

Mount Pleasant opponents bag award for rival scheme

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Community group lands engagement award for low rise alternative on Farringdon site

Residents opposed to controversial plans to redevelop the Royal Mail's Mount Pleasant sorting office site in north London have won a community engagement award for their work on a rival scheme.

The INTBAU World Congress Excellence Award recognises the work of the Mount Pleasant Association and charity Create Streets in galvanising public interest in the potential for the community to shape an alternative scheme for the 3.5 ha site.

Campaigners were unsuccessful in challenging Royal Mail's controversial plans for the site, which have been drawn up by AHMM, Allies & Morrison, Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios and Wilkinson Eyre.

Permission for the 700-home scheme, delivered in blocks of up to 15 storeys, was granted by former London mayor Boris Johnson back in October 2014, despite the opposition of local planning authorities Camden and Islington councils.

But the residents and lobby group Create Streets persevered with their own proposals, inspired by classical architect Francis Terry, which aim to offer more homes in blocks of up to eight storeys delivered via the Community Right to Build process.

A planning application for the first tranche of the community-led development was lodged with Camden council, which has jurisdiction over a portion of the Mount Pleasant site, earlier this year.

Edward Denison, who teaches at the Bartlett School of Architecture and is a member of the Mount Pleasant Association, said the community engagement award from INTBAU was a crucial recognition of locals' determination to come up with something better than the offer from the Royal Mail team.

"Rather than complain about it, they have spent four years developing an alternative proposal that offers what they want, and [what] this city needs: more homes, more affordable housing, more public space, and better planned streets," he said.



Sketch of Francis Terry's vision for part of the Mount Pleasant redevelopment

Create Streets director Nicholas Boys Smith, who is also a member of the government's Estates Regeneration Panel chaired by Lord Heseltine, said the award was a vindication of the team's hard work - helped with funding from the Greater London Authority.

"Supported by us and a great range of professional firms they have come up with a scheme which is higher density, higher value, more beautiful and more clearly a real part of London," he added.

The association and Create Streets have long argued that Royal Mail never intended to build out the scheme it won permission for but merely sought approval as a valuation tool for the part of its site earmarked for development.

Boys Smith said he expected Royal Mail to bring Mount Pleasant to market "in the next year" and added that the community team wanted to be in a position to bid for it.

"We are busy working hard to work up the rest of the scheme in more detail and to be in a position to attempt to purchase the site," he said.

The team's initial application for the site involves 150 homes, half of which would be designated as "affordable". The Mount Pleasant plans approved in principle by Johnson contain just 24% affordable housing.

In addition to Terry, the Mount Pleasant Association team includes landscape design from Alexandra Steed Urban and transport and urban design by Urban Engineering Studio.

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