

27.08.2024

Dear Simon, Jill and Team,

**Design:Midlands Design Review Panel: Tuesday 13th August 2024**  
**Design Review of proposed self build house, The White House, Market Bosworth (Our Ref: DMDR028)**

We write following the Design Review of self build house, The White House, Market Bosworth and would like to take this opportunity to thank you and your team for using the Design:Midlands Design Review service.

The design review Panel reviewing the scheme were Meredith Evans (Chair), Andy Thomas and Lindsey Wilkinson adhering to the ten principles of Design Review.

Site Context

The site (red line boundary) is irregular in shape. It is bounded to the east by a hedgerow and Public Right of Way (PRoW) and agricultural land. To the south by Bosworth Road which connects to Market Bosworth to the east, opposite are holiday lets and an established woodland. To the west by White House the clients home and grounds comprising a number of buildings arranged in a cluster and to the north agricultural land.

The site itself comprises an access to Bosworth Road, mature trees to the north which envelope this part of the site and a hedgerow to the south.

The Proposed Scheme

The clients have lived and raised their family in White House. White House is too large for Simon and Jill and no longer meets their needs. They are keen to remain on site in a place they are much attached to which better meets their current and potential future needs.

The design concept is for a single storey house to be contained within a walled garden which would be seen as an ancillary landscape element within the established gardens of White House. The walled garden feature references a similar walled garden found at nearby Bosworth Hall, a place which Simon and Jill know well and led to their passion for walled gardens.

The site chosen for the house lies to the north-east of the existing house in an area contained on three sides by hedges and trees. The site is relatively tight in terms of area and also contains a number of mature trees. The most prominent view of the site is from Bosworth Road across a large field leading up to White House and its mature gardens set against a backdrop of mature trees. The only visible part of the proposed house will be a 4m high stone clad wall with a series of arched openings which forms the

houses' south-east elevation. The wall extends beyond the floor plan of the house to create a 'walled garden' effect within the established White House gardens.

The house is single storey and almost square in plan. The main entrance is through one of the openings in the high wall with a bedroom and a spa running along the south-west elevation and a further bedroom, study and utility along the north-eastern elevation. A master bedroom, and main living spaces occupy the centre and rear of the house mainly facing north-west but also lit by a number of large roof lights. The elements of the house behind the 'garden wall' are contemporary in design with shallow pitched roofs containing a flat roofed area in the centre of the house.

The landscape proposals comprise a formal garden to the front and a series of narrow external spaces to the side and rear of the house.

A new vehicular access point onto Bosworth Road is proposed near the south-east corner of the site edged blue and will run along the field boundary up to the site of the proposed new house. A car parking area for 4 vehicles is shown at the top of this field immediately to the south-east of proposed house.

#### Planning Context

This is a current application and was presented to Hinckley and Bosworth District Council Planning Committee in June. The scheme was deferred subject to a design review by Design Midlands and a site visit by Planning Committee.

The planning application and committee report were circulated as part of the pre-meeting information for the design review.

### **The Panels Comments**

#### Building a compelling case for a new dwelling

The Panel emphasised the requirements of Paragraph 139 of the NPPF and the need for applicants to provide a robust case for development. In order to succeed a clear and compelling rationale is vital, informed by a thorough understanding of the site itself, its surroundings, identifying character, constraints and opportunities. This in-depth understanding can then inform and evidence a scheme that is truly responsive and embedded within its context.

To meet the criteria of Paragraph 139 of the NPPF the scheme needs to demonstrate that it is *'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.'* A sensitive response to the landscape character of the site is therefore an essential part of the project, requiring the same degree of rigour applied to the building.

The Panel drew attention to three key elements - the project clients' brief, the design team and the site itself. These elements need to work robustly with each other to achieve the high bar required.

### Site Context and Site Analysis

The Panel emphasised the need to provide information to evidence a true understanding of the characteristics of the site and the surrounding area. Attention was drawn to gaps in the site analysis presented, specifically the absence of a strategic analysis of the landscape context and visual analysis of views in and out of the site.

The proposals will impact on the existing landscape which needs to be acknowledged and addressed as part of the scheme proposals. The Panel recommended the design team undertakes a light Landscape Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA). This should demonstrate an understanding of the immediate and broader landscape context including green infrastructure, landscape character, topography, woodland, hedgerows, views etc.

The impact of the scheme on views into and from the site, both close to and further afield is also important; this was also raised within the Committee report. The matter of views and how the scheme responds to these views needs to be explored more fully. This work should include mapping key views to and from the site from close to the site and further afield, receptors identified include The White House both from the ground and first floor, the PRoWs and Bosworth Road. The Panel did not consider the scheme needs to be hidden and should positively contribute to its setting.

### Options Appraisal

Attention was drawn to the wider site ownership (blue line boundary). There is much to consider on the location of the proposed new house and its position within that area. The relationship with White House is particularly important and needs to be clearly established and defined as a key element in the design concept.

This process will result in options for the siting of the house and the Panel recommended that these should be fully documented and appraised to explain the rationale for the choice of site and position of the building within the site supported by a well-defined justification ie why this site? What has driven the shape of the site? Could the shape be altered for example removing and replanting the hedgerow to the south-east? Why this position within the site? Which other positions were explored? What were the positive and negatives of the site options? Why were these options discarded? A clear and logical narrative for the choice of the site and the position of the building within the site is invaluable in describing and supporting the proposal.

### Landscape Strategy

The Panel stressed the importance of the need for an integrated and collaborative approach to the scheme. The landscape proposals will need to be designed and developed in conjunction with the building, ensuring that the landscape complements, and is integral to, the overall design. The engagement of a landscape architect as part of the team to undertake this work was recommended.

The landscape strategy should build on the aforementioned landscape analysis which evidences an in-depth understanding of the landscape character and special qualities of the site. This information should then be utilised to drive / inform the proposals resulting in a scheme that reinforces its landscape setting

demonstrating how the building connects and interacts with the landscape, to ensure a robust relationship between the built and natural form.

With regard to the scheme as proposed concerns were expressed on the impact on the existing mature trees (including the tree protection zones) which are an asset. The scheme as proposed will result in most / potentially all of the trees being lost on site. This would significantly alter the site, result in the loss of site assets and would not be in keeping with clients ambition and passion for trees / tree planting. The Panel were also not convinced about the proposals for the external spaces for example the space to the rear of the building will be limited and be in heavy shade. The formality of the front garden which references a Parterre landscape is traditionally designed to be seen from above and not associated with a single storey house.

The Panel recommended the Landscape Strategy work should include the following:

- Utilise the landscape assessment to inform the position and siting of the building within the site for example if the decision is to pursue the existing site, how do you place a building within the site which minimises impact on the existing trees;
- A considered approach to existing and new trees. This should include engaging an arboriculturist to provide specialist advice for example which are the most valuable trees on the site, which trees will be retained, which trees will be lost including a clear justification. The role and function of new trees should be set out whether, as focal points, as a means of framing a view or screening car parking areas etc.;
- A strengthening and clarification of the interface and relationship of the house with the immediate landscape. This should include how the rooms engage with the landscape, views through the building to the landscape both within and outside of the site etc.;
- Further consideration of the design approach, quality, function, form, and character of the outdoor spaces. Further dialogue on the needs / wants for the domestic space ie. outdoor dining, space for grandchildren to play etc. and undertaking a landscape led approach to enable a sensitive and contextual response. This could include drawing on a courtyard typology with a central courtyard enclosed by the building;
- Detail of the relationship between the scheme and the PRoWs. A set of visuals to illustrate the views and the experience for those using the route adjacent to the site would be beneficial in understanding the relationship between the house and the PRoWs for example at what point on the route will the house be visible?
- The treatment of the boundary between the proposed house and White House – what will inform the alignment of the boundary for example, what will form the boundary and how will it be in keeping with the landscape context?
- How the landscape proposals contribute to the overall narrative and sustainability of the site.

#### The Walled Garden Design Concept

The design concept is drawn from a walled garden which would be ancillary element within the established gardens of the White House. It is inspired by the walled garden at the nearby Bosworth Hall. While the Panel appreciated the above, it was felt that the overall design narrative needs to be clearer, in particular how the site analysis and understanding of the site and context has informed the design

proposals. The Panel suggested that the 'story' for the scheme should be more fully explored and communicated.

This story should include an explanation of what elements of the Bosworth Hall walled garden had been selected and why. How do you put a walled garden on this particular site? Having adopted this concept, does it meet the clients needs, given the house itself is contained within it on a limited site? Is there a solution /concept which better meets the narrative than a walled garden?

#### The Sequence of Arrival

The Panel were not convinced of the need to reposition the existing access off Bosworth Road which is marginally to the south to the existing agricultural access. This would require the removal of a section of the existing hedgerow which will impact on its landscape and ecological value. The relatively low levels of traffic on Bosworth Road and what appeared to the Panel to be adequate sightlines suggested that further dialogue with Leicestershire County Highways should be undertaken to balance the requirements for safe access with landscape and ecology considerations.

The Panel also questioned the design of the drive which is formal, out of character with the adjoining landscape and undermines the design ambition of a walled garden within the grounds of White House. The importance of the drive in not undermining the design narrative of the development was emphasised. This will also need to include a carefully considered response to the landscape analysis mentioned previously. The Panel urged that the landscape proposals be included on the plans/drawings.

The car parking area is outside of the landscaped boundaries of the house and would be prominent within views into the site. The number of parking spaces was also raised – are four parking spaces needed? An integrated approach needs to be undertaken for the parking as part of the design of the house, walled garden and surrounding landscape.

Encouragement was also given to identifying what the sequence of the experiences would be from entering the site to reaching the house and particularly the impact of the proposed house on the landscape and the setting of White House.

#### The House

With regard to the design of the house, attention was drawn to the floor plan of the house which is square within a site which is irregular in shape; the tightness of the plot in terms of the proximity of the building to the existing trees (loss of trees), the value and quality of the resulting outdoor spaces and the quality of the internal spaces to the rear which will be in shade. The use of extensive rooflights to provide enough natural light was questioned by the Panel. There were additional questions regarding how the house will be ventilated and the poor relationship of the rooms with the parterre / formal garden to the front. The proposals were thought to be constrained and not making the most of the opportunities the site presents.

While it was understood the client's preference is for a single storey house this requires a larger footprint which is problematic for a relatively small site. Options should be explored including whether part of the house could be two storey, for example whether the guest bedrooms could be located on the first floor.

This would reduce the building footprint and address some of the issues raised and enable improved views to the tree canopies and wider landscape setting. This approach would need to be tested against and work with views to and from White House and the PRowWs. A courtyard plan form with buildings around a courtyard enabling a central private space was suggested as an alternative that could be explored.

#### Environmental Approach and Performance

The Panel welcomed the overall ambition for a sustainable building and urged this to be explored much more rigorously as part of the design process ie. orientation, fabric first approach. This will also need to include detailed information on the measures proposed, how these are embedded and integrated within the building and landscape design.

#### Additional information

The Panel encouraged the Design Team to provide additional information to support and aid understanding of the scheme. This should include the site analysis – what is that makes the site special, plans / drawings which show the site in a broader context, including White House to assist in understanding the interface, impact and relationship of the scheme with the house and a set of images (before and after) including key views into the site including the PRowWs and a set of sections to understand how the scheme sits within the landscape.

#### **Summary**

The Panel thank you and your Team for bringing the proposals to design review and the opportunity to comment on the scheme.

As proposed concerns were raised on the impact of the scheme on the site in particular the loss of the existing trees, the quality of the internal and external spaces, the formal approach to the drive and the visibility of the parking area / cars. The Panel emphasised the requirements of paragraph 139 of the NPPF and the need to demonstrate and evidence the proposal meets the criteria which includes '*outstanding design*'. The Panel recommended further work be undertaken as follows:

- Additional site analysis including landscape analysis, character, identifying receptors, views to the site including PRowWs – how best to place a new house within the landscape;
- Provision of a clear and compelling narrative for the scheme- is there a different solution for the site which better meets the clients needs and works with the site context?
- Provision of an options analysis on the overall site location and the position of the building within the site. Is this the best location for a building within the site?
- Provision of a Landscape Framework for the scheme to ensure a robust relationship between building and landscape;
- To further explore the building forms ie. would a building which is part two storey work better on the site and meet the clients needs than the current walled garden form;
- Ensure the access and drive are in keeping with the narrative including further dialogue with County Highways on repositioning the access;
- Detail on the environmental approach and performance of the building;
- Supporting information including the scheme in the wider context in particular White House.

We trust 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 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.