

PROPOSALS FOR DEVELOPMENT OF VINEGAR YARD

A submission by Team London Bridge

November 2018

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](#). We have considered the current proposals in the context of new and emerging development plan policy in 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/Snowfields/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.

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.

Shared approach

5. We have welcomed the development of a shared approach through the draft Framework for the otherwise separate major developments planned for the area. The latest plans for Vinegar Yard do not fully meet the expectations of this Framework. We have also identified a number of areas where the Framework itself needs to be strengthened. We have fed in on detailed proposals for Capital House and the Leather Warehouse and Bermondsey Yard. It has been helpful to have architectural drawings for these schemes and we would welcome the opportunity to view and comment on these for Vinegar Yard.

6. In responding to the St Thomas Street East Framework we have developed a set of urban design principles which we believe should drive the proposals for Vinegar Yard. It will

be important for a planning application to be accompanied by evidence showing how they have been addressed. The principles are set out below and expanded on in our [response](#):

- *Bookends and arrival points*
- *Pedestrian connection hierarchies*
- *Active frontages*
- *Key elevations*
- *Responding to the Low Line*
- *A variety of defined spaces: boulevard, alleys, yards and open space*
- *Servicing*

St Thomas Street boulevard

7. The site has an extensive frontage along St Thomas Street and is in the setting of its listed railway arches. We welcome the intention for the St Thomas Street elevation to respond positively to the rhythm of the arches. This is important to avoid a single monolithic elevation. The street level views in the exhibition material suggest more work is needed to achieve this ambition and the influence of the arches needs to be much more pronounced on this key elevation, including at ground level which needs to be at a more human scale. Further opportunities also need to be taken to address the reality that much of this stretch of St Thomas Street will be heavily shaded.

8. Given its prominent location this development demands a stunning design impact benchmarked against the standard set in recent years by Hay's Galleria, The Shard, City Hall, and London Bridge Station. We hope the impact on St Thomas Street will be a focus for consideration by Southwark's Design Review Panel.

Cultural offer – music venue

9. The proposals depend heavily on the quality of the music venue and recording studios as the keynote contribution to the site's cultural assets. The music venue is also pivotal in the cultural offer for the whole St Thomas Street East Framework area. The approach should be informed by the [London Bridge Culture Strategy](#). It will also be important that this building relates well to the proposals for the Leather warehouse.

10. Securing a successful venue two and three floors below ground will be a challenge. Any planning application will require significant information on their acoustic as well as on practical issues around ventilation and access. This venue will also need to be integral to measures which activate the relationships between the retail uses, new square and the repurposed warehouse that lies in a separate landownership. It is important to learn lessons from the Scoop which has had to adapt to conflicting requirements from diverse tenants, the community and the landlord.

11. We welcome the way in which the music venue supports the "arrival point" function at the east end of St Thomas Street. It needs to work as a 360 degree building and encourage footfall on all sides. The ground floor use is potentially problematic if it is focused on ticket sales and accommodating influx of large numbers of people at the end of performances. This space needs to work for other users of the area and be a destination in its own right

even when the music venue is not being used for performances. We would also encourage that further consideration be given to ensuring the view south from the “special room” at the top of the music venue building can benefit from the exciting vista across the railway lines and London Bridge station.

Retail uses

12. We welcome the emphasis on providing for retail space that meets the needs of independents and complements the Bermondsey Street offer. This is also a feature of other schemes in the Framework area and it would be helpful to see further evidence of the overall demand for such space to ensure there is an appropriate balance of provision and to underpin the commercial success of the new developments. We understand a retail strategy is being prepared for the whole Framework area and this should be both consulted on and included with any planning application. 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.

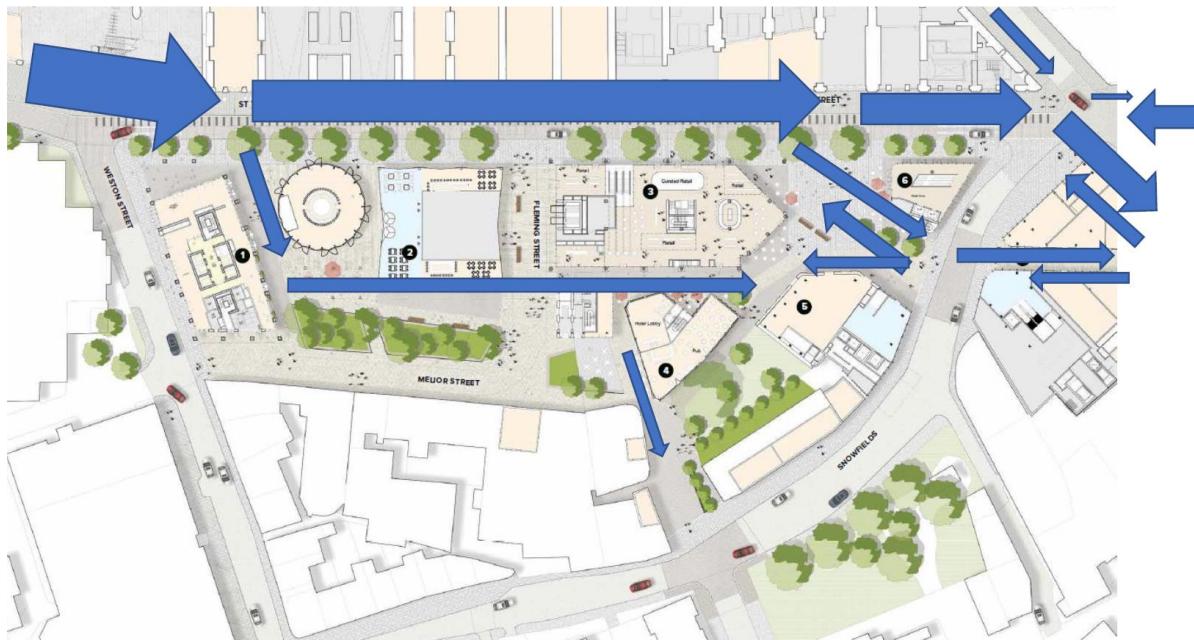
13. We are concerned that the quality of the retail offer in the “Lower Ground Floor” may be compromised by being underground. This is especially the case with restaurant uses of the kind emphasised in the exhibition material given the importance of them have a street view. We ask that further consideration be given to the balance of retail and restaurant uses above and below ground and that natural light is available in the “Lower Ground Floor”.

Open office lobbies

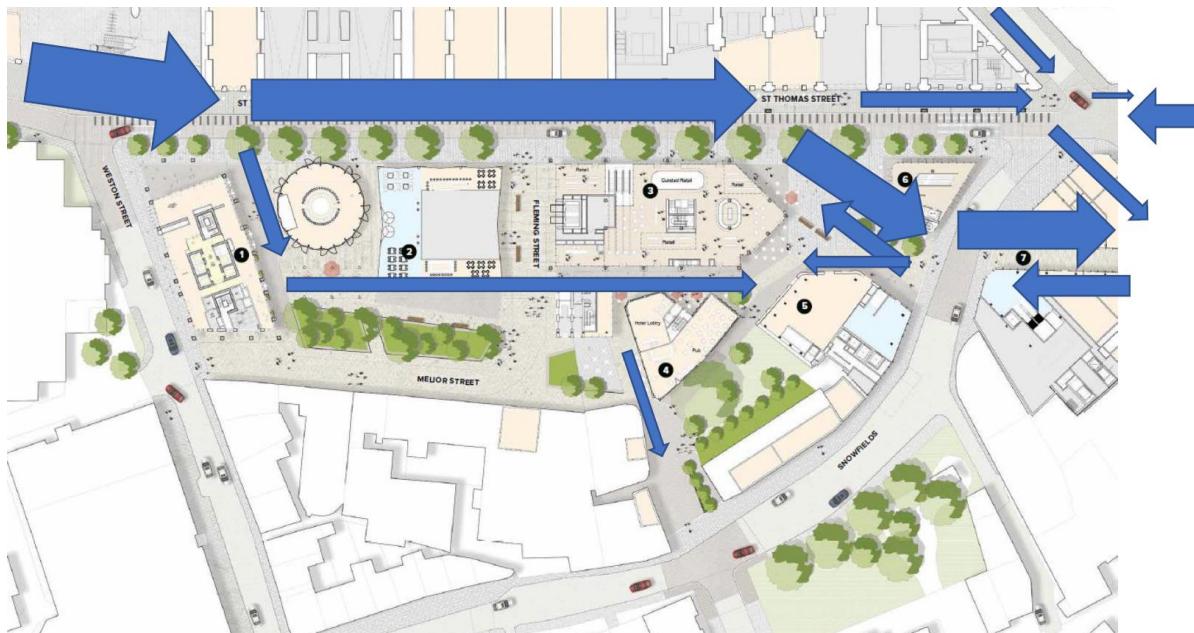
14. The commitment to providing “open office lobbies” will support active use and boost trade. It is unclear from the exhibition material where this open access will be provided. It will be necessary to ensure the internal and external design makes these spaces welcoming to casual visitors and the wider public and avoids the perception of a private office lobby. Open frontages and wide entrances that provide the necessary visual prompts and encouragement to draw people in and encourage their use as internal public realm will need further thought. These spaces will also need to be open for public use for most of the day and night. It will be important to design in appropriate security provisions to support this access and avoid the need for potentially intrusive measures being installed at a later date.

Public realm and pedestrian flows

15. The new public square alongside the music venue is important not only for its contribution to the Vinegar Yard development. Its design will also influence the flow of pedestrians and others through the whole Framework area and have a particular impact on Sellar’s proposals for White Lion Yard. It will be important that this does not become the only frequently used route between Bermondsey Street and London Bridge station and beyond or White Lion Yard risks becoming congested. We believe around 75% of commuter pedestrians moving between Bermondsey Street and London Bridge Station should be using St Thomas Street, and 25% using the parallel route, including the Vinegar Yard and White Lion Yard to achieve the best balance. This is illustrated for the morning peak below. This does not account for people entering the new buildings, nor heading south along Weston Street and Melior Place, and is based on our own footfall counts at the east end of St Thomas Street:



16. This will not be achieved under the current proposals with large numbers following the shortest route across the new square and through White Lion Yard. In the evening even higher numbers will come through the yards to shop, eat and socialise. This will also put pressure on the informal crossing point at Snowfields. We expect the proposed design to result in the movement illustrated below:



17. Addressing this issue will require changes to both the Vinegar Yard and the Leather warehouse and Bermondsey Yard schemes. This should be supported by a new movement analysis of the whole Framework area which shows where specific movement patterns will go at different hours and takes account of the main building entrances and the impact of 10,000 new employees and students. The design and layout of the new public square should influence these flows by emphasising its role in the pedestrian hierarchy as a public space to dwell over its role in providing a through route. There is also a need for a retail strategy which covers the whole Framework area that can influence pedestrian flows by

encouraging browsing along key routes to slow movement and influence route choices. These measures and other interventions to White Lion Yard will help spread the pedestrian footfall across the Framework area.

Changes to the Framework

18. There have been important changes to the design since publication of the St Thomas Street East Framework. These include a new route linking Fenning Street (shown incorrectly as “Fleming Street” on the exhibition material) and Vinegar Yard. The appearance of this critical new route is hard to assess from the drawings provided but the relationship to the new hotel and its entrance seems well judged, and it links well to the yard space. We are unclear how well this route links to the Threadneedle site, and the vista appears to be towards a wall by the servicing yard, which will be a barrier to pedestrian flow along this crucial secondary (and retail) route. We would suggest further work with the neighbouring development, linking this route more positively to a more formal Melior St Garden space.

19. We are also less confident in the new freestanding building at the southern end of Fenning Street. This is a key location in the wider Framework area which will have significant additional footfall. It is also critical to views of the Horsehoe Pub and the exhibition materials show how this has been compromised. There is a risk that the lack of an active frontage for most of this building will deaden the area and we ask that this receives much more consideration. Accessing basement cycle parking should not be the key use of this central location and such access should be provided more discretely.

20. An issue missing from the St Thomas Street East Framework is the potential of meanwhile uses to animate and add vitality to the area during a period of major transition over many years. This would be helped by a Meanwhile Strategy establishing clear expectations and providing the basis for particular initiatives, such as the use of the existing Fenning Street building as a cultural space.

Environment and greening

21. We welcome the ambition to achieve BREEAM Excellent and ask that this be a clear commitment in any planning application. This will be helped by a stronger approach to greening roofs and walls plus some additional planting (for example greening the wall in Fenning Street as a joined up approach to Melior Street Garden). We would also welcome more information about other areas of environmental resilience – which should form part of the joint framework approach - aiming for the highest accreditation in areas including carbon, energy, wellness, and reduced ground level wind speeds and urban heat island effect.

Servicing

22. There is a lack of clarity on how the buildings will be serviced. We should also welcome further details on the proposed “freight and services consolidation scheme”. This **must** be consistent with the wider Framework and support a shared approach which uses the same vehicles across the whole Framework area. We can envisage, for example, a tension between the space needed for servicing the music venue building and that required for public cycle parking and there is a lack of information on the overall approach to public cycle parking provision. The London Bridge Cycling Strategy indicates that public cycle parking needs to be conspicuous to the final destination.

23. We look forward to continuing to work with the landowners and prospective developers of the main sites along and around St Thomas Street to help deliver shared ambitions for this critical part of the London Bridge area.