

Notes of the Design Surgery at Gravesham Borough Council on 27th April 2022

Gravesham Borough Council attendees: Alison Webster, Karen Cronin, Peter Price
Design South East: Richard Portchmouth, Afreen Patel, Bridie Lebdiri (observer)

Site: Milton Mount Hall, Old Road East Gravesend, Kent, DA12 1NQ

Officer present: Peter Price

Planning application ref: 20211092

Background:

Development of 3-storey building containing 9 x 2 bed flats towards the front of the site, and 2 pairs of semi-detached 3-bedroom houses with 20 car parking spaces.

Comments:

- This is a revised proposal and since its last review shows significant improvements. The Old Road East block is in principle much more successful compared to the previous iteration. In particular the accommodation within is a lot better laid out and gives higher quality spaces and rooms with good daylighting and ventilation.
- The reduction from 5 to 4 houses is an improvement and eases some pressure off the car parking.
- The general existing building orientation is east west along the site. We found it difficult to understand the current proposed orientation of the houses within the site. They are set out at right angles to the street with a north/south alignment and face towards the car park to the adjacent block of flats.
- There is the possibility to reorientate these houses and create a courtyard/mews with the main block facing Old Road East. The scale of the houses could be reduced so the height of the buildings is working with the topography of the site. Lowering the roof to appear 2.5 storeys and not full 3 storeys as shown would help with the southern boundary condition.
- The potential to create more distinctive contemporary architectural expression should be explored. The form and detail of the buildings could provide an improved relationship with the gardens and landscape courtyard. The use of balconies on the south facing elevations help define the main components of the building. The architecture could become more distinctive in response to its orientation by adopting forms that harness the sun and provide a renewable energy source. Once the form is set for the buildings, the materiality can contribute to the expression. Passivhaus design could further enhance the carbon credentials of the scheme.
- The alignment of the front block on Old Road East is not clear in relation to its neighbours and requires further explanation. It seems to have moved forward to take the alignment of the building to the east. It is considerably shallower in plan which has considerably improved its bulk and mass in relation to Wycliffe House.

- The proposed courtyard houses should take inspiration from the context and topography, in order to create a more inventive and bespoke architectural solution that responds to the specific context, along the lines of a Mews typology.
- We recommend that the courtyard parking be reduced. This could be achieved by reducing the number of units in the Old Road East block from 9 x 2 bed apartments to 3 x 2 bed plus 3 x $\frac{3}{4}$ bed maisonettes (reduction of 3 units but equivalent floor areas). This would give much greater potential in creating well landscaped associated courtyard parking and communal amenity spaces.
- A thorough analysis of the site context and sensitivities in terms of privacy, views, outlook is required and will give a platform from which appropriate design parameters and responses can be set. We think the design could further draw in response to the significant site topography and exploit the orientation to inform a contextual and high quality low carbon layout.
- Sketches illustrating some of the above comments are attached for clarification. These are not intended as design solutions and are for discussion & information only.