



Ruth Gray
Vincent & Gorbing
Sterling Court
Norton Road
Stevenage
SG1 2JY

HERTFORDSHIRE DESIGN REVIEW PANEL MEMBERS

St Laurence Drive, Wormley – 27/02/14:

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

CONFIDENTIAL

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Dear Ruth,

Report of the Hertfordshire Design Review Panel: St Laurence Drive residential care development, Wormley

The Hertfordshire Design Review Panel was convened on 27 February 2014 to review proposals for redevelopment of part of the former Wormley JMI school site to provide a care home facility on behalf of Hertfordshire County Council. The remainder of the school site is anticipated to provide further residential development, which will be dealt through a separate detailed proposal and planning application.

At the time of review, the proposals for the care home and the wider site were at concept stage. A planning application for the care home is likely to be submitted to Hertfordshire County Council in May 2014 as a Regulation 3 planning application. A separate planning application for residential development within the wider site is likely to be submitted to Broxbourne Borough Council in June 2014. Early consultation with Broxbourne Borough Council has taken place with regard to both the care home and residential development. The focus of the design review was upon the care home proposals, and as such Broxbourne Borough Council was not in attendance. Representatives of Hertfordshire County Council, as the likely planning authority for the care home proposals, were in attendance as observers.

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

The former Wormley JMI school site is flat and approximately 1.48 ha in area. It is bounded by suburban residential areas to the north, east and south, with the New

River bounding the site to the west. The existing access and street frontage is sited on St Laurence Drive to the north.

Vacant single storey school buildings and associated parking occupy the northern area of the site, with the remainder given over to open playing fields and playgrounds to the south and east. A mature tree belt runs along the western boundary of the site, adjacent to the New River. Further well-established soft landscaping is evident around the northern boundary, with a pocket of dense scrub situated along part of the eastern boundary adjacent to existing housing. A mature hedge encompasses the remainder of the site along its boundaries to the east and south.

The site is brownfield land, and is not subject to any planning policy designations or allocations. Adjacent land to the west of the site and New River is designated as Green Belt. The local plan policy designations for the New River and associated open space (Community and Open Space, Waterside Green Chains) are in place with the intent of protecting the setting and recreational value of the New River.

Overview of the scheme

The proposal is for a 75 bedroom dementia care home and associated facilities. The new facility would replace an existing home located 3 miles from the site. It would continue to cater for the existing facility's catchment area of local need and demand.

A master plan encompassing the care home and separate residential development is being prepared to guide the overall development of the site. The key aims of the master plan are to extend the surrounding suburban setting into the site through new road frontages created by the care home and separate residential development; to maximise use of, and relationship with, the New River frontage; to minimise the creation of any negative or dead spaces.

The existing entrance to the site would be retained and improved, leading to a curved road running south-east creating a cul-de-sac layout serving both the care home and residential development. The new care home would occupy the western half of the site adjacent to the New River.

The design concept is for a linked series of 'household units' around an enclosed court connected via a wedge shaped block to a curved frontage containing public and administration facilities facing St Laurence Drive and the main access point. The separate identities of the various units are to be expressed through the use of materials and elevational design. Two courtyards will be created through this layout: a northern public courtyard framed by the curved entrance block and associated residential accommodation and a southern courtyard framed by the quadrangle of 'household units' specifically for the use of residents with dementia. The client brief has imposed a 2 storey height restriction for the care home.

Panel's observations and recommendations

Overview

The Panel thanked the project team for outlining the design philosophy and development of the proposal to date. The focus upon innovative design of accommodation for vulnerable adults was welcomed and encouraged. The Panel finds much to be admired in the scheme and strongly supports the overall approach

to the design of the care home and the strategy for the wider site. The Panel hopes that the integrity of the scheme's conceptual design is maintained through future iterations of the design.

The Panel believes that more could be made of the scheme through revisions to the floor plate and internal layout through further consideration of the communal spaces at the end of corridors, and a more considered approach to materiality and elevational design. The Panel believed the residential development may be underdeveloped and could benefit from further private housing or intermediate housing for older people.

Layout and floor plan

The Panel believes the overall position and layout of the care home within the site is appropriate and will serve to create an active public realm and road frontage. The Panel also felt that the creation and arrangement of separate yet connected blocks within the layout will help to deliver distinct spaces for residents, staff and visitors as they move through and around the care home.

The Panel feels that the layout and floor plan of the curved and wedge shaped blocks are, however, somewhat problematic. The Panel feels that altering the layout of these two elements, perhaps by flipping it horizontally, would allow more bedrooms to have a view of the river (rather than service and administrative rooms) and facilitate an additional courtyard or public open space along the river frontage. A revised layout could also enable the building's main entrance to have a more direct relationship with the site's main entrance. In conjunction with a revised layout, the Panel suggests that the floor plan within the 'curve' and 'wedge' element be reconsidered to ensure opportunities for views from resident bedrooms and communal spaces to the river are maximised.

The Panel also believes greater clarity is needed on the position and design of quiet areas. Some have various doors opening on to them which appear to undermine their use. Others appear to be serving a dual use as circulation space which is likely to compromise them further. The Panel also noted that in some instances, the internal space at the end of a corridor has not been designed as a destination for residents with dementia, nor to allow residents in those areas to enjoy comfortable year-round external views, in particular views of the river setting. Access to the green roof and a roof garden might be considered, by introducing a third storey element, to allow staff or the less ambulatory to enjoy outside space.

Materiality & elevational design

The Panel noted that the project team intend to use materials to reflect the separate uses and identities of the care home's various elements. This approach was welcomed, but the Panel felt that the proposed materials composition across the separate buildings is too mixed and indistinct to achieve this aim and requires further consideration.

In conjunction with a revised layout and floor plan, the Panel believes that further exploration of how a visitor recognises and enters the main entrance to the building is required. Further thought on the treatment of the main entrance could also help to

achieve this whilst also seeking to facilitate a better visual connection between the public street and the private external spaces beyond.

The Panel would welcome a site model and cross-section drawings to show how the proposal sits within its wider context and to better communicate the scale of the building. The Panel also encourages the project team to undertake further work on the sensitivity and detail of the elevational designs to illustrate how the building will relate to and create spaces around it, in particular the courtyard spaces.

More detailed attention should be given to the early development of the landscape design on this significant site on the edge of Green Belt. In particular consideration should be given to a stronger treatment of the New River Frontage.

Conclusion

The Panel is encouraged by the expressed philosophy of 'innovation' being followed and the strength of design that is already evident at this early stage of the scheme. The Panel have limited and specific concerns about maximising the opportunities presented by the river frontage and improving the connectivity of the building with its river setting. Through appropriate and sensitive revisions to the layout and floor plans of key elements, and through a more considered approach to elevational design and materials, the Panel believes the project team can deliver a successful and high quality adult care scheme for the Wormley area.

Yours sincerely,

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

Barry Shaw (Chair, Hertfordshire Design Review Panel)