

PROPOSALS FOR DEVELOPMENT OF VINEGAR YARD

Team London Bridge submission to GLA

GLA ref 2020/6665/S3, Southwark ref 18/AP/4171

January 2022

1. Team London Bridge (TLB) is the Business Improvement District (BID) representing approximately 400 businesses in the area between London Bridge to the west, Tower Bridge to the east, and south towards Bermondsey. TLB has a strong remit from businesses since 2015 to deliver the [London Bridge Plan](#). Our mission is to ensure London Bridge excels as a leading place for global commerce and continues to develop as a pioneering local centre for enterprise, culture and entertainment.

2. TLB has welcomed the opportunity to inform development of the Vinegar Yard proposals. We made representations on the site through consultation on the New Southwark Plan (NSP) and in responding to the St Thomas Street East Framework and two previous planning applications in 2018 and 2019. We have made representations on the scheme as it has been amended through the planning process. We have considered the proposals in the context of both the New Southwark Plan and London Plan and consistency with our London Bridge Plan.

3. The Vinegar Yard site is highly significant, especially for its contribution to the potential of St Thomas Street and the inclusion of a main arrival point into the area from the tunnels under the railway at the Bermondsey Street/Snowsfields/St Thomas Street junction. The proposals relate to part of one (NSP53) of a small number of major development sites identified for London Bridge in the emerging Southwark Plan. The scale of the development proposed and its relationship to St Thomas Street and other development sites along St Thomas Street is critical. To this end we welcome the development of the St Thomas Street East Framework 3.0.

4. The London Bridge Plan sets out the St Thomas Street Boulevard as a key placeshaping project – demanding a ‘world-class vision for the street’, with an active and vibrant local economy - *“Revitalised arches and tunnels and a world-class pedestrian-focused public realm will ensure that the St Thomas Street Boulevard is a showcase of all that is historic and distinctive about London Bridge”*. It also sets out ambitions for the Low Line.

5. We welcome the significant changes that have been made to the scheme in relation to previous applications and during its consideration by Southwark Council and GLA. We particularly welcome the potential the site now provides to strengthen the growing Biomedical innovation cluster in London Bridge and to retain the Warehouse in Fenning

Street. The most recent changes have helped to define a clearer east west route, increased visibility of the greening on terraces, and provided an improved active frontage.

6. There are other significant issues which we have raised, including the impact on St Thomas Street, the quality of the reimagined Vinegar Yard (including its role as a servicing route), the cultural offer and the sustainability and greening commitments where we believe further improvements are needed. The reduced area of the public space associated with Vinegar Yard and its impact on pedestrian flows across the area is also significant and further work is needed to reduce conflicts arising from the servicing arrangements proposed.

St Thomas Street East Framework

7. We have welcomed the development of a shared approach through the St Thomas Street East Framework for the otherwise separate major developments planned for the area. The impact of the Framework on the plans should be more clearly expressed, including the justification for departures.

St Thomas Street Boulevard

8. The site has an extensive frontage along St Thomas Street and is in the setting of its listed railway arches. It has a major role to play in the transformation of St Thomas Street into a boulevard, characterised by active frontages, lively retail and cultural activity, pedestrian and cycling priority and designs which provide buildings of a human scale at ground level and a high quality public realm which takes full advantage of greening opportunities.

9. The proposals include a very large lobby serving both offices and outpatients and occupying at least a third of the St Thomas Street frontage. There is a risk of this having a deadening effect on the ambitions for St Thomas Street boulevard and we would welcome further evidence justifying the scale of the proposed lobby, including the number of outpatients expected to be using the building and how these will interact with office workers. We would welcome consideration of alternative approaches, including locating the main lobby on an upper floor. Every opportunity should be taken to make the ground floor of the building along St Thomas Street a welcoming retail and cultural space for the general public to use.

10. The retail offer will be key to the success of the scheme in contributing to St Thomas Street Boulevard. It needs to be at more than one level to be successful. Taken as a whole the Framework proposals will bring approximately 10,000 new people to the area with needs to be served outside working hours, at lunch time and at weekends. The site serves a 7-day space and this needs to be recognised in the range of retail and cultural provision, including the availability of an affordable offer during the office lunch hour.

11. There are also opportunities to be realised from the success of the meanwhile uses currently on site which have rapidly established themselves. These are popular, interesting, fun, artistic, unexpected and adaptable and have created an appealing and successful atmosphere and vibe. This should be carried forward into the new scheme, including through strong support for existing businesses making the transition. The retail offer should also meet the needs of independents and complement the Bermondsey Street offer.

12. The proposals present blank elevations at the corner of St Thomas Street and Fenning Street and fail to take the opportunity to make this a key design feature which contributes positively to the public realm.

13. Further opportunities also need to be taken to address the reality that much of this stretch of St Thomas Street will be heavily shaded.

Cultural offer

14. A very significant growth in the number of people living in, working in and visiting the area is expected as a result of the planned developments in this part of London Bridge. We would welcome more evidence that the approach is informed by the [London Bridge Culture Strategy](#) and Southwark Local Plan Policy P45. This will require space within the buildings being devoted to cultural uses and measures to activate the relationships between the retail uses and the new public realm.

Local employment – Southwark Studios and start-ups

15. We welcome the commitment to providing 10% affordable workspace. This is the minimum required to be compliant with Southwark Local Plan Policy P30 and we encourage a more significant provision. This would strengthen the contribution to the Biomedical innovation cluster and the dynamism of London Bridge's local economy.

16. It will be important that the quality of the space being provided for local employment uses is of a high standard. Southwark Studios is proposed to be located at a basement level which presents particular design challenges. This will demand a bold and innovative approach, including maximising the availability of natural light.

The Warehouse

17. We welcome retention of the Warehouse on Fenning Street. This retains an important element of the area's identity, provides the opportunity for community use, and offers a more relaxed context for the Horseshoe Inn and a reduced impact on the Conservation Area.

18. The proposals reference the Warehouse being put to a mix of retail and community use. We believe clearer commitments are needed to ensure the Warehouse makes a significant cultural contribution, including as part of the wider medi-culture offer that is developing across London Bridge.

Public realm, urban greening and pedestrian flows

19. The quality of the public realm and its impact on pedestrian flows will be critical success factors in future development of the site.

20. We welcome the opportunity of the new urban garden to support mature planting and the commitment to planting on some roofs and balconies. Nevertheless, given the emphasis being placed on the importance of urban greening we are disappointed that the emerging scheme has an Urban Greening Factor right on the limit to be compliant with London Plan policy. We believe there are opportunities to be more ambitious and contribute to London Bridge's Green Grid. These include significant additional planting at street level to support the ambitions for the St Thomas Street Boulevard and other public realm, supported by long term maintenance and management plans.

21. Development of the site will have a very significant impact on pedestrian flows and routes through the area. It is important that these are manageable, desirable and that congestion is avoided. It is helpful to see the impact of more meandering east/west movement parallel to St Thomas Street as a result of the proposals. This analysis needs to be supported by adequate data on pedestrian flows and the impact of different design options. It will be important to understand the significance of potential routes through as well as between buildings, including east/west north of the Warehouse and north/south between St Thomas Street and the Horseshoe Inn.

22. The new public realm comprising a reimagined Vinegar Yard and the new urban garden to the east of the site is critical to success. It offers a much reduced area of public realm when compared to previous proposals for a major new public square. It also needs to provide a stronger sense of arrival from the key St. Thomas Street, Snowsfields, Bermondsey Street & Crucifix Lane Junction as identified in the St Thomas Street East Framework.

23. There is significant potential for conflict between the use of the new public space for both servicing and public uses. The commitment to using a consolidation centre to reduce the impact of servicing is welcome. Nevertheless, the proposals show that Vinegar Yard provides the main route through which to service the new development and we are unsure that this will be successful. It will require the transformation of Vinegar Yard early in the morning on a daily basis from service road to a public space supporting cultural, retail and

other public activity. We are particularly keen that the service route across Vinegar Yard from Snowfields does not take on the character of a service road, especially given uncertainty over future development to the south.

24. We also note the location of a disabled parking bay in Snowfields, which may conflict with the ambition to create a cycling contraflow here.

Environment and sustainability

25. This scheme will be one of the first major developments to be brought forward following declaration of a Climate Emergency by Southwark Council and with the experience of managing the Covid-19 pandemic. It will be important to visibly address this by anticipating future public and tenant expectations and requirements. We are currently working on a carbon net zero strategy for London Bridge, and we hope that this scheme will be able to play an important role in delivering opportunities identified.

26. The scheme should set exemplary sustainability standards, including commitments to:

- BREEAM Outstanding
- WELL Platinum
- air quality positive
- EPC rating A
- wirescore (platinum)
- water run off at greenfield rates

27. In the light of the pandemic it should also include use of filtration systems, set higher standards for fresh air provision in the building, make use of wider doors, lifts and routes, deploy touchless systems, and use anti-viral coatings on surfaces

28. Sufficient information about other areas of environmental resilience including reduced ground level wind speeds and addressing the urban heat island effect is lacking. It is important to evidence the impact of the scheme on ground level wind speeds and the quality of the public realm as a place to dwell as well as pass through.