

PRESENTATION BY MENTA REDROW LTD AT OVAL ARK ACADEMY ON 26 APRIL 2017

1. Menta Redrow organised the presentation in order to give information to residents about Planning Application 16/05511 which Menta Redrow has made to Croydon Council, and to hear residents' views about the application. ECCO members will probably know by now that this is an application which puts forward a revised plan for the second phase of the Morello site including Cherry Orchard Gardens. ECCO members who wish to catch up with developments are referred to the ECCO website (you will need to click on "Menta Redrow" in the left hand menu) which gives links to recent posts about the application, including details of the amended application, a summary of concerns raised by ECCO members and a report of a pre-application discussion which took place at the Planning Committee meeting on 6 April 2017.
2. I counted 16 local residents in attendance. I attended on behalf of the Steering Group, as did Tomas Howard Jones and Esther Sutton. In addition, Councillor Patricia Hay-Justice was able to attend for part of the meeting, and asked some pertinent questions. No-one from Redrow PLC was present.
3. In the paragraphs which follow, that which I have shown in quotation marks is the exact words of the speaker, insofar as I was able to record such words accurately in my contemporaneous note.
4. Craig Marks, who is a board member of Menta Redrow Ltd and whom residents have got to know as front person for the scheme, gave a speech updating those attending about the amended plan. Mr Marks summarised the nature and extent of his long involvement in Croydon projects, in particular the Stanhope Schroder development now known as Ruskin Square.

5. Mr Marks told us that the purchase of Galaxy House by Menta Redrow had enabled the creation of a linked basement which would create a car-free zone. He stated that almost all the properties in Morello 1 had been sold. Among the buyers were “not many families certainly not big families”. Mr Marks explained that the Royal Mail site was a separate development, and that Menta Redrow were working with Marstons, who own the Porter and Sorter.
6. Architect Cara told us that Network Rail were looking at different things for the East Croydon station from those that were on the agenda when the previous plan was issued in 2011. The new scheme omits that part of the site owned by Network Rail. She emphasised that Menta Redrow were focussing on objectives which were within their control. Cara promised that the buildings would be of “exceptional design quality”. She showed some pleasant drawings of the development, but these were accompanied by the reminder that the design is at an inchoate stage, and we may not see the final designs for some time. Cara informed us that there would be 135 basement parking places.
7. Cara gave us a vision of the proposed bridge link in these terms: “the space lifts up to the level of the bridge”. (I have continued in this report to refer to the relevant structure as a “bridge”.) She stated that the play space on the Cherry Orchard Gardens site would be private, that is, for the sole use of residents and their families. She also promised “a linear park running along Cherry Orchard Road”. On the first floor of Morello 2 would be a community hub, a space which could be used by individuals and workers for small business units seeking to have a quiet area for internet access, and rooms for some activities, by implication activities such as holding meetings and conference calls. (Mr Marks later said that the hub would be self-financing.) Cara further stated that Morello 2 would contain 10% affordable housing and Cherry Orchard Gardens 15% affordable housing. Cllr Hay-Justice asked about price. Mr Marks stated that they were “still looking at it”.

8. Following the introductory remarks, those attending were asked for questions and comments. In prefacing my summary of the concerns expressed by ECCO members, I stated that the amended scheme was preferable to residents as its height was much reduced from its predecessor. I reminded Mr Marks that the “sweeties” that developers promise in their presentations unfortunately do not always make their way into a final development in the way which residents anticipate, and that he must excuse those who brought a sceptical eye and ear to proceedings.

9. The summary of concerns which I went on to express were as follows:

- Absence of progress in the construction of the link to Dingwall Road above East Croydon station – what is currently dubbed “the bridge to nowhere”/related issue of provision of s.106 money (raised by Tomas Howard Jones, member of the ECCO Steering Group)
- The loss of four mature plane trees on the corner of Cherry Orchard and Oval Roads and more generally the absence of attention to the provision of greenness in an area deprived of greenness
- The absence of community space
- The low level of affordable housing

10. Other concerns were as follows:

- The creation of a wind tunnel behind the Morello 2 site which would particularly impact people on using East Croydon station (raised by a resident of Addiscombe Court Road)
- Poor visual quality (in terms of design) of new developments in Croydon (resident of Cedar Road)
- What is going to happen to the Porter and Sorter? (Gordon Thompson – Chair of Canning and Clyde RA)

- What will be the impact on taxis/transport interchange? (resident of Addiscombe Court Road)

11. Craig Marks and Cara dealt with concerns as follows:

Re: “Bridge to Nowhere”/s.106 funding

Mr Marks said Menta Redrow would “build it, fit it and fund it”. He said that as soon as the site ceased to be a building site, the bridge would be ready to use subject to the important caveat which was that the completion of the scheme required the agreement of Network Rail, as the bridge would cross their land. Mr Marks called for closer liaison between the Council, Menta Redrow and Network Rail on the issue, suggesting that such liaison should be facilitated by the Council.

Unfortunately, there was a lack of clarity in Mr Marks’ explanation about use of s.106 money. The most likely interpretation of his comments is that the completion of the bridge does not depend on section 106 payments being made as it depends more on building works around the bridge finishing. In any event, the main impression given is that the bridge part of the development has yet to be resolved or negotiated between several parties. This is unsatisfactory, considering the significance of the 'The Bridge to Nowhere' as a feature of the scheme and hot issue.

Re: loss of four mature plane trees

Mr Marks stated that the 2011 permission provided for the developer to cut down the trees. He stated that expert advice had been obtained from “pre-eminent arboriculturist Julian Forbes-Laird” and that Mr Forbes-Laird had advised that the trees were – in Mr Marks’ words –“past their best”. The roots of these trees were a restriction on the new build. However, Mr Marks stated that Menta Redrow would see “how they (ie the plane trees) can be retained”.

Re: the absence of community space

This issue is dealt with in paragraph 7 above.

Re: the low level of affordable housing

Mr Marks stated that he knew what it cost to get the scheme built. He said it would show “great architecture”. He considered that the cost of infrastructure and development was impacting on affordable housing. The shared ownership model for the affordable properties on Cherry Orchard Gardens was the “right product”, and allowed Menta Redrow to fund the scheme. He would let the Greater London Authority know what Menta Redrow wanted to deliver. The Council’s appraisers, BNP Paribas, were “very happy with what we are doing”.

Re: the creation of a wind tunnel

The previous scheme had been tested by engineers and not found wanting. The current scheme is yet to be tested.

Re: poor design quality

Cara stated that the new buildings will be “amazing”. They would be “looking at a brick finish”, at which point Mr Marks interjected that they would “evolve that”. No-one asked what that meant.

Re: Future of Porter and Sorter

Mr Marks has a good relationship with Marstons. He is seeking to “unlock” Billinton Hill/Royal Mail sites and foresaw that the Porter and Sorter would continue to trade but possibly in a new building. He was interested in it coming into the Morello site.

Re: transport links

Mr Marks and Cara saw this as a TfL issue. Their focus was on “pedestrian development”. Mr Marks said that much depended on the development of the Royal

Mail site. He stated that Marstons were ready to “unlock” the taxi issue in relation to Billinton Hill, and he recommended that local councillors took up this issue.

12. I would identify the main action point for ECCO (and, indeed, other Residents’Associations in the area) to make representations to the Council to convene meetings as a matter of urgency to ensure that there is joined-up thinking in the implementation of the East Croydon Masterplan. Such meetings should seek to resolve conflicts arising from disparate land ownership and to avoid negative effects of piecemeal development upon:

- (i) pedestrians, cyclists, drivers and public transport users;
- (ii) the public realm generally, particularly in respect of environmental issues in the broadest sense; and, not least,
- (iii) the speedy and satisfactory conclusion of the building of the East Croydon bridge.

Optimally, residents’ representatives would be able to attend such meetings, but at the very least there needs to be open communication between the Council and residents on the progress of the implementation of the East Croydon Masterplan.

13. ECCO may also wish to receive further information as soon as possible about the design proposals for Morello II.

14. Menta Redrow are organising two public exhibitions at Oval Ark Academy: on 18 May 2017 between 5 p.m. and 8 p.m. and on 20 May 2017 between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. They expect to have their amended application before the Planning Committee in the Autumn of 2017, before which the Council will carry out statutory consultation with residents.

Jerry Fitzpatrick

(ECCO member)