

WINCHESTER & EASTLEIGH DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

Date of meeting: 29/11/2022

Site: The Ageas Bowl, Marshall Drive, West End, Southampton, SO30 3XH

Proposal: Full planning application for the erection of 185 dwellings, a 71-bedroom care home (Use Class C2), a 142-bedroom hotel (Use Class C1), a well-being centre (Use Class E / F2), a new pavilion building and improvements to existing stadium, new vehicular access, car parking, pedestrian circulation and processional ramp, together with associated tree planting, landscaping, SuDS and biodiversity enhancements.

Planning reference: F/22/93194

Design Review Panel Members sitting on the Panel: Jeremy Tyrell (Chair), Fiona Hudd, Gail Kenton & David Gregory

Council Officers in attendance: Liz Harrison & Gary Osmond

Item presented by: Ewen Miller (Calder Peel Architects)

Declarations of Interest declared: None

Comments:

The application proposes a very large and complex scheme consisting of a number of elements, which individually would justify their own separate applications. Even this special extended design review panel was not sufficient to fully get to grips with the application as a whole. However, a number of clear issues and recommendations presented themselves.

For reasons of clarity, these comments are divided into each of the various elements of the application proposals and focus on the main aspects to address and respond to.

Entrance (Fan Space and Ramp)

This is a very theatrical and fun gesture which would provide a far better entrance and approach into the stadium than that at present. There is great potential for a vibrant and exciting space on match days and events. However, thought as to how this space would appear and work on non-event days needs to be given. Also, how will the space present itself when

approached from both the car park and from Botley Road. Should the ramp be visible from the street or something that reveals itself through the trees?

Thought as to how the public space beneath, and the ramp itself, is lit is also required. Such a strong form needs to be well lit with a considered architectural lighting scheme. However, there will need to be some sensitivities towards ecological impact, such as upon bats.

New Hotel

The location of the hotel is considered to be far more appropriate than that seen at the pre-application stage, being more connected to the existing hotel and car park, as well as the proposed stadium entrance ramp, whilst also providing a transition between the main hotel car park and the green countryside and golf course to the other side.

The kink in the building's footprint, whilst a result of the need to adhere to planning boundaries, actually works and provides more architectural interest than were the building straight. There was no objection to the general scale or form of the building, or to the intended simple brick finish, but it was considered more thought as to how the ends of the building are dealt with is required. This is particularly relevant to the end which faces the existing hotel and its strong curved form. How can the two buildings be made to better relate to each other and ensure the space between is comfortable.

This hotel will be the first structure visible from the matchday car park. As such it is important to ensure that it provides a design standard, including landscaping, appropriate for the high-profile nature of the stadium.

New Pavilion

No significant issues in relation to the pavilion were highlighted. It is a simple structure which reflects the character of earlier stands around the stadium and makes good use of the dual aspects/views towards the main and nursery grounds, providing a link between the two which currently does not exist.

More details in relation to the intended materials and roof finish is required, as the top of the roof will be visible from the opposite side of the stadium. As will the underside from the nursery ground.

Care Home

This was considered to be the least convincing of the various elements put forward. Firstly, it was questioned whether this is the best location within the wider stadium site for such a use, and whether a nursing home was the most appropriate type of development to be positioned next to a stadium which holds large scale sports events and open-air concerts.

Notwithstanding the nature of the use, concerns were expressed in relation to the design and architectural treatment of the building, which has a very

commercial/office appearance and feel, which seems to be counter to the domestic nature of the building and its occupiers. The design feels far less developed than the other proposals and the level of detail in the drawings (particularly the elevations) was insufficient for a detailed planning application. Whilst large floor to ceiling windows do provide good views, are these views which someone who will spend much of their time in their room want to see all the time, and would they feel too exposed to the outside world. Whilst views towards the adjacent woods would be attractive, views towards the road would be less so. The reference made to the large glazing of the current hotel rooms was noted, but this is a very different scenario to that of a care home where residents should feel comfortable and protected.

Architecturally, the building has a very different feel and character to the remainder of the proposed developments. Whilst the reference to wishing to reflect the form and framing of the adjacent stadium was noted, this design language was not considered to be the most appropriate for the intended use and should be reconsidered.

Other areas to further consider are how the spaces around the building would be used and feel. The landscaping of these spaces needs to be considered as part of the building's overall design, not as an afterthought. Whilst views towards the landscaped gardens envisaged would be very attractive, how easily can residents with mobility issues access steeply terraced gardens. And how can these gardens be made secure without resorting to fencing, which would appear oppressive and unattractive when viewed from the publically accessible woodland beyond.

Wellbeing Centre

This is a prominent 'gateway' building into the wider development. Whilst the functional requirements of the building have strongly influenced its form, it is nonetheless a simple and quite elegant structure which has obviously been given a great deal of thought in terms of its architectural treatment. It was noted that further thought as to how external spaces around the building would be used, by whom and for what purposes is required but was also seen as a potential opportunity to reflect the idea of the 'protective wall' which is expressed in the residential element of scheme and throughout the wider development.

Residential Quarter

Housing:

The initial concept of a continuous wall enclosing blocks and "decaying" towards the woodland edge had an organic feel which had the potential to transition and address the change of character between the stadium and adjacent woodland. However, this has been lost in the more worked up housing layout, where dwellings are far more regimented and linear in nature. How the development abuts the woodland edge is rather harsh and

inconsistent between fronts and rears. This is a shame and loses the promise of the concept sketch.

The idea of a continuous wall, the nature of which changes depending on whether it adjoins a building or forms a boundary, being more open in places and closed/solid in others is a simple yet quite bold idea that has the potential to create a unique and original development. However, great care needs to be taken to ensure that the need to meet building regulation requirements, etc. does not adversely impact the resulting design. Equally, design details need to be approved and conditioned to ensure the ideas are not watered down or 'value-engineered' to a point where the concept is lost.

There was no issue with the architectural style proposed, indeed a more contemporary approach was welcomed and seen to be more appropriate to the context of the stadium than a 'traditional' approach would be. However, it was considered that it would be a more successful scheme if some of the more organic forms of the conceptual layout were to be brought back into the design.

Apartments:

The use of apartment blocks to address the landscaped area between the stadium and residential quarter was considered to be the right response to dealing with the very differing scales of the stadium and housing beyond. However, it was considered that the orientation of the blocks – being predominantly north and south facing – resulted in a number of issues which need to be addressed.

Firstly, it was not felt to provide enough enclosure to the landscaped public area. Instead, the space bleeds out through the gaps between the blocks and in some cases has pushed parking areas up against what should be a well landscaped and attractive public space between the residential quarter and stadium.

This orientation also results in the spaces between blocks being generally overshadowed, unwelcoming and would not provide the best outlook for the apartments. This orientation and the single aspect of most units also results in half the apartments getting no sunlight and the other half too much. The design of the apartments was also felt to be less successful, lacking the interest and detail provided in the housing units and would benefit from remodelling in conjunction with reorientation of the units.

It was therefore suggested that turning the blocks through 90 degrees should be looked at as an option, this could create a more formal 'crescent', responding to the curved form of the stadium. This would provide better enclosure to the landscaped space, would lessen the visual height of the blocks, allow parking areas to be placed between or behind the blocks, and allow all units to be either east or west facing so they would receive sunlight and have a far better outlook.

Conclusion

This is an opportunity to create something very special which would complement the existing stadium and its setting. Whilst elements of that proposed showed promise, there is still much work to be undertaken in relation to ensuring a consistent design language/quality. This does not mean that all elements should look the same, rather that they are reflective of each other, to ensure that all development surrounding the stadium has a consistency and does not appear as a series of separate unrelated pieces which would do little to help enhance the setting of the stadium.

The more modern design approach taken was welcomed and encouraged but needs to include matters of sustainability throughout the design, as well as ensuring that the high-quality finishes and materials proposed are implemented successfully and faithfully to the design. Much of the design hinges on the use of well executed brickwork and detailing, which if not undertaken well, will result in a much lesser quality development.

Overall, that presented showed promise and was sufficient to demonstrate a masterplan concept. However, many elements are still not fully resolved and significant work is still required to finalise various aspects of the design to a level where the panel could comfortably recommend that the LPA is in a position to consider planning approval.

The panel also discussed whether the scheme should be reviewed by the Hampshire Panel and/or the South East Regional Design Review Panel / Design South East.