

DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

NOTES OF MEETING Wednesday 18th November 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)
- Tim Day
- Gary Elliott
- Tony Michael
- Nicholas Waring

Apologies

- John Fyfield
- Tim Snelson
- Krystina Brooks

Officers Present:

- Paul Garrett: Physical Regeneration Team
 - Paul McGarry: Physical Regeneration Team
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Item 1: 09/P2319, APPLICATION, Brenley Playing Field

The Panel noted that a number of changes had been made to the previously reviewed proposals as a result of officer and Panel comments. The Panel however, still had some considerable concerns about the overall quality and function of the development. These centred around both the open space and the new buildings.

Regarding the park, the Panel was concerned that it had not actually been designed as a 'place' rather than simply a space – it was not clear what its role and character would be and there was concern that some wild areas were being lost, reducing biodiversity. The applicant failed to convince the Panel of the overall quality of the park in both this respect and in terms of its materials.

There was some concern about the interface between the buildings and the open space, notably the public-private transition and how parking would be controlled in the homezone. Discussion also touched on the quantity of open space in relation to the planning brief and Secretary of State direction on the sale of the land. There was concern that the applicant's calculation of 1.85ha included the homezone area (approx. 1.6ha excluding the homezone) was notably less than the 1.9-2.0ha referred to in the brief and by the SoS.

Regarding the buildings, questions were raised on some key issues. First, one main concern related to the number of single aspect flats, with a large proportion being north facing and that this would provide poor living environments. This was linked to the internal environment of the buildings that would have numerous and long internal corridors that would be difficult to light and ventilate naturally. Second, a concern related to the overall architectural quality of the buildings and how to ensure this – through ensuring the same architect remained on board, and through strict conditioning on any permission. There were concerns that the scheme ran the risk of becoming a poor quality 'Design & Build' type of development.

The Panel felt that the applicant was predisposed to a single-aspect form of development and had not adequately considered how other typologies and layouts could create a higher quality living environment. It was felt that the overall density of the development, which was well over that recommended in the London Plan was getting in the way of a significantly better layout and that a relatively small reduction in the number of units would enable a significant increase in the quality of the development and living environment of residents.

The size and design of the individual units was also felt to require improvement. There were problems with the relationship of part of the eastern block with neighbouring properties with respect to privacy and visual impact. The Panel also asked about the location of affordable housing – learning that it was intended to spread this around both east and west blocks. The Panel asked about renewables, learning that the development was intended to reach Code for Sustainable Homes level 4.

Whilst the Panel felt that there were some basic elements that the applicant had got right, such as the siting of residential blocks around a new publicly accessible park, the building heights in general and the use of contemporary architecture, it felt that there were still numerous issues that needed further work, some of these being more fundamental issues such as the use of single aspect flats, design of the open space and architectural quality..

VERDICT: AMBER (towards RED)

Item 2: 09/P2080, APPLICATION, Selsey House & 1 Lambton Road

The Panel questioned the extent to which the architecture was designed as part of the healing process of the health centre. It was felt that certain elements were important to include in such an approach – including natural

light, foliage, calm ambience, low toxicity in materials and natural ventilation. The Panel felt that this approach had not been taken sufficiently and was apparent in the design – particularly in that the atrium seemed to have been squeezed to a very small size by the quantity of accommodation. It was felt that scheme ought to be making the atrium the major focus of the building rather than the ancillary feel it currently has.

The Panel were also of the very strong view that the building is essentially a public building – what is inside it is essentially public to local people, such that the main internal elements of the building are of public concern – rightly so if people are to like and value this key new building in Raynes Park. It was felt that the atrium was key to this and needed to be made a far larger and more prominent element of the overall design. It was also suggested that it could be brought forward such that the first floor waiting area was surrounded by expanses of light on two sides – the atrium and the glazed front elevation. As a means of enlarging the atrium it was recommended that, now there was a basement car park, that a full basement should be excavated and ancillary and storage rooms be located here.

Questions were asked about natural ventilation and it was recommended that windows should open as sashes rather than casements. It was noted that the architectural approach to the front and rear portions of the top floor was different and that this should be better unified. Questions were also asked about the level of external staff areas. Whilst it was felt that the front elevation was an improvement (the circle form was better represented in the atrium with rooms around it), it was felt that this also could benefit from a little more thought, particularly from the perspective of patients in the waiting room – it was suggested that in this context that internally it might seem a bit simple or formulaic.

In general the Panel were more content with the proposal than previous schemes reviewed and it was noted that the external design and massing had improved. However, it was noted that it was a current application and that there was considerably more work required on the internal quality of the building in order to make it the excellent building it had the potential to be. The verdict given was done on the basis that any planning consent needed to be heavily conditioned, with the use of informatives, as well as addressing the issues raised above.

VERDICT: AMBER