

DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

NOTES OF MEETING Thursday 31st October 2013

Agenda and notes (where appropriate) can be viewed at the Council's website at:

<http://www.merton.gov.uk/living/designandconservation/designreviewpanel.htm>

Panel Members Present:

- Councillor John Bowcott (Chair)
- Marcus Beale
- Tim Day
- Tony Edwards
- Tim Long
- Sir Duncan Michael
- Tony Michael
- Terry Pawson
- Andre Sutherland

Council Officers Present:

- Paul Garrett
- Ashley Heller (Item 1)
- Tobey Van Zyl (Item 2)
- Sally Squires (Item 3)
- Nas Ravat (Item 4)

Also Present

- Sylvia Synodinou (Urban Design London)
- 3 Members of the public (Item 1)

Notes:

Item 1: 13/P2575, Mitcham Market Canopy

The Panel's views on this application were quite clear, and essentially in two parts. The Panel was in clear support for the improvement of the market and the provision of a canopy to achieve this. They also commended the Council in trying to achieve this. However, the Panel were clear in their view that they did not support the particular design chosen. The Panel were also quite critical of the design in that it felt that its comments made at the review in July had not been accepted or taken on board.

The Panel was very strong in the view that the Council must set an example to others in ensuring that the buildings it commissions are of the highest possible design quality. Not just because it is using public money, but so that it does not undermine its credibility in demanding the same from others in their planning applications. The Panel were quite clear that they felt this proposal was not a quality design.

It was felt especially important that this should be a quality building. It was felt that Mitcham deserved something of high quality to 'lift' the town centre, particularly as the town had suffered from poor quality development and traffic planning in the past. The building was in a highly prominent and visible location, so it needed to be a 'jewel' and have longevity. It was felt that the polycarbonate roof material did not have a quality feel, its effective lifespan was too short and it had poor acoustic properties. It was also considered that the examples shown of where this had been used, were not relevant comparisons to the proposed use, since the polycarbonate is proposed to be a roofing rather than a walling material, and a permanent structure. Glass would be more suitable.

Whilst the Panel welcomed the changes in size and extent of the canopy, it was felt that it still sat awkwardly with the position and orientation of the café. It was also noted that the pavement next to the bus route narrowed to the north, and this was where it was felt more people would be concentrated, and therefore it was important this was not too cramped. Overall, it was felt that the shape of the canopy was not responding to the shape of the site available and therefore sat uncomfortably within it.

Although the Panel acknowledged the clear qualitative improvements to the market that the canopy would bring, it also noted that half of the stalls would be facing outwards and not be giving customers the protection from the weather that the stall holders would be enjoying. It was felt that this somewhat undermined the effectiveness of the canopy.

Previously, comments were made about the decorative elements of the canopy. It was suggested – and reiterated at this review – that the design should be influenced or inspired by an engineering or structural theme (eg. Paxton), rather than a decorative one (eg. Morris). It was felt that the design was more decorative art than sculpture. It was noted that the decorative elements seemed not to be structural and if these were removed, there would be not much left. It was felt that decorative elements needed to perform structural roles as well, in order to demonstrate the suggested, more appropriate, affinity with a structural and engineering inspiration for the design.

Details of power supply, lighting, water supply and paving materials were referred to. Although it was noted that these issues were being addressed and designed-in by the project team, it was felt that these were clearly an integral part of the design and should therefore be included in the planning application material.

The Panel made some suggestions about alternative approaches to design, based on the comments made above, as well as noting the budget constraints referred to by officers:

- Spend the money on high quality paving and power/water facilities and have more traditional market stall covers that are set up each day.
- Remove the decoration and spend the money on a structure capable of taking the weight of glass in the future, even if it could not be afforded at present.
- Make the structure smaller and/or better relate it to the shape of the site and orientation of surrounding streets and buildings. A modular, expandable design might work well.
- Have permanent stall covers, but with a completely different design approach. Lords (Mound Stand) and London Zoo (Aviary) were cited as examples of a lightweight design, with an almost temporary feel, where the structural form and the appearance were integral.

However, it was really felt that there were some fundamental problems with the ideas underpinning the design itself, and it was these that needed to be reassessed, and which led the Panel to its clear verdict. Although this was a more negative response than previously, it was felt that this was appropriate given its application status and lack of any meaningful change or response to previous concerns.

VERDICT: **RED**

Item 2: 13/P2659, Pelham Primary School

The Panel were generally very positive about this proposal. They felt that the analysis in the Design & Access Statement was good. It particularly handled the issue of the mature willow tree well, coming to a considered conclusion that its removal would bring wider benefits to the school, its outdoor space and street frontage. It was however, felt that some form of strategy should be employed to replace lost 'tree years' with equivalent new tree planting.

The Panel felt that the building was in the best place on the site and worked well with the rest of the school. It also created a strong and positive street presence to Southey Road that reflected local character and scale. It also helped create an enclosed rear courtyard play area of good quality. It was felt the scheme benefited from its simplicity.

Overall the Panel felt the design quality to be good, both internally and externally. The plans were clear, logical and worked well. Discussions were had regarding the internal corridor, though on balance, it was felt this did work quite well given it was not too long; and regarding the exterior appearance. It was noted the punched window 'barcode' style of the elevation was an 'in-vogue' style.

This was not necessarily a bad thing but it was important that the building must appear clearly as a school without the need for overly obvious signage, and it must also feel comfortable and welcoming to children. Some further work was recommended on this issue as currently it could appear a bit severe and ascetic. The use of vines and lower cills were suggested as some means of achieving this.

The forward extension of the hall was commended as it unified the new style on the street frontage and introduced a smaller, more human scale element in the elevation. One suggestion did however, suggest this could be rebuilt to provide an additional classroom above (possibly retaining a double height hall below).

To the rear of the hall, where the new building met the old in the crook of the 'L' shape, was where the Panel felt the design was least successful. It was felt that the new and old butted together in a slightly uncomfortable manner that was not fully resolved. The change in buildings needed to be recognised architecturally – not ignored. It was suggested that a 'flash gap' space be provided between the two buildings

The Panel were also critical – in a general sense – about the approach taken regarding parking provision and logistics in general with regard to the Council's schools expansion programme. It was felt that short term issues such as these were dictating designs that may not be the best for the long term future of the school. The buildings should be built to last and short term issues were undermining this.

Although this was not a particular issue with this site, it was felt that the cycle parking could be better placed in front of the new building. This would release more space for the play area and reinforce the image of the building as a school.

Overall, the Panel felt the proposal was very good and the issues raised above did not detract from their clear verdict.

VERDICT: **GREEN**

Item 3: Pre-Application, Singlegate Primary School

Pre-Application. Notes Confidential

Item 4: Pre-Application, Merton Abbey Primary School

Pre-Application. Notes Confidential