

**WIMBLEDON SCHOOL OF ART. MAIN SITE: NEW ENTRANCE FOYER
PLANNING APPLICATION: SUPPORTING STATEMENT**

1. PURPOSE

1.1. This document is a Supporting Statement to the planning application being submitted on behalf of Wimbledon School of Art (the School) for the construction of a new entrance foyer.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1. The School is a major specialist Higher Education Institution which specialises in art and design courses. The School's sites and buildings are all located within the London Borough of Merton, and the main campus is in Merton Hall Road, Wimbledon, London SW19.

3. DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL

3.1 The Scheme is for the construction of a new entrance foyer area which will be the entrance used by the School's staff and students – and, most importantly, visitors and local residents – when gaining access to the School's main gallery area and theatre.

3.2. The School wishes to take this opportunity of emphasising the close relationship it has with its local community, and therefore wishes the new entrance foyer area to be as open and inviting as possible. This is part of a long term strategy to strengthen local links and participation and encourage a sense of ownership of the school by the local community.

3.3. While the new entrance foyer area will be, in effect, a route through from the outside to the gallery and/or the theatre, the School will also want to take the opportunity of having displays of its students' work in that entrance foyer area. The School is committed to continue working closely with its local community, so that the people who will have the opportunity of visiting the new entrance foyer - whether just to view exhibitions in that area or (perhaps in addition) as a route through to the gallery or theatre - will not just be academic and other visitors, but will also be residents who live in the immediate area.

3.4. The School is proud to be called the Wimbledon School of Art, and is equally conscious that the local authority and the residents are proud of having the School in their midst.

4. PLANNING POLICY

Regional Planning Policy

4.1. As the Mayor's The London Plan has only recently been adopted, it is worthwhile noting that Regional Planning Guidance Note 9 (RPG9) contains a number of references to education, for example, Policy RE2 states:-

“Human resource development should be recognised as a central component in harnessing and promoting future economic success in the Region and access to job opportunities should be improved for those currently disadvantaged in the labour market.

“ Development plans should include policies which ensure that sufficient and accessible premises are available for training and education purposes to suit the requirements identified through the relevant strategies, including those to be drawn up by Learning and Skills Councils and the Regional Economic Strategies.”

In addition:

“i. The Employment Services, Learning and Skills Councils, local learning partnerships and local employers play important roles in enhancing skills and opportunities in the Region;

“ii. Further and higher educational establishments are also vital to the success of training and education strategies;

“ iii. Local authorities should consider how they can support similar measures to those already employed by some of the best universities and colleges in establishing effective links with knowledge-based industries ...”

4.2. The London Plan also has policies on sustainable development, and, in this regard Policy 2A.1 is particularly relevant, “The Mayor will use the following criteria in developing Sub-Regional Development Frameworks and when considering UDP's and planning applications referred to him:-

Optimising the use of previously developed land

Using a design-led approach to optimise the potential of sites.

4.3. So far as education is concerned, there is a specific policy within the London Plan on higher and further education “Policy 3A.22 Higher and Further Education”. In that policy, the London Plan

states, "The Mayor will and boroughs should work with the LDA and the Higher and Further Education Sectors to ensure that the needs of the Education Sectors are addressed in Sub-Regional Development Frameworks and in UDP's ..." The policy then lists five bullet points, the most relevant of which are:-

"promoting policies aimed at supporting and maintaining London's international reputation as a centre of excellence in higher education".

"taking account of the future development needs of the sector, including the provision of new facilities and potential for expansion of existing provision".

"recognising the distinctive locational and access needs of Further Education establishments".

Local Planning Policy

4.4 The current major planning policy document appears to be the Unitary Development Plan (UDP) adopted in October 2003. While there do not appear to be any specific policies dealing with building extensions in respect of higher education institutions, nevertheless the general thrust of that part of the UDP is clearly support for the retention and improvement of existing education facilities, particularly those which seek to involve the wider community.

5. DESIGN STATEMENT



5.1. Urban context. [Drawings 335/001, 029, 030]

5.1.1. The school is situated in an area of mostly residential development, near Dundonald Park and adjacent to Wimbledon Chase School, with playing fields and open spaces stretching out towards the West. It is in the Merton Hall Road Conservation Area, which is predominantly of late Victorian /Edwardian development, although stretching southwards to the older settlement around The Rush and the Kingston Road.

5.1.2. Wimbledon School of Art's links both to other arts institutions in London and globally mean that the approaches and routes to the school are especially important. These can be characterised as Urban: the approach to the site from the north - London, Wimbledon urban centre, walking down Hartfield Crescent, through or past Dundonald Park, and Suburban: approaches to the site from the south - Kingston Road, Merton Park - shops and pub.

5.1.3. Although the new development must respect and enhance the character of the conservation area, its nature, as the foyer to an arts school, gallery, and theatre, mean that it contrasts with, rather than fits in to the surrounding residential development - a point of urban discontinuity, reflecting its distinct function.

5.2. The character of the Conservation Area.

5.2.1. The three storey late Victorian houses which form the majority of the Merton Hall Road give a strong sense of rhythm to the East side. Although there is considerable variety in detail, with flat, rectangular, bow and bay frontages, the houses offer a unified and definite character with their palette of red brick with stone dressings, tile cladding, and echoes of Venetian Gothic detailing.

5.2.2. The school of Art occupies a frontage of about 150 metres on the West of the street, [drawing 335/024] offering a variety of buildings, from north to south:

- the parapetted and metal windowed three storey 1930s refined classicism of the original school, of a mid grey/brown brick with a rusticated ground floor.
- the brown brick neo-vernacular of the galleries constructed in 1983 offering low pitched gables to the street.
- two former residences, nos 46 and 48 Merton Hall Road, dating from approximately 1902, which have been converted to institutional use, with brick and metal clad workshops behind.

5.2.3. Beyond the school frontage to the south is an unbuilt frontage of about 140 metres offering

glimpses to the playing fields beyond, leading to the pedestrian thoroughfare, The Chase.

5.2.4. Unifying features across this broad frontage are a row of mature trees, and the black modular vertical railings. An existing mature horse chestnut tree stand almost directly in front of the proposed foyer, and is an integral part of the design, providing screening and some solar shading to the foyer.

5.3. The proposed design. Design issues include:

5.3.1. The institutional culture of the school. The building should embody the value of the school, reflecting its position as a thriving place of art-making, education and research. The foyer is in a sense the 'shop window' of the school, and should offer views into the interior, and the opportunity to display the work of the school in fine art, sculpture, costume, theatre and media design.

5.3.2. Layers of privacy and protection. [Drawings 335/26,27,28]. The schools buildings are set back from the street, and the new facade is approximately 10.6 m from the front boundary of the site. The design responds to and extends the layers of public and semi-private space. The existing tree forms a powerful three dimensional screen casting shadows and reflections on the new glass wall. Layers of privacy extend from roadway to pavement, through the new pedestrian entrance in the boundary railings, the re-landscaped forecourt, and through the glass walled draught lobbies to the new foyer space and existing service spaces behind. The design opens up views right through the existing building and into the rear yard, like a glass slot giving expression to the interior activities of the school. [This is illustrated in image 27.03]. The curved forms of the rear service core, together with its deep blue colour, further draw the eye into the interior of the building.

5.3.3. The scale of the new building. It is important that the foyer is of an appropriate size to signal its presence as the main entrance of the School. For this reason the building is 7m in height, although a single storey space, to become a 'light box' for exhibiting the work.

5.3.4. Light spillage. [Drawing 335/023] it is important to prevent light spillage or light pollution from the new structure, and the proposed lighting strategy is shown on drawing 335/023. Lighting within the foyer will be internal asymmetric uprights, shielded to prevent glare and light spillage, and track lighting to the perimeter for exhibitions. There are no proposed new external lights. The existing horse chestnut tree will dapple any indirect light from the site. Drawing 335/023 also shows the scale of the building and its relationship to the existing residential development opposite, together with the sight lines from the upper floors of the residential properties into the new spaces.

5.3.5. Structure and materials. The structure is to be a grey painted exposed steel frame, partially glazed, and partially infilled with timber framed panels finished in unpainted render. The roof is to be a metal standing seam roof in aluminium/zinc finish (dull grey) into which planting trays may be fitted at a future date to allow a sedum roof. It is invisible from the street. The edge trim of the roof is to be stainless steel, to echo the new studio buildings at the north western part of the site. Glazing is to be provided in an aluminium polyester powder coated glazing system, also grey. The intention is to provide a simple contemporary harmonious structure which will allow the interior life of the school to speak for itself.

5.4. The foyer will provide a more generous entrance to the recently refurbished gallery, theatre and studios, an area for meeting and milling around, displaying current projects and the new outreach staff will be prominently located in offices. The WC facilities will be upgraded to form a semi-public space to serve the gallery, theatre and school. These alterations will enable the existing buildings to be brought into more productive use, for the benefit not only of the School but the whole community.

6. HIGHWAY/TRANSPORTATION MATTERS

6.1. A new pedestrian entrance to the site is proposed. The existing railings along the site boundary are modular and can be unbolted to allow new gates to be inserted. Three parking spaces within the site will be turned into the new pedestrian access from the street. The macadam finish across the site is a shared surface for vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists. External on-street parking is unaffected.

7. SUSTAINABILITY

7. Sustainability issues include:

- energy conservation, both embodied and in use
- allowing choice for future generations
- understanding the limits of design.

7.1. Energy conservation: embodied. The structure is steel framed to minimise mass and reduce

construction time.

Infill panels are timber framed to lock CO2 into the structure. External finishes are unpainted to minimise use of paints and solvents.

7.2. Energy conservation in use: The new foyer will be naturally ventilated, with high level automatically opening windows to promote stack ventilation.

7.2.1. External louvres will provide solar shading to the south elevation. Vines have been considered but not included due to long term implications for damage to the adjacent slate roofs.

7.2.2. Photovoltaics have been considered but not included due to costs and orientation of the proposed roof is not appropriate.

7.2.3. Green roof has been considered but not included due to costs and safety for maintenance. However, it is possible to add a sedum mat to the proposed standing seam metal roof in the future.

7.3. Limits of design. The design is intended to provide an adaptable space that can be used in future in ways that we do not expect. The structure is inherently adaptable and separate from the surrounding buildings.

8. PUBLIC CONSULTATION

8.1. The School values being part of its local community, and therefore invited a local residents to attend the School on the evening of Tuesday 15 February, to view the plans, and model, showing the School's proposal.

8.2. The local residents who received the letter of invitation were those residents on Merton Hall Road between its junction with Henfield Road and 49 Merton Hall Road, together with residents in Braeside Avenue.

8.3. In addition, the School's architects, Marcus Beale Architects, have placed the relevant drawings and this design statement on their web site at www.marcus-beale.com/WSA, so that any interested party can view the proposed scheme, without having to travel to the School or the local planning authority's offices.

8.4. Comments received so far include:

8.4.1. Concern over noisy out of hours working. Response: The School would have no objection to a standard condition being imposed.

8.4.2. Concern over alarms being accidentally set off. This is not a planning matter but the School will take appropriate measures.

8.4.3. Concern that this is the 'thin end of the wedge' for future developments. The School will be reviewing its building needs in future and will seek permission for any future developments in the normal way, allowing for public participation and consultation.

8.5. The School welcomes comments and will endeavour to respond appropriately, whether or not they are planning matters.

Marcus Beale Architects Ltd
for
Wimbledon School of Art

18 February 2005