

## **SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK DESIGN REVIEW PANEL**

Date of meeting:	23/01/2020
Site:	Astley House, Spital Road, Lewes, BN7 1PW
Proposal:	Demolition of the vacant building and the construction of 28 residential units with associated landscaping and on-site car parking
Planning reference:	SDNP/19/05619/FUL
Panel members sitting:	Mark Penfold (Chair) Robyn Butcher Luke Engleback Paul Fender Nicholas Pople
SDNPA officers in attendance:	Ben Terry (Design Officer) Michael Scammell (Conservation Officer) Nat Belderson (Link Officer) Nikki Allen (Support Services Officer) Tania Hunt (Support Services Officer)
Lewes District Council officers in attendance	Christopher Wright (Case Officer) Jenny Martin (Conservation Officer)
SDNPA Planning Committee in attendance:	None
Item presented by:	Thomas Farmer (Downen Farmer Architect) James Downen (Downen Farmer Architect) Sean Martin (Downen Farmer Architect) Ben Crozier (Agent)
Declarations of interest:	None

**The South Downs National Park Design Review Panel is an independent assessment of development proposals by a panel of multidisciplinary professionals and experts, who aim to inform and improve design quality in new development. It is not intended to replace advice from the planning authority or statutory consultees and advisory bodies, or be a substitute for local authority design and landscape skills or community engagement**

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

Case Officer requests to the panel:

1. Whether the scale of the development is appropriate:
  - a. Height of the houses
  - b. Height and bulk and scale of the apartment block
2. Whether the layout is appropriate taking into consideration:
  - i. Site context
  - ii. Historic buildings within the vicinity of the site
3. Guidance towards the architectural detailing of the houses and apartment block.

Panel questions to case officer:

1. On road parking along De Montford Road – loss of spaces?
2. Open spaces, twittens, how it relates in bulk and scale to the surroundings.
3. LVIA? – Validated without one.

Discussion/Workshop

### **Main Issues**

- **Eco-system services**
- **Landscape assessment**
- **Scale of development**
- **Architectural detailing**

Landscape:

- The group discussed whether the wider landscape matters of the site have been considered – is this a landscape-led scheme.
- In context, from the wider landscape, the site is the beginning of the high street; it's the junction between countryside and Lewes. The park to the west of the site forms a key route into/out of Lewes from the wider National Park and so views across the site towards Lewes and the castle are all the more important (in fact upon further investigation, this "park" forms the south-eastern limb of a registered battlefield).
- There are significant views to Lewes - you can see the Castle, the church, the escarpment of the cliffs and the downs beyond – a key feature that should be maintained and enhanced.
- How does this site sit within the context of the town and wider landscape, such as the National Park and the downs on all sides?
- The landscape design within the scheme needs to add value to the biodiversity and ecology of the site.
- The applicant described how, as you walk up the park to the west of the site you will still be able to see the castle and the cliffs despite the height of the proposed apartment block at the western end of the site.
- Key views will be obstructed from the lower sections of the park. The Panel were concerned that views would be obscured both by the height of the western end of the development, and also that development extended outwards to the edge of De Montfort Road, thus cutting a view down the road towards the castle in half.
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- West end of the site – holding the end of the site confidently whilst being appropriate to the scale of the buildings around it and also being respectful of the views across the town.
- Panel suggested creating bigger drawings that stretch out and include the park and down the street to see how the green spaces are connected.
- Landscape needs to be an integral part of the design, not just decoration – it's functional.

### Ecosystem Services:

- Biodiversity loss and climate change are the two environmental emergencies that need to be addressed
  - The design and supporting information needs to demonstrate a biodiversity net gain.
  - Think of the opportunities and policy requirements needed to address those environmental emergencies.
  - Heavier rain events will become more common – needs to be thought about
  - Heatwaves – can be quite short but can also be quite dangerous.
    - Look at the buildings and the materiality of it and the space between the buildings and the orientation of them regards to retention of heat and radiation of that heat at night-time.
    - Think of vegetation as another material for the buildings.
- The roof garden structure will need to be irrigated
  - Where will that water be harvested from, stored and used.
- The panel suggested refining the green roof design to address both biodiversity and climate change.
- Discussed whether balconies would be better situated on the south side not the north side.
- Can planters at the front be rain gardens?
- Can boundaries be constructed using crushed concrete or dolerite which will mineralise? This will absorb carbon in the atmosphere.

### Scale:

- Differing characteristics on each street either side of the site.
  - One side – very simple terraces with planar roofs, very low scale, very close, a typical Victorian street.
  - On the other side no terraces but there are buildings with spaces between them.
  - One street has lower building heights than the other.
- **The panel felt the buildings are out of scale, they are one storey too high.**
- The panel asked if the unit size could be reduced from 3 / 4 beds?
  - The units are the size the market requires.
- Concern over the height of the houses in comparison to those opposite which are small terraced cottages with planar roofs following the line of the wall.
- Roofs generally follow the grain of the street in this way with ‘pulses’ or ‘moments’ where they get turned around, whereas nearly all the houses in this scheme have roofs the other way round. This means that when you look down the street from above you see a texture of roofs and chimneys, instead of gables that stop the view as each one comes along.
- Take reference for local cues - look at the scale of the western elevation in relation to the North /South Street, (A275), where there is a significant step (up and down) in building heights.
- Step backs and ‘L’ shapes are more interesting and inventive.
  - ‘Safe’ design at the front and more interesting at the back.

### Twittens:

- **Historic mapping shows a gap at the eastern end of the site, there is a nice architectural end to the house, it would be a shame to lose this.**
- The panel also thought it would be difficult to negotiate a party wall at the eastern end so would a twitten help here...
- You should consider a twitten beside 117 Western Road, a building identified as of Townscape Merit in the CAA, both to protect residential amenity to the rear of that property and to ensure that its decorative, side gable tile-hanging can be physically maintained in the future and can continue to make a useful contribution to Character Area 4.2 of the Conservation Area.

- **There is the precedent of a recently constructed twitten further down the street.**

#### Open Space:

- Planar roof coming through as opposed to gable ends would help the quality of the open space as it could be very dark due to the height of the buildings.
- Suggestion from panel to create a 3D model that includes the streets either side.
- Green space at Western end was considered but the applicants design team thought that due to the high levels of traffic it might not get much use.
- No rear access to gardens (access to gardens only through the houses) - bin collection/cycle storage needs to be resolved in your final design.
- Access to roof garden for apartments only, through the core of the apartment building.

#### Gateway:

- Who is the gateway for? Pedestrians? Motorists?
- Is the gateway the prison? The panel feel the prison is the gateway – there is little justification to create another gateway

#### Energy:

- Solar panels on the roof?
- Please can the applicant consider, in conjunction with the LDC Conservation Officer, whether PV Panels are appropriate?

#### Summary

This is a workshop session, where we've discussed how you can progress and improve your design in terms of the main issues we have identified, whether it be eco-system services, responding to landscape and townscape, reducing the scale of development, and by improving its identity through the introduction of a twitten and architectural detailing.

So in summary that's what it's all about, going away and developing your scheme and ideas with the landscape at its heart – your scheme should be demonstrably landscape-led. We are more than happy to review your scheme at a later date.

**Action:** Applicants - To email through the Design & Access Statement