


LONDON
REVIEW PANEL


Economic Development Team
London Borough of Camden
London
WC1H 9JE

June 2020

Dear 

London Review Panel: Queen's Crescent, Camden

Please find enclosed the London Review Panel report following the design review of Queen's Crescent, Camden on 17th June 2020. I would like to thank you for your participation in the review and offer ongoing Mayor's Design Advocate support as the scheme's design develops.

Yours sincerely,


Mayor's Design Advocate

cc.
All meeting attendees
Jules Pipe, Deputy Mayor for Planning, Regeneration and Skills
Philip Graham, Executive Director of Good Growth, GLA
Patrick Dubeck, Head of Regeneration, GLA

LONDON REVIEW PANEL

Report of London Review Panel meeting Queen's Crescent, Camden

Wednesday 17th June 2020
Review held remotely.

London Review Panel

██████████	MDA
██████████	MDA
██████████	MDA (Chair)

Attendees

██████████	Camden Council (Inclusive Economy)
██████████	Camden Council
██████████	Camden Council
██████████	Camden Council (Highways and Infrastructure)
██████████	Camden Council
██████████	Camden Council
██████████	Camden Council

██████████	East (Architecture, Landscape, Urban Design)
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██████████	East (Architecture, Landscape, Urban Design)

██████████	GLA Reneneration
██████████	GLA Reneneration
██████████	GLA Regeneration
██████████	GLA Regeneration (Panel Manager)

Apologies / report copied to

Report copied to

Jules Pipe	Deputy Mayor for Planning, Regeneration and Skills
Philip Graham	GLA
Patrick Dubeck	GLA

Confidentiality

Please note that while schemes not yet in the public domain, for example at a pre-application stage, will be treated as confidential, as a public organisation the GLA is subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOI) and in the case of an FOI request may be obliged to release project information submitted for review.

Project location

Queen's Crescent, LB Camden, London, NW5 4EG

Presenting team

██████████	Camden Council (Inclusive Economy)
██████████	Camden Council (Highways and Infrastructure)
██████████	East (Architecture, Landscape, Urban Design)
██████████	East (Architecture, Landscape, Urban Design)

Camden Council introduction

Camden Council gave an overview of the context within which this project forms a key centrepiece. The site functions as the primary local centre for Gospel Oak with services including a community centre and library. The community who use this local centre suffer from high levels of deprivation, in contrast with the immediate affluent neighbourhoods such as Hampstead and Highgate. There is significant change underway and planned for Gospel Oak, with many of the adjacent existing housing estates undergoing or planning for redevelopment

There is a rich history on the site, with the street market purportedly the oldest in London. The market in recent decades has declined from its heyday, suffering from a range of issues including changing shopping habits, perceived shopping offer and quality of the public realm and environment. There are also community concerns regarding the traffic management of the street and crime in the area. The ambition is to create a clean, green, safe and inclusive local centre which balances the evolving needs for residents, businesses and their demands for active travel and servicing.

East presentation

East are currently developing the designs, seeking feedback on the designs from multiple stakeholders across the council. They will be undertaking a quality monitoring role throughout implementation. Their analysis showed shopfronts are often in bad condition, with many using the pavement as spill out display space causing conflicts with other pavement users. The market caters for the local community with few tourists or other visitors from further afield. Traders also spill out onto the pavement, using it for storage, refuse and causing conflicts with other pavement users (prams and wheelchair users). Some traders do not use stalls and setting out their wares on pallets directly on the road causing issues with traffic and pavement users and contributes to a poor-quality market experience. Over the last few years a market management scheme operated by the council has provided additional business support to traders, though there have been ongoing issues and disagreements in some areas such as waste collection and the road gate management.

The community centre is successful, though there are aspects of the access and visibility that could be improved. The library is hugely popular with all demographics and a real focus for different communities coming together.

There has been a significant amount of consultation and public engagement including co-design. This involved training local representatives to interview their communities, radio podcasts to share the findings and 1:1 scale street testing of designs. Often cited was the need for youth and revenue funding support rather than capital spending on street improvements. The key principles proposed are healthy streets, space for the community and support for small businesses and the market. Proposals include electric bollards, consolidating the market, decluttering the street and celebrating the heritage and entrances points.

London Review Panel's views

Summary

The Panel believe Queen's Crescent has all the ingredients for a wonderful local high street; one that functions as a local centre with diverse and evolving communities at its heart. Its location at the centre of significant emerging development also provides the opportunity for it to better serve the existing communities. A street market project is often led by a strong business case whilst these proposals focus on physical interventions. Both are important to the success of the scheme and need to go hand in hand to ensure quality spaces that support and are supported by a vibrant local economy. The Panel question whether the aspiration is to broaden the appeal beyond the immediate community and advise the design team consider what these potential changes could have on the character and purpose of the market.

The Panel think this is a great design team who have a project process in place and would encourage them to progress with the proposals without hesitation. The design team should use this unique time to action the iterative proposals and implementation strategy they have carefully developed to date. This has the potential to herald a new era for Queen's Crescent as an exemplar of a local centre. The process the design team has established is pertinent to these times of change and are a great way to re-engage with the community after a hiatus. The local community is going through huge changes and they should help direct this. This proposal is both timely and urgent and the Panel encourage the design team to use this as a moment to accelerate the necessary interventions. There will be opportunities to review and reflect as the proposals are initiated as part of the team's experimental methodology.

Approach To Engagement & Design Process

- The Panel applaud the engagement process to date in a context which has sensitivities around consultation and encourage the design team to continue this excellent process with feedback to and from the community.
- The Panel recommend a continuous process of training up residents, businesses owners and market traders in areas such as community consultation and street curation alongside the physical interventions proposed.
- The Panel encourage the design team to commence works and demonstrate to the community there is nothing to fear in these changes. Bringing them on the journey will demystify and democratise the process.
- The Panel believe the design team have developed an approach that is tentative in a positive way regarding the community process. This is important in retaining the communities trust by avoiding perceived big capital street projects which do not address the finer grain issues of the area.
- The focus on testing and prototyping is strongly encouraged and will enable a robust proposal that evolves incrementally as the design team and community trial the various elements.
- The Panel encourage the design team to continue with their pop-up testing with the local community using cheap and flexible methods of experimentation.

Covid-19 Impacts & Opportunities

- The Panel recommend the design team use the established iterative process to investigate the challenges of Covid-19 on the project. These issues include increasing space for social distancing, encouraging active travel such as cycling and walking and other temporary or permanent measures.
- The Panel encourage the design team to consider the possibility of improvement of the vitality of the street as a local centre. This should be assessed as people's preferences evolve to shop locally and avoid unnecessary travel.
- The Panel advises that the consolidation of the market stalls be reviewed to allow for social distancing.

- The impact of Covid-19 on the scheme will be significant and the proposal will need to absorb these changes now and as it develops in the future.
- The Panel advise that now is the time to test and action the proposals in the physical world and to review and adapt as needed as the situation evolves.

Pavement Ownership & Curation

- The Panel encourage the design team to consider expanding the width of the pavements along the length of the street. This is important to reinforce the priority of pedestrians over vehicles and allow social distancing.
- The Panel would encourage further collaboration with the shop owners to engage with the pavement, curating their displays where they extend into the public realm within their demise. This has the potential to help activate the street in a more positive way whilst avoiding conflicts with other users such as buggies, wheelchairs and stall holders. Developing a best practice guide with the street's stakeholders could help improve the quality of the space and the relationships between the different user groups.
- The Panel would encourage the design team to offer local cafes the opportunity to take ownership of the public realm outside of their pitches. This would introduce an additional offer to encourage people to dwell and activate the street further. As discussed this could be part of a trail and test process to assess its success and any unforeseen implications.
- Onsite market stalls and storage could help unify the markets identity and alleviate some of the issues with vendors placing goods and storage on the roads and pavements during market day.

Parking & Servicing Arrangements

- The Panel strongly encourage the design team to reduce the parking to the proposal to avoid the space being dominated by static traffic on non-market days. The Panel recommends that there are better uses of the space to encourage its activation throughout the week.
- The Panel suggest that further justification for reducing the parking includes improving air quality and a predicted increase in trade for the shops as seen in other pilot schemes across London when parking is reduced.
- The Panel advises that the design team explore options to servicing the shops and markets from the side street network to avoid conflict with other users. Whilst some servicing throughout the week is necessary this should be subservient to the uses of the space for the community to enjoy.
- The Panel recommends the design team increase the activity between the proposed tree planting, with fewer car parking spaces and more opportunities for amenity such as seating, planting or pocket parks.
- The Panel suggest the design team explore temporary traffic orders to test and inform the proposals for a revised servicing and parking strategy.
- The Panel encourages the design team to promote a low traffic neighborhood that prioritises active travel.
- The Panel understand that the gates used to close the street for market day are important for the community's sense of ownership but would suggest options to remove them are included in the testing of new traffic strategies. It may be that they are no longer required if other improvements have been made and a consensus achieved with the community to remove them.
- The Panel recommend a review of the parking strategy for traders on market day when considering the changes to parking and servicing arrangements proposed.

Quality Space To Dwell

- The Panel think this project has the potential to improve the public realm as a place people want to go and spend their time.
- The Panel commends the proposed greening of the street and would encourage this be expanded wherever possible. The more planting there is the more likely people will pause to enjoy it.

- The Panel would suggest the design team continue exploring how to encourage people to wander into the street and stay longer by providing opportunities and places to dwell.
- The Panel encourages the proposed community planting beds as part of the testing process and would advise that efforts are made to establish community responsibility with local groups to take ownership of these assets. This will increase the chances they are successfully maintained.
- The Panel thinks the materials and their implementation is a creative use of a limited budget and would encourage this being developed further with more 1:1 onsite testing.
- The Panel commends the design team on its proposal to deal with the difficult ramping issue near Ashdown Crescent. The proposals to flip the ramp back on itself addresses the difficult site condition and balances the various needs of the users.
- The Panel thinks there is further opportunities around the baggy and hidden space between the Community Centre and betting shop for a thoughtful intervention. This space could be opened more and provide a flexible space in the street for greenery and seating.
- The panel commends the effort of the design team to balance legitimate service concerns with the need to deliver a high quality scheme that responds to community feedback, and considers key design elements, such as paving and lighting, have struck that balance successfully.

Next Steps

- The Panel encourages the team to get started using the great research, processes and proposals they have developed to date. Now is the time to test these ideas with the community and in physical spaces.
- The Panel advises the design team consider the short and long term impacts and opportunities of Covid-19 for Queen's Crescent in their proposals. The proposed method of testing and adapting should allow for robust proposals to be explored.
- The Panel recommends the design team widen pavements where possible and develop strategies to curate the pavement with shopkeepers and stall holders to improve the quality of the space.
- The Panel thinks the design team should revise the parking and servicing strategy to reduce both of their impacts on the quality of the street as a public space throughout the week.
- The Panel would suggest the design team seek to further increase the planting on the scheme and continue experimenting in-situ with materials and opportunities to encourage people to wander in and dwell.
- The Panel would welcome the opportunity to further comment on this exciting and aspirational scheme.