

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

UPDATE REPORT, DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE. 14th NOVEMBER 2019

| Agenda item no | Reference no | Location | Proposal / Title |
|----------------|---|---|--|
| 5.1 | PA/19/00008 (FPP) and PA/19/00009 (LBC) | The Bell Foundry, 32-34 Whitechapel Road, 2 Fieldgate Street and land to the rear, London, E1 1EW | Part retention of B2 land use (foundry) and internal alterations and refurbishment of listed building to provide new workshops/workspaces (B1 land use) and cafe (A3 land use) at ground floor. External alterations to listed building to raise roof of hayloft building and create new link building. Demolition of unlisted 1980s building and wall to the rear. Erection of building along Plumbers Row and Fieldgate Street with hotel (C1 use) with ancillary members and guest uses in part 5, 6 and 7 storeys with x2 levels of basement, with restaurant/bar (A3/4 uses) at ground and mezzanine level and additional workspace (B1 use) on ground and first floors. Roof plant, pool, photovoltaics, waste storage, cycle parking, public realm improvements and associated works. |

1.0 CORRECTIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS

- 1.1. The recommendation should state 'Grant planning permission and listed building consent subject to conditions and s106'
- 1.2. Within the key dates listed on the first page, the first consultation start date is incorrect. This should be 23/01/2019 rather than 23/10/2019.
- 1.3. Paragraphs 7.2 and 7.5 refer to the hotel providing 108 rooms. This is incorrect as the scheme proposes 103 hotel rooms. This change was required due to the site needing to be serviced on-site, as such necessary changes to the site layout and cores of buildings means that 5 rooms were omitted. As such, where the committee report references an uplift in hotel rooms, see Executive Summary and paras 7.2, 7.6, 7.7 and 7.124, this uplift is 69 rooms not 74.
- 1.4. The onsite servicing requirements also required the following floorspace changes from the originally submitted scheme:

| Use | GIA (sqm) | GEA (sqm) |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Restaurant/Bar (A3/A4) | 1,227 (1,249) | 1,370 (1,415) |
| Hotel including ancillary (C1) | 4,539 (4,584) | 4,845 (4,900) |
| Workspace (B1) | 374 (375) | 516 (515) |
| TOTAL | 6,140 (6,208) | 6,731 (6,830) |

N.B. floorspace figures for uses in the Old Foundry will remain the same.

- 1.5. Paragraph 7.225 incorrectly stated that 8 cycle spaces would be provided to serve the B class uses; this is incorrect and should state 10.
- 1.6. Paragraph also incorrectly states various cycle parking figures:
 1. '*...4 short stay spaces are proposed by the hotel and restaurant entrance (within the curtilage of the proposed development...*' should refer to 6 spaces
 2. '*...16 proposed in a store situated adjacent of the entrance to the historic building...*' should refer to 17 spaces
 3. '*..An additional 20 spaces are proposed on the pavement of Fieldgate Street in front of the historic building.*' This should refer to 22 spaces.
- 1.7. Drawing list:
 1. Bicycle parking drawings 1211, 1212 & 1213 are superseded by 0312 Rev B and 0313 Rev A which are listed correctly in the schedule and were included within the reconsultation in May. As such, 1211, 1212 and 1213 can be deleted; these were already superseded on the website.
 2. Proposed Section EE (drawing no. 2804) should be Rev A, not Rev C as currently shown in the schedule. This is a minor clerical issue; the correct plan is available online.
 3. PL_0310 and PL_1208 (proposed sixth floor plans) to be deleted as superseded by other drawings.
- 1.8. The committee report incorrectly states in paragraphs 1.2, 1.6, 7.102, and 7.116 that the 1980s extension to the foundry is curtilage listed. This is incorrect as it post-dates the 1948 cut-off date for curtilage listings. For clarity sake, officers will reiterate here that the subterranean structures are curtilage listed as these pre-date the 1948 cut-off date.
- 1.9. Paragraph 7.148 states that GLAAS '*...recommended that further pre-determination fieldwork be undertaken at the site...*' The word further should be deleted.
- 1.10. Paragraph 4.12, points 8 and 25, dismisses the relevance of the UKHBPT proposals to acquire the site. Officers consider that this is correct but would like to explain this. In principle, if harm would be caused by the loss of an existing use then whether there was interest in buying the site for that use is relevant to whether the loss of the use should be allowed. Marketing requirements for the loss of employment uses would be one example, as well as a justification for substantial harm to a designated heritage asset under para 25 of the NPPF. An offer to buy the foundry could be relevant as some harm is caused by the scheme, again, as an aspect of alternatives. However, in the present case officers understand that no offer in the normal sense, with a price proposed, was made to the previous owners of the site and as UKHBPT approached the previous owners after they had already contracted to sell, so they could not accept an offer anyway. UKHBPT's interest would have been in support of their scheme which is still vague and impossible to rely upon. There is also no basis for concluding that it could lead to a better or at least as good, outcome in the short or long term.
- 1.11. Paragraph 7.28 sets out the affordable workspace offer. Officers incorrectly noted in the report that the 80% affordable workspace will be provided at no more than 70% of market rates. This should state 30% of market rates and in line with GLA rates which are £11 to £19/sqft.

2.0 ADDITIONAL REPRESENTATIONS

- 2.1 One additional support comment from an LBTH resident was received. The key points of this were:
1. Proposals are appropriate and considerate of the listed elements of the site
 2. A small bell foundry will be retained whilst the character of the building will be restored and opened up to the public.
 3. Hotel building at the rear of the site are appropriate in scale, and will bring significant employment to the local area.
 4. Nostalgia is not a valid reason to deny a development which will bring so many benefits to the local community.
- 2.2 Six additional objection comments were received (two LBTH, one Norway, two UK and one no address). The key points from these representations were:
1. There is a viable proposal put forward by the UKHBPT together with its partner, Factum Foundation, to continue to operate a full-scale working foundry. This proposal has a credible business plan, experienced management and funding available.
 2. The proposal is speculative and the inappropriate change of use for the foundry as proposed by the developer must be rejected.
 3. There is no market evidence to demonstrate that a foundry cannot continue to operate on the Whitechapel. The continuous use as a foundry is the optimum viable use.
 4. A boutique hotel with a private members club and rooftop swimming pool should be rejected.
 5. The local population, including community groups, are overwhelmingly against this proposal.
 6. The neighbouring East London Mosque was not consulted by the developer and considers the scheme proposed to be wholly inappropriate.
 7. The reinstated foundry is tokenism. The concept of a working foundry on 12% of the original foundry site placed alongside a café is simply unworkable and with considerable health and safety risks.
 8. The scheme contradicts the Council's 'Whitechapel Vision Rejuvenation Prospectus' and the GLA's 'Thames Estuary Production Corridor'
 9. There are many other buildings suitable to be hotels in the area but not this unique site.
- 2.3 A further objection was received late on 13th November from UKHBPT. The letter reiterates previous grounds for objection to the scheme and considers:
1. There are serious concerns about the officers analysis set out in the committee report in relation to the recognition of the heritage significance of the Bell Foundry. The harm to significance, to following national planning guidance regarding the tests for justification of such harm and a misrepresentation of the public benefits that when taken together result in unsafe conclusions.
 2. Officers have failed in the report to follow the proper approach to optimum viable use of the building and failed to adequately test the optimum viable use of the site and inadequately assessed the business case that accompanies the UKHBPT scheme for the Bell Foundry.

Member Representation

- 2.4 One letter of representation was also received from Councillor Puru Miah on the morning of 14th November 2019 which is in objection to the proposal. The Objection can be summarised as follows:
1. Recommends that the matter for determination should be deferred due to a) the lack of information in the officer report and following the further objection from UKHBPT b) purdah and the upcoming general election and c) awaiting a response to an FOI request from Historic England
 2. Objects to the change of use of foundry buildings and regards this as substantial harm (as defined in the NPPF)
 3. Does not consider the benefits and justification for the hotel can be used as justification to the harm done to the foundry
 4. The proposed foundry site and foundry business is the listed building and heritage asset. The developer, Historic England and the Council recognise the conversion from a living working foundry is harmful and there is no justification for this substantial harm (and would constitute heritage vandalism) due to:
 - a) the extant permission and the fact the consented hotel could be built out anyway and not on the foundry part of the site
 - b) the foundry can and must continue as a living working foundry with new management and new investment as proposed by UKHBPT
 - c) there is no evidence that this cannot happen as there has been no marketing and refusal of offers is not evident. The Councillor considers this to be a material planning consideration
 5. Considers the planning argument put forward by officers to be flawed and this is set out in the planning statement prepared by UKHBPT planning advisors
 6. The scheme proposed by UKHBPT would deliver all the hotel jobs and highly skilled artisan and contemporary jobs/apprenticeships (as has happened in Stoke)
 7. Level of public and local support for retention of a living working foundry.
 8. The applicant should be told to submit a different planning application for the non-foundry land and sell the foundry to someone who will and can continue to run this country's oldest business for the benefit of everyone.

3.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 Officer recommendation remains that planning permission AND listed building consent should be GRANTED for the reasons set out in the main report and all conditions/obligations.