



**Watford Place Shaping Review Panel**

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

Tuesday 9 November 2021

Zoom Video Conference

**Panel**

Peter Bishop (chair)

Thomas Bryans

**Attendees**

Paul Baxter	Watford Borough Council
Alice Reade	Watford Borough Council
Tom Bolton	Frame Projects
Reema Kaur	Frame Projects
Miranda Kimball	Frame Projects

**Observer**

Colleen Scales	Watford Borough Council
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**Apologies / report copied to**

Louise Barrett	Watford Borough Council
Sian Finney-MacDonald	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

19 – 21 Clarendon Road, Watford, WD17 1JR

## 2. Presenting team

Richard Harvey	PRP Architects
George Baines	Iceni Projects
Mairead Flower	Iceni Projects
Andrew Gale	Iceni Projects

## 3. Planning authority briefing

The site is located on the corner of 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 dating back to 1980, formerly occupied as Royal Bank Scotland. The site is not within a conservation area and the building is not listed or locally listed.

The site is located at a strategic nodal point, with Clarendon Road identified in the Draft Watford Plan as a key employment development zone and Beechen Road a primary vehicular route to the town's commercial centre. The proposed building seeks to enhance the legibility of Beechen Grove and unify the height of the emerging and existing skyline on and around Clarendon Road.

This scheme was first reviewed by the panel on 16 February 2021, followed by a chair's review on 13 April 2021. An application for planning permission was then submitted for mixed-use redevelopment of the site, with a ground floor Class E unit and 103 dwellings in a 23-storey building.

Following comments from planning officers on the height and massing of the previous 23-storey proposal, there has been a fundamental redesign of the project brief. The architectural form is now expressed as a 12-storey building, with an eight-storey shoulder located on the eastern part of the site fronting Clarendon Road.

The final Draft Watford Local Plan has been submitted for examination. It includes an emerging policy QD6.5-Building Height, which states that proposals for taller buildings (over eight storeys in this area) should clearly demonstrate features including exceptional design quality, clear townscape rationale for height, positive relationships with heritage assets, appropriate residential amenity and significant public and sustainability benefits.

Officers find the amended height and massing of the revised proposal more comfortable in respect of the site context, and visual impact on the townscape and setting of listed buildings. Officers asked for the panel's views on these issues, and on the façade design, ground floor activation, layout and residential amenity.



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## 4. Design Review Panel's views

### *Summary*

The panel commends the applicant for its work to develop the scheme for 19 – 21 Clarendon Road, and feels the proposals now meet the level of design quality required to justify a tall building under Watford's emerging policy requirements. The scheme, at a maximum of 12 storeys, sits comfortably within the Watford townscape. The detailed design and material selection make positive references that successfully connect to nearby listed buildings. The scheme's approach to sustainability is ambitious and commendable. With some further detailing and refinement, it can deliver appropriate residential amenity and significant public benefit. The panel asks that attention is given to ensuring the ground floor articulation is strong and that planters are removed - if at all possible. Discussions should be held to ensure the community space is occupied and used, and that the café space activates the public realm. The outdoor terrace space should be refined to ensure it will be used throughout the year. The panel encourages officers to work with the applicant to ensure that the revised residential mix, with a significant increase in one person one-bedroom units, is appropriate for the location and the market, and that affordable housing provision meets policy requirements. These comments are expanded below.

### *Design approach*

- The panel welcomes the revised design for 19 – 21 Clarendon Road and feels the approach to massing, with a 12-storey building and an eight-storey shoulder, reads successfully within the surrounding Watford townscape.
- This revised approach breaks down the previous bulky form, and successfully addresses the key intersection of Beechen Grove and Clarendon Road.
- The panel also feels the building's architecture now subtly references the Grade II listed Watford Palace Theatre and Beechen Grove Baptist Church, and that the overall architectural approach is balanced and refined.
- To ensure the proposed high standard of design is delivered, the panel recommends planning conditions are used, if at all possible, to ensure the retention of the design team during the delivery phase.

### *Residential mix*

- As part of the revised design, the panel understands the rationale for adjusting the development's residential mix, but questions the significant increase in one person one-bedroom units from 1.9 per cent to 27.7 per cent of overall provision. This results in a typical floor (Levels 1-7) including three single aspect units.
- The panel would prefer to see fewer single aspect units, but can accept this floor plan configuration if it reflects local need, as these units are all south facing, have generously sized balconies and are shallow in depth.



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- The panel hopes that, as the scheme progresses, officers can ensure that affordable housing provision meets local policy.

## *Ground floor*

- The panel notes that now the active double height space is no longer part of the ground floor, care will be needed to ensure articulation is strong enough at this level to create a convincing ground floor presence.
- The panel encourages the applicant to simplify the ground floor to ensure the cleanest possible junction between the building and public realm is delivered.
- The panel understands that the planters on the Beechen Road frontage are outside the applicant's ownership. However, it encourages discussions on removing them completely, if at all possible, and on pulling them back from Watford House Lane to provide easier access to the bike storage area.
- A well-used café and community space are key to the success of the public realm and ground floor. The panel encourages the applicant to explore opportunities for the café to provide outside seating. Management arrangements for the community space should be resolved as soon as possible, to ensure the space can be used and enjoyed once the building is complete.

## *Outdoor terrace space*

- While the panel welcomes the inclusion of a large outdoor terrace for residents, but asks the design team to refine its design further to respond to the intended functionality of the space.

In particular, the panel would like the applicant to consider how the space will be used both in the summer and in the winter, during the day and at night, for play and for work, and how communal activities can be encouraged and enabled. This exercise may lead to the pergola being relocated.

- The panel asks that, if glazing is needed to provide a sufficient safety barrier, it should be carefully placed on the inside of the parapet to minimise its visibility.
- The panel also encourages the provision of appropriate landscaping to ensure privacy for the residential unit that overlooks the outdoor terrace.

## *Sustainability*

- Overall, the panel welcomes the sustainability approach, and the adherence to LETI and Passivhaus principles.



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- The panel encourages the applicant to assess whether brises soleils are required for the top storey units on the southern façade, which do not have balconies above them to help prevent overheating.

### *Next steps*

- The panel feels confident that the applicant can address its comments in discussion with Watford officers.

