



Watford Place Shaping Review Panel

Report of Formal Review Meeting: Watford General Hospital

Tuesday 9 February 2021
Zoom Video Conference

Panel

Peter Bishop (chair)
Maurizio Biadene
Joanne Cave
Andrew Thornhill
Bevan Jones

Attendees

Paul Baxter	Watford Borough Council
Sian Finney-MacDonald	Watford Borough Council
Ben Martin	Watford Borough Council
Louise Holman	Watford Borough Council
Alice Reade	Watford Borough Council
Ellen Higginson	Watford Borough Council
Phil Dodshon	Watford Borough Council
Linda Bishop	Watford Borough Council
Tom Bolton	Frame Projects
Miranda Kimball	Frame Projects
Penny Nakan	Frame Projects

Apologies / report copied to

Andrew Clarke Watford Borough Council

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.

CONFIDENTIAL

1. Project name and site address

Watford General Hospital Redevelopment, Watford General Hospital, Vicarage Road, Watford, WD18 0HB

2. Presenting team

Adrian Price	BDP Architecture
Tom Rudd	BDP Architecture
Chris Stanton	BDP Architecture
Nick Pigula	BDP Sustainability
Duane Passman	West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust
Tim Duggleby	West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust
Justin Liebenberg	Royal Free London NHS Foundation Trust

3. Planning authority briefing

The development application site relates to a roughly triangular shaped parcel of land (circa 22,500 sqm) to the south of the existing hospital, and with access from the recently built road of Thomas Sawyer Way to the south and west. The site is allocated in the Watford Local Plan Core Strategy 2006-31 as part of the Special Policy Area 3 (SPA3) Health Campus (now known as Riverwell), for delivery of a major mixed-use regeneration to include an improved major acute hospital. The existing hospital campus, located to the north of the site, consists of hospital buildings in poor operational condition, with poor public realm quality.

The application site, to the south of the existing hospital, currently contains surface parking which will be relocated into a new multi-storey car park east of the site. The areas south and further east of the site have approved residential schemes, with planned further phases of residential, school and mixed uses. The site has significant ground level changes, with 15m difference from Vicarage Road in the north, down to the Colne River to the south of the site. This includes a significant slope on the east side of the site and adjacent to the western elevation of the multi-storey car park.

It is proposed that, following building of the new hospital on the southern site, the existing hospital land to the north would undergo further phases of development. Officers recognise the hospital is a significant infrastructure project for the town and the wider region and offers substantial enhancement opportunities. The large scale of the envisaged development is justified by the civic nature of the building. However, it is expected that the scheme should deliver high quality design.

This scheme was brought for review at illustrative masterplan stage. Officers asked for panel comments in particular on:

- massing and appearance;
- integration to the wider regeneration area;
- ground floor user experience;
- improvements to public realm including landscaping;
- energy and sustainability enhancements across the scheme.



CONFIDENTIAL

4. Design Review Panel's views

Summary

The panel commends the design team for the progress made to date on masterplanning a challenging site, but suggests a more innovative design approach could provide greater benefits. The proposals have a strong design logic, and both buildings and the wider masterplan are carefully considered. The panel is pleased that the surrounding urban quarter has been considered as part of the overall design. In particular, it sees the role of the proposed green spine as a strong proposition, both as a place for healing and as a space for the wider community to come together. However, the panel identifies some conventionality about the proposals which, although very competent, do not break new ground in hospital or care provision. This is a missed opportunity, and a more innovative design approach is commended to the team. In particular, the panel encourages the design team to go further by investigating how indoor spaces and landscape can be designed to work together to create a holistic, healing environment. The team's overall approach to design and to sustainability is progressing well, but the panel encourages Watford officers to work with the applicant to lock in key elements of the parameter plan and the illustrative masterplan at planning. This will be important to ensure that the vision and ambition for this health campus can become a reality once the hospital buildings have been delivered. These comments are expanded below.

Design code

- The panel agrees that an outline planning application and the development of design codes is the right way forward for this scheme. To ensure the new hospital integrates with and enhances the wider area, the outline application should include a number of essential elements: the location of development plots, building footprints and podiums, height parameters, active frontages, green infrastructure and scale of public spaces, and clarity about spaces for pedestrians and cyclists.

Massing

- The panel acknowledges the need for the massing and block configuration of the scheme to be dictated by clinical needs and efficiency. However, it considers that the Cube Towers option to be more successful from a townscape perspective than the Finger Towers option, as it breaks down massing and generates better public spaces.
- With the new hospital likely to consolidate services into a taller building, as design progresses, the panel encourages wind testing to ensure mitigation and comfort is considered for the hospital's immediate spaces, as well as across the wider masterplan.
- The panel notes the challenge of designing a building with an elevation as long as 78m. It suggests that greater detail should be agreed for this frontage



CONFIDENTIAL

at outline planning stage to ensure the building sits comfortably at ground level.

- Once a massing form is finalised, the panel expects the design team to conduct sunlight and day light analysis for the wider urban quarter.

Healing environments

- The panel encourages the design team to interrogate the relationship between indoor and outdoor spaces, and between the buildings and the landscaping at ground level, to identify innovation that can help to ensure the new hospital supports care and healing as a whole.
- The aim should be to create a healing environment that balances privacy and views, and integrates green spaces with the hospital buildings. It is important that, with the site's challenging topography, both patients and visitors have a positive experience at ground floor both inside and outside the buildings.
- Alongside the delivery of a supportive public realm at ground level, the panel would also like to see green spaces included on the upper levels of the building to help with patient recovery; although it also recognises the challenge of accommodating space alongside necessary plant infrastructure.
- The panel supports the concept of a green spine (Hospital Street) linking Thomas Sawyer Way in the south to Vicarage Road to the north. It recognises the critical role this will play as a shared public realm asset, enabling the wider community to come together and allowing the hospital community, including patients and workers, to spend time outside. The panel encourages the design team to explore further how the hospital and its environs can work together to support healing. This should include investigating whether the public realm could link across Thomas Sawyer Way, to the scenic Colne Valley to the south.
- The panel supports the plan to include an internal access core in the design code for the site, to help manage the 12m level change. This core could also help to free up space in the public realm and release more space across the green spine.

Sustainability

- The panel commends the design team for the work it has completed to date on the scheme's environmental performance but notes the need to revisit the design once the forthcoming NHS Net Zero guidance is released.
- The panel is pleased to see that glazing has been considered at this early stage in the design process. However, it notes the need to ensure the south-west facing finger form is protected from potential overheating, as design progresses.



CONFIDENTIAL

- The panel applauds the design team's approach to using landscape design to deal with issues of water management and drainage. It suggests that the team should consider further how the sustainable drainage strategy can work as widely as possible across the masterplan, including with Thomas Sawyer Way to absorb water and prevent run-off in the River Colne.
- The panel encourages the applicant to develop a sustainable travel plan for the site, addressing ways in which car use and the need for parking can reduce over the coming decades.
- If carbon off-setting is to form part of the net zero carbon strategy, it should be planned early in the process rather than left until later.

Next Steps

- The panel would welcome the opportunity to review the scheme again, once a massing configuration has been confirmed and design detail has progressed.

