

05.09.2012

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Planning Services - Development Control  
Town Hall  
Argyle Street  
London WC1H 8ND

Our reference: DCC/0407

## **LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN: CENTRE POINT**

Your reference: 2012/2895/P

Dear Amanda Peck,

Thank you for submitting this scheme to us; we reviewed the proposal on 15 August 2012. This is our formal response to the planning application. We applaud the design team and the client for the sensitive approach taken to redeveloping the Centre Point complex that should breathe new life into a much loved London landmark. We welcome the proposal for a new public space at St. Giles Circus; any planning permission should be contingent upon the delivery of this space. A convincing case is made for the change of use of the tower to become a residential building although we think the top of the tower should be made accessible to the public. We also ask that the design team consider how the building could perform better environmentally, particularly in its approach to solar shading.

### **A new public space for London**

We welcome the planned closure of St Giles High Street (North) to allow for a meaningful public space to be created at the heart of the Centre Point complex, an important step in reclaiming the area for the pedestrian. We acknowledge the challenge of transforming the traffic-dominated environment at Centre Point into a convivial place to enjoy and pass through, while maintaining its functional role as one of London's key public transport hubs. We also understand that the design team's plan for the public realm adapts the proposals developed for the site by Gillespies. We think that the emerging design for what will become one of London's major public spaces shows much promise. In particular, the bold geometry of the paving design, which evokes the era in which Centre Point was built, helpfully alludes to local pedestrian desire lines. As proposed, the space should be capable of offering a mix of passive and active functions to give it life throughout the day. As an attractive sun trap, it should also be a good counterpoint to the space fronting the busy Charing Cross Road. However, the local authority should assure





itself that the design manages the effects of down draughts from the tower at its base and under the bridge link. The scheme should also take into account the potential impact of development on the Denmark Place site, which will form an important southern edge to the space. We support the decision to introduce a retail unit of a lightweight design underneath the bridge link. Equally, we understand the rationale for introducing a pedestrian route through Centre Point House to Bucknall Street. However, in our view, it should be wider, well lit and sufficiently animated by retail to ensure it becomes an attractive and well-used route.

### **A new life for Centre Point**

Situated at the confluence of two of London's major arteries, Centre Point is one of London's most iconic buildings. The design team has shown commendable sensitivity in its approach to redeveloping this cherished London landmark. We think the case for the tower's change of use to residential is a strong one, helping to ensure this listed building has a life for many years to come. We find the planning of these units particularly well-considered. However, despite its change to a wholly private use, we believe there is a public responsibility on the part of its owner to allow public access to the top of tower, just as has come to be expected of major new-build towers in cities like London. We think there is scope to dedicate one of the tower's six private lifts to public use to allow for this. We accept that this would involve the loss of a penthouse unit. However, the decision not to include an affordable housing component in the tower, which in itself denies the creation of a mixed community within the building, makes the case for public access to the top all the more compelling. Therefore, we welcome the client's decision to commission a study to investigate this.

The decision to remove the east and west staircases from the base of the tower will clearly benefit the public realm by de-cluttering this space. However, in their new position these grand stairs risk becoming redundant as residents favour the lifts to reach their apartments. A lobby free of these stairs would be better able to accommodate the facilities required to support public access to the tower. Further, a semi-public ground floor incorporating an element of retail would help the building confront the unique challenge of locating a private residential use at the heart of one of central London's principal public spaces.

### **Sustainability**

We acknowledge the challenge of ensuring that the environmental performance of Centre Point meets both current building regulations and more stringent standards in the future while preserving the architectural integrity of this listed building. We appreciate the efforts to address overheating in the tower in part through the use of internal blinds. However, we feel that exchanging the solid spandrel panels for glazed panels is counter-productive in this regard, the substantial increase in glazing making it harder to manage heat loads in this east/west facing building. Therefore, we would advise against full glazing. While we welcome the intent to preserve the hierarchy and rhythm of the façade, in our view, the introduction of external shading would not necessarily disrupt this given the deep reveals of the window bays. We ask the design team to investigate alternative solutions to improve upon the solution currently proposed.



## Conclusion

Overall, this is a well-considered proposal that, alongside interventions by Crossrail and others, have the potential to transform perceptions of the St Giles Circus area. However, given that the proposed public space is integral to the scheme as a whole and represents a key public benefit, the local authority should satisfy itself that this can be delivered as intended as part of this planning submission.

Thank you for consulting us and please keep us informed of the progress of the scheme. If there is any point that requires clarification, please telephone us.

Yours sincerely



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## Review process

Following a site visit, discussions with the design team and local authority and a pre-application review, the scheme was reviewed on 15 August 2012 by Keith Bradley (chair) and Michael Coombs. These comments supersede any views we may have expressed previously.

## Affiliated panels

Design Council Cabe is affiliated with independent design review panels which commits them all to shared values of service, the foundation of which are the 10 key principles for design review. Further information on affiliation can be found by visiting our website.

As this scheme is the subject of a planning application, we will publish our views on our website, [www.designcouncil.org.uk](http://www.designcouncil.org.uk)

