

Report of the Ashford Design Review
Panel

Land at Liberty Farm, Bradbourne

17 July 2021

The design review meeting

Reference number	1653/300621
Date	30 June 2021
Meeting location	Online via Zoom
Panel members attending	Liz Gibney (chair), architecture Chris Bearman, architecture Peter Neal, ecology, landscape architecture Richard Portchmouth, architecture Robert Sakula, architecture
Panel manager	Xan Goetzee-Barral, Design South East
Presenting team	Olivia Hellman, Hollaway Alex Richards, Hollaway Ian Turkington, Turkington Martin
Other attendees	Tracey Block, Brabourne Parish Council Mick Burgess, Ashford Borough Council James Dodson, HydroGenesis William Harbottle, Brabourne Parish Council Paul Howson, Ashford Borough Council Caroline Richards, Client Oliver Peel, Ashford Borough Council Ben Sayers, HydroGenesis Elizabeth Welch, Hobbs Parker
Site visit	This review was carried out during the Covid-19 outbreak in 2020/21. Independent site study including desktop research prepared by the design team and a digital walk-around (in a similar fashion to that which would have been conducted on-site) was carried out prior to the review.
Scope of the review	As an independent design review panel the scope of this review was not restricted. However, the local authority asked us to particularly concentrate on the quality of design assessed against Paragraph 79 criteria.
Panel interests	Panel members did not indicate any conflicts of interest.

Confidentiality

This report is confidential as the scheme is not yet the subject of a detailed planning application. Full details of our confidentiality policy can be found at the end of this report.

The proposal

Name	Liberty Farm
Site location	Land at Liberty Farm, Canterbury Road, Bradbourne, Kent TN25 6LP
Site details	10 Ha site of open land for pasture and hay meadows, broken with hedgerows. The site is on a south-facing hillside. There is a small barn and animal stabling without connection to the wider utility network located to the east of the site. Access points are located on the eastern edge directly to Canterbury Road.
Proposal	One-off dwelling house across several levels cut into the ground.
Planning stage	Pre-application. A full planning application is intended to be submitted.
Local planning authority	Ashford Borough Council
Planning context	<p>The site sits within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding National Beauty (AONB) and it has open views to the south with very limited views to the north. An area of Ancient woodland lies to the north-west corner of the site. The site also sits within an area highlighted as having archaeological potential.</p> <p>For the proposal to be acceptable it must meet Paragraph 79 criteria as well as the Local Planning Authority's (LPA) H015 exception criteria, for dwellings in remote locations.</p> <p>The site falls within the East Stour catchment area and is therefore subject to particular environmental policies. The proposal must have nutrient neutrality in its wastewater drainage.</p>
Planning history	No recent or relevant planning applications.
Planning authority perspective	Residential development would not usually be permitted on this site given its unsustainable and remote location in an AONB. The proposal must meet Paragraph 79 criteria as well the LPA's H105 exception criteria.
Community engagement	None.

Summary

The panel commend the client and design team for a thorough, compelling presentation. The proposal is well thought through and grounded in sound analysis. The narrative underpinning the proposal is evident, and the team have established a strong case for the house.

However, there is ambiguity in the architectural identity of the scheme, and it is unclear how the building relates to the landscape. Successfully addressing these issues will provide a unique opportunity to establish an outstanding piece of architecture that is a sensitive and long-term solution for the site. Doing so will also provide a framework through which to resolve the design issues outlined below.

The panel is therefore not convinced the proposal meets the high standards set out in Paragraph 79 criteria. However, with the approach, capability and commitment demonstrated, we believe there is an opportunity to do so with further design development.

Key recommendations

1. Resolve the architectural identity of the proposal by studying contemporary farmhouse typologies and how these might sensitively respond to the site in the long term.
2. Clarify the degree to which the building is hidden or expressed in the landscape through a series of accurate section drawings.
3. Develop the relationship of the building to the landscape, in terms of the programme, form, elevational design and plan-roof relationship as this will strengthen the narrative of the proposal.
4. Carry out further studies into species, prevailing habitat structure of woodland, scrubland and meadow, as well as surface water drainage and embed this into the landscape design.
5. Consider alternative outlooks and positioning of the building in the landform following a detailed topographical study of the site.

Detailed comments and recommendations

1. Architecture

- 1.1. The proposal presents a fascinating, strong and positive narrative that clearly relates to an authentic rural family lifestyle.
- 1.2. However, the relationship of the building design to its use as a family farm and its architectural identity are not yet resolved. The traditional qualities and character of a farm are concealed by an over stylised architecture with elements, in particular the choice of materials, that are inappropriate to the programme and context. Whilst a traditional farmhouse is not necessarily the only appropriate reference, the design team should study variations of the farmhouse typology and produce a number of options. Discussion in the review concluded that a contemporary farmhouse might be the most appropriate solution for the site and client and pursuing this typology will achieve a strong identity for the proposal.
- 1.3. It is not yet clear how the building will adapt over time as generations of the family grow older, the study of the farmhouse typology might provide an opportunity to develop this aspect of the design and further strengthen the narrative of the proposal.
- 1.4. The ambiguity of the proposal is also evident in the relationship of the building to the site, as it attempts to be an architectural statement as well as discreetly conceal itself in the landscape. This approach undermines the overall proposal. The extent to which the building is dug into the ground versus protruding from it is not clear. The protrusions will create numerous precipices with sheer drops that seem unsuitable for a family farm lifestyle. The precipices will need to be mitigated with protective barriers that could severely detract from the building and landscape design. The exposed slab edges appear overly thick and detract from the quality of design. Detailed section drawings should be produced to explain how the building is integrated into the landform, how expressed/hidden it is and how the users will move around it, including where there are precipices.
- 1.5. The concept of chalk scars presents an interesting opportunity for the proposal to respond to the site's unique qualities, but it is unclear how the concept has been applied to the proposal and the design team is encouraged to articulate and resolve this by developing the elevational design. The currently unsuccessful integration of the greenhouse into the proposal could be resolved by studying how it responds to this concept of chalk scars.
- 1.6. The rectilinear arrangement of the plan does not allow for a sensitive response to the landscape and landform around it, considering the curvilinear design of the roof. The interplay between these two critical elements has not been sufficiently studied; the design team should consider how the relationship between the plan and roof

might allow for a dynamic solution that generates character for the proposal. Whilst the panel welcome the use of Virtual Reality modelling, a physical three-dimensional model may also help to develop and resolve these issues.

2. Landscape and ecology

- 2.1. A thorough analysis of the site was presented, which is welcomed, however a more detailed historic map analysis of the site and wider setting should be carried out to understand the changes in uses and boundaries. This will allow the design team to better understand the boundaries and field patterns of the site and how this might play a more significant role in the narrative.
- 2.2. The relationship of the proposal to the landscape is not yet clear, as demonstrated in the drawings that appear abstract and require further resolution. In particular, how the use of meadows might change could be more closely linked to the building design as this will provide opportunities for the proposal to enhance the site.
- 2.3. The design team must ensure the stewardship of the site extends beyond the construction phases and through successive generations, to ensure the character of the site and the proposal is protected.
- 2.4. There appears to be two distinguishable areas in the proposal – indoor and outdoor spaces, with little differentiation in between. The landscape areas close to the building are likely to become gardened and domesticated and it is important this is designed into the proposal from the onset.
- 2.5. The detail of the ecological analysis is encouraging and the reinforcement of hedgerows and use of wildflower meadows is sensible. However, further study into the species as well as the woodland and scrubland should be carried out to ensure a sensitive and more comprehensive response to the setting that considers the important role of these key ecological elements.
- 2.6. The management and use of surface water is not yet well refined and this should be addressed now to understand the impact it will have on the wider drainage network, a key policy concern raised by the LPA at the review.

3. Layout and access

- 3.1. The proposal's location on a south-facing hillside has resulted in a single aspect building. The design team is encouraged to consider other outlooks as this might establish a more intimate relationship with less prominent parts of the site and consequently maximise the site's qualities. Multiple aspects is best practice in a residential environment as it provides environmental and quality of life benefits.

- 3.2. The proposed location of the building positively responds to the barn and woodland edge whilst reinforcing the hedgerow network. The panel questioned whether the proposed offset rotation of the building from the natural topography could be adjusted to better respond to the prevailing landform and suggested a more detailed topographical study is carried out.
- 3.3. The access arrangements generally seem resolved, although a diagram indicating vehicular access to the building versus tractor movement across the site would be a useful addition to the presentation to confirm that neither farm nor domestic functionality is compromised by the proposed layout. The panel questioned whether the proposed tunnel would be the most appropriate solution to access the barn.
- 3.4. A site plan of the building was not presented at the review and the panel was therefore unable to fully understand the internal access arrangements and location of the thermal envelope. These elements of the design should be addressed now to ensure they relate to the external conditions. A site plan will also help the panel understand proposals for fencing and cattle grids, amongst other boundary conditions.

4. Materials and detailing

- 4.1. The approach to materials and detailing was not discussed in great detail at this review. However, the choice of materials and quality of detailing should be significant contributors both to the enhancement of the setting and the outstanding nature of the proposal. The material choice should also be evaluated in respect of the building's carbon footprint with a view to achieve a net zero carbon development.
- 4.2. Paragraph 130 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2018) states: *'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).'*
- 4.3. In order to be consistent with this national policy, the applicant team and local authority should note Design South East's general guidance on material quality and detail. At planning application stage, the quality of the detailing should be demonstrated through large scale drawings at 1:20 and 1:5 of key elements of the building/landscape and should be accompanied by actual material samples which should be secured by condition as part of any planning approval.

5. Energy strategy

- 5.1. The approach to energy efficiency was not discussed in great detail at this review, however, the use of hydrogen as a storage medium appears to be an interesting and

innovative approach that should be pursued at a greater detail. Overall, the panel would expect that as a Paragraph 79 proposal this should be an exemplar project leading in the field of sustainability and ecological design to help raise standards generally.

- 5.2. Our guidance is that at the planning application stage the proposal must produce a clear energy strategy which details how the development will optimise thermal performance, minimise the demand for energy, supply the remaining energy requirements efficiently and optimise the use of renewables in order to align with the Government's emerging zero carbon policy. This strategy should be informed by detailed modelling work informed by respected calculation methods.

Confidentiality

If the scheme was not the subject of a planning application when it came to the panel, this report is offered in confidence to those who attended the review meeting. There is no objection to the report being shared within the recipients' organisations provided that the content of the report is treated in the strictest confidence. Neither the content of the report, nor the report itself can be shared with anyone outside the recipients' organisations. Design South East reserves the right to make the content of this report known should the views contained in this report be made public in whole or in part (either accurately or inaccurately). Unless previously agreed, pre-application reports will be made publicly available if the scheme becomes the subject of a planning application or public inquiry. Design South East also reserves the right to make this report available to another design review panel should the scheme go before them. If you do not require this report to be kept confidential, please inform us.

If the scheme is the subject of a planning application the report will be made publicly available and we expect the local authority to include it in the case documents.

Role of design review

This is the report of a design review panel, forum or workshop. Design review is endorsed by the National Planning Policy Framework and the opinions and recommendations of properly conducted, independent design review panels should be given weight in planning decisions including appeals. The panel does not take planning decisions. Its role is advisory. The panel's advice is only one of a number of considerations that local planning authorities have to take into account in making their decisions.

The role of design review is to provide independent expert advice to both the applicant and the local planning authority. We will try to make sure that the panel are informed about the views of local residents and businesses to inform their understanding of the context of the proposal. However, design review is a separate process to community engagement and consultation.

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