

LONDON

REVIEW PANEL

██████████
The Polka Theatre,
240 The Broadway,
Wimbledon,
London
SW19 1SB

March 2019

Dear L ██████████

London Review Panel: Polka Theatre

Please find enclosed the London Review Panel report following the review of the Polka Theatre proposals on 13th March 2019. On behalf of the Panel, I would like to thank you for your participation in the review and offer the Panel's ongoing support as the scheme's design develops.

Yours sincerely,



Daisy Froud
Mayor's Design Advocate

cc.

All meeting attendees

Jules Pipe, Deputy Mayor for Planning, Regeneration and Skills

Debbie Jackson, Executive Director of Development, Enterprise and Environment, GLA

Patrick Dubeck, Head of Regeneration, GLA



**Report of London Review Panel meeting
Polka Theatre**

Wednesday 13 March 2019

Review held at: Close Brothers, Wimbledon Bridge House, 1 Hartfield Road, London, SW19 3RU

London Review Panel

Daisy Froud (chair)
Paloma Strelitz

Attendees

██████████	GLA Regeneration
██████████	GLA Regeneration
██████████	GLA Regeneration
██████████	Polka Theatre
██████████	Polka Theatre
██████████	Foster Wilson Architects
██████████	Foster Wilson Architects
██████████	Cragg Management
██████████	LB Merton
██████████	Love Wimbledon BID

Apologies / report copied to

██████████	Europa
██████████	LB Merton
██████████	GLA Regeneration
██████████	GLA Regeneration

Report copied to

Jules Pipe	Deputy Mayor for Planning, Regeneration and Skills
Debbie Jackson	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 name and site address

Polka Theatre, 240 The Broadway, Wimbledon, London SW19 1SB

Presenting team

██████████	Polka Theatre
██████████	Polka Theatre
██████████	Foster Wilson Architects
██████████	Foster Wilson Architects

LB Merton's views

LB Merton wholeheartedly support the proposals and view the Polka Theatre's presence in Wimbledon as contributing to the very essence of the town/ central to the town's identity. The recently consulted Wimbledon Town Centre Masterplan acknowledges the strong cultural offer of the Polka Theatre and its importance as an emanating anchor point, describing the Broadway Corner area as being characterised by culture. The proposals are befitting of LB Merton's emerging priorities for the area, which include 'cultural space' and 'high quality architecture' in addition to 'independent retail' and 'greening Wimbledon'. The latter two of which could be encouraged by the development and success of the theatre.

LB Merton described the challenge of increasing development pressure in the area in recent years and gave a commentary of planning applications in the immediate locality to the Polka Theatre, including the efforts the Council has expended in enhancing the quality of these schemes. The Council indicated its commitment to shop front improvements throughout the Borough, using CIL monies and a potential Future High Streets Fund application to improve retail parades such as the row adjacent to the Polka Theatre. The Broadway Corner parade is being considered for improvements by the Council. The area is also included in the 'high quality resurfacing' and 'decluttering' zones for public realm improvements in the masterplan.

Polka Theatre introduction

Polka Theatre representatives set out the context and need for development, describing the artistic and technical limitations the Theatre currently faces. Accessibility is a considerable factor in the refurbishment, as the existing Theatre does not provide access for all and fails to reflect audience and artist expectations. Alongside a spend-to-save financial rationale for the project, the new development will give space to fulfil the ambitions of the company; to produce artistic work of exceptional quality, to engage more children and families in theatre, to have a financially stable future and for Polka to be a central hub for the community.

Design Review Panel's views

Summary

The London Review Panel are enthused by this exciting project and children's theatre. The Panel recognise the inspiring spirit of the Polka Theatre and admire the sense of discovery and playful learning the company offers. The ambition of the project and proposed key moves are well-defined and supported by the Panel. In general, the Panel find the design proposals logical and recognise the functional and operational considerations that have informed the scheme.

The Panel recognise a significant opportunity to maximise the benefit of the outdoor play areas, encouraging co-design and collaboration with children, theatre users and specialist play design consultants. The power of

the elevation and scenography of the High Street are considered to resonate with the nature of the theatre programming. The way in which the scheme responds to this, both in a temporary way during construction and through the final frontage design would benefit from further design work. The Panel welcomes the potential for participation and the act of engaging the community, which has a pleasing interconnectivity with performance and theatre and could be developed creatively during the construction works and 'off-site' Polka sessions. A more rigorous exploration of the Theatre's visual identity and how this is communicated coherently through the architectural language is recommended.

Consideration of the Polka Theatre's role in the proposed LB Merton wider area improvements would be beneficial, jointly assessing with the Council how Polka as a catalyst can stimulate and influence the aspirations of adjacent public realm.

Playspace

- The Panel view the programmatic narrative of storytelling and story-making as having a synergy with the potential design and design process of the external playspaces.
- The Panel urge the design team to explore the ethos and theory of adventure play and to consider how this could be applied to an external space and integrated in the production of this space.
- The concept of a creative landscape was of interest to the Panel, who encourage a greater exploration of this theme. The 'Garden of the Imagination' proposal could sit within this theme.
- A consideration of sunlight and shadow and other environmental factors that impact how the external spaces are experienced should underpin the design approach.
- The intended contrast or continuity of the two proposed external spaces is also considered an interesting line of enquiry by the Panel.
- The proposed sensory garden space adjacent to the church could fully engage with the prop workshop. A way of viewing the production process of props and scenery is encouraged by the panel, offering comprehension of craft and making to a young audience.
- The Panel referenced several precedent projects of interest; Discover Stratford, Kings Crescent Estate, Breakers Yard at Sutton House and Mountview Theatre School, Peckham.
- The Panel would recommend GLA assistance in writing a brief with Polka Theatre for a playspace consultant/ designer to develop the external spaces.

Identity and Street Presence

- The Panel consider the primary moves of the proposals to be coherent and rational.
- Some concerns were raised over the use of motifs and the lack of continuity or consistency of these. The Panel suggests that the story told through the public facing element of the building should have clarity and represent the essence of Polka Theatre.
- The more generous pavement space created to the front of the theatre should be responsive to the design proposals and reflect the overall design intent of the project.
- Signage and wayfinding proposals offer an opportunity to reinforce the vibrant character of the Polka theatre, careful consideration should be given to how these relate to the changing promotional banners and posters.
- The way in which the screen design contributes to the identity of the theatre and the narrative of the outdoor spaces would benefit from the input of an artist or designer. The Panel view this commission as significant to the success of the project and would welcome GLA assistance in writing a brief for this, or an involvement in a discussion about how this piece is commissioned.
- The Panel feel a GLA Special Assistance day would be beneficial for the project, to review graphic design ideas and concepts.

Visibility and 'In the Meantime'

- The Panel commend the planned off-site programming and 'hard hat' tours for the duration of the project.
- The hoarding design for the 'interval' period is an opportunity to activate the theatre during construction, communicating to passers-by what Polka represents and what the design proposals entail. Both the hoarding panels and the façade of the building offer the most compelling space and opportunity for inclusion in the storytelling process. As the design work continues, this opportunity should be maximised.
- Collaborative design was again identified as a suitable process for the hoarding design, working with children to tell the story; the process of development and the history of the Polka Theatre, avoiding the unimaginative use of solely children's artwork.
- The Panel suggest the design and appearance of the 'interval' period is considered and included in future design development work, including any GLA Special Assistant Team input and/ or the playspace commission.

Masterplan and the Wider Area

- The Panel questioned what it means for the Polka Theatre to define the character of Broadway Corner within the masterplan. If the aspiration is for the area to be developed as a child-focused cultural and leisure hub, with the Polka as catalyst, then consideration should be given to how the child-focused element can permeate into the public realm and wider area.
- The Panel commend and are encouraged by LB Merton's commitment to improving the Broadway Corner area.
- The Panel would endorse a public realm scheme where children are the design driver and believe this focus would benefit everyone. The act of making and storytelling is intrinsic to the project vision, embedding this vision in the townscape to create a playful and child-friendly space would be enjoyable and accessible for all.