

WINCHESTER & EASTLEIGH DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

Date of meeting: 02/08/2022

Site: Land adjoining 4 Brookfield, Providence Hill, Bursledon, Southampton, SO31 8AU

Proposal: Mixed use development comprising veterinary surgery and 16no. dwellings with vehicular access off Providence Hill and associated car parking, cycle storage, sustainable drainage system, sub station, hard and soft landscaping, acoustic fencing and pedestrian/ cycle links to Providence Hill.

Planning reference: F/22/93160

Design Review Panel Members sitting on the Panel: Scot Masker (Chair), Jon Moore & Neil Armitage

Council Officers in attendance: Gary Osmond

Item presented by: Richard Summers (Boyle + Summers) & Nick Taylor (Carter Jonas)

Declarations of Interest declared: None

Comments:

The thoroughness of the application submission was welcomed and helped to establish the site constraints in terms of history, topography, trees, ecology, drainage, etc. However, it was difficult to make a full and detailed assessment of the proposals based on the information provided. The topography of the site in particular is complex, and it was not entirely clear how various elements of the development would relate to the existing and proposed final levels. A worked-up 3D model of the site and its surrounding context, including trees and neighbouring development would greatly assist in developing and testing the layout and establishing where the important views and vantage points are. Failing this, a series of sectional drawings through the site would allow the relationship between the development and levels to be better understood.

In principle no concerns were raised regarding the proposed mixed use of the site, particularly given the two uses – veterinary practice and residential housing – were physically separated. Notwithstanding, there will nonetheless still be a relationship between the two halves of the site, particularly around

the site entrance where the quality of the public realm will need thoughtful consideration.

In general terms, the residential half of the development raised no particular issues, albeit was difficult to understand the levels and topography across this half of the site. Much of the success of this element of the scheme will depend on how level changes are addressed. This bottom end of the site appears to have a relatively soft and natural feel which could easily be lost by resorting to harsh engineered solutions to deal with levels and drainage.

One part of the residential half of the scheme which was considered to be less successful were Plots 1&2. These plots appear somewhat dislocated from the remainder of the residential development and could appear rather awkward when viewed from the site access. This separation would be further exacerbated by what appears to be a significant change in levels compared to the carriageway. It was considered that the current layout would be more successful if these plots were removed or relocated. One potential solution suggested was to realign the roadway, pushing it more towards the northern boundary of the site before turning to follow the existing alignment parallel with the northern boundary. This would allow Plots 1&2 to be relocated to the inside of the bend, pulling them into the remainder of the residential development. It would also negate the need for extensive access ramps, provide a cleaner separation of the residential development from the remainder of the site, and open up uninterrupted views of the treeline, stream and windmill from the site access. Alternatively, it was suggested that one of the other maisonette blocks be relocated to join Plots 1&2, to form a larger single block or pair of blocks, potentially using a split-level layout. This would better address the street and would be less dominated by the scale of the veterinary building. However, it was acknowledged that these suggestions would need to be tested to see how they would impact views towards the windmill.

Views from within and across the site will be very important. Whilst it was noted that particular attention had been paid to the views from Providence Hill across the site and up to the windmill, as is required by the local plan policy for the site, the same level of care did not appear to be given to the view which would be created through the existing treeline by the new vehicular access. This new vantage point will be equally important both in passing views from Providence Hill but more so when entering the site, either as a resident or as a customer of the vets. Presently you would be greeted by the roof of Plots 1&2 and a quite extensive gated area of car parking for the vets, which would not create the most attractive of settings or approach into the development.

A significant part of this poor approach is the position of the veterinary practice car park, which dominates the space between the main site entrance and the building itself. The rationale for locating the car park in 'front' of the building, rather than to the 'rear' was unclear, particularly as this arrangement appeared to require extensive engineered retaining structures to level off the steeply sloping site for both the car park and building. Whilst it is accepted

that there are particular operational requirements which the proposed practice building must meet in terms of the internal layout, it did appear that this is a fairly generic design intended for a site which does not have the particular constraints of the application site. Not only is the site steeply sloping in this location, it is also visible from all sides, and squeezed between two fairly dense treelines. As such, a standard design which may have been successful elsewhere will not work in this instance. Details of what other solutions had been considered were not available.

One possible solution suggested was to use the building itself as a retaining structure. This could be achieved by repositioning the footprint of the building further down the slope and more centrally within the site – effectively where the car park is currently shown but further away from the Providence Hill frontage. This would allow space for access parallel to Providence Hill to a car park where the building footprint is currently shown. The site levels can then be dealt with by moving the current first floor office accommodation under the main veterinary floor, creating a lower-ground level. This way the functional requirements of the building are not impacted; customers can still access from ground level; the building itself would be more prominent and legible within the site, as well as from Providence Hill; the ancillary office accommodation has a far better outlook; and the amount of visible retaining structures would be kept to a minimum. It would also give the building a more appropriate visual scale and form for what is a predominantly residential area, i.e. it would appear as generally single storey from the main road and could have a pitched roof. Which would also be less of a maintenance issue given the number of deciduous trees around the site.

Architecturally the residential element of the scheme appears to be of a relatively standard design, much like recently constructed neighbouring schemes. Whilst using a 'traditional' design was not considered to be an issue, care still needs to be taken to ensure proportions, detailing and materials are of a good quality and that basic urban design rules, such as ensuring elevations address the street in an appropriate manner, are followed.

The appearance of the veterinary building, however, did raise concern. Whilst it was accepted that it is a functional building with a relatively inflexible internal layout, this does not mean that equal thought to the exterior of the building should not be given. For instance, windows on the ground and first floor do not align, and the flat roof boxy form is not in keeping with the character of the locality. Although some attempt to improve its appearance has been made, the result is an awkward juxtaposition of materials and forms placed onto the 'front' of an otherwise dull brick box. Whilst this may work in a much more urban context where there is a clear front and rear, that is not the case in this instance. Here, the building will be visible from all sides, each of a differing character, meaning that it must try to address each in a manner which is appropriate to its setting and the wider context, particularly given the close proximity of the Grade II* listed windmill.

It was the Panel's view that further work is required to ensure that the site layout and form of buildings works with the site's topography. This is

particularly relevant to the veterinary building and its car park, which presently appears to have been dropped into the site from elsewhere, rather than designed to work with it. This issue may be addressed through a closer relationship between the two design teams. It will also likely assist in better tying the two development elements together architecturally, as well as the shared public realm.