

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

Workshop Notes

Date of meeting:	19.09.23
Site:	Garden Street Auction Rooms, Garden Street, Lewes, BN7 1TJ SDNP/23/03275/FUL
Panel members (DRP):	Andy Clemas Maria Hawton-Mead Mark Penfold (Chair) David Chambers Stefanie Fischer William Hardie
SDNPA officers in attendance:	Mark Waller-Gutierrez (Design Officer) Tania Hunt (Support Services Officer) Stella New (Case Officer)
Applicant and Project Team:	Alex Bateman, Mohsin Cooper Ltd Dale Elliott, Landivar Architects Olivia Emery, Landivar Architects
Observers:	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.

Summary

The Chair thanked the applicants for bringing the proposal back to the Design Review Panel (DRP). This is the third time that the site has come to the DRP, and the scheme has now become a planning application and therefore there are technical issues relating to this. The Chair reiterated that as from the very beginning of this proposal being presented to the DRP the panel consistently felt that the site was overdeveloped. This overdevelopment is presenting the problems that the applicant team are trying to deal with. There are some technical issues regarding the landscaping to the south, including a strip of land that is outside the applicant's ownership. There are also constraints on land around the River Winterbourne that the team are unable to do anything with.

The key views (particularly from the west towards the Downs) with the bulk of the building on the site, is a real problem. The panel approved of how the team had dealt with the walls, particularly at the lower level. However, the bulk of the building indicates that there's too much on the site, which is where the issue lies. There may be some opportunities to mediate this by dealing with the materiality and verticality. A townhouse typology could be incorporated, where it steps up the street giving a vertical emphasis and creating greater granularity. There was an issue with the fenestration arrangement on the building's corner, with offset windows. Typical corner building precedents in Lewes either have strictly aligned windows with a hierarchy in terms of window height with successive storeys, or you have a blank corner with no windows. The Chair emphasised that these local precedents can be used to inspire a locally characteristics resolution of how this elevation should be designed.

Another discussion centred around the sequence of the views. Moving back from the site the development becomes much more of a big grey mass. It is not until you get closer that you can appreciate the detailing, which is otherwise visually ineffective from a greater distance. The character of views of Lewes in the context of the site are of a series of colours (of a certain palette, including red clays) and plains (with articulated roofs and pitches). The resulting filigree and colour palette needs to be reflected in the proposals to better integrate what is currently a large building and an uncharacteristically grey mass. Within the documents provided with the presentation there were some lovely colour swatches, but the panel failed to see any of those colours coming through into the building forming the background landscape. Therefore, it was felt that there could be some mitigation to the bulk of the building through more appropriate detailing, some extra verticality: reconsidered parapets and their relative heights and/or transparency.

The fundamental issue is that this is a big block on quite a restricted site. The panel understand that the brief is for a certain number of units. Unfortunately, this has resulted in a site that is overdeveloped with restricted architecture. The Panel appreciated that the applicant team has tried very hard, and the Chair personally felt that the timber solution was really quite appropriate because it had that lightness. However, this has been lost and it has become much more Castle-like in its form. There are also some technical issues in planning terms that would need to take away from some of the work due to the amount of landscaping that would need to be done. There were also concerns from the panel regarding the long-term feasibility of the proposed landscaping on the roof terraces and how well people would maintain these areas, which is concerning as the images rely very heavily on abundant planting, including roof trees, to help soften the visual impact of the proposed building.

The final point was regarding sustainability and how this needs to be inherent in the design process at the start. It was felt that there could be some problems with this, particularly with daylight in the north facing and overheating in the south facing elevations. Also, considering a 1 in 100-year storm event and how to remove water off of this site after heavy rain. In conclusion, although the Chair praised the applicant team for all their hard work, the final point and general view from all panel members was that the site was overdeveloped.

Main Presentation Questions/ Comments and Answers

Entrance to site – The entrance and the existing wall and the positioning of the entrance, which appears to be wider than the existing road?

The entrance is 4.6m including 1.4m for pedestrians. Therefore, this will be a shared entrance. The width is to allow for passing cars as this will be 2 way and there needs to be some tolerance due to the incline.

Why is the existing access not being used and wall being kept?

Floorspace – it does make sense to keep the existing access, but the resulting area that is left does not enable the team to hit the brief. There was also an issue with road safety, due to congestion. It was also felt that the new approach opens up a new view. The bricks from the wall would be reused on the site.

Entrance to the building – the entrance to a building is often communicated via the architecture but currently this is not very legible. How would you make people aware of where the entrance is?

Will add signage. The plinth curves around and leads you in. We have also met with David Smith (flint specialist) , who did The Depot, and this early engagement has been really helpful.

Have you gone far enough with playing with the materials, textures and orientation to properly define the entrance?

Colour– the greyness of the colours (knapped flint plinth supported, but also with grey bricks above) and how this works, with reference to the curves – which are often done with mathematical tiles in Lewes. The material/colour analysis of the Lewes context was good. It would be good to introduce some of the colours from this research..

The grey is a little dark and the upper level would benefit from being lighter.

Window on the corner – could you explain the disposition of the windows and their proportions in relation to picking up on local character?

Lewes is higgledy piggledy precedent and is quite playful. This is a nod to this and an attempt to not be regimental and symmetrical. This is an attempt to be playful.

Façade/ Mass- the façade is quite bland and there was talk previously about breaking up the façade with the strata. Too much grey creates a bigger looking building. It is quite massive, rather bulky on the corner and overall, quite castle-like. The view from the station demonstrates the visual impact of the large, grey mass and it detracts from the more typical intricacy of the townscape beyond.. The visuals provided are relying on a lot of greenery to offset the mass. The parapets make the building look even bigger and there are no equivalents of pitched roofs and chimneys which helped provided greater articulation. Is there an opportunity to layer vertically with a change of materiality and colour? If you address the layering, then this may change window positions and proportions but will work its way around. The stepping back and the detail will break up the mass along with colouring and planting.

There are a lot of hues in the existing roofscape – so this would be something to look at and reference.

Sustainability – Do you need solar shading on the south facing fenestration to stop overheating? This might introduce a visual device that might make it look more attractive. Did you go through a process of investigating if you could have boreholes for a ground-source heat pump, rather than air source? A communal system would be more efficient. Also, individual air-source heat pumps should be positioned on an outside wall and away from any area where noise would be a problem. It is fundamental to get this analysed early on along with solar and heating analysis. There also needs to be more work done on setting energy targets early on and at least 2 units need to be passive house certified (SDNPA policy requirement). N.B. It was checked by a Panel Member regarding

the technical data for the heat pump NIBE S73 that was suggested. This data suggested 'install with its back to an outside wall ideally in a room where noise does not matter'.

It will be individual air-source pumps as ground-source was felt problematic.

Parapets – Do the parapets on the south side need to be solid? Could they be more transparent, with a filigree edge of colour and material so that it is more broken up? The brick work could also have e.g. header brick gaps in the bond..

Workshops – Does the underground have any natural lighting or ventilation? Could the workshops have the view out over the landscape as opposed to the carpark, having it?

Only the entrance to the carpark itself. I am sure this could be shuffled around.

Landscape – How does the pond relate to the Winterbourne, does the pond sit over the culvert and could it be opened up?

It's a little further to the north. It was decided that it is best to leave the culvert covered as this could create a flood risk.

How will the planting be maintained?

Some would be contracted out and others would be the resident's responsibility.

Is there a green roof under the PV panels and will they be used for solar shading?

Yes. This was discussed but there are 44 panels on the 3 roofs, and we were careful to keep some rationality with the scheme.

Accessibility – How many flats are not accessible? This is important as it is in the ideal position to the town and the railway station for people with accessibility issues.

There are 4 flats that are only accessible via the stairs.

Could these flat be made accessible?

Yes, through the garden or with another lift.

Build – Timber frame?

Yes

CLT?

Not sure, probably using modular panels. Brickwork to support itself – 3 brick thick up to 1 brick at the top.