

Cornwall Design Review Panel Meeting: Wednesday 6th June 2018

Site Address: Polvellan Manor, Looe

Proposal: Demolition and works to existing house to form apartments, with new residential development in several locations within the grounds, landscape, etc.

Design and Development Team in attendance:

Helen Brooks – architect, RLT Architects
Clare Macness – architect, RLT Architects
Mike Westley – landscape architect, Mei Locii

Cornwall Design Review Panel Members in attendance:

Mark Pearson (Chair) – architect + urban designer
James Webb – historic environment consultant
Estelle Doughty – architect
David Slatter – architect, planner and access consultant
David Losasso – architect + educator

Advisors to the Panel:

Martin Mumford – police architectural liaison officer
Nick Cahill – Historic Environment Strategy Officer, Cornwall Council

Observers :

Steve Kirby – Panel Facilitator, Cornwall Council
Cllr Edwina Hannaford – Ward Member, Cornwall Council

Apologies:

None

Conflicts of Interest:

Mike Westley is a member of the pool of those appointed that might be called upon to form a Cornwall Design Review Panel, but will clearly have no influence over this current report.

Thank you for your recent presentation.

Please now find below the formal guidance of the Panel. You should disregard any specific points made verbally by individual Panel members as part the formative discussion during the meeting as they may not now reflect the considered and collective views of the Panel.

For clarity the Cornwall Design Review Panel does not consider the principle of the development but focuses its observations on design matters arising from the presented scheme to assist both the Design Team and the Local Planning Authority.

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Panel Guidance

Introduction

We are very pleased to be consulted again regarding this important site – which has been the subject of earlier design reviews. This was a first meeting following a new developer/promoter having acquired the property.

The Site and its Setting

We are encouraged by your statement that the design of the project would be 'landscape-led'. The historic house is, of course, an important component but it is the general quality of the wooded hillside, and former landscaped pleasure grounds which have been unmaintained and poorly managed which is of equal importance.

We are also pleased to hear that public access to the site will be treated more liberally than previous iterations of the scheme – it seems virtually impossible to bar pedestrians and some form of permissive managed opportunity for people to visit/pass-through the site seems appropriate. Inclusive access for the immediate environs of the house and its adjacent grounds will help older residents maintain active lifestyles.

This points towards a wider issue, which is the movement strategy not just within the grounds, but in linking back to the town. We understand that pedestrian access to the site is frustrated by a lack of footpath and some off-site works to restore safe walking routes to basic amenities for future residents ought to be part of the measures taken to improve the sustainability of the project (and promote health and well-being through encouraging exercise).

Management of surface water will need careful assessment and no doubt the landscape design will be important in providing 'soft' rather than 'hard' engineered solutions to this? Rather than see this as a negative constraint we urge that you consider this as an opportunity to add interest and character.

The Overall Layout

In broad terms you are following the strategy for new development that was established in the previous schemes and therefore we are supportive of the locations identified for new build structures.

Beginning with the least satisfactory of these (in terms of detail), we find the 'Mews' element at the eastern end of the site to be an awkward replacement for the cylindrical apartments that were previously proposed. We feel this element is mis-named, this is not a mews condition and the short-terraced form fails to set up a coherent relationship back to the important east front of the main house. We are also concerned that the proposals do not pay sufficient respect to the 'lookout' landscape feature which exists nearby and the basic proposition of development in this location needs to be more sensitively considered. Given the emerging architectural language of the rest of the site

and the landscape-led strategy, these principles should also be applied to this part of the site.

In turning to the 'Central Area' we see a reduction in the development intensity, which is welcomed and we applaud the gaps that are now emerging between units. We were unsure about the wisdom of providing the bridge across to first floor units as a threshold to the new courtyard, possibly better to introduce stairs within the first 'gap' or, possibly, combined with an enlarged end unit? The eastern ends of the units facing back towards the Manor and the approach from the entrance to the site really need to be secondary fronts – these types ought to have dual aspect – exploiting the views but also being respectful in their end elevations. In a similar way the western end of the Manor seems now to be prominent at the end of the new courtyard and the modelling of this repaired end of the house needs to take on this responsibility of providing a good 'stop vista' in this location. If the heritage analysis points to limited architectural or historic value to this part of the former villa, a possible 'new' extension to this end of the house could be considered appropriate?

The re-modelling of the house to remove later extensions seems sympathetic to the original building. The contrast formed between the existing building and the proposed new linked units is positive to both and the fragmentation further helps this distinction by drawing the new additions back into the landscape. Further spatial separation of the Manor from the linked units will help the Manor to read as a separate building and the new accommodation is not seen to grow out of it - this will lend better integrity to both.

The 'Woodland' element seems also to be slighter in terms of the number of units being attempted, and we welcome this. There seemed to be an odd logic to the roof forms here and we suggest that this would benefit from re-consideration. We wondered if the dwellings, now separate from each-other rather than arranged in a terrace, might become variations on a common theme rather than identical as types? Repetition of a common form, varying in its engagement with the landscape would give a stronger contextual identity and distinct character. The building forms shown may lend themselves to pitched roofs in the 'boat-house' tradition following from themes developed in previous submissions.

The Form and Detailing of the Housing

We are encouraged by the breaking up of the proposals into smaller development components sitting as a series of interconnected buildings – this ought to allow a closer adherence to subtle topographical characteristics. Perhaps the 'Mews' component should also adopt this same typology (see our earlier question above?).

In discussing the architectural language you occasionally mentioned / showed the elements sitting lightly on the ground on post supports (rather like 'pods') but then elsewhere it seems inevitable that firm retaining structures will be present – perhaps you need to clarify the structural / constructional system and accept a 'hybrid' approach – strengthening the contrast and poetry between a 'heavy' and 'light' expression?

Turning back to the original house we were not clear on whether a coherent strategy had yet been evolved to deal with the rear elevation – which will need extensive repair / re-modelling following demolitions?

We had a brief discussion about materials and urged caution in specifying on this. Given its north-facing wooded hillside location, it will be difficult to construct a low-maintenance fabric that will age gracefully in this location. Material choice and its detailing will be most important.

In Summary

The proposals are clearly at an early stage of development, but we are generally supportive of the revised approach within the formerly agreed strategy and wish the project well. Should a further review of more developed ideas be desirable then we would be happy to undertake that.

We trust these observations are helpful and of assistance, it must be emphasized that they represent the views of the Cornwall Design Review Panel only and are based on the information presented and discussed at the Panel meeting. They cannot prejudice the outcome of a full appraisal of a planning application on this site or any final determination made through delegation by the Head of the Planning and Regeneration Service or a decision made by a Cornwall Council Committee. However, the local planning authority is required to have regard to the recommendations of this guidance in assessing applications – in accordance with para 62 of the NPPF.

Subject to payment of the appropriate fee the Panel would be pleased to review this project again preferably whilst still at the pre-application stage of the process. If the design of the project is subject to only modest revision prior to submission then a 'desktop review' may be a more appropriate mechanism with which to update our guidance, however, substantial change will merit a further 'full panel review'.

Queries regarding the report content, administration or operation of the Panel should be directed in the first instance to the Panel Facilitator, Judy Howard, Cornwall Council Tel (01872) 224311 or email jhoward@cornwall.gov.uk

Confidentiality

Unless expressly requested by the design team on the grounds of bona fide commercial confidentiality the information within this report is not regarded as confidential and the Panel will publish a copy on its web page.

Where commercial confidentiality has been requested by promoters then the Panel will respect that during the pre-application stage, although Cornwall Council is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) and the report may have to be made accessible in response to an information request, unless one of the exemptions in the FOIA applies.

Beyond the pre-application stage, this Cornwall Design Review Panel guidance report (together with any subsequent updated versions) will be made public once the project becomes registered as a formal planning application.

Use of the Report

Extracts from the report shall not be used for the purposes of marketing or for press release without the express permission of the Panel which should be sought via the Panel Facilitator.

Any comments or quotations taken from this guidance for use in other documents such as design and access statements must not be abridged and, if selective quotations are used, then a complete copy of the full guidance should be attached as an appendix to that document.

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