



Old Kent Road Community Review Panel

Report of Community Review: 789-799 Old Kent Road

Monday 11 December 2023

Treasure House, 682 Old Kent Road, London, SE15 1JF

Group

Gurmeet Sian (chair)

David Clarke

Simon Donovan

James Glancy

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David Stoker

Attendees

Tim Cutts London Borough of Southwark

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Apologies / copied to

Lauretta Doku 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

Big Yellow Self Storage, 789-799 Old Kent Road, London, SE15 1NZ
Planning application reference: 23/AP/2365

2. Presenting team

David Scanlon	Mountford Pigott
Simon Allen	Big Yellow Self Storage Company
Andrew Deller	DWD Property and Planning
Harriet Swale	DWD Property and Planning

3. Planning authority briefing

Proposals are for the demolition of the existing building and the construction of a self-storage facility, food retail unit, and light industrial units. There will also be an undercroft service yard and car parking provision, landscape design, and a public pedestrian / cycle way.

The site is on the corner of Old Kent Road and Hillbeck Street, covering approximately 0.3 hectares, surrounded by a mixture of uses. It forms part of site allocation OKR18, which encourages retail provision on Old Kent Road with other uses above.

Officers would welcome the panel's comments on how the proposed mix of uses could be delivered successfully and whether the scheme contributes to the Council's plans to revitalise the Old Kent Road high street. It would also be helpful to hear how the specific challenges that come with the provision of self-storage units could be resolved in an urban setting.

4. Community Review Panel's views

Summary

The panel is generally supportive of the scheme but would like to see more ambition to ensure a development that responds to and enhances its context. The panel is comfortable with the height and massing of the scheme. The new route is positive but could be improved with clear segregation of cyclists and pedestrians. Whilst broadly supportive of the architecture, there is scope for this to be more specific to Old Kent Road. The elevation along Sylvan Grove requires further thought to ensure its visual interest, for example by incorporating public art. The panel would like to see the creative use of lighting and an improved wayfinding strategy, to enhance the appearance of the building at night, and contribute to safety at street level. It asks for reassurance about the affordability of the makers space / studio space and the retail space. The panel would like to better understand which businesses will be able to use these units, and to what extent fit out will be provided, as this is key to affordability. The panel suggests prioritising local business tenants for the retail space and exploring the potential for the on-site sale of products made in the makers space. In-depth community engagement will be essential to ensure the development responds to local needs. A community space could be valuable for educational or community use. The panel recommends working with a variety of local organisations to maximise the scheme's social impact, especially to serve vulnerable populations.

Site layout and massing

- The panel is comfortable with the height and massing of the scheme.
- It welcomes the creation of a new route pedestrian and cycle route to the north of the site. This will be a continuation of the cycle route (quiet route) through the Tustin Estate, connecting Ilderton Road and Sylvan Grove.
- The panel encourages segregation of cyclists and pedestrians to allow for safe and comfortable movement by both groups.
- Including artwork along the new route could help to increase its quality and local artists could be commissioned.
- Light industrial units are proposed to the back of the site. The panel asks for more thought about how the scheme can help potential customers who might not be familiar with the area to find these. This will also be important to allow for passing trade.
- Space for cargo bikes in the parking courtyard would be encouraged and could be used for deliveries by makers in the light industrial units.

Architecture and character

- The panel advises a more ambitious architectural approach to provide more visual interest, in a way that feels specific to Old Kent Road.
- For example, red bricks are characteristic of the area could be incorporated into the designs which would also add warmth.
- Creative lighting design could enhance the scheme at night. The panel recommends referring to the approaches being used in the Old Kent Road Rail Bridge Public Art and Lighting Project as the schemes could complement each other.
- The panel appreciates the low-key way in which the Big Yellow Storage Company's yellow branding has been applied at street level in the canopy, and behind the glazing. It wonders if subtle and creative use of yellow could be incorporated into the upper floor elevations.

Light industrial units

- The panel would like to be reassured about the affordability of the light industrial units which could help to secure a varied mix of tenants.
- It highlights that the doors in these units look too narrow for some businesses that use larger equipment or machinery, such as bakeries.
- Identification of the types of businesses that would be encouraged to use the light industrial uses could help to inform their design.
- The cost of fitting out a space can be a barrier to affordability for start-ups or small businesses. If the development could provide 'plug and play' space for specific uses, this would contribute to the local economy.

Retail unit

- The proposed retail unit is opposite a future new Bakerloo Line Station. This makes it important that that the retail unit is successful, creating an active and welcoming arrival experience once the station opens.
- However, in the short term the viability of the retail unit may be challenging, with several recently completed developments in the area having vacant retail space.
- The panel asked if the retail unit could be made available for community use, at least in the short term.

- Another option could be to link the retail unit with the light industrial spaces, curating the occupiers to allow products made on site to be sold in the shop. This would probably require the retail unit to be let at a subsidised rate.
- The panel suggests researching case studies such as the Bermondsey Uprising pop-up shop and community space, to help ensure the offer here is successful.

Community engagement and use

- The next stage of design should be informed by community engagement, beyond the community review panel.
- As part of this process, the panel would like to know how the scheme's social impact will be measured and how this will be communicated to local communities.
- As noted above, the panel would encourage provision of community space as part of the development. As well as reviewing what will already be provided by recent planning approvals in the area, local engagement will help identify what would be most useful.
- Options including a wellness centre, education space, or religious space were mentioned as potential community uses.
- The scheme could also positively contribute to the area through its management and operation. For example, jobs could be created for the long-term unemployed, prison leavers, and staff volunteering time could focus on local activities.
- The panel asks if the roof could be converted into a community garden or allotment. This would be beneficial for local people without access to a private garden.
- Opportunities to enliven blank walls by commissioning public art from local groups would also be encouraged.

Next steps

The panel is available to review the proposals again once the project team has had the opportunity to respond to its comments.