

## DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

### NOTES OF MEETING Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> June 2009

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

<http://www.merton.gov.uk/living/designandconservation/designreviewpanel.htm>

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#### Panel Members Present:

- Councillor John Bowcott (Chair)
- Tim Day
- Tony Edwards
- Tony Michael
- Terry Pawson
- Tim Snelson
- Nicola Theron
- Sally Warren

#### Apologies

- Marcus Beale

#### Officers Present:

- Paul Garrett: Physical Regeneration Team
  - Tom Procter: Contracts & School Organisation Team
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### **Merton Schools Programme**

As an overview to the meeting as a whole, Tom Procter briefed the Panel on the Merton Schools Programme. This is a programme for the development and modernisation of the borough's schools over the next 5-10 years. Tom handed out an information leaflet which gave the context for the Programme. The programme is linked to the Council's Local Development Framework (LDF) and the expected population increases to 2025, and to the Government's Building Schools for the Future programme (BSF).

The Panel asked a number of follow-up questions to this briefing, notably about how the temporary classroom proposals fitted in to longer term proposals, the academic bias/basis of schools (i.e. curriculum offer), the attractiveness of large schools, the importance of improved energy standards

(eg. Breeam), sustainability/adaptability issues, and the strategic approach in general. Although the projections could justify the need for a new school, due to a range of constraints, an approach based on expanding existing schools was being taken initially. Siting for temporary buildings, particularly 6<sup>th</sup> form classrooms, is planned not to inhibit future larger scale development at secondary schools as part of the BSF programme.

A number of questions related to detailed design issues and these are covered in the notes on individual agenda items.

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**Item 1: Sixth Form Temporary Classrooms Scheme: 09/P1119 Raynes Park High School, 09/P1111 Ricards Lodge High School, 09/P1120 Rutlish High School and 09/P1102 Bishopsford High School**

Members were particularly concerned with a few key issues relating to all the sites. These related to the temporary nature of the buildings, a design/architectural theme to the buildings, sustainability and comfort issues, the quality of the learning experience (and thus the popularity of the school) and general siting and individual design. The Panel acknowledged that the architects had been given a challenging brief and that the proposals at this stage represented work in progress, and were not finalised plans.

The Panel asked about the temporary nature of the buildings. It was established that a number of manufacturers were being considered- the Panel made the point that there was a range of manufacturers, some offering very high quality products. The buildings would be based on a steel frame box, would take about 20 weeks to construct and would be easily demountable (for possible resale). It was established that the buildings could also last well beyond the five year period of use planned by the Council (up to 25-30 years). The Panel were concerned about this issue in light of any change of government and the longevity of the BSF programme.

The Panel noted that attempts had been made, with the cladding and the coloured panels, to introduce a bespoke element to the design to lift it from appearing as the basic portacabin design. It was thought that this needed some rethinking, due partly to the expense of the cladding and lack of support for this from all the schools. It was felt that the overall feel would still be of a temporary portacabin and that further work was needed on this. It was felt that the quality of the learning environment and thus the interior was very important and that this needed further thought.

On this point it was noted that, due to the nature of the buildings there was no 'elegance' in their architectural language. Some means needed to be found to take the building out of the ordinary so it was not seen as a 'tarted up portacabin'. It was suggested that architectural elements needed to be found that could help develop identity for the buildings – this need not be something expensive.

It was felt that branding and achieving a 'quality' environment would be best achieved, and be more cost effective by greater attention to the design and finishing of interiors. It was noted that most of the buildings were not visible from public places. However a balance had to be struck between the quality of the internal learning environment and the quality and appeal of the external appearance. Suggestions were made that there could be more involvement by the schools to personalise buildings through artwork in order to help the buildings inspire learning. It was established that the architects had had no direct contact or discussion with school pupils in developing their proposals, although head teachers had consulted pupils (to what extent this was not known). There was a general feeling that there was nothing apparent about the buildings at the moment that would actively make people choose to study there as opposed to elsewhere – a big ask given the 'collegiate' approach to the use of the 6<sup>th</sup> forms which would 'tie' pupils in to studying at Merton schools.

Although it was acknowledged that the interior layouts were still in the development stage, concerns were expressed about the quality of the internal environment, particularly the layouts, light penetration, temperatures and noise issues. It was suggested that the generous corridor widths could be widened out to provide atriums. It was established that the architect was considering green roofs, external louvers and 'monodraft' ventilation shafts for the buildings, but these had not been fully investigated or designed in to the buildings – thus not shown on plans. The Panel therefore this area also needed further work.

With regard to the siting and individual design, it was felt that the external space surrounding the buildings and how they related to other existing buildings was important for the quality and attractiveness of the buildings, the quality of the learning environment and in developing an individual character for each building. This is where imaginative thought about the form and layout of the buildings could help improve the quality of the overall development without a huge price tag. Given that all the buildings were very similar in design, it was felt that this approach needed much more consideration, and would help in creating a distinctive learning environment.

On a general point the Panel questioned the attractiveness of 6<sup>th</sup> forms as part of large schools, though it was acknowledged that part of the brief was to make them distinctive as 6<sup>th</sup> forms and often have their own separate access points. On a specific point, the Panel acknowledged that the environmental conditions for Raynes Park high School were more challenging than the others. The Panel did not otherwise comment specifically on the siting of individual locations. Given the above comments and concerns, and that the project was 'work in progress' in many respects, the Panel felt that there were a number of areas that required further work, but acknowledged the difficulty of the brief.

**VERDICT: AMBER**

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## **Item 2: 09/P0918, Holy Trinity Primary School**

The Panel were united in their support for the proposal as submitted in the planning application. They considered it had addressed the sustainability issues very well and that the overall design related well to the existing buildings in design and layout. The internal adaptability of the building design had also been considered. As a result, the majority of the comments were discussions on aspects of detail, and should be read in the context of this overall support, rather than taken as criticism of the scheme per se.

Questions were asked about the entrance and interface with the street. It was noted that the main parent drop off points were at different locations from the main 'controlled' entrances. It was also noted that the full height windows to the main hall extension were to enable a direct interface with the street for functions and open days.

Much of the discussion centred on the Effra Road frontage. This consisted primarily of discussion of the window proportions, sizes and arrangements in relation to the existing building – it was noted that they had been designed to relate to those of the existing building, although there could be a number of ways in which this could be done. Reference was also made to the amount of brickwork in the new façade. On this point it was noted that attention to detail in design and quality of materials was very important, and that the existing trees would form part of the streetscape and be an element in breaking up the proportions of the façade.

Specific comment was also made on the proposed minor changes that introduced red soldier-course banding above windows and shallow arches above the ground floor windows. The Panel felt that these changes conflicted strongly with the overall design approach that they supported. The Panel felt that these changes were also small and fiddly and diluted the architectural form of the new building. A proposed "sculptured" brick panel, the use of natural ventilation, non-load bearing walls to aid future flexibility, water capture and re-use, tree retention, the intention to aim for Breeam excellence, were all noted. The use of a simple block model was commended.

Overall the Panel were very supportive of the proposals and felt that a good and well thought out solution was being proposed for a generally constrained site.

**VERDICT: GREEN**

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## **Item 3: 09/P0868, APPLICATION, Former Royal Sun Alliance Sports Ground**

The Panel were initially interested in who the client was, who would use the facility and how the building was being funded. It was established that there were a range of funders and users. Funding sources are to be the Football Foundation, S106 contributions, Raynes Park High School fundraising and

Westside Football club. The users would include the high school, other primary schools, local cricket and football clubs and other users through availability for commercial hire. It was also established that the high school would be the main user and manage the facility. Maintenance would be contracted out and that main parking provision would be at the high school rather than on site. Access would mainly utilise the existing footpath over the railway.

It was also established that the location was in a flood plain and the building needed to be raised above ground level due to this. The main criticism of the Panel was that the entrance to the building and its environs were somewhat austere and unwelcoming and that further consideration of this issue was needed. Comments on the design related primarily to the exposed location and the building's susceptibility to vandalism and graffiti. The approach to this was explained, it being a combination of shutters, treatment of brickwork, surveillance from nearby houses, frequent use of the building, and its roof height making it difficult to climb onto. The design of the shuttering was explained, and the Panel did not have any criticisms of this.

The Panel applauded the efforts at consultation that were explained and felt that good management was key to the success of the building given the sensitive residential location. The Panel asked about the sustainability of the design. It was established that cost constraints prevented much consideration in this respect, but the design allows for easy modifications at a later date. It was noted that the Football Foundation funding regime does not encourage renewables. Questions were also asked about the flexibility and use of the terrace, and it was felt that perhaps this required further thought to ensure it was adequate for users. Spoil is to be retained and re-used on site to minimise construction traffic in residential roads, and a ground source heat pump was being examined.

Overall the comments were very positive towards the overall design, the thought that had gone into it and the work that had been done on consultation.

**VERDICT: GREEN**

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**Item 4: NO NUMBER ALLOCATED YET, PRE-APPLICATION, Wimbledon Chase Primary School**

Pre-Application Scheme – Minutes confidential