

South Cambridgeshire District Council

Design Enabling Panel

PANEL MEETING REPORT

Scheme:	Construction of a new dwelling in the open countryside outside the village development framework. A "Paragraph 79 dwelling" under the ' <i>National Planning Policy Framework</i> ' (2019)
Site address:	Land adjacent to Mill Farm, Fowlmere Road, Melbourn, SG8 6EZ
Status:	Full planning application ref: 20/03105/FUL
Date:	Thursday 19 November 2020
Venue:	The DEP meeting was conducted online via Microsoft TEAMS due to Covid-19
Time:	10:00 – 12:30
Site visit:	A site visit was conducted by the DEP Manager on 18 November 2020 who filmed the site visit. The site visit videos were viewed by Panel Members prior to the DEP meeting.

Panel Members

Simon Carne (Chair) – Director, Simon Carne Architect

David Gibson – Director, David Gibson Architects

David Gunn – Senior Architect, Adamson Associates

Nicolas Tye – Director, Tye Architects Ltd

Graham Whitehouse – Director, GWP Architects Ltd

Local Authority attendees

Dr. Bonnie Kwok, Principal Urban Designer & DEP Manager

Tom Davies – Urban Design Officer (Urban Design)

Jane Rodens – Senior Planning Officer (Case Officer)

Dean Scrivener – Senior Planning Officer (Case Officer)

Applicant and Representatives

Timothy Poulson – Director, Poulson Architecture (Applicant and Architect)

Marcus Kohler – Director, MKA Ecology (Ecologist)

Professor Robert Tregay – Director, Robert Tregay Limited (Landscape Architect)

Dan Cash – Senior Lecturer, University of the West of England (Energy Consultant)

Declaration of potential conflict of interest

At the start of the design review meeting, the Panel Manager informed all Panel members that the applicant Tim Poulson is a member of the Design Enabling Panel and all DEP members confirmed that there was no conflict of interest.

Relevant planning policies

'National Planning Policy Framework' (2019) (NPPF)

Paragraph 79 - Planning policies and decisions should avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside unless one or more of the following circumstances apply:

- a) there is an essential need for a rural worker, including those taking majority control of a farm business, to live permanently at or near their place of work in the countryside;
- b) the development would represent the optimal viable use of a heritage asset or would be appropriate enabling development to secure the future of heritage assets;
- c) the development would re-use redundant or disused buildings and enhance its immediate setting;
- d) the development would involve the subdivision of an existing residential dwelling; or
- e) the design is of exceptional quality, in that it:
 - is truly outstanding or innovative, reflecting the highest standards in architecture, and would help to raise standards of design more generally in rural areas; and
 - would significantly enhance its immediate setting, and be sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area.

Paragraph 124 - The creation of high-quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities. Being clear about design expectations, and how these will be tested, is essential for achieving this. So too is effective engagement between applicants, communities, local planning authorities and other interests throughout the process.

Paragraph 127 - Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:

- a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;
- b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;
- c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);

- d) establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;
- e) optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and
- f) create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users⁴⁶; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.

Paragraph 128 - Design quality should be considered throughout the evolution and assessment of individual proposals. Early discussion between applicants, the local planning authority and local community about the design and style of emerging schemes is important for clarifying expectations and reconciling local and commercial interests. Applicants should work closely with those affected by their proposals to evolve designs that take account of the views of the community. Applications that can demonstrate early, proactive and effective engagement with the community should be looked on more favourably than those that cannot.

Paragraph 129 - Local planning authorities should ensure that they have access to, and make appropriate use of, tools and processes for assessing and improving the design of development. These include workshops to engage the local community, design advice and review arrangements, and assessment frameworks such as Building for Life. These are of most benefit if used as early as possible in the evolution of schemes, and are particularly important for significant projects such as large scale housing and mixed use developments. In assessing applications, local planning authorities should have regard to the outcome from these processes, including any recommendations made by design review panels.

Paragraph 130 - Permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, taking into account any local design standards or style guides in plans or supplementary planning documents. Conversely, where the design of a development accords with clear expectations in plan policies, design should not be used by the decision-maker as a valid reason to object to development. Local planning authorities should also seek to ensure that the quality of approved development is not materially diminished between permission and completion, as a result of changes being made to the permitted scheme (for example through changes to approved details such as the materials used).

Paragraph 131 - In determining applications, great weight should be given to outstanding or innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability, or help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, so long as they fit in with the overall form and layout of their surroundings.

'South Cambridgeshire Local Plan' (2018)

Policy H/15 Countryside Dwellings of Exceptional Quality

Outside the Green Belt, single new bespoke dwellings of exceptional quality will be permitted in the countryside providing all of the following criteria are met:

- a) The dwelling would reflect the highest standards in architecture, being recognised as truly outstanding or innovative;
- b) The dwelling would significantly enhance its mediate setting;
- c) The nature and size of the site, and the design of the dwelling, its landscaping and location on site are sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area and to wider views;
- d) That there are no existing dwellings on the site capable of being replaced under Policy H/14.

Policy HQ/1 Design Principles

1. All new development must be of high-quality design, with a clear vision as to the positive contribution the development will make to its local and wider context. As appropriate to the scale and nature of the development, proposals must:
 - a) Preserve or enhance the character of the local urban and rural area and respond to its context in the wider landscape;
 - b) Conserve or enhance important natural and historic assets and their setting;
 - c) Include variety and interest within a coherent, place-responsive design, which is legible and creates a positive sense of place and identity whilst also responding to the local context and respecting local distinctiveness;
 - d) Be compatible with its location and appropriate in terms of scale, density, mass, form, siting, design, proportion, materials, texture and colour in relation to the surrounding area;
 - e) Deliver a strong visual relationship between buildings that comfortably define and enclose streets, squares and public places, creating interesting vistas, skylines, focal points and appropriately scaled landmarks along routes and around spaces;
 - f) Achieve a permeable development with ease of movement and access for all users and abilities, with user friendly and conveniently accessible streets and other routes both within the development and linking with its surroundings and existing and proposed facilities and services, focusing on delivering attractive and safe opportunities for walking, cycling, public transport and, where appropriate, horse riding;
 - g) Provide safe and convenient access for all users and abilities to public buildings and spaces, including those with limited mobility or those with other impairment such as of sight or hearing;
 - h) Ensure that car parking is integrated into the development in a convenient, accessible manner and does not dominate the development and its surroundings or cause safety issues;

- i) Provide safe, secure, convenient and accessible provision for cycle parking and storage, facilities for waste management, recycling and collection in a manner that is appropriately integrated within the overall development;
 - j) Provide a harmonious integrated mix of uses both within the site and with its surroundings that contributes to the creation of inclusive communities providing the facilities and services to meet the needs of the community;
 - k) Ensure developments deliver flexibility that allows for future changes in needs and lifestyles, and adaptation to climate change;
 - l) Mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change on development through location, form, orientation, materials and design of buildings and spaces;
 - m) Include high quality landscaping and public spaces that integrate the development with its surroundings, having a clear definition between public and private space which provide opportunities for recreation, social interaction as well as support healthy lifestyles, biodiversity, sustainable drainage and climate change mitigation;
 - n) Protect the health and amenity of occupiers and surrounding uses from development that is overlooking, overbearing or results in a loss of daylight or development which would create unacceptable impacts such as noise, vibration, odour, emissions and dust;
 - o) Design-out crime and create an environment that is created for people that is and feels safe, and has a strong community focus.
2. Larger and more complex developments will be required to submit Masterplans and Design Codes to agree an overall vision and strategy for a development as a whole that demonstrates a comprehensive and inclusive approach.

'District Design Guide' (2010)

This document sets out minimum residential amenity standards for new developments in the district, e.g. minimum private and communal amenity space, minimum back-to-back distances, minimum garage sizes, etc.

'Cambridgeshire Quality Charter for Growth' (2010)

This document sets out core principles of the level of quality to be expected in new developments in the district: the 4Cs, i.e. Community, Connectivity, Character and Climate. Collectively, they form the basic principles for achieving higher quality development that meets the needs our communities. New housing development should provide a great choice of housing along with the active participation of local communities. New developments should be located where people can benefit from high connectivity to jobs and services. Climate change should be tackled through imaginative landscaping and innovative approaches to transport, energy and waste. Places of character should be created, with distinctive neighbourhoods and a first-class public realm.

Background information

Timothy Poulson is client and architect for the proposed NPPF Paragraph 79 house located on a site that is part of a site that adjoins his house. The architect has lived on the site since it was purchased in the 1990s. The site contained a number of buildings, one of which has been converted and sold. The Mill Farm itself consists of the remains of original agricultural buildings, greatly enlarged with a steel framed extension designed by Timothy and constructed in 2005. The proposed NPPF Paragraph 79 house was reviewed by the DEP on 27 September 2018, 28 February 2019 and 8 August 2019. This is the fourth design review.

At the first review design on 27 September 2018, the architect presented his very early thoughts on the proposal in advance of commissioning specialists to conduct studies to support the proposition. The Panel stressed the importance of obtaining studies prior to developing a design. At that stage, the development was essentially for a building of a particular and distinctive character sited without the input of the landscape and ecology studies.

At the second review on 28 February 2019, a radically different plan was proposed, and a number of new precedents presented as inspiration that set the design on a different course. The Panel noted that 'the change in form is an abrupt change of direction, which raises questions without any answers provided'. Studies had been instigated but there was little evidence at that stage that they had informed the development of the site planning and house design.

At the third review on 8 August 2019, there were two new members (Judith Tranter and Simon Conder) and one panel member (David Gibson) from the first and second reviews, who could not be present but commented positively on the proposals in advance through a desktop review. The Panel, as a whole, was supportive of the direction the design was taking. There were still concerns on a number of factors, including:

- 1) The Loggia – clarification on this space and how it could function as an outdoor space for rest and relaxation. T
- 2) The Winter garden – it sits within the 6-metre square grid. The surrounding circulation space, which is approximately 1.6m wide, is quite separate from the top lit central space. The Panel considers the corridor a space of limited value and a missed opportunity.
- 3) Lifetime homes should be demonstrated, in particular, the scale and fitting out of washrooms, lavatories and bathrooms.
- 4) Furnishing the plans is essential to support the spatial proposition and how it will function.
- 5) Materiality – justification on the use of Corten steel in terms of sustainability.
- 6) The simple structural grid will require greater depth to support the larger spans in front of the studios and music rooms. The sections and elevations need to be drawn out in more detail.

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At the fourth review on 8 August 2020, a new member Graham Whitehouse (DEP Chair) was included in the meeting to share his expertise on Para 79 proposals. This is due to both Judith Tranter and Simon Conder have retired from the Panel. The other Panel Members: Simon Carne, David Gibson, David Gunn and Nicolas Tye have all attended previous design review meetings on more than one occasion and are familiar with the site and the proposals.

Panel views

It should be noted that the comments below include items from the Panel's in-camera discussion and amplify the brief opinion delivered at the end of the session.

Summary

On behalf of the Panel, the Chair Simon Carne thanked Tim Poulson for a very thorough response to the comments made at the previous DEP meetings, and for putting together an exemplary presentation for the Panel to review.

There is general agreement amongst the Panel that the scheme is close to an endorsement, but it has not cleared that bar yet.

The applicant is asked to provide further information in relation to the construction details of the proposed dwelling (see details outlined below). The information can then be assessed by three of four panel members through a desktop review.

The further comments below indicate the extent of detail design justification that a Paragraph 79 scheme requires. Truly outstanding design of exceptional quality, reflecting the highest standards in architecture, raising standards of design generally in rural areas, the enhancement of setting and sensitivity to the defining characteristics of the area, requires a level of detail significantly beyond a normal planning application. Comparisons with schemes that have achieved approval elsewhere in the immediate area beyond South Cambridgeshire are not relevant, although the fact that Chris Loyn's Icomb scheme was only approved on appeal despite the Design Review Panel's endorsement indicates the challenge.

Introduction

The Hide

The Panel thanked Tim Poulson and his team for their presentation of the proposal for a new house of exceptional quality under Paragraph 79 of the 'National Planning Policy Framework' (2019) (NPPF). This is the fourth time the Panel has reviewed a scheme for the site and following the practice of the Design Enabling Panel (DEP), the members of the Panel have viewed a scheme at least twice before. This is Graham Whitehouse's first sight of the proposal and Graham has also not had the benefit of a site visit but has seen videos of the site and

existing house circulated to the Panel. All the other members of the Panel have visited the site and Tim's existing house, Mill Farm.

Whilst this is the fourth review, Tim explained that the first proposal was essentially a sighting shot to assess whether a scheme along the lines of the initial concept presented had the potential to be developed. The Panel advised Tim to undertake site studies and engage in particular with landscape and ecology experts and to develop a design informed by those studies.

The second scheme reported the results of the background studies, which was welcomed. The proposal moved away from the initial concept and the Panel considered that the move was not supported by a convincing rationale. The Panel report also queried the variety of historic and contemporary references without explaining why or how they were relevant.

The third presentation returned to the initial concept, informed by the background studies. There were a number of concerns which Tim Poulson has now addressed in his fourth iteration.

The chronology is included because there may be a perception that, after four presentations, the design should be close to completion. The Panel believe that this most recent iteration is really the second in the sequence and as such it has highlighted a number of issues that still need to be addressed.

The presentation

Tim introduced the presentation to this review by re-visiting the vision and inspiration for the design stressing his approach for simplicity, in contrast to the complexity of many other proposals for Paragraph 79 houses, some of dubious quality. Tim's presentation described a clear and logical story behind the development of the house.

Progress since the third review and how it had evolved covers eight areas of concern:

- 1) Sensitivity to the site topography. This proposal is a welcomed evolution with a sensitive consideration of the building and site levels, the approach and setting of the house, ancillary spaces and landscape.
- 2) Element of surprise and theatre. The Panel endorse the changes to improve the approach and access to the house. The entrance through an enclosed courtyard is a significant and welcome development.
- 3) Orientation and shading. The Panel previously wondered whether the Corten veil of fins was for occlusion and/or shading? Tim referred to the orientation shared with the Villa Rotunda. He has refined the design so that shading is limited to the south east and south west, where it is most needed. The reassessment of the strict symmetry has led to a reduction of shading and the colonnade is interrupted to allow important views out. The plan now responds to the sun's movement around the building with the north east elevation devoid of overhang and colonnade.

4) Rigour, symmetry and simplicity. This is a further development of 3. above. Stripping the design back to a clear expression of the house, as a unitary enclosure with a simplified internal layout is welcomed.

5) The winter garden and circulation. The refined development of the internal planning and the concept of rooms in a natural landscape is well illustrated. The central winter garden court now connects to the landscape and provides for assembly and entertainment with circulation no longer separated. This creates a 9m square space, the centre part being openable to the sky. The scale of this centre space is also referenced back to the Villa Rotunda. These are significant and welcome moves.

6) Mobility and Lifetime homes. This has been addressed and demonstrated. Vehicle access by bringing the cars into the piazza is the right move and enhances the sense of arrival. Lifetime homes diagrams and commentary are also welcomed.

7) Corten steel justification. In Tim's own words it is a "a noble material". Affinity to the landscape character and its relationship with natural materials is well argued. Its recyclability and low maintenance requirements will need further justification. The extensive use of Corten in the scheme is an important feature of the design, which is discussed further in the Panel's comments.

8) Integration of water elements. Tim admitted that it hadn't been thought through as much as other features in the previous iteration. It has been developed as a decorative element. The panel wonder whether this could be taken further in the celebration of water in the design. How the roofs are drained was also part of the further discussion.

In the Landscape description, Robert Tregay demonstrated how the landscape contributes to the design of the building. The unity of man and nature and the integration of landscape and nature with the built form. The sense of order that is taken out into the landscape and how it enhances the site. Defining the approach sequence and the integration of the building with the site are important contributions to satisfying Paragraph 79.

In Ecology, Marcus Kohler stressed the creation of a continuous environment and habitat including a wetland area, orchard and meadow. This delivers a mosaic of diversity value for a sustainable development. All adding up to a significant improvement to the site's ecology.

Dan Cash described the environmental 'exergy' system using data to control building environmental services. The system maximises the use of energy on site, giving and taking energy from the grid and addressing how this building will work within the wider network. Whilst there was no further discussion of this aspect, the Panel believe it would be valuable to monitor and report on the system in use. This could be an important contribution to understanding the efficacy of the environmental design.

Discussions

The discussion focussed on a number of more detailed and practical aspects of the design. The proposal has now developed to a stage where such matters need to be clarified as part of the

planning application for a Para 79 house. The high bar set by Para 79 requires greater certainty and detailed information to demonstrate that the design is of exceptional quality.

Structure, construction and materials

In response to general questions on the development of the design, Tim described the structure, material build up and indicated thicknesses of various materials and elements of structure. In the absence of dimensioned drawings, the Panel are unable to endorse the proposal purely based on the written and verbal descriptions provided to date.

The construction methodology uses simple methods and modern techniques to achieve a refined and considered outcome. This is a welcome approach. But the build-up of materials and prefabrication mentioned, have not been drawn. Drawings to describe the design should indicate design intentions including sketch details, with key dimensions. They should describe and illustrate the appearance of materials based on detailed consideration. Drawings sufficient for the Panel to assess the design are critical. The quality and integrity of the design must be demonstrated. Typical wall sections, plans indicating structural layouts, supporting walls and columns, non-structural partition wall and removable 'furniture' walls will demonstrate the flexibility of layout, which the architect has claimed as an important feature of the design. Technical aspects of the design and its environmental performance need to be addressed.

To give the Council and Panel confidence in the design's quality, the Panel wonder whether a structural engineer would assist in integrating the detailing and structural requirements of the building and providing a rationale for the structural system being proposed. Whilst the Panel acknowledge that the proposal is not complex, indeed simplicity is one of the key elements of Tim's justification, structural design has taken a minor role in the proposal and yet details may arise that can affect the appearance. The structural proposal would be an important part of demonstrating 'the highest standards in architecture'.

Flexibility implied by 'furniture as wall elements' requires an understanding of the extent of the desired flexibility. Moving furniture elements could affect service runs and internal finishes. The integration of services and structure within a flexible proposal requires more information.

The use of Corten

The detailing and weathering of Corten was highlighted in the third review and mentioned again in this review. The perimeter cladding is described as a rain screen system using thin form Corten steel prefabricated panels. How this is detailed, fixed and panels are jointed, the scale of cladding panels and how they provide a continuous appearance as implied by the illustrations needs to be addressed. The freestanding elements enclosing the entrance court also require explanation of the material and its stability as freestanding elements. Information on the embodied carbon content of Corten and a metal framed wall structure (should that structural design option be confirmed) would assist in gaining an endorsement of the sustainability credentials of the design.

Rainwater disposal and drainage

The desire to make use of water on the site is welcomed, but more can be achieved. Roof falls and rainwater disposal from the main and ancillary spaces roofs is not shown. Where does the run-off go? How are paved area drained? The routing of surface water drainage and location of downpipes needs to be shown. The effect of rain on the appearance of the Corten cladding could affect the Corten. Runoff at ground level and the potential for contamination of water from the rusted surfacing should be considered. It is important that all aspects of the selection of Corten and its detailing is covered as this will be the key element on the appearance of the building. Demonstrating the robustness of the proposal and its appearance over time will be the focus of attention from the planning authority. Foul drainage and its disposal is not mentioned.

Dimensioned plans and sections with key details at reasonable scales through the building will explain much of the information required to address the points above and will also clarify key building dimensions and the integration of structure and services including ventilation of internal bathroom and lavatory spaces. This will aid an understanding of how the simplicity of building and construction is achieved.

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Note: *Please note that these comments are informal opinion of the Council's Design Enabling Panel and relate to the design aspects of the proposals. The comments are produced for discussion purposes only with the applicant. The views expressed will not bind the decision of Council members should a planning application be submitted, nor prejudice the formal decision-making process of the Council.*