

LONDON REVIEW PANEL

Report of London Review Panel meeting Church Street Triangle, Westminster

Thursday 5th November 2020
Review held remotely.

London Review Panel



MDA
MDA (Chair)
MDA

Attendees



Westminster City Council
Westminster City Council

Jan Kattein Architects
Jan Kattein Architects
Jan Kattein Architects

GLA Regeneration
GLA Regeneration (Panel Manager)

Apologies / report copied to

Report copied to

Jules Pipe	Deputy Mayor for Planning, Regeneration and Skills
Philip Graham	GLA
Patrick Dubeck	GLA

Confidentiality

Please note that while schemes not yet in the public domain, for example at a pre-application stage, will be treated as confidential, as a public organisation the GLA 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.

Project location

Church Street Triangle, City of Westminster, London, NW8 8ET

Presenting team



Westminster City Council (Economic Development)
Jan Kattein Architects
Jan Kattein Architects

Westminster City Council introduction

Westminster City Council gave an overview of the context within which this project sits. The project is equally funded by GLA Good Growth Fund and Westminster CIL and sits in the heart of a diverse community where this project has the potential to make a significant positive impact. Church Street and the surrounding area are undergoing large scale regeneration. This project will act as a statement of intent on these future regeneration initiatives, using small scale interventions to test and trial ideas. The team have ambitions for using this scheme to bring the community together to boost the local economy, local skills and address antisocial behaviour. Supporting small local businesses is the focus of this project with a view to linking up with the creative sector industries already established in the area.

The project brings together disparate existing spaces including a vacant public toilet block and ground floor retail units, both of which face onto a triangular public space. There is an ambition to bring these vacant units back into use as quickly as possible for the benefit of the local community and local businesses. The objective is to make this space a clear and cohesive part of the street and neighbourhood, improving perceptions of the area for locals and visitors. It has been important to communicate the intentions for this site to the community and the team have aimed to achieve a high standard of design that is contextual.

The site sits at a prominent crossroad, in the heart of Church Street where the local street market meets the traditional antiques quarter. Potential operators of the spaces have been engaged to feed into the design and brief development. Designs are to be concluded by January and competitive tenders sought in February. The operator will commit to affordable rents to deliver on the social value objectives and this will be included in the services contract within the lease. The operator will be selected to achieve the key socioeconomic objectives which balance social and commercial requirements.

Jan Kattein Architects presentation

The design team presented the proposals including design development, public engagement and the anticipated phasing. The team identified the triangular site as an underutilised asset adjacent to a very busy and diverse street market. The site is well placed within the established community in an area planned for significant regeneration. The current site consists of boarded up retail units used for storage for market traders. The existing public toilets are a mock Tudor style and are well liked by the community but were too large and

expensive to operate. Through public consultation there were interdependencies evident between the existing businesses and the market. Consultation responses included a desire for more events, activation in the public realm with opportunities for businesses to spill onto the street and market trader support.

Phase 01 includes reactivating three vacant units including a large unit requiring subdivision, the small No.62 unit and the public toilets. The proposals aim to provide a testbed to help grow small and emerging businesses with spaces for training, workshops, studios and shopfronts. Three operators have provided feedback to help shape the proposed uses and layouts within the spaces. These have developed into the current layout option for an internal arcade surrounding a community café. The public toilets will be remodelled to become a single café with three toilets retained for public access and managed by the café operator.

Feedback from Phase 01 public consultation included the need for more flexible community space for local groups. There was also feedback that the proposed cafés in the retail and the toilet block would create competition between themselves and the existing offer. The design team would like the panel to advise on how best to balance the needs for flexibility with proposed uses in the layouts so that they cater to the specific needs of the community.

Phase 02 focuses on the public realm which sits between the retail units and the street market. Opportunities for play with a focus on young people are also a key ambition as are opportunities for the space to curate community events. The proposals seek to better connect this space with the market which currently turns its back on it. The current strategy is to expand and spill out from the retail units and toilet block into the triangle. Two options are being developed:

Option 1 – to cluster islands and pockets inhabited by surrounding businesses, with an area for play, an area for greenery and an area for events.

Option 2 – one urban thread with linking structures and temporary furniture that retains the landmark paving slabs that the community would like kept.

London Review Panel's Views

Summary

The panel believe this project has significant potential to support and grow the businesses and skills of this diverse and established community. These proposals are starting to provide a framework for this support. The panel encourage the team to more clearly state the core objectives for this project and suggest that these should include how these publicly funded proposals can best offer support where it is most needed. This will provide the team with a useful guide to refer to as the designs develop and ensure that decisions are taken that help achieve these key objectives.

The panel agree that a more specific brief is required to move beyond current plans which are attempting to be all things to all people. Each space and the public realm should play a distinct and complementary role. The panel encourage the client and design team to overlay and connect the programme of individual spaces, shared facilities, classes and events they anticipate for this project to ensure they are mutually beneficial. Key to the success of this scheme will be establishing the right mix of uses for local people and their requirements. There was broad consensus that the café provision in the central space within the multi-unit undermined the ability to have shared equipment for use by leasees and for the provision of community workshops.

The panel recommend that the team explore the relationship with the future masterplan, more clearly demonstrating how this scheme will inform the emerging context. The panel would suggest more exploration of the designs in the public realm which can integrate with a bolder market reconfiguration and address anti-social behaviour through a proactive and inclusive design. Key to the success of the public realm will be its adaptability and the team are encouraged to develop designs that can respond to changes in use.

Approach to Engagement

- The panel would recommend that the team continue to reach out to the local business associations and community groups to inform their brief's spatial requirements.
- The panel suggest further studies into local skills and enterprises would highlight where there is a need for this support and these facilities. This would inform how the team's brief can be better tailored to local need and therefore be more impactful for the community.
- The panel advise a continuing dialogue with the market traders to help shape the public realm proposals and inform the strategies for access, waste and cleaning. It would also provide a forum to promote a mutually beneficial relationship between this project, market traders and local businesses by reimagining the existing market's orientation and interaction with the wider environment.

Clarifying the Core Objectives in the Brief

- The panel agree that this is an interesting stage in the process to draw in the focus and ensure the proposals reflect agreed key objectives. The panel

recommend the team more clearly state who the intended beneficiaries of this project are and what the desired outcomes should be. Westminster should take stock and ensure that corporate objectives for business support are enabled by design proposals as they develop.

- The panel suggest that a clear objective is to support and develop local skills and businesses and this could be targeted where the need and potential is the greatest. The panel suggested that the client and design team take stock of the prominent haberdashery businesses and explore community skills and aspirations to inform the objectives. The panel would suggest the team demonstrate how you can take these baseline skills and grow them to become a professional offer through these proposals. This could include showing the shared facilities, training events, workspaces with specific equipment (e.g. sewing machines) and a programme of classes to run alongside this to support these developing skills. In this way the project can be a community-based 'college' for local market businesses and skills, where you can go from kitchen table, to training, to workshop, to shopfront.
- The panel agree that the layouts need to be more specific with regard to the public facing role of the proposals and the private commercial spaces. Clarify which parts of the proposals are intended as a community offer and when this offer is available throughout the day, week etc. This would avoid the shutters coming down and the spaces turning inwards, resulting in a disconnection between the community, passers-by and the users of the facilities.

The Project as a Testbed

- The panel agree that this project offers a great opportunity to test ideas around skills training, shared workshops and the commercial operations that are needed to support these uses. The panel believe it is not clear from the proposals which aspects of the scheme are intended as part of this testing and would recommend the team highlight where they anticipate the innovation within this project will be explored.
- The panel would advise the team to explore whether the testing is for only this site and its uses, layouts and operational strategies or if it is to inform the wider emerging masterplan. The panel believe the early stage of this project lends itself to live action research that could be invaluable to future developments affecting this community and this opportunity should be seized upon.
- The panel suggest that if this project is about testing support for existing businesses and local skills then a clearer connection of the links between the existing skills and businesses and how this scheme can help them grow could be shown in the proposals.
- The panel note the opportunity for an ecosystem of support within the proposals with a range of specific uses complimenting each other. The panel would recommend the team clearly define the spatial location and needs for these uses

by showing, for example, which space is the workshop, which is the show room, which are private and public elements and where they overlap. The team are unlikely to get this right the first time and trial and error will be needed to find the right balance of uses and programme. This is an appropriate approach for a project that uses testing as a design methodology and the team should be confident in proposing the initial composition.

Specificity in the Layouts

- The panel agree with the design team that the current layout is too generic and by becoming something for everything, it risks becoming something for nothing. The team have presented a wide spectrum of anticipated uses and the panel advise that a more contextual and specific programme of spaces that cater to the needs and demands of the local community would be a more convincing and truly useful proposal from which to test the proposals. The panel would advise the team to show the specific potential uses in the layouts, demonstrating the tailored offer to the local context rather than a potentially flexible use across all these spaces. The panel encourage the team to avoid replicating the same flexible use approach across all three plots. By defining them more with specific uses the scheme can still provide flexibility without duplicating a non-specific series of spaces. These distinct spaces would complement each other, with a café in the pavilion-like toilet block, workshops/studios with a shared facility in the larger unit and a shopfront for showcasing the studios and event space in No.62.
- The panel believe the internal arcade layout was intriguing and would encourage this developed further as the layouts evolve.
- The panel agree that the central space within the multi-unit should be reviewed with it potentially more workspace orientated. This would also address the concern regarding the oversupply of café uses proposed near each other. The panel recommend that if the team proposed the central space within the larger unit is to be a flexible space for community use then the team should be clear about this intention and demonstrate understanding of the furniture layouts, storage and associated management model and costs. However, if this central space is seen as an outlet space for the micro businesses in the multi-unit for local makers, the team should illustrate how this could be managed by the operator of this space.
- The panel agree that the brief for this multi-unit space needs developing and now would be a good moment to cross check public engagement and operator feedback, with WCC innovative business support programme, to ensure the space is used to best effect in supporting aspirations and operational issues. The panel advise that operators for the multi-unit space should be brought on board in time to inform this detailed design and specification.
- The panel suggest the retail uses at the front of the layouts could become a public room used for activities and groups such as yoga and provide a more defined and visible public offer. This would in turn allow for more generous

workspace behind this which is more private but can be accessible to public during events such as open studios.

- South Kilburn Studios were suggested as a good example of a shared central space that provides a supporting offer.

Opportunities in the Public Realm

- The panel note the fantastic energy on the street in this community and this project will play a key role in unlocking the potential of this place. There is an exciting life to the market, and by creating spaces for events this project can complement the weekly cycle and programme of activity.
- The panel agree that the flexibility of the space is paramount to its success and the proposed ribbon seating proposals have the potential to undermine the ability of the space to adapt. The panel advise that the public spaces should be developed to support existing and potential future uses.
- The panel advise that there is an opportunity to address anti-social behaviour in the public realm. The design team should further explore and demonstrate the options of accommodating and inviting groups beyond, but potentially including, those involved in anti-social behaviour to crowd it out, rather than creating a sterile space as a response.
- The panel suggest the team explore how a bolder reordering of the market layout could maximise connections with the adjacent businesses and public realm such as by making the market back-to-back. The panel would recommend the team consider where the ancillary support space is for the market in any reconfiguration and public realm designs including assessments of what is required (storage, waste, cleaning etc.).

Next Steps

The Panel would welcome the opportunity to further comment on this exciting and aspirational scheme and suggest a further session in January 2021 to review the how the project has developed in response to these recommendations.