

Design Review Report:	9 December 2004
Meeting Date / Material Submitted:	1 December 2004
Location:	Abergavenny, Former Lanes Garage Site
Scheme Description:	Residential
Architects / Design Team:	Powell Dobson [Jaime Moya, Ann-Marie Smale]
Client/Developer:	Holm Oak Developments [David Nicholas]
Planning Authority:	Monmouthshire CC [Martin Davies]
Planning Status:	Full application submitted
Design Review Panel:	
Alan Francis (chair)	Phil Roberts
Cindy Harris (officer)	Robert Firth
John Punter	Wendy Hall
Ben Sibert	Douglas Hogg
Observers:	
Gillian Wulff	Peter Roberts

Presentation

This proposal is for a residential development of 31 one and two-bedroom apartments within a conservation area and very close to the historic centre of Abergavenny. 20% of the units will be affordable. The site, which is currently used for motor trade activities, is an important one within the town. It fronts on to Lion Street, opposite the proposed redevelopment of the Cattle Market site, and on to Monk Street, a heavily trafficked route. It also overlooks Brewery Yard - an area identified for regeneration in the urban design framework prepared for Monmouthshire County Council by MacGregor Smith. Local planning policy supports the redevelopment of brownfield sites such as this.

The design seeks to respond to the existing scale and character of its surroundings in a contemporary way, without resorting to pastiche. In particular, it aims to maximise the development potential of the area, provide an architectural statement at the main Lion Street entrance, and enhance pedestrian movement around the site. The relatively modest parking standard (1:1) is felt to be appropriate to this town centre site within easy reach of most facilities. The main vehicular entrance is from Lion Street and parking is contained in a rear internal courtyard. Double height projecting bays help to break up the mass and create visual permeability, combining privacy with surveillance.

The development of these proposals has suffered from a lack of any clear information concerning future plans for Brewery Yard and the Cattle Market site. The Brewery Yard frontage, which ideally would create a residential context, at present overlooks 90 degree parking with no footpath in between. Hence boundary walls are provided at this point, but there is potential for front gardens in the future.

The developer, who is local to the area, is keen to develop environmental features in this scheme, such as rainwater harvesting, sustainable drainage, mechanical ventilation units with heat recovery, solar powered street lights and structural timber frame. He believes there is a marketing advantage in being able to offer these features. The contractor, to be appointed under a modified Design and Build contract, will be judged on their environmental statement and willingness to work within this framework.

The local planning authority has concerns about the scale of the proposed development, especially on the Brewery Yard and Lion Street frontages which could be seen to dominate existing buildings. In this respect, the proposals do not respond to the context and would be intrusive. The rectilinear balconies are viewed as discordant and not sympathetic to the context. There is also concern about the lack of live frontages. The application is currently in abeyance, awaiting the architect's response to these issues.

Panel's Response

The panel regrets the lack of live frontages along Brewery Yard but appreciates the difficulties for the designers and developer arising from the lack of any indication on the nature of future development. We think that more variation could be introduced into the major frontage along Brewery Yard, including direct access, and that the Lion Street frontage should be made more domestic, with a reduced height of two stories. Rooflines on the Lion Street and Monk Street blocks could be broken up vertically by ventilation shaft 'chimneyheads'.

We would like to see the block on Lion Street extended over the main vehicular entrance, as would the architects, but this has been strongly resisted by the highways engineers on the grounds that it would prejudice access by emergency vehicles. We support the local authority's view that the double height rectilinear balconies sit uncomfortably in this context.

The east/west pedestrian route on the southern edge of site remains a 'dead' space and would benefit from having residential units fronting onto it. Current proposals show a railing along the southern edge with no gate. The developers are anxious to avoid overdevelopment and have been constrained by the parking standard, although this has been reduced. The panel considers that more should be

done to enliven and promote greater use of this pedestrian route. We suggest that, as a minimum contribution to this, the Monk Street frontage could be returned some way along the route, facing the MDC office.

The panel sees no reason to create a gap between these buildings and the adjacent property on Monk Street. The applicants referred to a 'rights of light' issue, but this only occurs at the rear and would be unaffected by any gap.

The panel applauds the developer's approach to sustainable construction, though we are concerned that it may be eroded in the process of 'Design and Build'. The courtyard finish will be permeable paving, in line with sustainable drainage objectives.

Summary

- The panel welcomes the principle of residential development on this site, and the environmental aspirations of the developer
- We share the frustrations of the developer and designers with regard to the lack of information on future development of Brewery Yard and the Cattle Market site. We urge the local authority to rectify this as soon as possible, and ideally in time for this scheme to benefit from a clear policy direction. We would like to see direct access from the houses into Brewery Yard.
- We would much prefer to see a continuous built form along Lion Street, with an inhabited overpass above the vehicular entrance. The gap between the buildings on Monk Street should be closed.
- We find the projecting balconies unsympathetic to the context.
- We would like to see more variety in the scale and elevational treatments of different frontages. The massing on Lion Street is too high and should be reduced.
- The east/west pedestrian route on the southern boundary of the site should be enhanced and reinforced.
- The parking standards, while reduced to a relatively modest level, should be revisited and reduced even further.

End

NB A Welsh language copy of this report is available upon request.