



**Watford Place Shaping Review Panel**

**Report of Small Sites Review Meeting: 46 – 50 High Street**

Tuesday 18 August 2020  
via video conference

**Panel**

Peter Bishop (chair)  
Irfan Alam  
Anna Bardos

**Attendees**

Paul Baxter	Watford Borough Council
Sian Finney-MacDonald	Watford Borough Council
Ben Martin	Watford Borough Council
Alice Reade	Watford Borough Council
Adrian Harvey	Frame Projects
Penny Nakan	Frame Projects

**Observers**

Sharon Hayes	Watford Borough Council
Sean Peschiera	Watford Borough Council
Helen Harris	Watford Borough Council

**Apologies / report copied to**

Tom Bolton	Frame Projects
Louise Holman	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

46 and 48-50 High Street, Watford, WD17 2BS

## 2. Presenting team

Jim Richards	Nissen Richards Studio
Andrea Hickey	Nissen Richards Studio
David Brown	Newsteer
Jessica Wilson	Newsteer
Daniel Berko	46 and 48-50 High Street Watford 2017 Limited
Laurence Beck	46 and 48-50 High Street Watford 2017 Limited

## 3. Planning authority briefing

The site is located within Watford town centre. The frontage to the High Street consists of two locally listed buildings, which form part of a wider group of listed and locally listed buildings that contribute significant group value to the character of this part of the High Street. The site backs onto Wellstones to the rear, which is a public highway but operates principally as a rear service road to High Street properties.

Adjoining the site to the south-east is a recently completed mixed-use development including two commercial units fronting the High Street and 56 flats (Nos. 52A-56, High Street). The scale of the building is four storeys on the High Street and seven storeys on Wellstones. A similar scale of development has also recently been approved at No. 60, High Street adjoining Nos. 52A-56. To the west of Wellstones is the Telephone Exchange site, which consists of a large exchange building and extensive surface-level car parking.

Officers would particularly welcome the panel's comments on the impact of the proposal on the adjoining heritage assets, as well as its assessment of whether the quality of the replacement building justifies the loss of the locally listed buildings on the site. Further, its views are sought on the scale, footprint, height and elevational treatment of the 11-storey element to the rear, as well as the quality of residential accommodation and the impact of the scheme on its neighbours.



# CONFIDENTIAL

## 4. Panel's views

### *Summary*

The panel considers that, while the proposals have the potential to enhance the High Street frontage, significant changes are needed if the element facing onto Wellstones is to be acceptable. While it considers that the quality of the proposed design for the building fronting onto the High Street could justify the removal of the existing, locally listed buildings, subject to design refinement and quality of detailing, the design approach requires further justification through a context study. In contrast, the rear element of the building is too tall for its setting, setting a concerning precedent for future development in this part of Watford and undermining the emerging frontage on Wellstones. A considerable amount of work is required if the scheme is to provide an effective and appropriate response to its setting. The panel believes this and other problems stem from an excessive volume of development required for the site. In particular, the long blank façades to the side of the block form an awkward presence, neither a tower nor part of a sequence of buildings. The panel raises concerns over the quality of the residential accommodation proposed, relating to the internal arrangement of circulation space, the layout and lack of daylight in individual units, and the quality of the entrance. The next iteration of the scheme should also be accompanied by visualisations showing how the building sits within its context, as well as thorough daylight analysis and full data on the scheme's environmental performance. These comments are expanded below.

### *Response to context*

- The panel recognises the difficulties presented by the site, but does not consider these to be unusual in a town centre site. Despite these challenges, the scheme occupies a sensitive and prominent position and therefore needs to provide high quality development that will enhance both the High Street and the emerging residential street of Wellstones.
- Locally-listed buildings are important to Watford, and should not be carelessly replaced. However, the panel feels that proposed designs for the block fronting onto the High Street are relatively sensitive in terms of scale and design, and provide continuity between its two listed neighbours. Subject to high quality detailing and materials, this building could justify the replacement of the existing buildings.
- While the panel feels that the approach to the arrangement of windows onto the High Street is potentially interesting, it considers that this design approach should be supported by a character analysis of the High Street as a whole.



## CONFIDENTIAL

- In contrast, the taller element to the rear of the site sits uncomfortably within its context and it is likely to have a significant and negative visual impact. In particular, the long blank façades of the taller block could dominate both the High Street and Wellstones.
- The panel is concerned by the lack of visualisations provided showing the buildings in relation to the wider area. These should be produced to allow the proposals to be fully assessed.

### *Scale and height*

- The panel considers that the volume of development required on the site exceeds its capacity. This has resulted in a proposal that is too tall for the context, and fills the entire site footprint, with overly complex floor plates, and the provision of limited daylight both for the units and the amenity space.
- The proposed rear element is considerably taller than any of its neighbours, including the Telephone Exchange, and is likely to be disruptive to the site's context.
- The panel is also concerned by the precedent that a 11-storey building will set for future development on Wellstones, and sees no justification in design terms for a building of this height in this location.
- While the height of the proposed rear tower element suggests it is intended as a point block, its width and two long blank façades means that, in fact, it will form part of sequence of buildings along Wellstones. The panel asks that greater clarity is developed about the intended approach to massing to ensure the building's presence in the streetscape is balanced and carefully designed.

### *Internal layout*

- The internal layouts of the units suggest that many will have dark interiors, and result in residential accommodation of questionable quality. The panel feels that the layout of each unit should be interrogated individually, to ensure that the quality of the spaces being created is acceptable.
- The scheme as a whole also borrows much of its daylight from the neighbouring sites, which could prejudice future development. The panel therefore asks that a full and rigorous year-round daylight analysis is undertaken, including all units and amenity spaces.

### *Entrances*

- The panel understands the rationale for not providing a residential entrance to the scheme from the High Street. The location of the single residential entrance on Wellstones is not in itself an issue, as the panel recognises that the character of this street will change.



# CONFIDENTIAL

- However, the route from this entrance to the units in the front block is circuitous, and the quality of the entrance itself is poor, offering no sense of arrival. The entrance is subordinate both to the bin store and to the service entrance to the commercial unit.
- The narrowness of the entrance corridor (at 150cm wide) is a further concern, as it is likely to feel cramped and uncomfortable to use.

## *Other issues*

- The panel also raises its concern that no affordable housing is to be provided within the scheme, and that no accessible units are planned, and suggests that this approach requires further justification.
- It is important that the design team provides full data describing the scheme's environmental performance, so that it can be assessed as part of the design.

## *Next Steps*

- The panel looks forward to reviewing a further iteration of the scheme, including contextual visualisations, daylight analysis and environmental performance data, in due course.

