

28 April 2010

**Planning application: 2010/0223
Kick Start Site 5 (former Horston and Sherwood, Woodberry Down Estate)**

To date the Hackney Society has made no general comments about the regeneration of the Woodberry Down Estate. Overall, we feel the case for demolition and comprehensive redevelopment has not been adequately justified in both economic and sustainability terms. The planned demolition seems even more imprudent in such a depressed and uncertain financial climate. We are concerned that this financial uncertainty will impact on the quality of proposed schemes – reducing developers' willingness to invest in good quality design to provide exemplar housing that raises the standard of social, key worker and private provision.

Woodberry Down, one of the largest post-war London County Council estates, was conceived in 1936. Over the years it has proved popular with many tenants. The site is bounded by Green Lanes, the New River and the East and West Reservoir – providing the area with a number of natural amenities. Much of the housing on the Estate is solidly built with double-aspect flats – generously proportioned and orientated north-south to give east-west light, thus maximising natural daylight and shielding tenants from the noise of the Seven Sisters Road. Overall, the proposed scheme crudely sets out to only increase density in order to meet housing targets with no aspirations to good design and future standards.

The Hackney Society would like to make the following comments about the proposed scheme by Hawkins/Brown Architects:

Scale and massing

The massing is clunky and uninspiring, although we like the ambition of the double-height at ground level in Block 1 and 2, we feel that Block 3 needs to be treated in the same way.

Orientation and layout

Fifty-four percent of the proposed housing is single aspect with 8% single aspect north-facing. The Hackney Society feels that this is inadequate and avoidable. We would like to see more units with double aspects and better orientation for natural daylight. We understand the architects' desire to orientate the scheme with views over Haringey towards the north, but this does not afford the best natural daylight. We are also unhappy about the 'mews', which we believe is a deeply problematic public space that needs to be resolved due the security issues that it creates. The 'mews' has no passive surveillance from other residents – a fundamental consideration if this space is to feel safe and welcoming rather than a hostile and intimidating space. We would like to see the architect address this issue by introducing flats and/or maisonettes on the ground floor that address

the mews/street. At present the plans only propose one or two flats at ground level, for a disabled or elderly tenant. This is unacceptable and very isolating for those occupants. The mews should be akin to precedent image 5 used in *point 7.7 The Mews of the Design and Access Statement*.

The entrances to the blocks are small and inadequate. There is very limited space for occupants to informally meet with neighbours. The corridors are long and narrow, anonymous and ultimately intimidating. We would like to see generously proportioned circulation spaces with lobbies and manned-concierges.

We feel that the placement of the refuse bins and the plant at the front of the scheme has a negative impact – creating blank walls and dead spaces. We also feel that the proposed Business Development and Training Centre situated on the ground floor in Block 1 and 2 will not necessarily create the desired ‘active frontage’. In order to create a sense of place there also needs to be bold and visible main entrances for residents as well as business centre users on Seven Sisters Road and the mews. The colonnade needs to be used by residents otherwise the frontage will only be active for a limited number of hours during the day. The underground parking is also problematic. We feel it needs to be made more permeable and visible from the street. We also do not like the exit/entrance to the underground parking surfacing onto the mews.

Dimensions of flats

We are pleased that the socially rented flats meet the Parker Morris standard plus 10%, but we are dismayed by the smaller dimensions of the ‘key worker’ and ‘private’ housing. Some of the flats are for up to 5, 6 and 7 people. In these cases the kitchen/dining/living areas are inadequate. The redevelopment of this estate offers an opportunity to design better homes with improved living conditions for all kinds of occupiers.

Materials

We are happy with the choice of materials.

Conclusion

The Woodberry Down Estate was built at a time of optimism, when the forces of architecture and social welfare joined hands to give the best to the people of Hackney. Overall, the Hackney Society believes that the proposed designs by Hawkins/Brown lack both ambition and optimism – in part due to the developers’ requirements.

For the last 15 years there have been claims that the redevelopment of Woodberry Down is Europe’s largest regeneration project. Why can’t the design of this new estate be an exemplar project that offers a housing model that exceeds European standards and places this regeneration project at the forefront of European best practice?

Hawkins/Brown is an architectural practice with a good reputation. The Hackney Society would like to see Berkeley Homes invest more in this scheme and put faith in their architects to deliver a mixed-use development that is indeed an improvement on what preceded it.

As they currently stand, the proposals do not offer sufficient improvement to the borough's housing stock, nor to the physical environment of Woodberry Down, to offset the environmental and social price we would pay for wholesale demolition and redevelopment of the estate.