

Building a Better Harrow Residents Panel: Meeting 10, 11 July 2017

Attendance

Officers: Paul Nichols, Leanne Cooper, Danielle Witter

Panel members: Raj Kumar (facilitator / chair), Joanna Bowyer, Mihir Benodekar, Vishaal Shah, Yagoda Subotic, Graham Kaunders, Consolata Ndungu,

Councillors: Cllr Keith Ferry

External: Aaron English, Stephen Taylor Architects

Apologies: Daniel Thurlow, Louise Baxter, Peter Jackson, Kiran Chotalia, Manjul Shah
Daniel Lester

Presentations

Welcome & Introductions - Raj Kumar

Latest News: Paul Nichols

- Design Review Panel Launch: Monday 10 July. The Panel has been launched to ensure good standards of design in planning applications. There have been a number of attempts over the year to set up a DRP. The panel will involve a neutral group of experts to take an objective view of the quality of design of a scheme both at pre-application stage and as it goes through planning. Set up with 3 different chairs who will rotate as there are lots of schemes coming through. The launch was an opportunity to celebrate that so many people are interested in getting involved in Harrow. Lots of ideas on design themes for Harrow.
- Engagement events – two held recently, Poets' Corner and Byron Quarter. Not the first events. Some positive and negative discussions at both events and we are picking up those comments. The last Wealdstone Project was held in May. All 3 schemes moving towards planning applications. They are all going through a process of refinements and additional design work.
- The delivery programme is going into a Cabinet paper in September to trigger a procurement programme.

Q&A

- Q. In terms of the DRP what power does it have? A. The real power lies with the Local Authority and the planning committee but we will treat their comments with a lot of respect. Cllr Ferry – this is an overhaul of the planning system in Harrow. The advantage is that the planning committee members will be aware of schemes in advance, not to pass judgement but to take more informed decisions on projects, rather than first seeing a scheme on the planning committee evening – particularly the large developments. The more advice the committee can get the better.

- Q. Is there an update on Platform 7 (proposal for meanwhile use by Harrow & Wealdstone Station)? A. We will pick that up in September.
- Comment: We need to look at how to engage young people. Also on the procurement process we need stakeholders to be involved.

Poets' Corner: Aaron

- Aaron from Stephen Taylor Architects talked to the Panel members about the latest designs for the Poets' Corner scheme, showing them the latest designs which were displayed at the Poets' Corner drop-in events in early July.
- Key points:
 - 900 units
 - 365 car parking spaces
 - 2,900sqm of commercial space
 - School
 - 1.4 ha of public realm
- The masterplan follows a neighbourhood of streets model. The buildings are predominately 6 storeys high, except along Station Road where it is appropriate to go taller.
- The driving idea is to provide north-south streets creating a connection between Harrow and Wealdstone. This creates blocks which are orientated east-west and blocks which are dual aspect.
- The buildings are staggered to create a rich experience walking through the development.
- Smaller neighbourhood squares have been created which can be viewed from facades throughout the development.

Q. How can we connect the dots and think about the walk through and connecting the neighbourhood?

Aaron:

- We have based this on north-south streets to encourage movement from Station Road through the site to Harrow & Wealdstone station.
- Particular focus has been given to Station Road, with colonnades, retail and office uses, making that a more active space, along with a civic square.

Panel thoughts:

- General question and concern about wayfinding, navigation and landmarks and how you make your way through the different blocks. It isn't clear at the moment how the plan reflects key landmarks, local vistas such as the station, leisure centre etc.
- The flyover is very transit led, needs to be a more comfortable pedestrian environment for everyone.
- The retail and commercial uses need to be attractive to draw people into the destination.
- Widen the streets and introduce greenery to soften the streets adjacent to the station.
- Make the quiet route (the route through the site to Harrow & Wealdstone Station) more prominent.

Aaron:

- We are taking onboard feedback from consultations. These are questions that have come up and we have discussed in the office. It is finding a balance between something which is easy to navigate but also enjoyable to navigate.
- The stagger is important as it makes the streets more room like. There are urban markers, tall buildings and things you look for.

Q. There are blocks between the different building, what do they represent, thinking about the views and access?

Aaron:

- They are link buildings which enclose the courtyard gardens. On one side they are two storeys and on the other they are single storey. On the north where it is two storeys that will be a small house and that will face the one storey building which will be things like cycle storage. They provide frontage onto the lanes so give an active frontage and surveillance.

Comment:

- A single story link could be a bit weak against a six storey block. A cycle store in planning terms might be an active frontage but I'm not sure. I would be cautious about that. These link buildings tend to work better with a bit more weight.
- I have a reservation about not having a strong physical link back to the High Street. One of the problems along this stretch is that it just dribbles out and doesn't have much of a purpose at the moment.
- It looks like there will be some dark corners.

Aaron:

- We are ensuring this will be a nice place by making nice buildings and producing a design code. Through the development of Phase One we are picking up elements which we think are important for creating a nice place. Streets which are very active with entrances and urban gestures with cut outs on the ends and urban facades..
- The majority of the masterplan is 6 storeys. It steps down at the edges to 3 storeys on the southern boundary and 3 and 4 storeys on the western boundary. On Station Road which is busier and able to accommodate more height it goes up to 8 storeys, with the exception of the building in the corner (closest to the flyover) which goes up to 14 storeys.

Comment:

- Thinking about the height walking along there would it make you feel like you want to walk through that neighbourhood?
- It depends on how it is delivered. You go to central London and all you see is tall buildings but you don't feel imposed by them because they slot into the existing environment.
- A lot will depend on the ground floor, how you scale it out and what the detail is.
- The acoustics along that road are a concern and with the materials of brick and masonry it could be loud to walk along there.
- The development should face a bit more the Milton Road/Poets Way side as that is a quiet pedestrian route to Harrow Town Centre. Maybe we need to think more about where people actually walk right now and work a bit more with that. If I was walking from Harrow Town Centre to the station or Wealdstone, I would swing in on the residential streets and not go over the flyover bridge.
- The 14 storey building will be a focal point for Harrow & Wealdstone station.

Raj:

- Have panel members commented on the scheme to date through the engagement process? It is important we do so and get our comments in.
- There should be a fly through. This is an important way for people to see and interact with the development.

Aaron:

- In thinking about the neighbourhood of streets, we are thinking about character, landscaping, pedestrian and cycle movement, restrictions on parking and how windows might relate to the street.
- Looking at the streets in more detail there are hierarchies:
 - Station Road and Marlborough Hill

- 2 proposed green streets through the development which are one way
 - One to the west is full access with residential parking
 - The primary pedestrian route has restricted access for service vehicles and residents only
- There is a slope across the site of about 4m which is quite important when we are doing the basement car park as you can provide the basement parking without as much cost as you only need to dig half the basement.
- We have been thinking a lot about the quality of the streets. We visited a number of 19 century housing estates and contemporary ones and we were thinking about what makes this an enjoyable place in terms of the dimension of the street and technical aspects such as the amount of daylight into the streets and key targets which we are meeting.
- We have streets and other types of different spaces. We are considering this as a network of spaces. We have the streets, neighbourhood squares, courtyard gardens, civic space and a green edge to the west.
- The civic square is an interesting part of the masterplan, it is opposite the Mosque and it is seen as a central focus. A place where we might hold markets, where the war memorial might be moved to and there is the potential for other things.

Panel ideas on civic square:

- Making it different, not just mundane things you see at other places. Think about areas of play for children and adults without obstructing other uses - table tennis table or large board games. You could host markets, events and an open air theatre. It should have lots of planting and vertical planting to tie it into the buildings and soften them. An element of shared surface on Station Road.
- The Mosque looks unfinished and the square will have to work harder to improve the quality of the space which is why green on the balconies and vertical planting might be a way of setting it.
- The material of the civic square floor should be welcoming so the colour is important.
- How much space is in that area? It has to be useful but not too much space. It needs to be a good quality market. If it is food – artisan and homemade. How to use the space beside a market? It has to be somewhere people can come to. A free music event for up and coming artists.
- We need to change the face of that particular area straight away.
- Can we create a competition for local residents to come up with options for the square?
- We need someone to activate the space and ensure there are events going on there. A friends group or individual to look after it?

- The group needs to be set up before the space is constructed and becomes live. It should be part of the management strategy. It would be a big shame for the space to be constructed and sit there idle. It does need a bit of resource but that should repay itself.
- There are some examples of it in Harrow. There are individuals going and taking care of gardening and planting around Headstone Lane station because they see the benefit and are keen to be involved locally.

Aaron:

- We are providing courtyard gardens and 5,000sqm of space - the requirement is 3,000sqm. Within those will be play space for younger groups.
- For older children there will be a shared play space by the school, possibly a shared rooftop playground.
- The tenure mix: Phase One – PRS with discount market rent and Phase Two – a mix of private sale, affordable, intermediate and custom built.
- We are trying hard to retain as many trees as possible on the site. We will be planting new trees along Station Road and within the new courtyards.
- On the commercial space there are different types. The current thinking is that there will be some office space in the taller building and potentially a gym and either shops or retail elsewhere. This is an open discussion at the moment and we are designing in the flexibility for these uses.
- There has been much talk in the office about Mansion blocks and the character of Metroland. It is a typology which is quite familiar and detailed and we want to capture all of the best bits in the proposals.

Comments:

- To get the quality you want in the scheme, you need to get the right brick and contractor as the devil will be in the detail.
- The Panel should be involved around the decision on who manages the properties.

AOB

- **Date of the next meeting: Tuesday 19 September 2017**