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FRAME PROJECTS

Old Kent Road Community Review Panel

Report of Community Review: Bricklayers Arms Masterplan

Monday 16 December 2024
231 Old Kent Road, London, SE1 5LU

Panel

Gurmeet Sian (chair)
Shelene Byer
Simon Donovan
Rebecca Lefort
Rahul Mani
Saidat Oketunde
Sarah Osei
Sydney Simms
David Stoker

Attendees

Tim Cutts	London Borough of Southwark
Colin Wilson	London Borough of Southwark
Adrian Harvey	Frame Projects
Yingli Tang	Frame Projects

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

Bricklayers Arms Gyratory, Old Kent Road.

2. Presenting team

Roddy Langmuir	Cullinan Studio
Sanaa Shaikh	Native Studio
Mike Martin	Turkington Martin

3. Planning authority briefing

The site includes the Bricklayers Arms gyratory, flyover, and surrounding land. Southwark Council received funding to carry out feasibility studies to explore the potential to rationalise the highway network to create more land for housing, repair a historic stretch of high streets, and stitch the site back into its surrounding neighbourhoods. Architects have been appointed to work on a masterplan.

The proposal would redevelop the roundabout and flyover by reconfiguring the road network, unlocking land to the north of the site for development and public realm enhancements. Under this plan, the road would connect from Great Dover Street and Tower Bridge Road, bypassing the northern section of the roundabout, and instead linking directly to Old Kent Road. The gyratory falls within the Old Kent Road Opportunity Area and is a site allocation in the Area Action Plan.

The first public engagement event, held in late September, garnered much interest from the local community. Building on their responses and ideas, the architects have refined the options. A second public engagement exercise was held on 11 December, to seek further views on those options. Officers would welcome the panel's comments on the kind of green spaces that are needed in the area, which kind of shops and services would be most valuable here, and how Bricklayers can be made a cherished public space for the neighbourhood.

4. Community Review Panel's views

Summary

The Community Review Panel thanks the design team for bringing the scheme to review at an early stage in its development. It is broadly supportive of the proposals, which are an exciting opportunity for the area, provided they can be made a success. The conversion of the flyover into a public space is broadly supported, and the ideas presented for uses of the flyover undercroft are a helpful starting point. The site is subject to significant traffic noise and disruption, and the recognition of the need to screen the new public spaces is welcome. To make a success of the new public spaces, active and dynamic management will be critical and should ideally be provided by a community-owned trust.

While the general approach is supported, there are some concerns about the impact of the proposals on traffic flows and bus services. A car-free scheme is accepted in principle, but the knock-on effect of visitor parking should be acknowledged and addressed, and space should be allowed for delivery vehicles and taxi drop-off. The proposed building heights and massing appear to be appropriate for this site, but the scheme must reflect the heritage and diversity of the area, both in its architecture and its uses. A holistic strategy for environmental sustainability should be developed that includes making the most of opportunities for renewable energy generation.

The site is at an important junction within this part of London and the scheme has the potential to act as a connector, both between other places and between this community and the wider area. It will be important, as the scheme develops to think more about the communities and people living beyond the red line. The involvement of local people will be key to the success of the scheme, and the engagement that has been undertaken so far is welcome. However, additional, innovative measures will be needed to reach the very diverse communities that make up the area, and particularly small businesses.

Public space proposals

- The panel broadly supports the proposals to create additional public space in the area. It feels that the converted flyover could become an attractive destination and valuable asset to the area, bringing in visitors and providing local residents with opportunities to meet and relax.
- To enhance the attractiveness of the flyover space, opportunities should be explored for institutions, such as the Imperial War Museum, to locate outdoor exhibits here.
- It will be important to activate the lower-level spaces in the evening, as well as the daytime, bringing life to the streets and creating a buzz around the area.

- The ideas presented for the flyover undercroft are interesting, but the panel feels that the proposals should allow for experimentation, with no uses locked in from the start.
- If the public spaces are to be pleasant and enjoyable to use, then sheltering them from traffic noise will be essential.
- Any seating provided in the public spaces should be located and orientated to be useful and enjoyable.
- The proposals create a number of spaces, and the panel would like to see clearer definition of what is publicly accessible and what is private or semi-private.

Connections

- The space sits at the junction of a number of dynamic neighbourhoods and the proposals could unlock connections to them, to more effectively integrate the northern end of Old Kent Road with the wider area.
- To be successful, the scheme should seek to attract footfall from Tower Bridge Road and from Elephant and Castle, as well as making connections to Maltby Street market.
- While improvements to the subways would be positive, the panel notes that they are very unpopular with some local people, who feel them to be unsafe. Alternative access arrangements to the repurposed flyover should be considered, so that everyone can enjoy the new space and access it easily and comfortably.
- The panel notes that the pedestrian experience is currently unsatisfactory and feels that the scheme should ensure that routes are made as direct and pleasant as possible.

Management and maintenance

- The panel are largely supportive of the greening of the flyover but feels that the management of the new green space will be critical to its success.
- It would prefer to see a management organisation other than the local authority take on the responsibility. Ideally, this should be a community trust that can involve local people and bring dynamism to the curation of the spaces.
- If such a community trust can be established, the panel would like to see the assets transferred to it, so that they can be commercially exploited to support the costs of management and maintenance. For example, the space could accommodate a café or climbing wall that could generate an income.

- Beginning to develop a management organisation now could help to generate interest in the scheme and support efforts to engage the community and other stakeholders.

Community benefit

- The potential for the scheme to attract new visitors to the area is positive, but this needs to be balanced with ensuring that the existing community also benefits from and feels ownership over the development.
- The proposals should give particular attention to safeguarding local businesses, ensuring that they can benefit from the changes. This could be a matter of making space available to them within the development, or improving connectivity to their existing locations, so that they benefit from any increase in footfall.
- The panel welcomes the work to engage the local community that has been carried out so far. This should continue and intensify, so that the proposals can bring real benefits to local people.
- However, to reach the wide range of communities within the area, and particularly the small business community, additional and innovative approaches will be required.

Building form and uses

- The panel is comfortable with the proposed scale and massing of the buildings, and feels they are appropriate and proportionate in this location.
- The panel feels that a mixed-use scheme would be most appropriate on the site, combining workspace with new homes. However, it notes that it will be essential to tailor the commercial offer to market demand so that the spaces are occupied and can thrive.
- The panel would be keen to see the architecture reflect local character. The proposals should embed the heritage and diversity of the area, so that the development is grounded in place. This should include both the buildings and their uses.

Traffic and car parking

- The changes to the gyratory system and enabling redevelopment are broadly supported by the panel. However, there are some concerns about the impact of the changes on local traffic flows in what is already a congested part of London.

- The car-free nature of the scheme is accepted in principle, but the panel notes that visitors to residents are likely to drive to the site, putting pressure on neighbouring streets.
- If the flyover is to become a destination, there are likely to be additional pressures for car parking. The potential for some permit-controlled visitor parking should be considered, in addition to any Blue Badge parking required.
- Similarly, adequate provision must be made for deliveries and taxi drop off, if a car-free scheme is to be made to work.
- The area is subject to very high levels of traffic noise, and rigorous analysis of this should inform the site layout and approach to screening.
- The area is also a major route for blue light vehicles. The panel would like to see options explored for restricting the use of sirens where possible, to protect residents from unnecessary disturbance.

Environmental sustainability

- Opportunities for including photovoltaic panels or other renewable energy generation in the scheme should be explored. A holistic approach to environmental sustainability should be developed as part of the scheme's evolution.

Programme and delivery

- The timescale for delivering the scheme, once agreement and funding have been secured, needs to be understood, as it is likely to disrupt the neighbourhood for a prolonged period. Clarity over how this will be managed will be important to keeping the local community engaged in the development.

Next steps

- The panel would welcome the opportunity to see the scheme again, later in its development, if that would be useful to the officers and the design team.