

**6-8 Alie Street, Aldgate**

in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets

planning application no. PA/15/2538

**Strategic planning application stage 1 referral**

Town & Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended); Greater London Authority Acts 1999 and 2007; Town & Country Planning (Mayor of London) Order 2008.

**The proposal**

Office renewal to provide an eight-storey office building (45.6 metres A.O.D.) providing 4,502 sq.m. of Class B1 floorspace (including four ancillary study bedrooms) with reuse of an existing basement and provision of cycle spaces, plant equipment and associated works.

**The applicant**

The applicant is **Royal College of Pathologists**, and the architect is **Bennetts Associates**.

**Strategic issues**

The proposed **office renewal** at this **CAZ** and **City Fringe Opportunity Area** site is strongly supported, and the application accords with the London Plan.

**Recommendation**

That Tower Hamlets be advised that the application complies with the London Plan for the reasons set out in paragraph 33 of this report, and does not need to be referred back to the Mayor.

**Context**

1 On 21 September 2015 the Mayor of London received documents from Tower Hamlets Council notifying him of a planning application of potential strategic importance to develop the above site for the above uses. Under the provisions of The Town & Country Planning (Mayor of London) Order 2008 the Mayor had until 30 October 2015 to provide the Council with a statement setting out whether he considers that the application complies with the London Plan, and his reasons for taking that view. However, in this case it has been agreed with Tower Hamlets Council that the Mayor will provide his statement on 4 November 2015. This report sets out information for the Mayor's use in deciding what decision to make.

2 The application is referable under Category 1C 1.(c) of the Schedule to the Order 2008: *"Development which comprises or includes the erection of a building of... more than 30 metres high and is outside the City of London"*.

3 Once Tower Hamlets Council has resolved to determine the application, it would normally be required to refer it back to the Mayor for his decision as to whether to direct refusal; take it over for his own determination; or allow the Council to determine it itself. However, in this instance GLA officers are recommending that the application is not referred back to the Mayor.

4 The Mayor of London's statement on this case will be made available on the GLA website [www.london.gov.uk](http://www.london.gov.uk).

## **Site description**

5 The site is located within the Whitechapel ward of the Borough of Tower Hamlets, approximately 250 metres southeast of Aldgate station. This area is identified by the London Plan as within the Central Activities Zone (CAZ) and City Fringe Opportunity Area, and the Tower Hamlets Core Strategy designates this area as a Preferred Office Location (POL). The site is also over-sailed by a London View Management Framework (LVMF) SPG viewing plane 25A (City Hall to the Tower of London) above 50 metres A.O.D.

6 The site is on the southern side of Alie Street and northern side of North Tenter Street. To the west of the site is 55 Mansell Street (six-storeys plus plant) and to the east is 10-12 Alie Street (six-storeys plus plant). The surrounding area is predominately commercial in nature with the majority of the buildings in office use.

7 The site comprises a six-storey building constructed during the late 1980s, with the front elevation fronting Alie Street and a rear elevation fronting onto North Tenter Street. The building is currently in lawful office use.

8 The site is neither listed nor within a Conservation Area, however, there are a number of heritage assets in the vicinity, including Grade II Listed Buildings at 2 and 8 Mark Street, and, 57 and 59 Mansell Street.

9 The site is well served by public transport and registers a public transport accessibility level of six, on a scale of one to six, where six denotes the most accessible locations in the capital.

## **Details of the proposal**

10 The proposal is for office renewal to provide an eight-storey office building (45.6 metres A.O.D.) providing 4,502 sq.m. of Class B1 floorspace (including four ancillary study bedrooms) with reuse of an existing basement and provision of cycle spaces, plant equipment and associated works. The proposed building is intended to become a new headquarters building for the Royal College of Pathologists.

## **Case history**

11 On 18 August 2014 permission PA/14/01721 was granted by Tower Hamlets Council for refurbishment and extension of the existing building at this site in order to provide an additional 655 sq.m. of office floorspace. This application was not referable to the Mayor of London, and has not been implemented.

12 On 13 August 2015 a pre-application meeting was held by the GLA to discuss this proposal. The advice subsequently issued by GLA officers stated that the proposed renewal of this CAZ office site is strongly supported in strategic planning terms. The applicant was,

nevertheless, advised to ensure that the application addresses matters with respect to office; inclusive access; sustainable development; and, transport.

## **Strategic planning issues and relevant policies and guidance**

13 The relevant issues and corresponding policies are as follows:

- Central Activities Zone *London Plan; draft Central Activities Zone SPG;*
- Opportunity Areas *London Plan;*
- CAZ Office *London Plan; the Mayor's Economic Development Strategy; draft Central Activities Zone SPG;*
- Urban design *London Plan; Shaping Neighbourhoods: Character and Context SPG;*
- Inclusive access *London Plan; Accessible London: achieving an inclusive environment SPG;*
- Sustainable development *London Plan; Sustainable Design and Construction SPG; Mayor's Climate Change Adaptation Strategy; Mayor's Climate Change Mitigation and Energy Strategy; Mayor's Water Strategy;*
- Transport and parking *London Plan; the Mayor's Transport Strategy;*
- Crossrail *London Plan; Mayoral Community Infrastructure Levy; and, Crossrail SPG.*

14 For the purposes of Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the development plan in force for the area is the 2010 Tower Hamlets Core Strategy; the 2013 Tower Hamlets Managing Development Document; the 2013 Tower Hamlets Adopted Policies Map; and, the 2015 London Plan (Consolidated with Alterations since 2011).

15 The following are also relevant material considerations:

- National Planning Policy Framework and National Planning Practice Guidance;
- draft Minor Alterations to the London Plan 2015; and,
- draft City Fringe Opportunity Area Planning Framework (December 2014).

## **Principle of development**

16 London Plan policies 2.10 and 4.2 strongly support the renewal of office space within the Central Activities Zone (CAZ), and the City Fringe Opportunity Area Planning Framework (OAPF) recognises Aldgate as having potential to provide workspace for a variety of sectors, particularly those with an affiliation to the City. Noting also the Local Plan designation of this site as a Preferred Office Location, GLA officers strongly support the proposal in principle terms.

## **CAZ Office**

17 The proposed office renewal is intended to provide a new headquarters for the Royal College of Pathologists (a professional membership organisation and registered charity). Accordingly, the proposal comprises a mixture of general purpose office space, as well as some end user-specific facilities - including a conference hall and overnight accommodation/study bedrooms for visiting members. For the avoidance of doubt GLA officers are satisfied that the overnight accommodation would be ancillary to the office use.

18 Overall the proposal would provide 4,502 sq.m. of Class B1 floorspace – amounting to an uplift of 371 sq.m. over what has recently been consented at the site (refer to paragraph 11). The uplift in office floor space is supported in accordance with London Plan Policy 4.2 and the draft City Fringe OAPF.

19 London Plan Policy 4.3 seeks to ensure that uplifts in office space (above a justified local threshold) provide for a mix of uses (including housing) in order to contribute to the vibrancy and sustainability of the CAZ. In this case, the ground floor of the scheme is required to serve the office, and the proposal falls within a locally designated POL – where housing is not regarded as an appropriate use. In such circumstances an off-site contribution or payment in lieu is typically sought. However, it is acknowledged that Tower Hamlets has not established a floorspace threshold above which any such contributions would be payable. Having regard to the above, as well as the status of the applicant as a registered charity, and the relatively modest uplift in office floorspace in strategic planning terms, GLA officers have not sought a mixed use contribution in this particular case.

## **Urban design**

20 The proposed design is supported in accordance with London Plan Policy 7.1. The scheme is well thought out, optimises the development potential of the site and remains sympathetic (in terms of scale and materials) to the context and neighbouring heritage assets (discussed in paragraph 8). The proposed building and office space would be high quality, and would support CAZ/City Fringe objectives for the renewal and enhancement of office stock. The street-facing edges are well-defined and the proposed choice of robust materials (a balance of brick and fair faced concrete) is supported.

21 At eight-storeys / 45.6 metres A.O.D. the proposal would not exceed the plane of the wider setting consultation area for LVMF SPG view 25A. Accordingly GLA officers are satisfied that the proposal would not impact on strategic views or the setting of the Tower of London World Heritage Site.

## **Inclusive access**

22 This scheme presents an important opportunity to promote equal and convenient access to employment opportunities within the CAZ. Based on the material submitted it appears that the principles of access and inclusion have been generally well considered. In particular GLA officers support the commitment to ensure that one of the proposed study bedrooms would be wheelchair accessible, and welcome the introduction of a generously sized power-assisted pass door at the primary office entrance (in response to pre-application advice). GLA officers are satisfied that the application accords with London Plan policies 4.12 and 7.2.

## **Sustainable development**

### Energy strategy

23 In accordance with the principles of London Plan Policy 5.2 the applicant has submitted an energy strategy for the development, setting out how the scheme proposes to reduce carbon dioxide emissions in accordance with the London Plan energy hierarchy. In summary, the proposed approach comprises energy efficiency measures (including passive design measures, low energy lighting and heat recovery); and, renewable energy technologies (comprising 100 sq.m. of roof mounted photovoltaic panels). GLA officers accept that a combined heat and power system is not appropriate for this scheme, and support the commitment to ensure that

the on-site energy centre would be designed to be capable of district network connection in future.

24 For the purposes of assessing applications against the carbon dioxide savings target within London Plan Policy 5.2, the Mayor now applies a 35% reduction target beyond Part L 2013 of Building Regulations. Based on the savings associated with the proposed energy efficiency and renewable energy measures, the scheme is expected to achieve a 36% reduction in carbon dioxide. This is supported, and the Council is encouraged to include a planning condition which secures development in accordance with the submitted energy strategy.

#### Climate change adaptation

25 In conjunction with the photovoltaic array, the applicant is proposing a green roof as a contribution to green infrastructure within the CAZ. This is supported in accordance with London Plan policies 5.10 and 5.11, and would enhance the drainage characteristics of the development in response to London Plan Policy 5.13. The Council is encouraged to secure detailed approval of green roof and sustainable urban drainage measures accordingly.

### **Transport**

26 TfL has reviewed the planning application and is satisfied that the scheme is acceptable in strategic planning terms.

27 The commitment to promote sustainable transport modes is particularly supported. Notwithstanding this, TfL is currently engaged in discussions with the applicant and the Council regarding the optimisation of on-site cycle parking provision – having regard to London Plan standards and a number of spatial constraints associated with the retained basement space. GLA and TfL officers are nevertheless satisfied that a reasonable outcome will be secured in this regard.

28 The Transport Assessment includes information on the demolition and construction phases, including a routing strategy and construction access details. In this regard it is noted that larger vehicles would be using Alie Street in one direction only. The approach to routing seems reasonable, however, TfL requests that it is consulted on the detail in due course – as this may have implications for the operation of the Transport for London Road Network and local cycle routes (particularly at the Alie Street junctions at Leman Street and Mansell Street).

29 The site is within the Central London Charging Area where section 106 contributions for Crossrail are sought in accordance with London Plan Policy 6.5 and associated SPG (Use of planning obligations in the funding of Crossrail, and the Mayoral Community Infrastructure Levy). TfL has calculated that this development would generate a contribution of £143,360. However, under the terms of the Mayor's SPG, the charge would be waived where the development is to be used wholly or mainly for charitable purposes for more than seven years.

### **Local planning authority's position**

30 Tower Hamlets Council is expected to formally consider the application in November / December 2015.

## Legal considerations

31 Under the arrangements set out in Article 4 of the Town and Country Planning (Mayor of London) Order 2008 the Mayor is required to provide the local planning authority with a statement setting out whether he considers that the application complies with the London Plan, and his reasons for taking that view. Unless notified otherwise by the Mayor, the Council must consult the Mayor again under Article 5 of the Order if it subsequently resolves to make a draft decision on the application, in order that the Mayor may decide whether to allow the draft decision to proceed unchanged, or direct the Council under Article 6 of the Order to refuse the application, or issue a direction under Article 7 of the Order that he is to act as the local planning authority for the purpose of determining the application and any connected application. There is no obligation at this present stage for the Mayor to indicate his intentions regarding a possible direction, and no such decision should be inferred from the Mayor's statement and comments.

## Financial considerations

32 There are no financial considerations at this stage.

## Conclusion

33 London Plan policies on CAZ, Opportunity Areas, office, urban design, inclusive access, sustainable development and transport are relevant to this application. The application complies with these policies, for the following reasons:

- **CAZ and City Fringe Opportunity Area:** The proposed renewal of this CAZ office site is strongly supported in accordance with London Plan policies 2.10 and 4.2, and the draft City Fringe OAPF.
- **Office:** The proposed uplift in office space is supported in accordance with London Plan Policy 4.2.
- **Urban design:** The proposed design is well considered and supported in accordance with London Plan Policy 7.1.
- **Inclusive access:** The approach to access and inclusion is supported in accordance with London Plan policies 4.12 and 7.2.
- **Sustainable development:** The proposed energy strategy and climate change adaptation measures are supported. The Council is encouraged to include planning conditions to secure the detailed approval of these measures in accordance with London Plan policies 5.2, 5.10, 5.11 and 5.13.
- **Transport:** The application is acceptable in strategic transport terms. Notwithstanding this, the applicant and the Council are encouraged to continue to engage with TfL with respect to detailed matters associated with cycle parking; and, construction access and routing.

34 The Mayor does not need to be consulted again on this application.

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for further information, contact GLA Planning Unit (Development & Projects Team):

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