

## **RESPONSE TO PLANNING APPLICATION REF DC/10/74205/x FOREST HILL POOLS**

I write on behalf of the Forest Hill Society to set out our response to the consultation on the planning application to rebuild Forest Hill Pools.

We have been through the application in some detail and **write in support of the proposals**. To a great extent we think this is a very good scheme, in a good location, and in particular:

1. The general arrangement of the two pools works well and appears to allow a good level of natural side lighting into the main activities of the building
2. The retention of the superintendents' house is a strong element of the scheme and helps to tie together the three 'civic' buildings of the Pools, the library and Louise House
3. The approach to the scheme from Forest Hill Town Centre is effective and the two entrances are well located.
4. The curved roof is a positive design element and the green roof is a positive recent addition.
5. The balance between the retention of the pocket park and the addition of public open space to the north of the scheme in front of Torcross House seems to work well.
6. The inclusion of meeting room/community room on the first floor, overlooking the pools is a positive element of the scheme as there are few community spaces within Forest Hill.
7. Recent amendments to bring the café terrace around the front of the building and introduce some landscaping in front of the pools to soften and green the otherwise hard exterior.

We do have some reservations about the scale, bulk and design of the new café/plant block on the Dartmouth Road frontage. We are concerned in particular that the louvred element on the top is too large and that the design does little to break down its scale to an acceptable level. This part of the building also appears to be very blank and boxy. This building will be very prominent on Dartmouth Road and will obscure views of the superintendent's house on the approach from Forest Hill Town Centre. For this reason we believe the design of this element of the scheme needs to be of the highest standard and may need some further consideration.

It seems surprising that a layout of the building on the site is not included as a separate application drawing and is only provided as a landscape plan within the design and access statement. This drawing is critical to the understanding of the placement of the building on the site and does make some aspects of the scheme hard to understand, and in particular for neighbours to assess.

With regard to the community room at first floor we would like to see some protection given to the use of this space for community purposes, perhaps through an appropriately worded planning condition?

It is very surprising to us that no internal sketch views of the building are provided in the application as understanding the quality and potential of these spaces is a key part of the proper consideration of the design. This lack of information makes it hard to understand the scale and feel of some key spaces within the building and whether they will function as intended.

There are also a number of smaller concerns that we have about the building and how it works or where we are concerned that the submitted information is not sufficiently clear. These are as follows:

1. We are concerned about pedestrian safety in the coach drop off/disabled parking areas generally. In particular the footway from Dartmouth Road into the main entrance is pinched by the bottom of the ramp around the café terrace and seems to be less than 1m wide.
2. The building does not seem to be making the most of the potential for natural lighting and prior to submission the roof lights over the pool hall and the internal street element of the scheme have reduced in area to a point where they no longer provide the sense of openness and light that we understood was intended.
3. The internal visual interaction between the different elements of the scheme has been a strong selling point but the 'windows' between the first floor gym and main pool hall, and the changing village and the pool hall appear small and are unlikely to provide the connection that is indicated and that would benefit the scheme.
4. It is not clear from the drawings whether the first floor studio spaces have curved ceilings that follow the shape of the external roof. This is important because as well as making these interesting and dynamic spaces, a high ceiling is needed to benefit from natural lighting from the Kalwall to the south side of the building as this only starts above head height. If not, and the Kalwall is provided but does not give daylight to these spaces this seems to be a missed opportunity.
5. The southern elevation of the retained superintendent's block facing Louise House has not been given sufficient consideration given the surprisingly high level of visibility of this part of the façade. This wall is even blanker under the proposals than it is now.
6. The pool covers are not drawn on the plans, although they are indicated by text and it would be useful to see the likely extent of these on a drawing so that it is clear that there is enough space around the pool. Text indicates that these will be below seating which seems to be a very sensible idea.
7. Earlier plans showed a sliding retractable wall between the two first floor studio spaces and this would be beneficial in facilitating more flexible use of these two spaces.
8. It is not clear whether lockers will sit in front of the windows of the superintendents' block at first floor or whether this is because of the way the plan is illustrated? It would be unacceptable if this were to be the case as it would reduce the potential for (appropriately obscured) natural lighting and make the front façade appear very blank.
9. The current plans for the pocket park do not show any play equipment for small children and we would like to see this reinstated as part of the scheme.
10. At stakeholder meetings there has been discussion of a possible need for security fencing along the northern side of the building. If this is to be the case we would want to see the detail of this considered as part of the planning application rather than some later measure, and which may not work with the overall design approach to the building.
11. We are concerned that the opportunity has not been taken to design a coherent frontage space between the pools, Louise House and the Library, and at the same time resolve the accessibility problems into all three buildings. The current design uses railings, cycle parking and other elements as a barrier between them further reducing the potential for this to happen in the future.

12. The lift has been reduced in size and this has an impact on the accessibility and usability of the building. It is understood this is because of the need for a hoist into the basement but it would surely seem sensible to have one lift that provided for both these purposes?
13. The mobile phone mast that currently sits within the pocket park has been retained in situ along the frontage when it would undoubtedly benefit from being relocated to a less prominent location.

Many of the issues set out above have been raised with the Council's Project Team at stakeholder meetings so they should already be aware of them. However, there has been a reluctance to deal with some of these issues and we are concerned that the opportunity is not being taken to make improvements to the design and function of the building that would significantly benefit the scheme into the long term. This building will be in place for many years and it seems important that we should give some careful consideration to getting it right now, rather than live to regret some elements of it for years to come.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you require any further information or clarification of any of the above points.