

# MERTON DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

## NOTES OF MEETING

07 December 2022

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### Panel Members Present:

- Marcus Beale
- Vinita Dhume
- Tony Edwards
- Dipa Joshi (Chair)
- Beatrix Young

### Apologies:

- Tim Long

### Council Officers Present:

- Paul Garrett: Panel Administrator
- Mark Warren: Note Taker

### Councillors Present:

- Cllr Aidan Mundy
- Cllr Caroline Charles
- Cllr Daniel Holden
- Cllr James Williscroft

Notes:

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### **Item 1: 13-19 Wimbledon Hill Road.**

The panel thanked the applicant for taking the scheme to the Design Review Panel. It would have been preferable to review the design at an earlier stage so that the wider issues discussed at the meeting could be incorporated into the application scheme.

#### **Land use**

The panel questioned whether residential use was appropriate for the site given its proximity to a busy junction. They had concerns with the levels of noise and air quality in this location. A commercial/employment use may be more appropriate here, but if residential use is proposed this must be of a good quality which means mitigating the effects of traffic. They acknowledged that there are ambitions to improve the air quality in the future, however the proposal should not rely on that to justify its appropriateness for homes.

They suggested that the lower two levels would be more appropriate for residential amenity or commercial rather than homes as they are most exposed to poor air quality and noise. There were concerns that the proposed building arrangement may prejudice development on the neighbouring Barclays site to the north as many homes overlook the site.

#### **Contextual analysis**

The architect confirmed that the design was a reworking of previous designs for the site. The panel recommended that the applicant takes a step back and analyses the site context, both existing and emerging, as a starting point, as this necessary contextual analysis was missing. The applicant's facade design was similar to Wellington House, and whilst this was considered a good building, the panel felt that this site is more urban in character, and the architecture should reflect this.

It was felt that the proposal did not abut the adjacent building in a comfortable way. Either it could make an abrupt change to a taller scale, or it should follow the established eaves/cornice lines more closely.

This is a prominent corner site, the panel strongly suggested that the applicant analyses the context and focus on the four corners that create the setting for the junction, current and proposed. The space between the buildings is as important as the building itself, and that it is unclear how the proposals would contribute to the junction as a whole.

The panel felt that 6 storeys was appropriate for the site given its location and prominence. It could possibly be taller. However, the massing relationship between the proposal and adjoining buildings should be further explored.

## **Commercial ground floor**

The panel had concerns with the development's relationship to the street. The development gives an opportunity to improve the existing constrained condition of Wimbledon Hill Road and the junction, which is heavily used by pedestrians. The panel suggested stepping the ground level into the site provide a more generous public realm which would greatly improve the street experience and deliver a public benefit to Wimbledon Town Centre.

The panel were not convinced by the servicing strategy that relied on the mews road to the rear. It was noted that servicing via the refuse store is not appropriate. The panel were concerned with the lack of staff facilities and staff cycle parking. It was also felt that the cycle parking could be sited on the corner for improved surveillance. The panel felt that there should be more investigation into how the rear alley could be improved as a public route. It was important that the commercial unit was as flexible as possible, and it currently fell short of this.

## **Residential**

The panel made multiple observations regarding the quality of homes being proposed. They felt that the arrangement on the first floor felt forced and had concerns with the proposed lightwell providing adequate light and amenity. They also suggested that the applicant explore the location of private amenity to distance itself from the corner, where noise and air quality is worst. Overall the layouts did not make sense in terms of achieving a good quality of life for residents.

The applicant proposed a single lift to provide access to all floors and roof top amenity. The panel were concerned with its compliance with building regulations as the roof level is over 18m above ground level. The panel recommended adding a second lift. The roof top amenity design should be developed to ensure that this space functions as intended.

## **Sustainability**

The panel was concerned with the lack of information presented regarding sustainability. It was not clear how sustainability was integrated into the design approach and the panel advised the applicant to explore this further. This included an analysis of embodied energy and the circular economy. It was noted that many elements of sustainable building design conflicted with each other and such issues needed to be addressed and resolved.

Panel members expressed that the development should aim to be close to Passivhaus i.e. zero carbon in use. The panel questioned whether the proposal had undergone any overheating assessments to ensure that the glazing was appropriately sized, since there appears to be too much glazing. It was noted that the building would need a major refurbishment in under 30 years if it were to become zero carbon. The panel questioned whether the proposal as planned actually met current standards. Some of the analysis left a lot of questions unresolved, notably the acoustic report.

## Summary

The panel acknowledged that the challenges of the project revolve around a constrained brief and strongly recommend exploring the project with a broader view. The panel felt that contextual analysis and sustainability should be more thoroughly explored and better integrated into the design process. Sustainability should be at the heart of a proposal whose design lifetime will extend beyond 2050.

Although likely to be permissible in planning terms, the proposed residential land use needs careful mitigation, and commercial/employment use may be more appropriate. The panel felt that the commercial unit and its servicing required further interrogation. It was felt that there was the scope and opportunity for an exciting building to work on this important site and its important location gave the applicant a responsibility to achieve this.

Verdict: **RED**