



Watford Place Shaping Review Panel

Report of Formal Review Meeting: 94 Rickmansworth Road

Tuesday 13 July 2021
Zoom video conference

Panel

Peter Bishop (chair)
David Hart
Tahera Rouf
Nicola Rutt
Andrew Thornhill

Attendees

Paul Baxter	Watford Borough Council
Sian Finney-MacDonald	Watford Borough Council
Helen Harris	Watford Borough Council
Alice Reade	Watford Borough Council
Tom Bolton	Frame Projects
Miranda Kimball	Frame Projects
Penny Nakan	Frame Projects

Apologies / report copied to

Louise Barrett	Watford Borough Council
Andrew Clarke	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

94 Rickmansworth Road, Watford, Herts, WD18 7JJ

2. Presenting team

David Clarke	David Clarke Landscape Architects and Arboriculturists
Tracey Hardy	Wakelin Associates
Jane Wakelin	Wakelin Associates
Rachel Wakelin	Wakelin Associates

3. Planning authority briefing

This brownfield site is in a predominantly residential area, with high density residential development directly to the north and west ranging from two to four storeys in height. The existing buildings and the whole site have a completely unrestricted commercial use with 24 hour operation. Adjoining residential development has established limitations on the proposed residential scheme in terms of scale, bulk massing, and prospective heights.

Demolition of the existing predominantly B2 industrial/commercial buildings is proposed, and the construction of a residential scheme of 96 residential units with parking, landscaping and servicing.

The site is approximately 150m from the Watford Underground Station and in close proximity to frequent bus services along Rickmansworth Road to Watford Town Centre. The location is sustainable in relation to transport links and town centre proximity.

The proposal is for high quality sustainable residential dwellings in a sustainable location, with a higher-than-standard level of amenity space, a strong identity and clear character, increased connectivity, and specific areas for community interaction. The scheme proposes improved access arrangement onto Rickmansworth Road and pedestrian links to adjoining areas and adjoining transport links. The site does not contain any listed or locally listed buildings and does not fall within a conservation area. The site is not designated as protected employment land.

Officers seek the panel's views in particular on the following issues:

- layout of the buildings and layout of car parking
- the design approach and elevational treatment of the buildings
- potential for future linkages and pedestrian connections to Metropolitan Station Approach (although the land belt is in separate ownership)
- landscaping proposals
- sustainability proposals



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4. Design Review Panel's views

Summary

The panel feels that the site has great potential and, with some further refinement to the block layout and the configuration of the landscaped amenity space, coupled with greater detailed architectural design, this site could provide a welcome residential addition to Watford. In particular, the panel feels that the current arrangement of private, semi-private and communal outdoor amenity space could be confusing for residents. The panel suggests moving the private amenity space to the rear of ground floor residential units and providing a smaller, semi-private space at the front of blocks, adjacent to the communal space. While this move will reduce the semi-private space, it will provide better opportunities for residents to interact, as well as allowing the communal amenity space to increase in size. It also suggests moving all of the blocks (A, B, and C) slightly to free up space around the designated parking area, helping to improve the overall arrival experience, especially for pedestrians. By moving the blocks to add extra space to the car park area, a clear vista through the site across the central amenity space can be provided. The panel supports improving all connections and access into and out of the site, with better lighting on the access road off Rickmansworth Road, carefully selected material choice for access roads across the central amenity space, and new links to the east to Metropolitan Station Approach and to the north to Chiltern Close. These comments are expanded below.

Amenity space

- The panel commends the amount of amenity space provided for residents; however, the panel suggests the design team re-visits the sequence and arrangement of public, semi-public and private amenity spaces to help improve the scheme's overall sense of place.
- The panel suggests swapping the private outdoor amenity space, currently located in the front of ground floor units with the semi-private space located to the rear. This refinement can help further community cohesion by co-locating communal thoroughfares as well as provide a clearer user experience for residents.
- By introducing smaller semi-private spaces addressing the communal area, the centre courtyard space will also be able to expand.
- Given the amount of open space available, the panel asks the applicant to meet the required amount of play space on site by increasing the current proposed provision.

Layout

- To further improve the central amenity space, as well as the overall parking provision, the panel encourages the applicant to look at the layout and arrangement of the residential blocks.



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- While the car park is in the best location for the site, the panel considers that the parking area will create a poor arrival sequence.
- By adjusting the positioning of the blocks – with Block B moving more towards the north, allowing Block A to also move – space can be freed up centrally to help create a better arrival experience.
- Repositioning Block C could deliver a clearer vista through the site, and help create connections to the community located immediately to the north.
- By repositioning residential blocks, the applicant can free up space for the car park to wrap around the edge of the site, and to step back where the access road meets the site. This change will allow more breathing space at the critical entry threshold into the site.
- To also help with the overall communal experience, the panel suggests the cycle stores form part of the cores and main arrival area in each block, rather than sitting in a separate location.

Connections, safety, and access

- As the single point of access into the site, the panel feels the arrival route needs further attention. To ensure a safe and positive arrival experience, the lightning and safety strategy for the site, especially along the access road, needs further thought and development.
- As the site is landlocked and surrounded by tall trees, good lighting will have a critical role to play in the success of the site. Thought should be given to how lighting can be designed to create a welcoming setting.
- Pedestrians should have priority over vehicle movement, and routes should make this demarcation clear, especially where the access road meets the parking area. Equally, routes for cyclists should be safe and well-marked.
- The panel understands the need for servicing and emergency access through the site, but these paths should not cut up the vital communal public space at the heart of the scheme. Carefully selected materials can help to ensure these routes are designed as part of the communal space.
- The panel welcomes the connections shown to the east, linking the site to Metropolitan Station Approach, and to the north linking the site to Chiltern Close. These links will help further the permeability of what is otherwise a landlocked island site. Informal pedestrian links to Metropolitan Station Approach, across the strip of land owned by Network Rail, will form effective connections.



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Massing and architecture

- The panel considers the scale and massing of the development to be appropriate for the setting.
- During the next stage of development the panel encourages the applicant to develop the architecture, and the elevations in particular, to a more ambitious level, while not losing sight of the simple, robust design approach.
- The panel also encourages the applicant to explore how more interest can be introduced into the design of the entrances and the treatment of the balconies.
- The panel considers that the site offers significant potential to deliver villas in a parkland setting. However, it feels that the use of brick, along with glass balconies, is not best suited to creating this character. It recommends the applicants takes inspiration for its choice of materials from the proposed landscaping approach.
- As part of these developments, the units on the top floor, and the overall roofscape, should be re-visited to ensure the amount of private outdoor space provided is appropriate for the unit sizes.

Sustainability

- The scheme's approach to sustainability is heading in the right direction, but the panel expects further detail and refinement as design and development progresses. The panel encourages officers to work closely with the applicant on this aspect of the scheme.
- As part of the refinement of the landscape and amenity space, the panel suggests the applicant looks at incorporating sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) as part of the site's blue and green infrastructure.

Next Steps

- The panel would welcome the opportunity to review the scheme again once the detailed design and the sustainability strategy have progressed, and the applicant has been able to respond to the panel's comments. It offers a Chair's review focused on sustainability as an option.

