

DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

NOTES OF MEETING 28th January 2009

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

www.merton.gov.uk/designreviewpanel

Panel Members Present:

- Marcus Beale
- Councillor John Bowcott (Chair)
- David Breen
- Sir Duncan Michael
- John Priestland
- David Whitestone

Apologies

- Tony Michael
- Gary Elliott
- Kirsten Jeske

Officers Present:

- Paul Garrett: Physical Regeneration Team
 - Paul McGarry: Physical Regeneration Team
 - Jolyon Boyle: Development Control
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Item 1: PRE APPLICATION, Selsey House/1 Lambton Road

Item withdrawn from agenda at applicant's request.

Item 2: COMMITTEE DEFERRAL, 360-364 London Road, Cricket Green (Kwik-Fit Garage)

The Panel questioned how much consideration had been given in the design of the building to the proximity of the site to the conservation area and nearby listed buildings. The applicant made reference to the adjacent building having elements or 'modules' to its façade that the new building related to. The Panel acknowledged that the new building was 'of its time' and honest in this respect, also that the frontage of which it was a part had an eclectic mix of 3 old buildings, which the proposal added positively to. The new building is respecting but not copying adjacent buildings, and was based on their variety.

The Panel also asked about the top storey and whether it was necessary in terms of the design, or whether it was there for commercial purposes alone. Though they did not express a desire that it should be removed, there was a feeling that the building would benefit from the top floor being set back further than currently proposed.

There was a general discussion with the applicant on the materials used and why they had been chosen, notably the blue brick on the houses. The applicant referred to previous use of the type of brick and another scheme they had designed on Wimbledon Hill Road, which some Panel members were positive about. The reasoning for the blue brick was generally, that it differentiated from the commercial element of the proposal and worked well with the colour of the zinc roof. The Panel felt that there was variety in the materials, but that there was reasoning and logic to their use, and that they had not simply been 'thrown' onto the façade to create variety.

The Panel expressed some concern regarding the ability of the applicant or owner to control the architectural integrity on the shop-fronts (floor to ceiling glazing) from inappropriate design of advertising or fascias by occupiers. It was suggested that some control needed to be exercised over this. The Panel also noted that there were no single aspect flats and that the design has managed to respect the amenity of the neighbouring flats to the rear.

Overall the Panel's response was very positive to the proposal.

VERDICT: GREEN

Item 3: APPLICATION, 77-91 Hartfield Road, Wimbledon

The Panel felt that whilst there were a number of elements the proposal had got right for the site, it considered that the proposed building would have a negative impact on the area due to its presence in the street and relationship to surrounding buildings. This was primarily due to its height and that the building line had been brought forward from the existing building. Elements the Panel were generally positive about were the plan form of the building, the uses, the manner in which the front elevation had been subdivided, and the general architectural quality of the building.

The argument put forward by the applicant, based on perspective views from Bertram Cottages Conservation Area, relating heights to the town centre buildings and reference to the existing scale of buildings on the west side of Hartfield Road, were generally not accepted by the Panel. They felt that the building was too large for the site. Whilst the Panel accepted that the town centre was slowly expanding down Hartfield Road, they felt that this proposal was premature and over-scaled for the location and the time. It was noted that the site was well outside the UDP town centre boundary, and that although this may change in the future, it was wrong for the proposals to pre-empt, presume or try to unduly influence this.

Whilst the verified perspectives from the conservation area were acknowledged as accurate, it was felt that the presence of the building would nonetheless have a significant impact on the setting of the conservation area. No strong argument was given to justify a 6 storey building next to a 2 storey conservation area, other than referring to the height of the existing buildings. This did not sit well with the fact that the existing buildings, in today's planning climate, would be unlikely to be given planning permission due to the proximity to the conservation area.

The Panel asked about the quality of the rear courtyard area and the applicant explained the orientation of the windows and distances to surrounding buildings. The Panel were sceptical of the proposed trees in that they might reduce outlook and daylight for residents of the new building. The Panel were also critical of the high numbers of single aspect flats and the lack of information on materials for a full application.

Overall the Panel were critical of the proposal, primarily at the more fundamental level of it being over development of the site. However, it felt that some of these issues could be dealt with by alterations to the design. Ideally the building should be two storeys less in height. However, this could possibly be addressed in part by a combination of less height and setting back the top storey more. The building should also, be set back further from the street edge, at least to the point of the current building.

VERDICT: RED

Item 4: APPLICATION, Roan Industrial Estate, Mortimer Road, Mitcham

The Panel had a number of concerns regarding the design of the proposal. Most fundamentally was the quantity of development, particularly on the corner of the site, where there was a stark juxtaposition between the proposed 5-storey block and the existing 2 storey houses, as well as the community uses opposite. No clear design reason was given as to why this needed to be 5 storeys.

There were also concerns regarding the architectural style of the proposal. Firstly there did not seem to be any particular reasoning for the roof form of the houses, and secondly there seemed to be no reason why the asymmetrical bays of these houses should be scaled up and replicated on the larger corner building. This was seen as less appropriate as it contained flats and a surgery, rather than houses. It would have been better to adopt a different style to the building that better reflected its uses. Overall there seemed to be no clear design rationale or story to explain why the proposal was designed the way it was.

Similar concerns about rationale were expressed regarding the layout of the parking to the rear, it seeming to be designed primarily around the needs of parking, rather than making an attractive place. It was questioned whether this would be a quality space. The quality of the space to the rear of the flats was also questioned, being overshadowed by a 5-storey building.

The Panel also asked questions regarding sustainability. However the responses were made in terms of what could happen, rather than what had already been built into the scheme from the start. There was a sense that, even at the application stage, there were no fully developed proposals on reducing energy use and sustainable energy production and therefore the applicant was not serious about such issues. This was made clearer by the applicant stating that the strip of land leading to Bond Road was specifically excluded from the application, but that is could be very important in contributing to energy reduction measures.

The overall view was that it was a basic, mechanistic response to the site, with many opportunities not taken and a good deal of scope for a better solution for the site.

VERDICT: RED