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**HERTFORDSHIRE DESIGN REVIEW PANEL**

**Westland Green, Little Hadham 18/07/14:**

Barry Shaw, Barry Shaw Associates (Chair)  
Colin Munsie, CRM Associates  
Colin Rice, Edward Cullinan Architects

**Confidential**

05 August 2014

Dear Richard,

The Hertfordshire Design Review Panel was convened on 18 July 2014 to review a proposal for a replacement dwelling at Westlands, Westland Green, Little Hadham. At the time of the review the proposal was at the pre-application stage.

**Declarations of Interest**

Barry Shaw declared that Nicolas Tye, the leader of the project architects 'Nicolas Tye Architects,' is a member of the Hertfordshire Design Review Panel. The panel confirmed that there were no further links with Mr Tye or the architectural practice.

**Site visit and presentations**

Following a site visit by the panel, the design team outlined the background and design rationale underpinning their proposal. It was confirmed that the client had engaged with structural engineers, and intended to engage with other key consultants after planning permission had been secured.

The proposal comprises the demolition and replacement of an existing modest three bedroom, timber framed, shingle clad bungalow with pitched slate roof, which is of Colt construction, dating from the 1960's.

The proposed replacement dwelling is of contemporary design, using local stone and timber in an effort to reflect local character. The proposed building is formed of two linear pods, one ground floor and one first floor, perpendicular to one another, with the first floor cantilevered from the ground floor by 11M. There is a play on weight of structures, with the more solid/dense first floor apparently being supported by the glazed/light ground floor. The logic of the design has largely been driven by the client's desire for luxurious space and contemporary living, alongside restrictions placed upon the proposal by prevailing local plan policy for replacement dwellings in this area.

The planning authority provided the panel with a brief summary of the relevant planning policy '*HSG8 Replacement Dwellings in the Green Belt and Rural Area beyond the Greenbelt.*' The planning authority confirmed that they are comfortable in principle with a replacement dwelling, however expressed some concerns that the

proposed scheme could fail local plan policy HSG8 for reasons of being materially larger and more visually intrusive than the existing dwelling. There are also concerns over the impact of the proposed dwelling on the setting of the wider settlement which was seen to be characterised by more traditional design.

The presentation was followed by an engaging and constructive Q&A session with the Panel that explored the applicant's proposal in more detail.

## **Panel's observations**

### **Overview**

The Panel supports the principle of a new contemporary replacement dwelling in this location, however, there are some concerns regarding the rationale underpinning its design, in particular how the dwelling's design and layout responds to the site context.

### **Submitted information**

The Panel were presented with a suite of photos, plans and elevations to communicate the design approach. The panel welcomed the early approach, however questioned the validity of some of the drawings and images that appeared to contradict fundamental aspects of the design, for example in relation to the massing of the building modules, and the treatment of the junction between the ground floor and first floor modules.

It is suggested that greater clarity is required regarding which aspects of the design the images are intended to communicate. Accurate sections that picked up the site contours would demonstrate the relationship between the building's internal and external spaces, the access road and its wider setting.

### **Early engagement with consultants**

The Panel identified potential constraints and opportunities within the site due to the presence of existing landscape features, such as trees and vegetation, and suggested that early engagement with key consultants, such as ecologists, landscape architects and arboricultural experts, could positively influence the evolution of the building design, and its relationship with its setting.

### **Local character**

The Panel acknowledged that the impact of the replacement dwelling on local character is a key policy consideration and encouraged the client to refer to any existing local documents, such as landscape character assessments, that could help enrich the understanding of, and response to, the distinct characteristics and qualities of the area.

The Panel reflected on Hertfordshire's rich history of innovative and contemporary architectural design. At the local level, the Panel recognised that individual sites within Westland Green have been developed in line with the requirements of individual owners, resulting in a variety of architecture expressive of its own time.

With this in mind in mind, the Panel felt that the site and wider area has the ability to accommodate a sensitively designed contemporary dwelling that makes a positive contribution to the local character. With regards to detailed design, the Panel suggested that a stronger design response to the context of the dwelling, alongside a

carefully chosen palette of locally distinct materials, could help assimilate the building within its setting and enhance the 'unique sense of place.'

### **Visual intrusion and volume**

The Panel felt it was important to explore the understanding of "intrusiveness" as the volume and visual intrusion of the proposed dwelling are both key planning considerations.

The Panel understood that the rationale behind the design approach was to meet planning policy HSG8, in particular keeping the overall height of the dwelling below that of the existing dwelling's chimney stack and orientating the first floor module to reduce the perceived mass of the dwelling from the public road.

The Panel contemplated that the degree of intrusion is a balanced judgement taking account of the building's height, but also its layout, form and response to the site context and visual amenity. With regards to visual amenity the Panel considered that the development was not significantly overlooked and is well screened to views from the wider landscape by the existing tree cover.

The Panel suggested that the ability of the site to accommodate change, where it does not result in wider significant landscape and visual impacts, offered an opportunity to explore the interrelationship between the building height and site levels, and to play with more abstract forms and the modular articulation. The Panel would have liked to have seen a design and access statement exploring the proposal and creating a stronger rationale for the contemporary approach. This might articulate a less constrained design approach to issues such as height, while paying more attention to the relationship to the site's contours, existing landscape and neighbourhood setting.

### **Size of internal spaces**

The Panel felt that the internal spaces were of considerable proportions, in particular the entrance lobby and the reading area. They suggested it would be possible to tighten the layout whilst maintaining generous room proportions, which in turn could provide more flexibility in the arrangement and articulation of the building modules.

### **Relationship between internal and external spaces**

The Panel had strong concerns regarding the relationship between the building's internal and external spaces due to the proposed changes in levels and how they function in respect of each other. The panel is concerned that setting this ground floor level approximately 1.2m below the existing ground level would result in a poor relationship between the ground floor living areas and the garden. The design team is encouraged to explore options that maintain the dwelling's ground floor level at garden level.

The Panel feels that there is potential for a more logical approach to the arrangement of the dwelling's ground floor living areas and external spaces, based on an understanding of the micro-climate, and how they are used in respect of each other. For example, the relationship between the kitchen and al fresco dining / entertaining areas throughout the day is a key consideration.

### **Cantilevered first floor module**

The Panel agreed that the cantilevered first floor module was an exciting concept, in particular the juxtaposition of its simple form within the setting of the trees. There was sympathy with providing panoramic views of the wider landscape and reducing the

perceived mass of the dwelling from the public road as drivers for the design rationale. .

The Panel did however feel that the first floor module required further development both in terms of the quality and function of the spaces created beneath the cantilevers, and in terms of how the cantilevers are constructed without compromising the elegance of the module and the illusion that it is floating above the ground floor.

### **Sustainability**

The Panel raised concerns that a sustainability strategy had not been carried out from the inception of the design process, and highlighted some issues and opportunities regarding the sustainability of the chosen approach.

For example, the Panel queried how balancing energy efficiency, solar heat gain, natural lighting and shade would be managed through the design with large areas of glazing in place. The practicality of maintaining such a large area of glazing should also be taken into consideration.

The Panel encourages the applicant to consider the integration of sustainable techniques, such as rainwater harvesting and ground source heating systems, as early as possible, as they can strongly influence the building's siting and internal layout.

### **Entrance strategy**

The Panel encourages the applicant to avoid an over-engineered and manicured approach to the driveway, in favour of a more informal approach, reflecting the natural and free flowing entrances that are characteristic of the properties in the local area.

The use of sensitive lighting, surface texture and colour, and landscape planting should enhance the setting of the dwelling and the quality of the ground level experience.

### **Summary**

The panel were supportive of the general approach to providing a contemporary design on this site. They judged that the setting was sufficiently contained by trees and the contours of the landscape as to have only a local impact. They considered that the brief for the replacement dwelling consisting of three bedrooms was modest and that the building size, while larger than the accumulated floor space of the existing dwelling was not excessive. They welcomed the contemporary expression employed by the architect.

At a detailed design level the panel had a number of reservations. They felt that information was lacking, in particular a clear section through the site demonstrating the relationship between the building and the district contours of the site. They suggested more work be done on the character and use of the external spaces and that this work might then be reflected in a further iteration of the plans. They pointed out that architecture of the quality proposed required a mastery of all the details including, in this case, structural relationships between the two main masses. They suggested that more work was required on sustainability. They were particularly concerned that key relationships arising out of the design of the entrance road and the level of the ground floor of the building be dealt with through landscape planting rather than heavy engineering.

Yours sincerely,

*Signature*

Barry Shaw