

DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

NOTES OF MEETING Tuesday 22nd January 2013

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:

- Councillor John Bowcott (Chair)
- Marcus Beale
- Tim Day
- Paul Dodd
- Tim Long
- Tony Michael
- Andre Sutherland
- Nicola Theron

Council Officers Present:

- Paul Garrett

Apologies

- Sally Warren
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Item 1: 12/P2874, Application, Land to the Rear of the Grove Hotel

The Panel were critical of this proposal at all levels and felt that considerably more thought needed to be given as to how this site should be developed. At the general level the Panel felt that the proposal was particularly divorced from the adjacent former pub physically, architecturally and operationally. It suffered from this in all these aspects. The architecture did not relate at all well to the pub, the layout of the building presented qualitative problems and the gap between the buildings would be a poor quality space.

It was felt that the urban design was particularly poorly resolved as demonstrated by the space between the buildings, with little thought given to the boundary line between the two buildings. It was also felt that this would be a poor quality entrance to the residential units – essentially from down a service alley - and that the entrance should be directly from the street and the bin store accessed from the alley. It was also felt that little thought had been given to the management of this space, it being a messy, tight space that

could easily become little more than a rubbish dump. Therefore the refuse store ought to be adequately sized and sensitively screened from the street, otherwise it would not be a pleasant place to live, and have an adverse impact on the streetscape.

It was felt that not enough consideration and thought had been given to the local context of a noisy, busy and polluted street. The balconies were poorly located and would be subject to direct views into them from the top decks of buses as well as direct street noise, and the white render would wear poorly in the dust, grit and pollution from the busy road. It was felt that the residential units could be rotated 90° and that the balconies needed to be to the rear.

Whilst the Panel had no objection to a contemporary style, it was felt that the design should be of a higher quality. It bore no architectural relationship at all to its location, particularly to the adjacent pub. The Panel considered the pub a generally attractive building and that this should be used to inform the design of the new building. Done well, the pub and the new building could be seen as two halves of the same building. Architecturally, the pub and the new building should be seen, and treated, as a whole. The architecture could be so much better and this showed that little thought and time had been given to this. A design strategy would assist to support the proposal.

Some concerns were raised about the attractiveness of the retail unit in relation to its size and flexibility – notably the arrangement of the w/cs. It was noted that a similar unit across the street had been vacant for a while and that letting a unit adjacent to a Tesco Metro could prove challenging. Overall it was felt that the site was rather cramped, but that ideally the general location should be able to justify a taller building. The Panel felt that it could support a high quality taller building on the site if it would resolve some of the siting and layout difficulties, but that there is a height limit to the context of this specific, small site. Taller buildings would require a larger site.

The Panel also noted that the character of the immediate surroundings is a fragmented urban location that is hostile to pedestrians and visually poor. It did not look good, it was something of a non-place. It was felt that the development was adding to this negative character rather than remedying it – it could almost become a bit of an embarrassment. A more comprehensive approach to development that makes a positive contribution to the immediate area is needed. Unfortunately the proposal did not even relate well to the pub which was in the same ownership. The Panel suggested the applicant could approach the owner of the adjacent car park to discuss a possible joint comprehensive development.

Due to the range of concerns given above, the Panel was quite clear in its verdict.

VERDICT: **RED**

Item 2: 12/P3140, Application, **Land to the Rear of the Nelson Arms**

Overall the Panel were very enthusiastic and positive about this proposal, and applauded the architect for his architectural approach and willingness to use colour. There was a clear sense of ambition to build something good, which was applauded. It was felt however, that a bit more thought was needed on some of the detail to ensure that a higher degree of refinement and longevity would be achieved, before it could be fully endorsed by the Panel.

The concept of the articulated box form was welcomed, but it was felt that the lower front left element could be brought further forward beyond the building line to reinforce the concept of articulated boxes when viewed along the street. This would add a little more internal space that could aid internal planning.

Whilst the colour was welcomed, there needed to be a clear rationale for the choice of colour. Given that there was no architectural reference to the nearby pub, it was suggested the colour of the pub's glazed brickwork could be a reference. Given the façade was mostly render with minimalist detailing, it was important the quality was seen through construction. Planning conditions on the details and type of render would be important in this respect.

The few critical points related to the ground floor. It was felt the front wall was too high and gave the building a fortress feel. A lower wall or railings would be suitable for a front garden where a rear one also was provided. The security of the undercroft was questioned. It was felt that the carpet shop did not need a retained access and the space would be better given over to rear gardens. Whilst the sub station needed access, it was suggested this could be by key access, so the undercroft could be gated at the front of the building.

It was felt the communal areas of storage, bins and cycle storage could be more efficiently arranged. It was suggested the cycle parking be brought to the front, and made more efficient and flexible by having a single space (than can accommodate a range of items such as prams, buggies, scooters etc.) rather than cubicles. If these issues were addressed then the Panel felt that it would be more supportive of the proposal.

VERDICT: **AMBER**

Item 3: 12/3121, Application, 127 Durham Road

The Panel had a number of key concerns about this proposal, though it acknowledged that the general approach to scale and site layout was probably appropriate for the site.

Architecturally the panel felt the houses looked too traditional and 'twee'- particularly the Durham Road houses, which is unnecessary. The houses at the end of Panmuir Road (facing a small cul-de-sac called Park View Close) were considered better and more 'honest', but even these would benefit from more attention to detail – intellectually they were not very 'robust'. On

Durham Road it was felt the architectural design was a missed opportunity for higher quality housing and simply not authentic – there were two pairs of semi-detached houses masquerading as two detached houses (with a side extension that looks like a conversion) for no good reason. The feel of the buildings was a design for the least resistance. Nevertheless, the interpretation of traditional houses requires careful consideration – in particular the eaves were picked out as an example of poor attention to detail – being clunky in appearance. Overall it was felt the architecture could be a lot better, and was in contrast to what the applicant was capable of producing.

The Panel was also concerned about the relative narrowness of the houses – 4.5m on Durham Road and 4.2m on Panmuir Road – this being very narrow for most houses, but particularly for large family houses. The upper floor layouts seemed to work quite well but the ground floor plans of the Panmuir Road houses seemed odd. A fully open plan layout for a 4 bed house was questioned, as was the position of the toilet/utility space occupying the whole frontage. It was suggested the kitchen and w/c be swapped around into a more traditional arrangement. To be of sufficient quality, such large houses should be wider, even if it necessitated the loss of one unit. However it was noted that the densest part of the development was on Panmuir Road – the part least able to accommodate it.

The narrowness of the houses has resulted in fundamental problems in the layout of the ground floor. The narrow width means that an appropriate kitchen cannot be located at the front of the building by the front door. Consequently, the kitchen is located deep within the building in an open plan kitchen-living-dining area with little direct natural light. The utility-w/c at the front door indicates this is the rear of the property, which is further exacerbated by the high boundary wall, minimal front garden and the absence of individual garden gates. The Panmuir Road streetscape is poor urban design and offers little to the adjoining neighbourhood.

The narrow widths and deep plans of the houses were felt to be poor in terms of sustainability as they would be dark in the middle and may require the use of lighting throughout the day. These issues were a direct result of a decision to get five houses onto the Panmuir Road frontage. It was also noted that the wall in front of these houses was very high, offering little natural surveillance, with the end house was set back and would be barely visible. At this entrance area the poor condition of the otherwise attractive mature tree was noted and it was suggested the applicant address this as part of providing an attractive entrance and setting to the terrace – irrespective of the ownership.

Whilst there had been changes over time to some properties, it was felt the prevailing character of Durham Road was for front gardens without parking. It was therefore felt there should be no front garden parking to the south pair of houses. This was especially so given there was adequate rear parking, it would increase on-street parking, and that it currently contrasts poorly with the more attractive north pair with fully landscaped gardens and mature tree.

The quality and operation of the internal parking court was questioned. It was felt this would not be able to be well landscaped with planting and greenery due to the parking and refuse vehicle turning requirements. It was also felt there would be a conflict with the noise and disturbance of these activities and the peacefulness one expects from rear gardens. It was felt the private nature of this space would not be clear and the high fences would make natural surveillance difficult, which could be contrary to the principles of Secured by Design. It was felt this whole space was not well resolved.

It was noted that the width of the access road was defined by the access needs of the refuse vehicle. However it was felt this would lead to unauthorised parking along the access road and potential safety issues for pedestrians (especially as no segregated path is provided). It was felt that the decision to allow refuse vehicles into the site was causing too many problems and the development should be serviced in the usual way from the street, with bin stores in front gardens. This would allow the access road to be narrowed to prevent illegal parking and allow the rear area to be designed and landscaped in a more appropriate manner to allow greater natural surveillance, increased planting and larger gardens. The appropriateness of putting in steps to avoid a gently sloping garden was also questioned.

This would also free up more space on the Durham Road frontage and allow the house fronts to be more equitably designed and possibly an over-build of the access way to be created.

VERDICT: **AMBER**