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**Review of Amended scheme at Bericot Way, WGC, 27/02/14:**

**HERTFORDSHIRE DESIGN REVIEW PANEL MEMBERS**

Barry Show, Barry Shaw Associates (Chair)  
Yasmin Sharriff, Dennis Sharp Architects  
Nicolas Tye, Nicolas Tye Architects  
Francesca Weal, Weal Architects

**CONFIDENTIAL**

4 March 2014

Dear Mark,

**Report of the Hertfordshire Design Review Panel: Bericot Way residential care development, Welwyn Garden City (amended scheme)**

The Hertfordshire Design Review Panel was convened on 27 February 2014 to review proposals for a care home on part of a green field site owned by Hertfordshire County Council in a residential area of Welwyn Garden City. The site would house the care home as well as some further residential housing development to be dealt with via a separate planning application.

A previous planning application for the care home had been refused planning permission partly on design grounds relating to the scale and massing of the building. In response, the project team sought the Panel's views on the scheme in February 2013. The planning authority were invited to partake in the Design Review but declined the invitation.

Following the Design Review, the project team worked up amended proposals and sought pre-application advice on a revised scheme from the planning authority in September 2013. The planning authority's pre-application advice on the amended scheme welcomed an overall reduction in the scale and massing of the building, but still maintained concerns that the front and main elevation was overly large and bulky. In response, the project team sought the Panel's views on the amended scheme. Once in receipt of the Panel's views, the project team intend to undertake further work on the scheme before deciding whether to submit it as a planning application to Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council or to Hertfordshire County Council as a Regulation 3 planning application.

**Declarations of interest**

Francesca Weal declared that her husband is a Hertfordshire County Councillor, but confirmed that he did not sit on the County Council's planning committee nor had any involvement with the proposed scheme. It was agreed that there was no conflict of interest

## **Overview of the site**

Please refer to the Panel's report on the original proposals dated 25 February 2013 for a general description of the site.

## **Overview of the amended scheme**

The amended scheme no longer includes provision of 10 sheltered bedrooms or four independent units for Young Physically Disabled (YPD) residents, or an enablement suite. The amended scheme now comprises:

- 75 bedroom care home
- A 20 person elderly day care centre
- Communal space, gardens, car parking and mobility scooter parking

Key drivers for the amended design were a reduced client brief, the planning authority's and the public's concerns over scale and massing, as well as the Panel's earlier feedback. The design has evolved through a number of iterations before arriving at the amended scheme before the Panel, which briefly comprises:

- Revised floor plan, moving from a splayed 'Y' shape to a strong linear main building with two perpendicular wings projecting south from the main building.
- Reduction in ridge and eave heights across the scheme,
- Stepped ridge and eave lines from three-stories at the centre of the main building to two-stories at its peripheries and the projecting wings.
- Inclusion of small pitches and gablets within the roof of the main building's northern elevation
- Introduction of green walls and full height glazing to the ends of each wing
- A more prominent main entrance
- Simpler courtyard elevations of the two wings
- Revised landscaping and layout of the access and car park, with views to staff parking and service areas now terminated.

Further background on the original scheme's design and how it evolved are outlined in the Panel's report dated 25 February 2013.

## **Panel's observations and recommendations**

### **Overview**

The Panel again thanked the project team for providing a thorough explanation of the scheme's evolution. The Panel strongly supports the design approach being taken by the project team and welcomes a number of changes made, notably the revised access and car park design, the simpler roofscape, and relocation of stair wells to provide communal spaces with a southerly aspect and view. The client's decision to remove the four YPD units has also resulted in a more comfortable site layout.

The Panel understands the drivers behind the amended scheme and can see how they have influenced it. However, the Panel were disappointed that the design's evolution had been dominated by a focus on reducing scale and mass at the expense of a robust reappraisal of the building's elevations. Whilst the Panel understands the reticence to invest in elevational design before the principle of development is established, it believes further work on the elevations at this stage

may help to resolve ongoing discussions about scale, mass and the perceived institutional or 'undomestic' design of the scheme.

Further information on the proposed landscape design, other than for the access and car park, were not discussed.

### **Scale and setting of the building**

A revised client brief has allowed the scheme to introduce a more regular layout and floor plan, and a simpler roofscape, which on balance is welcomed by the Panel. On reflection, the Panel were ambivalent about the stepped eaves as it saw merit in the original design which presented a strong horizontality to the building. The Panel maintains its view that the overall scale and mass of the original proposal was appropriate in its suburban context, and that the site's residential surroundings do not preclude a three storey development of this type.

The Panel feel that more extensive cross sections and a working model of the development and its immediate surroundings would help to compare the building's proposed scale with the scale and context of the surrounding built environment. The Panel were concerned that superficial modelling of the elevation in response to comments by the planning authority was detrimental and a simple and integrated response reflecting the use, orientation and views would be appropriate. The site is open and the Panel saw no reason why a building of the size and mass proposed should not be permitted.

### **Elevational treatment**

The Panel's previous concerns had centred upon a lack of variety and richness in the elevational treatment and a lack of interaction between internal and external spaces, particularly within the end elevations of the wings and main building. The Panel felt that the original scheme's elevational treatments were perhaps intended to help the building appear falsely diminutive to combat concerns about massing, and thought this approach had a negative effect on the appearance and character of the overall scheme.

Most changes that have been made within the amended scheme are welcomed, particularly the braver response to the northern elevation and main entrance, and the response to the horizontality and verticality of the design. The inclusion of green walls might be an expensive gimmick and much more could be done with traditional climbing plants and a stronger landscape treatment. Glazed quiet areas at the end elevations of each wing could be further developed. The drawings themselves still do not sufficiently explain the context of the design (edges, fronts and faces) and how it will interact with the suburban edges around it.

The project team are again urged to revisit the elevational designs in relation to simplifying the eaves, internal uses and materials palette in order to articulate the scheme more richly and facilitate greater interaction of internal and external spaces and a better connection with the neighbouring area. The Panel's earlier suggestions to include balconies, bays or oriel windows to help achieve these aims remain.

## **Daylighting of communal spaces**

The Panel welcomed the greater prominence given to the main entrance, but are concerned that the reception area has poor daylighting due to the location of the scooter store. To resolve this, the Panel suggests that the location of the scooter store, or its rendered external façade, be reconsidered to allow more light into the reception area. Light wells and sun pipes could also be used in other communal spaces throughout the linear main building to help bring daylight into the building.

## **Conclusion**

The Panel welcomes the changes made within the amended proposal that have addressed a number of their previous concerns, with the amended design benefiting from the client's decision to omit the four independent YPD units.

The Panel's report following the review of the scheme in 2013 explained its desire to see stronger architecture and higher quality, less apologetic elevational treatments to mitigate the building's otherwise uniform institutional appearance. On the whole, the Panel do not believe the amended scheme has achieved this, and therefore urges the project team to undertake a robust reappraisal of the elevational design in order to deliver a confident 'domestic' building that sits well in its surrounds and creates a high quality internal environment for its vulnerable residents.

The Panel hopes that the advice and conclusions of the Panel herewith will not only lead to improved iterations in the design's evolution, but also help to establish a more nuanced understanding of the design between the parties involved.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Barry Shaw". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Barry Shaw (Chair, Hertfordshire Design Review Panel)