

DP5564/TJH/HA

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Sent via email to: future.merton@merton.gov.uk

Dear Sir/Madam,

MERTON'S NEW LOCAL PLAN – STAGE 2A CONSULTATION

REPRESENTATIONS ON BEHALF OF LONDON & ARGYLL (MERTON) LTD ('L&A')

We write on behalf of our client, L&A, who are the freehold owners of Merton Abbey Mills in Colliers Wood. L&A have owned the site since 2005.

The Site

Located alongside the historic River Wandle, Merton Abbey Mills is well-known locally for being a mixed-use business centre that draws on its deep-rooted history as a site linked with religion, industry, trade and culture.

The site is located within the Wandle Valley Conservation Area and is located approximately 10 minutes' walk from Colliers Wood tube station. Immediately to the east of the site are two fast food restaurants (KFC and Pizza Hut) set within large areas of car parking; whilst the 'big box' retailers of Sainsbury's and M&S are located further to the north of Merantum Way. The site is connected to the north side of Merantum Way via pedestrian subway. To the west, on the opposite bank of the River Wandle, are light industry uses, whilst immediately to the south and east is residential development, including 'Bennet's Courtyard' winner of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's Annual Housing Design Awards in 2005.

Merton Abbey Mills is made up of a collection of eight buildings, two of which are Grade II listed (the Wheelhouse and the Colour House), and five which are locally listed. These buildings provide small business with enterprising facilities where ideas can grow, but also a frequently host local arts, drama, and crafts events.



The Challenge

When acquired back in 2005, the collection of buildings were in poor condition, under invested and needed significant work to meet the requirements of occupiers at that time. L&A worked with the Council to secure a number of planning permissions which supported reinvestment and supported returning the buildings back to beneficial occupation.

The site has been home to an eclectic mix of uses over the past 15 years, including cafes, restaurants, pubs, craft shops, workspaces/offices and the 'Colourhouse' Children's theatre. The retail and cultural uses are primarily located at ground floor with the workspaces at upper levels. The mix of uses operates as an ecosystem whereby the retail and cultural uses are often supported by the business/workspaces located at upper levels.

Whilst Merton Abbey Mills has supported a mixture of businesses and occupiers over the past 15 years, the site is once again at a point where it is in need of re-investment to ensure it can continue to contribute to the borough over the course of the next 15-20 years. Over time, the public realm has become muddled and disjointed and the attraction of Merton Abbey Mills as a destination has waned. The pandemic has only served to magnify the need for reinvestment and regeneration to ensure that Merton Abbey Mills can continue to have a successful future.

New Local Plan

Within Chapter 4 'Colliers Wood', Merton Abbey Mills is described as a 'unique asset' and a 'vibrant market' within the town centre. We support the recognition that Merton Abbey Mills is unique, but unfortunately would not agree that the market can be described as 'vibrant', albeit that is the aspiration and hope for its future over the next plan period.

Policy N3.1 identifies there is a policy aspiration to improve access to the site and recognising the importance of heritage assets and the contribution they can make to regeneration and new development. We support the recognition in the plan of the need to improve access to the site and would welcome further discussion with Council and other relevant stakeholders on this.

Site Allocation

Due to the renewed need for regeneration, it is considered that Merton Abbey Mills would benefit from an allocation within Chapter 4 of the new Local Plan. An allocation would be commensurate with the status of Merton Abbey Mills within the borough and provide useful context to future reinvestment and regeneration at the site.

The overarching vision for Merton Abbey Mills is to create spaces for new and independent business to flourish, in a setting that lets creativity develop and grow, connected by a public realm that creates a destination for all to use at any time of day, to eat, drink, play, stay, enjoy and be entertained.

A heritage-led regeneration will build upon Merton Abbey Mill's character and heritage, whilst delivering intensified, modern and fit for purpose accommodation which can help re-establish Merton Abbey Mills as



a vibrant mixed-use quarter. The introduction of an element of housing onto the site would also help contribute to fostering a greater sense of place whilst increasing activity throughout evenings and weekends.

As for the other proposed allocations in the plan, an allocation for Merton Abbey Mills would contain key design and accessibility guidance, as well as identifying the mix of uses that could come forwards. This would provide greater certainty for L&A when progressing a future planning application(s) through the planning process.

The inclusion of an allocation within the plan would support Merton Abbey Mills in re-establishing itself as a vibrant, mixed use cultural hub which would make a significant contribution to the vision of creating a thriving and attractive District Centre at Colliers Wood as set out in Policy N3.1 of the plan.

Initial discussions on a heritage-led regeneration and the future vision for Merton Abbey Mills have been held with planning officers. These discussions have been positive. We would welcome the opportunity to have further discussions with officers to agree the content of an allocation for Merton Abbey Mills ready for inclusion in the next version of the plan.

We trust our comments are useful as the Council progresses with the preparation of the new Local Plan and we look forward to engaging further with you at the next stage. Should you have any queries or wish to discuss any of the above then please contact Tim Holtham or Harri Aston at the above office.

Yours faithfully,

DP9 Ltd.

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