



Watford Place Shaping Panel

Report of Formal Review Meeting: 125 – 133 The Parade

Tuesday 8 March 2022

Watford Community Housing, 59 Clarendon Road, Watford WD17 1LA

Panel

Peter Bishop (chair)

Irfan Alam

Michael Popper

Jessica Reynolds

Linda Thiel

Attendees

Paul Baxter	Watford Borough Council
Andrew Clarke	Watford Borough Council
Sian Finney-MacDonald	Watford Borough Council
Ben Martin	Watford Borough Council
Kate Pickard	Watford Borough Council
Alice Reade	Watford Borough Council
Tom Bolton	Frame Projects
Reema Kaur	Frame Projects
Miranda Kimball	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

125 – 133 The Parade, Watford WD17 1NA

2. Presenting team

David Minnis	Edgington Urban
Richard Hardy	Cotswold Archaeology
Peter Jeffery	Sphere25
Mark Sleight	Sphere25
Ian Sutherland	Dwyer Property

3. Planning authority briefing

The site is approximately half a hectare and occupies a prominent position within Watford town centre. It has an irregular shape fronting The Parade, Albert Road South and Beechen Grove. The site currently contains a three-storey building which dates from 1964. The building is currently occupied by several commercial and leisure uses including an Iceland supermarket. To the rear is a large car park used in association with the Iceland supermarket. The site is partially within the Civic Core Conservation Area, and the surroundings include many heritage assets.

In the Final Draft Local Plan, this site is within the Town Centre Core Strategic Development Area and is allocated as being suitable for mixed use development, including residential and commercial uses. The proposal is for the demolition of the existing buildings on site and the development of a mixed-use scheme to provide 146 residential units split into two separate blocks, retail space, including the provision of a food store and retail store, and associated cycle parking, car parking, landscaping, and amenity.

Watford officers consider the proposed use and heights to be acceptable in principle; however, officers have some concerns and asked for the panel's views, in particular, on the layout of the site, especially the success of the Family Block; the quality of accommodation in the main block; how the scheme and its massing sit within the surrounding historic setting; and the access to the Family Block.



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4. Place Shaping Panel's views

Summary

The panel considers that the proposals for 125–133 The Parade have the potential to make a positive contribution to Watford's historic civic core. However, refinements to the designs are needed to ensure a high-quality of residential accommodation is also provided. Overall, the proposed elevations, scale and massing successfully sit within the civic core's townscape. Further consideration is needed of the design for the crown of the building, fronting The Parade, and of the way it meets the neighbouring, locally listed 135 The Parade. The panel questions the quality of the internal layouts and the narrowness of the corridors in the main block, with a significant proportion of single aspect units. The panel is concerned that there are too many residential units per core and suggests that a third core, fronting onto The Parade, could help to address these issues. The panel questions the lack of outdoor private amenity space for units facing The Parade and Albert Road South, and suggests that balcony provision would improve the quality of accommodation. The panel also questions the quality of the communal outdoor amenity space for the Family Block, and its setting, which is dominated by car parking. It suggests the number of car parking spaces should be reduced, further greening included and more work carried out to ensure the residents can access the block through a high quality, safe public realm. Lastly, the scheme's sustainability strategy requires further consideration to ensure the building's design and performance targets can be met. These comments are expanded below.

Elevational treatment

- The panel feels that the scheme's proposed scale and massing, with a stepped arrangement of blocks, sits comfortably within the town centre and Civic Core Conservation Area context. In particular, the panel considers the way the building wraps around the corner of The Parade and Albert Road South to be a successful approach.
- The panel suggests that, as designs progress, the applicant should reconsider its approach to outdoor amenity provision. It considers the current amenity space to be insufficient, especially for the smaller units fronting The Parade and Albert Road South. While the current elevational treatment is successful, the panel feels the addition of recessed or Juliet balconies would raise the quality of the residential accommodation without harming the historic townscape.
- The panel encourages the design team to look closely at the relationship between the proposals and the neighbouring building at 135 The Parade, and to ensure in particular that the new block's crown treatment meets the existing block and its prominent gable in a sympathetic way. The panel asks for further long views to show how the two buildings will sit comfortably alongside one another.



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Internal layout

- The panel questions the high proportion of single aspect units in the main block, and suggests that there are number of potential benefits to adding a third access core. It would help to improve the internal quality of the scheme by allowing the introduction of more through-units and dual-aspect units.
- While the panel welcomes the three communal amenity spaces distributed across the main block, it questions the residents' journey along narrow corridors to access these outdoor spaces. A third core could enable more generous corridors to be provided throughout the block.
- A third core could also enable better connections at ground level, and allow direct access for residents onto The Parade, avoiding the need to exit via the Albert Road South.
- A third core in this location could also help to create a comfortable threshold between the back of the new block and the residential units with windows facing out from the rear of 135 The Parade.

Servicing

- The panel questions the prominent positioning of the residents' bins and recycling storage on the Albert Road South street frontage, and suggests an alternative location should be identified.
- The panel also questions the location of the bicycle storage in the basement, and suggests a more accessible location for residents is explored.

Family Block

- While the panel supports the scheme providing family units in the smaller block, it is concerned by the block's ground floor setting.
- The commercial car park dominates the site and leaves a limited amount of public realm for the residents of the Family Block. To ensure there is meaningful ground floor space, the panel suggests that some of the commercial parking spots, close to the Family Block, to prevent its setting from being dominated by vehicle.
- The panel also suggest that reducing the number of car parking spots can also allow more greenery and landscaping to be introduced into this space.
- The panel suggests that the triangular plot, located between the Family Block and the car park, should be incorporated into the scheme's landscape design to help enhance the quality of this space.
- The panel also finds the scheme's edge treatment, including the site's relationship with the pedestrian underpass on Beechen Grove and with the



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access road to the north, requires further resolution. It is important that the journey to the front door of the block is safe for residents, and is characterised by high quality public realm.

Sustainability

- The scheme's sustainability strategy needs to be developed as part of the next design iteration. The panel encourages the scheme, as a town centre site, to aim for very high standards in relation to both embodied and operational carbon.
- The panel suggests that the use of large, portrait format windows throughout the building is like to lead to overheating, and asks for further thought on whether they could be smaller, and whether spandrel panels can be incorporated to reduce solar gain. It also suggests that the windows should be openable to allow for natural ventilation.
- Given the current proportion of single-aspect units, and risk of overheating, the panel is concerned that the thickness of floors and walls will be insufficient to achieve the proposed u-values. The panel asks these are revisited.
- The panel also suggests further clarity is needed about the nature of the proposed materials and their carbon efficiency, especially the use of pigmented concrete.
- While the panel welcomes the replacement of the trees that will be removed from the site to enable the development, it questions whether their replacement on land outside the site is a practical option, requiring both agreement and maintenance from Hertfordshire County Council. The applicant should resolve the deliverability of these plans ahead of submission.

Next steps

- The panel is available to review the scheme again, if required, when the design team has been able to respond to its comments.

