

The Design Review Panel

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Site	23 Crescent East, Hadley Wood, EN4 0EY
Proposal	Demolition of existing house and erection of 7 flats with basement parking
Local Authority	Enfield Council
Applicant	PK Developments
Agent	Alan Cox Associates
Review Date	31st May 2023

This design review panel session was booked by Dalkey Developments, and this is the first time The Design Review Panel has reviewed this scheme. The session was carried out on the 31st of May 2023 and incorporated a site visit, which was extremely helpful in understanding the site and its context.

The information presented for review is considered to have been clear and professional. This is welcomed by the Panel and this presentation material is of benefit to the design review process.

Paragraph 133 of the NPPF states: -

“Local planning authorities should ensure that they have access to, and make appropriate use of, tools and processes for assessing and improving the design of development. These include workshops to engage the local community, design advice and review arrangements, ... In assessing applications, local planning authorities should have regard to the outcome from these processes, including any recommendations made by design review panels.”

Therefore, the Panel provides the following feedback: -

Whilst the Panel acknowledges the amount of work that has already been undertaken in producing the proposals being reviewed, confirmation from the design team that there is still scope for flexibility in the design is welcomed.

Generally, the Panel is supportive of the proposal. The site is not located within a Conservation Area and having carried out a site visit, the Panel does not feel the proposal will have a detrimental impact on the nearby Conservation Area. Overall, the proposal represents a sustainable development that results in a more efficient use of a brownfield site.

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The Panel thanks the Design Team for the opportunity to visit the site and see the street and details of other buildings and how they have been incorporated into the design. The Panel welcomes the attractive frontage which creates a building that appears to be one dwelling, rather than a number of flats.

Commendably, the process and adjustments prompted by the pre-application process have been greatly beneficial, yielding a series of strategic alterations that stand to enhance the building's overall appeal and functionality.

A particularly noteworthy modification is the greater setback of the new building from the existing frontage, which augments the building's ability to interact harmoniously with the surroundings, including the conservation area, by creating a visually verdant environment. The decision to incorporate a gable element on the west side of the building has also been appreciated. Though some have argued its necessity on the grounds of minimizing impact on the view from St. Paul's church, it is considered by the Panel that its impact is minimal.

The repositioning of the site entrance is a commendable move, promoting privacy by preventing direct views from the street down the ramp. The proposed intensification of land use aligns with contemporary architectural trends and maximizes the utility of the site, demonstrating a forward-thinking approach to urban development.

Notwithstanding the above, it is suggested it may be helpful for the design team to graphically demonstrate the constraints and optioneering exercise they have carried out in developing the design proposals, as this may further inform aspects of the design and also help to demonstrate to third parties that the building represents the optimum and most appropriate solution for the site. Although it is assumed that various configurations, building mappings, and site positions have been evaluated, empirical evidence demonstrating that the proposed design delivers the best return on investment, end-user experience, and compatibility with the local planning authority (LPA) and contextual issues is needed. In its current state, the design and access (D&A) statement does not effectively elucidate this.

It is noted that the scale and robustness of the initial design did present a highly visible proposal when seen on approach from Camlet Way/Beech Hill. It is considered the revised orientation of the building is an improvement and, whilst still visible, is an appealing and appropriate architectural style. The Panel does not consider it should be necessary, or appropriate, to seek to hide the proposed building behind a line of trees.

The Panel welcomes the design approach, which accentuates the property's aesthetic rather than detracting from it. The synergy between the architecture and the verdant setting enriches the overall aesthetic appeal of the design. The aspiration to preserve the green setting as an integral part of the design concept is supported.

In terms of the garden layout, while there is scope for creating private spaces for the residents, the Panel believes it would be unwise to remove the existing greenery entirely. The charm of a

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large garden lies in its sprawling and undefined nature, and it is noted there is a large amount of well-established planting to the rear of the property which it would be advantageous to retain.

Careful consideration should be given to how the design may encroach into Root Protection Areas (RPA) of existing trees. The Panel suggests it may be beneficial to seek input from an arboriculturist to advise on measures to mitigate this impact, especially in relation to the existing willow tree, which is a notable feature of the property.

Architecturally the design proposal offers multiple attractive features that enhance the user experience. A notable element is the half basement, furnished with storage facilities and a gym. Its design allows for an outside view, which contributes to a more pleasing and interactive environment. Furthermore, the proposed layout on the entry provides an almost unobstructed view through the building, right to the back. Such openness is desirable in promoting a sense of space and continuity.

Notwithstanding the Panels overall support for the proposals, the following comments are made in the spirit of helping the applicant and design team produce an even better proposal. For the avoidance of doubt the Panel's support is not subject to the below comments being addressed.

It is suggested there may be a benefit in further considering the choice of location for the car park ramp placement. The current positioning, while understandably made to respect the conservation area and maintain the preservation of a significant tree at the front of the site, may need additional consideration, especially in relation to the placement of waste bins and bike storage. It would be worthwhile to reconsider these placements and their functionality in the design.

The journey through the building and its different levels poses a few challenges that could be addressed. For instance, the steep stairs leading down to the basement car park entrance and the narrow terrace above it could be reimagined to make the journey more pleasant and less obstructed. The suggestion of implementing a playful aesthetic language could be beneficial in this respect.

The massing of large windows is a distinguishing feature that the design should retain. The design's ability to let an observer see right through the building is an intriguing architectural element. The opportunity for an engaging common area or space that allows a view out to the garden would be a beneficial addition. Such an element would allow occupants and visitors to experience the building more dynamically, lending more depth and interest to their interaction with the structure. If this effect can be heightened and more overtly expressed, it may further enhance the building's appeal.

In the aesthetic language of the building, it's necessary to weigh the implications of more complex design elements versus the functionality and maintenance needs. A more playful or robust design may not necessarily contribute to the longevity or sustainability of the building. Yet, the ability to adapt the design and manipulate the spaces can be advantageous.

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The project has potential for reimagining some of the spaces and elements for increased functionality and aesthetic appeal. For example, the existing terrace near the rear entrance could be redesigned to create an inviting link to the garden. This redesign would not only improve the aesthetic appeal but also enhance the functionality of the space.

Regarding the concept of the villa, it offers an intriguing perspective on the hybrid nature of the proposed structure, which does not neatly fit into the categories of either a house or a block of flats. Such a model presents an interesting opportunity for exploring the thresholds between public, semi-public, and private spaces within the building. This could form the basis for a distinctive design language that articulates the unique character of the villa concept.

However, despite the strength of the concept, and while the detailing within the set context is done with precision and politeness, there is an opportunity for the volume of the structure to appear less imposing. Further exploration and development of the generous, encouraging design approach could possibly yield a more balanced and harmonious outcome.

The pre-application report provided a number of intriguing alternatives. It is understood that commercial motivations often dictate the final decision on the architectural style, and this has resulted in the current traditional style of the proposal. Even though the building proposed is commendable, there is the opportunity to explore other design directions that could potentially offer a more thrilling outcome.

Considering the building from the perspective of a resident raises further thoughts about its design. While the entry is well-conceived and has been subject to considerable refinement, the rear elevation presents challenges. The flat roof over the three windows seems restrictive and detracts from the overall aesthetic of the building. A reconsideration of the building's plan, perhaps to a slightly T-shaped arrangement that would allow the gable front to run through the structure, might provide an opportunity for improvement.

The interaction between the indoor and outdoor spaces is another dimension of the design that may benefit from further exploration. As it stands, the heavy planting at the front presents a visually appealing aspect, yet there is potential to integrate this more thoroughly with the building's entry experience. This could perhaps involve driving through the garden or another means of incorporating nature more seamlessly into the experience of the building.

The treatment of surfaces within the building and how one enters the site and navigates to the basement warrants further consideration. The experiences crafted within this building are as important as its physical structure. In creating a place, there is room to engage in a more playful, experiential approach that could enhance the occupants' interaction with the building and the site.

A potential area of improvement involves addressing the embodied energy of the existing building. While the building has been classified by the LPA as a neutral contributor to the conservation area, justifying its removal in energy terms could enhance your proposition to the LPA. Reusing

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materials from the building could strengthen the case by demonstrating a commitment to sustainability and waste minimization.

Additionally, while there is a clear commitment to sustainability with the incorporation of features such as the mechanical ventilation with heat recovery (MVHR) system and an air source heat pump, it would be beneficial to specify the projects sustainability targets. The current plans appear to teeter on the verge of passive house design, yet the inclusion of heating plants implies a less ambitious aim. Clear articulation of sustainability targets, along with the details of how these systems will be integrated into the design, will undoubtedly reinforce the strength of your proposition.

Moreover, the basement parking decision, though beneficial in providing a more landscaped frontage, warrants further exploration. It's a substantial undertaking involving significant cost implications, dealing with hefty retaining walls, tanking issues, and the disposal of material off-site. A comprehensive cost-benefit analysis exploring alternatives, such as garden flats and front parking, could offer a lower development cost while maintaining high-end value.

Aesthetically, the front entrance may benefit from a larger scale, signifying its presence amidst the other strong visual elements in the vicinity. This is more of an instinctual observation rather than a rational argument, hence it might be beneficial to experiment with different proportions. Additionally, the rear elevation's motif repetition could be revisited to achieve a subtler and more pleasing aesthetic.

The design could potentially benefit from further investigation into the possibilities of adding another story at the back, reducing the size, or removing the basement car park. The ultimate aim should be to find a balance between profitable development, user comfort, and sustainability, effectively aligning with the context and local planning regulations. This analysis aims to guide further explorations, fostering a project outcome that maximizes value for all stakeholders.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS, (to be read in conjunction with the above)

In summary, the main conclusions of the Panel are: -

- The Panel is overall supportive of the design proposals.
- The proposal is considered to be a sustainable development on a brownfield site.
- It is considered the proposals will not detrimentally impact the nearby Conservation Area.
- The design's frontage, simulating one dwelling rather than multiple flats, is supported.
- Adjustments from the pre-application process have improved the design significantly.
- The set back of the building & inclusion of a gable element improves visual harmony with surroundings.
- The repositioned site entrance & planned land use intensification are praiseworthy.

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- The Panel suggests illustrating design constraints & evolution to demonstrate the project's suitability.
- The revised building orientation is felt to be appropriate & shouldn't be hidden behind trees.
- Enhanced site views through careful landscaping & tree root growth consideration are suggested.
- Existing greenery preservation & considerations for Root Protection Areas (RPA) of trees are suggested.
- Car park ramp placement, building navigation, bin & bike storage locations, & terrace design need reconsideration.
- The unique design articulates the hybrid nature of the proposed structure well.
- There may be an opportunity to make the structure even less imposing for a more harmonious outcome.
- Explorations in design directions, rear elevation, & indoor-outdoor space interaction are suggested.
- Embodied energy considerations for sustainability & clear articulation of sustainability targets may be beneficial.
- Cost-benefit analysis for basement parking versus alternatives is suggested.
- A larger front entrance & a revised rear elevation motif repetition could improve aesthetics.
- It may be beneficial to explore further options of adding a story at the back, reducing size, or removing the basement car park.

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NOTES:

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