

ST THOMAS ST EAST FRAMEWORK PROPOSALS

A submission by Team London Bridge

October 2018

1. Team London Bridge welcomes the opportunity to help shape the development of this key area of London Bridge. The London Bridge Plan sets out our strategic vision for the London Bridge area and informs our submission. We have also contributed to the emerging New Southwark Plan for this area and made representations on relevant planning applications.
2. We welcome the development of the Framework. It provides the opportunity for a unified approach to the development of the area which will bring greater benefit to the business and residential community than if the sites in different ownership were developed separately. The need for a Framework was a key recommendation of our work on the New Southwark Plan. We also welcome the support for placeshaping proposals in the London Bridge Plan including the Low Line, St Thomas St Boulevard and the Green Grid, as well as contribution to the London Bridge Cultural Strategy, and have identified opportunities below for these to be taken further.
3. We have previously identified (in response to the New Southwark Plan site allocations) and continue to seek the following from any Framework for the location:
 - Recognise the individual and collective contribution of the different sites to the development of St Thomas Street as a high street, including part pedestrianisation and support for town centre uses at ground level, and also potentially above ground floor and set back from the St Thomas Street frontage
 - Support the need for a mix of floorplate sizes to encourage retail and office diversity
 - Avoid a single, monolithic elevation along St Thomas Street
 - Acknowledge the need for future development to respect the food, culture and retail offer in Bermondsey Street and the station
 - Address the future impact of development on the microclimate and shading and require development to mitigate the impact of development on wind speeds along St Thomas Street and adjacent areas
 - Acknowledge the merit of existing, undesignated buildings
 - Increase permeability throughout the site, building on and add to the historic fabric of alleys and courtyards
 - Deliver an overall increase of public open spaces to create a green grid, incorporating greening into new buildings and trees lining the whole of St Thomas Street and securing the retention and management of Melior Street Community Garden as a community run asset
 - Support the need for sustainable drainage given this is a critical drainage area
4. We have indicated to development partners that to realise the potential for St Thomas Street - the ambition for the St Thomas Street Boulevard was set out in the London Bridge Plan - will require an approach that:
 - Minimises traffic flow and speeds
 - Creates space to attract large numbers of pedestrians and cyclists

- Enhances east-west and north-south pedestrian flows linking the station and destinations
- Develops a holistic vision for the uses and activity on the street
- Ensures a diverse and thriving economy, across health, education, commerce, innovation, culture, retail (inc. food and drink) and the night time economy
- Retains and enhances the character and visual quality of the street through greening, public realm, architecture and active frontage.
- Ensures balance between the unique heritage of the London Bridge Campus (Guy Hospital and Kings College London) and Bermondsey and inspiring new architecture.

5. While progress has been positive so far, the Framework approach needs stronger delivery, bringing the key organisations together and maximising the benefits of true collaboration ahead of development proposals coming forward that visibly respond to the lead that the Framework provides.

Mix of uses

6. We are keen to see more work on the range of uses being proposed within the Framework area. Our starting point is to support the clear priority for office, retail and leisure/cultural uses over residential which we believe is appropriate for London Bridge. The framework proposal will bring approximately 10,000 new people to the area and we do not see a vision for how their needs will be served, especially outside working hours, at lunch time and at weekends. This will be a 7-day space which needs to be recognised in the range of retail and cultural provision. It is currently unclear whether there is provision to cater for this influx and provide for London's Bridge's function as a major town centre. We support the proposal for a music venue and encourage an on-site solution to providing a significant cultural offer (as previously proposed through the Migration Museum), which, as we have seen from the Bridge Theatre, brings so many spin-off benefits. We are looking for more detail on the range and volume of different use classes to be provided for the area as a whole and for specific locations. The arrival points have a particularly important role to play in drawing people into the area.

7. In planning for future student accommodation, it will be important to ensure this does not exceed the capacity of the area or push out other uses more appropriate to the strengths of this part of the Central Activities Zone. This could include provision for locally relevant commercial space – for example flexible co-working opportunities mixed with amenity provision that links up with the exciting plans at the London Bridge Campus next door, or the high number of sustainable fledgling businesses in the area. These uses would also provide wider access to facilities.

Urban design principles

8. The success of the Framework will depend in large part on its ability to secure delivery of the overarching urban design principles through individual development proposals. It will be important that each development can show how it responds to the design principles at planning application stage.

9. We have a number of comments on the eight urban design principles put forward and invite views on our own proposals:

Arrival points

10. The Framework correctly identifies the main exit from London Bridge station onto St Thomas St as a major arrival point. It is important that this is followed through into the development proposals which currently place the lobby of a major building for student accommodation at this point. A much more appropriate welcome is needed which also pays critical attention to the space around any building on the Capital House site with:

- capacity to accommodate cultural activities at street level by the entrance
- a strong relationship between any new building, Melior Street garden and the alley by Beckett House to bring St Thomas Street Boulevard to life and encouraging footfall into the green space
- an emphasis on design that avoids creating public spaces and lobbies perceived as being private

11. We question the vague definition of the arrival point at the east end of St Thomas St. We believe this is located at the key junction with Bermondsey St and Crucifix Lane. It is important that the urban design principle consider where the actual arrival point is, rather than the one within the framework property boundary. Attention to welcoming, generous spaces at this junction is important, as well as anchor buildings which draw people into the Framework area.

Pedestrian connections

12. The Framework's commitment to increase permeability is admirable and we welcome the evolving proposals and main routes. Nevertheless, we think it is important for the Framework to bring wider benefits along its boundaries (including Weston Street and Bermondsey Street) and beyond its area, especially to the key route through Bermondsey St tunnel, St Thomas Street (west) and Crucifix Lane.

13. The Framework makes provision for a new desire line through Vinegar Yard, across Snowfields and through a new alley to Bermondsey St, which is not indicated as a new pedestrian route. We anticipate this will be very heavily used which could detract from the arrival point status of the Bermondsey St junction. It would be helpful to see projections of future footfall across the Framework area – for example showing the location of main office entrances and number of workers expected at each - to ensure an appropriate hierarchy of provision is being made and appropriate capacity provided.

14. The Framework relies heavily on a new route to the north of the pub, which appears to depend on agreements not yet reached. Securing these agreements will be important to the overall success.

Anchor buildings and active street frontages

15. We welcome the principles here, but think in terms of delivery it is better articulated as two separate principles: active frontage and key elevations. Key elevations are well illustrated on the map, but should also include the Rotunda (the predominant vista when walking eastwards from The Shard and Guy's). We also encourage a stronger approach to the south east sides of the warehouse on the south side of Vinegar Yard, as well as The Shard and railway arches. Active frontages, pedestrian routes and building alignments should then be geared to maximise the impact of these elevations – a method used to excellent effect in More London.

16. We suggest that a distinction is made between key elevations that enhance existing assets and new elevations.

St Thomas St arches

17. We support the role of the arches in shaping future urban design in the Framework area. We do not see how this principle has been translated into practice. The rhythm of buildings and spaces in the Framework proposals do not appear to be defined by the arches' grid, and the grid stops abruptly before the Bermondsey Street arch. We are also disappointed that this Framework does not do more to deliver on the Low Line proposals. These play not only an important role as a public realm corridor and walking route but also an economic role as a location for affordable retail and business units. It will be important for the Framework to be much stronger in delivering the

ambitions for the Low Line. This might include the height of the arches, colour, materials, response to retail arches (vs loading or plant), and also how light will penetrate the site onto the arches.

Inns and Yards

18. We welcome the intention to “borrow” and “extend” the scale and character of the Bermondsey St inns and yards into the Framework area. We believe this will need much more work to be successful. The morphology of the Bermondsey St inns and yards is very different to the less complex and wider spaces proposed. These spaces will also be framed by much higher buildings and a different physical treatment to the public realm. The image provided with this urban design principle is also misleading in omitting the Rotunda with a round footprint that introduces a very different feel to the public realm. We also question whether the Melior Street Garden design should be based on a yard (see point 20). We would encourage further work to be undertaken on the morphology, character and feel of the inns and yards immediately adjacent to the Framework area and for this to take a stronger role in shaping the nature and location of the development proposals which will follow. These spaces should be much more influential in shaping the final development. The recent work by Untitled Practice on the nature of the area’s inns and yards provides a rich source of information on a more appropriate way forward.

Formal and informal edges

19. We are not persuaded of the value of this urban design principle. We would encourage a new principle for making St Thomas St a boulevard providing a range of civic functions, appealing public realm and with an active frontage that could extend to more than the ground floor. It should also be strongly influenced by the rhythm of the existing railway arches.

Variety of spaces

20. The Framework should be clearly driven by the variety of public spaces which exist or are being created. These should drive the location of new buildings, their key elevations and the ground floor function. We find it hard to imagine how the spaces as proposed will look and feel from the information provided. Each space should have a defined role and character with an approach to its public realm and greening that allows it to function effectively both as a place and a route – to be set out in a framework public strategy. Spaces include the St Thomas Street Boulevard; a more formal open green space at Melior Street Garden; a less formal space at Vinegar Yard which can host a range of cultural events and activities; and several incidental spaces and transitional alleys through the site. We do not support Melior Street Garden as a linear space. It needs to be recognised as a formal open space and not merely a link between buildings. The current proposal also does not allow sufficient light penetration and enjoyment of The Garden for public use, nor an approach which allows for the community element of the Garden in community hands, such an important part of this community. Just beyond the area, the framework needs to address the increased pressure on Leathermarket Gardens. It also requires an integrated approach to green walls and roofs as part of the approach to the public realm. We also note that the vast majority of the street trees identified in the Framework are in the public realm and it is important that planting also occurs on private land.

Servicing

21. The principle of consolidation of servicing is welcomed. There is a lack of information on how this key area of urban management will be delivered and this will need to feature strongly in the next iteration of the Framework. This should include basic requirements such as the use of the same vehicles across the site. We would like to see more information on driver movements through the site, and the potential impact on surrounding buildings and public realm – mitigating against driver error or passing parked vehicles.

22. It is unclear how disabled or necessary parking and public cycle parking will be integrated within the scheme. This needs to be clarified.

23. To help advance this area of work, **we suggest the following urban design principles** based on our comments above, and welcome discussion of these.

- *Bookends / arrival points* - defined by:
 - Generous spaces
 - Nodes of activity linked to the buildings and spaces that draw people into the wider site
 - Strongly defined buildings that face outwards (see “Key elevations”) and welcome people into the site

- *Pedestrian connection hierarchies* - defined by:
 - A hierarchy of routes indicated through width and public realm treatment
 - A pedestrian route through the Vinegar Yard
 - Pedestrian routes connecting beyond the Framework area, including Bermondsey tunnel, Crucifix Lane, Weston Street and St Thomas Street West
 - A clear relationship between the footfall generated by key developments and designing for pedestrian movements.
 - Design that considers future placement of signage and wayfinding

- *Active frontages* - defined by:
 - Interesting shop windows
 - Porosity of entrances
 - Welcoming with clear reasons to enter for all
 - Cultural interest / significance

- *Key elevations* - defined by
 - Space alignment which draws the eye to the assets of the area, and bold, inspiring design at key nodes
 - Enhanced placemarks (e.g. three sides of warehouse, two sides of pub, church, arches, The Shard)
 - New placemarks (e.g. St Thomas St façade of Beckett House, Capital house entrance, Music venue facing east, Bermondsey St building facing north, the new extension face linked to the warehouse)

- *Responding to the Low Line* – defined by the response to the rhythms, forms and dimensions of the railway arches in terms of
 - Height
 - Colour
 - Alignment (buildings, open space, trees)
 - Form
 - Distance
 - Light penetration

- *A variety of defined spaces: alleys, yards and open space* - defined by (through a public realm strategy)
 - A boulevard
 - Width (agreed set back building line)
 - Tree lined
 - Light penetration
 - Low traffic

- A formal open space
 - o A destination to stop and rest
 - o A civic space
 - o Proportions
 - o Defined by the space, not the building
 - o Sunlight and air
- A less formal open yard
 - o Activity (programmed with culture, eating, play)
 - o Features (water, sculpture)
- A series of alleys and small yards
 - o Movement through
 - o Active frontage
 - o Incidental space
- *Servicing* - defined by:
 - Separation from pedestrian movements
 - Allowance for driver fallibility
 - Coherence of approach

Health benefits and air quality

24. The Framework makes some reference to the opportunities for bringing health benefits to the area. Given its location adjacent to the London Bridge Campus and the local work of the Guy's and St Thomas' Charitable Trust among others, we believe this an area where future delivery should be setting the pace for other areas. Healthy streets and air quality are two particular opportunities.

25. We welcome the attention given to air quality in the Framework and urge that this goes further in avoiding future air pollution. This is a world-class business area and transport interchange as well as a visitor destination and a health hub.

26. We believe the Framework can do more to support delivery of better air quality for the area by establishing a target that delivery of the Framework will be Air Quality Positive. It should go beyond design solutions for individual buildings to support urban design solutions to improve air quality, including public realm improvements to provide urban greening of open space and buildings and provision of healthy streets throughout the Framework area. It should also address the air quality implications of construction impacts which will affect the area for several years.

Placemarks

27. We also urge the next stage in the development and delivery of the Framework explicitly to identify the opportunities to enhance existing and create new "placemarks". We address some opportunities in the urban design principles set out in paragraph 23. Team London Bridge is working with Bermondsey Street Area Partnership and Shad Thames Area Management Partnership to identify valued views and other placemarks that shape the character of our areas. This includes an online mapping survey in which people are identifying the [Placemarks](#) that matter to them. This review has shown that people value not only views but also important buildings, open spaces, trees, public art, street furniture, rights of way, signs, names and many other things that contribute to local character. This major area of new development creates the opportunity for new placemarks that will be treasured by the community in the future.

Cultural use and relevance

28. The London Bridge business community has vocalised its desire to create an environment in which arts and culture can flourish; driving footfall, enhancing place reputation and supporting the

local economy. The London Bridge Culture Strategy outlines a vision that will make the area 'a main stage' for culture in the capital and identifies the need to use and create public spaces that can be utilised as 'platforms' in which different scales of performance, exhibitions and installations can be easily accommodated. We would like to see this theme given greater prominence in the framework.

Social regeneration

29. We welcome the intention behind the variety of other social, cultural, economic and health benefits to the area and look forward to collaborating further on the Social Regeneration Charter.

Environmental resilience

30. The Framework can play an important role in supporting the ambassadorial role that London Bridge has in promoting innovation and environmental resilience, aiming for the highest accreditation in areas including, carbon, energy, wellness, BREEAM, and reduced ground level wind speeds and urban heat island effect. There is increased recognition and focus on sustainable buildings, as seen from the recent Stirling prize (we also have various excellent examples in the London Bridge area).

Meanwhile uses strategy.

31. The Framework should set out how to mitigate the impact of several years of development in the area, particularly any negative impacts on food and beverage businesses in the local vicinity and the local environment. Meanwhile activities can offer an exciting addition to the area as the project develops, and we welcome exploring where we can work together.