

The Design Review Panel

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Site	Buckfast Abbey, Buckfastleigh, Devon, TQ11 0EE
Proposal	Proposed Buckfast Abbey Care Village
Local Authority	Dartmoor National Park Authority
Applicant	Buckfast Abbey
Architects	KWL Architects
Review Date	27 th November 2019

The session was booked by Dartmoor National Park Authority, and this is the first time The Design Review Panel has reviewed this scheme. This session included a site visit.

The extremely clear, comprehensive, and professional presentation is welcomed by the Panel. It is felt that this comprehensive and professional presentation was of benefit to the design review process. This feedback is given based upon the information submitted to the Panel in advance as well as the presentation and discussion at the session.

Furthermore, it is considered that the site visit undertaken by the Panel was an extremely useful exercise in helping the Panel to appreciate the unique site location and characteristics. The applicant's engagement with the design review process and very clear articulation of the project brief and aspirations for the site is welcomed; these aspirations are supported.

Paragraph 129 of the NPPF states: -

“Local planning authorities should ensure that they have access to, and make appropriate use of, tools and processes for assessing and improving the design of development. These include workshops to engage the local community, design advice and review arrangements ... In assessing applications, local planning authorities should have regard to the outcome from these processes, including any recommendations made by design review panels.”

Therefore, the Panel provides the following feedback: -

It is noted that the proposals have been brought to The Design Review Panel relatively late in the design process, and the Panels comments are therefore given in a spirit of helpfulness and should be read in this context. The Panel recognises the complexity of the scheme and the many layers of information and technical considerations that have already been taken into account in developing the design proposals.

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The very positive aspirations for the site are acknowledged to be extremely worthy. The Panel is supportive of the care village concept and operation model; that is to say the homestead/household model and the intention to provide an architecture that responds to a wide range of care needs, that includes dementia sufferers, is supported. Furthermore, the Panel welcomes the stated aspiration to create proposals that allow and encourage wider public engagement and use of the facilities.

It is also noted that the stated aspirations for the proposed project link to and complement the St Benedictine traditions, and the Panel acknowledges that the abbey's track record in terms of its past estate development is exemplary.

Notwithstanding the above, overall it is considered that the analysis that has led to the narrative, that in turn results in the physical expression of the proposed buildings, is not clear. The Panel accepts that proposals of this type have very specific operational needs and this aspect is not questioned by the Panel. However, the Panel has concerns regarding how the buildings have been positioned within the site and how they relate to their wider context. There is a concern that currently the proposed buildings do not result in a harmonious expression with each other and the proposals are felt to be overly complex; that is to say the logic of the different architectural expressions is not evident. The Panel is not suggesting that the design of the proposed building should be uniform, but rather that they should engender a sense of overall harmony.

It is suggested that it would be helpful for the proposals to demonstrate how the design has been informed by an analysis of the site, both in terms of opportunities and constraints including (not limited to):-

- Site history / historic mapping
- Position of the site within the wider landscape, backdrop, long range views outwards and towards the site
- Analysis of surrounding building heights; including a strategy and reasoning behind the design approach undertaken and how this has been informed by the surrounding buildings
- Topography
- Access routes and wider vehicular and pedestrian links
- Sun paths and shadow studies
- Functional proximities required operationally
- Access requirements,
- Ecology
- Trees/root protection areas

Regarding landscape design, it is noted that the site is very intimate and self-contained and therefore the Panel does not have any concerns regarding the impact that the proposals may have on the wider landscape setting in terms of long range views back towards the proposed development.

Notwithstanding the above, there is a concern that currently the proposals do not result in an inclusive relationship with the adjacent village. It is also considered that the proposals have not demonstrated a visually or physically integrated approach with the wider abbey estate. The Panel feels that the

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design results in a scheme that has the character of a very self-contained campus. In an effort of helpfulness, it is suggested that there may be an opportunity to further explore a range of themes that could demonstrate enhancements to both the wider abbey estate and the village; demonstrating enhancements to the existing settlement may help to address the uncomfortable feeling of such a large self-contained development in this location. It is suggested that it may be beneficial to analyze the proposals and how they relate to their surroundings in terms of being a series of interlinking spaces; that is to say it is suggested that there is an opportunity to create a series of spaces that may provide a tranquil flow through the abbey estate, which it is suggested may be in accordance with the abbey's wider aspirations and ethos.

It is noted that the approach taken regarding the site boundaries is one of concealment, which it is felt may be at odds with the aspiration for the proposals to integrate with the village and wider abbey estate.

It is considered that the river is a key part of the site landscape character. The proposals may benefit from further considering the site relationship to the river, and it is suggested that it would be helpful to the design team for further information to be provided in this regard. There may be an opportunity, that is currently being missed, to provide enhancements to this aspect that may result in a wider public benefit. For example, the Panel suggests that there may be an opportunity to create a publicly accessible green pedestrian edge that overlooks the river.

There may also be an opportunity for the landscape design to be further developed generally to act as a unifying device, that may help to hold the separate buildings together, across both the proposals site as well as across the abbey estate as a whole. There is a concern that currently the proposals do not integrate well with the existing abbey estate, or village setting.

It is considered that the proposal would benefit from demonstrating a response to a contextual analysis that goes beyond the red line of the proposal site; for example it would be helpful to demonstrate how the proposals relate to the village and how end users, both residents and visitors, may permeate through the site, in accordance with the stated aspirations. The Panel recognises there are specific operational needs, however it is felt the proposals should also give consideration to the quality of placemaking and the impact on the village and wider abbey estate.

It may be beneficial, within any future presentation or planning application, to graphically demonstrate how the abbey, the site and the village have evolved over time, illustrating the current proposals as part of an ongoing narrative. It is suggested that this may be helpful as it is noted that the site may have historically accommodated very large buildings.

There is a concern that currently the landscape proposals, architecture and grain of development appears to be overly suburban in character, which it is felt is not in accordance with the design team's stated aspirations and is not considered to be appropriate for this site. It is felt that it may be beneficial for the proposals to better relate to and reflect the surrounding Dartmoor landscape character. There is a further concern that generally the design of the proposals feels overly driven by operational needs,

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without sufficient consideration being also given to the impact the proposals may have on the sense of place and landscape character.

The Panel feels that the design proposals could more fully meet the stated aspiration regarding local distinctiveness. It is felt that the aesthetics conveyed within the 3d visualization images provided at the design review panel session do not relate to southern Dartmoor, or Devon. It is felt that there is an opportunity to better connect with characteristics of the immediate site and the wider locality of Dartmoor. It is considered there should be a better analysis of locally distinctive building materials, surfacing materials and landscape species. Eg. What is particularly special to Dartmoor and South Devon. This analysis should then demonstrably feed into a locally distinctive materials and species palette for the scheme.

There may be an opportunity for the proposals to consider how different demographics may better mix within the site, helping to create a vibrant community within the proposed development site; this may in turn, in accordance with the stated aspirations, represent an enhancement to the existing village.

It is noted that a 1.8m close boarded timber fence is proposed as part of the ecological mitigation measures, however it is suggested that there may be an opportunity for this to be approached differently, perhaps enabling the provision of glimpsed views.

It is noted that the existing buildings within the estate are of a high quality that it is considered is not yet reflected within the architecture of the buildings contained within the presented proposals, and there is a concern that currently the architectural design proposals may not yet meet the longer term stewardship aspirations of the abbey. There may be an opportunity for the proposed external spaces and buildings to better relate to their immediate site context and orientations, helping to maximise natural daylight and outward views; there is a concern that currently many of the external spaces may be in shadow for much of the year.

The Panel is supportive of the provision of the proposed leat and the associated micro hydro energy generation, which it is felt results in an exciting space. There is however a concern that this space feels relatively cut off. It is suggested that there may be opportunities for the design of the proposals to further exploit the available opportunities so as to demonstrate an overall enhancement, rather than only demonstrating mitigation.

Regarding ecology generally, the Panel welcomes the consideration and approach that has been undertaken to date. In an effort of helpfulness, it is suggested there is an opportunity for ecology and habitats to be further enhanced within the development, and not just on the edge/at the site boundaries. The Panel notes that the design team have undertaken further discussions with Natural England since providing the information to the Panel for review, and this is supported. The stated aspiration to reduce and manage artificial light spill is also supported by the Panel and it is noted that a centralized management system may allow for better control in this regard. It is suggested that external lighting within the landscape design (for example up lighting on trees) should also be carefully considered within the management plan.

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The Panel is supportive of the proposals to create a village square; however, it is felt that the potential for this space may have been compromised as a result of indirect access, as well as likely overshadowing from building B. In an effort of helpfulness, it is suggested that it may be beneficial to provide a series of sketches that illustrate how different end users enter into and utilize the site. It is felt that this exercise may help to further inform the design. It is noted that the main external space (village square) and the main center of public activity are not next to each other and it is suggested that it may be beneficial for this strategy to be further considered. Furthermore, it is noted that the village hall and proposed village square are disconnected.

In an effort of helpfulness it is suggested that the drop off roundabout could work harder, that is to say this could become a more useful external public space that may provide a connection to the wider public realm, representing a wider enhancement and public benefit.

There is a concern regarding the relationship between Block C and Block B and the resultant outlook. It is noted that Block B is the only east west orientated building and it is suggested that there may be an opportunity for Block B to be reoriented so as to provide a choice of outlooks for residents, either towards the river or the roadside / entrance, which may provide animated views and be beneficial in preventing a sense of isolation for residents.

It is felt that the smaller standalone extra care apartments (G1 & G2) located to the south may be isolated and overshadowed; it may be beneficial to produce further detail and explanation of these proposed units, the reasoning behind their position, how they will operate as well as how they link both functionally and aspirationally to the wider development.

Regarding the proposed road layout within the site, the Panel suggests that it may be beneficial if this could be reduced, perhaps through making greater use of the main access.

The Panel is supportive of the fabric first approach being undertaken; however, it is suggested there may be an opportunity for the proposed energy strategy to go further, which may also have positive implications regarding ongoing management opportunities for the wider abbey estate.

It is suggested that the proposals would benefit from demonstrating site wide SUDS as an integral part of the overall landscape design. There may be an opportunity for SUDS proposals to be utilized as landscape features and contribute towards the sense of place, as well as provide a connection to the surrounding landscape character and river.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS, (to be read in conjunction with the above).

In summary, the main conclusions of the Panel are: -

- The Panel welcomes the very thorough and professional presentation documentation
- It is considered that the site visit undertaken by the Panel was an extremely useful exercise

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- The Panel is supportive of the care village concept and stated aspirations
- It is not evident how the site analysis and operational needs & constraints has informed the design of the buildings or landscape
- There are concerns regarding buildings siting & wider contextual relationships
- There is a concern the proposals do not result in an inclusive relationship with the village
- There may be an opportunity to further consider the developments relationship to the river
- It is felt the landscape design, architecture and grain of development appears to be overly suburban & does not respond to the local built environment/local distinctiveness
- There is a concern the architectural design may not yet meet the longer-term stewardship aspirations of the abbey
- External lighting should be considered within the management plan
- It is noted that the village square & the main center of public activity are not next to each other
- The village square may be heavily overshadowed by building B
- There is a concern regarding the relationship between Block C and Block B and the resultant outlook
- There may be an opportunity for the proposed energy strategy to go further
- There is an opportunity to integrate SUDS into the landscape design

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NOTES:

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