



Watford Place Shaping Panel

Report of Chair's Review Meeting: 46 – 50 High Street

Tuesday 12 January 2021
Zoom video conference

Panel

Peter Bishop (chair)
Anna Bardos

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
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.

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1. Project name and site address

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

2. Presenting team

Jim Richards	Nissen Richards Studio
Jessica Wilson	Newsteer

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.

This scheme was previously reviewed at a Small Sites Review Panel in August 2020 and returns for a Chair's Review to consider key amendments. The panel raised a number of concerns and since then, during the pre-application stage, the applicant and officers have worked to address these. Officers asked for the panel's comments, in particular, on:

- demolition of the high street building and storey building to High Street and change to commercial ground floor and flats
- overall height of the Wellstones block - 11 storeys reduced to eight storeys, including design and material amendments to the top floor, flanks and balconies
- reduction in number of residential units (from 31 to 25)
- new contextual views
- amendments to the entrance area from Wellstones
- sunlight and daylight assessment for the scheme



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4. Panel's views

Summary

The panel welcomes amendments made in response to issues raised at the previous review meeting and feels the scheme has improved greatly as a result. The reduction in height of the taller element significantly improves its impact in views, and it now sits comfortably within its local context. The redesigned Wellstones entrance has greatly improved the experience for residents. The panel suggests that, rather than using a contrasting cladding material for the top storey of the Wellstones block, brick should be considered as an option. The applicant should ensure daylight levels will remain sufficient if the neighbouring plot, at No. 58 High Street, is developed in future. Overall, the panel feels the scheme will be a high quality addition to the High Street but deems it critical that the current architect remains involved through to completion, to ensure the proposed quality detail design is delivered. It encourages officers to condition this as part of any consent. These comments are expanded below.

Scale and height

- The panel welcomes the reduction in height of the scheme's taller rear block from 11 storeys down to eight storeys, and feels it represents a significant improvement from the designs presented at the August 2020 Place Shaping Review. Key views now show that the revised scheme integrates well into the local context.

Daylight

- The panel notes the importance of ensuring that, in the event of a development on the neighbouring site at 58 High Street, the loss of the light provided by secondary windows will not have a damaging impact on overall levels of daylight within the building.

Entrance area and servicing

- Overall, the panel feels the re-design of the entrance to the development from Wellstones represents a significant improvement on the previous approach.
- The panel welcomes the removal of the loading bay from Wellstones and supports the servicing of the commercial units from the High Street.
- The entrance hallway will require careful day-to-day management to prevent clutter from accumulating and undermining the quality of a space that is very important to the experience of residents. The panel suggests that the application's reserved matters address this issue.

Materiality and quality

- The panel supports the use of high quality materials across the two blocks. However, it does not consider that the top floor of the Wellstones block needs



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to reflect the anodized metal work used for the mansard roof of the four-storey High Street block.

- The panel encourages the applicant to re-visit the material treatment on the eighth storey and to test the alternative option of carrying brickwork to the top of the rear block. The current material choice does not reduce the appearance of bulk, and a single material may result in a stronger overall form.
- It also notes that it is simpler to deliver brickwork detailing to a high standard than to do so with cladding, which can appear low quality if poorly installed.
- The panel considers that the podium courtyard has improved since the last Place Shaping Panel. It encourages the applicant to invest in this space and its landscaping as an important element in delivering a quality scheme.
- The panel acknowledges the work on the brick detail on the flank wall and rear elevation since the previous review and feels this area of the scheme had made a big step forward.
- The quality of the materials and details across the scheme, including windows, insets, brick detail and fascia, are critical to its success. The panel also considers it essential that the current design team remains involved in the scheme through to completion to ensure the proposed quality of design is delivered. It recommends that officers include this as a condition of any planning permission.

Commercial units

- The success of the scheme will be partly determined by whether the commercial units fronting onto the High Street are occupied once completed. The panel supports the applicant's efforts to ensure the space provided meets the needs of potential future occupiers.

Sustainability

- The panel points out the value of analysing the whole life carbon embodied in the scheme and asks the applicants to provide this information if at all possible and use it to refine designs.

Next steps

- The panel supports the revisions to 46-50 High Street and, encourages the applicant to continue to refine the design in collaboration with Watford officers.

