



HERTFORDSHIRE DESIGN REVIEW PANEL MEMBERS
Shenley Road, Borehamwood Design Review 02/05/13:
Chair: Barry Shaw, Barry Shaw Associates
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CONFIDENTIAL

Dear James

Hertfordshire Design Review Panel: Shenley Road, Borehamwood

Introduction

The Hertfordshire Design Review Panel met on 02/05/13 to review proposals for the redevelopment of the site currently occupied by Isopad House and Hertsmere House, 231 Shenley Road, Borehamwood.

The site lies within the Elstree Way Corridor, the subject of the draft Elstree Way Corridor Area Action Plan (AAP).

The developer team have had a series of pre application meetings with Hertsmere Borough Council officers. The first scheme put forward to HBC was acceptable in principle, however concerns were raised that the scheme lacked prominence and there was no landmark quality to the design.

The developer team have been mindful of the content of the AAP. The proposals now before the Panel have been amended in the light of officer discussions with the LPA and the content of the AAP. These proposals will also be the subject of a public exhibition.

Declarations of interest

There were none.

Site Visit and Presentation

The Panel visited the site in the company of the developer team. Following the visit the Panel received a presentation from Greg Greasley from Assael Architecture Limited.

Overview of the AAP

Matthew Wilson (HBC) provided the Panel with the context to HBC's strategic vision for the wider Elstree Way Corridor (EWC).

In summary the EWC has been identified for redevelopment; the APP has allocated 800 residential units within the corridor. Development should be of a scale, height and quality to reflect the importance of the area as a gateway to Borehamwood, and to improve the physical appearance of the area. New residential development should offer a variety of tenures, relatively tall buildings, a range of community facilities and public realm improvements to link the EWC to the town centre.

Alterations are expected to the highways network, along the corridor and in particular resulting from removing the roundabout on Elstree Way.

Overview of the site

The site lies within the EWC, between the town centre and the A1 employment corridor and just under 1km from the railway station. The site is located on the corner of Shenley Road and Brook Road, opposite the Elstree Film Studios.

The adjacent building to the west is occupied by NatWest, and to the rear a day nursery/health centre/community centre. To the north is the Baker Court residential area and to the east Hertsmere Council offices. Isopad House fronts onto public amenity space on which is sited a war memorial.

The surrounding buildings do not give a distinct architectural identity to the area.

The site is at a prominent location at the entrance to the town centre. The site could become a more prominent location due to the likely reconfiguration of the highways network (removal of the roundabout on Shenley Road) at a later date.

[The Panel did raise a missed opportunity to look at the proposed site in the context of the additional green space that would be opened up with the removal of the roundabout].

Overview of the scheme

The site is at a prominent location at the entrance to the town centre therefore this is an opportunity to create a landmark building.

The scheme consists of two buildings, an L shaped building to wrap around the corner plot, and a rectangular building to the rear to enclose the proposed landscaped amenity space. The height steps up towards the corner at the roundabout. Behind the building frontage is a communal courtyard with parking below.

The two buildings offer a total of 154 residential units, of which 36 are proposed to be affordable (23%). There are a mix of unit sizes, from 1 and 2 bed units to 3 bed family sized flats. Every floor has a central corridor. The residential density is 450 units per hectare.

The scheme follows the existing building lines along Brook Road and Shenley Road. Vehicular access to the site will be from Brook Road, to the two parking levels.

There are a variety of heights within the scheme, see pre application drawings, with building heights stepping down from the corner building. There are double height windows on the corner block to give the appearance of 6 storeys, from here there is a change in scale along Shenley Road and Brook Road. Glass set backs are used on the top storeys to help reduce the appearance of the height/ scale of the buildings.

The scheme seeks to create a strong corner building, with a primary (corner) entrance with a strong sense of top, middle and bottom. The scheme is inspired by cinema architecture, with a vertical glazed corner connecting the top of the building to the bottom between two solid elements. The corner building is flanked by wings which step down in height.

There are different material treatments for the top, middle and bottom of each building. The middle corner building will use white brick. A green buffer is proposed along Shenley Road. Active frontages are created with the use of balconies. The use of vertical lighting at night will help make the building look active.

The developer team has looked at the possibilities of designing a scheme which could successfully adjoin the NatWest building site, if this site comes forward for redevelopment.

Panel observations and recommendations

Overview

The Panel thanked the architect and the development team for the site visit and presentation.

HBC officers stayed only to clarify queries the Panel had on the APP, then were asked to leave the meeting to allow the Panel to discuss and agree their response.

Observations on the APP/EWC

The Panel supports HBC in its strategic vision to regenerate and improve the urban environment along the EWC, and acknowledges its drive to increase densities and economic investment to the area.

The Panel welcomes the draft AAP and the height guidance it contains, which is a good starting point for HBC to take. However, as a place where people want to live at higher densities, it is important too for HBC to think through what this means at all levels of detail.

The Panel is concerned that not enough background/ base planning work has been undertaken to understand and deliver the reality of delivering high quality/ high density development. The policy for densification in a suburban area needs particular attention, together with a need for a landscape strategy and an assessment of the impact of tall buildings in the borough.

The scheme before the Panel also raises issues about how decisions taken now will set place-making standards for the rest of the corridor. Planning information in the APP does not address the issue of planning briefs for future areas. The Panel again offers its design review service to HBC in taking forward/ assessing key policy aspects of the APP.

Observations and recommendations on the scheme

The Panel supports the use of the site for housing at a high density and welcomes the intention of the developer to deliver high quality architecture at a prominent location in the EWC.

The Panel considers the principles surrounding the design concept to be sound and supports the commitment of the developer team to establish a high quality statement building. The Panel welcomes the client team commissioning an architectural practice with a track record of good design.

Several positive aspects of the design were noted, including the way the design has sought to address a prominent corner site.

Site context

The reconfiguration of the highways network, resulting from the potential removal of the roundabout, provides potentially different development opportunities for this site. The Panel is of the view that both the development team and HBC have missed an opportunity to analyse the wider context and the opportunities presented.

Scale & massing

With the right quality of design a high rise development could be justified. This together with this prominent site being a rare opportunity to establish a statement building, and the site being in the closest part of the corridor to the railway station, the site offers a recognised opportunity for greater density. However, the Panel is concerned over the scale and massing of the scheme and the quality of the urban environment that would be created.

The height of the buildings could be justified, but only if the design and massing are exceptional. A tall building on the corner could be acceptable if well designed, however it needs to have an elegant form, particularly when viewed from a distance. The current scheme is too bulky in spite of the efforts made by the architects to subdivide the elevations of the main frontages. The building should be designed to give more emphasis to the corner

and to a lesser extent on the Elstree Way frontage, with the scale dropping away dramatically on the Brook Road frontage. The current relationship to Brook Close is very poor, and the scale here should be no more than four storeys, with servicing movements and refuse storage contained within the site in order to minimise the impact on the community hall.

Glass set backs, used on the top storeys are workable but this design solution has been used many times before.

The Panel recommends that an analysis of the strategic views of the proposed scheme is undertaken, as the bulk of the scheme could be unattractive when viewed from afar.

Active frontages

The Panel recommends the entrance is moved to the middle of the corner building, that fronts Shenley Road and the landscaped, amenity area, rather than at the corner. The side wings along Brook Road would then be correctly perceived as the side.

The Panel recommends putting front doors from the affordable housing onto Brook Close to help create active frontages along this edge. The Panel felt information on ground floor uses was vague and recommends further thought is given to how activity levels could be increased. There seemed little justification for ruling out non-residential uses. A restaurant or gym, for example, could work well in this location.

Access and servicing arrangements

The Panel raised concerns that the lack of internal bin storage and collection area could create operational difficulties for the occupants and nuisance for neighbouring users. Bin collections are proposed to be taken from Brook Close in proximity to the entrance to the buildings car park. Brook Close provides access to a number of neighbouring buildings; therefore some operational conflicts are envisaged with the current proposals. Service movements should therefore be contained within the site; separated to ensure safe pedestrian routes.

Choice of materials

The Panel supports the developer's choice of materials.

Internal layout

The Panel are concerned over the internal living environment of the scheme where residential units are single aspect. This is not good practice, resulting in no cross ventilation, no daylight in the corridor and varying levels of daylight depending on the orientation of the residential unit.

The internal layout of the apartments is poor, and the number of single aspect flats should be reduced by adding more vertical cores to enable some dual aspect flats to be provided. This

would also give a more active frontage to Brook Road, further more effort should be made to introduce other active uses into the main frontages of the scheme.

Sustainability

The Panel welcomes a proposed code level rating of 3 for the main building, and the use of renewable energy technologies within the development.

Conclusions

The Panel supports efforts to regenerate and improve the urban environment along the EWC, and acknowledges HBC's drive to increase densities and economic investment to the area.

The Panel considers the principles surrounding the design concept to be sound and supports the commitment of the developer team to establish a high quality statement building.

The Panel is of the view this scheme needs further development if it is to meet the standards required by the site. With the right quality of design a high rise development could be justified at this location.

A significant redesign of the scheme is required, including changes to the scale and massing to ensure a more elegant form of development. It is also probable that the quantum of accommodation will need to be reduced in order to make the scheme acceptable in design terms.

Yours sincerely,



Barry Shaw, Chair
on behalf of the Hertfordshire Design Review Panel

cc.

Project and design team representatives:

Dipa Joshi – Assael Architecture Limited
Greg Greasley – Assael Architecture Limited
Richard Henley – Preston Bennett
Paul Jenkins – Preston Bennett
Jason Rishover – Heronslea
Patrick Eggenton - EAS

Local Planning Authorities:-

James Chettleburgh, Planning Officer, Hertsmere Borough Council
Matthew Wilson, Senior Planning Officer, Hertsmere Borough Council
Scott Laban, Area Team Leader, Hertsmere Borough Council

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