



Endurance consent for Minorities hotel

A new 258 room hotel scheme has been approved for the City's eastern fringe, promising the novelty of both a green wall and roof, and exterior cladding in kitchen worktop material Corian.

Endurance Land's scheme at 24-26 Minorities was approved without lengthy debate and will form part of a cluster of hotels that corporation planners have blessed for sites in the vicinity of the Tower of London.

The new build will feature a two part block, with the frontage to Minorities rising just seven floors, and a tower to the rear climbing to 17 storeys, and replace a six storey 1960s office block currently on the site. Total floorspace in the new building will be 9,469 sq metres.



Members were presented with two options for the project, one retaining a banking hall on the ground floor with first floor hotel reception reached by escalator – potentially to rehouse the current bank tenant on the site – with the other giving the whole building over to the hotel use. “In planning terms, we're relaxed about either option,” said planning director Peter Rees.

While acknowledging the additional height over the building currently on the site, Rees noted the site on the northern boundary, taking in the Aldgate bus station and Trinity Square, already had permission granted in 2007 for redevelopment with blocks up to 24 storeys high; while to the south was an existing office block of comparable height.

“We're not talking about a building that's out of scale with its surroundings in any way,” said Rees

To the north, Rees noted rooms would be without much of a view. Accommodation on that flank would open onto a narrow, tall lightwell as the approved replacement building would abut the site boundary to the full height. But he said that in a modern hotel in a global city: “It's not uncommon to have rooms that don't have a daylight view.”

On the building's eastern flank, which fronts the Mansell Street Estate gardens, a six-storey green wall was proposed to soften the project's impact.

“The green wall has been designed in consultation with residents,” advised Rees. And, adding to the green credentials, the lower of the two blocks would feature a green roof planted with sedum grass. The Aldgate Estate Residents' Association had noted some detailed concerns, while not expressing its objection to the development.

Architects Mackay + Partners have designed the scheme visually as if it were two adjacent buildings. The rear, taller block will have a facade of a mix of clear and tinted glazed panels, interspersed with vertical strips of LED lights.

Rees spent much time explaining to committee the novel treatment for the lower block facing Minorities, which would feature panels of a Corian-style material. “It is an unusual building material, an artificial stone, you might call it.”

He noted Corian had originally been developed to provide a hard finish to rival marble, being a combination of stone with resin. First used in hospitals, it had more recently become a material of choice for upmarket kitchen worktops. Now, the fact that it could be moulded meant it was being proposed as a cladding panel.

“You can make very thin panels, and even have parts of it translucent.” While the architects had further work to do, the panels in illustrations would feature a pattern of thinner shapes, through which light from behind would filter, providing an attractive exterior after dark.

Summarising, Rees closed: “It is a piece of architectural interest in a street that does not have many of them. I warmly recommend it for approval.”

Rev Dr Martin Dudley wanted clarification regarding a clause that said entrance doors to the bar and restaurant would remain closed. “This refers only to emergency doors and exits,” replied Rees, “and we will re-word it appropriately.” Patrons would normally be allowed free entry and exit through the Minorities entrance.

Jeremy Simons was concerned about the future of the green wall. “We've just had the driest spring in one hundred years, and the green wall in New Street is looking particularly sad.” What provisions were there for its maintenance?

Marianne Fredericks proposed a solution: “We have asked for the green roof to be maintained, can we ask the same for the green wall?”

Archie Galloway wanted clarification about the elevational treatment: “Are there green windows in the green wall?”

“This is an issue of keeping these irrigated, it has to be designed in,” replied Rees. And he accepted Mrs Fredericks' proposal: “I think it would be sensible to add the green wall into the condition.” And he clarified the wall's construction: “The wall is simply a planted area, some of which will come in front of windows. The intention is that the foliage will filter light into some of the rooms.”

Oliver Lodge was confused by differing percentages in the report regarding the loss of light neighbouring buildings might suffer. “This is to do with the reduction in light due to the new building, and the facility of the building to receive light,” said Rees.

The percentage light loss at the building facade was different from that experienced in an interior, due to matters such as the degree of overhang, and set-back of windows.

Deputy Michael Welbank, a seasoned campaigner for solutions to the City's sewer smells, had been checking the small print too: “The director recommends a high-level vent – can we make that a condition?” (It is generally a condition that all new high rise buildings in the City will have a high level sewer vent.) That was indeed the case, said Rees, referring Welbank to condition clause 22: “I think you will find that should give satisfaction.”

Deputy John Owen-Ward was impressed by the design, and the views of the building at night, but he wondered about the new cladding: “What's its appearance in daylight?”

“The intention is that the outside face is modelled so that there is faceting on the exterior face,” replied Rees. “Both day and night show a variation in the surface.”

Alex Bain-Stewart was concerned to see the new scheme would use roof-mounted wet cooling towers for the air conditioning, seeking an assurance these would not cause any danger of Legionnaire's disease.

Rees replied the installation and management of plant was closely monitored by the corporation's environmental health team.