

3 March 2010

Dear Gillian

151-157 City Road – Planning application 2010/2759

The Hackney Society does not object to the principle of the proposed new hotel on City Road but does have concern with regard to the detail of the scheme.

Form

The site faces the Moorfields Conservation Area in neighbouring Islington and is therefore sensitive. Any new proposal of this scale has a significant effect and so must be considered carefully.

We consider that the proposed buildings height, scale, form and massing appear well considered and the slice to the roof provides a balanced relationship with the equally tall Farrell building (now on site) on the corner of Britannia Walk and City Road.

Façades including the sliced roof.

Squire and Partners (the architects) concept of a sculptural cloak, which wraps the building is interesting and the detail at ground level of the cloak being raised to reveal the internal space is considered a necessary and positive architectural device.

In order for the form of the building to be understood as a three-dimensional object, rather than a series of façades abutted, the Hackney Society consider that the sliced roof façade should benefit from the same aesthetic treatment as the vertical façades. Viewed from the north and from the adjacent tall building this façade will be of great significance. The Hackney Society would question how well the proposed photovoltaics will work on a roof that is north facing. How much electricity will they generate? So while a positive gesture towards sustainability we feel that it undermines the aesthetic quality of the building producing an obtrusive fourth façade.

Also, the proposed building relies almost completely upon the concept of the façade acting to produce an optical illusion created by layering and depth and so the buildings potential success or failure relies upon how successfully this is done. The Hackney Society believes that the following details are critical to the success of the proposed building:

- Quality of detailed design and architectural quality of the building envelope
- Material selection, fritting and etching methods
- Sectional depth of the façade. Given the scale of the building it may need a significant depth to create the three-dimensional effect proposed.

Indeed the proposal could prove to be a very interesting if it is executed well, but could equally be a failure if the wrong cladding materials are adopted, or if the developer cannot afford the cost of the proposed cladding.

We would like to see a condition attached to the planning permission being that a 1:1 sample of the façade before full planning permission is given. A 1:1 sample of a large-scale constructed using the proposed materials and methods would be essential to the application. The proposed façade can only reasonably be assessed in this way.

Conclusion

Overall, the Hackney Society think 151-157 City Road is an exciting project with the façade treatment and the changing light show, which will be evident once users move around the building. If done properly with glass the building could deliver an exciting elevation to the street from all directions. However, given the orthogonal shape of the building, which stems from the site footprint, the roof ought to be treated as a façade and more consideration should be given to its appearance, as it is visible from the north and will impact greatly on Hackney.