

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

Date of meeting:	20/11/17
Site:	Sustainability Centre
Proposal:	Low carbon retrofit and extension of existing hub building to create a new Learning Centre with enhanced facilities. Works include the internal re-organisation and recladding of the existing building and a 2-storey extension to the West to provide a new public entrance and welcome space at lower ground level and a new classroom above. A new first floor external deck & canopy structure will provide improved access, solar shading and covered education and external seating areas. Landscaping works to the immediate surroundings of the building will improve access, orientation and the buildings landscape setting.
Planning reference:	SDNP/17/05495/PRE
Panel members sitting:	Graham Morrison (Chair) Paul Fender John Starling Kim Wilkie
SDNPA officers in attendance:	Genevieve Hayes (Design Officer) Vicki Colwell (Major Planning Projects Officer) Paul Slade (Support Services Officer) Hannah Chapman (Link Officer)
SDNPA Planning Committee in attendance:	Alun Aylesbury Robert Mocatta Ian Phillips
Item presented by:	Alice Cooper (Terra Firma) Christine Seawood (Sustainability Centre) James Todd (Architype)
Declarations of interest:	None

The Panel's response to your scheme will be placed on the Planning Authority's website where it can be viewed by the public.

The SDNPA operate a transparent service, whereby pre-application and application details, although not actively publicised will be placed on the online planning register. This is unless the applicant gives reasons why the enquiry is commercially sensitive.

COMMENTS

	Notes
1.0 Discussion/Questions with applicants	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Panel noted that the first impression should be a key area of concern, but there doesn't seem to be any plans for reducing the amount of tarmac around the entrance to the site. The Applicants explained that they were concerned about how they'd deal with the debris left from clearing the tarmac from the car park and they noted that the car park sees a lot of use; any surface put in would need to be able to take a large amount of traffic with minimal maintenance in order to avoid straining the charity's finances. If they had the opportunity, the Applicant would love to be able to remove the tarmac, but it doesn't seem viable at this time. 2. The Panel questioned the sense of legibility of the site. When looking towards the building from the car park, the main entrance is hidden around the corner; it's important in creating a legible approach for the entrance to be visible on arrival, giving visitors a clear indication where to go. The Applicant said that, while they wanted the building to be seen, they didn't want it to lose its character as a building in the woodlands. Positioning the entrance where it is gives them an opportunity to create a distinct guiding path that runs around the building, taking visitors on a journey around it and giving them the opportunity to see the landscape beyond. The Applicant felt that they'd made the right decision with the entrance on this occasion, but agreed that they would look again at this decision. 3. The Panel asked if the Applicants were going to retain the lodge, noting that it has a very military camp character that's incongruous with the current use of the site. The Applicants said that they planned to keep it, as they feel that it's an important heritage asset as a reminder of the original use of the site, but agreed that it will need to be re-characterized to fit the site better, something they intend to do at a later stage of their retrofitting scheme. The Panel suggested that the surrounding car parks have an extremely negative effect on the characterisation of the lodge. It might be worth looking in depth at the arrangement of the car park, as it could be made more efficient and the extra space could be used for planting features that might break up the impact of the tarmac. 4. The Panel raised concerns that the phase 4 area, around the sewage works, might not be the best place for more buildings; why was it chosen? The Applicant said that it's part of phase 4 of the plans in order to provide time to further develop the scheme. Phase 4 is intended to see the activities around the building enhanced, with teaching about sustainable, natural

	<p>and low impact building. It's intended to be a training ground and the Sustainability Centre is looking at it from this use point of view.</p> <p>5. The Panel asked whether the orientation of the Welcome Space and Classrooms had changed over the course of the diagrams displayed.</p> <p>The Applicants said that the orientation has changed a few times as part of the planning process, testing different options, with the current orientation believed to be the best option.</p> <p>The Panel noted that the two areas could be pulled apart slightly to allow for a central entrance space between them.</p>
2.0 Panel Summary	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Panel very much appreciated the application being presented at this early stage in the design process. There is much to encourage here and the Panel very much admired the ethos and the intentions behind the proposals. The Panel understood the financial limitations on the charity and understood this would have an impact on its level of ambition but the Panel nevertheless believed it was possible to think more strategically about its priorities. There are therefore a number of concerns that could be addressed. 2. The basis of the scheme is the masterplan. The impression is that this is driven by too expedient a discipline and this, in turn, has raised three issues - landscape, routes and legibility, and the architecture and its consequences. The Panel's primary concern was that this was a masterplan in which decisions taken now could 'lock in' and make unavailable strategies that might be more beneficial in the future. An example of this is the commitment to the current location of an unattractive and inefficient car park layout that also happens to be the very first impression on entering the site. 3. The Panel commented that a part of that 'first impression' is the relationship between the site and the South Downs Way. Here, it is critical that the landscape response in new development has a relationship to that route. To the North of the site, on the other side of the South Downs way, there are a variety of out of place features; the substantial razor wire fence and the new housing scheme with its 'landscaping'. Then on the south side, the fast road with the SDW running parallel and the large parking area. Though the context may not be possible to change, there can be a proper response. 4. The Panel also felt that though it may have some sentimental value, the existing gatehouse/lodge has little heritage or visual value. It detracts from the overall image of the site and spending money improving it is likely to be expensive and with limited benefit. The number of visitors who may find it interesting in its familiarity will decrease in direct proportion to those interested in the site for its current function. The Panel believe that its removal would be a stronger position to hold that its re-characterisation. 5. The masterplan must lay out the plans for the next 60 or

	<p>so years for the Sustainability Centre. It is not expected that everything will be immediately implemented but a long term strategy should set the direction for the many inherited features including plethora of hardstanding areas and the existing tarmac car parks.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Turning to the proposed remodeling of the building, the Panel was not entirely convinced by the efforts to cast the Sustainability Centre as 'a building in the forest'. The landscape strategy is currently just not strong enough to make that idea believable. The design and its setting requires more conviction and should decide conclusively whether this is a building in the woods, a point of transition or something else entirely, and then commit to it with an appropriate landscape strategy. As the intent behind the building derives from the masterplan, this is the right moment to commit to a single vision. This is the Sustainability Centre and the Panel believes it should not only have the generality of a bold vision to fit its vital position, its Landscape strategy should also include non-human movement, ecology and habitats. 7. Regarding movement and circulation throughout the site, the Panel was not convinced that the parts the Applicants were trying to protect were the parts most deserving of that care. Specifically, the avenue of Sycamores is to be retained, but these sycamores are of low quality and the Panel is not confident that investing in them would benefit the future planning of the site. A better investment, in the Panel's view would be the re-configuring of the car park, introducing landscaping to help break up the impact of the hard parking area. 8. The Panel is also not convinced that the building needed to be seen from the site entrance. In the site planning, there is a possible option for visitors to be funneled straight in to the car parks and to get their first view of the building from there. This might create a better sense of arrival and help to determine the best place to put the entrance to the building. Designing the experience from the South Downs Way to the front door of the building could be as deliberate as it is subtle. 9. On the composition of the building, the Panel noted that the curvature on the South sides may develop with some effect, but it raised concerns that the North side has not had the same degree of work committed to it. The additional storey of 'deck' and 'cornice' on the South side gives greater credibility to the composition. The North elevation in its present form may not be so successfully wrapped by either the new cladding of the curving new layer. 10. Looking at the plan and the way in which the building is being extended, the Panel suggested that it may be clearer if education could be focused entirely on the top floor with the public on the lower floor. More could then be made of the stairs and the potential for separate entrances. 11. Overall, though the Panel believes the plan could be
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	<p>stronger and more confident. It commented that this was a good starting point with much potential and it hoped to see the scheme again as it evolves.</p>
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