

## **Cornwall Design Review Panel Consultation + Desktop Review: Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> August 2015**

**Site Address:** Tregarthen's Hotel, St Mary's, Isles of Scilly

**Proposal:** A thorough re-working of this significant site with considerable demolitions of low grade existing accommodation and provision of new self-catering cottages, accessible hotel accommodation, entrance / access improvements and other minor works, including landscaping.

### **Design Team:**

David Scott – Scott and Co

### **Cornwall Design Review Panel conducting the review:**

The Cornwall Design Review Panel members taking part in the consultation review were: Mark Pearson (the Chair of full Panel Meetings) and Tim Kellett

### **Conflicts of Interest:**

None

### **Presentation of the Scheme**

David Scott provided an introduction and commentary to the various drawings submitted to the Isles of Scilly planning service including location and floor plans, elevations, etc. There were also some useful three-dimensional images modelling sun path / solar geometry not present in the planning application. The Panel members have also had the opportunity to inspect the Design and Access Statement and other documents via the website.

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*Thank you for your recent submission/presentation. Please find below the comments from the Cornwall Design Review Panel. We are pleased to assist the Council of the Isles of Scilly planning service with this project.*

*This is the formal guidance of the Panel arising from this consultation - which is a design review in accordance with section 62 of the NPPF. You should disregard any specific points made verbally by individual members of the panel during the formative discussion as they may not now reflect the final agreed views of the whole Panel as now confirmed below.*

*For clarity the Cornwall Design Review Panel does not comment on the principle of the development, but focuses on design matters arising from the presented scheme and produces guidance to assist both the Design Team and Local Planning Authority.*

## **Panel Guidance**

### ***Introduction and Summary***

Thank you for seeking our engagement with these proposals - this is a project that occupies a very significant position in forming the identity of the island - highly visible on the approach by sea and prominently located near the centre of Hugh Town, close by the harbour. In common with many hotel complexes, the site has been rather poorly developed in the past and has some difficult topography and awkward geometries in plan – increasing the design challenge.

The environs of the site contain some important historical assets and the original Tregarthen's building itself, although not listed, is a significant landmark structure within the townscape which forms part of the Conservation Area which, we understand, embraces the whole island. The Garrison wall which forms the southern boundary of the site and adjacent bastion are other important considerations demanding an appropriate design response to these scheduled ancient monuments.

We are very encouraged that much of the low quality architecture that appears to have gradually accumulated 'piecemeal' is to be swept away and this development prospect represents a 'once in a generation' opportunity to re-organise the site. We therefore applaud the scope of the project, however, we are not yet convinced that sufficient consideration has been applied to the layout and design of the replacement structures to make the most of this site. As we set out below, there seem to be opportunities to relate these more sensitively to the adjacent historical assets, and to establish a more coherent internal structure to the site that will provide a robust and flexible framework into the future. A clearer layout could liberate and combine what are currently minor pockets of space to provide some decent-sized open spaces within the site - capable of more significant and confident landscape ideas that might both be enjoyed by the residents and help to temper the presence of new buildings within the sensitive context.

We would therefore hope that the design can be improved and revised drawings submitted prior to determination as we are not fully supportive of the project being approved in its current form.

Each one of the following sections contains specific recommendations for consideration.

### ***Understanding and Presenting the Site within its Setting***

The proposals are clearly in a highly developed stage, having been submitted as a planning application. Normally design review is best undertaken at the pre-application stage when ideas are still fluid and one of the most important discussions to be explored is to do with an appreciation of the context and to establish what an appropriate design response to it might be. As a result we are concerned that opportunities to explore some other approaches could be very restricted at this stage.

We would usually recommend that a 'constraints and opportunities plan' capturing all the potential influences on the design might be part of an early presentation and discussion with the local authority, and an agreed version of that plan might then guide the design process towards a successful outcome. (The Isles of Scilly "Design Guide" refers to this type of plan as a 'site appraisal' drawing.) The inclusion of such a diagram early in a Design and Access Statement can also help to ensure that the statement is, as it should be, a reasoned account of why design decisions have been taken, rather than merely a description of the final outcomes.

We are encouraged that key opportunities to improve the presentation of the main hotel entrances have been recognised. We have little to say about the lower pedestrian approach from the car park. It seems appropriate to signify this confidently with the introduction of the proposed small tower structure and we are sure that this will represent a significant improvement aiding the legibility of the existing entrance.

The second approach to the hotel, from Garrison Hill, is also sorely in need of improvement, but this is more to do with the appearance of the hotel beyond rather than the handling of the entrance to the site itself. The boundary walls here forming the eastern edge of the site deserve respect and any revisions to the character of Garrison Hill climbing up to the important gateway ought to be carefully tested in three dimensions - where the roofs and buildings behind the existing gateway appear to have a uncomfortable relationship to the street and boundary wall.

Turning to the lower part of the site, we note that the Hendra and Gibson accommodation located in a simple but handsome vernacular cottage structure is very firmly and successfully rooted in its place and provides an important 'bookend' to the 'Seawall' area. The western end of this part of the site relates immediately to the bastion feature which forms part of the Garrison wall. We think that there is a danger that this feature could become less distinct and lose some of its historic significance if development occurs too close to it. The opportunities to remove the unsightly lean-to shed and garage should certainly be seized, but we think that a modest landscape space should be created here in order to distance new development from the bastion and ensure that the shape of this historic feature can still be confidently 'read' as a distinct defensive form along the wall. Proposed views looking back from the quay wall / Rat Island will be important tests - replicating those enjoyed by approaching vessels to the harbour.

The Garrison Wall sloping steeply up from the bastion up towards the southern corner of the site is another powerful characteristic of the site. One of the current disappointments of the existing accommodation is in its indifferent response to the historic structure here. Any new proposals ought to recognise the potential to improve on this situation and a considered posture in relation to the wall ought to be an essential part of a successful layout.

The original form of the 1849 hotel is still splendidly apparent and its simple shape registers a strong presence (when seen from the sea) at the

highest point of the site alongside the gateway into the garrison. This again needs to be preserved and if possible enhanced rather than eroded. The charming painted sign on the NNW elevation, clearly aimed at attracting arriving passengers on board the Scillonian and other vessels, exudes a lovely character that is worthy of preservation.

These above are some of the main points that we would expect might be identified on a 'constraints and opportunities' plan.

We would also observe that this is very much a three-dimensional site and we find the lack of cross-sectional information to be surprising. Some of the potential of the site will only be revealed by exploring and representing it in this form. Ideally there would be full three-dimensional modelling (virtual or real) to fully show the form of the buildings and spaces. We would recommend that some existing and proposed 'key sections' are included in an augmented set of drawn information.

Growing out of this discussion of the context, we would now like to make the following observations about each of the individual development opportunities that have been identified within the site...

### ***Seawall Cottages***

The general form of these seems to correctly take its cue from the Hendra / Gibson Cottages. There are resonances with the posture of boathouses which seems natural enough near the shoreline. We are less certain that stepping forward from the building line implied by the gable end of the existing cottages will be successful and this needs to be tested more carefully. We would like to see a perspectival view from the centre of the car park in which the flank of the first cottage will be visible. There may be space for four cottages but the western-most unit begins to obscure the form of the bastion from key views and this may be unacceptable in terms of the loss of its significance. We would favour a landscape space at this western end which could either be dedicated to the end unit or, more beneficially, act as a shared destination at the end of the site (barbeque area or similar?). If there are four units then to house each one under its own duo-pitch roof would be a neater solution – the two units which share 3 gables produces some awkward junctions and compositional strangeness. We find the internal arrangements of the units to be quite loosely planned and would expect that with tighter organisations then space could be saved in order to achieve the same basic elements of the brief. The south elevation of this block needs to be considered in relation to the space created between it and the 'central cottage block' (see below).

### ***Central Cottage Block***

The current proposal seems to create a number of conflicts and compromises – awkward residual spaces and corner 'chopped off' the building on the south side; staircase approaches to central units on opposing sides of the building confusing 'fronts' and 'backs'; a roof form which seeks to empathise with the original hotel building and yet is canted

at an angle in relation to it in plan form; use of stepped hip roofs which produce complicated and intricate detailing which is alien to the robust island vernacular construction...

We favour a layout that establishes this block as a structure that runs parallel to the garrison wall and therefore steps down the contours, the roof-scape echoing the sloping wall behind. It may be possible to modestly extend the length of such a block, to include displaced single storey accommodation that is currently proposed / retained against the Garrison Wall.

On this alignment then a new triangular external space is formed between the front of this block and the rear of the Seawall Cottages. This presents opportunity for more significant planting and the interesting and attractive reconciliation of ground levels within this space. It would be broad enough to contain some communal amenity space shared between the self-catering units and improving the sociability of the site. In creating a space here then the outlook from the hotel in a north-westerly direction would be greatly improved. We think that there ought to be a direct pedestrian access from this space into the hotel in order to avoid self-catering guests having to walk down to, and through the car park simply to gain access to the hotel facilities, which seems unnecessarily inconvenient.

### ***Accessible Cottages***

We respect the ambition to aggrandise the entry sequence from Garrison Hill, but we fear that the unit of accommodation proposed to the south west of the approach will be heavily compromised and a very weak offer in terms of the experience for guests. Very little natural light is conveniently available for the ground floor and rooflights have to be relied upon to light the only general living space which seems viable within the floor plan. The difficult plan shape leads to some inefficient use of space and the gable end 'cut off' obliquely will present in an awkward and unconventional way towards and above the boundary wall on Garrison Hill.

The design of any development framing the entrance from Garrison Hill needs to be carefully handled and three-dimensional studies need to explore and represent the resolution of forms here. A conventional elevation drawing does not illustrate all the complex issues that are present here adequately.

We suggest that a single accessible suite is explored on the north eastern side of the route to the hotel entrance. It may be possible to retain the first floor carer's bedroom and use this to form an inhabited two-storey archway as an alternative hotel entrance, disguising the single storey flat roof beyond. This would allow the creation of a larger landscaped courtyard at the entrance. If a second accessible suite is certainly required/desired then it might be possible to consider designing the eastern-most Seawall Cottage as a fully accessible (self-catering) unit, accessed from the car park?

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## ***Architectural Language of the Construction***

There are some good material choices in evidence and we applaud the aim of finding an expression for the architecture that is locally distinct. We do, however, feel that there is an unsatisfying ambiguity between some of the thoroughly traditional building forms and detailing with the use of modern insertions such as structural glass balustrades, for instance. It also presents some ambiguity in the understanding of the real historic qualities of the site. We would advocate a more integrated contextual approach that combines good materials, characteristic forms and detailing with a contemporary sensibility. This would enable modern needs and details to be incorporated more seamlessly, in a coherent language that is still 'of its place'.

## ***Landscape within the Layout***

We feel it is important to recognise that the character of 'place' will be established by the spaces between the buildings and views through them as much as the structures themselves. A design strategy should develop these positively from the outset [the opportunities plan] rather than just detailing the spaces 'left over' between buildings. It should clarify a very positive use of each space and then make sure every aspect of the design contributes to achieving it.

We have identified two, perhaps three, opportunities to create memorable and useful spaces within the layout – a retained space beside the bastion, the triangular space in the centre of the site between the new blocks and, potentially, a modest arrival space immediately adjacent to Garrison Hill. Each of these represents an opportunity for some interesting landscape design and the introduction of some larger planting than would otherwise be the case. Some carefully chosen species alongside the bastion would provide a further division between the historic defensive position and the new cottages. Although the other spaces would be probably dominated by hard landscape, there would also be scope for some modest but significant planting that would help to humanise the site and provide a more attractive character for residents. We would encourage the appointment of a landscape designer if those skills are not already present in the design and development team. Ideally thoughts about the open spaces should proceed in tandem with adjustments to the buildings - to create an integrated and harmonious whole.

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### ***Confidentiality***

*Unless expressly requested by the design team on the grounds of bona fide commercial confidentiality the information within this report is not regarded as confidential and the Panel will publish a copy on its web page.*

*Where commercial confidentiality has been requested by promoters then the Panel will respect that during the pre-application stage, although local authorities are subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) and the report may have to be made accessible in response to an information request, unless one of the exemptions in the FOIA applies.*

*Beyond the pre-application stage, this guidance report (together with any subsequent updated versions) will be made public as a consultation response once the project becomes registered as a formal planning application.*

***Use of the Report***

*Extracts from the report shall not be used for the purposes of marketing or for press release without the express permission of the Panel which should be sought via the Panel Facilitator.*

*Any comments or quotations taken from this guidance for use in other documents such as design and access statements must not be abridged and, if selective quotations are used, then a complete copy of the full guidance should be attached as an appendix to that document.*

*Queries regarding the report content, administration or operation of the Panel should be directed in the first instance to the Panel Facilitator, Judy Howard, Cornwall Council Tel (01872) 224311 or email [jhoward@cornwall.gov.uk](mailto:jhoward@cornwall.gov.uk)*