



Watford Place Shaping Review Panel

Report of Formal Review Meeting: 94 Rickmansworth Road

Tuesday 12 October 2021

Watford Town Hall, Rickmansworth Road, Watford WD17 3EW

Panel

Peter Bishop (chair)
Tara Gbolade
Andrew Thornhill

Attendees

Louise Barrett	Watford Borough Council
Paul Baxter	Watford Borough Council
Johnny Lui	Watford Borough Council
Alice Reade	Watford Borough Council
Tom Bolton	Frame Projects
Reema Kaur	Frame Projects
Miranda Kimball	Frame Projects

Observers

Cllr Peter Jeffree	Watford Borough Council
Cllr Stephen Johnson	Watford Borough Council

Apologies / report copied to

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

94 Rickmansworth Road, Watford, Herts, WD18 7JJ

2. Presenting team

David Clarke	David Clarke Landscape Architects and Arboriculturists
Matt Fitzpatrick	Abbey Consultants
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 commercial use. 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 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.

The Place Shaping Panel first reviewed these proposals on 13 July 2021. Since then, designs have evolved, with changes made including:

- Reduction in the number of residential units and car parking spaces.
- Blocks A and B moved to the north and Block C the east to open a vista through the site, increase shared space and improve the arrival experience.
- Changes to the arrangement of amenity spaces, and a play area added.
- Improvements to the site entrance.
- Increased numbers of 'car club' parking spaces and electric car charging points. Integrated, secure cycle stores with repair and cleaning facilities.
- Refinement of elevations and further detailing.

Officers asked the panel for its views on whether these changes have improved the arrangement of blocks and use of space and the arrival experience, and whether there is now more clarity on the sustainability of scheme, and on the detail of design and materiality.



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4. Design Review Panel's views

Summary

The panel is pleased to see the positive changes made to the scheme since the previous review, and considers that only relatively small alterations are needed to deliver a high quality development. It asks that layouts are adjusted to improve the outlook of single aspect flats, especially north-facing units in Block B. The outlook from flats looking directly onto the blank gable of Chester Court should also be improved. An accessible connection to Metropolitan Station Approach should be designed in and pursued in collaboration with Watford officers and Network Rail, and the boundary with the development softened to create ecological benefit. The northern site boundary with Chiltern Close should be softened, and a pedestrian connection considered. The site access road should be narrowed to allow a pedestrian-friendly shared surface, with trees planted on the west side and the footpath moved to the east. The play space should be integrated with the wider shared space design, making use of landscape elements. Sustainability ambitions should be extended further, to meet the requirements of the RIBA 2030 Climate Challenge. South-facing flats should be shaded. Designs should be detailed to a very high level of quality, to ensure its architectural ambitions can be delivered. These comments are expanded below.

Site plan

- The panel is pleased by the development of the site plan that has taken place since the previous review, with the rearrangement of blocks creating a stronger sense of arrival, increasing shared space in the centre of the development, and making a clearer delineation of public and private space.
- The panel suggests that more could still be done to improve the outlook of the single-aspect units included on floors above ground level. This is particularly important in Block B, where central units are north-facing. The design team could consider moving this unit to the south to create a corner view, which would add variation to both the view and the elevation.
- The panel also notes that a flat in Block A looks directly onto the blank Chester Court, in Observer Close. Internal planning should be reassessed to avoid this blank outlook it at all possible. Landscape treatment could also be used to improve the view from these flats.

Routes and connections

- The panel considers that a connection from the north-west corner of the site to Metropolitan Station Approach would be very beneficial. However, the gradient and the trees make it difficult to provide an accessible route. Nevertheless, the design team should explore options for providing access, possibly via a zig-zag ramp with steps alongside. The panel asks the team to work with Watford officers to determine how this route can be secured. For example, if the



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scheme is designed to the site boundary, a Section 106 agreement could be used to deliver the remainder of the access. Watford officers should bring the relevant parties together to discuss how this can be achieved.

- The panel feels that direct access from the site to Chiltern Close, while desirable, is not essential. However, the treatment of the northern site boundary between the two streets is important. The current fencing should be replaced to create a softer landscape edge characterised by planting, potentially including a gate.
- The panel suggests that the geometry of the central shared space should be adjusted to ensure paths relate to the desire lines between the three blocks. These should be sufficiently well-acknowledged in the design to make it easy for people to reach to their front doors.
- The panel is pleased to see the expansion of the access road through the acquisition of the adjacent garage. However, the route is too wide for a shared access road and would be more successful if its width was reduced to 3.5m. This would still provide room for refuse lorry access, while allowing the route to be treated as a shared space.
- It also suggests that the pavement beside the access road from Rickmansworth Road should be moved from the west side to the east. This will help to allow the road to be integrated with the adjacent site to the east, this is redeveloped in the future. It will also create space to plant trees along the west side of the route which will improve the arrival experience further.

Public realm and landscape

- The panel considers the play space to be a valuable addition that adds generous space to the site. However, it suggests that more work could be done to integrate play into the surrounding landscape, rather than relying on off-the-shelf play elements.
- The panel feels the approach to ecology across the site is positive, and will create a good balance of amenity planting and rich species. However, they suggest that birch should be avoided, as the species is particularly likely to suffer the effects of climate change.
- The area of the site with the richest ecology is the strip of land beside Metropolitan Station Approach. The panel suggests exploring a softer boundary between this land and the development, to link new planting on the site with existing biodiversity.

Sustainability

- The panel supports the sustainability standards set for the development, but suggests this ambition should go further. Instead of designing for the situation now, the development should aim to meet the performance standards set by



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the RIBA 2030 Climate Challenge. It encourages the design team to ensure the environmental specification for all aspects of the development is as ambitious as possible, to ensure it plays its part in tackling the climate change emergency.

- The panel suggests further thought is needed about how south-facing units in Block B can be shaded externally to prevent overheating.

Architecture

- The panel considers that good progress has been made in developing the architectural approach to the blocks. These now have the makings of well-ordered, rational façades, but it is important that the ambition of the design is reflected in the detailing.

Next steps

The panel suggest that the applicants address its comments in discussion with Watford officers.

