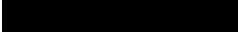


**LONDON**  
**REVIEW PANEL**

  
Project Manager  
London Borough of Islington

February 2021

Dear 

**London Review Panel: Improving Public Assets - The Cally, LB Islington**

Please find enclosed the London Review Panel report following the design review of Improving Public Assets - The Cally, Islington on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2021. 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 Improving Public Assets Caledonian Road, Islington

Monday 1<sup>st</sup> February 2021  
Review held remotely

### London Review Panel

MDA  
MDA (Chair)  
MDA

### Attendees

LB Islington (Community Development Officer)  
LB Islington (Youth Employment & Apprenticeships Manager)  
LB Islington (Programme Director)  
LB Islington (Project Manager)  
  
BWA (Quantity Surveyor)  
Public Works (Architect and Engagement Lead)  
Public Works (Lead Architect)  
  
GLA Regeneration (NW Area Manager)  
GLA Regeneration (Panel Manager)  
GLA Regeneration (Project Officer)

### Report copied to

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

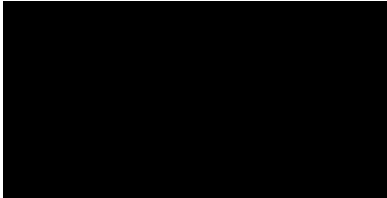
### Confidentiality

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**

Caledonian Road, known colloquially as 'Cally' passing about a mile and a half north-south through the London Borough of Islington. The buildings in scope are the Jean Stokes Community Centre, Coatbridge House, Carnoustie Drive, LB Islington, London, and Islington West Library, 107 Bridgeman Road, LB Islington, London

## **Presenting team**



LB Islington (Community Development Officer)  
LB Islington (Youth Employment & Apprenticeships Manager)  
LB Islington (Project Manager)  
Public Works (Architect and Engagement Lead)  
Public Works (Lead Architect)

## **LB Islington introduction**

LB Islington provided the context and strategic objectives for the project, which is part of a wider 'We are Cally' programme which is reviewing the use and design of public assets to support key outcomes for the Cally community, primarily around employability, skills, confidence and cohesion. The area epitomises the inequality between the rich and poor in Islington and Cally residents feel a strong sense of disempowerment and exclusion from the change that is happening around them. The Cally is an area of multi-generational employment and there is a strong desire to do better, particularly for young people.

The We Are Cally programme has five themes driving its objectives: Children and Young People, Health and Wellbeing, Local Economy, Strength of Community and Public Spaces. As part of their community wealth building strategy LB Islington aim to identify and utilise underused buildings to complement existing services and better cater to the needs of the community. The two pilot projects within the scope of this review will prototype modern and engaging public spaces in local hubs and will feed into the development of the We Are Cally plan. The aim for these sites is to become anchors in the local social infrastructure network.

LB Islington described the extensive conversations with residents and stakeholders that have fed into the We Are Cally programme development which expressed the need to integrate these voices into project development to avoid the community feeling excluded from project delivery. The engagement process aims to create a stronger sense of ownership between the community and their built environment through co-design.

Engagement has also informed rethinking how services can be delivered in the area to improve outcomes for local people. LB Islington aim to provide employment support for young people through an employment support hub and to respond to community and VCS priorities (services proposed include a tool swap, library, community canteen and a range of workspace and touch down points for local voluntary sector organisations and the community). Given the ambition to increase interactions between the community and these buildings/services/resources, proposals seek to improve physical accessibility across both sites.

## **Design Team presentation**

Public Works were appointed through the GLA's ADUP2 framework in September 2020. The team began an engagement process in October which included drop-in sessions on site, newsletters and leafleting and organising community events to discuss the needs and aspirations for the projects.

### *Jean Stokes Community Centre Condition*

The JSCC is located on the raised ground floor of a 1960's red brick estate with an unused basement accessed externally. The main entrance is not accessible and blends into the residential block with many people unaware of its existence. The public realm immediately in front of the entrance has been closed off as a road and a future project may include landscaping to provide additional external space. The basement has low ceilings and poor natural light and is not accessible from the community centre above. The current fit out was for an office in the basement and this has not been used for 5 years. There are structural constraints including beams and columns as well as high level servicing that needs to be accommodated in any proposals.

### *Jean Stokes Community Centre Proposals*

The proposals for this site include making the entrance more visible and accessible by utilising its location at a key crossing point in the estate and differentiating it from the rest of the residential block in which it currently blends into. This includes expanding a reception, seating area out from the existing building line and using a bold metal and glass material palette that relate to the architectural language of the estate. The proposals also introduce a new internal vertical circulation to connect the two floors. The basement will be split into two wings, one for workspace and one for workshops.

### *Islington West Library Condition*

The existing building is a Grade II Listed Carnegie Library with external lift access to raised ground floor and lower ground only and is unable to extend to the upper floors. There is a large, grand room at first floor which is currently underutilised. There are complications around the conservation of the existing features that the team would need to accommodate. The team noted that young people may be unfamiliar with the building and that there was an ambition to make it more welcoming to this audience.

### *Islington West Library Proposals*

The key proposals are to introduce a young people's employment hub with a mix of workspaces, private meeting spaces, kitchenette and equipment library. These spaces will be inserted into the existing hall using bold, customisable furniture and screens. The proposals will also introduce a second lift in the upper ground lobby to enable accessibility to the first floor. The team propose bringing the contemporary fit out design down into the upper ground lobby space to aid wayfinding.

## London Review Panel's Views

### **Summary**

The panel commend the client and design team on the fantastic intentions evident in the project and recognise the collective effort to develop this project from the ground up to respond to the priorities and needs of local people. The team have done a great job within the constraints of the existing buildings and with their engagement process made even more challenging due to lockdown. We Are Cally is a good example of developing a grass roots, place-based action plan. There is a need for these types of projects more than ever in the context of Covid recovery.

Reflecting the curtailment of engagement due to lockdown, the process of co-design could continue through implementation, by actively testing proposals with the community, service users, and service delivery teams. This would enable the community to take ownership of the spaces and enable they can be adapted where issues arise. The panel encourage this approach alongside developing wayfinding and curating events to showcase the spaces and services on offer.

The team has responded well to the challenging brief, but the panel would advise the client and design team to take a strategic view on project priorities to ensure that the resources are deployed most effectively to achieve stated objectives. There are challenges and costs associated with parts of the existing buildings that may be diverting resources away from the level and type of engagement needed to deliver the objectives of this project.

### **Comment for both sites**

**The panel recommend the team continue their co-design process by testing these proposals with the established networks and forums.** The panel understand that the team have undertaken a comprehensive engagement and consultation process to date and design proposals have been informed by this process. The panel now encourage the team to seek feedback on the current proposals from the community and future service users. The panel recommend this commitment to co-design strategy to continue to develop the trust built up to date, to ensure the spaces are fit for purpose, and to build community buy-in and ownership of the spaces. The panel advise the team not to rush delivery based on the current conclusions drawn from the design focussed engagement process, which was significantly impacted by lockdown, as this could risk losing the trust of the community built up over the much wider We Are Cally engagement to date.

**The panel encourage the team to test on-site the proposals as live action research.** The process of co-design is an iterative one and the proposals are now ready to be trialled in-situ with the community and service users. This will be particularly useful and important in testing the design and operational strategy for the West Library to assess how young people engage with the building, its access and how approachable and familiar young people feel towards to it. The team can use this live action research to test and adapt the project with 'co-design through habitation' with future users of the space and allow for longer term decisions to be informed by this.

***The panel recommend clarifying the priorities for this project and establishing the minimum required to achieve these and allocate the budget accordingly.*** The panel suggest that elements of the brief such as introducing a second lift into the West Library will divert significant amounts from the budget and question whether this will help in achieving the projects key objectives in establishing a youth employment hub. The panel suggest that delivering the services are the priority and the brief should be shaped accordingly. The panel suggested that codesign process could be expanded beyond in-situ trialling to include budget allocation, and the panel would recommend the community have input into designing this budget. This could involve a series of budget scenario 'games' or exercises to test how to allocate money most effectively and to ensure users and the wider community understand and support the alignment between budget allocation and agreed priorities.

### ***Jean Stokes Community Centre***

***The panel agree that the JSCC has lots of existing redundant space which can accommodate the proposals without the need for the foyer extension.*** The panel encourage the team to reconsider whether the entrance extension proposed is needed to achieve its objectives and suggest that the cost of this could be reallocated to more impactful areas of the project. A lighter touch approach to the entrance could include a canopy to provide covered external space and enable outdoor mixing. The access into the JSCC must be reconsidered and codesigned with a wider range of users and accessibility needs, including wheelchairs and double buggies. The panel advise the team to consider the sightlines into and out of the JSCC, particularly from the new proposed entrance making visible to the public the activities within the JSCC and to further challenge the existing unwelcoming approach.

***The panel agree that the JSCC entrance and vertical circulation is an important intervention and would encourage the team ensure there is more space in and around the lifts and stairs.*** This may also include cutting out a void space to allow more daylight and sense of volume in these circulation spaces to better connect the two floors and avoid congestion around tight stairwells and lift landings.

***The panel agree the internal designs for the JSCC look sensitive and are an appropriate response to the buildings history and intended users.*** The material palette and colours are helpful in highlighting the JSCC to those on the street and provide a connection to the building's 1960's heritage and nearby social infrastructure.

***The panel agree that the existing kitchen is a useful asset and would encourage the team expand its accessibility for a wider range of users and functions.*** The panel suggest that a programme of training courses and other events could make wider use of the kitchen facilities and this should be tested with the community on site.

***The panel advise that post-Covid workspaces may benefit from a more cellular approach rather than an exclusively open plan layout and the team should consider the flexibility in the plans to achieve this.*** Considering the requirements of future users will allow for an adaptable series of spaces that can flex to changing needs.

***The panel would also advise the team of the benefit in reviewing the existing programme of activities and management issues in the JSCC to understand what can be improved.*** The JSCC hall is a large space that may not lend itself naturally to be let out. Understanding the current issues will be useful in developing management, booking systems, revenue planning and programmatic proposals for the spaces so not to repeat these problems.

***The panel recommend the team consider how the JSCC can advertise itself through wayfinding to those unaware of its existence in the wider estate and from Caledonian Road.*** The panel suggests that awareness and use of the community centre by the wider community and beyond will be key to the success of the management and programming of the centre and should be carefully thought through at this stage of the project.

***The panel recognises the opportunity to improve the public realm around JSCC and suggest the team prioritise this as a next phase of the project.*** The panel believe there are opportunities to better link to the surrounding spaces in front of the JSCC and would encourage the team to consider how these spaces can interact with the JSCC entrance as a place to gather in a future phase of the project. The road closure claimed during the Cally Festival as a temporary space now has permission to remain permanently. It could provide spaces for urban greening, seating and places to dwell for residents and users of the centre. As a key pedestrian route through the estate it could provide much needed shared external amenity for residents. Within the current phase of the project the team can lay the foundations for a good public realm by making the building outward facing onto the surrounding spaces and the panel suggest there is an opportunity to utilise the external basement access to further activate the public realm.

### ***Islington West Library***

***The panel believe the West Library hall is a beautiful historic room and the suggested proposals may not allow users to experience this.*** The design brief for this space is ambitious and the current installation of furniture and pod spaces within the hall seem crowded and don't allow the users to appreciate the hall. The panel suggest there is a need for more circulation space to allow young and vulnerable people room to feel comfortable moving through the zones. The panel questions whether there is enough space for wheelchair users to comfortably navigate the space. A good example of a similar occupation of a historic hall for more focused uses is Old Manor Park Library and Maggie's Centre in Bart's Hospital which both provide contemporary rooms within a heritage setting. The panel would advise the team to avoid making changes to the fabric of the building that may become quickly outdated.

***The panel suggest the team review the West Library design brief and in collaboration with service users and clarify an operational model for the employment hub to support prioritisation of key activities within the space available, and consider alternative locations for the employment hub if required.*** The panel understand that LB Islington's review of assets and historic engagement with the community demonstrated that there is a local appetite to bring the West Library first floor hall back into user. The panel would

suggest the team focus on the employment hub's requirements and consider whether the highly constrained West Library space is suitable space for welcoming and engaging vulnerable user groups with multiple needs. The panel suggest that within the JSCC basement proposals there is enough space to accommodate the employment hub. This would bring a critical mass to the centre for activity and services make the employment hub more visible, as well as eliminating the difficult and costly lift access proposed in the West Library. The panel suggest that other uses complimentary to the library function could be considered that do not rely on significant changes to the circulation.

***The panel support the prototyping new uses of existing buildings as part of a place-based strategy to support local needs.*** The panel recommend that any future asset review could expand its scope to consider vacant units on Caledonian Road itself to support the high street and further test service delivery approaches, such as pop-up employment hubs and support local recovery.

### **Next Steps**

The panel would welcome the opportunity to further comment on this exciting and aspirational scheme.