

## SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

### Session Notes

Date of meeting:	18.09.2024
Site:	Gaia Cottage, Diding SDNP/24/03131/PRE
Panel members (DRP):	Mark Penfold (Chair) Paul Phasey William Hardie Maria Hawton-Mead Anrew Smith Richard Eastham
SDNPA officers in attendance:	Kelly Porter (Case Officer) Roselle Goacher (Design Officer) Mark Waller-Gutierrez (Design Officer) Ashia Ciesielczuk (Senior Support Services Officer)
Applicant and Project Team:	Harry Groucott (MH Architects) Maria Wright (MH Architects) Alice Cooper (Terra Firma) Charles Rolls (Client)
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

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The Design Review Panel appreciated the applicant team presenting the application to them and the work that has gone into the application so far.

1. It is clearly a beautiful site and we think the landscape analysis and the way you have analysed the macro landscape is very good which gives a lot of pointers to the project.
2. More analysis of the micro landscape (i.e. gardens) would be welcome because this should inform the form of the building. The applicant has alluded to things like the tree you would see looking out to from the bedroom.
3. The building form needs to respond to the external space uses. That needs to come out in your analysis and the testing of the building form relates to the uses in the external spaces (e.g. where do the children play football, where are the intimate spaces around the building etc.).

At the moment there is a northern patio, but does that really work as a space? Should it be incorporated in another way?

4. We are concerned about the energy aspects because of the building's shape and form and the large areas of glazing (heat loss). With the large amount of south-facing glazing there is a real risk of overheating, which should be modelled and avoided. Great to hear you are looking to put ground source heat pump into the field.
5. The barn analogy is not the best in this case because the building and the site does not relate to a farmyard or anything like that. It is an individual building within a very particular and very enclosed and rather beautiful little space and actually how the building responds to that is the thing that will make it successful. We think you need to think that through and test different forms, where the spaces outside relate to the inside.
6. Please put the building plans into the site, to show the context and to demonstrate that the plans respond to what happens in the site. It is those glimpsed views through windows and doors as you walk through the property which happens at the moment.
7. Test the design, landscape, micro landscape, macro landscape, surroundings and energy. We understand the desire not to have a too simple a building form because articulation adds interest, although this can be achieved with external elements around a simple form.
8. Capturing the right spirit of the place and acknowledging its Sylvan nature should inform the design.
9. We recommend you look at your colour palettes again. It would be good to do a colour palette of just the garden and the views looking out of the garden. These will inform a very special building that is particular to the site.
10. Bring the narrative of the stewardship of the land into the document because ecosystem services and stewardship are going to be part of what is required going forward. It would be helpful to understand the plans for stewardship of the wider estate, but this site is one of the stewarded pieces that is a little jewel.

## Discussion

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Did you in terms of looking at the site think that there was a little 'hidden gem' of a space with a building that currently sat very well within its landscape? How have you responded to the character of that space?

*Yes, I think the proposed house disappears into site. The scale of it and its inoffensiveness is probable contextually is its best feature. I do not think it takes advantage of the site or any views, the house itself is completely closed off from a lot of the northern views and it doesn't really take advantage at all of any of the southern views. It is very much a localised relationship to the garden. I think the desire to keep the scale and mass of the building down is very important and for it to still appear modest in views where it is visible. That is something the client and we were very keen to maintain. The property currently does not make the best of the site or the best of the context.*

One of the characteristics is that the views are almost glimpsed because of the character of the site. The danger is in opening up all the views, so they become very open, rather than maintaining that sort of enclosure. The landscape that the building sits within and the smaller spaces within the plot give it a unique character that differs from the more traditional houses further up the lane or the big manor house. They are buildings that sit assertively within a plot, but this one sits within the landscape. The response to that landscape and the subtle views in and out of the landscape we think need to be demonstrated and need to drive the design.

*You've got the gap on the northern boundary which we are not seeking to change, so I think we are always going to get a sort of channelled view, and to the south it is more expansive. To create a dwelling which offers greater opportunity to enjoy the view from within the site but not necessarily to be apparent that its being enjoyed from outside the site. It is very much private space and private view from that dwelling. I think the lower-level component is very much about that connection with and intimate views of that immediate garden context than necessarily about the longer range views.*

Is it necessary to have all that glass? Can one not set up more focused or glimpsed views view from windows?

*The key for us was to try and link the lower level more with the intimate garden and have more picture window views at higher levels.*

The retention of the existing intimate character of the private garden needs retaining. Overlays of the existing building and proposed schemes would be very useful to see.

*Agreed*

It was mentioned the client wants the form of the building to achieve something discreet, modest, simple and hopefully sustainable. The panel's view is that this design is quite a complex form and has a lot of external surface area for heat loss. I wondered if you had thought about designing a simpler shape for the house? The lower roof has an exposed roof part and there is a lot of dormers, a lot of in and out. The most sustainable shape is a rectangle and anything beyond that makes it more difficult to achieve good energy efficiency, e.g. for passive house standards. If Also, if it were truly referencing a barn it would need to be a very simple shape.

*It is acknowledged that passive house principles favour the simple built form is best, but this simplicity can work against the other design brief drivers that we have from the client, including maximising views That's where the L shape form comes from. The upper levels are very simple 1 ½ storey with a pitched roof. It will be the lower level where we are dropping down and pulling out where we are trying to take advantage of the topography. The lower level delivers the quality family space of a certain size and the client is not necessarily wanting to replicate that full area at ground floor level.*

Have you put this design through any energy software to see where it does perform in terms of what your targets are? This will give you a very good idea of where things may overheat etc.

*Not yet no.*

If we are standing by the well in the garden how far down will the new floor level be? Will it be where the well is or are you digging down deeper? It is really difficult to see if you are excavating from that level going further down or whether that will be where the floor is.

*Slightly lower than the well head but higher than the water level.*

We question whether the ratio is right in informing the building design between the relationship of the intimate private garden spaces and maximising the longer views from the higher level. How has the client's view informed this in terms of the scale of the house, the rooms they require and how they want to use it? Also, how many square meters is it?

*It's a 4 bedroom house and a mix of the usual kitchen, family rooms. The client has a large family and wanted to take the opportunity to create a family space at that lower level with the intimacy of the garden. The property is roughly 300 m<sup>2</sup>.*

In terms of dark night skies, it is in a core zone, a key and very sensitive landscape. You mentioned that other elevations of barns that already have these frontages and cause light pollution, but previous schemes may well pre-date the South Downs Local Plan. Views from high receptors back to the site, which is currently hidden, secretive and private are needed.

Testing that against the long-range views and where the gable end is pointing is needed. We can see there are some quick wire frame exercises but it is that journey from what it is now to what it might be that needs testing.

*Photos were taken along the whole ridge line to see how the impact would be from people walking along the South Downs.*

We recommend that the applicant tests more designs of the house. This design has been almost presented as a final piece. There is testing an outcome and testing the process, and we think a sensitive site like this needs to see more options, with varying plans and where the dwelling sits on the site. Just in simple forms to understand how the building relates to the site, where you can see it from, what is its impact on those longer views, can it be seen above the tree line? Some of that has been done already. The complexity of the form is a concern with a lot of recesses and changes in geometry, but there is something in a lot of the very simple forms of buildings that are in that area that could provide some cues to what you are doing here. Test simpler forms but equally there is the opportunity here to really go for it with something that is architecturally beautiful and something that is really embedded in the site. You want to get the new building to feel 'right' for the site, like the existing building does. Bigger and grander perhaps, but still feels right.

*Wanted to push in detail for the panel as thought that is the best way to get feedback.*

About the consented second access and where the requirement for that came from? It looks to me that the configuration of the building is working off that second access. Could it not work off the existing access? It is very tight going past the neighbouring property and the sensitivity of that will necessarily change during the development of the second access. What does this bring that the other access doesn't allow?

*We were originally looking at how can we approach this building in a different way because the southern access is very tight and the highways regulations were making that very difficult. It would have meant that we would have had to wipe out a lot of the sunken lane to actually get the access in. There are visibility issues with that access because of the oblique angle and the blind bend. Coming in from the northern boundary was to visually intrusive even though it had its merits. We took a lot of time to try and ensure we could get the access into the bare minimum space requirements, putting in extra planting and things to help screen and to be aware of what we were doing to that lane. It was a very difficult design issue that we spent a lot of time exploring options on.*

The second access is described as the means of arrival and from that point the sequence and the access is almost determining or influencing the environmental layout. One could arrive via the existing access and depart via the consented access. It's just a different approach to explore. The existing access is lower therefore the vehicles are very hidden from view, whereas you will have to be careful with the consented drive as the vehicles (visually prominent, shiny cars) will sit at one of the highest points. Therefore, how vehicles are encompassed within the landscape needs to be carefully considered.

*The top paddock is very screened, it is almost invisible from outside the site.*

Has a survey been done to see whether you could do a bore hole for ground source heat pump?  
*Client owns field to North of site so we might look at shallow ground source in there. We want net zero plus, and that is on all levels it terms of ecology, materiality, energy use, water etc.*

Although non reflective solar panels have been mentioned, it is important that they are well integrated into the roof.

*Agreed*