



Old Kent Road Community Review Panel

Report of Review Meeting: Folgate Estates (Phase 1)

Monday 13 December 2021

Via Zoom

Group

Gurmeet Sian (chair)

Tyreece Asamoah

Lucy Atkinson

Hugh Balfour

Shelene Byer

Hazel Flynn

Aaron Mo

Saidat Oketunde

Peter Warren

Attendees

Tim Cutts	London Borough of Southwark
Ben Gisborne	London Borough of Southwark
Cat Janman	London Borough of Southwark
Peter Spendiff	London Borough of Southwark
Colin Wilson	London Borough of Southwark
Lucy Earle	International Institute for Environment and Development
Tom Bolton	Frame Projects
Abigail Joseph	Frame Projects

Apologies / copied to

James Glancy	Old Kent Road Community Review Panel
Victoria Oluwables	Old Kent Road Community Review Panel
Madison Westwood	Old Kent Road Community Review Panel

Confidentiality

As a public organisation the London Borough of Southwark is subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOI), and in the case of an FOI request may be obliged to release project information submitted for review.

Declaration of interest

Office Sian, a practice owned by Gurmeet Sian, Chair of the Old Kent Road Community Development Panel, is part of a development team employed by Southwark Council on a site within the Old Kent Road Opportunity Area, at the Ledbury Estate. Gurmeet works alongside the practice leading the team, Karakusevic Carson Architects, not directly for Southwark and does not take part in any design review of schemes on the Ledbury Estate or adjoining sites.

1. Site address

Folgate Estates (Phase 1), 729-733 Old Kent Road, London SE15 1JS

2. Presenting team

Juliet Aston	MICA Architects
Stuart Cade	MICA Architects
Serena Cardozo	MICA Architects

3. Planning authority's briefing

Nos. 729-733 Old Kent Road is a Victorian warehouse building facing the Old Kent Road. These frontage buildings on the Folgate Estates site have been largely vacant for a decade or more. To help address this, the council has recently been awarded funding through the government's Future High Streets Fund to bring the buildings back into use. The buildings will be refurbished for commercial use, likely to be a new community café (ground floor) with workspace. The upper floors will be used for training or educational purposes.

The masterplan for the Folgate Estate site and surrounding ownerships envisages that, at the rear, the frontage buildings will open onto a working yard area. Buildings around the yard would consist of light industrial and commercial use from the ground floor upwards. The council will be developing a planning application for a scheme at the rear as a second phase, comprising commercial space and residential flats, in due course. The council is required to spend the Future High Streets funding by March 2024 which is the timeframe for completing the project.

Southwark officers asked for the panel's views, in particular, on the proposed hospitality training uses; on how community use could be further incorporated into the scheme; on the strategy to re-use building materials; on plans to extend the buildings and on servicing and access.

4. Community Review Panel's views

Summary

The panel appreciates the opportunity to review the scheme at an early stage and supports the restoration of the historic buildings at No. 729-733 Old Kent Road, but makes comments related to architectural approach and proposed uses. It expresses some concern about the potential impact of a tower block on the site as part of the Folgate Estates (Phase 2) proposals, and asks for continuing work to ensure the two phases work together. Comments on the proposed architecture include conflicting views on whether the new gables are appropriate, and the suggestion that the ground floor frontage is too dominant relation to the proportions of the building above. The panel encourages the design team to reflect the detailing of the Victorian building at ground floor level and to consider how the new building at No. 729 can reflect the proportions of adjoining buildings. The panel supports the provision of training facilities on the site, as long as they meet a demonstrable local need. An accessible, flexible community space would offer significant local benefit. The panel raises some concern that the site is not suited to café use as it lacks footfall, and that the pedestrian environment is too hostile to encourage people to linger. It suggests work is needed to improve the public realm around the site, and to improve pedestrian connections across Old Kent Road. The prominence of the site as a node between neighbourhoods should be reflected in the design. A greater level of local consultation is encouraged, including discussions with local residents and businesses, and with the Livesey Exchange which may be able to assist with training provision. These comments are expanded below.

Masterplan

- The panel expresses some concern the Folgate Estate (Phase 2) development proposed a very different building form to the Victorian buildings being restored in Phase 1. It is important that Southwark officers have a clear view of how the two elements will relate to one another and unity be created between the two phases. It is also important that a Phase 2 tower does not obscure views from Phase 1.

Architecture

- The panel is pleased to see a thorough analysis of the site's history used to inform the proposals. It supports the retention and restoration of the buildings at 729-733 Old Kent Road, which is considers valuable local heritage assets, and their conversion for new uses.
- Panel members provide mixed views on the proposed architectural treatment. Some express feel the gable design is out of keeping with the Victorian building, and that the shop front is too large and dominant in relation to the floors above. Others like the combination of modern design with older fabric, and feel it is keeping with the character of the wider area. Some also support the use of neon signage to provide a dramatic contrast

- The panel suggests the ground floor façade designs should reflect the detailing in the Victorian brick and stonework in the upper storeys of Nos. 731-33. It is keen to see more detailed façade designs, when the proposals reach this stage of development.
- The panel also asks whether No. 729 can be rebuilt in a way that reflects the architecture of the original building, with for example the same window sizes and continuity of brickwork, to be more reflective of the adjoining building.
- The panel points out that the site is on an important nexus between routes connecting to Bermondsey and Walworth, and that this location could be reflected in the name or the design of the building. People could be drawn to the space if they are aware how close it is to other neighbourhoods.

Uses

- The panel supports the proposed community uses for the upper floors, and is pleased to see investment in local training facilities. However, they emphasise the importance of ensuring that catering industry training will be meeting a clearly identified local need, and will not overlap with training that may already be available in the area.
- The panel is concerned that ground floor conditions may not be suited to the proposed café or restaurant use. The pavement on this side of Old Kent Road is narrow, and footfall is limited. The junction with Asylum Road is busy, and does not provide a relaxing location to sit outside. It is important that the viability of a hospitality business on the site is assessed before a decision is made on the best ground floor use.
- The panel also notes the need for new uses to be viable regardless of the Bakerloo Line extension, which is unlikely to be delivered in the foreseeable future and cannot be guaranteed to provide extra footfall.
- The panel feels it would be beneficial to make connections between catering training and commercial facilities, so that the uses within the building relate to and support one another.
- It also feels that a community space that can be accessed without the need to make a purchase is important for the area. There is a lack of community spaces available nearby at a low cost or free. A flexible space that could provide spaces for uses such as exercise classes or showing films would help to fulfil a local need.
- The panel is pleased to see that plans include full fit out, to help ensure commercial spaces come into use, but emphasises the need to include facilities such as a three phase power supply and a connection, heating, and extraction and ecology units, which are expensive but essential for hospitality businesses.

- The adjoining Phase 2 development will include a mechanics yard and a barber's shop. The panel is keen that the businesses, which provide important local services are relocated in the vicinity and are not driven out.

Public realm

- The panel suggests that if this stretch of road is to become more pleasant, measures to calm traffic and improve the pedestrian environment, for example painted crossings, will be needed. If a better connection could be made across the street with the Victorian buildings opposite, it would help to give the area more of a focus on pedestrians, rather than vehicles and stronger sense of place that would help to make a café a more viable option.

Community involvement

- The panel suggest that wider community consultation is needed to ensure local residents groups with an interest in the site are involved. Groups such as the Vital OKR small business coalition should be given the chance to provide input, and are likely to have good ideas and advice to offer.
- The panel also emphasises the importance of providing activities and facilities for young people in the area, and is keen to ensure the building makes a contribution to improving youth provision.
- The panel also suggests that the Livesey Exchange project run by PemPeople should be engaged with the project. They may be able to help provide uses that would be suitable for the site. The founder of PemPeople, Nicholas Okwulu is an expert on training in the area would be a good contact to discuss options.

Next steps

The Community Review Panel is available, if required, to provide further advice once designs have developed to the next stage.