

## Background

In the Hackney Unitary Development Plan it states: “The Council will take appropriate action to secure the retention and enhancement of buildings and structures of local significance which are not on the statutory list.” (Policy ‘EQ20: buildings of local significance’, Hackney UDP, 1995).

It also states: “There are a number of exceptional buildings in Hackney ... which are not on the Statutory List ... These buildings are considered to be of local significance because of their architectural/industrial, archeological merit and/or townscape importance, local historic associations, and value to the community as cherished landmarks.”

The former Lea Bridge Tramway Depot at 38-40 Upper Clapton Road is one of the few remaining examples of a Victorian horse-drawn tram depot in London. Other examples include an Edwardian tramway office and depot in Walthamstow and the former electricity transformer station and tram depot in Islington (both listed). Opened on 12 July 1873 by the North Metropolitan Tramways Company the former Lea Bridge Tramway Depot retains many original features – granite setts in the yard, tramlines running through the ground floor of the central tram shed building, cast iron colonnades, and stable flooring on the first floor where the horses were originally housed.

The building also gives clues to why Clapton evolved into a busy Victorian suburb. Following its construction, Clapton benefited from a regular and cheap tram service. From 1872 to 1907 it took commuters to and from the City and West End. One of the horse-trams, which operated from here, is currently displayed in the London Transport Museum in Covent Garden.

The site comprises of a U-shaped range of late 19th century gabled tram sheds and horse stables, and a two-storey extension of a similar period (presently used as a car showroom). The buildings are constructed of stock brick with some windows and doorways edged with blue engineering bricks.

In English Heritage’s *Advice Report for Listing* it states: “There is a claim to local interest at this site, as the setted yard, gabled ranges, and visible tram tracks at the entrance together reflect the history of Clapton, and the surviving components of the 1870s tramshed are notable for their earliness in London’s transport history.” So, while the buildings were not deemed worthy of statutory listing by English Heritage in 2005 the buildings were said by the inspector to be of local significance. The former Tramway Depot is a well-loved local landmark that supports many light industrial businesses.

The site also lies opposite Brooke Road, which is on the border of the Northwold and Evering Conservation Area. It is clear that the development of this Victorian suburb owed much to the tram and rail links, which came to the area in the early 1870s. It would be ironic if a key catalyst for the development of this area was now to be partially demolished as well as unsympathetically developed.

If restored and ingeniously converted, the former tramway buildings could provide both historic and contemporary architectural interest in an area that has been deprived of any clear master planning or quality new development in recent years. During the last 50 years many historic buildings in this area have been demolished and replaced with insensitive development – the demolition of 19th century buildings facing what is now the Lea Bridge roundabout, the demolition of the Tudor

building Brooke House, the cheap conversion of the former pub on the corner of Upper Clapton Road and Prout Road to name but a few.

**The Hackney Society would like to see the retention and sympathetic refurbishment of all the ranges that form the tram depot. The Hackney Society does not support this proposed development on a number of grounds. These are detailed below:**

## **DESIGN**

The Hackney Society feels that the position, heights and massing of the various new blocks (A, B, C, D, and F) to be over-complicated and out of keeping with the surrounding domestic scale of the residential and industrial buildings in the area.

### **Conversion of historic tram shed building 'Block E'**

While the Hackney Society supports the retention of the central former tram shed building ('Block E') we feel that the design of the roof extension and the conversion of the interior space clumsy and inappropriate. The roofline, massing and materials of the extension fail to relate to the delicate gabled roofline and brickwork of the former tram shed. The grey ship-lapped fibre cement cladding jars with the colour of the original stock brick. The rhythm of the private roof terraces from the roof extension and the gabled roofline below them clash creating a dissonant visual effect. This is made worse by the 'new openings in the brickwork wall'. They create yet more visual confusion by revealing further window openings in the new roof extension each with a different pattern or size. The impact of 'Block E' and 'Block A' when viewed from Upper Clapton Road is ugly and completely out of scale with the surrounding buildings. Also, the conversion of the existing workspaces into smaller units limits the types of business that can use the spaces. Most of the current occupiers will find these units inadequate.

The demolition of part of the current Jaguar car showroom to reveal the gables of the tram shed is supported and with an architecturally suitable scheme would improve the attractiveness and visual impact of the surviving tram-shed buildings.

The skill of working with heritage buildings is to achieve a unity between old and new. This has not been achieved with this proposal. The architect has failed to create a convincing visual language that links the old and new in both functional and aesthetic ways. Instead the scale and shape of the proposed new blocks hugely reduces the presence of the historic tram sheds thus weakening their simple and aesthetic form.

### **'Block A'**

We oppose 'Block A' which faces onto Upper Clapton Road. At 7-storeys this building is out of proportion with its surroundings – it is too high and set too far forward – dominating the streetscape. Both Beaumont Court, to the north, and the Beecholme Estate to the south-east, only extend to 5-storeys. We would like to see this height matched in any new developments on the site. Also, for such a prominent position, 'Block A' does not deliver a high quality design. The 'smorgasbord' of materials (Cor-ten steel panels, grey stock brick finish, perforated zinc and Telford smooth brown brick finish) while trying to add interest, just produce an incoherent design

that detracts from the historic fabric of the tram shed. 'Block A' is an aggressive addition creating a crowded feeling along the road.

### **'Blocks B, C, D and F'**

These blocks result in the demolition of the north stable/tram buildings, which we do not support. Many homes and gardens in adjacent roads will also be overlooked, depriving those residents of privacy. The six and seven storey blocks are especially too high, casting a huge shadow.

In a recent poll in the Architect's Journal entitled 'Do you like the look of this project on Upper Clapton Road, London by Stephen Davy Peter Smith Architects?' Seventy four per cent had said 'no' in the poll (13.1.10).

### **Housing**

We consider that both points 7.30 and 7.34 in 'Design and Sustainability' (Providing Better Homes, Draft Core Strategy, Local Development Framework, June 2009) have not been adequately met in this proposed development. We feel that the scheme is not "high-quality housing and in line with identified needs in places where people want to live." Clapton currently has a lack of 3 to 4 bedroom houses with gardens for large families. The proposal of 3 to 4 bedroom flats is a poor solution.

### **Density**

Leabridge Ward already has three new large-scale developments, increasing local population density way above the London average. The proposal represents the highest level of mixed-use density currently being developed in Hackney, setting a dangerous precedent for future development in the rest of the borough.

At present the Beecholme Estate and Casimir Road enjoy a quiet neighbourhood with the tram sheds shielding them from the worst of anti-social behaviour and noise from the Upper Clapton Road. By creating such a dense development and opening up the site by forming a new pedestrian route this neighbourhood will be transformed for the worse.

### **Loss of light industrial units and associated jobs**

"Hackney's location on the city fringe is ideal for companies who need to be close to the Central London and City market but require light industrial space."

The Hackney Society strongly disagrees with the assessment in the Planning Statement that the "active" planning history of the site is an "indication that the current run down and low grade commercial buildings are inadequate for modern-day purposes, and are in need of investment for sustained employment use." The existing tram shed, contrary to that opinion, is a successful example of reuse and provides Hackney with essential light industrial units for artists, craftspeople, manufacturers and mechanics. The tram sheds are run down, but with refurbishment provide ideal workshops for manufacturing. The site also houses the only remaining active group of artists and designers left in north-east Hackney. Artists and creative industries are important to the economy of the area as well as creating an interesting and diverse community.

The proposals also completely underestimate the number of people employed on the site, and the kind of work they do cannot take place in the proposed light usage spaces envisaged in the application. The closure of such business would have a knock-on effect and cause substantial direct and indirect job losses. The proposal has failed to take into account the need for space of existing businesses (mechanics, joiners, mould makers) and bases its assumptions on space needed for office workers.

The current site is a busy and active working site, with every unit rented. Such light industrial spaces have all but disappeared in Hackney, as a result of warehouses being converted into housing, and industrial units being demolished for new housing developments. This site is perfect for what *Invest in Hackney* says makes Hackney unique:

“Hackney has a long tradition of manufacturing, but as in other areas of the country, this has seen a decline over the years. This has, however, left Hackney with an interesting legacy of old industrial property. These empty spaces have been taken on by creative and design businesses, and from this a new High Value Manufacturing sector has developed. This sector of the manufacturing industry often sees the whole production process from design and development, through manufacture and on to the point of sale, housed under one roof. The products of this industry are often hand crafted and one-off pieces, with the value of the finished product arising as much from the design as the function. This is particularly true of sub sectors such as furniture, fashion and jewellery production, which have all developed into prominent industries in Hackney’s economy. The growth in this sector has also added to the borough’s particular retail offer, and complements the artistic and creative industries that also flourish in the borough.”

### **Impact on local amenities and services**

Local amenities such as nurseries, schools and doctors surgeries are already overstretched with the impact of recent residential developments on the Latham’s Yard site still to be calculated. The Hackney Society thinks that this proposed development will have an adverse impact on services.

### **Environmental impact: traffic and car parking**

Such a large development with the introduction of 50 car-parking sites will create even worse traffic congestion on one of the most important outward routes to the North and East of the City. Reports cited on the impact to existing traffic conditions are based on dissimilar areas and fail to take account of local conditions (commuter parking for Clapton Station, local congestion on Upper Clapton Road.). The increase of traffic on the narrow residential roads (Prout, Casimir, Cleveleys and Gunton Roads) will bring noise, danger and even more congestion to already congested roads. Also, no environmental study has been carried out on the possibility of ground pollution and possible decontamination on a site that has been used by various industries in the last century.

### **Conclusion**

**The Hackney Society thinks that the development is seriously flawed and does not meet high standards of design. We would like to see a smaller development that retains the U-shaped range, colonnades granite setts and some of the double-height spaces of the existing industrial buildings.**



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