

PLANNING APPLICATIONS SUB-COMMITTEE
Thursday, 9 May 2024

Minutes of the meeting of the Planning Applications Sub-Committee held at Livery
Hall - Guildhall on Thursday, 9 May 2024 at 11.00 am

Present

Members:

Deputy Shravan Joshi MBE (Chairman)
Graham Packham (Deputy Chairman)
Deputy Randall Anderson
Mary Durcan
Deputy John Fletcher
Deputy Marianne Fredericks
Amy Horscroft
Deputy Charles Edward Lord
Judith Pleasance
Deputy Henry Pollard
Luis Felipe Tilleria
Jacqui Webster

Officers:

Zoe Lewis	- Town Clerk's Department
Fleur Francis	- Comptroller and City Solicitor's Department
Gemma Delves	- Environment Department
David Horkan	- Environment Department
Tom Nancollas	- Environment Department
Rob McNicol	- Environment Department
Gwyn Richards	- Environment Department
Peter Wilson	- Environment Department

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Ian Bishop-Laggett, Deputy John Edwards, Anthony Fitzpatrick, Alderman Robert Hughes-Penney, Jaspreet Hodgson, Deputy Brian Mooney, Deputy Alastair Moss, Eamonn Mullally, Alderwoman Jennette Newman, Alderwoman Susan Pearson and Shailendra Umradia.

2. MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT IN RESPECT OF ITEMS ON THE AGENDA

There were no declarations.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED: - That the consideration of the minutes of 17 April 2024 be deferred until the next meeting of the Sub-Committee.

4. **ALBAN GATE, 125-130 LONDON WALL**

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Planning and Development Director concerning an extension, refurbishment and alterations to Alban Gate, 125-130 London Wall including: creation of a connection from the office reception to the Wood Street north escalator; reconfiguration of Class E uses and spaces at podium level to include extension of the office floorspace; formation of new seating areas at podium level; installation of new planters; refurbishment of the escalator surrounds (Wood Street south and north); formation of feature and art walls; re cladding of columns; alteration of the Alban Highwalk City Walkway and declaration of new areas of City Walkway; and provision of new lighting and wayfinding.

The Town Clerk referred to those papers set out within the main agenda pack as well as the Officer presentation slides and an addendum that had been separately circulated and published.

Officers presented the application and stated that the application related to the ground and podium level of Alban Gate, a postmodern office building that spanned across London Wall, with the Barbican Estate to the north of the site, residential development on Monkwell Square to the west and commercial development surrounding the site on the remaining sides. Members were informed that the site was not within a conservation area and the building was not listed. It was recently granted a certificate of immunity from listing by the Secretary of State.

Members were shown an image of the existing building looking north along Wood Street. The Officer highlighted the building's publicly accessible escalators on its north and south sides, in addition to a lift and stairs. Members were informed that these were important for providing routes between ground and podium level for pedestrians. The Officer also highlighted the walkway with retail units.

Members were shown an existing image of the entrance to the building on the Wood Street north side. In addition, they were shown an existing image of the podium level which included one of the retail units and an additional entrance into the building. Members were informed that the existing retail units at podium level were all vacant, despite the applicant's attempt to market them.

The Officer stated that the existing building would be retained and minor refurbishment and extension works were proposed to enhance the ground and podium level of the building. The proposal sought to address some of the constraints with the existing site, i.e. reception areas across multiple levels, and the public routes lacking wayfinding and vibrancy.

Members were informed that at ground floor level, the works proposed included the recladding of the existing columns in aluminium and new backlit feature walls along the London Wall and behind the escalators on the Wood Street north side of the building. Part of the steps on the Wood Street north side would be removed and replaced with a planter. The escalator surrounds on the Wood

Street south side of the building would be refurbished with a new art wall incorporated.

The Officer stated that the most significant element of works would take place at podium level. It was proposed that the reception office entrance would be extended. At present, it was considered that the entrance at this level was small in relation to the scale of the building. In order to enable the extension to take place, one of the existing retail units would be demolished and the loss of the retail unit was considered to be acceptable in policy terms.

A new seating area and planting were proposed at podium level in place of the retail unit and further opportunity would be sought for greening and planters. A new feature wall was proposed adjacent to the extension.

Members were shown existing elevations and sections along London Wall which showed the areas of the building to be removed. Some existing glazing would be removed at ground floor level to make way for the new feature wall and the retail unit would be demolished along with a gantry area at podium level.

Members were also shown proposed elevations and sections, which included the refurbished escalator surrounds and the new office extension and new planting. The existing sections and elevations of the Wood Street north side of the building showed the areas to be removed, the existing retail unit and the current glazing that formed the backdrop to the escalators. The proposed images showed the new greening and the new office extension. Members were informed that it was also proposed that a small part of the office floor plate at podium level would be extended, but this would not impact on the functioning of the escalators.

The Officer stated that in order to make way for the extension, approximately 200 square metres of existing city walkway at podium level would need to be rescinded for the extension and planters. This was considered by Officers to be acceptable in principle as it would be offset by approximately 220 square metres of city walkway that would be newly dedicated in place of the retail unit that would be removed.

Members were shown images of the existing and proposed routes within the city walkway and an image showing the impact that the extension would have on pedestrian walking routes. While some of the routes around the podium would be extended, this would not be to a significant degree where people would need to walk around the extension. The podium would still be spacious and accessible and the extension would be glazed as well to allow sight lines through the built form. New signage, details of which would be provided by condition, would aid wayfinding around the site. Members were informed that at present, the site lacked greening, so new opportunities were sought, with planters to create a more welcoming and softer environment.

Members were shown a number of CGI images of the key entrance and arrival points onto the podium. An image looking south along Alban High Walk showed one of the new planters and the new office extension. An image looking south

into the podium showed it would maintain a spacious feel and that the walkways through would be unobstructed. Members were shown an image of the new extension, new planters and seating looking east across the podium, which would be provided by condition. Members were also shown images of the greening on the podium and the new office extension and the seating areas. They were also shown images of the refurbished escalator surround and the location of the new wall art, the details of which would be provided by condition.

Members were shown an image of the new feature wall that would form a backdrop to the escalators on the Wood Street north side of the building, and were informed this would be much brighter, with the greening enhancing the environment, than the existing black tiling. Members were also shown a view from the ground floor level.

The Officer stated that the works were quite minor. There would be no impact on the overall appearance of the building and as a result, there would be no harm to the setting or impact of any of the surrounding designated heritage assets.

In summary, the Officer stated that the proposed works would enhance the ground and podium level through new greening, lighting, wayfinding and finishes to public routes. The proposed podium level extension would create a prominent and clear arrival point for the building. The Officer stated that the applicant had developed the proposal in consultation with local residents and matters relating to final details and construction arrangements would be required by condition. The alterations to the city walkway were considered acceptable in principle, as the rescinded walkway would be offset by the dedication of new walkway. Officers therefore recommended that the application be approved.

The Chairman stated that there were no speakers registered to address the Sub-Committee in objection to the recommendations.

The Chairman stated there were two speakers registered in support of the application and invited them to speak.

Mr Fred Rodgers, a resident of the Barbican Estate stated he was surprised in view of recent complaints in relation to delegated authority, that the application was being considered by the sub-committee. He requested that step free access to Barber-Surgeons' Hall gardens should be provided as those in wheelchairs or with buggies could not get into and enjoy the garden.

He added that step free access was not only vital, especially for Destination City, but also for the compliance with the CLC statutory obligations. Mr Rodgers stated that City Gardens were continuing with their own master plan for the site, which would include step-free access.

Mr Rodgers showed images of the current means of public access to the gardens and the point adjoining the applicant site. He stated that the installation of an access ramp there, would be feasible. He also stated that alternative

access to the north of Barber-Surgeons' Hall was also feasible, but would involve the laying of a path around Bastion 13, which would require listed building consent and being outside the city wall would infringe on the site of the former Jewish cemetery. Mr Rodgers stated that the Officer report claimed, without evidence, that such works would be outside the scope of this application and could not be secured as part of it. He added that whilst the Officer report stated that the applicant had been made aware of the request, it seemed that this had not been followed up and Members could be unaware if the applicant was amenable to this request. He stated that the option of requesting the applicant agreed to a commitment being secured as a planning obligation should be taken at the meeting.

Mr Adam Draper from Arax Properties, stated that he was representing the applicant. He informed Members that Alban Gate was a unique site on London Wall, comprising two connected commercial buildings, one of which bridged over London Wall. Designed by Sir Terry Farrell, the building was in the post-modernist style. To the north, was Monkwell Square and the Barbican Estate.

Mr Draper stated that the proposals, designed by award winning architects TP Bennett, sought to capitalise on the opportunities to address the existing shortcomings of this early 1990s building, at ground and podium levels. The existing height and massing of the building would remain unchanged, and the scheme proposed very limited deconstruction. The proposals would have no impact beyond the immediate vicinity of the lower levels of the building and would not adversely impact residents.

Members were informed that one of the key shortcomings of the building was the lack of legibility across the ground and podium levels and the lack of a primary, meaningful office reception for a building of this size. The retail units at the podium level also lacked any real street presence and had largely failed following the pandemic, despite active marketing.

Mr Draper stated that the application proposed an enhanced office reception at podium level and a legible, muted design, that complemented the existing post-modernist design, but would enhance wayfinding through the site. It would also provide significant enhancements to the existing environment and general aesthetics through hard and soft landscaping improvements.

Members were informed that the enlarged office reception and optimised retail accommodation would provide vibrancy and natural surveillance at podium level. The existing escalators would be serviced and refurbished as part of the scheme. The revisions at podium level would also increase the aggregate area of the City Walkway by 20 square metres compared to the existing arrangement. The proposals sought to optimise the functionality and design of the existing lower levels of the building, whilst maximising fabric retention and prioritising the principles of repurposing and reuse wherever commercially possible.

Members were further informed that the planning application had been carefully considered following extensive pre-application discussions and wider

stakeholder engagement. A substantial consultation exercise was undertaken prior to, and during the consideration of an earlier refurbishment application, which was later withdrawn. These discussions, and feedback from residents, had directly informed the design of the current proposal, which had received no objections from local residents, with only six comments made which generally related to construction and operational matters. Mr Draper stated the applicant was aware of the location of the building and its proximity to residents, and would ensure that these comments were addressed with the appointed contractor.

Mr Draper advised Members that the applicant considered the proposed works were essential in order to address a major shortcoming of the existing asset and to ensure that Alban Gate could continue to operate as a Grade A office building in the heart of the City of London. He added that these proposals struck the right balance of respecting the embodied carbon intrinsic to the buildings, whilst creating the changes needed to ensure ongoing relevance and appeal to the ever-evolving occupational market.

Mr Draper welcomed the recommendation by Officers and asked Members to support the proposals.

The Chairman asked Members if they had any questions of the supporter and applicant.

Members commented that some of the steps would be removed but some would remain and raised concern about the accessibility issue of steps having to be used in order to access the escalators. Mr Alastair Paterson from TP Bennett architects stated that the applicant was not changing the current situation and that an extremely long ramp would be needed to make the escalators accessible.

In response to Members' questions about whether the escalator could come down to street level, or a platform lift be installed on the steps to help people access the escalator, Mr Patterson stated there were no proposals to replace the escalator or install a platform lift. He stated that there was a lift on Wood Street south which could take people from ground to podium level.

A Member asked if the applicant had considered the proposal from the objector and the applicants stated they had not been briefed on the suggestion.

A Member commented that all the retail units along the high walk had been vacant for some time and asked if this was a post-pandemic problem or if there was an issue with a lack of passing trade. The applicants stated that retail agents had been engaged in marketing the asset throughout the period. A number of businesses had failed during the pandemic and there was a lack of passing trade with the building not being in active use day-to-day. Occupiers had struggled to see the opportunity to operate a viable business in that location, partly due to the quantum of retail space there versus the way the building was now occupied with certain occupiers employing hybrid practices. Under the proposals, the intention was to try and right size the retail provision

to provide a single space within the podium area, providing positive amenity for the building, nearby residents and other users of the space.

In response to a Member's question, Jeremy Randall from Gerald Eve stated that a previous iteration of the scheme had been presented to the City of London's Access Group. They provided detailed comments and the revised application responded to many of the comments that were received.

A Member raised concern about the large gap where the building joined the high walk and asked if the applicant, when undertaking the refurbishment, could ensure any large gaps between the building and the railing on the high walk were plugged. Mr Randall stated the applicant would need to discuss this with Officers as it would be an amendment to the proposal and the applicant would need to ensure this was acceptable to Officers.

In response to a Member's question about escalator reliability and servicing, the applicants stated that the leasing history of the building meant that until June 2023, the escalators and the maintenance and repairing obligations of those escalators sat with the maintenance of the building. The tenant was not in physical occupation of the building day-to-day and the building was sublet to a number of other occupiers. Since June 2023, direct responsibility for the day-to-day property and facilities management of the building had been taken back by the applicant and all the escalators were put back into a state of operation. The reason for the delay in getting to that point was a long lead in time for ordering certain components. Members were informed that one escalator had recently suffered a failed part and that part was on order with an expected two to three-week lead in time so it was expected that this would be in operation again by the end of May 2024.

Members were informed that a key part of the proposal was to seek to establish the podium level as the dominant reception space for the building and so having reliable continuous access up to that podium was of fundamental importance to the applicant. A robust management strategy had been put in place to ensure that the escalators remained operational and any faults or issues were quickly addressed.

The Chairman suggested that the Sub-Committee now move to any questions that they might have of Officers at this stage.

The Chairman asked Officers how well Officers considered the reliability and maintenance of the escalators was secured within the conditions put forward. An Officer stated that, at present there were no conditions to cover the escalator maintenance and operation as the actual operation of the escalators was not included within the application and no works to the escalators were proposed as part of the application. As there were only changes to the escalator surrounds proposed, it was not considered reasonable to condition this. Officers had discussed with the applicant the operation of the escalators and the applicant had provided details of the maintenance arrangements and the maintenance plan.

In response to Members' questions, the Chairman stated that there should be clarity on who was responsible and who could be contacted if the escalators were not in operation. An Officer stated that it would be unreasonable to put a condition on the maintenance of the escalators as conditions could only relate to the proposal but Officers could include in the conditions a requirement for contact details and a phone number to be provided.

A Member asked if the objector's suggestion that there should be a condition that the applicant would provide step-free access to Barber-Surgeons' Gardens, was reasonable. An Officer stated that at present, this was not within the scope of the application. Officers had discussed this access point with the applicant who had considered it. However, in order to carry out some of those works that were suggested, part of the area that would be required to undertake those works was outside of the application site. It was therefore not within the scope of the application and was not considered reasonable and proportionate to request such an access on an application of this scale.

A Member stated that in order to achieve an accessible city, partnership with developers was required. She asked if the maintenance of the escalators could be included in the Section 106 agreement. Officers stated that they would continue discussions with the applicant but it would be unreasonable to impose such an obligation as the applicant was not replacing the escalators.

Seeing no further questions, the Chairman asked that Members now move to debate the application.

A Member spoke in favour of the application and stated the proposal would be an enhancement.

A Member stated she was supportive of the application and hoped developers would consider the discussion in relation to developers going beyond what they had agreed to.

Having fully debated the application, the Committee proceeded to vote on the recommendation before them.

Votes were cast as follows: IN FAVOUR – 10
OPPOSED – 0
There were no abstentions.

The recommendations were therefore carried.

[Luis Tilleria, who had not been present for the whole item, did not vote.]

RESOLVED: -

(1) That the Planning and Development Director be authorised to issue a decision notice granting planning permission for the above proposal in accordance with the details set out in the attached schedule as amended by the addendum, subject to:

(a) Planning obligations and other agreements being entered into under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 in respect of those matters set out in the report, and the decision notice not to be issued until the Section 106 obligations have been executed.

5. *** VALID PLANNING APPLICATIONS RECEIVED BY THE ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT**

The Sub-Committee received a report of the Chief Planning Officer and Development Director detailing development applications received by the Department of the Environment since the report to the last meeting.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

6. ***DELEGATED DECISIONS OF THE CHIEF PLANNING OFFICER AND DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR**

The Sub-Committee received a report of the Chief Planning Officer and Development Director detailing development and advertisement applications determined by the Chief Planning Officer and Development Director or those so authorised under their delegated powers since the report to the last meeting.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

7. **QUESTIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE SUB-COMMITTEE**

There were no questions.

8. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT**

There were no additional, urgent items of business for consideration.

The meeting ended at 11.45 am

Chairman

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