

**Queensmere Shopping Centre**  
Design Review  
14 November 2013

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# 1 Purpose of Report

Atkins have been engaged by Slough Borough Council to advise and assist their Planning Department in assessing the current Planning Application for Queensmere Shopping Centre. This advice is limited to an Architectural design only.

It was agreed that our assistance would consist of discussions with the Applicant's Architects, to give them an opportunity to properly address the council's concerns. Meetings would be held where we offer feedback and observations on the design, leading to the improvement of the scheme.

This report is our feedback to the Planning Department of this process. Its purpose is to give decision makers the confidence and information to support high quality designs or to resist poorly designed schemes that do not meet the needs of the community.ww

## 2 Summary of Report

At our initial meeting the applicant showed good intent to amend the design to address the Planning Department and Design Panel's concerns, but this was not reflected in their subsequent submission of drawings. Our conclusion is that the concerns raised by the SE regional Design Panel, the Planning Department, and by us have not been adequately addressed by the applicant during this process.

While the proposed alterations constitute an improvement, and a move in the right direction, they do not constitute the fundamental review, or fresh start that the Design review panel have recommended.

We agree with the S.E. Regional Design panel's review of this application. They expressed "concerns about the quality of the proposed development and do not support the application in its proposed form"

We also note that this review would have been more productive if it was carried out at an earlier stage of the project, when major changes could be made with a minimum of wasted time and effort.

### 3 Record of the Review Process

|          |  |                      |
|----------|--|----------------------|
| <b>A</b> | Meeting with Planning department                     | (8th October 2013)   |
| <b>B</b> | Desk review of the application                       | (10th October 2013)  |
| <b>C</b> | Initial Meeting with Applicant and their Architect   | (14th October 2013)  |
| <b>D</b> | Follow up meeting with Applicant and their Architect | (30th October 2013)  |
| <b>E</b> | Submission of Amended scheme                         | (11th November 2013) |
| <b>F</b> | Assessment of Amended scheme                         | (12th November 2013) |

#### Meeting with the Planning Department

(8th October 2013)

Held at: Slough

Present: Paul Stimpson, Ian Hann – Slough Borough Council  
Paul Reynolds, Kaare Nielson, Stuart Hill – Atkins

Slough representatives introduced the scheme, outlined their concerns about the application, and handed over copies of the documentation. The model was also viewed, and it was agreed that we would assist them by having design discussions with the Applicant's Architects. In order to give them an opportunity to properly address the council's concerns. Meetings would be held where we offer feedback and observations on the design, leading to the improvement of the scheme. This would be carried out prior to the Planning Committee meeting at the end of November, and Atkins would prepare a report on the outcome of this process.

#### Desk Review of the Application

(10th October 2013)

A review was carried out and the following broad issues were identified:

It is clear that this is a major development, its size and significance will set the tone for the future image of Slough.

The history of the consultation and application was reviewed, and the evolution of the design over a period of more than five years was viewed. It was evident that there was a level of coherence and order to the original 2008 scheme which has been diluted in the process of arriving at the current scheme.

There is little evidence that the scheme is responding to a coherent approach to composing the towers on site, for such a significant development a clear strategy should be required.

It is difficult to see how the urban design analysis undertaken, has informed the architecture. The quantity and mix of development as composed on the site appears to lack rationale.

A clear approach to the distribution of the development across the site (massing) would be needed to address these concerns.

The architectural expression to give clarity of relationship between the podium and towers could be improved.

Massing of the circular tower appears incongruous with the rest of the towers.

The orientation of the residential towers appears to lack rationale.

The complicated arrangements of leases, access and rights in the shopping centre below is reflected in the lack of clarity and organisation of the scheme above.

There is also some confusion in the architectural language used, for instance the towers have very different expression to the short and long sides.

A lack of adequate detail in the drawings indicates a lack of refinement in the architectural detailing of the building. The choice of materials is equally important and relates to an understanding of context as well as to questions of maintenance, durability, sustainability flexibility and adaptability

A rebalancing of type, mix and quality of residential units would be desirable.

We have concerns about the quality of the accommodation for future residents.

To address these concerns greater attention to the quality of life for future residents in the design of the apartments, open spaces and communal areas would be needed.

The quality and size, orientation and views of the residential units themselves is poorly considered. There are, for example, a large number of single aspect north facing units. These will not be hospitable living spaces.

There is a lack of clarity about what is private, semi private and public space.

The physical model does not show the relationship between the development and the transportation centres.

The South East Regional Design Panel have identified the major issues, and we concur with their report.

## **Initial Meeting with Applicant and their Architect**

(14th October 2013)

Held at: Trocadero  
Present: Sundeep Bhavra of GA&A  
Bhavash Vashi of Criterion  
Stuart Hill of Atkins

At this meeting Atkins explained their role in the process, and drew the applicants attention to the importance of the Design review panel report.

This was a good meeting, the scheme was discussed, and Criterion and their Architect agreed that they would work towards revising the scheme in light of the discussions. We arranged to meet again in 2 weeks to review progress. The aim to produce revisions for the scheduled Slough Design Committee meeting at the end of November, was identified.

After the meeting the following summary of the broad areas of our discussion was circulated:

- Amend the massing of buildings, introduce a clear architectural hierarchy and clarify proposed development phasing (illustrated by progressive CGI's).
- Amend the Wellington Street facade to recapture the architectural coherence and balance of the 2007 scheme.
- Improve the residential unit mix, and orientation.
- Improve the quality of private and semi private residential open space.
- Improve and clarify visual linkage between Rail / Bus stations and the shopping centre.
- To be more specific on proposed materials and finishes, with regard to durability in the exposed environment.
- Research suitable precedents for this type of development, in order to justify the buildability given the site constraints.
- Review the residential layout against the principles of Secure by Design.

It was stressed that these were to be considered in more general terms, as examples of how the design can be developed, rather than a prescriptive list of changes required. The Design Panel report, and any other ways in which the broad principles could be achieved should also be considered.

### 3 Record of the Review Process

#### **Follow up meeting with Applicant and their Architect**

(30th October 2013)

Held at: Trocadero

Present: Sundeep Bhavra of GA&A  
Bhavash Vashi of Criterion  
John Blackwell of Cunnane (part)  
Stuart Hill of Atkins

At this meeting GA&A presented two sketches showing proposed alterations to the scheme:

A revised north elevation showed a reworking of the facade to improve the vertical – horizontal balance and the clarity of the architectural expression. This also indicated some consideration of the massing and phasing by showing the circular tower dotted, and swapping the two lower towers.

A sketch showing revisions to a typical residential tower at podium level, was also tabled. This showed an improved residential mix to this area, by omitting studio units and introducing some dual aspect units, and reducing corridor lengths. Re-orientation of the apartment windows was also introduced to improve privacy and views, and the soft landscaping pattern was altered to reflect this.

It was agreed that these proposed amendments do indicate an improvement to the scheme and they would be worked up, and submitted to the Planners for consideration in the next planning Committee Meeting.

#### **Submission of Amended Scheme**

(11th November 2013)

#### **Amended drawings were emailed to the Planning Department**

See appendix for Drawings.



## Assessment of Amended Scheme

(12th November 2013)

The covering email explains as follows:

These plans are for discussion as way of update for Ian/ Paul to take to members. Once we have concluded the design approach etc. and all are happy we can then formally substitute the plans. Paul/Ian I would welcome your thoughts on the suggested approach.

There was no text or explanation of the architectural intent issued with the drawings, so the architectural intent and purpose of the proposed changes is not clear.

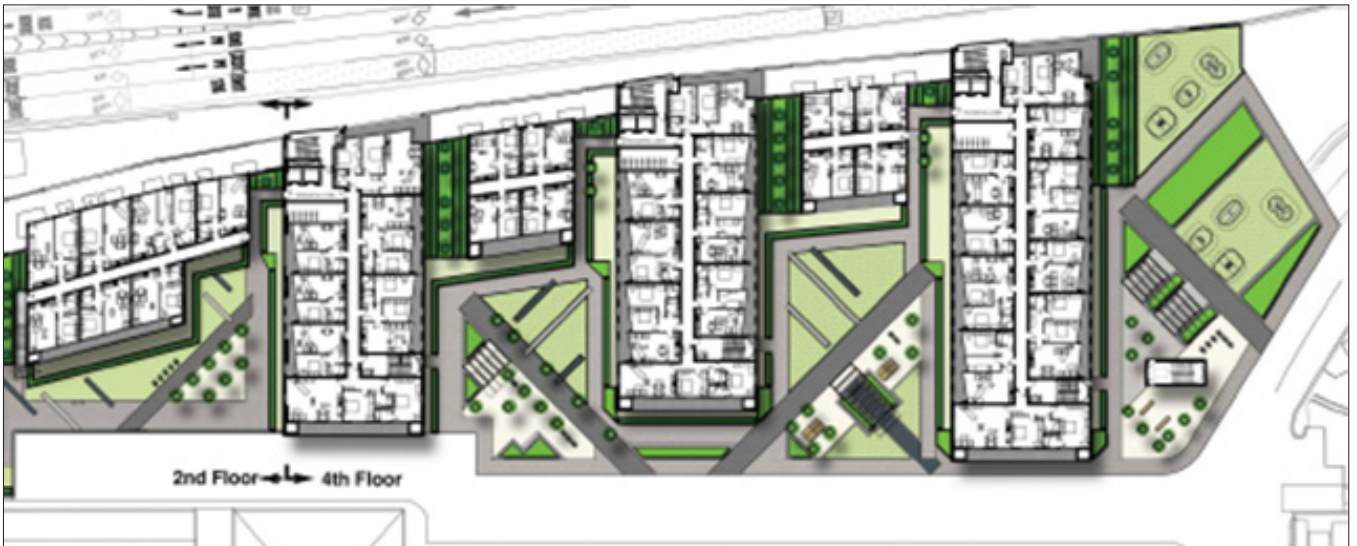
As a result, it is not clear that the purpose for these changes are understood, other than as a response to the observations of ourselves and the design review panel.

While these alterations may constitute an improvement, and a move in the right direction, they do not constitute the fundamental review, or fresh start that the Design review panel have recommended.



Extract from revised north elevation

Massing and composition of the three north/south orientated towers is improved. The architectural expression and legibility of podium is improved, but could be further clarified. Proposed phasing is not evident, the circular tower is greyed out, this is not explained.



Extract from revised residential part plan

Escape stair has been moved, larger end units have been introduced but an opportunity to introduce true dual aspect units has been missed. Single aspect units with north facing balconies have not been improved. There is a slightly improved residential mix, and reduction of corridor lengths. Angled apartment windows introduced to improve privacy and views. Landscaping pattern altered.

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