

Cornwall Design Review Panel Meeting: Wednesday 6th September 2018

Site Address: Pendower Beach Hotel, Ruan High Lanes, Truro

Proposal: Comprehensive redevelopment of the redundant hotel site with replacement 'Boutique' hotel and housing (22 open market units currently being explored), associated parking and landscape works.

Design and Development Team in attendance:

Gary Wyatt (KOHA Architects)
Antony Morvan (KOHA Architects)
Michael Hawes (Mei Loci)

Cornwall Design Review Panel Members in attendance:

Mark Pearson (Chair) – architect + urban designer
Peter Sandover – architect, masterplanner and community engagement consultant
Estelle Doughty – architect
Jane Knight – landscape architect
Paul Holden – architectural historian + chair, Cornwall Buildings Group

Advisors to the Panel:

Mark Ball – Case Officer

Observers :

Steve Kirby - Panel Facilitator

Apologies:

Martin Mumford, Police Architectural Liaison Officer

Conflicts of Interest:

None reported. Although he was not present at the review, it was noted that Mike Westley of Mei Loci is sometimes called upon to act as a panellist, but he would clearly have no role in reviewing this proposal.

Thank you for your recent presentation.

Please now find below the formal guidance of the Panel. You should disregard any specific points made verbally by individual Panel members as part the formative discussion during the meeting as they may not now reflect the considered and collective views of the Panel.

For clarity the Cornwall Design Review Panel does not consider the principle of the development but focuses its observations on design matters arising from the presented scheme to assist both the Design Team and the Local Planning Authority.

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Panel Guidance

Introduction

An earlier version of this project was first reviewed by the Panel in October 2017. The guidance report from that meeting has been studied by the current panel and they are familiar with the site.

We are pleased to be invited to review this scheme for a second time, as the site and its setting is in a particularly well-known and sensitive coastal location much visited by tourists and residents of Cornwall.

The panel has concerns that the guidance provided in the last report has been misinterpreted and this has led the design team to develop a proposition that is excessive in terms of scale with built form and landscape impacts that are inappropriate in such a sensitive coastal location within the AONB. Furthermore the definition, hierarchy and connection of private and public spaces and the architectural language proposed feels inappropriate here and requires further consideration.

Responding to the Context – Typology of Built Form

One of the key points raised in the last guidance report was to do with the grouping of buildings and how this might articulate and form significant landscape spaces and places as part of the overall composition. A greater use of a 'courtyard' typology was encouraged – generating massing that might perhaps be more associated with traditional larger farm complexes and therefore might have a greater resonance with the rural setting and also create useful 'micro-climates' given the exposure of the site.

In the plan drawings of the upper levels only a single 'court' is discernable – this is L-shaped (enclosed on only two sides) and is effectively the roof over the restaurant facility. Elsewhere, there is almost a suburban arrangement of dwellings many appearing as semi-detached types.

Generally the form of the proposed development is as a single-storey podium structure that occupies a considerable area of the site with then smaller two-storey 'buildings' extending upwards from it. You suggested that the scale issue (which had also been raised) had been addressed by this tactic of placing what were apparently two-storey buildings on top of the inhabited substructure.

We think that the appearance of what is now a substantial building complex will continue to have an adverse visual and landscape impact and is unlikely to be regarded as anything other than a three-storey structure. Further, we believe that this slightly surreal imposition of 'conventional' building forms onto this heavily engineered platform will be an alarming aesthetic experience in this location – with little or no visual satisfaction given the clearly artificial setting for the upper levels and the hard forms and elevations it creates at ground level. We would also question the quantum and quality of floor space proposed within the base level e.g. the lack of natural light associated with a single aspect deep plan form.

The visual references included in 'Concepts, Materials and Images of influence' presented to PACE (29.1.18) showed some promising influences and references however these have not been fully realized in the proposals presented to the Panel.

The Site Organisation

The new car park that has been introduced to the layout generates further vehicular routes across the site – the twin carriageways which occur to the rear of the main building is particularly unfortunate and again points towards an inappropriate 'engineered' solution in this sensitive setting and generates a poor quality entrance and frontage for the buildings that face onto it.

The northern car park seems to have intruded into a sensitive part of the site and the presence of vehicles here is bound to have a negative visual impact on the valley and will no doubt affect its ecology. The impact of so many cars (ie light reflectance from windscreens and repetition of regular forms) on the AONB should not be underestimated. If this is to be lit in the evenings / night-time (as seems likely to be necessary?) then further adverse impacts will be present 'after dark'.

The hotel has been introduced in a position with housing to either side – the smaller portion, to the south, seems relatively isolated and will lack privacy with public routes surrounding them. Would it not be better for the hotel to occupy this more public location and the housing to be grouped together in a quieter part of the site?

The layout at the upper levels retains gaps between buildings – you described these as 'opes' but we would beg to differ – the meaning of an 'ope' in urban design terms is more than a gap and the posture of buildings and the locations of entrances along an ope as a public route typically arranged perpendicular to a quayside is very different from what is proposed here.

More generally, there is still a confusion about public and private routes and spaces. These ought to be seamlessly integrated with the arrangement of built form and landscape places being created. We were not convinced that the paths being provided were certainly serving the destinations that might act as attractors to movement – given the parking arrangements and existing routes within this context.

Detailed concerns also relate to the amount of hard surfacing across the whole site, the inevitable pressure to fell/prune trees to create views, appearance and character of the retaining wall.

A Stronger Spatial Framework

It seems, on reflection, that as greater demands have been placed upon the project (retained hotel use / additional parking / reduction in scale) by other stakeholders, and concerns raised by the community then the response has been to find ways to accommodate these requests which have resulted in the unintended consequences of increasing the quantum of accommodation and developed area.

The Panel firmly encourages a 'stock take' of the priorities of the brief set alongside a transparent 'open book' viability assessment in order that all parties can understand

the economics of the project and identify an optimum development rather than a maximum build approach. The podium solution seems to be an expensive idea in terms of the likely construction cost? An approach that posited more conventional buildings rather than a building complex might retain much greater flexibility into the future, be more capable of being sub-divided into phases, be more sustainable and might be more responsive to, and respectful of, the context.

We would urge that before any further detail design is attempted then a very clear spatial framework is developed and confirmed that can organize a reduced brief across the whole site with reduced impact.

Concluding Remarks

It should be clear from the fore-going that we have significant concern about the project in this current form, and the path the design has taken since our last review, we would not be supportive if it was submitted for planning approval.

The viability of the project is not our chief concern but we are well aware of the financial realities that exist within any development process. It does seem to us that the quantum of development being attempted is excessive in this sensitive location and 'good design' here needs to be seen as a mechanism for achieving a more cost-efficient yet higher value solution in order to reduce the developed area and so that the built massing can be reduced. This sensitive site and setting does exert physical and environmental constraints and we suggest that the design and development team might usefully re-establish what the priorities are as a matter of principle, in discussion with the LPA and other stakeholders. A study of precedents in similar sensitive coastal locations may also be helpful in informing a design solution.

We hope that our observations are helpful in supporting further thinking about this project. We recognize that achieving an appropriate design response here is a difficult challenge and we wish the project well – we would be happy to offer a further review should that be requested.

We trust these observations are helpful and of assistance, it must be emphasized that they represent the views of the Cornwall Design Review Panel only and are based on the information presented and discussed at the Panel meeting. They cannot prejudice the outcome of a full appraisal of a planning application on this site or any final determination made through delegation by the Head of the Planning and Regeneration Service or a decision made by a Cornwall Council Committee. However, the local planning authority is required to have regard to the recommendations of this guidance in assessing applications – in accordance with para 62 of the NPPF.

Subject to payment of the appropriate fee the Panel would be pleased to review this project again preferably whilst still at the pre-application stage of the process. If the design of the project is subject to only modest revision prior to submission then a 'desktop review' may be a more appropriate mechanism with which to update our guidance, however, substantial change will merit a further 'full panel review'.

Queries regarding the report content, administration or operation of the Panel should be directed in the first instance to the Panel Facilitator, Julie Hoare, Cornwall Council Tel (01726) 223406 or email Julie.Hoare@cornwall.gov.uk

Confidentiality

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Where commercial confidentiality has been requested by promoters then the Panel will respect that during the pre-application stage, although Cornwall Council is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) and the report may have to be made accessible in response to an information request, unless one of the exemptions in the FOIA applies.

Beyond the pre-application stage, this Cornwall Design Review Panel guidance report (together with any subsequent updated versions) will be made public once the project becomes registered as a formal planning application.

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Any comments or quotations taken from this guidance for use in other documents such as design and access statements must not be abridged and, if selective quotations are used, then a complete copy of the full guidance should be attached as an appendix to that document.