

The Design Review Panel

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Site	Land Bounded by Exeter Road and The Retreat Drive, Exeter Road, Topsham, EX3
Proposal	Office Building off Exeter Road, Topsham - 16/0963/03
Local Authority	Exeter City Council
Agent	Vail Williams LLP
Applicant	Heritage Developments (SW) Ltd
Review Date	20 th October 2016

The following points are raised by the Panel:-

The Panel welcomed the thorough, clear and professional presentation given at The Design Review Panel session, held on the 20th October 2016 at Exeter City Council.

The Panel acknowledged the logical approach taken towards the design of the building, on what is acknowledged to be a fairly constrained site. Subject to the comments contained within this feedback document being appropriately addressed by the applicant, the Panel would be supportive of the proposals:-

The Panel is not supportive of the suggestion to either lower the building into the ground, or to reduce the height of the building, by decreasing the floor to ceiling heights. It is felt that the proposed building should be adaptable to other uses and users in the long term; therefore the Panel is not supportive of the suggested amendment of lowering the floor to ceiling heights of the proposed building, as this may restrict the buildings future flexibility.

The Panel has no concern in regard to the height of the proposed building; it is felt that the building provides a 'bookend' to the street scene against the back drop of the motorway flyover, and it is therefore felt to be appropriate that the building should not be apologetic. There is a concern that, within the 3d visualizations presented to the Panel, there appears to be a mismatch/discordant relationship between the curved form of the building's main elevation and the proposed roof top box. The Panel suggests that it may be possible to address this awkward visual affect through amending the composition between the curved façade, the roof box, and the circular light-well.

Re-orientating the building, so that the curved glazed facade of the building addresses the corner of the site and provides views towards the Exeter Road, may help also to address the concern in regard to the awkward relationship between the roof-top box and the curved façade. There is also a concern that currently the main views from the glazed façade face the side of the adjacent housing

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development. By re-orientating the building so that the curve faces the corner of the site, it is suggested that there is also an opportunity for the proposed building to better address, and therefore enhance, the street scene; also in turn provide a higher quality experience for the proposed buildings end users as well, having regard to the immediate surroundings.

The Panel feels that high quality detailing in regard to the glazing specification, the elegance of the proposed bracing system, and quality of the materials generally, will be crucial to the success of the proposed building. It is therefore suggested that this should be carefully considered as part of the proposals at an early stage, and or carefully conditioned as part of any approval that may be granted. It may be of benefit for 1:10 details of the glazing and bracing details to be provided to ensure an appropriate level of quality and elegance.

In terms of the proposed rendered fascia, the Panel suggests that it may be of benefit to the overall design of the proposed building if this were 'cleaner' and 'crisper', potentially seamlessly blending into a single plain with the proposed rendered façade below, on the north east and south east elevations.

It is suggested that the design may benefit from further considering the motorway facing elevation; there is a concern that this elevation should be low maintenance and consider long term weathering, and potential discoloration, as a result of its northern orientation and proximity to the motorway.

The incorporation of a roof terrace is supported by the Panel, however it is suggested that this proposed space could be further enhanced through the incorporation of further roof planting, potentially including trees. It is suggested that this may help the proposed building to link with the existing tree lined motorway embankment to the rear, (northern elevation), and in turn more sympathetically relate to and reflect its surrounding context. If this is proposed, then careful consideration should be given to the proposed depth of the roof structure to ensure that it is capable of bearing the proposed load, including water retention within the soil.

The Panel welcomes the proposed incorporation of trees and other planting along the Exeter Road boundary. It is felt that these proposed trees may help to create a better environment for pedestrians and cyclist. The Panel suggests that it may be possible to provide a cycle path within the proposed north east planted/landscape buffer zone adjacent to the Exeter Road. It is suggested that this may demonstrate an enhancement of the immediate context. However, it is felt that any planting, (trees and or shrubbery), proposed along the Exeter Road should not hide the building. It is suggested that the use of appropriate species of trees should be carefully considered, perhaps a high stemmed native species that may provide a green canopy, but would also provide a clear visual link, may be appropriate. It is felt that the proposed trees should also be contextually appropriate in terms of the historic landscape character of the setting; it is suggested that it may be beneficial to consult with a landscape architect in this regard to ensure the correct specification, (including, but not limited to, size and species), of trees and other planting.

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It is suggested that it may be beneficial for the proposed boundary stone wall (and or any other boundary wall or fence) not to be included within the proposals, potentially resulting in a softer green boundary with the site that enhances the street scene, and does not feel cut off from it. It is suggested that the proposed stone could be utilized as the material for the plinth element of the building instead, providing the proposed contextual link.

Generally there is a concern that the landscape proposals are being considered as an afterthought. The Panel suggests it may be beneficial for detailed landscape proposals, which respond to a wider contextual analysis, to be developed alongside and as an integral part of the proposed building design. It is felt that it may be beneficial for a contextual analysis to be undertaken, (including sun path and shadow studies), that may inform the detailed landscape proposals. It may also be beneficial to consider and illustrate the proposals in relation to the neighbouring sites and wider context. The Panel feels that subject to an appropriately designed detailed landscape scheme, there is an opportunity for the proposals to represent an enhancement to the existing site and its immediate surroundings, which the Panel suggests may be a material consideration in favour of the proposals.

It is suggested that any detailed landscape proposals should incorporate an external lighting design. The external lighting design should be produced to ensure that dark antisocial spaces are not created at night, as well as to appropriately define the building and the surrounding landscape within the street scene, without resulting in light pollution or light spill that would have a detrimental impact upon wildlife and habitats.

The Panel is supportive of the vehicular access being provided from Retreat Drive. However, the Panel questions the clarity of the entrance location and the arrival experience for end users, and it is suggested that the production of a detailed landscape design may help to address this concern.

There is a concern in regard to the provision of car parking to the front of the site along the Exeter Road, and it is suggested that it may be of benefit to the design for all of the parking to be relocated to the rear of the site.

In terms of transport generally, the Panel suggests that a specific work place travel plan may be useful as a supporting document, which may help to demonstrate one aspect of the proposals sustainable credentials.

The Panel notes the applicant's assertion that, due to the tidal estuary location of the proposal site, there is no Statutory need to consider sustainable urban drainage (SUDs). However, the Panel suggests that incorporation of an appropriate SUD's scheme within the proposals, perhaps through a mixture of appropriately designed landscape and planting, along with the use of an attenuation tank under the parking area, may represent a sustainable enhancement to the existing setting that may be a material consideration in favour of the proposals.

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Generally, the Panel welcomes and is supportive of the proposed aspirations in terms of the buildings sustainability credentials; however the Panel suggests that it may be beneficial for the proposed sustainable and renewable energy measures to be further enhanced. It is questioned if it might be possible for the building to aspire to be more than carbon neutral and be carbon negative. The Panel also suggests it may be beneficial to incorporate detailed ecological and habitat measures into the building and landscape design so as to be able to empirically demonstrate an enhancement to the site and immediate context in terms of ecology and sustainability. The Panel feels that if the suggestions for the proposed building to be carbon negative, along with the suggested ecological and habitat measures were incorporated into the design, that this should represent a significant material consideration in favour of the proposals design.

It is suggested that the proposals may benefit from considering the integration of solar shading into the glazed southern elevation of the proposed building, so as to avoid the potential for overheating, and avoid the need for retrospective amendments, and or the retro fitting of potentially unnecessary mechanical cooling.

SUMMARY OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

In summary the main recommendations of the Panel are:

- Subject to the comments contained within this feedback document being appropriately addressed by the applicant, the Panel would be supportive of the design of the proposals.
- The Panel is not supportive of the suggestion to either lower the building into the ground or to reduce the height of the building by decreasing the floor to ceiling heights.
- There is a concern over a discordant relationship between the curved form of the building's main elevation & the proposed roof top box element.
- It may be beneficial to re-orientate the building, so that the curved glazed facade of the building addresses the corner of the site & provides views towards the Exeter Road.
- The quality of the detailing & quality of the materials will be crucial to the success of the proposed building.
- The motorway facing elevation should be carefully considered in terms of long term weathering & maintenance.
- The proposed roof terrace is supported, but may be enhanced through the incorporation of further roof planting, potentially including trees.
- The Panel supports the proposed incorporation of trees & other planting along the Exeter Road boundary.
- Any proposed planting, (trees & or shrubbery), along the Exeter Road should not hide the building.
- It may be beneficial for there not to be any boundary wall or fence along the Exeter Road

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boundary.

- It may be beneficial for detailed landscape proposals to be considered, (& submitted), as an integral part of the proposed building design.
- It is suggested that any detailed landscape proposals should incorporate an appropriate external lighting design.
- The Panel is supportive of the vehicular access being provided from Retreat Drive.
- It may be of benefit for no parking to be located to the front, (Exeter Road), side of the site.
- A specific work place travel plan may be useful as a supporting document.
- Incorporation of a SUD's scheme within the proposals may represent a sustainable enhancement to the existing setting that may be a material consideration in favour of the proposals.
- The Panel is supportive of the proposed aspirations in terms of sustainability.
- The proposals may benefit from considering the integration of solar shading into the glazed southern elevation of the proposed building.

The Devon & Somerset Design Review Panel

NOTES:

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