

DESIGN REVIEW PANEL
NOTES OF MEETING 26th March 2009

Agenda and notes (where appropriate) can be viewed at the Council's website at:

<http://www.merton.gov.uk/living/designandconservation/designreviewpanel.htm>

Panel Members Present:

- Marcus Beale
- Councillor John Bowcott (Chair)
- David Breen
- Anthony Cain
- Tim Day
- Tony Edwards
- Kirsten Jeske
- John Merivale

Apologies

- Tony Michael

Officers Present:

- Paul Garrett: Physical Regeneration Team
 - Paul McGarry: Physical Regeneration Team
 - Steve Oakley: Development Control
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Item 1: 09/P0021 (OUTLINE), APPLICATION, 165-169 Merton Road, South Wimbledon

The Panel were informed that this was a Council owned site, and that the proposals were part of the site disposal process being undertaken by the Council's Property Management & Review Team. They were concerned that there appeared to be no design or planning brief for this site and no design input into the disposal process. It was noted that the consultants being used were property specialists and not planning, design or architecture specialists. This is clearly not a design-led exercise.

It was felt that this was a major factor in the problems the Panel identified with the proposal. It was also felt that it ought to be part of the Council's role to promote good quality design through example where it had the opportunity. It

was felt that the Council has, with this site, the opportunity to set a high standard for design in the borough, yet it was clearly failing to do this in this instance. It was also felt that this would send out the wrong message to private developers, and make it more difficult for the Council to insist on high quality design if it was promoting poor design on its own sites.

The Panel noted that the design was attempting to reflect the character and form of the villas to the north in the Pelham Road Conservation Area. However it felt that it was doing this in a very superficial, visual way, and that the character of the Conservation Area, and the buildings it was emulating goes much deeper than this – particularly in the internal arrangements of the building and how it would be used. It was questioned as to why the proposals should be trying to copy the character of the Conservation Area in the first place.

The Panel considered the design to be little more than fakery, and was essentially back-to-back houses, this having a negative impact on the amenity of the units – essentially creating single aspect town houses with cramped internal layouts and un-useable gardens at the front of the building. It was noted that the semi-basement arrangement with steps to the front doors were unlikely to be DDA or lifetime homes compliant as there was no alternative level access to the building. This was considered a fundamental flaw to the design.

The building appeared to have been designed around the needs of the car – particularly at basement level, noting the awkward ramp arrangement to effect a central vehicular access to the building and the tight spaces for garages and manoeuvring. It was recommended that the application must show the basement layout is feasible by indication swept-paths and vehicle sizes. It was questioned why so much parking had been provided in an area that was highly accessible by public transport. It was noted that the building line had been brought forward in line with neighbouring buildings, but that this would entail significant works to the tree in the middle of the front of the building (this tree is covered by a Tree Preservation Order). It was also noted that the size and position of the trees in the front were incorrectly shown on the plan.

It was also noted that the rear units had poor quality access down the side of the building and much of the internal layouts had not been designed to show the layouts were workable. It was considered that it was essential that the Design and Access Statement (DAS) show that it was feasible to provide good enough quality designs for the number of units the application was seeking permission for. The Panel felt that it singularly failed to do this and questioned why the application had even been validated when the DAS did not actually do what it is required to do according to government and CABE guidance.

In summary, the Panel felt that the quality of the indicated design was very poor (including renewables) and questioned whether the site could support the number of units proposed, particularly using the building form proposed. It was felt that the site was suitable for houses, but that fewer and better houses

could generate a similar site value, and that there was potential for flats above houses. It was recommended that the Council should set a planning and design led brief for the site, for which it could invite expressions of interest from private developers/architects.

VERDICT: RED

Item 2: NO NUMBER ALLOCATED YET, PRE-APPLICATION, 3 St. Mary's Road, Wimbledon

Pre-Application scheme – minutes confidential

Item 3: 09/P0402, APPLICATION, Emerald Service Station, 284 Burlington Road

It was noted that in the absence of the scheme architect, the applicant/developer gave a short presentation on the background to the proposal and its design.

It was noted that the building was raised above the street level by almost 1 metre, yet the flood modelling that had been carried out by the applicant and accepted by the Environment Agency, required a raising of only about ½ metre. The Panel urged the applicant to keep the ground floor as low as possible, both to minimise the necessary height of the building and to reduce the awkwardness and space requirements of internal ramps and steps.

The Panel's general approval of the overall design, including its height, scale, massing, bulk and materials, was implicit in that most comments related to detailed matters. This issue of support for the overall design was later raised specifically and agreed by the Panel. It was felt that the height was suitable for the location and that had a proposal for a building similar in scale to the adjacent shops been submitted, then this could be seen as under development. It was felt that the area was in need of general improvement and this scheme would aid in this. With regard to the relationship with houses in Claremont Avenue, it was felt that the new building related more strongly with Burlington Road, and provided a clear and generally appropriate marker between the residential street and the commercial street. The mix of uses were considered appropriate in the area of mixed use and a range of facilities

Areas where the Panel felt there ought to be further work done on the design related primarily to the corner and roof of the building. The idea of the corner of the building facing north being akin to 'the prow of a ship', was generally supported by the Panel as a means of marking it out as a local focal point. However, it was felt that this had the potential to be better and more fully realised by extending the white rendered elements of the frontage round the corner in the form of the balcony balustrades, instead of the proposed glass panels.

It was also felt that the designs for the shop signage may not successfully support the subdivision of the commercial unit, and future signage could undermine the quality of the shop-front or integrity of the frontage design. Given that the residential element was for a housing association and would likely be occupied by families, it was felt that the design should maximise the potential for roof gardens, balconies and 'green' roofs – which it currently had the potential to do better. Although the internal corridors were not extensive it was felt that they were a bit cramped and should at least benefit from natural lighting. The single stairwell, high number of flats in relation to it and the narrow corridor also raised some concern about whether the layout would meet building regulations, although the applicant considered that, at four storeys it was compliant, but would need an extra staircase if it was 5 storeys.

Questions were asked regarding provision of renewable energy and meeting UDP and London Plan targets. Whilst the applicant was not in a position to answer fully, it was clear this needed further consideration. The Panel felt this was an important area in which to demonstrate compliance. Further comments were made regarding the quality of the design of the series of doors on the Claremont Avenue frontage and importance in having an attractive residential entrance; the design of the plant and views out onto it from the flats; the difficulty of parking provision and desire to have parking bays in front of the building; and the benefit of producing a model to show the proposal and its relationship to surrounding buildings. The panel noted that parking and accessibility were difficulties, but did not raise any objections on this, or regarding the proposal being car-free.

Overall the Panel were positive about the proposal and gave the verdict based on the renewables issue being satisfactorily demonstrated.

VERDICT: GREEN

Item 4: 08/P0287/NEW, PRE-APPLICATION, Rainbow Industrial Estate, Raynes Park

Pre-Application scheme – minutes confidential