



**Watford Place Shaping Review Panel**

**Report of Formal Review Meeting: 934-974 Marchwood House**

Tuesday 9 March 2021  
Zoom Video Conference

**Panel**

Peter Bishop (chair)  
Irfan Alam  
Marie Burns  
Thomas Bryans  
Michael Popper

**Attendees**

Paul Baxter	Watford Borough Council
Andrew Clarke	Watford Borough Council
Phil Dodshon	Watford Borough Council
Sian Finney-MacDonald	Watford Borough Council
Tom Bolton	Frame Projects
Miranda Kimball	Frame Projects
Penny Nakan	Frame Projects

**Apologies / report copied to**

Louise Barrett	Watford Borough Council
Ben Martin	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

Garston Garage, 934-974 Marchwood House, St Albans Road, Watford, WD25 9NN

## 2. Presenting team

David Chalmers	Fairview New Homes
Mark Jackson	Fairview New Homes
Andy Reid	Fairview New Homes
Graig Rodgers	Fairview New Homes
Jason Rudolph	Rolfe Judd Architects
Angus Drummond	Rolfe Judd Architects
Alejandro Penalver	Rolfe Judd Architects
Mike Martyn	Cameo Landscape Architects
Heidi von Kotze	Cameo Landscape Architects
Paul White	Turley
David Chalmers	Turley
Colin Morrison	Turley

## 3. Planning authority briefing

The site, which houses the former Garston Bus Garage, is broadly rectangular, 1.19 hectares in area and 5 km from Watford Town Centre. A locally listed administration building fronts directly onto St Albans Road, and a substantial industrial building occupies the majority of the rear of the site.

The site is bordered by Garston Park on one side and, to the rear and south, by the gardens of two-storey post-war residential properties on Codicote Drive and Felden Close. There are two existing access points directly onto St. Albans Road. The southernmost access abuts the two-storey locally listed Garston Park shopping parade. There is variety in building types, forms, sizes, and functions in the area, but the broadly consistent scale and heights of no more than three storeys contribute to a townscape of a suburban scale and appearance.

This proposal is the second proposal for this site by the same applicant. Planning permission was refused for the first proposal for 165 flats in two buildings of up to five storeys, in December 2019, and dismissed at appeal by the Planning Inspectorate in October 2020. The inspector considered the character and appearance of the first proposal unacceptable. The principle of residential redevelopment is accepted. While the appeal decision raised concerns with design and layout, the following matters were agreed upon:

- The site is suited for higher density development.
- The loss of the locally listed administration building is accepted, being regarded as having low interest in architectural and historic terms.
- Proposed buildings would be sited at a greater distance from neighbouring properties than the present industrial structure and, while still visible, would be less obtrusive for residents – particular properties along Codicote Drive.



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- Parking provision meets the Council's maximum standards, and no highway safety or on-street parking concerns arise.

The revised proposals seek to respond to the concerns raised by the previous application and proposes 127 residential units in a mixture of one, two and three-bed units. Officers asked for the panel's views in particular on:

- The layout of the site, with a single vehicular cul-de-sac.
- The legibility of the link to Garston Park.
- Car dominance of the public realm, with encroachment of the car parking and turning heads into the main central amenity space.
- Quality of amenity spaces, and the space adjacent to the eastern boundary.
- The extent of non-active frontage and lack of entrances at ground floor level.
- The lack of duplex units or family houses as part of the overall mix.
- The low proportion – 13 per cent – of three-bedroom dwellings.
- Quantity of car parking and cycle storage.

## 4. Design Review Panel's views

### *Summary*

The panel considers that the density of the proposed development is at the limit of the site capacity, and an improved site layout is required to avoid a detrimental impact on the quality of public and private space at ground floor level. Improvements to the overall site layout and massing are needed to reduce the area of car parking and hard landscaping, which dominates the public realm. Closure of the southern access point should be challenged to ensure all layout options are explored. These should include orientations that reduce the risk of solar gain in east-west aligned blocks. Amenity spaces should be designed for different age groups, a lighting strategy produced and a clearer relationship created with Garston Park. The panel also considers that the removal of the locally listed building can only be justified by construction of higher quality buildings in its place, and that this is not yet the case. The architectural quality of the scheme is ambitious, but could be further improved by introducing greater clarity, including simplifying materials and elevations, and integrating balconies. Sustainability ambitions should be raised, and the installation of gas boilers avoided. These comments are expanded below.

### *Massing and layout*

- The panel suggests that the proposed massing is at the limit of what is appropriate for the scale of the site. A better balance should be sought between overall development quantum and a site layout that best serves the development.
- The site is unrestricted, and therefore offers the freedom to design optimum massing and layout, with a low proportion of single aspect units. The panel feels the applicant should re-visit the massing, layout, and aspect to deliver the highest possible quality development, which is required to justify the demolition of the locally listed building.



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- An improved site layout is also needed to reduce the high proportion of single aspect units. The panel notes that refuse and cycle storage are the only parts of the blocks with triple aspect, and asks that the quality of internal layouts is improved.
- The scale of Blocks E, F, and G feels inappropriate in relation to the domestic scale of the homes on Codicote Drive, and the panel suggests this should be revisited.
- The panel questions whether the alleyways running between Blocks E, F and G will create spaces that are pleasant to use.

## *Architecture*

- The panel challenges the planning inspector's decision that the architectural quality of the locally listed administrative building is low, and that its demolition is therefore justified. It considers that its demolition can only be justified if it is replaced by a building of higher quality. Changes to the design approach are needed to ensure the current proposals reach the level of quality this requires.
- The panel considers that the proposed architectural approach would benefit from greater clarity and simplicity.
- In particular, it suggests the design team reduces the number of different brick tones used and employs highlighted bricks more sparingly.
- The balconies feel separate from the blocks they are attached to. The panel challenges the design team to find a solution that integrates the balconies with the base architecture of the blocks.
- The panel also considers that balconies overlooking the busy St. Albans Road may not provide a high enough quality of amenity space.
- The panel suggests that the projecting bays on the western frontage appear awkward, and that this façade should be simplified.

## *Landscaping and amenity space*

- The panel commends the work carried out to develop the landscaping strategy for the site. However, it is concerned that the quality of public and private space is adversely affected by the density of the proposed development.
- Hard landscaping and car parking provision is too dominant. The number of parking spaces should be reduced to improve the quality of place, even if this requires a reduction in density.



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- The panel also encourages the design team to consider the provision of a wider range of amenity space types to ensure there are spaces designed for all ages – especially for younger and for older children.
- The panel suggests that the nature of the central courtyard space is ambiguous. Rather than a semi-public space, residents may prefer a more generous, secure external space that allows children to play. The best quality secure spaces on the site are currently the gardens and allotments to the rear of Blocks E, F and G, which are only accessible to some residents.
- A resolved lighting strategy will be important to help improve the security and overall attractiveness of the development, and to contribute to creating a sense of place.

### *Connections*

- The panel encourages the applicant to work with Watford Borough Council and Hertfordshire County Council, as highways authority, to challenge the requirement to close the southern egress point. It considers that removing the constraints created by a single access point could enable the design of a more successful site layout.
- The proximity of Garston Park is a major asset for the site, and further thought should be given to the way the development relates to it. The link to the park could be more legible, and perhaps simplified with a single access route along the northern edge of the site, without the need for a second, diagonal link through the main courtyard space.

### *Sustainability*

- The panel asks that the sustainability strategy for the development is revisited. There is scope for it to be more ambitious and, in particular, to identify alternative approaches that avoid the installation of gas boilers.
- The panel also suggests that the orientation of blocks should be reconsidered, to explore options that avoid east-west aspects, and therefore reduce the risk of solar gain.

### *Next Steps*

- The panel is available to review this scheme again, once the design team has had the opportunity to address the issues it has raised.

