



Pre-application presentation

Reference	PF/19/00112
Site	Blackwall Yard
Ward	Blackwall & Cubitt Town
Proposal	Residential led mixed use redevelopment of the site and enhancement of Grade II listed dock to provide approx. 900 new residential units, commercial floor space and a 2FE primary school across a series of buildings ranging between 4 and 38 storeys.
Applicant	Hadley Property Group
Architect	Glen Howells Architects, Panter Hudspith, White Arkitekter & LDA (<i>Landscape</i>)
Agent	Avison Young
Case Officer	James Woolway
Key dates	Pre-application request submitted May 2019 Pre-app discussions began in June 2019 CADAP review in January 2020

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The National Planning Policy Framework and the National Planning Practice Guidance promote early engagement between developers and Local Planning Authorities at the pre-application stage, prior to submitting a planning application. The Council welcomes pre-application discussions and has a well-established process to facilitate this. In March 2019 the Council's Development and Strategic Development Committees considered a draft protocol for pre-application presentations. The protocol is now incorporated in the Committee Terms of Reference. The Council's updated Statement of Community Involvement also highlights the importance of pre-application engagement and the role of elected members and local communities in this stage of the planning process.
- 1.2 This report updates the Strategic Development Committee on progress made and issues identified in respect of pre-application discussions for the proposed redevelopment of the Blackwall Yard site.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSAL

- 2.1 Pre-application advice is being sought for the redevelopment of the site consisting of:

The delivery of approx. 900 new residential units, a variety of commercial and retail uses and 2FE primary school across four development zones comprising the following:

- Plot 1:
 - Two towers (33 and 38 storeys overall) above a large podium block with frontage to Blackwall Way
 - Retail/commercial at ground level
 - Community 'hub'
- Plot 2:
 - Part 5 and part 9 storey block accommodating affordable housing and 2FE primary school
- Plot 3:
 - 15-storey residential block
 - Commercial/retail uses at ground level
- Plot 4:
 - Part 12, part 20-storey residential block
 - Commercial uses at ground level

Proposal includes enhancement works to the Grade II listed Graving Dock, and improvements to Blackwall Way.

3. SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

- 3.1 The application site comprises of an area approx. 1.4ha in size, which at present accommodates a car-park for the adjoining Reuters Ltd building, the Grade II Listed Blackwall Yard Graving Dock, as well as various open and landscaped spaces. The site is bounded by the River Thames to the south of the site, Blackwall Way to the north, Newport Avenue to the east and Paul Julius Close to the west.
- 3.2 Immediately abutting the site to the east is the Virginia Quay residential estate, consented in the 1990s, as well as the more recently built Longitude House, a 12 storey residential building consented in 2011 and recently constructed and occupied. To the west, within the Reuters Site Allocation, is the recently built Reuters data centre which is pre-dated by the Thomas Reuters Docklands Technical Centre which is bound to the south by the River Thames. Both buildings are contemporary in design, and present as an imposing boundary to the application site.
- 3.3 The site is accessed at present via the Thomas Reuters building, with a fenced frontage to Blackwall Way at present inaccessible publically. The site lies within 3min walking distance to the East India DLR station and is in close proximity to Aspen Way, a major vehicular arterial through the Borough.

4. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

- 4.1 PA/03/01515/EX – Permitted 15/07/2005*
Redevelopment to provide six buildings of 11 to 29 storeys comprising 708 residential units (C3) and leisure (D2), non-residential institution (D1), business (B1a) and retail (A1,A2,A3) uses, new open space, access arrangements and car parking. Involves works to listed dock structure.

Application includes the submission of an Environmental Statement under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 1999.

****Consent never implemented.***

5. PUBLICITY AND ENGAGEMENT

- 5.1 The applicant has undertaken their own public consultation events which have included public consultation events, leafleting and meeting with local stakeholders
- 5.2 Earlier this year, Hadley Property Group (HPG) held its first public consultation on its proposals to regenerate the Blackwall Yard site, which is situated on the River Thames, to the south of Aspen Way and to the east of Blackwall Tunnel.
- 5.3 This involved exhibition events held over two days, with over 4,500 flyers and letters sent to the local community, adverts in the local paper and meetings with local councillors and politicians. A dedicated website was also launched, featuring a number of interactive polling questions for people to complete. This was shared widely on social media to residents within a mile of the site.
- 5.4 Prior to this phase of consultation, HPG also organised two separate drop-in sessions in November 2019 for residents of the neighbouring Virginia Quay Estate to ensure they had the opportunity to meet the project team at an early stage and ask questions about the site and our early design principles.
- 5.5 HPG will be holding a further phase of consultation on the final designs for the site which we anticipate beginning at the end of June. This next phase of consultation will be 'digitally-led', with an expanded website and a 'virtual exhibition room' created to ensure local people still have the ability to view and comment on the proposals despite the limitations of the Covid-19

pandemic. Printed flyers, letters and adverts will also be sent again to local residents, businesses and community groups to ensure they are aware and have the opportunity to meet with HPG virtually or over the phone.

5.6 A high level proposal was presented to the Council's Conservation and Design Advisory Panel (CADAP) on 13th January 2020 to test the master planning principles of the proposal. The panel's written response recognises the opportunity which the site provides, and members were broadly supportive of the fundamental principles of the scheme, while acknowledging that detailed design was still to come.

5.7 Comments from CADAP members included the following:

- In principle supportive of the proposed height
- Servicing within the development and through public realm will need to be well considered
- A design code should be considered for the development
- Plots adjacent to Virginia Quay appeared as having a negative relationship with adjoining development
- Primary accessway to the development was particularly restricted
- Graving Dock represents an opportunity to provide for a high quality amenity space if designed in a heritage led fashion
- Broadly supportive of the landscaping principles, albeit some concerns with quantum of hard standing
- Framing of the dock by the buildings seen as a significant opportunity

It is noted that a number of these points have been addressed in subsequent revisions over the past 6 months of pre-application workshops.

6. RELEVANT PLANNING POLICIES AND DOCUMENTS

6.1 The Development Plan comprises:

- The London Plan 2016 (LP)
- Managing Growth and Sharing the Benefits - Tower Hamlets Local Plan 2031 (2020)

6.2 The Emerging Development Plan comprises:

- The Draft London Plan (DLP)

On the 9th of December 2019, the Mayor published his 'intend to publish' version of the London Plan. This version of the plan responds to the Inspector's recommendations. This will now be sent to the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State can then issue a direction which requires the GLA to amend the Plan if required. The Plan cannot be published (adopted) until these points have been addressed. It is anticipated that the final Plan will be published circa March 2020

6.3 Other policy and guidance documents relevant to the proposal are:

- The National Planning Policy Framework (2019)
- National Planning Practice Guidance (updated 2019)
- BRE - Site Layout Planning for Daylight and Sunlight (2011)
- London Housing SPG (updated 2017)
- London Housing Affordable Housing and Viability SPG (2017)

- LBTH Planning Obligations SPD (2016)

7. PLANNING ISSUES

- 7.1 The following key planning issues have been identified at the pre-application stage.

Land Use

- 7.2 The application site comprises the balance of the Reuters Ltd. Site Allocation (4.10) within the Local Plan. In terms of land use, the Site Allocation is identified for housing and employment (through the intensification of existing jobs at Reuters Ltd.) and for a primary school. The closest designated town centre is the Poplar High Street Neighbourhood Centre which is approximately
- 7.3 The site allocation includes a number of components which need to be delivered in the redevelopment of the site, including a 0.4ha quantum of open space (notionally co-located with the river), a public square, and enhancements to Blackwall Way which bound the site to the north.
- 7.4 Given the scale of the scheme, a moderate collection of commercial (B1) and retail uses (A1 – A3), as well as a central community ‘hub’ building which will fulfil an as yet undefined community function.
- 7.5 The fundamental principle of a high density housing led regeneration of the site is supported by officers, and is in keeping with the aspirations of the Reuters Ltd Site Allocation. The delivery of the 2FE primary school, as designed in collaboration with LBTH education advisors, is equally supported by officers and fulfils an infrastructure requirement within the Site Allocation.
- 7.6 With regard to land use, the primary policy issue lies with the provision of retail uses outside floor space outside of a designated town centre. Whilst this would provide immediate local benefit and activity to the frontages within the Site Allocation, the effect on the vitality and viability of the Poplar High Street Neighbourhood Centre will have to be tested.

Housing

- 7.7 Local Plan policies require at least 35% affordable housing to be provided (excluding any re-provision of existing) in broad alignment with the Council’s prescribed housing mix as set out in the Local Plan. The London Plan requires the maximum reasonable amount, subject to viability, to be provided.
- 7.8 Draft London Plan standards also calls for 35% of student accommodation to be secured as affordable accommodation, as defined by London Plan and associated guidance.
- 7.9 The application seeks to provide approx. 900 units of residential accommodation across four plots within buildings ranging between 4 and 38 storeys. The provision of a high density housing scheme within the Site Allocation and Blackwall Tall Building Zone is in principle supported.
- 7.10 At present the scheme proposed a policy compliant mix of affordable housing, with notionally 35% affordable housing and a policy compliant tenure split of 70:30 proposed by the applicant.

7.11 It is noted that final housing numbers, tenure and arrangements have not yet been confirmed by the applicant to date and the above represents the stated submission intent; however the in-principle commitment to a policy compliant provision of affordable housing is welcomed and supported by officers and may benefit from the “fast track” approach set out in the London Plan Affordable Housing and Viability SPG.

Design, Heritage & Heights

7.12 Planning policy requires high-quality designed schemes that reflect local context and character and provide attractive, safe and accessible places that safeguard and where possible enhance the setting of heritage assets.

7.13 The proposed scheme has been developed through collaboration between Glen Howells Architects, Panter Hudspith, and White Arkitekter. The landscape architecture has been designed by LDA.

7.14 Part 1 of the Local Plan Tall Building policy D.DH6 sets out the criteria for assessing the appropriateness of a tall building. The policy further directs tall buildings towards the designated Tall Building zones. Outside these zones, tall building proposals will be supported provided they meet the criteria set out in Part 1 of the Tall Building policy and can demonstrate how they will:

- a) be located in areas with high levels of public transport accessibility within town centres and/or opportunity areas
- b) address deficiencies in the provision of strategic infrastructure
- c) significantly strengthen the legibility of a Major, District or Neighbourhood Centre or mark the location of a transport interchange or other location of civic or visual significance within the area, and
- d) not undermine the prominence and/or integrity of existing landmark buildings and tall building zones

7.15 The pre-application site is located within the Blackwall Tall Building Zone (TBZ), which requires all buildings to step down from New Providence Wharf which has an upper limit of approx. 43-storeys. The TBZ supporting text also requires applications to be mindful of its immediate urban context, and to descend towards the River Thames.

7.16 Height and massing remain a significant part of pre-application discussions, with the scheme as currently proposed representing the upper limits of satisfactory height. Officers are mindful of the site’s various constraints including the delivery of a significant quantum of open space, a primary school, and enhancement of the listed dock and as such have sought to strike a fine balance between townscape impacts and development feasibility.

7.17 The proposal comprises of a four development ‘plots’ (as detailed in appendices) which comprise of a mix of built form, with Plot 1 comprising a large podium block set beneath two tower blocks of 33 and 38 storeys and representing the most dominant aspect of the scheme. Glen Howells Architects lead the design of this plot.

7.18 Plot 2, immediately adjacent to existing residential buildings at Virginia Quay, is lower rise in nature and will accommodate a mix of affordable housing and the 2FE primary school. The school itself has been developed through a series of dedicated workshops with the applicant’s architect for Plot 2, Panter Hudspith, and Council education officers and design advisors.

- 7.19 The designs of the riverside Plots 3 and 4 are led by White Arkitekter, and are bound by the challenging eastern interface with Virginia Quay and the western interface with the Reuters Ltd. data-centre. Plot 3 (15-storeys) and Plot 4 (20-storeys) are both tall buildings in their own right and have undergone substantial change over the period of pre-application to ensure they remain neighbourly, distinct and of the highest possible quality given their riverside role and prominence in the locality.
- 7.20 All four plots are configured around the Grade II listed Blackwall Yard Graving Dock, the enhancement of which forms a significant part of the scheme and the broader landscaping and design strategy led by LDA. Given that members of the public benefit from no access to the site at present, the opening up of the site and celebration of the listed asset represents a significant opportunity to enhance the deep seated maritime heritage of the site.
- 7.21 The applicant, LDA and Borough conservation officers have worked together, with input from Historic England, towards developing the dock as a heritage led area of public open space which all members of the public can engage with and freely utilise. This will provide much needed public open space and engagement with the sites heritage.
- 7.22 Townscape and detailed design of all plots remain the focus of recent pre-application meetings, with officers particularly concerned with regard to the townscape impacts of the tower pair of Plot 1, as well as the architecture of Plots 3 and 4. It is noted, however, that the applicant has proactively responded to officer objections and continue to work collaboratively with officers in shaping the scheme.
- 7.23 The overall design strategy results in a collection of interrelated but distinctly different buildings designed by three highly regarded architects and knitted together by a vibrant landscape strategy prepared by LDA which represents a substantial public benefit in opening up both the site itself and those adjacent. While further refinement of the architect continues through design workshops with Borough design officers and the applicant team, it is considered that the fundamental approach towards architecture and urban design remain sound.

Primary School

- 7.24 As noted in the above sections, the scheme provides for a 2FE primary school within Plot 2. This serves to fulfil the Site Allocation infrastructure requirement, and has been developed in great detail with Borough education and design advisors and represents a potential future model for vertical schools within the Borough.
- 7.25 The school has been designed to the most contemporary British Standards and the configuration and layout has been developed in tandem with anecdotal experience of local head masters and Borough education advisors.
- 7.26 Included within the school is an upper level MUGA, which will provide much needed dedicated outdoor play provision for the school; however it is noted that its proximity to Virginia Quay is likely to give rise to amenity concerns for local residents.

Open Space & Public Realm

- 7.27 The landscaping strategy of the scheme, and its integration with Virginia Quay, represents a significant opportunity to link together a series of existing neighbourhoods and future development sites through east-west links and the opening of the Thames Path along the Reuters Ltd. data-centre which will provide direct connections to Wood Wharf and Canary Wharf more broadly.

- 7.28 A series of 'character areas' will tie the site together to create a coherent public realm strategy revolving around the Graving Dock and the public square at the head of the dock.
- 7.29 The scheme seeks to engage with Virginia Quay to create a civic space at 'Meridian Square' which will promote movement between both sites and create considerable public benefit for existing and future residents who will utilise the mix of uses proposed by the applicant at Blackwall Yard.
- 7.30 The proposal includes enhancement works to Blackwall Way (as detailed in appendices), which will be agreed with Borough highways officers and TFL as these will comprise works to the public highway outside of the red line boundary. These enhancement works will be significant in providing a barrier to Aspen Way to the north, and improving what is a particularly pedestrian-unfriendly length of public highway.
- 7.31 At present the scheme fails to deliver a large 0.4ha open space as designated within the Site Allocation; however a series of open spaces within the development serve to contribute towards this target and it is considered that the enhancement of the Graving Dock as a public space serves to contribute meaningfully towards this target.
- 7.32 Recent iterations of the scheme have fallen moderately short with regard to child play, particularly over-12s provision which is identified as being an active provision catering towards older children. It is being explored as to whether the MUGA within the proposed school can help meet this role out of hours, as over-12s provision is proving challenging to provide for elsewhere in the development to a high standard.
- 7.33 It is noted that the landscaping scheme makes careful consideration for future flood levels, and integrates raised flood defences within the public realm accordingly.

Neighbouring Amenity

- 7.34 Planning policy seeks to protect and where possible improve the amenity of surrounding neighbouring properties and provide a good standard of amenity for all future occupants of development proposals.
- 7.35 The application will be accompanied by necessary technical documents, such as daylight and sunlight assessments, noise reports and wind tunnel testing, which will be reviewed by the Council's relevant specialist teams and external resources.
- 7.36 It is noted that there will be impacts to neighbouring occupants at Virginia Quay, with particular regard for Wingfield Court, Longitude House and the occupants of John Smith Mews immediately adjacent to Plots 2 and 3.
- 7.37 While the scheme has been considerably altered since its original submission in June 2019 to address these concerns. Setback distances between residential blocks within the application site have been designed to minimize overlooking, and visual intrusion, particularly within Plot 3.
- 7.38 It is noted that officers remain concerned with regard to the proximity of Plot 4 to the Reuters building, and the likely impacts this will have on future occupants of this block in particular.

Transport and Servicing

- 7.39 Planning policies promote sustainable modes of travel and limit car parking to essential user needs. They also seek to secure safe and appropriate servicing.

- 7.40 The site benefits from a high PTAL value due to its immediate proximity to the East India DLR. As such the scheme is proposed as residentially permit free, with the exception of blue-badge bays.
- 7.41 The scheme at present proposes a series of innovative approaches towards transport, with a eHub proposed which will facilitate the hiring of various modes of transport for occupants including cargo bikes, and larger vehicles for disabled persons.
- 7.42 The scheme has an aspiration to implement alterations to Blakwall Way to include noise and air quality amelioration to Aspen Way and the creation of pedestrian focused enhancements to the carriageway and footway to facilitate improvements to the D3 bus service.
- 7.43 A high provision of cycle storage will be provided for residents, in line with aspirations of the new London Plan and the Tower Hamlets Local Plan.
- 7.44 The servicing strategy for the development involves a centralised collection system within the development, with access for servicing vehicles provided from Blackwall Way at the western edge of Plot 1. The development is proposed to be fitted with an ENVAC waste system to reduce HGV vehicle movements on site.
- 7.45 It is noted that at present the scheme proposes a partial re-provision of private employee carparking for the Reuters building adjacent as part of a commercial agreement with the respective landowners; however this is not supported by Council highways and planning officers or Transport for London officers.

Environment

- 7.46 Planning policies seek to secure a range of sustainable development outcomes including net biodiversity gains whilst not impacting on existing protected species; the implementation of efficient energy systems which seek to minimise carbon emissions and to secure effective strategies for addressing matters relating to contaminated land and sustainable urban drainage.
- 7.47 The removal of a significant portion of hardstanding, and the introduction of a series of green spaces and roofs within the development as well as soft planting and water bodies within the Graving Dock, is considered likely to have meaningful benefits towards net biodiversity gains; albeit this will offset the loss of existing soft plantings to the eastern edge of the car park as existing.
- 7.48 The inclusion of electric bike and car sharing, as well as no residential parking will serve to promote Borough sustainability goals.

Infrastructure Impact

- 7.49 The proposed development will be liable to the Council's and the Mayor of London Community Infrastructure Levies (CIL) and planning obligations to be secured under Section 106 of the T&CP Act 1990,

8. RECOMMENDATION

- 8.1 The Committee notes the contents of the report and pre-application presentation.
- 8.2 The Committee is invited to comment on the issues identified and to raise any other planning and design issues or material considerations that the developer should take into account at the pre-application stage, prior to submitting a planning application.

9. APPENDIX – IMAGES

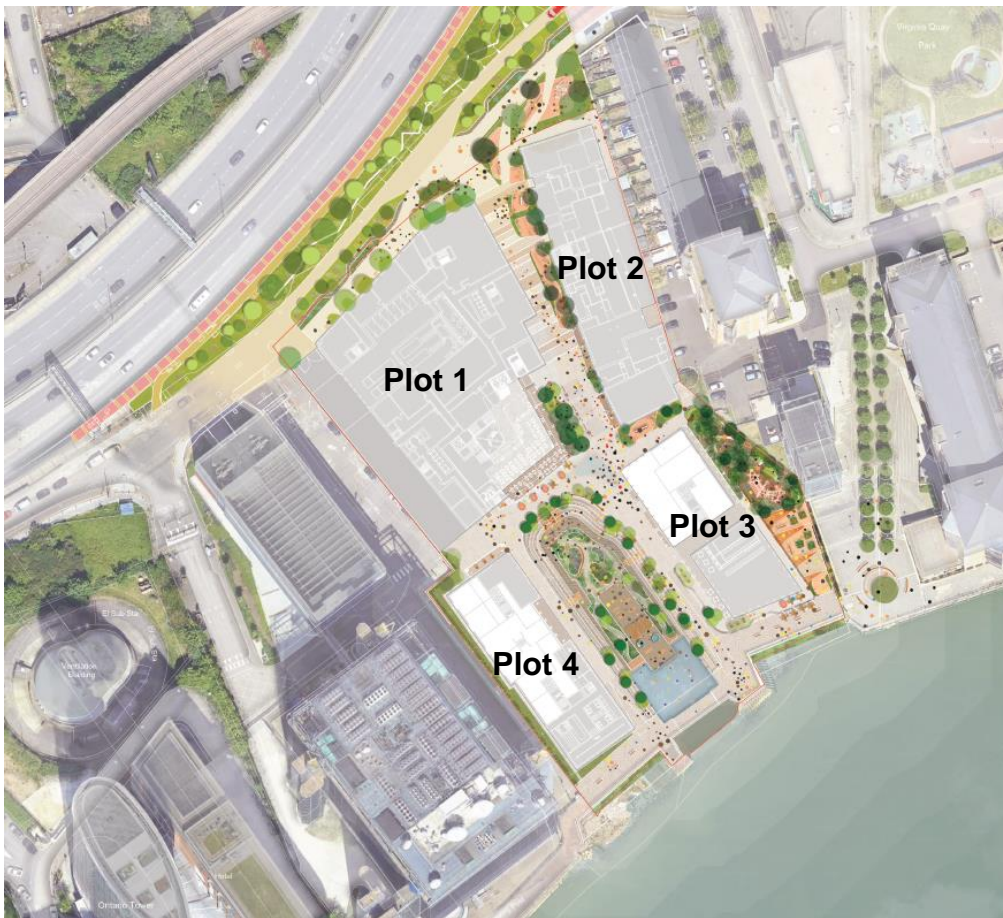


Figure 1: Landscaping Masterplan & Plots



Figure 2: Proposed Graving Dock Enhancements



Figure 3: Illustrative Drawing - Plot 4 & Virginia Quay



Figure 4: Illustrative Drawing - Graving Dock



Figure 5: Illustrative Drawing - View Towards Hub & Square



Figure 6: CGI - Plots 3 & 4 (May 2020)



Figure 7: CGI - School & Square (Plot 2) (May 2020)

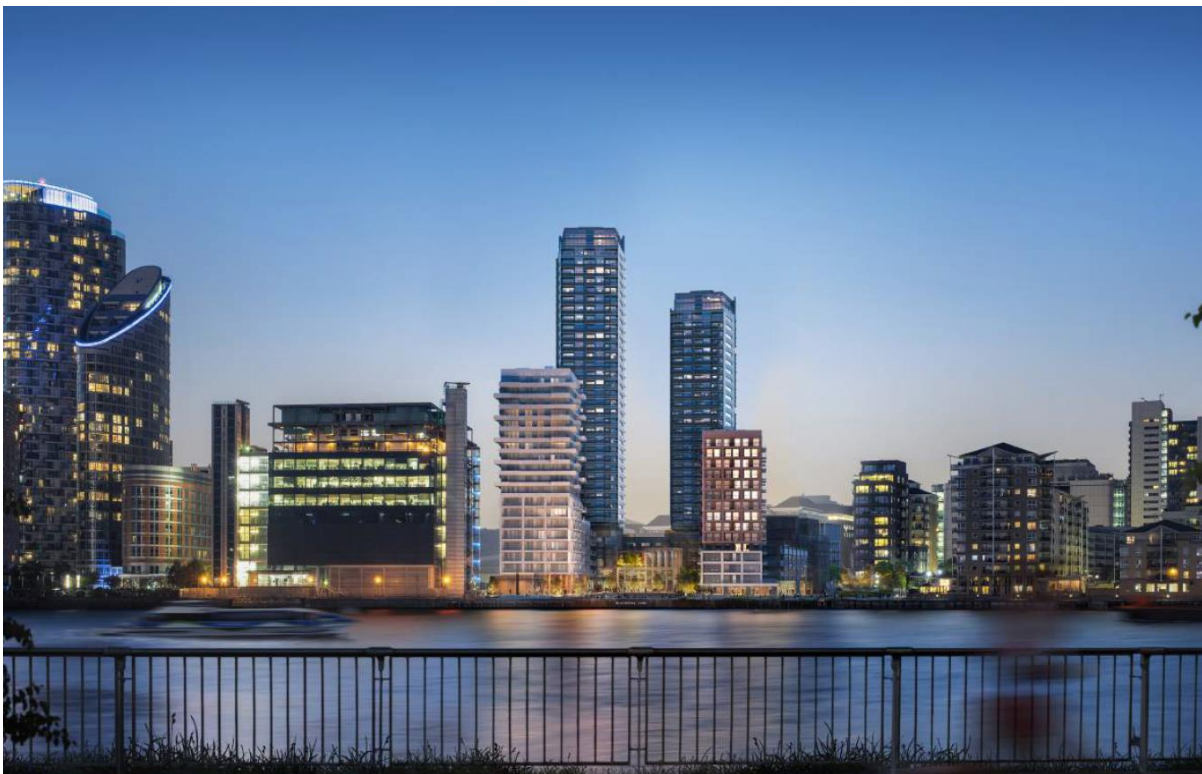


Figure 8: CGI - View from Greenwich (May 2020)

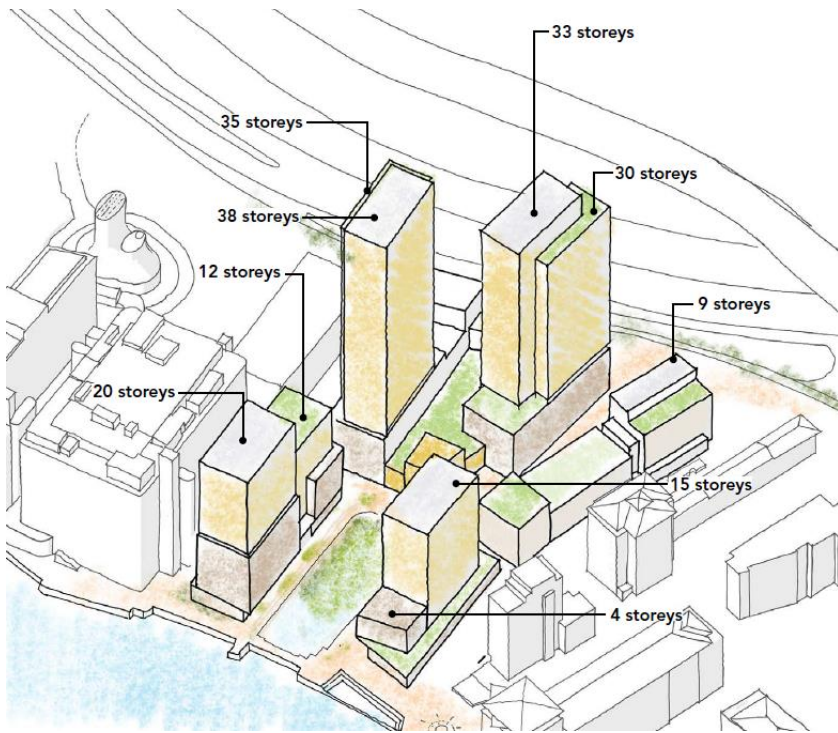


Figure 9: Indicative Heights & Massing (April 2020)



Figure 10: Blackwall Way Enhancements & Plot 1