

**DESIGN REVIEW PANEL**  
**NOTES OF MEETING 30 January 2020**

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

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

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Panel Members Present:

- Najeeb Latif (Chair)
- Marcus Beale
- Vinita Dhume
- Tim Long
- Beatrix Young

Apologies

- Jason Cully
- Rachel Jones

Council Officers Present:

- Paul Garrett
- Jonathan Lewis

Councillors Present

- Nigel Benbow (items 1 & 2)

Members of the Public Present (items 1&2)

- Sandra Vogel
- Tony Burton
- Sarah Sharp (recording)

Declarations of Interest

- None

Notes:

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**Item 1:** Application, 19/P3772, **16-20 Morden Road**, South Wimbledon

The Panel had a number of concerns regarding the design of this building and felt more work was required to ensure a quality building was built on this site.

It was felt there was a clear lack of a design narrative for the proposal, which should inform the design and appearance of the building. This was evident in the roof form and range of proposed materials. The appearance of the building was likened to a poor 1990s development. Regarding the roof, a range of poor quality examples were given, from non-contextual locations, whereas good quality examples from the locality should have been identified to inform an appropriate design response. The skyline was considered unsatisfactory, mostly due to the curved roof. The Panel felt that the materials palette was too varied and needed to be far more restrained – and again – be more contextual.

The Panel were concerned about having residential use on the ground floor, as this was a hostile environment for this use. Whilst stopping short of expressly stating this was inappropriate, they suggested that if this use was retained, some changes were required. It was suggested a deeper defensible space was needed and that a more solid acoustic barrier was needed – a wall rather than vegetation. It was also felt the bedrooms would be better located at the rear.

The south elevation was also considered problematic as it has a bedroom window directly facing onto a secluded, publicly accessible space. It was felt this was susceptible to anti-social behaviour and a better solution was required. This led to further highlighting of the difficulty of creating successful ground floor residential use and a suggestion that the southern part of the ground floor at least, should be considered for non-residential use.

Another key element of the design the Panel were concerned about was the high proportion of single aspect units – 21 out of a total of 30 units. It was felt this was poor design and a long way from being in accordance with London Plan policy D4 E. Internally the party walls and layouts had scope for simplification, notably regarding internal party walls, to create more regular shaped flats. There was also a lack of a coherent narrative on the approach to meeting sustainability requirements and this needed more work.

It was also felt that the car park at rear of the building presented a harsh area of tarmac, which could also attract antisocial behaviour. It was suggested that the car park could be re-arranged to provide some ground level communal open space and provide more conveniently located bin storage. It was also suggested that the basement could be expanded slightly to accommodate cycle parking and provide bulky storage for flats.

The Panel noted the applicant's approach to the building alignment, but remained uncomfortable with bringing the elevation forward from that of the adjacent Spur House. This was particularly so regarding the need to maximise defensible space for ground floor residential units and also reducing the depth of the building. This was related to the single aspect units and the depth of the kitchen areas which it was felt would not receive much light and require artificial lighting.

The Panel were also unconvinced by the positioning of the lift shaft as it presented a blank frontage to the street. If this was reversed with the stair well a more attractive solution with windows could be presented to the street. The Panel also felt that more

could be made of the entrance, expanding it to occupy one bay of the building in terms of its architectural expression. Overall the Panel felt a significant amount of development and revision was required to make the proposal acceptable.

VERDICT: **RED**

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**Item 2:** Application, 19/P2383, Land off Hallowfield Way, Mitcham

The Panel were unanimous in welcoming the changes made based on previous comments of the Panel, and felt that the overall design had moved forward positively. Notable was the changes to the park edge with more definition, a block plan that worked better and felt more permeable and a better street aspect to the park to the east. The Panel had no particular concerns regarding the changes in height but did note that the areas most suitable for increased height were the centre and south of the development.

The Panel were disappointed however, not to have had sight of the proposed Design Code prior to the meeting. It was this Code that the Panel felt was critical to giving the council sufficient surety that a quality development could be secured at reserved matters stages. The Panel were unanimous in the view that the Design Code must form an integral part of the outline planning application, as it was clear the site was intended to be sold on. There needed to be clarity regarding what was fixed and what was variable. For example, the Panel felt there was a strong case for fixing the block pattern in the design code.

Much of the discussion concerned issues that needed to be covered in the design code. The site was large enough to create its own neighbourhood, and a convincing story needed to be expressed regarding this. This included a clear understanding on the non-residential uses that were needed and would help create a neighbourhood. It was felt that 500m<sup>2</sup> was very inadequate. The site would be developed over a number of years and thus the phasing was important to ensure it minimised disturbance to early residents and also addressed the issue of meanwhile uses. This was closely linked to assessing the amount and type of non-residential uses.

The site had only one vehicular entrance for up to 850 dwellings and thus a clear strategy for emergency access and planning was required. Routes into and through the site thus needed to be maximised and be of high quality – including access to the transtop. This was required to maximise connectivity and reduce any feel of isolation or ‘ghetto’ feel and minimise the potential for ‘feral’ parking. Important to this is the design and appearance of the streets. This includes landscaping and parking as well as having good natural surveillance from buildings, especially at ground floor.

It was therefore considered important to ensure maximum control over streets and parking by ensuring they were adopted by the council. It was also important to ensure the street side and podium side of buildings worked well together with the right typology of flats and houses. The Panel also felt that the landscape strategy was weak and needed further development to maximise the quality of the public realm and linkages with surrounding open space.

Clarity was needed on the approach to parking and creating a low traffic neighbourhood, this included the amount and location of parking and the position of cycle parking and bin stores – to maximise active frontages. It must be able to be clearly demonstrated in the design code that the amount of units proposed can be achieved according to policies on high quality design. Particularly noted in this respect were the deep plans of many of the buildings and a weaker description in the Code (p38) of the approach to dual/single aspect units than is currently in the London Plan policy. It was recommended that the wording in the code was the same as that in the Policy and that an ‘example’ block or building was shown in the Code to demonstrate achievability in this respect.

All the issues raised by the Panel need to be incorporated in some way into the design code. This needs to be the document that demonstrates the ability of the proposal and the site to deliver the dwellings proposed. It will be the proof of the intent of the applicant. The Panel is willing to review the content of the design code as it is evolved.

VERDICT: **AMBER**

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**Item 3:** Pre-Application, 19/P3818, **159 Commonsides East**, Mitcham (Sparrowhawk),

Pre-Application – Notes Confidential