



**Watford Place Shaping Review Panel**

**Report of Chair's Review Meeting: 19-21 Clarendon Road**

Tuesday 13 April 2021  
Zoom Video Conference

**Panel**

Peter Bishop (chair)  
Nicola Rutt

**Attendees**

Paul Baxter	Watford Borough Council
Ben Martin	Watford Borough Council
Alice Reade	Watford Borough Council
Amy Wolanski	Watford Borough Council
Tom Bolton	Frame Projects
Miranda Kimball	Frame Projects
Penny Nakan	Frame Projects

**Apologies / report copied to**

Louise Barrett	Watford Borough Council
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**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

19-21 Clarendon Road, Watford, WD17 1JR

## 2. Presenting team

Richard Harvey	PRP Architects
Carolina Ferrando	PRP Architects
Mairead Flower	Iceni Projects
George Baines	Iceni Projects
Grace Wileman	Iceni Projects

## 3. Planning authority briefing

The site is located on the junction of Clarendon Road with Beechen Grove, which forms the multi-lane ring road to the town centre. The 0.08 hectare site contains a vacant three storey building circa 1980, which was formally occupied as RBS bank. The site is not within a conservation area and the building is not listed or locally listed. The Clarendon Road frontage of the site is within a secondary retail frontage as identified in the Watford District Plan 2000. The site is within the Special Policy Area for the town centre, seeking balanced provision of facilities and infrastructure. Taller buildings are subject to 'Skyline – Watford's Approach to Taller Buildings SPD 2016'.

As a town centre location, the immediate context of the site is mixed with a range of uses, listed buildings, permission for neighbouring tall buildings and sites with redevelopment potential. Notably, the adjacent junction with Beechen Grove has corners featuring Jurys Inn hotel (nine-storeys), Beechen Grove Baptist Church (Grade II-listed) and Arliss Court, a five-storey former office building converted to flats. Opposite on Clarendon Road is the Grade II Listed Watford Palace Theatre.

The scheme was previously presented to the Watford Place Shaping Panel at a Formal Review (16 February 2021) as a scheme with 117 residential units. The revised scheme is a 22-storey private sale residential-led tower containing 103 units, with associated amenity space and flexible commercial uses, including a café and work and community spaces at ground and first floor. Officers seek the panel's views in particular on the applicant's response to previous panel comments, including:

- a more simplified approach to the design strategy and building form;
- uniform vertical expression repeated across all elevations, with projecting brick piers;
- a double-height commercial space introduced to the north-east corner, which adds prominence to the Clarendon Road and Beechen Grove junction;
- additional communal uses added on the ground and first floors;
- balcony arrangements;
- dual aspect homes increased from 67 per cent to 80 per cent;
- photovoltaic panels introduced on the roof.



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## 4. Design Review Panel's views

### *Summary*

While the panel welcomes a number of amendments made in response to issues raised at the previous review, it considers that the revised proposals still fall short of the exceptional level of design quality required to justify a building of the proposed height in this location. In particular, the panel feels the tower needs simple and elegant elevations, but that these aspects are compromised in the proposed design by the horizontal banding and the shoulder terraces. Both elements interrupt the tower's vertical form, and the panel feels they should be reconsidered. If the shoulder terraces were removed, the location and arrangement of balconies could also be simplified, which would help to articulate a stronger vertical form. While the ground floor arrangement, especially at the Clarendon Road and Beechen Grove junction, has improved, the panel challenges the design team to develop the proposals further to include more features that will support its social sustainability. This should include creating more space for amenity on the ground and first floors, and exploring further opportunities for amenity space at roof level. These comments are expanded below.

### *Design – elevations*

- The panel welcomes the move away from direct design references to the historic buildings opposite towards a more contemporary materiality.
- The double articulation of ground and first floors is also a significant improvement.
- However, the panel does not yet consider the designs to be of the exceptional design quality required to justify the proposed height of the building. The panel suggests that the tower form should be further simplified, with cleaner elevations, to achieve this.
- It feels that the stepped shoulder terraces, and the different corner treatment for each element, interrupt the tower's verticality. It also questions the functionality of the outdoor shoulder terraces, which will have a width of only three metres.
- If the stepping is removed, the panel suggests the elevation could be simplified by introducing more inset and projecting balconies across the building.
- The panel also considers that the horizontal banding adds unnecessary complexity to the elevations and compromises the verticality of the tower.

### *Layout*

- The reduction in the total number of units, and the widening of the block, are positive moves that significantly improve the proposal.



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- The panel also supports the rearrangement on the ground floor and the introduction of the bike workshop space, which is potentially very beneficial for residents.
- The panel welcomes the increase in total number of dual aspect units, but cautions that care should be taken to prevent overheating overload for the single aspect units on the southern elevation.

## *Residential amenity space*

- The panel is pleased to see the higher proportion of family units included in the development. However, it is important to ensure there is enough amenity space for residents with children. The density of the development, and the lack of nearby green space, places an extra burden on the facilities included in the building to support residents and contribute to a socially sustainable community.
- While the panel welcomes the introduction of the community amenity spaces on the ground and first floors since the last review, it encourages the design team to do everything it can to further maximise opportunities for ground floor activation.
- In particular, the panel suggests stacking the ground and first floor bike storage and workshop spaces to allow these spaces to work as a single, coherent facility; and moving the flexible community space, on the ground floor, next to the café to help animation at the Clarendon Road and Beechen Grove junction.
- The panel suggests exploring the options for a more flexible space at ground level to support a greater range of ages and needs, and allow families with children to remain within the building. This may require residential units to be sacrificed to create more space, but would greatly benefit residents and help the ground and first floors to work together as a coherent unit.
- With the roof as the principal amenity space for residents, the panel encourages the design team to safeguard as much space as possible. The panel is concerned that the area of available rooftop amenity space could decrease to support plant requirements for the tower.
- The panel welcomes the scheme's improved sustainability strategy, but questions the overall gains made from the inclusion of the photovoltaic panels at roof level, which will provide limited power. The roof space they occupy could provide greater value if used for amenity instead.



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## *Next Steps*

- The panel encourages the applicant to work with officers to explore further opportunities to simplify the elevational treatment of the tower, ahead of planning submission.

