

DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

NOTES OF MEETING Thursday 28th November 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)
- Tim Day
- Paul Dodd
- John Fyfield
- Jon Herbert
- Rob Heslop
- Tony Michael
- Andre Sutherland

Council Officers Present:

- Paul Garrett
- Sally Squires (Item 3)

Apologies

- Terry Pawson

Notes:

Item 1: Pre-Application, 424-448 Kingston Road

Pre-Application – Notes Confidential

Item 2: 13/P3111, 118-120 Christchurch Road

The Panel's views on this proposal were mainly divided into two key areas. Firstly the quality of the architecture and secondly the height of the building and the case made for it.

The Panel were generally supportive of the architectural approach. It was felt to be a well considered, quality building in this respect. The top and bottom of the building worked particularly well and most of the improvements were

welcomed. There was some regret at the loss of some of the randomness in the façade and a question was raised about the use of the glazed brick balustrades, however these were relatively minor points.

The Panel were not convinced it was an exceptional building, to justify the height on its own architectural merit. This partly related to some detailed design issues, such as the internal layout and the number of single aspect units and the ground floor layout. Although it was acknowledged there had been improvements to the ground floor layout it was felt that this still needed further work. The cycle parking area still felt cramped. As the parking provision was so low, sacrificing some spaces for improved cycle parking was appropriate, given the good public transport accessibility.

The Panel were clear that the ground floor needed an active frontage, although questioned the retail use, the need for it and how flexible the space would be. They were not convinced that the servicing of the retail space had been considered thoroughly enough that there was even a clear servicing strategy. This impacted on the general quality of the public realm around the building, which was important to get right. Related to this was some concern about the environmental impact of the existing service yard to the Tandem Centre on the living conditions of new residents and the quality of the roof garden. This needed to be addressed.

These were issues of relative detail compared to the main concern of the Panel, which was the building's height. At the previous review, the Panel felt the height had not been sufficiently justified. The Panel felt that this had not really changed. It should be made clear here that the Panel were not expressing opposition to tall buildings in principle, but that they did not find the reasons put forward by the applicant sufficiently convincing to justify a 12 storey building in this particular location.

The Panel noted that the surroundings were a poor quality environment that ideally needed a co-ordinated master plan to guide new development. As this was currently lacking, it made it more difficult for applicants to establish what was appropriate development. The Panel's view was that a master plan should be produced for the area.

The building was of very high density, but did not necessarily offer benefits to the surroundings because of this – there was no community facility or large contribution being offered to much needed public realm improvements. The Panel were not convinced the site was a gateway to Colliers Wood as, on the ground, the location did not necessarily feel like a gateway. It was felt that the building did not need to be so high to have a landmark effect. It would still have – by virtue of its architectural quality if nothing else – a strong local landmark presence even if it lost 4-5 storeys. It was felt that, by being as tall as 12 storeys, the building was simply advertising itself, rather than having any other wider meaning.

The Panel were not convinced of the argument that the building provided enclosure to the wide Christchurch Road, as this could be done with buildings

of a completely different height and still achieve a good level of enclosure – this did not justify 12 storeys in particular. The Panel were also not convinced by the argument that it fitted in with the Council’s tall buildings policy for Colliers Wood. The building seemed to stand in isolation and did not read as having any particular relationship to the existing Brown & Root building. The tall buildings referred to in the analysis were disparate in their location and relationship to each other and could not realistically be read as part of a group, setting a precedent for tall buildings – certainly not that accorded with the policy description.

Given that the Panel had previously criticised the height justification for being weak, and that this important aspect of the proposal seemed not to have been strengthened, the Panel were minded to give a Red verdict. However, other improvements to the design led the Panel to give an Amber.

VERDICT: **AMBER**

Item 3: Pre-Application, Singlegate Primary School

Pre-Application – Notes Confidential

Item 4: Pre-Application, 191-193 Western Road

Item withdrawn at applicant’s request.