

 Havering LONDON BOROUGH	Strategic Planning Committee – Developer Presentation 23 October 2025
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Pre-Application Reference: W0210.25

Location: YMCA THAMES GATEWAY, 29 RUSH GREEN ROAD, ROMFORD RM7 0PH

Ward: RUSH GREEN & CROWLANDS AND HYLANDS & HARROW LODGE

Description: Erection of a building to be used for short-term supported accommodation.

Case Officer: Andrew Thornley

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Site Description

The application site comprises the northern car park of the existing YMCA building in Rush Green, and is comprised of hardstanding with a small section of amenity grassland in the north-east corner and a strip of grass adjacent to the River Rom.

The application site forms part of the wider YMCA site, which extends further south and west, and includes in its centre a large, long building of varying height (up to 11 storeys).

The surrounding area includes a mix of housing types and sizes, characterised predominantly by two-storey terraced houses, but with 9-10 storey blocks of flats to the north-east and a 3-4 storey (equivalent) self-storage unit to the east, beyond a single-storey community hall abutting the site. Grenfell Park lies to the south-east, beyond the River Rom, designated as Metropolitan Open Land.

It should be noted that the application site straddles the boundary between the London Borough of Havering and the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham.

Planning Policy Designations

Parts of the site, adjacent to the river Rom and including the patch of grassland in the north-east corner, are designated as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (of Metropolitan Importance), and most of the site is covered by Flood Zones 2 and 3.

Proposal

The proposed development relates to the erection of a six-storey building, comprising 184 supported accommodation units. The proposed building would also include shared living, dining and kitchen areas, and an on-site laundry room, with the ground floor further including flexible space for both resident and public use.

The proposed building would form part of the wider YMCA campus in Rush Green, which currently provides 148 supported housing units and 61 'move-on' flats, alongside a gym, nursery and café. It is proposed that the existing building's residents will decant into the proposed development, and the tower will then be redeveloped/refurbished at a later date (subject to a future planning application).

Quality Review Panel

The pre-application scheme was presented to Havering's Quality review Panel on the 02/09/25, and the feedback received from QRP is summarised in the table below.

It should be noted that as the scheme evolves and responds to feedback, some of these QRP comments may no longer be applicable to the latest version of the scheme.

QRP Comments	Applicant Team Response
Principle of Development	
The Quality Review Panel strongly supports the delivery of new supported housing units, particularly as it will enable the wider YMCA site to be improved and redeveloped, with the important community use retained.	The support for the principle of development is noted.
Layout	
The panel supports the redevelopment of the site to provide housing for residents of the existing YMCA building.	The proposed building has been setback from Rush Green Road with a further setback on the western element of the proposed building. This ensures retention of the trees and provides a pleasant environment for pedestrians. Courtyards were considered by the design team however it is not feasible as the YMCA need to maximise space on the ground floor for the various uses including flexible spaces, offices, consultation rooms, chapel, a large entrance, and plant space for the units above.
The careful examination of similar types of accommodation to understand key issues and how they can be resolved is beneficial.	
While there are time and funding constraints, the panel feels that further work is needed to address concerns about the quality of the accommodation.	
The panel suggests moving the building back from Rush Green Road to better align with neighbouring properties.	
The panel has concerns that the building is too close to the existing trees	

and will cause damage. An arboricultural assessment is required to help determine the root protection zones and developable area.	
Demolishing the existing café would help free up the necessary space to move the proposed building back. However, a temporary strategy should be developed to ensure the café use can be retained during construction.	
Improvements to the pedestrian experience on Rush Green Road should be considered, with a more generous pavement. The design of the building should avoid being overbearing.	
The addition of planting along the northern edge will create a buffer between the building and the pavement, improving the experience for those using and living in the building.	
The impact of waste management and servicing should be tested.	
Wider Masterplan	
The panel recommends undertaking a quick vision or masterplanning exercise for the wider YMCA site in parallel to maximise the long-term investment in the site. This would also support a stronger rationale for the proposal, providing the councils with clarity and assurance on how the site might evolve.	The proposed vision for Phase 2 and the wider site is still being considered by the YMCA. As part of the planning application, it is proposed to prepare a high-level narrative to the wider Site and Phase 2. Notwithstanding, the existing community and sports facilities are an important part of the YMCA offer, and these will continue to be offered throughout. A direct connection to Grenfell Park from Rush Green is existing and located only 35m from the YMCA site.
Key spatial moves, the mix and relationship between different uses, wider long term opportunities such as the re-naturalisation of the river, and a direct connection from Rush Green Road to Grenfell Park, need to be considered.	
Phasing and temporary uses should be considered to ensure that the existing facility's functionality and community benefit are maintained during construction.	
Landscape and Ecology	
The panel welcomes the approach to maximising the landscape potential, particularly given the site constraints.	The support for the maximisation of the landscape is welcomed. The application is supported by a Daylight/Sunlight Assessment and an ecological assessment.
The creation of a series of 'stepping stones' as part of the wider green and blue infrastructure, the potential to create a series of different biomes.	

improvements to the SINC and the consideration of people and nature are all positive principles.	The proposed ecological and landscaping improvements to the Site adjacent to the River Rom result in indirect improvements to the River Rom and Grenfell Park. This includes removal of non-native species and the introduction of appropriate habitats and flood water retention. These are considered to be a substantial contribution to improvements to the River Rom. Additionally, as a charity, the YMCA are financially constrained, and any additional contributions would impact their operations.
However, the emerging landscape ideas should now be translated into more detailed proposals. These should be informed by robust assessments, including sunlight, ecology, and wind; an understanding of the user experience in each space; and clearer commitments.	
The combination of photovoltaics and green roof is supported. Rather than sedum, the panel encourages the team to develop a planting strategy that will offer greater ecological and biodiversity benefits.	
The panel has concerns related to the quality and viability of the interior courtyard areas. Although they will have some value, their usability and appeal will depend on a better understanding of the environmental conditions to understand what planting is feasible and how comfortable these spaces are.	
A clear and appropriate purpose should be developed, with opportunities to incorporate seasonality into the planting palette.	
It may be better to bring areas of the courtyards down to the ground floor level, to provide additional light and amenity space for the communal entrances and studio spaces. This would significantly improve the deep ground floor plan and sense of arrival, and physically and visually connect the atria with the entrance.	
The emerging ideas for the rear yard are positive, particularly the relationship to the river. Public routes from the public highway should be made clear and obvious.	
The panel suggests incorporating some form of shelter in the yard so that people can use the space when it is raining or windy.	
The emerging approach to sustainable urban drainage is promising. Opportunities to capture and reuse water on-site would be positive for landscape maintenance and/or food production.	

Further clarity is required regarding the proposed lighting strategy.	
The alternative option for parking, located away from the river corridor, is preferred as this helps reduce its dominance in the landscape.	
A sustainable landscape management and maintenance strategy is needed to provide confidence in the long-term quality of the proposals and their benefit.	
The SINC and River Rom should be considered beyond the application boundary to help create a holistic landscape proposal and improve the outlook for YMCA residents.	
Grenfell Park would benefit from biodiversity and ecological enhancement, and could be used to help mitigate flooding.	
As the proposals will involve construction on a SINC, a Section 106 contribution could be made towards the re-naturalisation of the river through the park.	
Architecture	
Supported housing can create quite repetitive and utilitarian elevations. Careful thought should be given to how this is designed, including opportunities for greater variety, depth and quality to the facades.	An overheating assessment, a noise assessment, and daylight/sunlight assessment will be submitted as part of the planning application. Initial results confirm that the living conditions of residents will be acceptable. The building is setback from the street, with the ground floor layout revised to create a more active frontage with Rush Green Road including offices, the chapel, and a large entrance way. Flexible spaces are also provided to internal frontage to create an active frontage facing onto the communal landscaping.
The character study is positive, but a more distinct and joyful language is required. Architectural detailing on streets such as Elm Park Road should be reviewed to help inform the design.	
While material choices are at an early stage, the panel supports the use of brick.	
The response to environmental conditions, including issues such as solar gain, overheating and road noise, could also inform the architectural language of the building. Deep recessed windows and solar shading are likely to be necessary on the Rush Green Road elevation and could contribute to the building's character.	
Entrances should be made more legible and celebratory, particularly on Rush	

Green Road. Internal spaces should be generous and welcoming.	
To help make the Rush Green Road frontage active and inviting, the communal and community uses should be made more open and visible.	
While having a strong base is positive, stepping back from the street to create more space between the pavement and building should be prioritised. Alternative approaches to defining and activating the ground floor should be considered.	
Signage and wayfinding should be an integrated part of the design.	
Sustainability	
A more specific and ambitious approach to sustainability is required, including robust commitments and evidence of how this has informed the design.	The YMCA have sought to maximise the developments approach to sustainability. An energy and sustainability strategy, a whole life carbon assessment, a circular economy statement, and an overheating assessment will all be submitted as part of the planning application.
The strategy should address how embodied carbon has informed material selection, the re-use of existing materials on site, operational performance, and the construction strategy.	
Greater assurance is required regarding how overheating has influenced the design, including material choices, elevation details, ventilation strategy and the building's management strategy.	
The proposed electrical systems, their application for the various uses in the building, and the feasibility of heat recovery systems, such as those for showers, should all be carefully considered as part of the energy strategy.	
The applicant should ensure that it can easily connect to an energy centre in the future, or as part of a larger masterplan or in the local area.	
The consideration of how the building could be re-purposed for alternative uses in the future is welcome. In addition to identifying alternative uses, the potential deconstruction of the building at the end of its life should be considered.	

Key Planning Considerations

- Principle of Development

The type of accommodation offered within this development is in very high demand, and would greatly assist the borough by providing short-term accommodation for homeless people, allowing the council to meet its statutory duty to provide shelter for homeless people within the borough. Policy H12 of the London Plan (Supported and specialised accommodation) sets out that applications which seek to deliver this type of accommodation should generally be supported.

- Layout, Scale and Massing

The proposed building would have a long, linear footprint, with its long edge facing towards Rush Green Road, and would be six storeys in height. The layout features a slight kink in the centre, to allow the western end of the block to be slightly set back from the road, to lessen impacts on the row of three street trees to the front of the site on Rush Green Road.

- Detailed Design

The proposed development would be finished in brick, using generally paler brick tones with some detailing around the windows. The ground floor would be of a greater floor-to-ceiling height, recognising that the ground floor would provide the majority of the communal facilities, alongside the flexible space and the entrance lobby, and this would be reflected in the external façade.

- Quality of Accommodation

The proposed units would be approximately 13 sqm in size, with ensembles, and a slightly larger allowance for the accessible rooms, which would be equivalent to a hostel or small hotel room. Each room would be for single-occupancy use only.

Owing to the proposed layout, which is largely a response to other site constraints, nearly every unit would be single-aspect, although there is an opportunity for the corner units on each floor to be provided with a secondary window. As such, there are some concerns with the quantum of single-aspect north-facing units, which would have relatively poor access to daylight and virtually no access to direct sunlight, and conversely, the potential for overheating in the single-aspect south-facing units which make up the other half of the proposed units. This will have to be carefully considered by the design team and the local planning authority to ensure that the quality of accommodation provided is of an acceptable standard.

- Transport, Parking and Servicing

The application site is located on the car parking area to the front of the main YMCA building, and as a result of the development, all 59 of these spaces would be lost, with the scheme including the re-provision of 10 wheelchair-accessible parking spaces.

The site has a Public Transport Accessibility Level (PTAL) of 3-4, indicative of relatively good access to public transport, primarily in the form of buses. For this type of accommodation, there are no set parking standards, and parking provision should be assessed on a case-by-case basis. It is understood that the vast majority of people living on-site do not have access to a car, and that the car parking areas serve the general public when using the on-site facilities (e.g. gym, café, nursery), and it is important to ensure that sufficient parking spaces remain to continue to serve these needs.

- Landscaping and Ecology

The proposed landscaping areas will need to be multi-functional, in that it will need to provide external amenity space, surface water management and habitat creation, all within a fairly limited space. Part of the site is designated as a SINC, although its actual ecological value is unlikely to be high noting that the site is dominated by hardstanding and amenity grassland, and efforts to enhance the SINC's ecological value through the creation of a riparian buffer zone are currently being explored.

- River Rom and Flood Risk

The River Rom runs in a broad north-south direction along the eastern boundary of the site, and as a result, much of the site is in Flood Zones 2 and 3, meaning it is highly susceptible to flooding. This has heavily influenced the proposed layout and design of the proposal, such that no parts of the building falls within Flood Zone 3b (functional flood plain).

The applicant has engaged with the Environment Agency in separate pre-application discussions, who are generally satisfied that the proposal can be accommodated without increasing flood risk elsewhere, provided sufficient mitigation is put in place and secured as part of the development, to include flood resilience measures.

Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) would be used for this scheme to manage surface water, whilst the building would be raised 300 mm above the maximum-modelled flood depth for a 1 in 100 year flooding event.

In addition, the council and the applicant are currently exploring how best to naturalise this part of the River Rom, which is currently culverted with a sheer concrete wall, as part of the council's wider efforts to naturalise the river along its length within the borough.

Conclusions

The proposed development is still at pre-application stage. The scheme will be further progressed through a design led approach. At this stage we would welcome Members thoughts and comments on the proposals to be incorporated in the scheme prior to submission of a formal planning application.