



**Watford Place Shaping Review Panel**

**Report of Chair's Review Meeting: 934-974 Marchwood House**

Tuesday 11 May 2021  
Zoom Video Conference

**Panel**

Peter Bishop (chair)  
Irfan Alam

**Attendees**

Paul Baxter	Watford Borough Council
Andrew Clarke	Watford Borough Council
Sian Finney-MacDonald	Watford Borough Council
Ben Martin	Watford Borough Council
Linda Bishop	Watford Borough Council
Carmel Huntley	Watford Borough Council
Tracey Lynch	Watford Borough Council
Tom Bolton	Frame Projects
Penny Nakan	Frame Projects

**Apologies / report copied to**

Louise Barrett                      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
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

## 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.

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.

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. The proposals were reviewed by the Watford Place Shaping Panel in March 2021. Since then, amendments have been made to move building footprints further from neighbouring properties; to increase the percentage of dual aspect units to 66 per cent all units have been designed to meet or exceed Technical Housing Standards; to refine the architecture of Blocks E-G; to reduce onsite parking; to enhance the entrance to Garston Park; to refine internal amenity areas; and to alter the energy strategy to use central gas-fired boilers and Air Source Heat Pumps, with roof-mounted photovoltaic cells. A planning application has now been submitted.

Watford officers asked the panel to consider whether these improvements address the panels concerns and, in particular, for its views on dominance of hard landscaping, progress on sustainability, the layout of Blocks C and D, and whether the frontage on St Albans Road is of sufficient quality to justify demolition of the locally listed building. Officers also asked for views on a southern access loop, on which they are confirmation of the highways authority's position.



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## 4. Design Review Panel's views

### *Summary*

The panel considers that the proposals have improved in several ways since the previous review, but still considers that an improved site layout and design approach would deliver a higher quality development. The quantum of development on the site results in a compromised site layout, and undermines the quality of space at ground floor level. The panel is also concerned that the deep spaces and blank walls between Blocks D-G will create unwelcoming spaces. The simplified material range and palette is a success, as is the rationalised elevation of Blocks A and B on St. Alban's Road. More thought should be given to integrating balconies with the buildings, and to refining the height of parapets. The panel asks that the width of the access road is reduced, to create a more welcoming pedestrian route to Garston Park, ideally separated from vehicles with greenery. A clearer rationale is needed for the design of the landscaped area fronting St. Albans Road. Improvement to the energy strategy are very welcome, and anything that can be achieved to push this even further will be beneficial. These comments are expanded below.

### *Site plan*

- The panel's comments about the density of the proposed development, made at the previous review, remain valid: that a better balance should be sought between quantum of residential units and a site layout that best serves the development. Alterations, including the removal of four parking spaces, are beneficial. However, despite alterations to the design the footprint of the blocks remain fundamentally the same, and the amount of hard-standing has not changed significantly. Therefore the panel still considers that the site layout is constrained and that this has a detrimental impact on the quality of space at ground floor level.
- The panel accepts assurances that Hertfordshire County Council has categorically rejected the option of a southern site access point, but still considers that negotiation would be possible, and valuable. An access loop would provide much more flexibility for the location of blocks, and an improved layout could be achieved.

### *Architecture*

- The panel welcomes the proposed changes in materials and palette across the scheme, which are positive moves that help to simplify the architectural approach.
- It also considers that moving the balconies around to the sides of the St. Albans Road Blocks A and B is a successful rationalisation of the design. The development's main public elevation now appears simpler and better detailed.



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- However, the panel feels the design of the balcony units themselves could be improved. They still seem separate from the rest of the building. The team should explore whether their design can be improved to better integrate them.
- The panel expressed conflicting views on whether further design changes would benefit the St Alban's Road elevation. The flanks at either end of the façade could be considered to narrow, with excessively thin glazing strips. There could be scope to introduce greater generosity into these areas.
- On the other hand, the narrow windows on the end blocks could be considered to give the elevation an improved sense of proportion, and to make references to arch of Garston Bus Garage. It is for the design team to decide how it responds to these differing opinions.
- The panel suggests that the parapets have increased in size since the designs seem at the previous review, and appear a little top heavy. The team should look again at parapets to explore whether their design can be refined.
- The panel still has concerns about the gaps between Blocks D-G. The blocks are significantly larger than the two-storey houses suggested as a precedent, which also have windows in their flank walls and pitched roofs, helping to reduce the scale where buildings meet. The panel feels that the spaces between these blocks will feel canyon-like and unwelcoming, and asks that more is done to address the issue.

### *Landscaping*

- The panel considers that more work is needed to develop designs for the landscaping on the St. Albans Road site frontage. It is not clear whether this is a buffer area or a space that people will walk through. A stronger rationale is needed for the way the space will be used, which should inform the planting approach and a decision on whether to include low railings or a hedge along the boundary.
- While the panel understands the inclusion of fences around the central green space, it considers gates should definitely be avoided.

### *Entrance road*

- The increased emphasis on access to Garston Park is a positive change to the proposals. However, the panel considers the entrance road should be narrowed as far as possible, to reduce vehicle dominance and create more space for pedestrians. The carriageway width could be reduced along its full length by relocating spaces from the northern to the southern stretch of access road. This would also provide greater flexibility to improve the landscaping in the area where the public will walk to access the park, where it matters most.
- The panel asks the design to rethink this aspect of the scheme. They should



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consider increasing the width of the footpath leading to the park, and potentially include greenery to separate the pedestrian route from the road alongside. The aim should be to create a stronger, more legible connection with the Garston Park.

- The entrance to the park itself could also be repositioned if needed, to help ensure the park entrance is as welcoming and accessible as possible.

### *Sustainability*

- The panel is pleased to see that its request for a more ambitious sustainability strategy have been on board, and that energy use not only aligns better with current requirements, but are future-proofed. It encourages the design team to look for further scope to reduce carbon further, and to take any opportunity it can identify.

### *Next Steps*

As the planning application is now live, the panel is confident that Watford Borough Council can decide whether the proposals successfully address its comments.

