



**Old Kent Road Community Review Panel**

**Report of Community Review: Devonshire Place**

Monday 20 March 2023  
231 Old Kent Road, London SE1 5LU

**Group**

Gurmeet Sian (chair)  
Hugh Balfour  
Julia Feeney  
Hazel Flynn  
James Glancy  
Mike Levitt  
Sydney Simms  
Peter Warren  
Madison Westwood

**Attendees**

Patrick Cronin	London Borough of Southwark
Tim Cutts	London Borough of Southwark
Anna Maria Clarke	London Borough of Merton (observing)
Tom Bolton	Frame Projects
Abigail Joseph	Frame Projects

**Apologies / copied to**

Tyreece Asamoah	Old Kent Road Community Development Panel
Shelene Byer	Old Kent Road Community Development Panel
Aaron Mo	Old Kent Road Community Development Panel
Saidat Oketunde	Old Kent Road Community Development Panel
Victoria Oluwables	Old Kent Road Community Development Panel
Alicia Chaumard	London Borough of Southwark
Colin Wilson	London Borough of Southwark

**Confidentiality**

This is a pre-application review, and therefore confidential. 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.

## **1. Project name and site address**

Devonshire Place: land at Devonshire Grove / Sylvan Grove, London SE15 1NZ

## **2. Presenting team**

Chris Shaw	Shaw Corporation
Steve Harrington	Regal London
Ian Fenn	JTP
Sophie Thomas-Lacroix	JTP
James Goldstone	Connect PA
Jonathan Hoban	Lichfields

## **3. Planning authority briefing**

The site is application site located within Old Kent Road Site Allocation OKR16. This expects any redevelopment of the site to:

- replace existing employment space.
- provide retail on the Old Kent Road high street.
- provide new homes.
- provide community uses.
- provide new a new public square at Devonshire Grove and Sylvan Grove.

The applicant benefits from existing planning permission for a redevelopment to provide four buildings, the tallest being 39 storeys, containing 365 homes and flexible commercial floorspace. The ownership boundary for the site this permission applies to was larger than the site as now proposed, incorporating an area of Southwark-owned land. The applicant now proposes an alternative scheme that excludes the Southwark-owned land.

The alternative scheme would deliver 902 student bed spaces across a range of bedroom typologies, 214 conventional dwellings all in affordable tenures, 594 square metres of commercial floorspace and a dedicated community room. This would all be supported by on-site wheelchair parking, provision for deliveries and servicing, landscaped public space and public realm improvements.

Southwark Council's aspirations for the site, expressed in the Old Kent Road Area Action plan, are that it should deliver affordable homes, retail uses on the high street frontage, leisure, art, culture or community uses, a new access road to the waste management facility and public open space.

Officers asked for the panel's advice on whether town centre uses are optimised; the delivery and servicing strategy for the site; the quality of the public realm; height and design; the relationship of the site layout to routes; the layout and quality of homes; and the relationship between the student accommodation and homes.

#### **4. Community Review Panel's views**

##### *Summary*

The panel considers the proposals well thought through, with the potential to create a successful development, but requests development of aspects of the design, of ground floor uses, and of management arrangements. The panel is concerned that the building could become empty if the student rooms do not prove viable in the long-term. It also raises concerns over the way the student and residential elements will work alongside each other. Care will be needed to prevent students disturbing residents, through both design and high quality management. Thinking is also needed on how residents and students can mix, through ideas including a shared space such as a food hall.

The panel encourages bolder architecture to distinguish the building from other recent local developments, and act as a marker. Fenestration should add greater depth to façades, potentially using framing and different shapes to reflect local architectural heritage. Colour transitions in the brickwork should be less abrupt and more refined. The Block A crown should be revisited to ensure it does not increase the impression of height, or obscure views from the roof.

The panel asks for consideration of more adventurous uses than a supermarket, with more potential to activate the street frontage. Ideas include smaller units, and affordable workspace. A café within the development could help bring different groups together. The community space should be larger if it is to be useable. More parking is needed for deliveries, trades and GP surgery. A new Old Kent Road pedestrian crossing is needed, and thought should be given to how local bus capacity can increase to serve new residents.

These comments are expanded below.

##### *Student accommodation*

- The panel understands that the 900-bed student accommodation capacity is determined by viability considerations. However, it emphasises the need to be sure that there is sufficient demand to keep these rooms filled in the long-term. The development must remain in full use and not become empty, if it is to make a positive contribution to the area.
- The success of a large student development, especially alongside residential accommodation, will depend on very efficient and effective management. For example, it will be important for flats to be well-soundproofed, to mitigate against disturbance from students congregating in the outside spaces, and returning late at night.
- It will also be particularly important to ensure the development is cleaned regularly, with litter cleared away and bins emptied every day.

- The panel suggests that the design team considers 24 hours in the life of different people living on the site, to provide more detail on the way spaces will be used, and inform the overall design approach. It will be essential to create a place that works for everyone.

### *Architecture*

- The panel supports many elements of the designs, which it thinks represent an improvement in comparison to the previous planning application. In particular, the decision to remove the podium between Blocks C and D is a very positive move.
- The panel considers that the architectural approach could be braver and bolder, to add excitement and advertise the development beside one of the major routes into London. The development has the potential to deliver a 'hero building' that does not look like other new architecture in the area. The panel encourages further thinking on how this can be achieved, and suggests the reclad Tustin Estate towers as a positive local precedent.
- The panel also thinks that the building would benefit from greater variety and depth, and a less uniform appearance. The brick façades could be broken up by framing windows, perhaps reflecting the combination of square and arched windows found in Victorian buildings on the Old Kent Road, and using a different material such as stone. Painting the window reveals could also add greater richness and detail.
- The panel also feels that the brick palette for Blocks B, C and D would benefit from less colour gradation. The change from top to bottom seems a little harsh, and emphasises the verticality of the buildings. A more unified palette would work better, and stronger horizontal elements could also be considered.
- The panel suggests that the Block A crown make an already tall tower seem even taller. It also points out that its structure could obscure views of the sky from the rooftop amenity space. This element could be revisited and refined to address these issues.

### *Amenity space*

- The panel asks for more landscape design detail to show how the amenity spaces will provide facilities for different groups. In particular, the amenity spaces should be designed to be used successfully by both families with children and by students. More detailed thinking is needed to show how spaces will be provided that are suitable for both groups, avoiding conflict.
- The panel also suggests that outdoor mirrors could be used in some areas to increase the sense of space, and potentially allow amenity space to be used for exercise or dance routines.

- The panel also points out that the Southwark Recycling Centre is the source of unpleasant smells, which could have a negative impact for residents. It advises the applicant to investigate this further and consider whether mitigation is needed.

### *Community space*

- The panel considers it important that the size of the community room is increased. The current design is too small to be used for gatherings, but there is a lack of community space in the area. A larger space would provide a valuable local resource.
- The panel emphasises the importance of community building on the Old Kent Road, which presents a significant challenge in the context of major change. It asks for thinking about how the local community can be made to feel welcome, and people other than residents attracted to use its spaces. For example, local artists could be invited to paint a wall or contribute a sculpture to draw in visitors.
- The panel is also keen to see integration across the development, between residents and students. For example, it suggests that a space such as a food hall could be included that would provide a natural place for both groups to mix. It asks for further thinking about how the social architecture of the development can promote integration.

### *Uses*

- The panel questions whether a supermarket is the right use to occupy the ground floor retail unit. There are other supermarkets in the area already, and a different, more exciting use would deliver greater variety and value to residents.
- The panel also thinks that a supermarket is unlikely to create active high street frontage on Old Kent Road, as their units usually include areas of blank frontage space. It asks whether other uses could be considered, including providing affordable workspace or dividing the ground floor up for smaller businesses.
- The panel also notes that there are successful African restaurants on Old Kent Road that attract significant custom, and that a restaurant could also be considered as an option for the ground floor.
- The panel suggests that a retail unit should be located the development, close to amenity space. A coffee shop on the ground floor in the north-east corner of Block D could be used by parents while their children play, as well as by students. This would help to animate the development and provide all-weather communal space. It would also help to bring residents and students together naturally.

### *Movement and parking*

- The panel is not convinced that the proposed provision of four spaces for deliveries and trades will be sufficient. They are likely to be heavily used by delivery vehicles, and the proposed surgery would create additional pressure with patients requiring pick-up and drop-off. The panel asks for further thinking on this aspect of the proposals.
- The panel points out that it is difficult and dangerous for pedestrians to cross the Old Kent Road from the site. It is important that plans are implemented to improve road crossings to provide for the large number of new residents the scheme will bring.
- The panel also notes that bus routes along the Old Kent Road are overcrowded especially at rush hour. It asks the applicant and Southwark officers to discuss how public transport provision can be improved to serve the increase in population.

### *Next steps*

The panel is available to review the proposals again if required, once the applicant has had the opportunity to respond to its comments.