

# The Design Review Panel

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<b>Site</b>	Oxpens Wigginton, Banbury, Oxfordshire, OX15 4JZ
<b>Proposal</b>	Proposed Para 79 House
<b>Local Authority</b>	Cherwell District Council
<b>Applicant</b>	Virginia Sweetingham
<b>Agent</b>	Hughes Planning
<b>Architect</b>	Seymour-Smith Architects
<b>Landscape Architect</b>	Seed Landscape Design
<b>Review Date</b>	15 <sup>th</sup> November 2019

The session was booked by Virginia Sweetingham, and this is the first time The Design Review Panel has reviewed this scheme. This session included a site visit.

The extremely clear, comprehensive, and professional presentation is welcomed by the Panel. It is felt that this comprehensive and professional presentation was of benefit to the design review process. Furthermore, it is considered that the site visit undertaken by the Panel was an extremely useful exercise in helping the Panel to appreciate the unique site location and characteristics. The client's engagement with the design review process and very clear articulation of the project brief and aspirations for the site is welcomed; these aspirations are supported.

The Panel has been asked to comment on the proposals against the requirements of paragraph 79 (e) of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which states: -

***“Planning policies and decisions should avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside unless one or more of the following circumstances apply: -***

- a) ...
- b) ...
- c) ...
- d) ...
- e) ***the design is of exceptional quality, in that it: -***

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- ***is truly outstanding or innovative, reflecting the highest standards in architecture, and would help to raise standards of design more generally in rural areas; and***
- ***would significantly enhance its immediate setting and be sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area.”***

The large amount of work that has been undertaken to date is noted, as is the high standard of design; however, the extremely high bar that is required to meet the criteria set out for paragraph 79(e) of the NPPF is also noted. It is considered that currently the design proposals: -

- Have not yet demonstrated that they are truly outstanding or innovative, or that they reflect the highest standards in architecture
- Have not yet demonstrated how they may help to raise standards of design more generally in rural areas
- Have not yet demonstrated that they significantly enhance the immediate setting; or are sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area

Paragraph 129 of the NPPF states: -

***“Local planning authorities should ensure that they have access to, and make appropriate use of, tools and processes for assessing and improving the design of development. These include workshops to engage the local community, design advice and review arrangements ... In assessing applications, local planning authorities should have regard to the outcome from these processes, including any recommendations made by design review panels.”***

Therefore, the Panel provides the following feedback: -

Having undertaken a site visit, the very special nature of this isolated greenfield site is noted and, subject to an appropriate design being produced that meets the high criteria of paragraph 79 (e ) of the NPPF, the Panel would support a dwelling on this site.

Generally, it is considered that the landscape analysis is extremely thorough, however it is felt that there is a gap between this analysis and the design proposals, both in terms of landscape and architecture. It is suggested that it would be helpful for any future presentation, and or planning application, to include a clearer narrative of how the design proposals have been arrived at as a result of the extremely thorough analysis undertaken.

The Panel notes that 20 to 25 years ago the Plantation site would have been a field, therefore the narrative starts with the process of imagination to consider what was there. The approach is to take away existing

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features that are not wanted, and then to create a desired landscape setting that will then inform the proposed house design. This represents an opportunity for the landscape design and architecture to work closely together, with each informing the other.

Regarding the landscape design, it is considered that this is currently less evolved than the architectural design and, as above, it is suggested it would be beneficial to ensure both landscape design and architectural design are informing each other, rather than being progressed separately. It is considered that currently there is an element of narrative missing that links the reasoning behind the proposed location of the property and its relationship with the setting. For example, it is suggested that there may be an opportunity for the boundaries of the proposed lake to be reconfigured so as to better integrate with/ provide more design opportunities for the architecture of the building, and its place on the site.

The early stage of the design process is noted; however, it is suggested that it would be beneficial for a more detailed and defined landscape plan to now be produced at this stage; this information may include a specific species list.

It is considered that it may be helpful to now also engage with a hydrologist at this stage of the design process, to ensure the design proposals respond to accurate information in this regard. It is considered that expert advice should be provided in regard to the movement of water courses as this will most likely be outside of the usual professional scope of a landscape architect. The proposed buildings relationship with the water, buildability issues in this regard and potential seasonal changes may significantly inform the design and represent an opportunity to incorporate an element of poetry into the design.

The proposed track access would benefit from further consideration regarding detailing and materials to be used. It is felt that careful detailing will be required to ensure that the proposed crushed stone track does not become rutted in wet ground, and therefore require constant yearly maintenance. The proposals would also benefit from now considering practicalities, such as deliveries and bins as it is suggested that these considerations may inform the design of the access track.

The Panel feels that a landscape management plan will be essential for the success of this site and should encompass at least a 10-year development programme. This exercise will also ensure that the client is aware of the extent of commitment being undertaken, as well as the likely costs required to achieve the desired outcome. The meadow management plan will be important to achieve the flora and fauna associated with a wet meadow; this should include considerations such as how this will be grazed or cut. It is suggested that it would be beneficial for the proposed landscape character to be considered over different time periods, perhaps 5, 10, 20 and 50 years; it is noted that the sense of place and landscape character will change significantly depending on the number of trees and maturity of the landscape proposals.

The desire to remove the vertical regimented element of the Ash trees is supported, however it is noted that it is proposed to replace this with Birch trees, which it is felt to be an odd design choice when the

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desire to achieve a mix broadleaf woodland is the objective. It is also suggested that Birch may not be the most appropriate species to be provided in damp ground conditions.

It is noted that there are a lot of Ash trees to be removed, and the Panel suggests that it may be beneficial for this to be approached in sections, to allow for other species to develop. Although there may be Ash Die Back in the area, it is noted that the existing Ash trees are not showing signs of it yet, and this should be taken into account within a Landscape Management Plan.

Although the 'Plantation' and pond are man-made and the existing Ash trees are regimented, there is a character, stillness and quality to the space and the proposals would benefit from more clearly justifying the benefit/enhancement of removing so many existing trees. This justification/narrative should consider the impact that the removal of so many native trees may have on water uptake, views, ground conditions and ecology. It is not considered that the existing pond or Ash trees have any great value, however there is a concern that the proposals may require a significant amount of engineering in order to create the hide and reveal concept. It is felt it would be helpful to more clearly demonstrate that the existing site has a limited value in terms of landscape character and/or ecology and that it is not a woodland but rather a 'Plantation'.

It is felt that the siting of the house may benefit from further consideration; that is to say given the extent of the proposed change to the context (remodeling the pond, cutting down/ replanting all the trees etc) it is felt that the siting strategy of "hide and reveal" may not be the most appropriate approach. It is felt that there are a series of "thresholds" on the approach which may benefit from being better resolved. There is a concern that the proposals result in a pinch point at the gate by the existing barn. In particular careful management of construction traffic at this point will be required so as not to harm tree roots.

Architecturally, it is considered that the presentation given to the Panel was extremely clear and logical, notwithstanding this it is suggested that it may be helpful for any future presentation, or planning application, to more clearly demonstrate optioneering, in terms of siting of the proposed house. Furthermore, it is felt it would be beneficial for the design team to demonstrate that potential re-use of the barn has been considered as part of the above optioneering exercise, particularly as the proposed access passes so close to the existing barn. It is noted that the barn represents a very sheltered location within the site, which is reflected by the historic reasoning as to why a barn was built in this location, therefore it is suggested it may be helpful to include a clearer narrative as to why the current siting has been chosen. It may be beneficial for the proposals to more clearly explain how they may relate to the existing barn and also demonstrate that they will not damage its future potential.

Generally, the Panel is supportive of the proposed built form and the relationship between elements. Notwithstanding this, there is a concern regarding the central element, which it is considered feels static; it is felt that the proportions of the central element are less successful or refined and that this central element is less dynamic than the other two elements. The intention to create a contrast between the

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elements is noted and supported, however it is suggested that there may be an opportunity for this contrast to be further emphasized.

The proposed fenestration may benefit from further design consideration, so as to be more outstanding, innovative and bespoke, providing a more dynamic and exciting link between the inside and outside spaces. There is a concern that currently the proposed windows feel very standard.

It is suggested the proposals should consider the need for domestic paraphernalia and how this may relate to the rewilding exercise being proposed. Furthermore, the need for maintenance and landscape management equipment should be considered within the proposals, so as to ensure consideration has been given to the storage and access of any required machinery. Consideration of how the relationship between domestic curtilage and paraphernalia and wider landscape management machinery and access should be considered in the long term.

It is felt that the proposed subsidiary buildings have not yet been fully resolved and that the proposed servant spaces would benefit from further design evolution.

Regarding materials, the Panel suggests it would be beneficial for the proposed materials to be sourced as locally as possible in order to meet the stated aspirations and relate to the presented narrative. It may also be helpful to consider what will be done with the Ash trees that are to be removed; it is suggested that there may be an opportunity for this to become part of the narrative for the proposed dwelling. There may be an opportunity for the consideration of construction techniques and accessibility to become a bigger part of the narrative.

The Panel is supportive of the stated aspiration and presented narrative regarding a proposal that will effectively provide three different households, albeit for one family; it is considered that it may be beneficial to further explore this multigenerational living narrative, and that this may represent an opportunity to demonstrate a truly innovative approach that could help to improve the design of housing in rural areas more generally.

The Panel notes the high standard of architecture, however it is considered the proposals have not yet demonstrated that the architecture is truly outstanding or of the *'highest'* architectural standards. The proposals to significantly alter the landscape setting so as to result in a significant enhancement represents an opportunity for the architecture to inform the landscape design. As above, currently it is felt that there may be a disconnect between the landscape design and the architecture; it is suggested the proposals would benefit from further design development being undertaken; aspects that may benefit from further consideration include:

- sun paths/passive solar gain
- fenestration design
- building orientation

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- internal layouts & relationships with outward views
- entrances to the buildings
- interface between the buildings and the water

Furthermore, the Panel suggests it may be beneficial for the design team to further explore the building programme, considering who will be using each of the entrances, and how they may be perceived by different end users and visitors.

The Panel considers that it may be helpful for the applicant to proactively propose specific long-term commitments in regard to learning outcomes, on how the proposed building, associated landscape and ecological proposals may be used to help to raise the standard of design more generally in rural areas. It is suggested that the reinstatement and rewilding & ongoing landscape management narrative could be further explored so as to demonstrate an innovative design proposal. This narrative could explore how the building may change over time in terms of weathering, maturing landscape as well as by the architecture demonstrating a flexibility in terms of uses and potential end users.

Regarding the proposed energy strategy, the Panel welcomes and supports the stated aspirations, and it is considered that a zero carbon, fabric first approach should be undertaken as a requirement to be reflective of the highest standards of architecture. However, it is considered that the energy strategy presented does not result in the design being considered truly innovative, and it is felt that this aspect could be more innovative.

## **SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**, (to be read in conjunction with the above).

In summary, the main conclusions of the Panel are: -

- The extremely clear, comprehensive, & professional presentation is welcomed by the Panel
- It is felt that the design proposals have not yet met the criteria of para 79(e) of the NPPF
- Subject to an appropriate design being produced that meets the high criteria of paragraph 79 (e) of the NPPF, the Panel would support a dwelling on this site
- There is a gap between the landscape analysis & the design proposals
- The site represents an opportunity for the landscape design & architecture to closely work together with each informing the other
- There is an element of narrative missing that links the reasoning behind the proposed location of the property & its relationship with the architecture
- It would be beneficial for a more detailed & defined landscape plan to now be produced
- It may be helpful to now also engage with a hydrologist
- The proposed track access would benefit from further consideration regarding detailing & materials

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- A landscape management plan will be essential for the success of this site; encompassing at least a 10-year development programme
- Birch may not be the most appropriate species to be provided in damp ground conditions
- The proposals would benefit from more clearly justifying the benefit/enhancement of removing so many existing trees
- It may be helpful to more clearly demonstrate optioneering in terms of siting of the proposed house
- There may be an opportunity for the contrast between the three building elements to be further emphasized
- The proposed fenestration may benefit from further design consideration
- Control & storage of domestic paraphernalia should be further considered
- The need for maintenance & landscape management equipment should be considered
- There may be an opportunity for construction techniques to become a bigger part of the narrative
- There is an opportunity to further explore the multigenerational living narrative in terms of demonstrating innovation
- Further architectural design development regarding various aspects (outline within this document) would be beneficial
- It may be beneficial for the design team to further explore the building programme
- It may be helpful for the applicant to proactively propose specific long-term commitments in regard to learning outcomes
- The energy strategy is supported by is not considered to be truly innovative

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### NOTES:

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