

Tesco Stores Limited, 55 Morning Lane – Planning application 2008/3039

Overall, while the Hackney Society does not object to the principle of the proposed new Tesco Store and its associated mix-used development, and the demolition of proposed buildings fronting Mare Street, we do feel strongly that the proposed scale and massing of the development is inappropriate, and severely compromises the character and appearance of the Clapton Square Conservation Area, and the setting of St Augustine's Tower (listed Grade I), 354 Mare Street – the Old Town Hall (listed Grade II), and the historic St John-at Hackney Churchyard and Gardens. The Hackney Society does not feel satisfied that the proposed designs for the new development are of high enough quality for such a landmark and historic site.

St Augustine's Tower

St Augustine's Tower is Hackney's oldest surviving building and it is also something of an icon of the modern London borough, appearing, for example, in the official coat-of-arms and as a mast-head for the Hackney Gazette. The tower is all that remains of the old medieval parish church of St Augustine's, the majority of which was demolished in 1798 when the new church of St John-at-Hackney was built. The tower was originally retained as a separate bell-tower because the new church didn't have a bell-tower until 1814 (and it wasn't until 1854 that the bells from St Augustine's were finally transferred to St John's). Unusually, the tower was situated at the south-west corner of the medieval church, which used to extend eastwards over what is now the grass of the churchyard.

Founded in the 12th century as the population of the village of Hackney grew more numerous and wealthy, new parts were probably added to the church between the 13th and the 15th centuries as wealthy residents who had made money in London made bequests to their parish church in their wills. Old engravings and paintings illustrate a late medieval church with windows of the Perpendicular style, most of which seem to date to the late 15th or early 16th centuries. This is almost certainly the work of the well-connected rector Christopher Urswick and the royal accountant Sir John Heron.

Since 1990 St Augustine's Tower has been looked after by Hackney Historic Buildings Trust, who in 2005-6 secured funding for its most recent restoration. This restoration has made the Tower ready for public access by weather proofing the openings, installing electricity, repairing the stairs and fitting an electric winding mechanism to help preserve the rare 17th-century clock. Standing 25.8 metres high St Augustine's Tower is a reminder of the ancient village of Hackney and is one of London's few surviving Medieval buildings.

St John-at-Hackney Churchyard is a historic open space that gives residents much-needed sanctuary from the bustling and congested shopping areas of Mare Street and the Narroway.

Impact on the conservation area and listed buildings

Paragraph 4.14 of PPG 15 states:

'Section 72 of the Act requires that special attention shall be paid in the exercise of planning functions to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area. This requirement extends to all powers under the Planning Acts, not only

those which relate directly to historic buildings. The desirability of preserving or enhancing the area should also, in the Secretary of State's view, be a material consideration in the planning authority's handling of development proposals which are outside the conservation area but would affect its setting, or views into or out of the area.'

The Clapton Square Conservation Area Appraisal published by Hackney Council (October 2007) states:

'Clapton Square Conservation Area is a complex architectural entity. It contains many important buildings both in terms of age and aesthetics. As the ancient village centre of Hackney there is little uniformity of scale and composition. Buildings dating from the medieval period to the 21st century exist in close proximity and almost a third of the area is green public space. It is vital that all new development in the Conservation Area is sympathetic to the existing low-rise nature of the area and respects the important views into the open spaces. New development should be sympathetic to the scale and character of the area and should reflect the simple detailing and proportions of existing buildings. Extensions and new buildings should be from two-three storeys and building heights should relate closely to the scale of their neighbours.'

Comments

The Hackney Society considers the proposals will have an adverse effect on the setting of the Clapton Square Conservation Area in respect to views to the south from the open space of St John-at-Hackney Churchyard, the Narrowway and St Augustine's Tower. According to PPG 15, views out of conservation areas must be given due weight in assessing development proposals which fall just outside these areas.

We suggest that the northern limit of the development be kept in line with the present curtilage so that a tree screen could be maintained along the railway viaduct. This would reduce the impact of the scheme on the conservation area.

These views will be dominated by this huge development, which in part will rise to nearly 60 metres. The visual impact will be significant and will alter the character of central Hackney and the Conservation Area.

The Hackney Society would like to see better quality visual material that illustrates the impact of the development on the Conservation Area. We feel the materials provided, in the form of 'views', are inadequate and do not render the development accurately.