

03.11.2022

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Dear Adam,

Design:Midlands Design Review – Wednesday 26th October 2022
Breach House, Sutton Lane, Market Bosworth, Leicestershire (Our Ref: DMDR2239)

We write following the Design Review of Breach House, Sutton Lane, Market Bosworth and would like to take this opportunity to thank you for utilising the Design:Midlands Design Review Service.

The Design:Midlands Panel members reviewing the scheme were Nils Feldmann (Chair), Nick Corbett, Andy Thomas and Lindsey Wilkinson and followed the ten principles of Design Review.

Site Context

The site is located to the south of the Market Bosworth, a small town in Leicestershire. The wider site ownership (blue line boundary) comprises two fields and Sutton Lane from the site to the built edge of Market Bosworth. Sutton Lane is a private lane which connects to Market Bosworth to the north, the road surface is maintained by the local authority whilst the road itself and the verges are within the clients ownership, there is gate and cattle grid to the entrance. The wider site context is predominantly open landscape comprising fields separated by established hedgerows; isolated buildings which include Woodhouse Farm and Fields Farm which are set back from country lane and accessed via long drives; a historic windmill; presence of water including Sutton Brook; ditches and a large fish pond set within a woodland; areas of woodland and long views to the wider countryside and Market Bosworth church spire.

The proposed site (red line boundary) is irregular in shape and located within the northern field. The site is bounded to the northeast by Sutton Lane, an existing barn which is a non-designated heritage asset and has planning permission to be converted to residential use and to the east by the rest of the field. To the southeast by an existing hedgerow which separates the two fields, to the southwest by a copse and Sutton Brook. To the west by the continuation of Sutton Brook, established trees, a field and a Public Right of Way (PROW) which connects to Sutton Lane and into Market Bosworth. The site itself is pastoral

land, a key features of the site is the Breach Meadow which is the location of a former hedge which is visible on site and the aforementioned blue and green landscape infrastructure.

Planning History

Planning permission was granted to the previous landowner under Class Q to convert the existing barn to residential use. This was followed by an application by the applicant to convert the barn for residential use with a large basement, sunken courtyard and underground parking.

The clients preference is rather than implement the above permission plus a new barn is for a new family home of environmental and design exemplar and to upgrade the existing barn. The land will be used to breed and raise Highland cattle. The cattle do not require winter housing although a barn is needed to store feed, equipment etc.

Walk and Talk – December 2021

A Walk and Talk was undertaken of the design concept in December 2021. The comments and recommendations are summarised below:

- Expand the Design Team to include a landscape architect enabling a collaborative approach, combining landscape and architecture to be undertaken;
- Strengthen the design concept / narrative to clearly communicate the ambition, aspirations and approach of the scheme;
- Build on the site analysis work undertaken to provide a detailed understanding of the blue and green landscape infrastructure of the site context;
- Provision of a Blue and Green Landscape Strategy including a strategy on the approach to boundaries, trees, woodland, water, domestic landscape etc.
- Further consider the proposals for the water tower including exploring other sustainable technologies to ensure the development is off grid;
- Develop the sequence of arrival including the positive contribution of the retained barn and landscape in particular water in creating a strong sense of arrival; and
- A rationale for the positioning of buildings within the site in particular the water tower.

The Proposed Scheme

The design concept for Breach House draws on the character of water within the landscape, specifically Sutton Brook and the history of the local landscape around Bosworth Hall and its water tower, as well as windmills in using water and wind to generate energy.

The proposals for Breach House have been developed with structural and building engineers and environmental boarding. The building comprises a tower as a central connecting element, with an orthogonal arrangement to the building and the height and roof forms informed by the function of the spaces. The house will be composed of a timber portal frame with external buttress elements, the material palette comprises brick, limestone, shingles, clay tiles and timber boarding.

The ground floor comprises kitchen, dining, living, formal lounge, home office, plant rooms and car port; four bedrooms, bathrooms and terrace to the first floor; and bedroom mezzanine and platform to the

second floor. The water tower contains water storage and filtration, a wind turbine, ventilation, cooling, habitat areas plus staircase and circulation space.

The landscape proposals to the house include reinstating the historic hedgerow to the front of the house, a wildflower meadow to the front and east of the house (the seeds from Adams parents field), a courtyard terrace with a natural pool and an external terrace which are defined by the linear forms, linear rills and lawn area to the rear of the house and a central link.

The landscape proposals for the wider site include new tree planting within the site, succession Oak planting to Sutton Lane and a new woodland (to the east of the site); removing fencing and reinstating the hedgerows and existing pond; a new wetland area including new pond and meadows which will be used to graze cattle and rotated on a basis.

The proposal also include upgrading the existing barn which will be utilised to store machinery for managing the land and livestock.

A new access is proposed from Sutton Lane to the east of the existing barn with a curved track through the site, which connects to the to the western boundary of the plot to the car port.

Paragraph 80 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The intention is to build a case for development under Paragraph 80 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government July 2021.

Paragraph 80 states:

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 building; or
- (e) the design is of exceptional quality, in that it:
 - is truly outstanding, 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.

The Panel's Comments

The Panel has the following comments and recommendations for your consideration:

The current proposal

The project client and Design Team were commended for the quality and depth of work undertaken since the Walk and Talk, in particular the positive approach in taking on-board the comments and advice.

Expanding the design team to include landscape architects; undertaking a truly collaborative design process approach; provision of a comprehensive analysis; provision of a Landscape Strategy which draws on both the blue and green infrastructure of the site context and developing the proposals for the water tower and access.

The Panel considered the design approach, evolution and work undertaken to be hugely beneficial in meeting the criteria of Paragraph 80e of the NPPF.

Landscape Strategy

The engagement of landscape architects as an integral part of the Design Team; the collaborative design process undertaken and the provision of robust and comprehensive set of documents to support the design process and proposals are very positive.

The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) is an informative and accessible document and will be helpful for the public consultation. The Panel suggested prioritising the views identified within the document to the views locals will see / experience and the views they are most interested in. The visibility of the house / water tower is not considered to be a problem, drawing attention to the positive contribution a truly outstanding building can have on views when sensitively set within the landscape.

Breach House is positioned to the southwest corner of the site adjacent to an existing copse. The Panel appreciated the site has changed over time but queried the size and shape of the existing copse to the rear of the house. The Design Team were encouraged to undertake a small study of copses in the area. This should include an understanding on the natural size and shape of copses and to utilise this information to ensure the copse reinforce and references the landscape character of the site context. The position of the house within the site was supported.

The proposed woodland to the southeast of the site including the size of the woodland is supported including providing shade for the cattle.

The proposed formal / domestic external spaces are to the rear of the house comprising a courtyard terrace, external terrace, lawn area and a natural pool. The potential of the copse to shade and compromise the proposed spaces was raised. The Design Team were recommended to undertake an exercise to test the spaces are functional and comfortable, this should include interrogating the precise location of the house which does not need to align with the restored historic hedgerow. Detail on the how and when the open spaces will be used should also be provided to understand the rationale on the shape, form and location of the spaces.

The interface between the formal / domestic and informal / agricultural landscape were observed to be at the surface and within a limited space, for example the restored historic hedgerow to the front of the house. The Panel suggested to explore tree planting to Breach house to express the formal landscape at a higher / vertical level for example a tree lined route, formal orchard etc. The water rill to the front of the house is a feature which is within both the formal and informal landscape. Encouragement was given to explore how the approach to water changes from formal to informal.

The Panel highlighted the importance of an Estate Management Plan to demonstrate the commitment to retaining and enhancing the biodiversity of the existing landscape, how you will balance managing the farm with the biodiversity ambitions / targets and an understanding on what the priorities are for different parts of the site.

Site Entrance and Track

A new entrance is proposed to the east of the existing barn which will serve both the barn and the house. The alignment of the drive is gentle curved leading a carport and hard landscape space to the west of the house and to a side entrance to the barn. The Panel considered there to be a rationale for a new track but queried the alignment, which is not in keeping with the agricultural landscape context of the site, where farmyard tracks are straight due to practicality and functionality. The Design Team were encouraged to revisit the above and explore whether there is a better / more appropriate option.

Heritage Assets

The existing barn is a non-designated heritage asset and of heritage interest. The proposal to enhance and utilise the barn to support the pastoral / cattle function of the site is positive, protecting the significance of the barn and returning the barn to its optimum use – an approach which will benefit the heritage asset. The barn is positioned adjacent to Sutton Lane and the site access, and it is understood the barn was not physically connecting to farm buildings. The position of the house within the site which is separate to the barn is appropriate. Information on the relationship (visual and physical) between the barn and Breach House specifically the client as farmer was encouraged to further understand the relationship between the new and existing buildings.

Bosworth Battlefield (to the southwest of the site) is a registered Historic Battlefield. The setting of Bosworth Battlefield extends beyond the designation for example the movement of troops through the landscape to the battlefield. The Design Team were encouraged to research the above and record as part of the analysis work undertaken to demonstrate the proposals will not negatively impact on the setting of the battlefield.

St. Peters Church (Grade II*) is an important and significant heritage asset. The water tower will be the tallest element of Breach house. Information on the visual impact of the water tower should be provided.

The Water Tower

The proposals include a water tower central to the house drawing on Bosworth water tower and windmills in the area. The water tower is a focal point which accommodates a number of functions including water storage and filtration, a wind turbine, ventilation, cooling, habitat areas and circulation space.

The 'water tower' is a strong element within the scheme, it will be the tallest element of the house and visible within the landscape with the height, form, silhouette and materiality important. The Panel highlighted that the necessity and function of the water tower need to be tested rigorously to ensure it contains a necessary technical component of the design in a form suited to its function.

The wider landscape context includes windmills and the Bosworth Hall Water Tower. The design approach undertaken in integrating engineering and architecture to inform the proposals is commendable and interesting. Attention was drawn to the typology of the existing windmills and water tower with form following function whilst also providing delight. The opportunity to reference this approach was encouraged including refining the shape of the water tower and expressing the functional / engineering elements strongly, for example by revealing the wind turbine which would further strengthen the design concept.

The water tower will be visible within the wider landscape. The proposed height of the tower will be lower than the existing trees which is considered to be appropriate. Supporting information to illustrate the visual impact of the water tower within the landscape was encouraged in particular ensuring the integrity of St Peters Church. The Panel reiterated comments above on the positive impact outstanding architecture can have on views / landscape setting. The importance of short distance views was also raised including ensuring views of the water tower are enjoyed / afforded from the house.

A characteristic of the landscape is 'lookouts', including Bosworth Hall Water Tower. The potential for a room / look out within the water tower to enable long views out including intervisibility with existing buildings i.e. St Peters Church should be explored.

The proposal to clad the tower with timber boarding (a contrast material to the house) was supported which will enable the water tower to blend into the landscape.

The Client narrative

The Panel drew attention to three key elements in designing an isolated house in the open countryside - the project clients / brief, the design team and the site. These elements need to work robustly with each other to achieve the high bar required – a house which could only be for this client, on this site by this design team. The ambition of the clients and their brief, and the skills / expertise of the Design Team are strong. Supporting information on the your lifestyle / how you intend to live on the site would assist in understanding the proposals from the views you would like to enjoy at different times of the day; the relationship of the house with the barn i.e. how often will you tend to the livestock etc.

Summary

The Panel commend you and your team on the design process undertaken, which is based on a rigorous analysis of site, brief and options. The design approach has resulted in an exceptionally high quality scheme with a unique language which is contemporary, while echoing the typology / vernacular of local farmsteads. The proposals promise an exemplary scheme of outstanding quality, which will enhance its immediate setting and raise the standard of design in rural areas.

The level of work undertaken since the Walk and Talk was applauded, in particular expanding the design team to include landscape architects; undertaking a truly collaborative design process and the provision of an exceptional, comprehensive and carefully curated package of information.

The next stage of the scheme should address the following:

- Develop and detail the client narrative i.e. how you intend to live on the site;

- Undertake an exercise to better understand the impact of the proposals on heritage assets specifically Bosworth Battlefield and St Peters Church;
- Explore options for the site entrance and track i.e. would a direct track be more in keeping with the agricultural landscape character;
- Develop the proposals for the tower drawing on the form follows function approach of the existing water tower and windmills;
- Develop the proposals for the formal open spaces including what has informed the position, form and character of the open spaces;
- Testing the formal spaces will be comfortable and functional including potential refining the position of the house;
- Undertaking a study to better understand copses in the areas and to utilise to inform the proposals; and
- Provision of Estate Management Plan.

We would also like to thank Chris Brown, Matt Jedruch and Paul Grundy from Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council Planning Team for engaging, participating and contributing to the design review.

We trust that the feedback provided within this letter will prove to be of benefit to you in seeking a successful resolution and outcome for this scheme and provide an opportunity for further discussions with the determining authorities. We would be happy to provide further design advice on the project which would need to involve the design team and we will seek to ensure that the composition of the Panel remains the same throughout any ongoing review process.

Yours sincerely,

Dharmista Patel
Design:Midlands Design Review Panel Manager

Design:Midlands Design Review adheres to the ten principles for design review as follows:

1. Independent: It is conducted by people who are separate from the scheme promoter and decision-maker, and it protects against conflicts of interest.
2. Accountable: It records and explains its advice and is transparent about potential conflicts of interest.
3. Expert: It is conducted by suitably trained people who are experienced in design and know how to criticise constructively. Review is usually most respected where it is carried out by professional peers of the project designers, as their standing and expertise will be acknowledged.
4. Advisory: It does not make decisions. It acts as a source of impartial advice for decision-makers.
5. Accessible: Its findings are clearly expressed in terms that decision-makers can understand and use.
6. Proportionate: It is used on projects whose significance warrants the public investment of providing design review at national, regional and local level, as appropriate. Other methods of appraising design quality should be used for less significant projects.
7. Timely: It takes place as early as possible in the life of a design because this saves the most time and costs less to make changes. If a planning application has already been made, it happens within the timeframe for considering it. And it is repeated when a further opinion is required.
8. Objective: It appraises schemes in the round according to reasoned, objective criteria rather than the stylistic tastes of individual panel members.
9. Focused on outcomes for people: It asks how this building or place can better meet the needs of the people using it, and of the public at large who are affected by it.
10. Focused on improving quality: It constructively seeks to improve the quality of architecture, urban design, landscape, highway design and town planning.