

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

Date of meeting:	25/06/2020
Site:	Barnetts Cottages, Fitzlea Wood Road, East Lavington. West Sussex.
Proposal:	The demolition of two dwellings and replacement with one dwelling and associated annex, restoration and relocation of timber outhouse, relocation of bridleway, landscape design and drainage works including balancing pond.
Planning reference:	SDNP/20/01405/FUL
Panel members sitting:	Chris Blandford (Chair) Kay Brown Luke Engleback Paul Fender Kim Wilkie
SDNPA officers in attendance:	Ben Terry (Design Officer) Tania Hunt (Support Services Officer)
CDC Officers in attendance:	Derek Price (Case Officer)
Applicant and Project Team:	Adam Richards (Adam Richards Architects) James Fox Joe Chilvers Richard Dollamore (Whaleback Ltd) David & Christine Jones (Applicants)
Observers:	John Saunders (CDC) Mark Waller-Gutierrez (SDNPA)
SDNPA Planning Committee in attendance:	None
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.

18th May 2020

Update note on the South Downs National Park's Design Review and Design Workshop service

Given the current restrictions on movement and social distancing, the SDNPA Design Review Panel is moving to an online platform. This is a trial service that we hope will benefit both applicant and the National Park Authority.

Site visits are not being undertaken but their reintroduction is under constant review. The SDNPA will, therefore, ensure that all supporting information is provided to the panel within one week of the session being held. This will include the Case Officers briefing, a Design Officers briefing note and the Applicants presentation.

Case Officer Concerns:

- 1) The acceptability in terms of policy SD30; the replacement of the existing dwellings. The design is important here as there are circumstances where if there is a demonstrable enhancement of landscape and architectural design – then the strict requirements of the policy can be set aside.
- 2) Clarity on the provenance of the design approach and, if this has been successful in assimilating it with the surrounding landscape. The policy reference is SD4, SD5 and SD8.
- 3) The relationship of the proposed dwelling with the topography of the site. It is not clear how the levels between the various wings (of the building) relate to each other and how the building itself relates to the existing topography. This could be important from a landscape perspective, where the potential to introduce cut and fill would have a profound effect on the setting of the building within the landscape.
- 4) The effect of physical works to implement the bridleway diversion on the surrounding landscape. Policy reference SD4, SD5 (landscape and design).
- 5) The future management of the site; to ensure successful assimilation of the new building in its setting, as part of the established landscape.

Panel Questions:

- 1) LE – The new building footprint is nearly twice the footprint of the original cottages. That is a significant change and notwithstanding the brief from the client, do you think this is appropriate in the landscape where the settlement is quite sparse and small in scale?

We have used the local [farmstead] precedent, both as this loose arrangement of agricultural buildings and how the landscape weaves in and out amongst them. By breaking the dwelling down into these smaller pavilions, it reduces the overall impact by making them single storey, clearly giving a larger footprint, but equally giving it a much lower profile on the site.

- 2) LE – The proposed building is attractive, but this is not an agricultural landscape, it is a woodland - forest - heathland landscape. When the Saxons settled here you would get dispersed groupings of dwellings in the woodland, which is quite different from a farmed landscape. So, although it's broken up and it's lower, there is more of it. It is pushed further along the ridge, so it is more prominent from the road. The cottage is set back and discrete. So, from a visual perspective, in terms of a perceptible change, there is a lot more to encounter.

Architecture in the landscape does not have to be a negative. If it is bigger, that can be because there is more of a nice thing. So, therefore, we should not be ashamed that it is bigger, because it is more of a good thing.

- 3) LE – Please could you enlighten us on the proposed future and function of the groundsman's dwelling?

The client has been concerned about issues of security, maintenance and their longer-term health and care requirements. It made sense for there to be an annex that is attached to the house, yet still able to be used separately; for someone performing that role. We felt there was a good fit as we are replacing 2 dwellings; so, in a way, as an annex, it is effectively an additional small dwelling on the site.

- 4) LE - This is a low rise building with a larger surface area and therefore more heat loss. Is the wood stove being used for heating and hot water? ...and, with 10 years to turn climate change around – please can you expand on the sustainability credentials of the building?

There are two key elements: energy use and embodied energy. In terms of energy use, there is a ground source heat pump that takes heat from the pond and uses green electricity to turn into heat and hot water for the house. High levels of insulation and passive strategies, in terms of air management within the building, are being proposed. In terms of embodied carbon, the use of brick and concrete has a high level of embodied carbon, whereas, local stone can be as much as 90% less embodied carbon than concrete and brick. Also, using timber is huge benefit. With both of those elements, we are hoping to build a very sustainable house.

- 5) PF – The courtyard and the location of the entrance from the courtyard: In farmstead courtyards the entrance is quite often offset from the main elevation. Could there be more openings in the internal space to reflect the outside space?

The courtyard was set out to have some abstraction and we are keen to retain this; but also, this sense that you are moving around it. When you enter the building through the front door there is a long wall of timber post windows, so you feel you are still partly in the courtyard. The key thing about the farmstead precedent is that we are not building a farm, we are trying to build a contemporary building that somehow draws on the history of the local site, but the architectural design is ultimately subjective. We are trying to balance beauty, materials, and a sense of place to create something authentic. We are not expecting people to walk in to say this is not right as a farmyard, as it is not a farmyard, but it might trigger an association in their mind that brings in a world of cultural associations that enriches their experience of visiting the building.

- 6) PF – Bedrooms can address the perimeter views as well and living rooms - Is that the case of this design? There is an echo of the 'John Pawson – Tilty Barn'. In a sense – where do you want to see the outside from – your bedroom?

It is a lovely wooded site, and part of the idea of the courtyard is to take people on a journey as they come to the house. It creates this abstract geometric space that you are enveloped in. The landscape is taken away (other than trees seen above the roof and the walls), then you are drawn into the house. The experience of the house is the abstraction of landscape. The passages with the timber posts are the presents a notion of woodland. Then, when you go into the space the landscape is re-presented to you, after this purifying journey.

This project is a new home. We are trying to make a place for human habitation, within this wider landscape.

- 7) KB – How much does the current design evolve from the thinking of the previous pre-application designs? And, what alternative site options were tried out before settling on the preferred one?

We had many discussions with the client - taking out garages and lifts etc. - we were trying to slim it down and make it do the jobs that they require, as naturally as possible, rather than chucking lots of technology into it. That is why we felt it was necessary to have a radical break from the previous scheme and that is what led to this new way of thinking about the site and the house. We looked at lots of different layouts and had lots of discussion with our clients, and this scheme ticked the most boxes for the clients and the site.

The building footprint is smaller than the other options.

- 8) KB – You are using a farmstead ‘barn’ typology. Some of the examples that you have shown are a collection of barns around a more traditional farmhouse. Please could you explain your thought process, and how you ended up with a collection of barns that are perceived to be converted (to a home)?

I would not say that it is a barn that has been converted. It is a house that has characteristics that you would find in local construction. In the local area there is a cluster of barns with no farmhouse, so this is not unusual typology in the local landscape.

If we consider for a movement: is this a farmstead typology? Which way does it diverge or comply with that typology? Ultimately, this is a house that must meet functional needs, and must respond to the landscape in the right way. We would like it to be beautiful, but also natural in the landscape. On one level, you could say it was an abstract composition of forms, however, if you look at it another way, it looks like a barn. I hope it is a work of art; works of art are ambiguous and subtle, and sometimes contradictory; this brings them to life and creates new things to engage with. I hope it has some of these qualities.

- 9) KB – How has the storage of cars, bins and garden paraphernalia been considered in the design?

One of the purposes of the courtyard is to tuck cars away so that they are shielded from the wider landscape. To the north of the gate into the courtyard, the herringbone wall has a double thickness to take bins; one of the outbuildings is being reconstructed to store mowers and garden equipment.

- 10) KW – It would be helpful to have a clear existing and proposed contour plan. The sketches are fine, but you need accurate contours, the contours in the presentation do not join up.

- 11) KW – There is a tension in the building design between the local barn typology and its sculptural inspirations. For me, the scheme appears to be halfway between the two (ideas). The strong V-shape is a sculptural statement. The barn, however, would never be configured in such a sculptural V-shape. I wonder if you should have pursued only one concept: the haphazard barn enclosure, or just, unashamedly, sculptural design?

It is a subjective point and certainly we were hoping that those two things have a creative tension in the way that they interact when the building is built.

- 12) KB – Did you consider a layout where the main building had more of a southerly elevation rather than an elongated arrangement of buildings? So, that there was potentially more solar gain and a different orientation to the other sub-servient building forms?

The site topography is a long narrow plateau running north-south, so anything running east-west would leave you with a building that is stepping up and down the slope – so this was a natural response to the site to have this elongated north-south building.

- 13) KB – So, the main building could not have been orientated perpendicular to the main pavilion?

We felt that this gave the best views to the west towards the heath. We were keen that the space would have this. There is also a sense of direction that the buildings have, and the roof forms reinforce that. Where the roof forms are tilted one way, and another is almost like fish swimming around the site. There is a liveliness there.

Summary: Thank you – the presentation helped clarify things for us. The critical comments are just for clarity and there is a lot of positive applaud here.

The presentation revealed a better understanding and the evolution of the pavilion layout, and the apparent precedent of farm building clusters. There remains, however, a somewhat confusing message about the design concept for the building, which says it is both reflects the historic farm precedent as well as it being an inspirational sculpture in the landscape. We feel that it is better, perhaps, to admit the latter and let it be judged on this.

There is a need for an accurate site survey to assist in judging the fit of buildings to the site topography, both immediately outside the pavilions and in the wider context. We recommend that existing and proposed contours are submitted to support the application. More information on the ground levels and landscape design of the terraces / lawns / garden would also be valuable. You might consider using a model to better illustrate how the finished floor levels of the building and proposed changes in ground levels are assimilated? We would also like to see some further visual analysis, illustrating how the building sits within the landscape, from key views surrounding the site.

Please can you also explain how the pond can be used as an energy source and contribute to local ecology? Also, how surface water drainage and ensuring a constant water level in the pond are achieved?