

DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

NOTES OF MEETING Thursday 21st May 2015

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
- Tony Edwards
- Jon Herbert
- Rob Heslop
- Sophie Medhurst
- Andre Sutherland

Apologies

- Councillor John Bowcott
- Tony Michael
- Richard Walker

Council Officers Present:

- Paul Garrett
- David Gardener

Notes:

Marcus Beale stood in for John Bowcott in chairing the meeting.

Item 1: Pre-Application, 15/P1367/NEW, **360-364 London Road, Mitcham**
(Former Kwik-Fit Garage)

Pre-Application. Notes confidential

Item 2: Application, 15/P0890, **340 London Road, Mitcham Cricket Green**
(Former Cricketers PH)

The Panel felt that the perspective views gave a glimpse of what a positive effect the development could achieve. No issues were raised with the general height, scale and massing. However the relationship with the fire station and

Vestry Hall still needed further work, and the Panel felt that the building fell short on the quality of the architecture. This is a very significant, prominent site adjacent to a locally listed building and within a conservation area, visible from long distances across the Cricket Green.

A suggestion was made about having a non-residential ground floor, as this could address this and the number of design issues such as the height of the ground floor storey in relation to adjoining buildings and in relation to the building's immediate context.

At the broad scale it was felt that the applicant needed to analyse the whole Cricket Green and how buildings were clustered and related to it, in order to inform how the new building related to the group of the former fire station and Vestry Hall. In general the Panel were encouraging of moving the building closer to both adjacent buildings, particularly to the Vestry Hall. From the west, the flat-roofed section sat awkwardly between the main building and the fire station and abutted the main building in slightly awkward way.

From the south, the double gable was at a different roof pitch to the Vestry Hall. The Vestry Hall's gable end is blank, originally presumably to allow future development to abut it. It was felt appropriate not actually to attach to it, but the gap could be smaller. It was suggested that even if the building did not abut Vestry Hall, it should be designed so it looks like it could, but has then been pulled back a little. It would then relate better to the gable end eaves line, and roof pitch. It might also allow enclosing the entrance to the rear service area, which it was felt was too prominent.

At the more detailed scale, a comparison was made with the composition of the proposed building and the complexity and quality of Vestry Hall. This is organised in vertical bays, and with horizontal layers, differences of fenestration, etc., to present a complex, harmonious facade that deals with the minor asymmetries, e.g. non central doorways, in an elegant way. The positive elements of this building did not seem to be used as cues for creating a similar quality elevation in the new building and the Panel were disappointed with its composition. The fenestration and roof-line did not appear to bear any relationship to the form of Vestry Hall. It was felt that this elevation had to be of equal quality to that of Vestry Hall if it was going to successfully stand alongside it, particularly as it would be more visible from Cricket Green. The Panel did not support the suggested changes to the eaves line as this on its own did not resolve the problems with the elevation as a whole.

It was felt that the building had no clear front and back and that this needed to be better resolved. The main entrance was adjacent to the service entrance, which was on the 'main' elevation. This was an uncomfortable arrangement. The Panel noted that the building was oddly sited in that the 'garden' area was at the west next to a busy road. It felt that this issue, and that of the other frontage onto London Road had not been fully resolved. A landscape design was needed for all the spaces around the building that related well to both the new building and the landscape of the wider Green itself. There appeared to

be no landscape/ urban design strategy and therefore no justification for the approach taken, either in landscape or heritage terms.

With this, it was questioned whether all the proposed parking was necessary and not a lost opportunity to improve the public realm. It was also suggested that the building could be 'nudged' back a little to accommodate balconies on the main elevation as this would give depth to the facade and afford very pleasant views across the Cricket Green.

Overall a leap of quality of thought was needed on the justification and explanation for the design, the architecture – especially the elevation onto Cricket Green – and the approach to landscaping and interface with the public realm. Although the Panel felt that some of the fundamentals were fine, there was a considerable amount of further work needed to make the building of the quality it should be in this prominent location.

VERDICT: **RED**

Item 3: Pre-Application, 15/P0624/NEW, **Pinnacle House, 17 Hartfield Road, Wimbledon**

Note: The applicants have now submitted a full planning application for this proposal and expect to submit updated designs during the planning process. They also tabled further information on how designs for the elevations were evolving. The Panel generally supported this process and the direction of travel, though did not endorse any particular design.

The Panel noted the changes made since the first review of this proposal by the Panel. The Panel welcomed the improvements to the ground floor entrance, which was more symmetrical, open and airy and particularly the centrally placed wheelchair lift. The panel reiterated that it did not have an issue with the building's overall height.

There was some concern about the sensitivity of the rear of the building to the adjacent houses and businesses. The previous stepping arrangement was more sensitive and if the change in appearance and layout at the rear was to remain, then it was advised that the southern elevation should set-back at about 45 degrees, rather than the steeper pitch currently shown.

The Panel saw the elevations as work in progress, though an improvement on the original design. It was felt that the retained brickwork was in danger of looking like an 'add-on' to a new building and this needed to be addressed. There needs to be more nuance and subtlety rather than areas which are 'all glass' and 'all brick'. It was also felt that the building would benefit from a more clearly articulated base, body and extension, with some horizontal stratification in the elevation to express this. The building should look a bit more like what it was – an extended building, rather than a new one. This overall composition of the elevation was important to the success of the building and needed to be got right.

The entrance area might benefit from some form of structural element that avoided the impression of 'floating brickwork' but retained the open feel. The skyline of the building also needed to be improved from the prominent maintenance infrastructure. In response to the images of evolving designs, the Panel warned against making the building too dark and grey. It was suggested that the proposed vertical fins could incorporate some colour to increase the richness of the experience of passing the building. It was also important to consider the appearance of the building at night, given that it consisted of a significant amount of glazing.

Overall the Panel were very positive about the proposals and the direction in which they were evolving.

VERDICT: **AMBER**