

DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

NOTES OF MEETING Wednesday 25th May 2016

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
- Jason Cully
- Tim Day
- Rob Heslop
- Rachel Jones
- Nicholas Waring

Council Officers Present:

- Paul Garrett
- Paul McGarry
- Nuala Kennedy

Apologies

Tony Michael
Andre Sutherland

Declarations of Interest

- Marcus Beale and Rachel Jones declared potential conflicts of interest. Neither was considered sufficient to be a conflict by any others in the meeting.

Notes:

Item 1: Public consultation, No Application Number, **Estates Local Plan**, Eastfields, High Path & Ravensbury Estates

Overall the Panel were positive about the document and felt that, given the case for regeneration was robust, the proposals were the right way to go about the regeneration. The document was quite light and not heavy handed, and the historical analysis was good, succinct and concise.

One critical point was that the Panel felt the document was struggling to be clear in its structure and format and that it needed to be clearer on its planning policy

framework, structure and hierarchy. It could be unclear as to what the applicant is expected to produce for planning and the potential for confusion between the Design and Access Statement, design principles and design codes.

The Panel felt it was important that the plan should refer to other options that had been considered and why regeneration had been chosen over these. A sustainability appraisal was important, especially as there was a lot of embodied CO₂ in all the existing built fabric.

This was particularly important for Eastfields as it was considered of some architectural note and a clear case needed to be shown that the design problems of the estate could not be solved by incremental interventions rather than complete redevelopment.

The Panel were clear on the view that design codes would be too prescriptive and stifle creativity and flexibility, and that what the plan should be doing was offering design guidance. It was possible that this was a matter of clarifying or changing the terminology rather than a need for a significant change to the plan. The Panel also felt that it was important to build-in a series of design reviews for different stages of the regeneration.

The Panel acknowledged that Ravensbury was a beautiful location and that opening up visual links to Morden Hall Park was a good idea and something the Royal Parks and Palaces were beginning to do. The Panel also felt that the estate could easily accommodate more development without undermining its unique setting.

It was noted that building up to Merantum Way would turn it from a relief road with little context into a permanent part of the townscape. If this was done then it should not prevent the future possibility of realigning it at its eastern end to avoid the remains of Merton Abbey.

It was noted that on-street parking needed to be carefully designed so as to maintain pedestrian permeability across streets and not create a wall of cars. The Parish Church of St. John the Divine on High Path needed to be clearly shown as a local landmark.

The Panel was also keen to ensure the plan produced buildings that were flexible and adaptable to future needs – that the developments were sustainable and long-lasting and would not need to be demolished in another 40 years. It was acknowledged that it was difficult to step outside ones' own time and get this right, but one example was to ensure ceiling heights and room dimensions were generous. Getting the mix of house types and tenures was important in creating viable new communities and existing freeholders needed to be carefully considered so they were not priced out of the market.

VERDICT: NONE GIVEN

Item 2: Pre-Application, 15/P4014/NEW, **Ravensbury Garages**, Ravensbury Grove, Morden

Item 3: Application, 16/P0312, 226 London Road, Mitcham

The Panel felt that there was clear potential for a good scheme on this difficult site. However the current proposal had some significant shortcomings that needed to be addressed to enable this to be realised.

The Panel were clear about the sensitivity of the location, with the proposal to alter and partly demolish a locally listed building and the close proximity to a Grade I listed building. The National Planning Policy Framework, and guidance from Historic England, set out a clear methodology for assessing heritage assets. This is based on an assessment of an asset's aesthetic, historic, evidential and communal value, culminating in an assessment of the cultural significance of a heritage asset.

The impact of the proposals on the asset(s) then needs to be assessed, with evidence. If there is harm to the asset(s) then an outweighing public benefit needs to be demonstrated to justify the proposal. None of this work appeared to be present in the application and the resulting proposal suffered significantly as a result. This assessment should shape the proposals.

The Panel was clear that policy guidance was against demolition, but felt that demolition of the rear wing would not be a provocative move if it facilitated an otherwise acceptable proposal.

Although the applicant had shown the view in front of Eagle House towards the house, there were other important views to consider. These included the view from the south, where the new building and car park would be visible, and in the rear courtyard, where the proximity of the new building to Eagle House would be clearly apparent.

Regarding landscaping, the Panel felt that the frontage was dominated by, and designed around the needs of cars and would benefit from redesigning with the possibility of reconfiguring, reducing or removing the parking. The rear courtyard was similarly dominated by the needs of vehicles, was an unviable amenity space and wholly north-facing – offering a poor quality amenity. Vehicles needed to be accommodated within a designed landscape, rather than the landscaping being fitted around the needs of vehicles.

There was an inter-visibility of the proposed building and Eagle House that was unavoidable but that needed to be demonstrated to be neutral to or enhance the setting of Eagle House. The Panel felt that this was not the case.

The Panel felt that an arrangement that created amenity space on the south side of the new building would be a better approach. This would offer the opportunity of opening up and improving the environment of the footpath to the school. The current proposals compounded the enclosure of this space by the building to the south and

made this a rather unpleasant, cramped and potentially scary space, due to the overbearing feel of the four storey building and high, basic fence.

The Panel also felt that the boundary treatment with the Eagle House site was not very sympathetic, particularly with ancillary and cycle storage located here. This boundary needed sensitive treatment and the cycle storage could be divided up into smaller covered stores or located inside buildings.

The Panel felt that a cranked approach for a new building to the rear should be considered that was a less greedy use of the site. It was noted that the new building did not have effective private amenity space which did not meet the required 1.5m depth standards. Regarding the internal layout, the Panel were concerned that the layouts would be seen as bed-sits, with the interior folding doors.

The Panel felt that there was room for a scheme with distinctive architecture on the site but that it needed to be rooted in a thorough analysis of the heritage assets. Currently there were issues at various levels that needed significant review, from the basic concept and site layout through to the adherence of space standards, landscaping, amenity space, and architectural style.

VERDICT: **RED**

Item 4: Pre-Application, 16/P1536/NEW, **27-39 Hartfield Road**, Wimbledon

Pre-Application: Notes Confidential