

**1 DETAILS OF THE DEVELOPMENT**

Ref: 19/03679/PRE  
Location: 96-98 George Street, Croydon, CR0 1PJ  
Ward: Fairfield  
Description: Proposed demolition of existing buildings. Redevelopment to provide 11 storey building comprising office (Class B1 use) with ground floor cafe/restaurant (Class A1/A3 use)  
Drawing Nos: Submitted documents  
Applicant: Freshwater Group  
Agent: JLL  
Case Officer: Louise Tucker

**2 PROCEDURAL NOTE**

- 2.1 This proposed development is being reported to Planning Committee to enable Members to view it at pre application stage and to comment upon it. The development does not constitute an application for planning permission and any comments made upon it are provisional, and subject to full consideration of any subsequent application, including any comments received as a result of consultation, publicity and notification.
- 2.2 It should be noted that this report represents a snapshot in time, with negotiations and dialogue on-going. The plans and information provided to date are indicative only and as such the depth of analysis provided corresponds with the scope of information that has been made available to Council officers. Other issues may arise as more detail is provided and the depth of analysis expanded upon.
- 2.3 The scheme has developed through a series of pre-application meetings with officers and consideration by the Place Review Panel (PRP). A summary of the Panel's feedback is included within this report.
- 2.4 This pre-application report aims to provide Members with sufficient information for effective engagement with the scheme, and covers the following points:
- a. Executive summary of key issues with scheme
  - b. Site briefing
  - c. Place Review Panel feedback
  - d. Material planning considerations and officers' preliminary conclusions
  - e. Specific feedback requested
  - f. Procedural matters

### **3 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 3.1 The proposed scheme is for the demolition of the existing buildings, and the erection of an 11 storey office development, with café/restaurant use on part of the ground and mezzanine floor.
- 3.2 Discussions so far have primarily focused on the existing and proposed uses, height and massing, design and façade treatment of the building, ground floor activation, public realm and impact on neighbouring occupiers.
- 3.3 The views of members are sought on the proposals, with particular regard to the following key issues:

#### Existing and proposed uses

- 3.4 There would be a loss of 6 existing residential units to accommodate the proposal, which would be contrary to policy. The applicant has provided evidence that these units are of poor quality in terms of fabric and layout, with a refurbishment up to lettable standard not viable. The views of Members are sought on the loss of these residential units and whether a high quality office building with level and active frontages onto George Street and College Square could be supported in principle.

#### Townscape, design and massing

- 3.5 Officers support the principle of a tall building in this location. Subject to views testing, and balanced against the constraints including the neighbouring amenity impact and need for larger floorplates for an office typology, officers consider that the proposed massing could be appropriate, if the façade and materiality continue to develop positively. The general view of PRP was that a taller mass on a smaller footprint could be preferable and should be tested. Discussions surrounding this are ongoing alongside microclimate and amenity impact, but Members views are sought as to the height and massing currently proposed in terms of the impact on the townscape.

#### Public realm

- 3.6 Consideration of the public realm offer and the layout and activation of the ground floor is underway to ensure high quality delivery in line with the wider aspirations for the area. Members' views are sought in this regard, and on the initial proposals for College Square.

#### Impact on adjoining occupiers

- 3.7 Initial testing indicates material daylight/sunlight impacts on neighbouring occupiers in 101 George Street (adjoining) and 71-79 George Street (opposite) which are likely to be significant. Officers are working with the applicant to fully understand these impacts and how the massing and form of the building is being worked up to minimise these impacts as much as possible. This must be balanced against the vision of a mid-rise block on the site in the Fairfield Masterplan, the site allocations supporting redevelopment and the public benefits the scheme could deliver. The views of the Committee are sought.

## 4 BACKGROUND

### Site and Surroundings

- 4.1 The site is located on the southern side of George Street, with an additional street frontage to College Road. It is occupied by two buildings with a central raised walkway/landscaped area. No. 96, also known as Norwich Union House, is in use as offices. No.98, also known as St Matthews House, comprises a basement car park, office space at ground floor (there is a query over the use as a religious institution at ground floor, covered below), with residential accommodation above.
- 4.2 The surrounding area is predominantly made up of commercial and educational uses, although a part 38/44 storey building with 546 residential units and flexible non-residential uses at ground floor is nearing completion on the site immediately to the east, 101 George Street. The Croydon College buildings lie to the south of the site, whilst East Croydon Station lies to the north east on the opposite side of George Street.

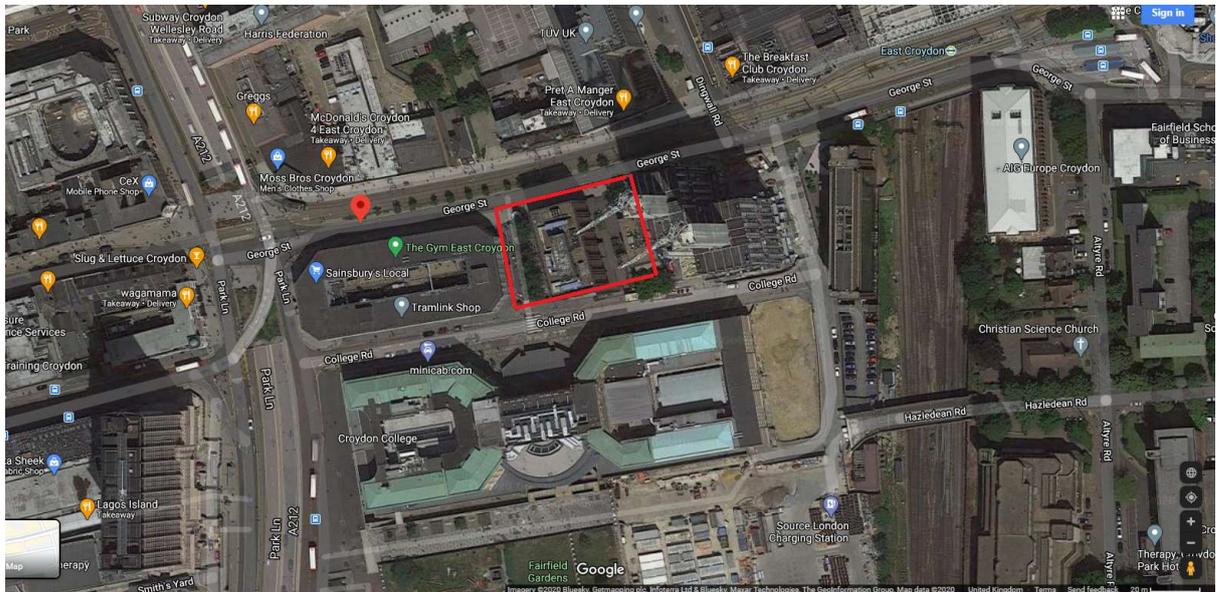


Image 1: Aerial view, site outlined in red



Image 2: 3D aerial view of the existing buildings

- 4.3 The site forms part of the Fairfield Masterplan area. There are a number of consented/proposed developments (in addition to 101 George Street – see planning history section below) in the site’s vicinity and wider area, including the forthcoming public realm for Fair Field to the south of the site and refurbishment of Fairfield Halls.



Image 3: Fair Field Masterplan

- 4.4 The site has excellent Public Transport Accessibility (PTAL 6B), being in close proximity to East and West Croydon Stations and numerous bus and tram links. George Street is a classified road.

- 4.5 In terms of heritage assets, the site lies opposite Locally Listed Buildings and in the vicinity of a number of other heritage assets – Conservation Areas (Central Croydon and Chatsworth Road), Locally Listed Buildings and Listed Buildings.

### **Planning History**

- 4.6 There is a substantial amount of planning history on the site (and indeed surrounding sites), but the following recent applications are of most relevance:

Land bounded by George Street, Park Lane, Barclay Road, and main London to Brighton Railway Line

16/00944/P - Outline planning permission for demolition and redevelopment to provide: flexible class A1 (shops) and/or class A2 (financial and professional services) and/or class A3 (food and drink); class B1 (business); class C1 (hotel); class C3 (dwelling houses); class D1 (non-residential institutions); class D2 (assembly or leisure); public realm and landscaping; and associated car and cycle parking, servicing, and access arrangements (with all matters reserved); and

Full planning permission for demolition including multi-storey car park and Barclay Road Annexe; extensions and alterations to Fairfield Halls including class A3 (food and drink); erection of buildings for flexible class A1 (shops) and/or class A2 (financial and professional services) and/or class A3 (food and drink) and/or class D1 (non-residential institutions) and/or class D2 (assembly and leisure) and class C3 (dwelling houses); change of use of basement car park (part) to class D1 (non-residential institutions); public realm and landscaping; and associated car and cycle parking, servicing, and access arrangements – Permission granted

(NB. This was a hybrid planning application comprising full planning permission for Phase 1A and outline planning permission for Phase 1B, 2 and 3 with all matters reserved – this pre-app site formed part of the outline element)

101 George Street (Former Essex House)

17/04201/FUL - Redevelopment of the site to provide a part 38 and part 44 storey building with 546 residential flats, with the ground floor to incorporate a flexible space including retail (Class A1), cafe (Class A3), business space (Class B1) and gallery space (Class D1) uses with basement accommodating parking spaces, cycle storage and refuse storage, and associated hard and soft landscaping – Permission granted and nearing completion on site

### **Proposal**

- 4.7 The proposed scheme is for the demolition of the two existing buildings on site, and the erection of an 11 storey building comprising offices (previously classified as use class B1(a), now Class E as per the Use Classes Order (2020)), with public café/restaurant use on part of the ground and mezzanine floor (previously use class A3, now Class E). A roof terrace is proposed on the top floor, along with public realm and landscaping works proposed for College Square, the area separating the site from Suffolk House to the west of the building.

- 4.8 A vehicular access is proposed to the rear of the building off College Road, serving a parking and servicing area (with provision for refuse storage) with two disabled parking spaces. A dedicated cycle store would be accessed from the eastern side of the building.

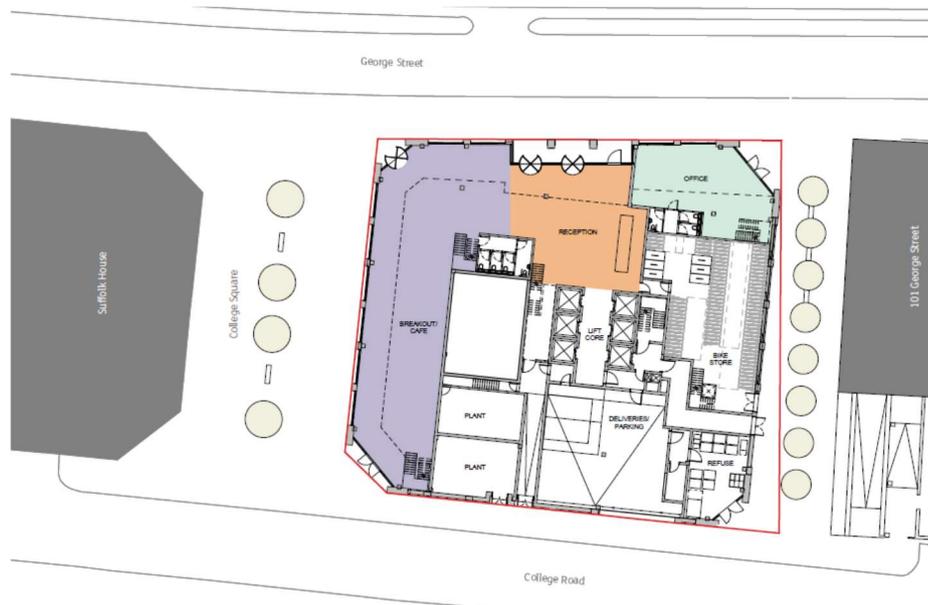


Image 4: proposed ground floor plan

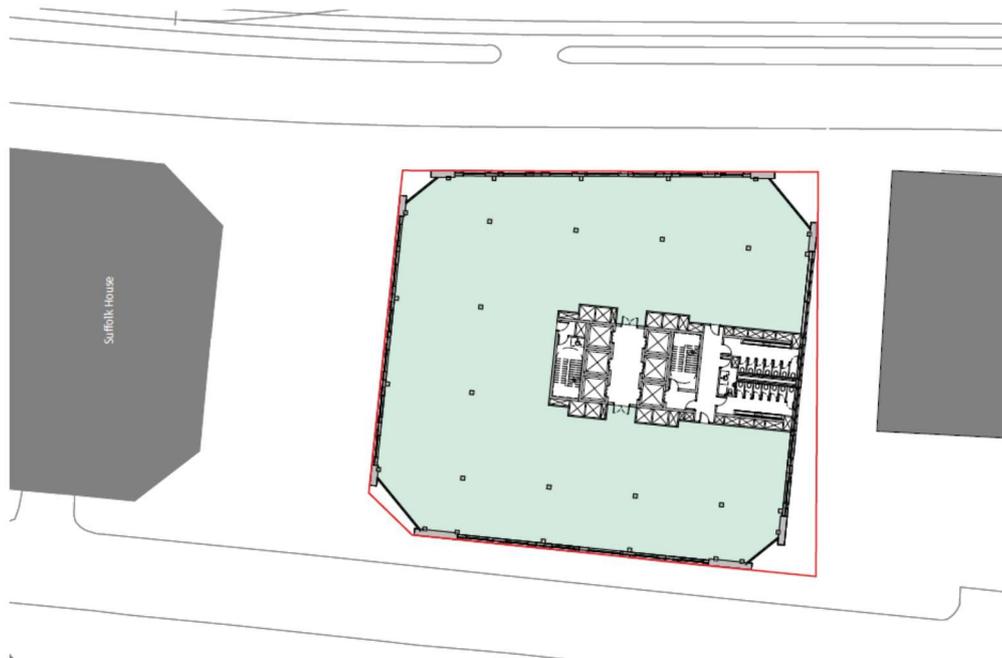


Image 5: typical proposed office floor plan



Image 6: CGI showing proposed scheme from George Street

## **5 PLACE REVIEW PANEL (PRP) RESPONSE**

- 5.1 The scheme was first presented to PRP on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2020. The Panel were generally supportive of the proposal but thought different options should be tested to see how the building could better relate to its context. Key comments were made as follows:

- Good starting point for the design, however the social aspirations of the project should be brought to the fore and the scheme should respond to the significance of its location within the Cultural Quarter.
- More community engagement with local stakeholders (including the College). The applicant was encouraged to explore opportunities to program events and activities with the College to make the scheme more richly integrated with its context. Important that the scheme seeks to break down some of the existing social barriers and creates a positive relationship with the College.
- Testing of different options for the massing and volume to explain rationale of how the applicant has arrived at the current design. A solution with a smaller footprint and taller mass would potentially work better to alleviate some concerns regarding townscape, microclimate and impact on adjoining occupier amenity, subject to testing.
- A more slender orthogonal footprint could be more appropriate.
- Microclimate testing should be undertaken as a priority.
- Concern about the close proximity of the massing to existing residential windows within 101 George Street and the impact on daylight/sunlight and outlook – the applicant should consider pulling the footprint further away from the boundary.
- Proposal needs to respond to the character of this part of Croydon more convincingly.
- Further consideration should be given to the material treatment and architectural expression – more material studies and contextual analysis should be undertaken to inform this and define a set of guiding design principles for the scheme. .
- More variety in the elevations would be welcomed, e.g. treating the north and south elevations differently and adding architectural interest to the east.
- Site offers great opportunities to improve the landscape of College Square which should tie into the wider vision for the Fair Field Masterplan Area (and should connect the different spaces e.g. through common materials). Landscape architect should be appointed to develop this further.
- The notional public realm should extend into the building footprint and invite the public inside to dwell – the glazed ground floor café and semi-public co-working space on the corner could work well.
- The terrace should be more public-spirited. It will benefit from excellent views towards the Fair Field Cultural Quarter and this should be celebrated.

5.2 The scheme is continuing to develop since the PRP review and is due to go back for a second review later in November. The changes made include:

- Different massing options tested and further justification for current approach
- Further contextual analysis carried out including nearby heritage assets
- Development of architectural approach and materiality
- Cycle store development
- Landscape architect appointed and public realm proposals for College Square starting to develop
- Initial qualitative assessment of microclimate impacts provided
- Initial daylight/sunlight impact assessment on nearby occupiers undertaken

## 6 MATERIAL PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

6.1 The main matters for consideration in a future submission are as follows:

- Principle of development
- Affordable housing
- Townscape and design
- Amenities of future occupiers
- Amenities of adjoining occupiers
- Transport
- Other considerations including S106 obligations

### Principle of development

#### Proposed uses

6.2 The site is located within the Edge Area of the Croydon Opportunity Area covered by policy DM38.4 of the Croydon Local Plan (CLP) (2018), where tall buildings can be acceptable subject to achieving a high quality form, design and treatment and where negative impact on sensitive locations is limited. Policy DM15 relates to tall buildings, requiring their locations in PTAL4 and above, to be of exceptional quality, respond positively to nearby heritage assets and include active ground floor and inclusive public realm. Therefore the principle of a tall building in this location is considered acceptable, subject to the above.

6.3 No. 96 George Street is allocated in the Local Plan for '*offices with residential development or hotel and/or retail (on George Street frontage)*'. No. 98 George Street is also allocated in the Local Plan, for '*redevelopment for residential and/or offices and/or retail (on George Street frontage)*'. The site allocations through the Local Plan therefore give some flexibility in terms of acceptable uses and it is considered offices with retail type uses - a café/restaurant/co-working space at ground floor - could be supported in principle. This would also comply with the aspirations of the Fair Field Masterplan, which envisaged an active frontage onto George Street and College Square.

6.4 The Intend to Publish version of the London Plan requires affordable workspace to be secured on B1 use class developments. This will need to be explored with the applicant and if secured, may help in the planning balance.

### Loss of residential

- 6.5 However, policy SP2.2 of the CLP (2018) does not permit developments which would result in a net loss of homes or residential land. The scheme would result in the loss of 6 existing residential units within St Matthew's House. These units are understood to be privately owned by the applicant but are currently unoccupied. The applicant has advised the units are unable to be let due to their poor quality and layout, and whilst they have considered refurbishment, this would not be viable nor possible to a lettable standard within the existing building envelope. Officers have requested the applicant provide robust justification for the loss of these units, with evidence to support the above assertions (including length of vacancy and marketing evidence) to allow the principle to be supported.



Image 7 and 8 – photos of internals of flats provided by applicant

- 6.6 Officers take the potential loss of residential very seriously. Through discussion to date the applicant is clear in their desire to submit an office-led development and have expressed concern with integrating residential into the scheme.

### Loss of community facility

- 6.7 Policy DM19.1 of the CLP (2018) protects community facilities, with their loss permitted where it can be demonstrated there is no need for the existing premises or land for a community use and that it no longer has the ability to serve the needs of the community.
- 6.8 Previous reference in the planning history has been made to a Place of Worship being in operation on the ground floor of St Matthews House, which would be considered a community facility. Contrary information however has been provided from the applicant, stating that whilst the Southwark Diocese utilised the ground floor of the building since at least 2000, this was for office functions

(which would not be a protected use) rather than as a Place of Worship. This will need to be formalised with supporting evidence in the applicant's submission, but at this stage officers are satisfied that there would not be loss of a community facility as part of the scheme.

## **Design and townscape**

### Height and massing

- 6.9 The proposed scheme is for an 11 storey building, utilising the majority of the site footprint with chamfered corners. The proposed massing seeks to mediate between the scales of 101 George Street and Suffolk House on either side, and the opposite Locally Listed Buildings on George Street (71-79 George Street to the north) and College Road (Croydon College to the south) respectively. Coupled with this is the need to balance the height and width of the building with the amenity impact on adjoining flank residential windows on 101 George Street (further detail below), and the requirement for large open plan floorplates to accommodate high quality office accommodation.
- 6.10 Whilst officers consider that a smaller footprint would be beneficial from a townscape and amenity perspective, we are cognoscente of the need for larger open plan floorplates for office developments. Taking these parameters into account, officers consider that the proposed massing could be appropriate, subject to further testing of the alternative options (including microclimate testing) and analysis of key townscape views (including the relationship with the Locally Listed assets and Locally Designated View looking east from North End to ensure harm is minimised). Feedback from the PRP suggested alternative massing options should be tested, and felt that a taller mass with a smaller footprint may be more appropriate in achieving a more slender form which is set away from the neighbouring windows. Members' views are sought.

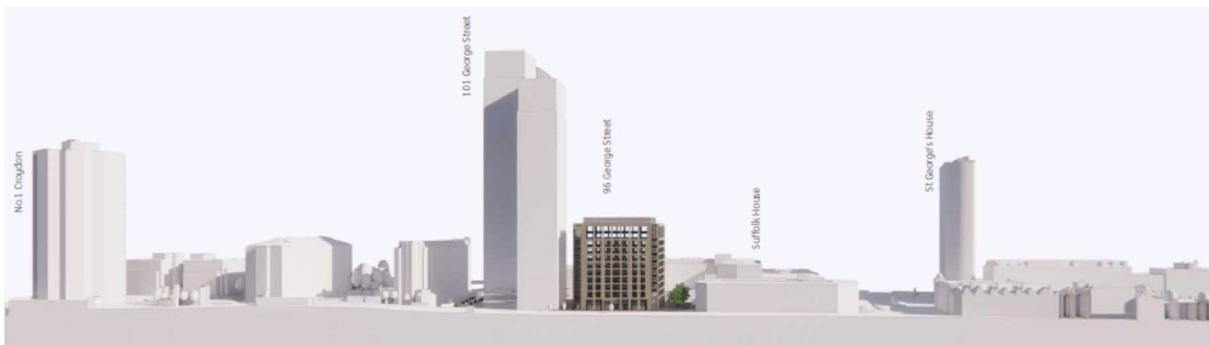


Image 9: CGI showing proposed scheme in its context (looking south)

### Design approaches and façade treatments

- 6.11 The design approach is focussed on incorporating Croydon typologies in the vicinity of the site which is supported in principle. This includes the rhythm and expression of Croydon's mid-century heritage, but also smaller scale Victorian heritage such as the Locally Listed buildings opposite. This is currently emerging as a woven approach to the façade, incorporating a regular grid expression with masonry in varying bonds and concrete feature panels. Officers are working with the applicant to ensure this concept is strongly articulated on the façade with differentiation expressed between the top, middle and base of the building and

elements of expressive character to give points of interruption and interest within the quite regimented elevations. It is also important to ensure the elevations achieve a vertical emphasis including development of the chamfered corners with the rest of the facade, particularly given the wide footprint proposed. These elements are currently under development, but officers consider that this is moving in a positive direction.

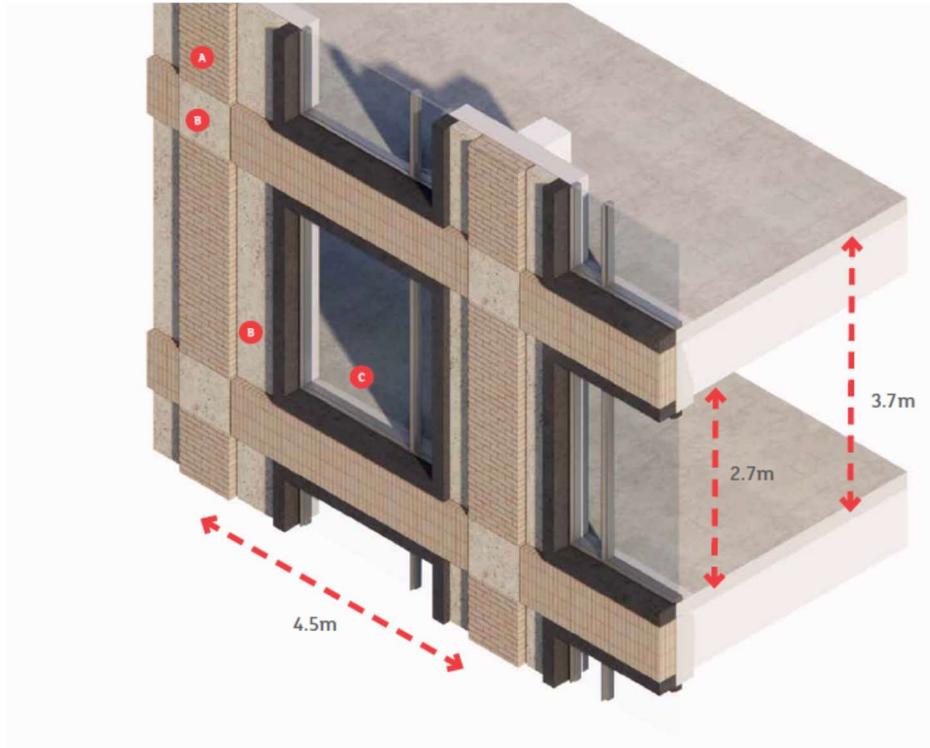


Image 10: Developing bay studies of the façade

6.12 A public art strategy will also need to be outlined and developed, and this could help improve the scheme contextually.

#### Materiality

6.13 The applicant is proposing a simple material palette of brickwork and concrete panels, which could be an appropriate solution. Officers are encouraging the applicant to experiment and test the right proportions, type, quality and expression of brick and concrete informed through contextual analysis and precedent studies to root the building in its locality, and add visual interest and richness. These pre-application discussions will continue.

#### Public realm

6.14 Both the Fair Field Masterplan and the design parameters for the outline planning permission for the wider area (ref. 16/00944/P) set out the need for active frontages along George Street and onto College Square, particularly at the corners (as do the site allocations). The ground floor uses will therefore be key, alongside the design, layout and treatment of the ground floor including entrance points. The introduction of a mezzanine floor at ground floor has been a positive addition in activating the frontage. Discussions are ongoing regarding the spaces and routes through and around the site and the ground floor layouts, including accounting for pedestrian flows, wind and microclimate. Further work is needed

in this regard, in particular for wind testing to be undertaken both on the public and private components of the scheme (including the layout and design of the proposed roof terrace), with any required mitigation designed in at this stage.

6.15 Linked with this are the strategies and designs for the public realm for College Square, which officers have been clear must come forward as part of the proposal. This public space is a key component of the Fairfield Masterplan and the Council has already invested in meanwhile use strategies for the space to begin testing how this space can evolve from its previous derelict status. The applicant is currently working up initial designs for the space (see indicative image below) supported by a brief provided by officers, to ensure the space works successfully for all potential users and complements the ground floor uses (e.g. outdoor seating for the café). Fundamental to the success of this space is microclimate conditions, which is why it is so important that wind and daylight/sunlight considerations are factored in fully and early.



Image 11: initial public realm CGI

### **Impact on adjoining occupiers**

6.16 There are a number of buildings surrounding the site, and some emerging/consented schemes. Most critically in terms of residential amenity are 101 George Street, nearing completion immediately to the east and the upper floors of 71-79 George Street opposite the site to the north.

6.17 The applicant has been made aware that the development will need to take full account of surrounding development, with initial testing carried out at an early stage to best inform the emerging massing. Whilst an initial analysis has been provided, a full and detailed daylight/sunlight assessment has been requested by officers (including comparative testing of alternative massing options) but is yet to be provided.

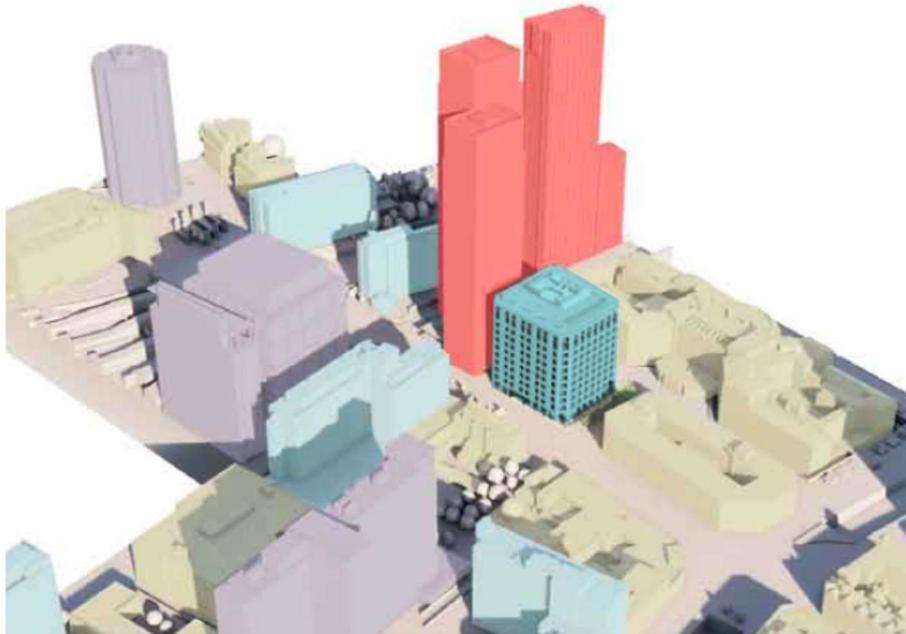


Image 12: surrounding context

6.18 101 George Street has flank primary habitable room windows facing the site which, the applicant's initial analysis suggests, would experience material daylight/sunlight impacts. It is important to acknowledge however that the 101 George Street scheme was recently consented, with the principle of a mid-rise block on this pre-application site established and the site allocations envisaging future redevelopment. Therefore, whilst the impact is a concern that will need to be carefully considered, it is noted that some degree of flexibility will be required in this respect to allow a redevelopment to come forward. Officers are working with the applicants to understand the extent of the impact and potential remediation, and through this, understanding the optimal building massing and design (along with consideration of the townscape impact and key views).

6.19 The applicant's initial daylight and sunlight testing also identifies impacts to varying degrees for the residential units on the upper floors of 71-79 George Street (nos. 77 and 79 George Street being most severely impacted). As above, officers have requested the full results and analysis to understand the full impact and which windows are affected. It is appreciated that there will be some degree of impact with any larger building on the site and the dense urban nature is acknowledged. This will need to be weighed against the extent of the impact and potential mitigation, alongside whether the scheme delivers sufficient public benefit.

6.20 In terms of privacy and overlooking, 18m is generally considered the minimum separation distance to allow adequate privacy. Given the proximity of the site to surrounding developments (both existing and proposed) a degree of mutual overlooking is to be expected, however care should be taken to retain amenity in this respect as much as possible, and ensure surrounding schemes are not prejudiced from coming forward. This will include consideration of the impact of the roof terrace, and window to window relationships with neighbouring 101 George Street.

### **Highways and transport**

6.21 A new vehicular access is proposed off College Road, serving a parking and servicing area with 2 disabled parking spaces. This provision is considered appropriate given the highly accessible location and commercial uses proposed. Exact arrangements for the access are to be agreed to ensure safe access and manoeuvring can be achieved.

6.22 Refuse storage would also be to the rear off College Road, with collection arrangements and management strategy to be agreed. A dedicated cycle store is also proposed for users of the building, accessed on the eastern side of the building adjacent to 101 George Street, the principle of which is supported to further activate this space. The designs of this the cycle store are developing positively, development of the eastern façade and wind testing to ensure the space is a pleasant and usable space to support this will be important considerations going forward.

6.23 Consideration is being given to the likely demand for deliveries and servicing in and around the building, given the amount of surrounding development. At present, it is envisaged the majority of deliveries and servicing will take place on site, with discussions continuing regarding the use of a loading bay on College Road for larger vehicles. A robust delivery and servicing plan would be required with any application. It is likely a restriction of car parking permits for future users of the building would be secured by legal agreement.

### **Environmental impact and sustainability**

6.24 A detailed sustainability strategy has not yet been confirmed, but the applicant has been made aware of the relevant policy requirements, including the forthcoming requirements in the Intend to Publish version of the London Plan for major non-domestic development to achieve zero carbon. Full discussions relating to air quality, overheating, surface water drainage, microclimate and lighting impacts are yet to be held.

6.25 The site is within Flood Zone 1 (low risk). The applicant has been advised that a full flood risk assessment and drainage strategy would be required to support a planning application. Green field run-off discharge rates are the policy requirement.

6.26 There are a small number of trees/shrubs across the site. Urban greening and integration of soft landscaping is very important, particularly in the context of a climate emergency. Given the scheme seeks to maximise the footprint of the site,

use of the roof for soft landscaping is all the more important and fundamentally required, as well as delivering trees and landscaping within College Square.

6.27 The applicant has been advised to submit a request for an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Screening Opinion to confirm that an EIA is not required.

### **Mitigation**

6.28 At this stage it is envisaged that planning obligations will be required to mitigate the impacts. Discussions are forthcoming in relation to the Heads of Terms, but it is anticipated that these would include the following:

- Employment and training (contributions and obligations)
- Air Quality contribution
- Zero carbon offset (if required)
- Future connect to District Heating Network
- Car parking permit restrictions
- Car club provision and membership to occupiers
- Travel Plan
- Transport for London contributions
- Delivery and servicing plan with financial bond
- Contribution to improvements to the public transport network/sustainable travel improvements/highway improvements/restrictions
- TV signal mitigation
- Wind mitigation measures
- Public realm delivery and maintenance
- Highway works to facilitate access and servicing requirements including potential loading bay/loss of on-street parking spaces, upgrades to footway and College Square
- Retention of scheme architects
- Affordable work space

## **7 SPECIFIC FEEDBACK REQUESTED**

7.1 In view of the above, it is suggested that members focus on the following issues:

1. The principle of a commercial development in this location and the loss of 6 residential units
2. The height and massing of the building
3. The ground floor uses and site layout, including public realm proposals
4. The proposed design approach to the façade and elevation details including materiality
5. The likely impact on neighbouring occupiers in terms of daylight, sunlight and outlook
6. The level and location of car and cycle parking proposed
7. The importance of green infrastructure and urban greening, both on the roof and in College Square

## **8 PROCEDURAL NOTE**

- 8.1 A planning application for the proposed development would be referable to the Mayor of London under the Mayor of London Order 2008.
- 8.2 The applicant has submitted a pre-application to the Greater London Authority (including consideration by Transport for London) for an opinion. A meeting was held on 6<sup>th</sup> October. Their main feedback focussed on the loss of the existing residential units, the height and massing of the development and the impact on residential amenity of the adjoining occupiers. The formal written response has yet to be issued.