

The Design Review Panel

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Site	Wildhouse Court, Wildhouse Lane, Milnrow, Rochdale, Lancashire OL16 3UU
Proposal	New build detached private property
Local Authority	Rochdale Borough Council
Applicant	Michael Morris
Planning Consultant	Chorlton Planning Ltd
Architect	CJ Partnership
Landscape Architect	Trevor Bridge Associates
Heritage	Adapt Heritage
Review Date	5 th February 2024

This design review panel session was booked by the CJ Partnership, and this is the second time The Design Review Panel has reviewed this scheme. The session was carried out on the 5th February 2024. A previous session that incorporated an online 360 virtual site tour (<https://virtualtours-online.uk/Wildhouse/>) was carried out on the 8th April 2022, and this feedback document should be read in conjunction with the previous feedback issued.

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.

The Panel has been asked to comment on the proposals against the requirements of paragraph 139 (specifically clause b) of the National Planning Policy Framework, (NPPF), which states: -

“Development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents which use visual tools such as design guides and codes. Conversely, significant weight should be given to:

(a) development which reflects local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents which use visual tools such as design guides and codes; and/or

The Design Review Panel

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(b) outstanding or innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability or help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, so long as they fit in with the overall form and layout of their surroundings”.

Important Note:-

The Panel notes that it is not being asked to assess the proposal against paragraph 84e of the NPPF. It is also understood that the LPA have expressed support for the principle of a dwelling in this location.

It is not within the Panel’s remit to comment on planning policy, but it notes the site lies within the Green Belt in which there is a presumption against most forms of development aside from a small number of exceptions or in very special circumstances. For the avoidance of doubt the following feedback is on the design of the proposal only, and provides comment on the proposal in relation to the criteria contained within paragraph 139 alongside the government and others’ wider suite of design policy and advice. It does not seek to make any statement on the suitability of the site for development in planning policy terms.

Paragraph 138 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. The primary means of doing so should be through the preparation and use of local design codes, in line with the National Model Design Code. For assessing proposals there is a range of tools including workshops to engage the local community, design advice and review arrangements, and assessment frameworks such as Building for a Healthy Life . These are of most benefit if used as early as possible in the evolution of schemes, and are particularly important for significant projects such as large scale housing and mixed use developments. 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: -

Firstly, the Panel would thank the Design Team for another opportunity to comment on the project. It also appreciates the clear and concise presentation which explained in an easy to follow way the work that has been undertaken since the last review and the changes to the scheme. The Panel is also grateful for the presence of an officer of the Local Planning Authority (LPA) and supports the continuing collaborative approach.

The Panel is pleased to see that the Design Team has sought to address the previous concerns of the Panel and has undertaken more background work and analysis to support the design approach.

The Design Review Panel

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It is clear that the new design is a significant improvement on the previous iteration. It is considered to be refreshingly contemporary whilst at the same time firmly rooted within the local vernacular tradition. The analysis of local settlement form has informed the basic form and massing of the new building and the proposed use of traditional materials helps to “anchor” the building in its local context. The new house should sit comfortably in its context, although, in order to demonstrate this the Panel suggests that a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment be prepared. The Heritage Statement demonstrates that, primarily as a product of distance, intervening planting and topography, the proposals would not result in any adverse impact on the setting of nearby heritage assets.

Whilst the analysis of local settlement character and vernacular form along with the Heritage Statement have demonstrated that a building of the scale and massing proposed can be accommodated comfortably on the site, so as to meet policy requirements the scheme still requires an appropriate landscape setting to help it integrate fully within its surrounds. As per the previous design review panel feedback the Panel suggests that it may be helpful for a hierarchical analysis of landscape character to be developed. It may be beneficial for this to start with national and regional definitions before reviewing local plan policies and surveying and describing the site. Once this has been undertaken, it is suggested that the proposed landscape scheme should seek to reflect and reinforce positive local character.

Without wishing to second-guess this work, it is felt likely that a landscape character analysis may result in a focus on native species and robust and very functional hard landscaping; it is suggested that any hard landscaping proposals should re-use local materials wherever possible. In overall terms, it is suggested it may be beneficial for the landscape design to derive from and reinforce local character and there is a concern that at present the indicative proposals suggest an approach which is overly suburban and includes ornamental shrub planting and potted specimens, which in the Panel’s view may be inappropriate. Other aspects shown on the proposals plan include an “enhanced wildlife zone” and a rain garden which are supported in principle, although it may be beneficial for these to be worked up in more detail and informed by ecological and tree surveys. It is also suggested that it may be helpful for the landscape design to be informed by an analysis of how each of the outdoor areas are likely to be used; this may be influenced by orientation, outlook and the weather and should be realistic. Sitting out on the indicative terrace on the northern side of the building, for example, feels somewhat optimistic in this Pennine location.

Returning to the house itself, the Panel supports the proposal for a super-insulated building aspiring to Passivhaus standards. Indeed, it encourages every effort to be made to acquire Passivhaus accreditation so that the project acts as an exemplar locally in terms of energy efficiency. The Panel does have doubts however as to whether the current scheme is likely to meet the relevant criteria given the large expanses of glazing and suggests the use of software that models Passivhaus outcomes for different designs. Similarly the requirements of Part O of the Building Regulations in respect of overheating may prove challenging for a building of this design. It is suggested therefore that the relevant assessment be carried out before any more detailed design work is undertaken. Ultimately the energy strategy for the house is not indivisible from the design of the house itself and the two should run in tandem as this aspect will have a significant impact upon the appearance of

The Design Review Panel

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the building. Similarly it is suggested it may be beneficial for the requirements in respect of fire regulations to be considered at the design stage.

Given that overheating of the house could be an issue, in a spirit of helpfulness it is suggested that it may be an option to introduce an overhang to the southern elevation which would provide partial shade to the terrace and passive shading to the house. It may also have the benefit of preventing rainwater dripping down the white render façade; there is arguably a local architectural precedent in the overshot roofs of lean-to structures on agricultural buildings. Notwithstanding the above, it is noted that there is a danger that such a feature could be at odds with the simple aesthetic of the house generally and so this idea is advanced by the Panel as something to be explored rather than as a definitive recommendation.

The site sits astride a ridgeline and the topography is complex. Whilst the presentation included some cross sectional drawings of the dwelling itself, it may be beneficial for these to be extended to include all of the site and particularly the relationship with the road. It is felt that demonstrating a full understanding of the site levels may be critical to securing in practice, the crisp and simply detailed building shown in the presentation images. Of more practical importance is that, as shown, there is no level access to the building – indeed a visitor would need to navigate two sets of steps to access the main living area; this is noted not to be consistent with one of the key aspects of the client's brief which was a home for life and it would be beneficial for this aspect to be revisited.

Aesthetically the proposed building is considered to be very appealing. The patchwork of solids and voids of different sizes works well and the use of familiar local materials will help the building to sit comfortably within its context. The fenestration in the northern elevation echoes traditional barn openings and the “chunky” stone surrounds to the lesser windows is a pleasing modern interpretation of a vernacular tradition. The building feels assured and confident. Notwithstanding the above, one suggestion aimed at simplifying the building further would be to consolidate the PV cells into a single array rather than the current approach, which somewhat breaks up the roofscape.

As the detailed design moves forward the challenge may be to ensure that the simple form is not complicated by either technical or decorative additions. In a spirit of helpfulness, it is suggested that it may be beneficial for the required attention to detail to also extend to the project management of the build itself.

In conclusion, the Panel considers that the revised design demonstrates significant improvement on the previous iteration. The revised architectural approach is supported by the Panel; it is unashamedly contemporary but at the same time feels comfortable in its historic vernacular setting. Notwithstanding the above it is considered that the simple and robust qualities of the new house should now be echoed in a comprehensive landscape design for the whole plot, for which it may be beneficial to reflect and reinforce local positive landscape character.

The Design Review Panel

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

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

- The new design is a significant improvement on the previous iteration.
- It may be beneficial for an LVIA to now be undertaken.
- It may be beneficial for an analysis of local landscape character to be undertaken & used to inform detailed landscape proposals for the site.
- It is suggested that landscape proposals should be based around native species & local reused flags, setts & stone walls. Overly suburban planting & features should be avoided
- It may be helpful for the landscape design to be informed by consideration of how various external spaces will be used, considering the local microclimate & sun path.
- The Panel supports the proposal for a super-insulated building aspiring to Passivhaus standard & encourages every effort to be made to acquire Passivhaus accreditation.
- It may be beneficial for Passivhaus modelling & an assessment of the project against Part O of the Building Regulations to be undertaken at this stage.
- It may be helpful to consider the introduction of an overhang to the southern elevation of the building.
- It may be beneficial for a comprehensive set of cross sections for the site to be produced.
- It is considered it may be beneficial for levels to be adjusted to allow level access to the house in line with the client's life time home aspirations.
- It may be helpful for an Ecological survey to be undertaken at the earliest opportunity & used to inform the landscape design for the site.
- The Design Team is urged to continue to work closely with the LPA.

The Design Review Panel

NOTES:

Please note that the content of this document is opinion and suggestion only, given by a Panel of volunteers, and this document does not constitute professional advice. Although the applicant, design team and Local Authority may be advised by the suggestions of The Design Review Panel there is no obligation to be bound by its suggestions. It is strongly recommended that all promoters use the relevant Local Authorities pre-application advice service prior to making a planning application. Further details are available on the Council's website. Neither The Design Review Panel nor any member of the Panel accept any liability from the Local Authority, applicant or any third party in regard to the design review panel process or the content of this document, directly or indirectly, or any advice or opinions given within that process. The feedback and comments given by the Panel and its members constitutes the members individual opinions, given as suggestions, in an effort of helpfulness and do not constitute professional advice. The local planning authority and the applicants are free to respond to those opinions, or not, as they choose. The Panel members are not qualified to advise on pollution or contamination of land and will not be liable for any losses incurred by the Local Authority or any third party in respect of pollution or contamination arising out of or in connection with pollution or contamination.