

SECTION 4

Design Process - Evaluation and Evolution

DESIGN PROCESS – EVALUATION AND EVOLUTION

The proposal is intended to be a contextual response to the specific constraints and opportunities that the site offers, in order to deliver a considered and appropriate scheme that is fully integrated into its context.

At the start of the design process, a site analysis was carried out to establish the key considerations and site specific factors that would drive the development of the design. This sections summarises these considerations and how they formed the basis of the design decisions that are discussed further in the design evolution section.

4.1 Site Analysis - Constraints

The site is bounded by Cromwell Road along its northern edge, a highly trafficked red route that generates noise and pollution.

The building form and massing should respect the daylight and sunlight to the adjacent residential terraces along Ashburn Gardens and Courtfield Road.

The existing landscaped area is subject to the London Squares Act and a new public garden square will be established on the site with an area of 2,700m².

The proximity of the adjacent conservation areas with the Cornwall conservation area to the north, Queensgate to the east and Courtfield to the south and west.

The proximity of the London underground tunnels that pass close to the north east corner of the site, at the corner of Ashburn Place and Cromwell Road.

The existing London plane trees are subject to Tree Preservation Orders.

Site access and parking - Cromwell Road’s status as a red route precludes any vehicles accessing the site directly from this road. The current servicing access location on Ashburn Place minimises disruption to the local road network.

4.2 Site Analysis - Opportunities

The existing building is widely recognised as being detrimental to the site and local area and its redevelopment is an opportunity to rectify the historic deficiencies in the current design.

The site’s excellent links to public transport support a high density development.

Established precedent for a tall building on the site with proximity to adjacent large commercial buildings on Cromwell Road making this suitable as a high density cluster.

Reinstate the garden square and create a publicly accessible amenity space for local residents. Create an active frontage to re-animate the street and improve points of entry and permeability through the site.

Retain the existing mature trees, setting them in a new green space to enhance and emphasise their scale and grandeur. Restore the historic urban grain with building lines that run parallel to the street pattern, creating active frontages and an improved pedestrian experience.

Redistribute the building mass in a more efficient form, concentrated at the Cromwell Road end of the site, reducing the apparent mass compared to the existing building. These provide a significant opportunity to correct the legacy issues

of the current building and create a high density landmark that makes a positive contribution to this part of London.

The opportunity to re-develop the site and re-organise the massing offer could offer the opportunity to improve the legibility of the building from the Gloucester Road Underground Station with a view to improving the wider streetscape.

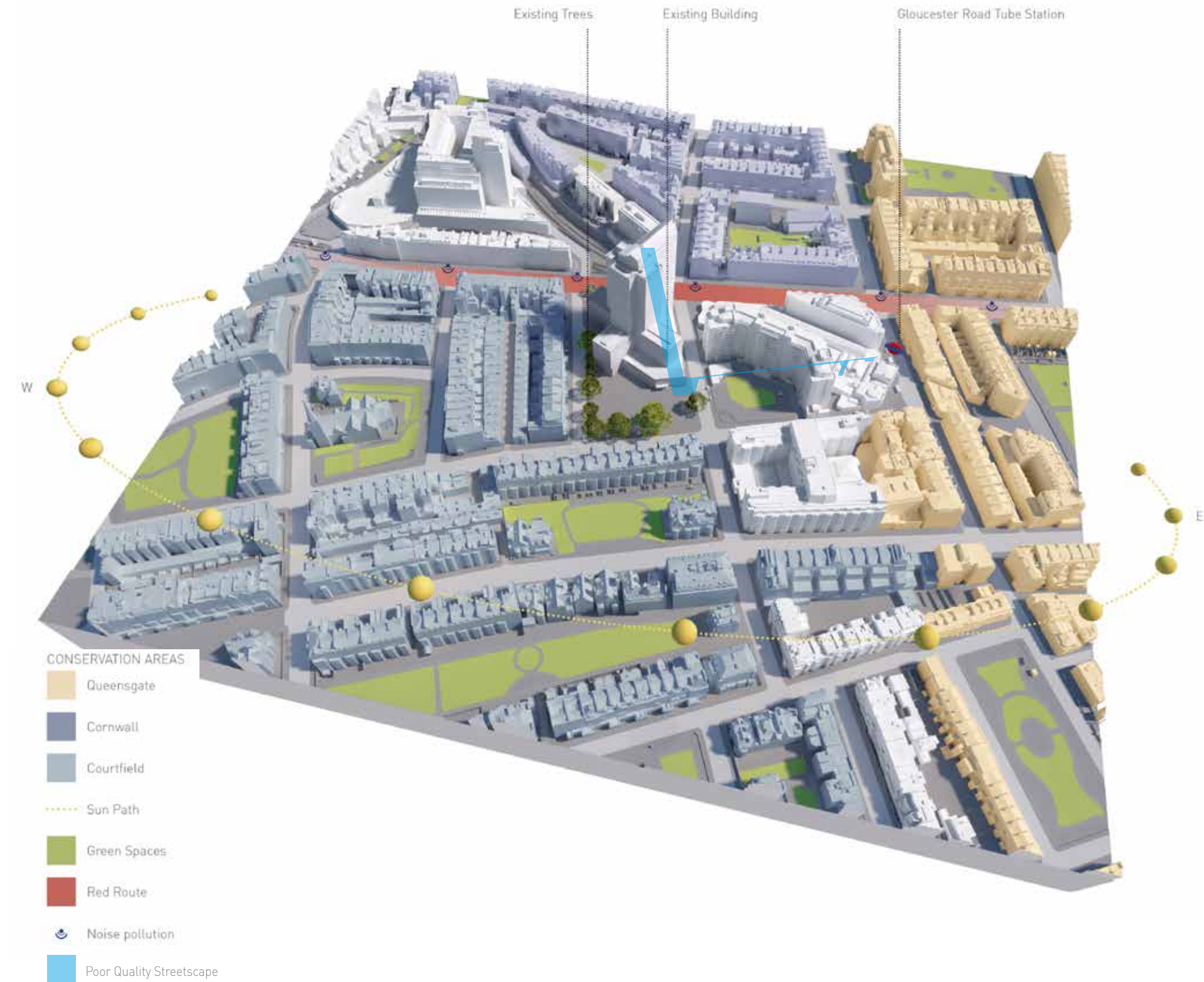


Fig 4.1 View of the existing site illustrating the site constraints



Fig 4.2 Fig 4.1 View of the existing site illustrating the site opportunities

4.3 Design Objectives

Client Brief

The Kensington Forum Hotel was acquired by Queensgate Investments in 2015 and the hotel continues to be operated under the Holiday Inn brand. Constructed in the early 1970's the building is becoming dated despite a refurbishment programme carried out in 2015. The nature of the building's construction, which uses in situ cast reinforced concrete to form bedroom walls makes more significant refurbishment or alterations difficult. The hotel is in need of a significant upgrade and the client has investigated the scope to refurbish the existing building but due to the limiting structural constraints, has favoured demolition and comprehensive redevelopment as the more viable option in securing the most appropriate level of long term future of the hotel.

The Applicant's brief for the site included the following key objectives;

- › To improve the overall quality of the external environment both for the neighbourhood and the setting of the hotel by reinstating the Garden Square as a publicly accessible amenity space.
- › To provide a higher-rated hotel on the site with a more diverse range of room types to suit the demand in the London market
- › To improve the front of house facilities for the hotel
- › To improve the customer experience of the entire hotel in particular it's sense of arrival
- › Increase the overall quantum of accommodation on the site in order to support the commercial viability of the hotel's redevelopment.
- › Improve the balance of land use by re-introducing homes on the site.
- › Create a building of quality with a lasting legacy to this area of London.

4.4 SimpsonHaugh's Architectural and Urban Design Response

As the design has developed several key architectural ambitions emerged these are summarised as follows;

- › To create an urban design arrangement that 'repairs' the damage to the urban fabric caused by the geometry of the 1972 Richard Seifert building.
- › Establish a design that improves the public realm by creating an appropriate setting for the re-creation of a traditional Garden Square and the creation of a place and environment that is comfortable, safe and desirable for local residents and visitors.
- › To produce a massing arrangement that increases the overall floor area on the site, in line with the client's brief, that minimise its impact to local residents by concentrating it towards Cromwell Road on the north east corner of the site.
- › Minimise the disruption to the site and the established existing trees by limiting the extent of the basement to the current footprint.
- › To produce an elegant contemporary architectural language that is sympathetic to the materiality of the context using materials of high quality that will endure and develop with age.

4.5 Design Evolution 2016 - 2018

The submitted proposal are the final result of an exhaustive design process over a two year period during which time up to 80 different schemes have been developed and considered. The variations have emerged in response to the input and comments made during the consultations process as well as design development in response to the brief and the technical resolution of the scheme. At a generic level the schemes can be grouped into 8 key steps that summarise the overall evolution of the design. These steps are:

- > Initial studies of the site and brief
- > Determination of the principle of a Garden Square in the south west corner
- > 4 buildings with a drop-off on the north east corner of the site (reviewed by the RBKC AAP Design Panel)
- > Relocation of the drop-off to the north west of the site
- > Consolidation of the massing into 3 buildings (presented at Public Consultation and reviewed by a second RBKC AAP Design Panel)
- > Courtfield Road building set-back from the pavement, middle building increased in height (revised brief for serviced apartments also introduced into the scheme).
- > 3rd building onto Courtfield Road is absorbed into a podium element addressing the Garden Square which interlocks with 2 towers
- > The podium is developed into singular component with the towers offset above the podium.

01 Initial Studies



02 Garden Square fixed



03 4 Buildings drop off on NE corner



04 4 Buildings drop off on NW corner



05 3 Buildings drop off on NW corner



06 Courtfield Road Building moved northwards



07 2 Buildings interlocking with a podium



08 2 Buildings on top off and off-set from a podium



Fig 4.3 Right illustration of the key design evolution steps



Fig 4.4 Photograph of models of 45 of the options studied

DESIGN PROCESS – EVALUATION AND EVOLUTION

4.5.1 Initial design studies

Prior to the appointment of SimpsonHaugh as architects for the development Queensgate had engaged Michael Squire and Partners to develop a proposal for the site. This proposal, consisting of two towers located to the north of the site supported by a 6-7 storey U-shaped podium, had been presented to RBKC in a Pre-App Consultation. The proposed architectural language and massing arrangement of the building were received negatively by the RBKC officers who suggested that a fundamental re-think to the approach to the organisation of the site was required. Queensgate therefore approached SimpsonHaugh to take a fresh look at the site and it's possibilities for re-development.

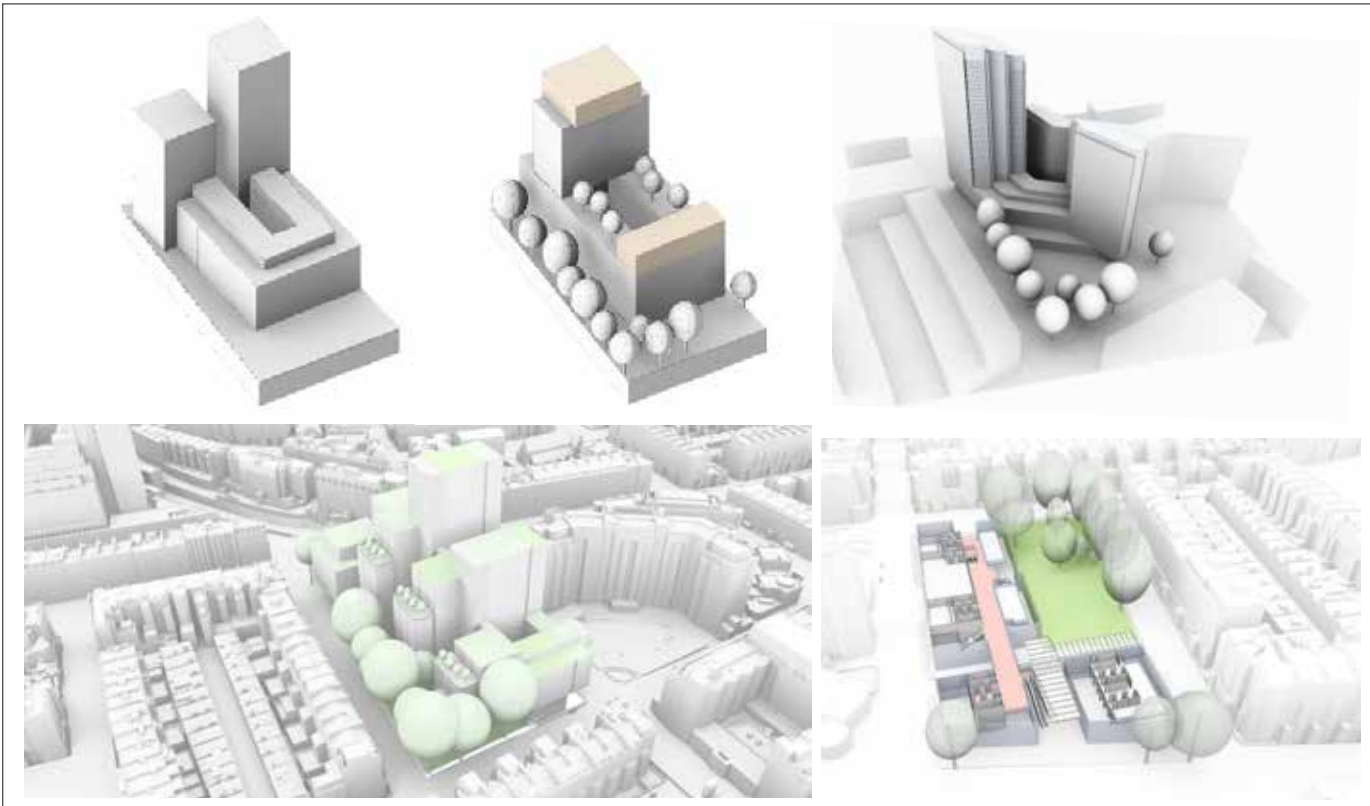
The initial studies considered were a reaction to the client's brief to generate a certain quantum of accommodation to support the business model a new hotel building as well as a reaction to the site from an initial urban design assessment. The schemes were prepared to test different building arrangements in order to understand the scale and design issues of the brief and the site. They were undertaken alongside a site analysis including research to understand more thoroughly the constraints and opportunities.

The schemes were self-consciously different some considering circulation routes through the site and drop-off locations in different positions. In terms of massing some schemes located accommodation in towers whilst others attempted to reduce the height by distributing it in perimeter block arrangements. At this stage the response to the open space was more of a reaction to the significant London Plane trees on the site and the space around them.



Fig 4.6 Photograph of model of the Michael Squire and Partners proposal

Top Fig 4.7 Plan arrangements of the initial schemes studied for the site



Right Fig 4.8 Axonometric views of early studies showing different positions for the drop-off and building massing in relation to the garden

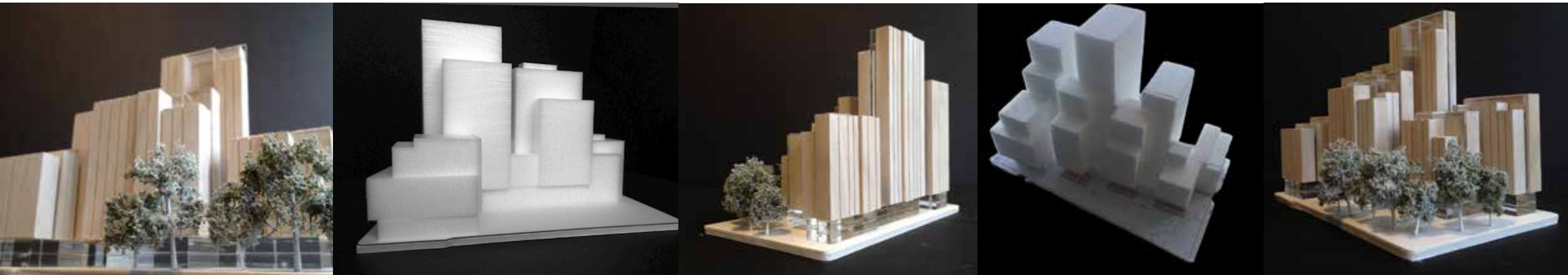


Fig 4.5 Photograph of models of 45 of the options studied



Fig 4.9 Rendered views of Cromwell Road of some early studies



4.5.2 Determination of the Garden Square

As the site analysis developed a significant constraint became clear to the development team; the need to achieve a certain area of open green space (2,702m²) on the site to be designated as a London Garden Square.

Whilst all the studies being considered achieved a large open space organised around the existing trees a strategy emerged that became a fix for the general arrangement of the buildings on the site; this was that the Garden Square should be located at the south western corner of the site in a formal rectilinear arrangement edged by built form that would return the site to its traditional historic urban grain.

Left Fig 4.12 Plan arrangements of the various studies with a fixed Garden Square together with massing view of the context and photographs of the existing garden

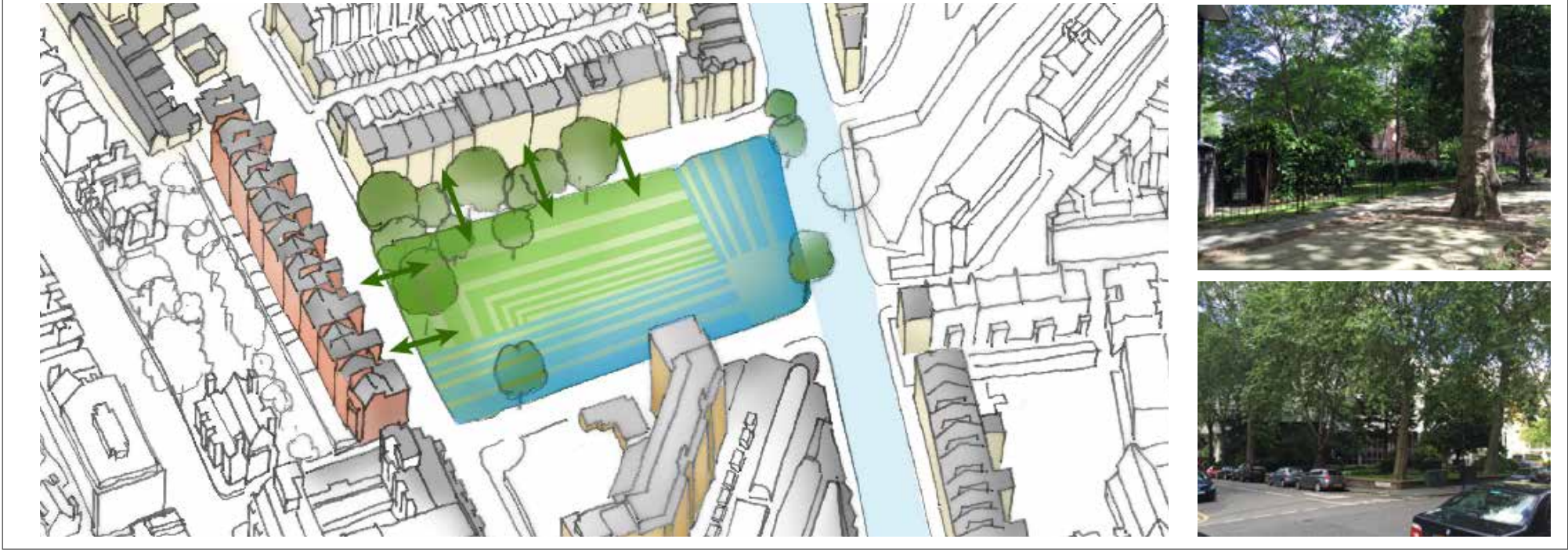


Fig 4.10 View of an early scheme from Ashburn Gardens/ Courtfield Road with a fixed Garden Square



Fig 4.11 View of an early scheme from Cromwell Road

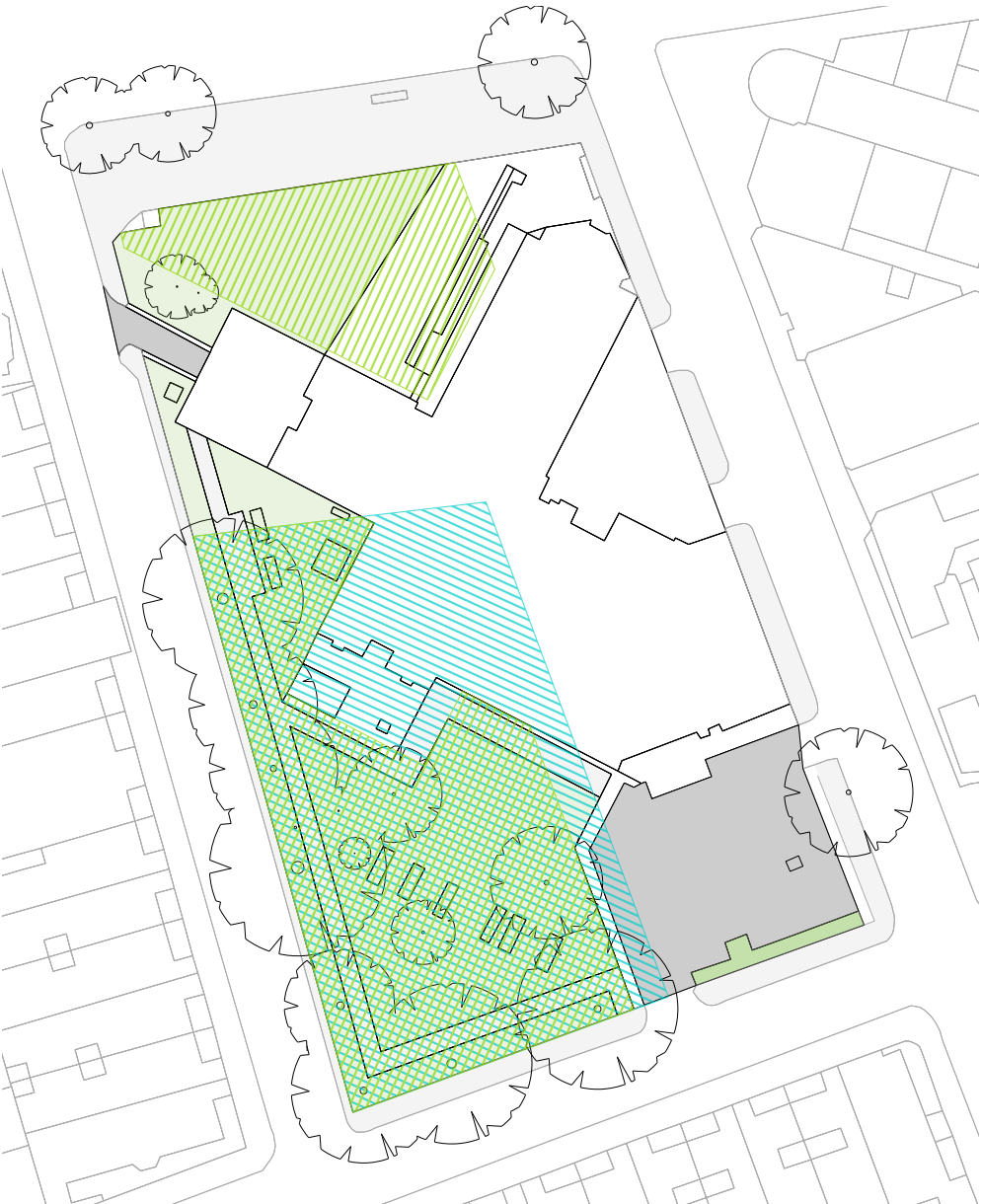


Fig 4.13 Illustration of the London Squares Land Registry Original (Blue hatch area) and Existing London Square Area (Green Hatch)

DESIGN PROCESS – EVALUATION AND EVOLUTION

4.5.3 Four Buildings with drop-off in the north eastern corner (May 2017)

Having established the principle of the Garden Square in the south western corner of the site a number of design options were developed around the principle four buildings around the eastern and southern sides of the Garden. These schemes reviewed at four Pre-App Meetings and culminated in a scheme that was presented to the Architects Advisory Panel (AAP) on the 10th May 2017.

The massing of the four buildings stepped in height from Courtfield Road where it was 10 storeys tall to 22 storeys for the middle building to 27 storeys for the tallest building in the north east corner. The fourth building on the north west corner of the site was 9 storeys tall and contained residential accommodation. The three buildings along Ashburn Place were ‘fissured’ in plan and section to reduce the apparent bulk of the buildings and also as a representation of the functional distribution; with a dividing @party’ wall between residential apartments facing the garden, and the hotel rooms, which faced Ashburn Place and Cromwell Road in the taller buildings.

The vehicular drop-off and main entrances for the development were located visually on the main artery of Cromwell Road anchoring the tallest building. Vehicles accessed the drop-off from Ashburn Place

The AAP panel welcomed the ‘L-shaped arrangement around the re-creation of a formal garden however they felt that the location of the tallest building set-back from the street wasn’t convincing nor the location of the drop-off which they believed would be an overshadowed un-welcoming space. Significantly they also thought that the fracturing of the massing was making the overall composition look more complex and consequently appear more . They preferred an earlier arrangement of simpler building blocks.



Fig 4.14 Computer rendered view of the scheme from Cromwell Road

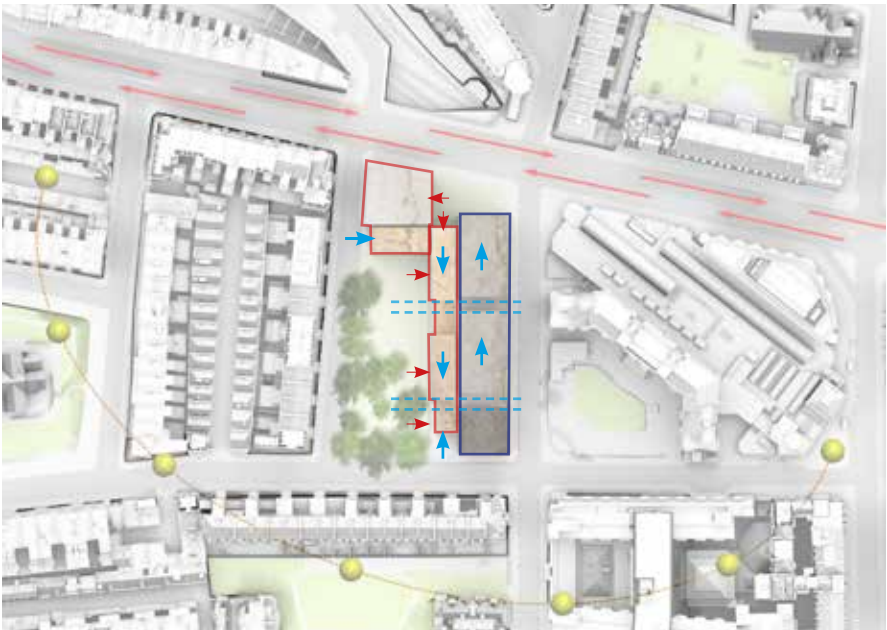


Fig 4.15 Concept plan strategy for the articulation of different functional elements with the residential component addressing the Garden Square



Fig 4.16 Massing view looking down Cromwell Road



Fig 4.7 Computer rendered view of the scheme from Ashburn Gardens/ Courtfield Road



Fig 4.18 Ground floor plan illustrating the drop-off in the north east corner of the site

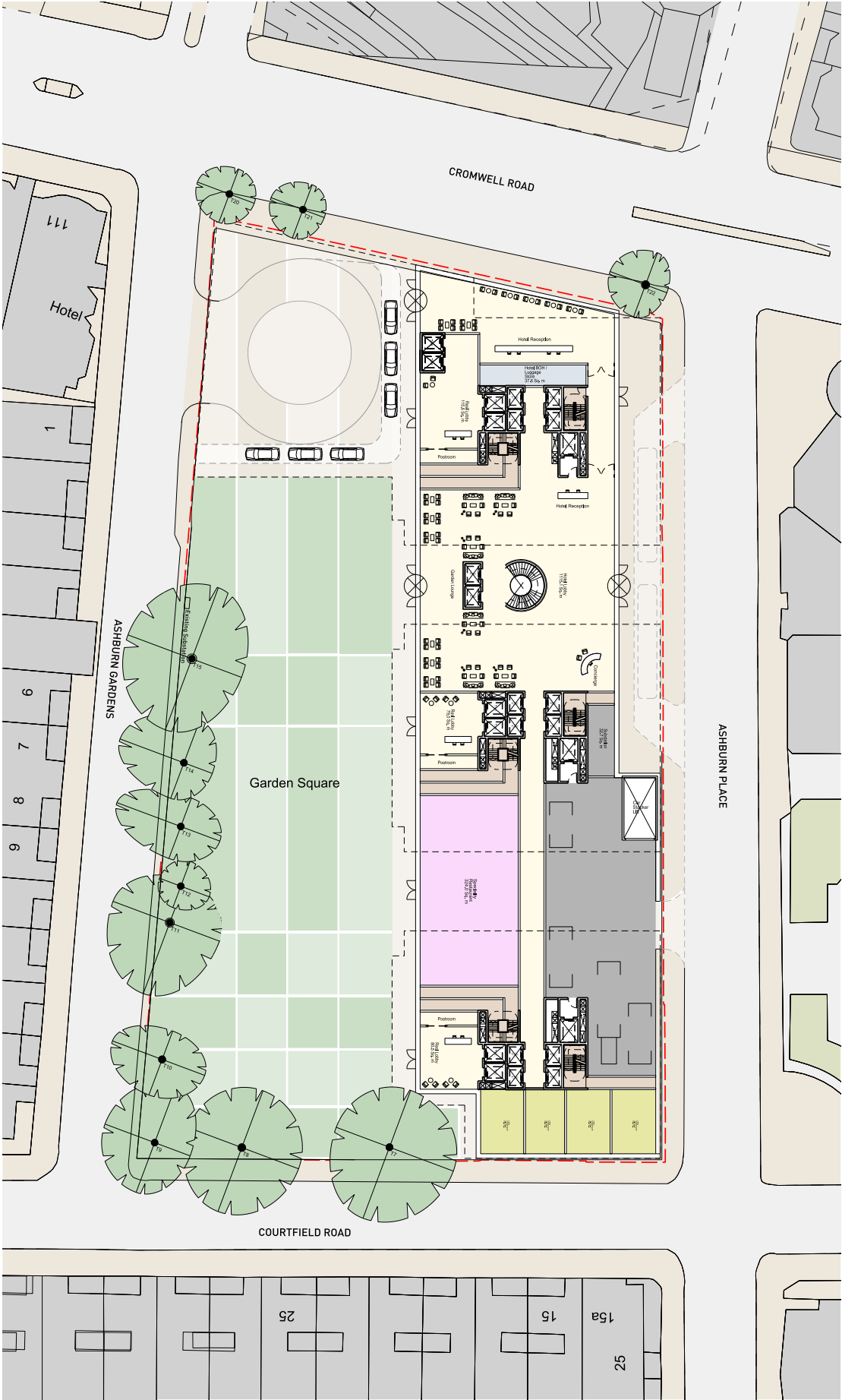


Fig 4.19 Ground floor plan illustrating the drop-off in the north west corner of the site

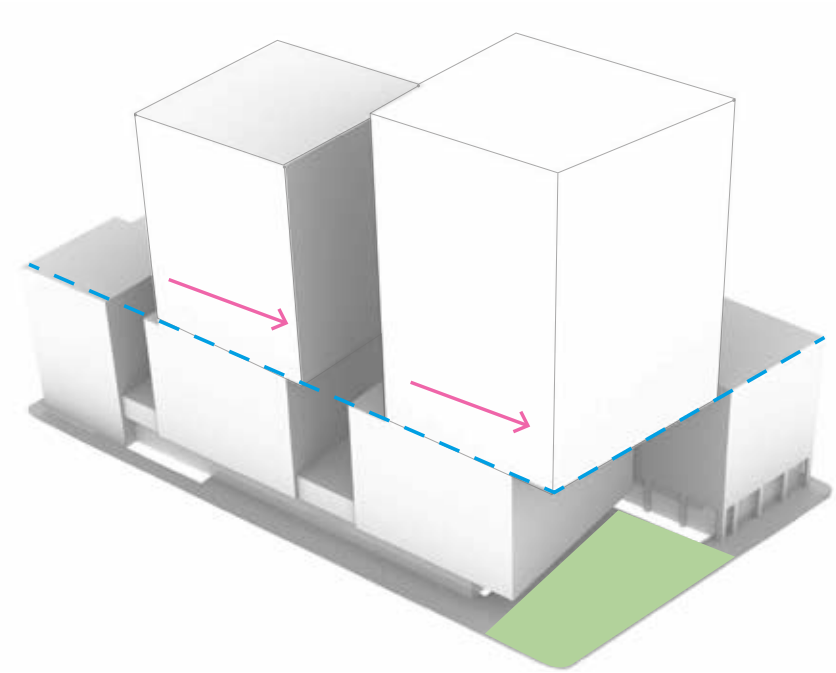


Fig 4.20 View of the massing model of one of the studies for the building for how the building could move towards Cromwell Road. This was the first time the cantilevered form was introduced



Fig 4.21 Computer rendered view of the scheme from Cromwell Road illustrating the drop-off below the 'table' of a residential building

4.5.4 Drop-off Relocated to the north-west corner of the site

Initial schemes studied in response to the comments made by the AAP looked at simplifying the three principle building forms on Ashburn Place into singular cubes. One study considered cantilevering the upper part of the tower towards Cromwell Road in order offer a stronger presence to the street.

Finally it was decided that the drop-off should be relocated to the north-west of the site in order to allow the main building to move fully to occupy the prominent corner position closest to the busy main road and furthest away form the quieter residential buildings to the south and south west of the site..

The north western building sat above the drop-off on a large table structure.

The scheme was developed in massing, elevation and functional detail to test the concept and how it worked with the clients brief,

The scheme was presented and reviewed at Pre-App Nos 5 on the 13th June 2017.



Fig 4.22 View of the massing model of two of the options for the building above the drop-off on the north west corner of the site.

DESIGN PROCESS – EVALUATION AND EVOLUTION

4.5.5 Reduction of the massing to 3 Buildings

The next significant step in the evolution of the design took place following the fifth Pre-App meeting. In considering the ambition to simplify the formal arrangement and the massing of the built forms the idea of removing a building from the composition emerged. Moving the drop-off to the junction of Ashburn Gardens and Cromwell Road from the junction of Ashburn Place and Cromwell Road was a good decision from a traffic circulation point of view; the access to the entrance was further away from the corner and there was already vehicular junction between the site and the street at this point. However the location of the drop off under the building was challenging technically as well as not ideal in creating the appropriate sense of arrival that the 5-star ambition of the hotel demanded.

The lower residential building on the north-west corner was always problematic formally; the various sub-options of the 4 buildings in a 'L'-shape around the Garden Square scheme tested this building in various arrangements, as podium to the main tower, as a stand alone building or juxtaposed as an addition to the tower. Some of these studies are illustrated on the preceding page.

It became clear that this building was compromising the overall arrangement on the site, as well as inhibiting the expression and legibility of the main tower on Cromwell Road. This tower was the main signature of the development at the base of which an elegant arrival space was to be clearly visible. It was determined that if the accommodation from the 9 storey building could be absorbed into the other three buildings the whole development, its buildings and open Garden Square space, could all 'breathe' more easily. The buildings themselves would also become more efficient as a core would be removed.

An option was developed with three stand alone buildings stepping in height from Courtfield Road. Through consultation with the RBKC planning and design officers it was felt that this simplification of the building forms strengthened the expression of each block, allowing each building to stand in its own right.

This three building massing was developed further through the summer of 2017 and evolved to incorporate refinements such as the offset in plan of the upper forms to relate the roof line of the neighboring terraces and the saw tooth facade expression. This scheme was reviewed at a second AAP in October 2017 and at further meetings with the RBKC planning and design officers.

The three building massing was supported as an improvement on the previous options although the loss of the 4th building opened up the garden to Cromwell Road and the associated problems of noise and pollution. Several options to screen the road from the Garden Square were studied including a pavilion. The final option of a screen wall integrating water features and a framed picture window offering glimpses of the Garden Square from the road and arrivals space has endured into the final proposal and will be described later in the Design and Access Statement.

The distribution of functions established in the earlier schemes remained; so that residential accommodation was located on the western side of the three blocks facing the Garden Square with hotel rooms on all other sides. The hotel front of house accommodation occupied the ground, first and second floors whilst back of house was occupied by the basement connected to a loading bay on Ashburn Place. A north-south pedestrian route edged the Garden Square linking the arrivals square to Courtfield Road this provided access to the residential lobbies. A series of townhouses edged the hotel on the southern side accessed from Courtfield Road.

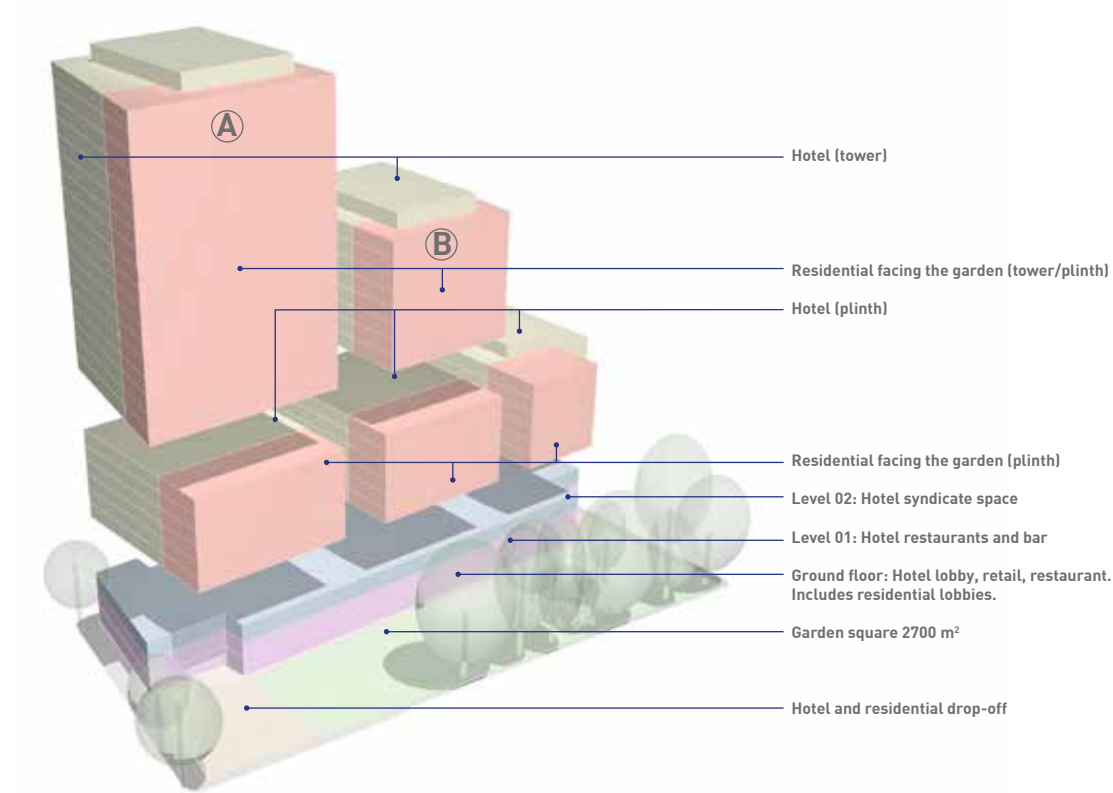


Fig 4.23 Axonometric view of the proposed functional distribution



Fig 4.24 Comparative plans of other London Garden Square's bounded on three sides

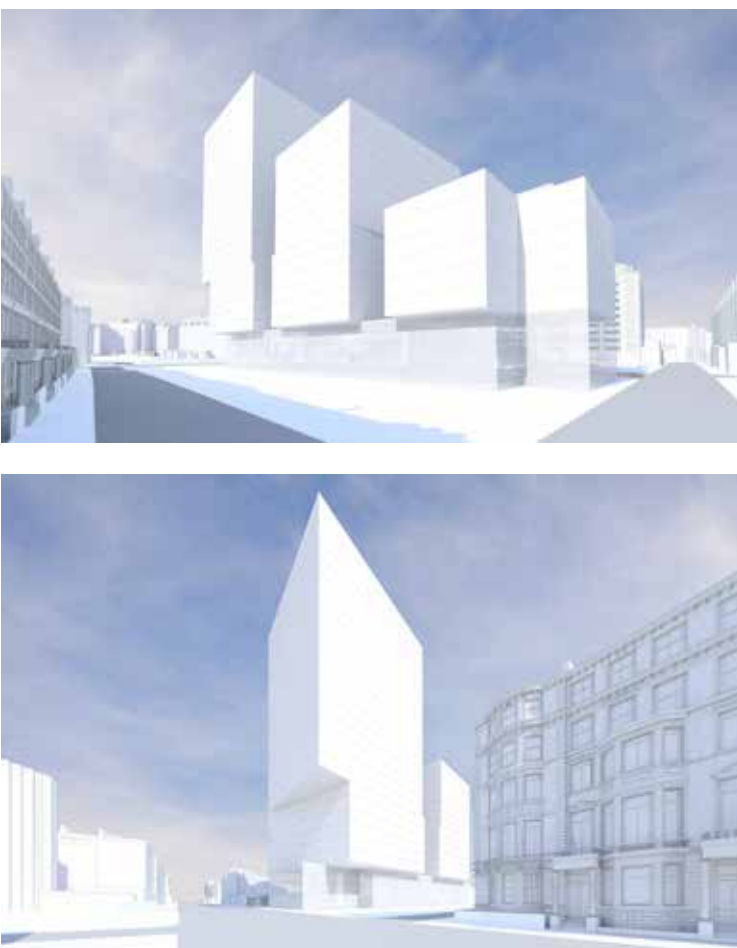


Fig 4.25 Massing views of the 3 building proposal from corner of Ashburn Gardens and Courtfield Road at the top and from Cromwell Road looking east at the bottom

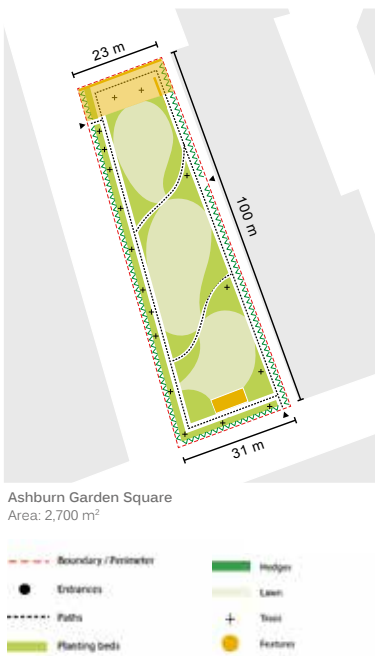


Fig 4.26 Plan of the proposed Garden Square at the same scale



Fig 4.27 Ground floor plan illustrating the drop-off in the north west corner of the site



Fig 4.28 Computer rendered view of the scheme from Cromwell Road illustrating the open 'Arrivals Square' and 3 building composition



Fig 4.29 Computer rendered view of the Garden Square looking towards the 'pavilion' enclosure on Cromwell Road

DESIGN PROCESS – EVALUATION AND EVOLUTION

4.5.6 Courtfield Road building set-back Scheme C (November 2017)

As well as being reviewed at the second AAP, the 3 building scheme was presented at the public exhibition in early November 2017 at which several key themes emerged from the comments received;

- > Can the lowest building be set back further from Courtfield Road?
- > Could additional green space be made available to separate the southern building from the back of pavement along Courtfield Road?
- > Can the building mass be redistributed so that more of the building mass moves away from Courtfield Road?
- > Can the existing trees be retained, particularly the plane tree on Ashburn Place and the plane tree at the corner of the garden square?

The financial viability and business model of the scheme was studied alongside the design throughout the summer and autumn of 2017 in response to the redistribution of the functions in the new design. The changing economic conditions and a deterioration in the residential property market (particularly the prime central London market), lead to a decision that the commercial viability of the proposal could be improved by introducing serviced apartments in place of the residential (C3) apartments. This change creates greater synergy between the hotel and serviced apartments which would benefit both uses, and result in an intensification of the hotel use on the site. Alongside this change and through consultation with the Borough, a smaller quantum of residential accommodation was too be maintained, with a proportion of it as affordable housing to meet the policy requirements of RBKC.

Following this brief change and the comments received through the public consultation, the functional diagram and massing of the proposal were re-considered. The changes introduced in response to the public consultation comments were to redistribute the massing by reducing the height of the Courtfield Road block and to intensify the two taller blocks. The Courtfield Road block was also pulled back from the back of pavement by 7 metres, introducing a landscaped buffer along this edge and allowing the existing trees to be retained.

The service apartments being smaller than the residential apartments meant that more perimeter wall had to be found in the massing arrangement. Several options were considered for how the serviced apartments could be integrated. The first approach considered was to effectively replace the residential strip of accommodation along the Garden Square with serviced apartments. Additionally, in response to a comment from Councillor Quentin Marshall about the width of the blocks, the massing of the serviced apartments 'strip' was articulated as a staggered terrace arrangement in front of and lower than the taller main blocks.

This arrangement was reviewed in Pre-App nos 10 on the 25th January 2018. Whilst it was acknowledged that there was now a need to link the three building forms to provide external wall for the serviced apartments, the consensus of opinion from the debate at the Pre-App was that the simplicity of the simple three building arrangement had been lost and that the scheme was too much of a return to the massing proposed at the first AAP, albeit with 3 buildings instead of 4.

The arrangement located the residential accommodation in the lowered southern building facing Courtfield Road and this was considered to be positive development and became a fix in the scheme arrangement.

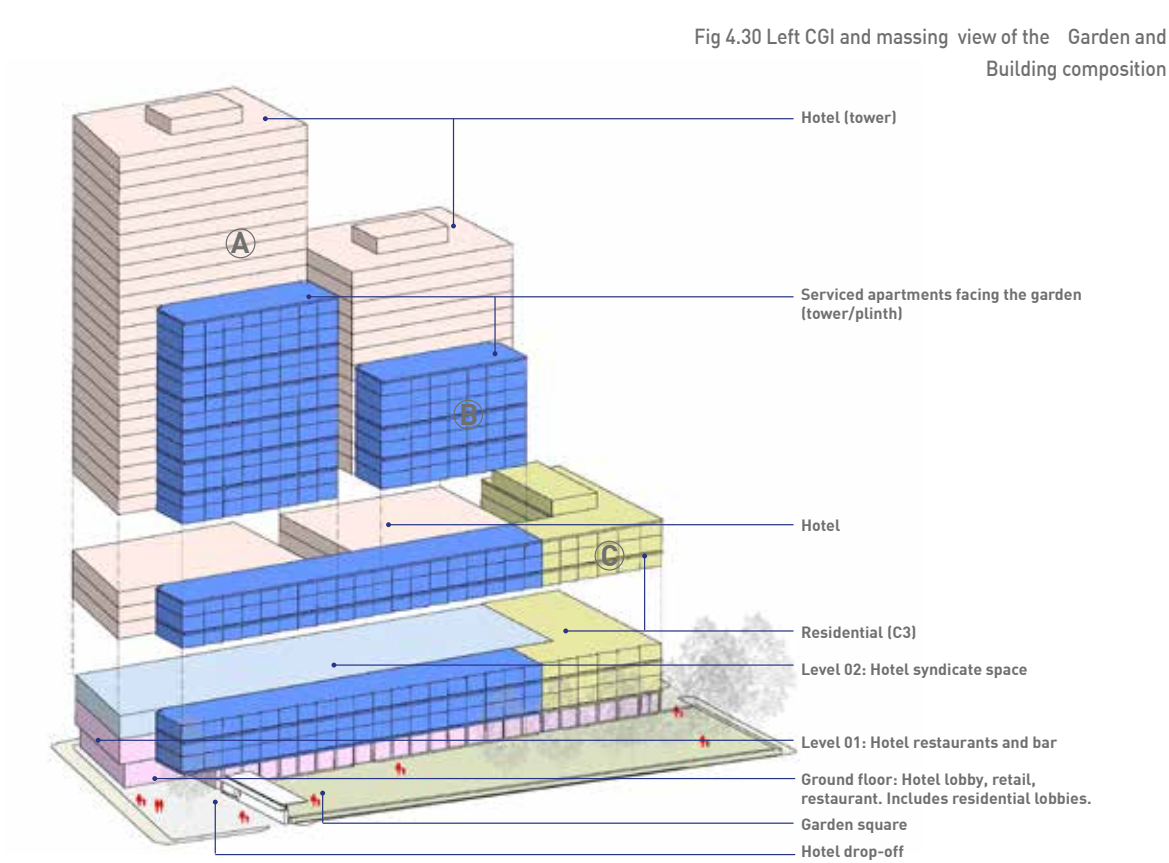


Fig 4.31 Axonometric view of the proposed functional distribution

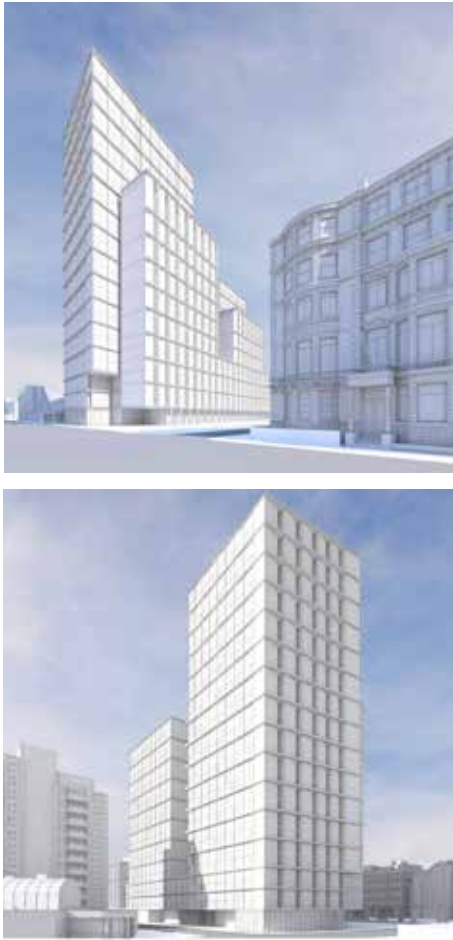


Fig 4.32 Massing views of the proposal looking east and west along Cromwell Road



Fig 4.33 Computer rendered view of the proposal onto Courtfield Road at the junction with Ashburn Gardens