farrell which appears to have been comprehensively amended. The original Plan features in the SPD.

Failures in the process of community consultation

Christina Lorima and **Rona Tunnadine** highlighted the inconsistent consultation and that many residents in her neighbourhood had never received letters about the project or the planning application and were interested in but largely unaware of the proposal. **Christina** claimed the consultation had been appalling and inadequate. **Rona** suggested that the poor advertising and lack of consultation was semi-illegal. **Miles Hansard** concurred that he too had had no response to his comments.

Judy Dainton reiterated the need for an extension to the consultation process. **Matt Harmer** concurred.

A view from Laystall Court

Graeme Weston summarised three key points:

- Consultation has not been adequately addressed;
- the swapping of social housing among developer's portfolio must not be allowed to happen on this site;
- and the over-riding deficiency of the master plan with the central 'open space' being a street to nowhere, suggesting that a diagonal non-vehicular route from the northeast to the southwest corners would have produced a more logical and efficient layout.

Flawed SPD

Mike Franks argued that the SPD was far too architecturally deterministic – i.e. it had created the architecture in the planning application rather than providing the guidelines for something truly innovative. He claimed the SPD is essentially a diagram of the scheme we have ended up with.

Conclusion

It was agreed that although the MPF was not established as a representative body there was sufficient consensus among its members to justify a pro-forma letter being drafted with a series of bullet-points highlighting the common objections that the MPF will submit to the Councils on behalf of its members.

Graeme Weston raised the question about the official recognition of the MPF and its legitimacy in carrying out this task. **Matt Harmer** confirmed this was unquestionable since the MPF has held formal meetings that Council officials and Royal Mail representatives have attended.

It was agreed that there would be three tiers of comments and objections to Council:

- 1) MPF
- 2) Local resident groups and/or businesses organisations
- 3) Private individuals

The MPF would keep members updated on the content of their pro-forma letter, while representatives or local groups would organise their own pro-forma letters and raise awareness in their localities to encourage other residents to **submit their comments to the Councils by late-July and no later than the end of August.**

Attendance List:

(Apologies for any mistakes and omissions – please notify me if you wish to be added to an updated list)

Edward Denison – Margery Street resident and MPF
Mike Franks – architect and MPF
Matt Harmer – Indigo
Daniel Francis – Indigo
Oliver Bennett – Farringdon Rd
David Lonsdale – Farringdon Rd
Sophie Scott – Granville Sq
Graeme Weston – Laystall Ct and MPF
Margaret Busgith – Lloyd Baker St
Darian Mitchell – Lloyd Baker St, Amwell Society and MPF
Judy Dainton – Calthorpe St
Sonny Tan – Granville Sq
Sally Galletti – Calthorpe St
Susan Hoskins – Wilmington Sq
Rashid Hussain – Wilmington Sq
Miles Hansard – Farringdon Rd
Matthew Scott – Farringdon Rd
Christina Lorima – Calthorpe St
Frances Thornton – Calthorpe St
Rona Tunnadine – Calthorpe St
Gloria Mendoza – Laystall Ct
Andrea Whittaker – Wilmington Sq
Mark ? – Wren Street Creative Hub
Rachel Lancaster – Wren Street Creative Hub