

Design Review:

122

Leadenhall Street

Designed by Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners

City of London

Planning reference 12/01186/MDC

18 September 2003

A 222m tall tower in the City of London with mainly office use, plus retail and leisure accommodation on the lower levels. Designed by Richard Rogers Partnership.

This scheme was first considered by CABE's Design Review Committee at pre-planning stage in November 2002. Following amendments to the design the scheme was presented to the Design Review Committee again in September 2003. A planning application has subsequently been submitted with only minor changes to the design that CABE was presented with in September 2003. Therefore, our comments from that time formed our response to the planning application, and these are as follows:

We previously offered our broad support in principle for this proposal, which we felt to be an intelligently designed scheme with the potential to be an extraordinary addition to the City. The further work done to refine the scheme and address our previous comments has served to reinforce our support. We wish to raise a number of issues which we hope can be taken into account as the design develops further.

The thinking behind the public realm aspects of the scheme has clearly moved forward a stage. We particularly welcome the introduction of a north-south route at ground level through the site, as we had previously suggested, and the thought given to the different character of each space. One space which may require further detailed thought is that to the north of the building - the danger here is that the orientation and possible wind conditions could result in a relatively inhospitable space.

A key area to consider in the further development of the design, as the architects acknowledge, will be the way in which the structure meets the ground and the way in which the lower level of the building relates to, and speaks about, what is above. The approach taken is an innovative way to define spaces and relate to the street level. We welcome the basic form of what is proposed, which represents an opening up to the street and surrounding spaces which is unlike anything else in the City. The challenge in developing this further is to produce a design which relates both to the scale of the building as it would be seen from a distance, and to the human scale of experiencing the building close up. We are confident that this can be successfully resolved, and we think there is the potential for something special to be created. Interesting and high quality detailing at the street level is likely to be valuable in creating a successful environment.

We were grateful to see the various option studies carried out to explore the possible height, massing and overall form of the proposal. In our view, these were persuasive in suggesting that the height as proposed arises from rational consideration of possible volumes and proportions for the chosen form.

We found the explanation of the way in which the form of the top of the building has been developed to be clear and convincing. This now, like the rest of the building, has a demonstrable rigour and logic in the way it is thought through, arising more clearly from the structure of the building. The appearance of the top also benefits from this further refinement, particularly in the way that the office element stands higher than the service core.

We welcome the proposed use of colour on the northern façade, an element which we think is all too often missing from prominent buildings.

Clearly, the most controversial aspect of this proposal is likely to be its appearance in views of St Paul's from along Fleet Street. We were pleased to see further visualisations of these views, and a DVD showing how the view will appear to a pedestrian moving along the street. This demonstrated that the tower will move in and out of relative proximity to the dome of St Paul's as one moves along the street, a relationship comparable to some extent with that which already exists between the 30 St Mary Axe building and St Paul's along the first part of this route. It does not appear that at any point the building would be so close to St Paul's as to impinge visually upon it; the dome is framed by sky at all points, and as the view of the dome and peristyle becomes clearer during the journey, this proposal appears to move away from the Cathedral. This leads us to think that an elegant tower such as this, which seems to us to work well as part of the wider composition with St Paul's, is acceptable in this location and does not have a deleterious effect on views of the Cathedral.

We found the proposal to work well in visualisations of the City cluster in longer views. We note that English Heritage have requested a further view from within the Tower of London, and we would be grateful to see this when it is available.

We note the reorganisation of the plan which has taken place since we last saw this scheme, and we acknowledge the rationale for this. A feature of many great buildings

is a clear and rigorous plan form. This project makes a distinction between the 'served' and 'servant' parts of the building, as does the nearby Lloyds building. We note by way of an observation that in the plan of this building as currently proposed, escape stairs are located within the 'served' portion of the plan, which arguably detracts from the rigour of the diagram and dilutes its clarity.

As we have suggested when reviewing previous tall building proposals, and as supported by the Mayor in his Draft London Plan, we think that it would be beneficial to have some element of public access further up the tower.

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