

LEWISHAM DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

DESIGN REVIEW REPORT

REPORT OF THE LEWISHAM DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

Name	Mais House, Sydenham Hill Estate
Status	Planning Application : 4th Review
Review Date	25 May 2021
Issue Date	10 June 2021

In attendance:

Design & Planning Team

Architects	Hawkins/Brown Iain Cochrain Alex Savvides
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Panel Members	Keith Williams (Chair)* Hugh Strange* Paul Dodd* Kathryn Davies Richard Portchmouth
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*LDRP members who have previously reviewed the scheme

Lewisham Officers	Michael Forrester (Major and Strategic Projects Manager) David Robinson (Planning Officer) David Syme (Strategic Planning Manager) Joanna Ecclestone (Senior Conservation and Urban Design Officer) Konoya Kabir (DRP Coordinating Officer)
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This report forms the response of Lewisham Design Review Panel (LDRP) to the virtual design review held 27 May 2021.

DECLARATION OF INTEREST

No conflicts of interest were declared from those present.

VIRTUAL SITE VISIT

The DRP was virtual and did not include a formal site visit due to the Covid-19 restrictions currently in force. A virtual walk through on 'Google Maps' was held prior to the review and the Panel had studied the material submitted in advance of the review by the applicant team.

In addition, several LDRP members have reviewed proposals for this site in the past and had carried out site tours at the time.

Therefore, all Panel Members were as familiar as possible with the site, its context and constraints.

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SITE AND ITS CONTEXT

The Sydenham Hill Estate is located on the eastern side of Sydenham Hill, to the south of its junction with Kirkdale. The estate has a site area of 2.67ha and includes three distinctive elements: Mais House (an apartment block of 63 sheltered housing units for the elderly), Lammas Green (a 1950s housing scheme, comprising three terraces set around a village green) and Otto Close (a terrace of two storey maisonettes). The area for consideration includes Mais House, its associated parking area, the amenity space between Mais House and Otto Close, a row of garages on the south side of Otto Close and its existing elevated hardcourt play area

Mais House comprises a part two/part three/part four storey block of 63 flats designed for older people above the age of 60. It is understood that the 63 units are a mix of studios, one bed and two bed flats. Mais House previously provided on-site support and social facilities associated with the flats. Mais House is a free form block, set within landscaped amenity space that is shared with two storey maisonettes on Otto Close. It has now been decanted and lies vacant. Otto Close comprises approximately 30 two storey residential units. At the north east of the Site, set between Otto Close and Rose Court, are 38 single storey residential garages. The garages are split across 7 rows.

There are three vehicular access points to the site. Two of these are from Sydenham Hill and serve Mais House. Of these, the northernmost access appears to be the primary access, leading to a parking area and servicing route through the site. The other access serves only the site frontage and appears to be used infrequently. Otto Close is a private road accessed from Kirkdale from which there is a pedestrian access to the site.

The site slopes steeply west to east. There are a number of mature trees within the site, concentrated on the site frontage and amenity spaces, though none are subject to a Tree Preservation Order.

The site is located within a predominantly residential area. To the east, on Kirkdale, is a row of two storey terraced houses, with relatively long rear gardens. To the north is a four storey nursing home, Castlebar, converted from an Edwardian detached house which is locally listed. To the west is Dulwich Wood (within the London Borough of Southwark) which is designated as Metropolitan Open Land, a Local Nature Reserve of Metropolitan Importance and Conservation Area.

The site has no special site allocation on the LDF Proposals Map or within the Site Allocations DPD. It has a PTAL of 2, indicating low public transport accessibility.

The site is constrained by heritage and conservation considerations with the following designations :

- Grade II listed Lammas Green (adjacent the site)
- Sydenham Hill / Kirkdale Conservation Area (part of the site falls within)
- Sydenham Hill community hall Grade II listed walls (on Lammas Green)
- Sydenham Hill Ridge Area of Special Character to the north/north-west.
- Visual and historic link with Sydenham Hill Wood and the former Great North Wood (to the west of the site)

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SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

The City of London Corporation (CoL) own the site and are the developer. The brief to architects Hawkins/Brown is to deliver 110 socially rented units (allocation split 50% to CoL and 50% to LBL) on site with the following housing mix:

Unit size	Proposed Unit Numbers
1 bed	47
2 bed	41
3 bed	11
4 bed	11

The residential units are proposed to be provided by a series of new buildings involving:

- Demolition of Mais House and construction new block(s) on the Mais House site and new blocks to the rear.
- Redevelopment of the garages at the apex of Otto Close
- Demolition and redevelopment of the existing garages at the rear of Otto close fronting Kirkdale

STATUS OF PROPOSAL

There have been three previous pre-application enquiries made on the site by the same developer on 31 October 2018, 6 March 2019 and 18 July 2019. The application was submitted to the Council in December 2019.

The scheme is being reviewed by the panel for a 4th time following a judicial review quashing a previous application decision made.

Following LDRP feedback at the 3 pre-application stage reviews, the applicant has made the following changes:

- Reduction in the total number of residential units from 150 units to 110 units
- Revisions to the layout and height of Block A, B and C. Blocks A and C are now four storeys and Block B is part six and seven storeys. The tallest element of the new main block has been reduced from 12 storeys in the scheme discussed with GLA to a maximum of seven storeys
- Provision of a community room, interview room, new estates office and residents store within the main block
- Revisions to the scale and massing of the terrace house blocks to part two and part three storeys and a reduction in one unit on the terrace
- Omission of the infill residential development to the hard ballcourt. Some alterations to the ballcourt are however proposed to provide play facilities and improved access to the car parking beneath it. 10 new parking spaces will be provided below the ball court
- Removal of the MUGA from the central landscaped area between Mais House and Otto Close properties and replacement with a smaller scale toddler play area alongside hard and soft landscaping works and programme of tree planting
- Ecological enhancements, including biodiverse planting, rain garden, bird and bat refuges are now included as part of the landscaping scheme

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- Alteration to car parking including the removal of the basement car park to Blocks A, B and C and replacement with surface level car parking spaces. Parking on Otto Close has been reconfigured to minimise disruption to services and usable parking spaces are also now provided underneath the retained ballcourt
- Vehicular access to Blocks A, B and C will be consolidated through the existing access between Mais House and Castlebar providing access to the surface level parking area, and for the delivery and servicing strategy for Sydenham Hill to Blocks A, B and C. A secondary access on the western boundary is for fire access only. The existing access which will be widened to improve accessibility and retains the existing bus stop on Sydenham Hill in its current location

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The Panel thanked the team for its presentation, before then inviting LBL planning officer's view.

LOCAL AUTHORITY PLANNING OFFICERS' VIEW

Officers are supportive of redevelopment of the site for socially rented housing given the current need and demand for such a tenure in the borough, and are keen that the proposed development presents the optimal number of socially rented residential units on-site with due regard for the following key issues:

Heritage and Conservation

The site is constrained by heritage and conservation considerations with the following designations:

- Grade II listed Lammas Green (adjacent the site)
- Sydenham Hill / Kirkdale Conservation Area (part of the site falls within this)
- Sydenham Hill community hall Grade II listed walls (on Lammas Green)
- Area of Special Local Character (to the south / south west of the site)
- Visual and historic link with Sydenham Hill Wood and the former Great North Wood (to the west of the site)

Officers support the reduction in scale and massing, from a previously proposed maximum of 12 storeys to 7 storeys which whilst continuing to be taller than surrounding buildings is considered to be of high quality architectural design.

Trees and Ecology

There are numerous single and groups of mature trees on site which contribute to the character of the site and wider area. These provide a positive contribution to the character and setting of the area and should be retained insofar as possible. The application scheme has sought to minimise tree removal where possible, with the submitted layout requiring the removal of 19 trees, but with a landscape scheme which to provide 48 replacement trees.

Summary

Officers are supportive of the submission proposals and whilst remaining a sizeable development, the scale, massing and layout have been reduced and amended from previous iterations, informed by the Panel's earlier comments. Officers are encouraged by the progress made to date and look forward to the Panel's comments on the application scheme.

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POINTS OF CLARIFICATION

Following the presentation by the architect and after Panel enquiry, the applicant team confirmed:

- the land at the garages to Otto Close starts slopes eastwards
- sunlight and daylight assessments have been undertaken including assessment of the impact on Castelbar. A ground floor window on the flank elevation did not meet BRE assessment standards but the remainder passed
- There are no north facing single aspect units as defined by the London Plan
- Block C : bikes are stores are located within the car park, with external access from the rear of the central part of the colonnade near the estate office.
- Demolished materials will be used for the ground mat but the bricks will not be reused as facing materials as their quality was not high enough
- The site has a PTAL rating of 2

DESIGN REVIEW PANEL COMMENTS

The Panel thanked the design team for their clear presentation commenting that the evolution of the scheme design is generally developing in a very positive direction and has improved significantly relative to earlier iterations presented to LDRP. There remain however, a number of issues that need further resolution. These include further work on building height, massing and scale and the architectural treatment in relation to the site's heritage assets and its leafy, sylvan, suburban character.

Heritage & Townscape

The Panel challenged the relationship between design outcomes and processes, including the assessment of the character area through the heritage townscape and visual impact assessment. The Panel were concerned that the height of the proposed buildings in particular the scale of 7 storeys and its impact on the Conservation Area and other heritage assets had yet to be fully evaluated/justified.

Overall character of the immediate context is that of a leafy suburb, with an abundance of mature trees and originally a series of large houses whereas this development is larger and more urban in feel. The Panel understand the justification of the need for the housing but these concerns need to be reflected in the application and shown that any potential harm has been addressed.

Height, Scale, Massing and Masterplan

The masterplan is for the most part working well and the Panel were pleased to see a considerable leap forward in the quality of the proposals from previous iterations and consider current proposals to be less hectic in their massing and articulation.

The reduction in height, from 8/9 storeys (Block B) is welcomed but in the Panel's view still has to reduce further in order to be successful. The consistent 4 storey heights for Blocks A & C seem more appropriately scaled and Block A works successfully in scale terms with the easternmost building within Lammas Green along Sydenham Hill, even though it is slightly taller.

The rationale for the deployment of hips and gables seemed to the Panel unclear when these important roof forms should really be used to reinforce the architectural and massing concepts and contribute positive points of accent and cadence to the overall composition.

The scale of the proposed buildings on Otto Close has never really been at issue, but their placement and south-western extent needs further consideration.

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Height, Scale, Massing : Block B

The Panel were concerned that Block B is still too high and impacts substantially on the longer views. In order to sit comfortably alongside its neighbours, particularly Castlebar, more height needs to be removed, notably to the rear portion of the block which is the taller.

The rear portion of Block B rises up and is the tallest point when to work with the topography of the site, it should really fall, and be a transition building between the front of Block B and Block C, breaking the height down as it runs down the slope.

The Panel question the impact Block B will have on the conservation area, in particular the relationship of the proposed ridgelines and treeline to the conservation areas, and the adjoining Dulwich conservation area. The two conservation areas reinforce each other and are in harmony with each other as a result of the architecture and topography working together, in particular the tree line and the characterful ridge line which can be seen from many locations around. The early villas that once occupied the site, established these principles successfully.

The new architecture should be working as a backdrop behind the mature treeline and not interrupting its ridgeline character. Block B challenges this and runs counter to the general grain and character of the conservation area.

The Panel felt strongly that Block B should be pushed back from Sydenham Hill in order to allow the planting of substantial specimen trees between it and the street, which is the defining characteristic of the Sydenham Hill ridge line.

Architecture and Layout

The gable at the end of the small terrace houses on Otto Close does impose on the view to the North Downs from Lammas Green. That in itself is not necessarily at issue but the view is framed by the elegant silhouettes of the two ends of the Lammas Green terraces in the south-east corner. The silhouette of these grade II listed buildings will be disturbed by the new terrace which the Panel feel should be set further to the east to avoid this intrusion.

The surrounding buildings (gables on the Donald McMorran designed building for example) are clever architectural exercises on how to deal with height and scale and the impact on the conservation area and the street scape.

This detailing gives helpful guidance for the resolution of Block B which in the Panel's view needs some thoughtful articulation to resolve the design of the tops of the building to part mitigate their impact and scale which at present remains somewhat overbearing.

The south-eastern gables to the rear portion of Block B seem architecturally underdeveloped in terms of detail and are extremely dominant, towering over the communal garden space. Reduction in scale and further articulation of tall gables could greatly improve their contribution to both the communal garden space and lessen their impact on Lammas Green.

Much of the ground level floor plate surrounding the entrance area is given over to bins and bike store. Though handled reasonably well architecturally, the approach is non-active and non-surveilled and contributes little to the quality of the entrance and approach to the building.

The double height internal communal space is a key feature of the arrival into the complex, is well positioned and the colonnade working well architecturally. The central column in communal room is questioned as it blocks the natural passage through the building to the central communal garden area, as well as restricting the view. The Panel suggest that it is deleted. The double doors opening onto the colonnade at the exit seem likely to clash with people walking, evidencing that further work is needed to resolve the key communal circulation.

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The Panel supported the change from the polychromatic brickwork of earlier design iterations, commenting that the design is now much calmer now, and is more sympathetic to the architecture of Lammas Green. The subtle shift in brickwork coloration works well, for example, on the Block B entrance area but the balconies, though elegantly designed as objects, seemed bolted on and do not seem integrated into the architectural treatment of the building lessening the overall qualitative effect.

The Panel challenged the ground floor apartments which open directly onto the public open space with no apparent defensible zone. All have bedrooms facing directly onto it which raises concerns of privacy. The Panel suggest duplexes be substituted to overcome this problem.

Panel approved of the internal circulation in Block A and B which brings natural daylight into the corridors but commented that this condition should also be achieved in block C within the corridor on the upper levels.

Landscape Strategy

The design of the landscaping in the central communal garden space has developed extremely well.

However, the Panel were not persuaded by the argument that removing trees was justified provided that more were planted. The Panel pointed out that a number of the specimen trees that are to be removed under the current proposals, have taken some 100 years to achieve their current maturity and contribute substantially to the site's biodiversity.

The new trees proposed for Sydenham Hill in front of Block B have limited space in which to grow so will not develop the large canopies that are one of the principal characteristics of the conservation area and will not match the existing mature tree growth. It is important to ensure that new specimen trees will survive for 100 years or more by providing space and growing medium, which will inevitably challenge the proposed location of the north part of Block B which the Panel felt is too close to the road.

The Panel were also concerned that a number of the north facing apartments will be overshadowed by trees.

Improvement to the houses on Otto Close are welcomed in terms of private space and the communal spaces, but as noted in the previous section further work is needed to the layout to retain the category A tree and reposition the new dwellings proposed for the current garage site.

The existing ball court is not well located given its proximity to new development, but the Panel accept the reasons for retaining it as set out at earlier review.

Materials + Detail : Securing Quality

The comments above on material and detail herein notwithstanding, the applicant team should note the Panel's general guidance on material, quality and detail. At planning application stage the quality of the detailing needs to be demonstrated through large scale drawings 1:20 and 1:5 of key elements of the building and landscape, and should be accompanied by actual material samples which should be secured as part of any planning approval.

LIGHTING

Although not discussed in detail at this review, the applicant the team should note the Panel's general advice that the proposals need to be developed to consider the diurnal/nocturnal aspects of the public realm and should include high quality lighting design work integrated into the landscape and architectural strategy.

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SUSTAINABILITY

Having a high level of sustainability will be a key component for the densification of the site. Although not explored further at this review, the design team should establish clearly to the satisfaction of the LPA, their intentions toward sustainability and energy use targets for the development.

SUMMARY

The Panel commented that the evolution of the scheme design is generally developing in a very positive direction and has improved significantly from previous iterations and sits much more comfortably within the surroundings than earlier versions. There remain however, a number of issues that need further resolution. These include further work on building height, massing and scale and the architectural treatment in relation to the site's heritage assets and its leafy suburban character.

The Panel challenged the relationship of the project with the context of the conservation area, in particular the protrusion of Block B which is still too far forward toward Sydenham Hill on the ridge line, preventing substantial specimen tree growth, which is one of the defining characteristics of the street and this part of the conservation area.

The Panel also challenged the relationship between design outcomes and processes, including the assessment of the character area through the heritage townscape and visual impact assessment. This seems not to be reflected in the height proposed buildings in particular the scale of 7 storeys. Overall, the character of the immediate context is that of a leafy suburb, with an abundance of mature trees and originally a series of large houses whereas this development is larger and more urban in feel.

The Panel do not support the scale of the rear part of Block B at 7 storeys, which should in Panel's view step down in height in parallel with the natural topography. This is likely to cause a height reduction of two storeys to this portion of the development.

The rationale for the deployment of hips and gables seemed to the Panel unclear when these important roof forms should really be used to reinforce the architectural and massing concepts and contribute positive points of accent and cadence to the overall composition.

The south-eastern gables to the rear portion of Block B seem architecturally under developed in terms of detail and are extremely dominant, towering over the communal garden space. Reduction in scale and further articulation of tall gables could greatly improve their contribution to both the communal garden space and lessen their impact on Lammas Green.

The double height internal communal space is a key feature of the arrival into the complex, is well positioned and the colonnade working well architecturally. The central column in communal room is questioned as it blocks the natural passage through the building to the central communal garden area, as well as restricting the view. The Panel suggest that it is deleted. The double doors opening out into the colonnade at the exit seem likely to clash with people walking along the colonnade, evidencing that further work is needed to resolve the key communal circulation.

The gable at the end of the small terrace houses on Otto Close does impose on the view to the North Downs from Lammas Green. That in itself is not necessarily at issue but the view is framed by the elegant silhouettes of the two ends of the Lammas Green terraces in the south-east corner. The silhouette of these grade II listed will be disturbed by the new terrace which the Panel feel should be set further to the east to avoid this intrusion.

The design of the landscaping in the central communal garden space has developed extremely well but further work needs to be undertaken to resolve issues of segregation of communal and private external amenity space, potentially introducing duplex apartments to avoid bedrooms being paced in close proximity to the communal garden as is currently proposed.

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The Panel were not convinced by the tree planting strategy proposed and were not persuaded by the argument that removing trees was justified provided that more were planted. The Panel pointed out that a number of the specimen trees that are to be removed under the current proposals, have taken some 100 years to achieve their current maturity and contribute substantially to the site's biodiversity.

FURTHER REVIEW

The Panel were supportive of the principles behind the development and much of the ambition outlined on the day.

The Panel considers that a number of design issues remain to be resolved which should be considered by LBL Officers as the planning application is progressed.

This report constitutes the formal response of Lewisham Design Review Panel to the project as presented at review on 25th May 2021 and supersedes any earlier advice given by the Panel on this project.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K Williams', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Keith R Williams FRIBA MRIAI FRSA: Chair LDRP