

The Design Review Panel

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Site	Oxpens Wigginton, Banbury, Oxfordshire, OX15 4JZ
Proposal	Proposed Para 79 House
Local Authority	Cherwell District Council
Applicant	Virginia Sweetingham
Agent	Hughes Planning
Architect	Seymour-Smith Architects
Landscape Architect	Seed Landscape Design
Review Date	13 th February 2020

The session was booked by Virginia Sweetingham, and this is the second time The Design Review Panel has reviewed this scheme. The first session was held on the 15th November 2019 and included a site visit.

The extremely clear, comprehensive, and professional presentation is again welcomed by the Panel. It is felt that this comprehensive and professional presentation was of benefit to the design review process. The client's engagement with the design review process and very clear articulation of the project brief, also aspirations for the site continues to be 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 continues to be acknowledged, 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 demonstrated that they will significantly enhance the immediate setting; and 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: -

The clear, coherent, and high-quality presentation given at the design review panel session is welcomed. The Panel notes that the design team have generally responded well to the previous feedback given, and the design and presentation is considered to have improved significantly compared to the previous iteration presented to the Panel.

The Panel welcomes and supports the optioneering exercise regarding alternative siting options for the proposed building; it is considered that this exercise has clearly demonstrated a logical reasoning behind the proposed siting. Regarding outward views, it is noted that the proposals appear to focus upon one particular outward view, and it is suggested that it may be beneficial to demonstrate within the presentation sketches that other outward views have also been considered and informed the design.

The concept of multi-generational living is strongly supported and it is considered that, subject to the

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comments within this document being appropriately responded to, this concept offers an opportunity to demonstrate a truly innovative design approach that may help to raise standards of design more generally in rural areas. The Panel is also supportive of the re-wilding concept presented by the landscape architect, however it is suggested that it would be beneficial for the multigenerational concept, and the re-wilding concept, to be better tied/linked; there is a concern that currently these are presented as two distinct concepts being approached separately.

Generally, it is considered that the landscape design and building design feel much more 'joined up' in their approach, which is supported. In particular, the Panel supports the design of the internal courtyard and entrance space, along with the proposal to introduce trees/ woodland close to the proposed house.

The landscape design documentation presented to the Panel is noted to be extremely thorough and well considered, however in an effort of helpfulness, it is felt that this may benefit from the lining up with, and reflecting, that of the architect. It may be helpful for this document to be less convoluted, thus making it easier to understand, like the architects simplified approach, so as to more succinctly and clearly demonstrate how the landscape design proposals respond to the overall concept and project narrative.

It may be beneficial to further explore and demonstrate the details of the transitional spaces between the proposed building and landscape/water, clearly showing the detail of how the proposed building meets the ground.

The Panel notes the design team have now engaged with a hydrologist; it is noted that the sites hydrology has now helped to inform the landscape design proposals, and this is supported. The flow rates through the ponds are questioned and, in a spirit of helpfulness, it is suggested that it may be beneficial to consider the detail and ecological mix to ensure a correct balance of feeding species so as to prevent an overpopulation of mosquitoes and midges.

The design teams concerns regarding Ash Die Back are noted, however notwithstanding this, it is suggested it may be beneficial to retain as many of the ash trees as possible during a transition phase, so as to help shelter and protect the new species as they become established. Not cutting down all of the Ash trees at once will also be beneficial in terms of ecology, and will help to retain the soil structure. It is suggested that there may be an opportunity for this approach, regarding the existing trees helping to nurture the new smaller trees, to link to the overall concept of multi-generational living, and the potential for both the proposed building and landscape to be able to be flexible and evolve over time as the generations change. It is further suggested that there may be an opportunity to further consider how the internal courtyard spaces may also evolve and adapt over time as the dynamics of the occupant's change, there may also be an opportunity relate this back to the architectural multigenerational living concept.

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The proposal to provide a mono-culture of Birch is not supported by the Panel, as it is considered that this may be repeating the approach previously taken with the Ash tree plantation; it would be beneficial to more clearly demonstrate that the proposals are moving away from a mono culture approach. Furthermore, it is suggested that it may be preferable for River Birch to be specified rather than Downy Birch.

Generally regarding ecology and biodiversity, it is considered that the proposals are extremely clear and well considered, providing a high level of biodiversity detail. Notwithstanding the above, it is suggested it would be beneficial to further consider the impact of artificial lighting, (both internal light spill as well as any external lighting), upon wildlife habitats. It may be beneficial for external light spill to be empirically modeled, so as to demonstrate an appropriate response has been undertaken in this regard.

The proposal to incorporate habitats within the fabric of the main building is welcome and supported; it is suggested that there may be an opportunity for this to be undertaken in an innovative non-standard way.

It is suggested that it would be beneficial for the proposed biodiversity net gain to be demonstrated empirically, for example through the use of a biodiversity budget.

The Panel is supportive of the design of the proposed house, which it is considered is of a high standard of architecture. Notwithstanding this, it is suggested that, in order to demonstrate the proposals are truly outstanding and represent the highest standards of architecture, it would be beneficial for the design to more clearly demonstrate how the multi-generational concept manifests and is more clearly expressed throughout the design of the building form and landscape design. It is noted that the architecture is represented by four distinct forms, and it is suggested there may be an opportunity for the stated concept to be 'louder' and more clearly manifest within each of these forms. It may be helpful to further consider the whole life cycle of the occupants, and how this may be more literally reflected/expressed within the built forms and materials of the proposed building(s). It may be helpful to provide a clearer contrast between the three inhabited buildings/blocks.

Regarding the proposed energy strategy, the Panel welcomes and supports the stated aspirations, and it is considered that the low energy fabric first approach proposed should be undertaken as a requirement to be reflective of the highest standards of architecture. In order to meet this requirement Passivhaus or zero carbon aspirations are considered to be appropriate. In a spirit of helpfulness, it is noted that Passivhaus has the added benefit of requiring a Passivhaus Planning Package (PHPP) spreadsheet analysis to be completed. This spreadsheet is not a "bolt-on" exercise after the design development is completed, rather it is a working tool which may help to inform the design. Provision of energy modelling would help to empirically demonstrate that the building will meet the stated aspirations. Notwithstanding the above, it is considered that the energy strategy presented does not

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result in the design being considered truly innovative.

The Panel is supportive of the fabric first approach being undertaken. Notwithstanding this, there is a concern regarding overheating. The proposed use of trees to provide shadowing and therefore passive cooling is noted and supported. It is also noted that the solar shading strategy relies upon the integration of external blinds / shutters. There is a concern that the proposed external blinds /shutters may restrict outward views; a strong winter sun may require the shutters to be closed so as to stop glare and or overheating. It is therefore suggested that this approach may benefit from further consideration.

The Panel notes the design team have stated that the building will be thermal bridge free, and this is not accepted. It is felt that this aspect has been generally well considered, and that these aspects have been minimized; it is noted that supporting document “2. architectural proposals” (page 33) shows a typical wall section. In order to demonstrate the design teams stated aspirations regarding thermal bridging have been met, it is considered further cross sections should be added to show how thermal bridges have been designed out specifically, for all elements including: window heads, wall/floor intersections and shutter supports. In a spirit of helpfulness, the Panel suggests that, so as to avoid creating cold bridges, it may be preferable for the external shutters to be part of an external frame, rather than being tied back into the building using steel. It is suggested these details should be further considered at this stage of the design process to ensure the proposed building may meet the stated aspirations regarding energy performance.

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.
- The proposals have not yet demonstrated that they are truly outstanding or innovative, or that they reflect the highest standards in architecture.
- The proposals have not yet demonstrated how they may help to raise standards of design more generally in rural areas.
- The proposals have demonstrated that they will significantly enhance the immediate setting; & are sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area.
- The proposed siting optioneering is welcomed
- The concept of multi-generational living is supported & offers an opportunity to demonstrate a truly innovative design approach.
- The Panel is also supportive of the re-wilding concept & this should be linked with the multigenerational living concept.
- The details of the transitional spaces between the building & landscape should be further explored.

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- Consider the detail & ecological mix to prevent an overpopulation of mosquitoes & midges.
- Retention of ash trees during a transition phase may help to shelter & protect the new species as they become established & retain soil structure.
- The proposal to provide a mono-culture of Birch is not supported by the Panel.
- It may be beneficial for external light spill to be empirically modelled to ensure no adverse impact upon wildlife.
- It would be beneficial for the proposed biodiversity net gain to be demonstrated empirically.
- It would be beneficial for the design to more clearly demonstrate how the multi-generational concept manifests & is more clearly expressed throughout the design of the building form & landscape design.
- The fabric first energy strategy is supported but is not considered to result in the design being considered truly innovative.
- There is a concern regarding overheating & there is a concern that the proposed external blinds /shutters may restrict outward views.
- It may be beneficial to further consider some of the detailing so as to ensure no thermal bridges are created.

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NOTES:

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