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HERTFORDSHIRE DESIGN REVIEW PANEL 3/10/14

Brewery Yard, Ware:

Barry Shaw, Barry Shaw Associates (Chair)
Peter Studdert, Peter Studdert Planning
Robert Thompson, Thompson Bradford Architects Ltd

CONFIDENTIAL

13 October 2014

Dear Terence,

The Hertfordshire Design Review Panel was convened on 3 October 2014 to review a proposal for conversion and redevelopment of Brewery Yard, Ware to provide 25 residential units and associated works. At the time of the review a full planning application for the proposal to East Herts District Council was imminent.

Declarations of Interest

No Conflicts of Interest were raised or noted.

The site and proposal

The site is located adjacent to the town centre, between Watton Road and Mill Close which forms the primary northern route out of the town, to where it links with the A10. The site is located within the Ware Conservation Area.

To the north of the site is an existing brewery conversion (Buryfield Maltings) completed approximately ten years ago by the same developer. This comprises a mix of two and three storey forms. Adjacent to this is an existing Travis Perkins depot site, with large modern industrial sheds, which is in active use. To the south is an existing gated access which leads past a post office building and two and three storey residential development in Mill Close. There is an existing pedestrian access from Baldock Street to the east which is proposed to be retained. The access is flanked by Georgian and Victorian two/three storey buildings. Adjacent to the west of the site is Buryfield Park from which views are possible to the development to the north.

The site comprises an area of previously developed land, including two three storey high former Maltings which are Grade II listed, together with a number of ancillary buildings. The listed Maltings are circa 1840's, partly rebuilt in the late nineteenth century. One of the listed Maltings has a substantial mid-twentieth century two storey

extension. The external space around the listed Maltings is primarily laid to tarmac or concrete.

The proposal is to convert the listed Maltings to provide 15 residential units, with the existing twentieth century extension of the listed Maltings wing being demolished. Ten new dwellings will be erected within the grounds, providing a mix of two, three and four bed houses primarily in terraced forms, creating a central courtyard with pedestrian access running east-west, and vehicular/pedestrian access running north-south utilising the existing access point at Mill Close, with a secondary access point via Watton Road.

Panel's observations

The site represents a significant opportunity to open up and revitalise this part of the Ware Conservation Area and town centre, and deliver high quality housing. The Panel supports the proposed design strategy and principles for the site, and welcomes the sensitive approach being taken to redevelop this historic and important town centre site.

To ensure most is made of the opportunity, the Panel strongly feels the scheme would benefit from a bolder yet sensitive approach to the new build element and external spaces. These points are expanded upon below.

Layout and connectivity

The Panel wholeheartedly welcomes opening up a proposed east-west pedestrian route, linking the High Street with open space and the forthcoming ASDA store beyond. This, together with a north-south route through the site for pedestrians, will aid permeability of this historic quarter.

Framing entrances and views through the site will be instrumental to creating attractive legible routes, and it is encouraging to see certain building features and landmarks being retained or pursued, such as the arched gable end of 'Building 3', the cowls and Lucam of the listed Maltings, and a distinctive corner building within the new build element. A robust and well considered landscape strategy will facilitate the desired pedestrian movement through the site (see 'External spaces' below).

Conversion of the listed Maltings

The structure and façades of the listed Maltings appeared sound and in a relatively good state of repair, and it is reassuring that the design team is seeking to keep them in a relatively unaltered state. The Panel urges the design team and planning authority to maintain their simplicity, robustness and honesty as industrial buildings. The use of high quality materials and craftsmanship will also be key to achieving this when carrying out works to the buildings should development proceed.

To ensure the listed Maltings remain true to their history and character, the Panel feels the earlier design of the eastern gable of 'Building 1' is preferable. The proposed fenestration for the gable end seems overly tidy and frugal which is at odds with the existing gable's randomness and generosity. Maintaining this individualistic character through to its converted state would help to ensure the redevelopment maintains a distinctive and honest identity.

The Panel appreciates balancing the need to introduce light into the listed Maltings without compromising their character too greatly. This is most acute in 'Building 1' where opportunities for light and outdoor amenity space are highly constrained by a north facing rear elevation that immediately faces onto an adjacent building. The proposed solution is to introduce recessed balconies and light wells into the roof of 'Building 1'. Whilst this would be at odds with the building's simple roof form it is clear the design team have spent much time considering suitable solutions. On balance, the Panel feels that the proposed solution is the right strategy. Its success will lie in the detailed design of specific elements; practical and elegant solutions are encouraged, for example maintaining clean lines by concealing drainage paraphernalia within the recessed balconies in an appropriate manner. The Panel are open to glazing the light wells or leaving them open to the elements.

New build elements

The Panel understands the proposed layout is largely a response to vehicular access and circulation needs, and an effort to follow the historic grain of Ware, characterised by long and narrow burgage plots. The Panel believes the proposed layout is sensible.

It was apparent that significant work had been undertaken to explore and refine a worthy architectural approach to the new build element. This has followed extended discussions with the planning authority. The proposed strategy seeks to contrast the new build with the historic elements of the site. The Panel agrees this is a sensible strategy, but feels its execution is a disappointment. In its current form, the architecture is thought to be a somewhat stylised pastiche of 'traditional' domestic forms that lacks the strength and simplicity of the listed Maltings in the Conservation Area.

Whilst appreciating the effort and resource already expended, the Panel strongly feels that the new build element needs a fresh approach; a bold, honest and contemporary design that utilises the palette and texture of materials and details present in the listed Maltings. There is the opportunity to create distinctive yet sensitively designed housing enjoyable to live in (e.g. large windows, airy spaces well lit and ventilated) rather than limiting the scope to historical styles. This approach should extend to the corner plot (19), where a distinctive response is needed to aid legibility and enforce a sense of place and identity.

External spaces and works

Accommodating parking spaces and a turning circle appears to have been the main factors behind the design of the courtyard area. Vehicle and pedestrian movement has been separated using tarmac and block paving to segregate and demarcate footpaths and 'highway'. Reference was also made to the site's industrial heritage to justify the use of tarmac, a rationale used in the Buryfield Maltings scheme adjacent to the site. Beyond this, however, the design team explained there had been limited regard to a wider landscape strategy. The Panel suggests the design team engage a landscape architect to develop a coherent strategy and detailed design, and it is hoped the comments below will help inform a successful approach.

The Panel suggests a more enlightened shared space solution would allow various demands (e.g. movement, parking, drainage, planting) to be met efficiently whilst creating a dynamic and attractive environment. Careful use of a palette of finer textured and high quality hard surfaces together with the appropriate siting and

design of vertical and strategic planting will help to structure and frame the space to guide users through it without recourse to traditional 'segregation' of users. A shared surface would also generate an informal residential feel to the space minimising the need for physical barriers and signage. The Panel also suggests that individual units should be allowed a strip of private external space fronting into the courtyard areas to allow for self expression through planting or ornament.

Critically, the design lacks a well considered bin strategy. Careful consideration should be given to the siting and design of any bin store(s) (for circa 75 individual bins) as this will be critical to safeguarding the amenity of residents and the quality of place. The Panel strongly urges the design team and planning authority to deal with these questions now, as part of the wider landscape strategy, rather than resolve them via planning conditions.

Conclusion

With a fresh and well-considered approach to the new build elements and landscape, as outlined above, the Panel would support the proposed scheme. A bolder approach to the new build element would be particularly critical if the scheme is to become a successful example of blending contemporary with the historic. With close attention to detail throughout the planning process, and the use of craftsmanship in the build process, the Panel would expect to see this derelict historic site become a valued place in its own right, making an important contribution to the vitality of Ware.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Barry Shaw". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a small dot at the end.

Barry Shaw
Chair, Hertfordshire Design Review Panel