Comisiwn Dylunio Cymru | **Design Commission for Wales**

Design Review Report: **24 March 2004**
Meeting Date / Material Submitted: **23 March 2004**
Location: **Rear of 26, King's Rd, Pontcanna**
Architects / Developers: **Russell Jones**
Chris Wood

Scheme Description: **Three storey, single residential**
Planning Status: **Full application submitted**

Present:
Cindy Harris
Mike Biddulph
Ann-Marie Smale
Russell Jones
Chris Wood

Presentation

Russell Jones set the background to this proposed development. Pontcanna is a relatively built-up area with little room for new development and this is an infill site. Adjacent houses on Hamilton Street are 2-3 storey Victorian villas. The existing building on the site – an old coachhouse/garage which is intended for demolition - adjoins a derelict store, whose owners are being consulted as to its fate. The site, which is on the edge of a conservation area, forms part of the original plot to 26 King's Rd, although it has frontage onto Hamilton Street.

This proposal is for a three-storey dwelling, with room heights kept to a minimum and an overall height lower than its three-storey Victorian neighbours. The internal layout, with a study on the ground floor lit by high level windows, reflects the lack of privacy and proximity to the street at this level. The combined kitchen and living room is on the first floor and two bedrooms and bathroom are on the second.

Externally, the ground floor shows a strong, solid base, high level windows, a stone facade and full-height sliding timber doors to the parking area. A two-storey lightweight steel frame with timber cladding and large windows,

forms the rest of the facade. A double height bay window to the first and second storeys looks towards the rear of the King's Road houses.

Response and Discussion

Scale and Massing:

In general, members of the Design Review Panel considered that the proposed scale and massing of the scheme was acceptable, as long as it could be demonstrated that the new building would not impact on light access to adjoining properties. The site does not form part of the continued terrace along Hamilton Street, and as it includes a former outbuilding it was felt that the proposed massing of the building would add an interesting new element to the street. It was not considered appropriate to mimic the scale or massing of neighbouring buildings, given the individual nature of the plot and our opinion that the chosen scale and massing does not detract from the character of the conservation area.

There was some discussion as to whether the roof pitch could be made steeper, to improve the proportions and respond to the vertical emphasis of existing houses on Hamilton Street, but without affecting the overall height. This would impact on the internal layout, but the Panel considered that one bedroom could be accommodated on the ground floor, facing onto the private parking area, thus reducing the third storey to one room (second bedroom / study). Different opinions on fenestration were also discussed. Concern was expressed about the rather unfriendly treatment of the ground floor on the street frontage. Both this and the lack of symmetry to the street-fronting façade were considered matters of detail, which given the individual nature of the plot would not detract from the integrity of neighbouring buildings.

Privacy and Light to Neighbouring Properties:

Concern was expressed about the extent to which the double height bay windows appeared to overlook neighbouring gardens on King's Road. The developer made it clear that without the third storey this development would not be commercially viable. The developer suggested frosting glass on these windows to limit overlooking, although the Panel questioned the ultimate intention, when clearly the elaborate design suggested a desire for a view. It was suggested that greater fenestration of the street facing elevations might be considered if light was considered inadequate, whilst the window form to the west might be reduced so that loss of privacy does not become a planning issue.

The Panel also questioned the extent to which properties on King's Road would lose light to habitable rooms. It was suggested that drawings might be prepared to convince all concerned that the scale, massing and location of the building does not inhibit adequate levels of light, especially on such a limited plot.

Sustainability:

The developer was keen to incorporate sustainability features into the design, and was considering installing solar water heating panels. This would probably lead to a change in the roof finish, from slate to zinc sheeting, which would better accommodate the solar panels, show a better relationship with the lightweight upper floors, and would also make reference to the former buildings on the site. The developer also planned to reuse stone from the building to be demolished. The Panel advised that Welsh oak cladding was an environmentally positive choice, although some members considered that the amount of timber on all three elevations, could be reduced. In general it was felt that, given the individual nature of the plot, this type of well designed intervention would add diversity to the street scene, whilst the commitment to sustainability should be fully endorsed.

Conclusion

The Panel considered that on the whole this scheme represented a positive contemporary addition to the streetscape, and that the proposed scale and massing were acceptable on what is a very small site. It does not appear to affect the integrity of adjacent buildings, and the proposed height should not prove an obstacle to the development. In particular the scheme is an undoubted improvement to what exists at present, and it would greatly enhance the neighbouring conservation area, when compared to the poor building and other structures that it seeks to replace.

The Panel strongly recommended that a Design Statement be submitted at the earliest opportunity, admitting the difficulty of the site and the resulting compromises; but emphasising the overall improvement to the street, the design quality and the sustainability measures proposed, referring to TAN 8 and TAN 12. Reference should also be made to architectural precedents for contemporary buildings on inner city infill sites.

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