

North East Hampshire Design Review Panel Comments

Application No. 16/04638/FUL

Listed Building: Yes/No
 Conservation Area: Yes/No

Proposal: New Theatre
Location: Horris Hill Preparatory School, Newtown, Newbury, RG20 9DJ

Site	Building	Sustainability	Detailing	Design Approach
Street pattern	Character	Energy	Functional	Response to context
Orientation	Feel	Materials	Simple	Massing
Landscape	Layout	Water	Weathered	
Pedestrian routes	Function	Access	Structurally honest	
Vehicle circulation	Outlook	Health	Historically correct	
Scale	Appearance	Waste		
Simplicity	Transitions	Reuse		
Historical context	Outside spaces	Inclusivity		

Purpose of the panel

The panel exists to review development proposals as may be presented to it by local authorities. The advice is independent and is made in good faith on the basis of experience and knowledge of the panel members in order to assist Local Planning Authorities in the assessment and determination of schemes put before them as part of the planning process. It is recommended that at both County and Local levels, projects are brought before the panel at pre-application stage, or as early in the planning process as possible; or if this is not practicable at the formal application stage. A record of the Panel's deliberations will be made available to applicants and their agents, but the advice is primarily addressed to the local authorities themselves.

COMMENTS

The conceptual approach of the project is very strong with its narrative and the site analysis. The architectural concept is, in principle, well thought through in terms of siting, massing and the contemporary approach within the existing Victorian setting. The proposal has well thought out relationships and typologies. More work is required to activate the spaces that are created and a strategy for the development of these spaces is needed. As discussed, a strategic soft and hard landscaping appraisal is required to enhance the approaches and setting for this building. This needs to also in strategic terms address the surroundings, including proposals to activate the poor elevations to the end of the squash courts which face this proposal.

The importance of the visual impact of the theatre could be greatly enhanced by upgrading the existing gravel courtyard to that of a stone (?) - paved piazza giving a sense of place to the theatre with the 'porticoed' entrance becoming a more visually important and obvious. The proposed rectangle of paving in front of the entrance is rather meaningless in shape and size

The development of the scheme has strong ecclesiastical and public piazza references, which help locate it in its environs and gives it presence and forms interesting relationships with the surrounding buildings. The panel were not sure that the plan of the building works so well, and the implied processional routes do not come to anything. The only overriding disappointment of the scheme is the floor plan layout. The relationship of the various uses and route of circulation spaces are illogical and waste space. The area forming an 'internal cloister' could be given over to enlarge the seating area while retaining the cloistered fenestration of the external wall looking over the small garden to the east. Access from the entrance foyer should run directly into the centre of a

wider auditorium, feeding back and up to the seating on either side. The storage and WC/cloak areas could easily be relocated in more meaningful areas

As reported from the pre app review the internal plan needs far more development as there appear to be several fundamental elements either missing or misplaced, including:

- A very small foyer with toilets that are accessed directly from the foyer space
- A small auditorium yet very large stage area – this was explained in the presentation and was justified by the architect
- No apparent plant space and space for ventilation systems etc – although this is being developed within the sections and the elevational analysis
- No box office or entrance sequence
- The quantity of WC provision seems very low and is located very prominently by the entrance
- No changing/ dressing rooms / green room
- No storage
- No control room/ space for lighting and sound controls

The large space to the north of the auditorium would work well for various and diverse activities which might be unrelated to the function of the main hall. However, the proprietary timber walling system (CLT) seems to be inappropriate for a structure which might, in the future, need to be adapted easily and quickly for different types of uses and functions.

The Architectural design language of the external envelope is strong in some areas but lacked resolution in other areas. It has a strong and well developed external typology, although the use of the colours that match the existing colours surround the site may not elevate this as a 'special' building. There should be no need to try to match or simulate the colour/materials of the adjacent buildings - this only serves to diminish the individuality of this relatively important building. Rather than adhere to the 'purity' of a timber-framed construction, perhaps the use of other rainscreen materials could be considered and finished in a colour which will tone with the existing pallet of the adjacent buildings

The front portico lacks resolution and its relationship with the piazza is equally unresolved. Its relationship with the ground and the blank facades opposite would be very worthwhile to explore further. A strategy for the wider relationships and its hard and soft landscaping would be essential to the success of the project in the long term.

The façade is well considered and its relationship with the other buildings with scale mass is well judged. However, we were left slightly bemused by the tenuous, and superfluous references to the brick in the tones and hues of the chosen boarding. It was considered that a natural timber finish may reinforce the jewel like quality that usually adorn prominent buildings such as ecclesiastical buildings.

The internal arrangements could also benefit from the ecclesiastical plan forms of the nave with the central processional route from the front doors into the building and into the auditorium. The current plans do not flow at all and corridor to the cloister could be widened and therefore a stronger relationship with the cloister could be established.

Date:20th January 2017

Signed 

**On behalf of the NE Hampshire Design Review
Panel**

Panel members present:

Mark Penfold (Chair),
Graeme Stevenson
Laith Anayi
Yolande Fothergill