

Design Review: Bloomberg Place

Designed by Foster and Partners

City of London

Planning reference: 11/00935/FULEIA

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We support the proposal for this major new commercial development, which makes a sensitive response to a challenging site at the heart of the City of London. The project benefits from having been designed to specifically accommodate the client as the end user and is a welcome improvement on the existing consented scheme. Overall we feel that the project is soundly integrated with its context, the facades are well considered and the proposal could deliver a calm and confident new headquarters for Bloomberg and make a valuable contribution to the City of London.

Urban Integration

The massing proposal sits comfortably amongst similarly scaled surrounding blocks and not only respects the established, protected view of St Paul's from Greenwich, but opens up a number of new public spaces that frame more generous vistas towards the cathedral. The creation of a dedicated visitor centre for the Temple of Mithras is to be commended and the integration with and expansion of the new Waterloo and City London Underground station, providing step free access, is also a very positive contribution to this project.

We applaud the strategy of reinstating the historic, diagonal course of Watling Street which now provides a strong, convenient and more intuitive link between St Paul's Cathedral and Cannon Street Station. However, this covered arcade appears narrow and it may be difficult to accommodate effective external uses; for example there is little room for a café to spill out into this street. Similarly, we feel that the undulating façade lacks the necessary depth to properly contain the suggested functions.

Although we recognise the value of providing three new squares, which offer a generous civic link to the surrounding city, we feel that two of the spaces are not being contained as well as one might expect in the city; providing more intimate, quiet and potentially delightful spaces. Therefore it is important that the quality of the third space is reinforced; we believe that the new northern square onto Bucklersbury Street has great potential to frame the entrance of St Stephen's Walbrook and offers a strong civic entrance into the new Bloomberg Place building. The new northern square would be a more successful and vibrant place if the long, dead frontage of the London Underground vent outlets were activated in some way; for example, there may be an opportunity to include informal retail or café spaces, the entrance to the cycle store could be celebrated, or a showcase for Bloomberg's public art programme might be established here.

Building Organisation

We support the strategy of devoting the ground floor of the new Bloomberg Place to public functions; the active perimeter animates the street in stark contrast to the uninviting edges of the existing building. We support the strategy of delivering the southern block to the same level of quality as the main northern block, although it will be sub-let on a temporary basis until it is required by Bloomberg. However, we feel that there may be potential for confusion in locating the single point of entry to the Bloomberg offices.

We appreciate the very specific client brief and understand the progression through the hidden central vortex, the importance of the sixth floor pantry and the clear lines of sight across the floor plates that require the cores to be located at the edge of the building. However, this sets considerable challenges for future occupants of the offices who may not share the same approach to organising the building. In order to future-proof the project, the design team and client should assure themselves that retrofitting the building to a more conventional layout is both simple and cost effective.

Elevations and Materials

The elevations have been skilfully articulated, with considerable attention paid to orientation and shading through the use of deep reveals and angled fins. We concur with the City of London that a material warmer than Portland Stone would be more appropriate in this context; although care should be taken if specifying Sandstone, to avoid the risk of spalling. The design team might identify another, warmer alternative stone. We believe that the choice of metal cladding should aim to be refined and subdued. Furthermore, the specification and detailing of the metal should avoid the risk of rain water running off onto the stone, causing unsightly staining. The design will also need to guarantee that pigeons are deterred from nesting, without resorting to methods that would interfere with the clean lines of façade.

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