

Appendix 2 – Watford Place Shaping Panel’s Report

CONFIDENTIAL



Watford Place Shaping Panel

Report of Chair’s Review Meeting: Cassiobury House

Tuesday 29 September 2020
via video conference

Panel

Peter Bishop (chair)
Linda Thiel

Attendees

Ben Martin	Watford Borough Council
Andrew Clarke	Watford Borough Council
Paul Baxter	Watford Borough Council
Sian Finney-MacDonald	Watford Borough Council
Louise Holman	Watford Borough Council
Semeta Bloomfield	Watford Borough Council
Tracy Lynch	Watford Borough Council
Tom Bolton	Frame Projects
James McCormack	Frame Projects
Penny Nakan	Frame Projects

Apologies / copied to

Deborah Denner	Frame Projects
----------------	----------------

Confidentiality

This is a pre-application review, and therefore confidential. As a public organisation Watford Borough Council is subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOI), and in the case of an FOI request may be obliged to release project information submitted for review.

Report of Chair’s Review Meeting
29 September 2020
WPSP07_Cassiobury House

CONFIDENTIAL

1. Project name and site address

Cassiobury House, 11-19 Station Road, Watford, WD17 1AP

2. Presenting team

Nicola Buckley	Corstorphine and Wright Architects
Paul Turner	Corstorphine and Wright Architects
Nick Bishop	Corstorphine and Wright Architects
Amy Jones	Tellon Capital
James Burchell	Tellon Capital

3. Planning authority briefing

The site is located on Station Road in Watford and contains a five-storey office building which dates from the 1970s. The proposals are for redevelopment of the site to create a mixed-use scheme comprising replacement offices and hotel in two linked buildings, between eight and thirteen stories in height, over a basement car park. The proposal includes car parking and refuse storage to the rear at ground level.

The site is within the Special Policy Area for the Town Centre (SPA1 of Watford Local Plan Part 1 – Core Strategy) which seeks a balanced provision of town centre facilities and infrastructure throughout the town centre. It is also within a designated Employment Area (Area E7a of Watford District Plan 2000). The provision of taller buildings in Watford is subject to Supplementary Planning Document ‘Skyline – Watford’s Approach to Taller Buildings SPD 2016’. The site is not within a conservation area.

The applicant has previously taken this proposal to Watford Borough Council’s Major Applications Review Forum in July 2018. The uses and height are considered acceptable in principle. Planning officers asked for the panel’s views, in particular, on:

- the impact on neighbouring residential dwellings on Canterbury Road with focus on the tall blank façades.
- massing and scale.
- landscaping and removal of existing trees.
- positioning of refuse servicing along the rear of houses on Canterbury Road.
- positioning of the loading bay on Westland Road.



CONFIDENTIAL

4. Place Shaping Review Group's views

Summary

The panel supports the overall approach to the development, but suggests that a number of adjustments are needed to ensure it meets the level of design quality required. The panel suggests adjustments to the massing on the west side to improve the relationship between elements. Although the Station Road elevation is successful, the blank elevations to the rear require more articulation and fenestration to add liveliness and improve the outlook from houses on Canterbury Road. The active street frontage on Station Road is welcomed, and options for restaurant seating to spill out to the street should be considered. The panel encourages as much tree planting as possible, and asks that opportunities are explored to create green space in the rear courtyard, including freeing space by swapping the ground level car parking with the basement cycle parking, and reducing the number of car parking spaces. Improvements should be made to uses and landscaping in the rear courtyard to create a more beneficial space and improve the relationship with the existing houses on Canterbury Road, including moving refuse storage further from the rear site boundary. These comments are expanded below.

Height and massing

- The panel welcomes, in principle, the demolition of Cassiobury House and its replacement with a larger, higher density scheme.
- It considers proposed massing and heights to be acceptable. However, the panel suggests the massing to the west side facing Station Road should be adjusted to soften the abrupt stepping between blocks. If the blocks drop down in smaller increments, this will also create space that could be used to install green roofs.

Rear elevations

- The blank façades on the south side of the development, especially at the rear of the hotel block, appear harsh and too austere. The panel asks that a greater level of articulation and fenestration is introduced to enliven rear elevations and improve the outlook for the houses on Canterbury Road, and the appearance of the building in longer views.
- Whilst it understands potential privacy and overlooking issues to the rear of the site, the panel encourages the team to discuss with the planning authority how windows could be also be added to southern elevations to help create more lively elevations.

Street frontage

- The panel appreciates the introduction of active street frontage onto Station Road. It suggests that the nature of this activity should be explored in more detail to ensure it influences the street environment. For example, restaurant



CONFIDENTIAL

seating could extend onto the street to make the most of the opportunity to generate an active public realm.

Rear courtyard

- The panel welcomes the decision to lower the current basement level to create level ground floor access from Station Road, which also enables an important buffer along the south boundary to the houses on Canterbury Road.
- The panel thinks that the rear courtyard presents an opportunity for a green space such as a pocket park that would provide much greater benefit than a car park. This would allow more trees to be planted on the site, and would create a more sympathetic boundary with existing housing.
- The panel encourages the team to explore a reconfiguration of the courtyard to provide generous garden and outdoor seating space for the hotel, or a breakout space for the offices, instead of car parking.
- The panel considers the location of the refuse storage area at the rear to be both too far from the building for convenience, and too close to neighbours on Canterbury Road. It suggests this layout is reconfigured.

Cycling and parking

- The panel suggests that the number of cycle parking spaces may need to be increased to ensure sufficient provision. It also asks whether the basement cycle store could be moved to ground level, replacing some parking space. This would provide a more convenient and attractive location for cyclists to arrive and park. A cycle hub at ground level would also help to activate the rear courtyard.
- Conversely, the panel thinks the quantum of car parking provision is too high, and the number of spaces should be reduced. It asks the team to open a discussion with operators about removing all car parking spaces from the rear ground level.

Landscaping

- The panel reluctantly agrees that removing the existing trees on Westland Road will prove necessary, but encourages the team to develop compensatory tree planting proposal further, including additional mature trees on Station Road if possible, to achieve a net gain in canopy coverage.

Next steps

The panel considers that its comments can be addressed by the design team in discussion with Watford Borough Council officers, prior to the submission of a planning application.

