

Notes of the Design Surgery

at Gravesham Borough Council on 6th October 2021

Gravesham Borough Council attendees: Peter Price

Design South East: Richard Portchmouth, Lizzie Atherton, Ross O’Ceallaigh (observer), Bridie Lebdiri (observer)

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

Officer present: Peter Price

Planning application ref: 20211092

Background:

The application property is a currently vacant single storey community hall (last used as a children’s nursery and dance school) on the south side of Old Road East close to the junction with Spring Grove. Summary of proposals as follows:

- Demolition of existing buildings and outbuildings.
- Erection of a new 4-storey building containing 14 2-bed units.
- Car parking at the back of the property consisting of 17 new spaces.

The local authority is seeking advice on the design, layout, and appropriateness of the scheme in the street scene. Advice is also sought on the internal layout and space for future residents of the scheme.

Comments:

- This is an interesting site, and it is a shame that other more sensitive, and site-responsive options were not presented or explored.
- The singular block approach, large footprint, and high density is leading to the building pushing against the site boundaries; the design doesn’t appear to respond to the street’s quiet character and finer grain.
- The topography has led to a ‘bridge’ connecting the front of the block with the street however the gap beneath is leading to the proposals disengaging with the street. The building should feel it belongs to the street and its entrance should address and enrich the character of the street.
- Due to the proposal’s proximity to the site boundary, we are concerned by the potential overlooking issues with the building to the west of the site which has multiple principal windows on its eastern flank elevation.
- The deep plan, and the organisation of the accommodation, is leading to much of the internal circulation being given over to dark unventilated corridors which is not a pleasant or efficient design.

- The internal environments will not be of good quality – the kitchens and living spaces will be dark and lack natural ventilation.
- An option that could be explored is having 3 units per floor (1 at the back and 2 at the front) rather than 4 so that the living spaces are of higher quality and the units are properly dual aspect. This move would also reduce the amount of car parking required.
- We are unsure about the practicalities of the landscaped border and eco-zone – a maintenance and management plan will need to be worked through and presented – and we are not convinced they will be well-used spaces.
- The SUDs strategy and how it relates to the landscape will be an important part of the application and need to be resolved at an early stage.
- Given the size of the car parking area, a more appropriate approach may be to have a yard at the back, integrated with and broken up by landscape, rather than tarmac bordered by landscape.
- The flank walls appear very plain and lack detail and fenestration – perhaps some brick patterning could be explored. The glass balconies do not look very attractive and must be very tall due to privacy and overlooking issues. Perforated or patterned metal, instead of glass, would be preferable and more conventional.
- We would encourage an approach that explores different types of housing on the site – for example, a small block could be located at the front, addressing the road, whilst at the back of the site could be mews type housing – with a courtyard style space in-between.

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