



FRAME PROJECTS

Watford Place Shaping Panel

Report of Chair's Review Meeting: Wellstones Car Park

Tuesday 11 October 2022

Zoom video conference

Panel

Peter Bishop (Chair)
Irfan Alam

Attendees

Paul Baxter	Watford Borough Council
Sian Finney-MacDonald	Watford Borough Council
Chris Osgathorp	Watford Borough Council
Alice Reade	Watford Borough Council
Estelle Pengelly	Watford Borough Council
Kate Pickard	Watford Borough Council
Reema Kaur	Frame Projects
Kate Trant	Frame Projects

Apologies / report copied to

Louise Barrett	Watford Borough Council
Andrew Clarke	Watford Borough Council
Ben Martin	Watford Borough Council
Tom Bolton	Frame Projects

1. Project name and site address

Wellstones Car Park, Watford WD18 0LG

2. Presenting team

Steve Akeju	Telereal Securitised
Tim Tolcher	CJCT Architects
Gillian Cooper	Newsteer Real Estate Advisers
Jessica Wilson	Newsteer Real Estate Advisers

3. Planning authority briefing

The 0.25-hectare site contains surface car parking formerly associated with the adjacent Telephone Exchange building. To the north-east is Wellstones, a former service road with three recently constructed or approved residential developments at Nos. 46–50, 52A–56 and 60 High Street. The project proposes to redevelop the underused Exchange Road site, close to Watford town centre. The car park that occupies the site creates a void in the existing urban grain.

The proposed scheme now provides 89 new homes, as well as 95 sqm of ground floor commercial space, and public realm improvements. Active frontages are provided on the north, east and west façades through a mix of commercial and residential uses to improve the aspect towards the site and the existing streetscape.

The applicant has made changes to the scheme following the Place Shaping Panel that took place on 12 April 2022. These include:

- Reduction in height to a maximum of eight storeys (i.e. within the Base Build Height for development in this location).
- Reduction in footprint to move the building away from site boundaries.
- Changes to ground floor uses, particularly along Exchange Road, to include commercial units and bike storage.
- Re-arrangement of the internal layout.
- Refinement of elevations, including removal of set-back top floor of Block A.
- Wider public footpath to the north of the building.
- Improved daylight and sunlight across the scheme.
- Quality of internal layouts and increase in dual aspect units.

Officers asked for the panel's views in particular on:

- Whether the proposal addresses previous comments.
- Whether its height, massing and design are appropriate for the location.
- Its effect on the setting of nearby locally and nationally listed buildings.
- Whether the proposed ground floor uses will provide activity and legibility.
- The quality and arrangement of the public realm.
- The quality of residential accommodation, including internal spaces, proportion of dual-aspect units, outdoor space and servicing arrangements.
- The approach to sustainability.



4. Place Shaping Panel's views

Summary

The panel welcomes the updated proposals, and the progress made since the previous review in April 2022. The changes are positive and to be commended. The panel feels that the adjustments made to the scheme's massing are very effective, and that the development now sits comfortably in its context, and responds well to Wellstones, Exchange Road and the Holy Rood Catholic Church to the south of the site. The panel feels that the scheme has the potential to create a high-quality medium-rise development, and to provide a good example of high-density design at a human scale. The panel appreciates the way that the changes to the scheme's overall footprint have led to the development of a successful courtyard typology, creating a more generous public realm. The adoption of a revised residential typology, the introduction of deck access and the increase in dual aspect residential units are also welcomed by the panel. The work to improve the ground floor, including reducing the provision of residential units at that level, is an equally positive change. The panel is pleased to see the focus on landscaping and the public realm, internal courtyards and roof gardens. The panel highlights the importance of ensuring that the quality of the public realm and landscaping evident in the proposal is retained in the built scheme, and that the architecture is delivered with rigour and detail. The panel also comments on the detailing of metal railings, and notes the importance of ensuring privacy in bedrooms overlooking decks. These points are expanded below.

Height and massing

- The panel welcomes the reduction in the height of the proposed buildings to a maximum of eight storeys, and the reduction in the number of residential units from 135 to 89.
- The panel considers the variation in the height and massing, façade treatments and materiality across the blocks successful, as well as the scheme's response to its surrounding context.
- The panel recognises that the scheme's amenity spaces, public realm and circulation all significantly benefit from the decision to bring the development back from the site's 'red line' ownership boundary.

Architecture

- The panel recommends further exploration of the type of railings to be specified for the deck areas, to ensure that they meet guidelines relating to the use of an open or solid design.
- The panel also suggests further thinking about how appropriate privacy levels can be achieved for bedrooms with windows overlooking access decks.



- The panel stresses to both the applicant and to Watford Borough Council officers the importance of ensuring that the quality proposed throughout the development is not compromised by value engineering, and designs are delivered to the high standards presented.

Ground floor level

- At ground floor level, the panel suggests revisiting the balance between openness and privacy along the secondary route to the north-west of the scheme and along Wellstones. Lit windows at ground floor level will create a more pleasant route at night.
- The panel enjoys the rich palette of materials proposed across the scheme, feeling that this contributes to the potential success of the development. It will be vital to ensure that the quality and detail of the materials is retained.
- The panel enjoys the articulation of the pitched roofs on Exchange Road at the south-west corner of the site, feeling that this treatment is now an appropriately contextual approach.
- The panel questions the use of the cladding in the rear elevation of Block D, at the top. It suggests that its proportions overemphasise the top of the building and should be revisited.
- The panel questions whether the horizontal emphasis of the ground floor level, for example along Exchange Road, is appropriate. It feels that this approach creates an impression of a horizontal 'wafer' with a building above, and suggests further consideration of the way the buildings meet the ground.

Landscape

- The panel welcomes the proposed tree planting as setting a positive precedent for the longer term. This is particularly the case on Exchange Road, where trees will encourage future consideration of whether the quality of the public realm can be improved and pedestrians given greater priority.

Pedestrian routes

- At the south-eastern corner of the site, the panel is concerned that there is a narrow alleyway could be created between the building and the site's ownership boundary 'red line'. It suggests avoiding the introduction of a redundant space.

Next steps

The panel is confident that the issues outlined above can be addressed by the project team in consultation with Watford Borough Council officers and, on this basis, is happy to support the scheme.

