

Design Review Panel

05.04.06

DRP/R01



Meeting 1 Report ****FINAL****

Projects

Cob House, Cadhay – Kevin McCabe
Salter House, Lympstone – Stan Bolt Architects
Vaysey House (South Beach), Exmouth – Squirrel Design

Panel Members

Cllr Andrew Dinnis, Heritage & Design Champion (Chairman)
Cllr Marcelle Boote, Development Control Committee Chairman
Cllr Tom Reeves (Exmouth Littleham Ward Member)
Kate Little, Head of Planning & Countryside Services (first part of meeting only)
Mark Pearson, CABE Design Action Manager (Devon & Cornwall)
Ian Booker, Paul Humphries Architects Limited
Ian Davis BArch FRIBA FRTPI (Lay Member)
Stephen Guy, Principal Conservation Officer
Steven Power, Urban Designer & Design Panel Coordinator

Other Attendees

Roy Stuart, Chairman Ottery St Mary Planning Committee (on-site in Cadhay)
Harland Walshaw, Lympstone Village Design Statement Group (on-site in Lympstone)
Sukie Tamplin, Principal Planning Officer (case officer for Cob House & Salter House)
Glyn Thomas, Senior Planning Officer (case officer for Salter House)
Gail Stone, Senior Planning Officer (case officer for Vaysey House)

Meeting Date

Monday 27th March 2006, 9.45am (all day)

Venue

Council Offices, Knowle

Summary

The Design Review Panel (DRP) reviewed 3 projects under the theme of one-off houses. The projects were located in Cadhay, Lympstone and Exmouth. The panel visited each site and met a representative of the local community in Cadhay and Lympstone who expressed the community's view of the projects.

Overall the panel were particularly impressed with the Salter House in Lympstone and identified that it had been designed and built to a high standard and could serve as a benchmark residential project.

The panel considered the Cob House in Cadhay as an interesting project in terms of architectural design although some issues did arise regarding the use of materials and massing. The panel did

not consider some of the urban design issues to be well resolved. This centred on the proximity of the house to the boundary of the site and its relationship with the adjacent bungalow.

The Vaysey House in Exmouth was considered to be the least successful project in terms of urban design, architectural design, detailing and landscaping. Although the panel did think that project management issues may have detracted from the quality of the project.

Summary of Recommendations

Explore ways in which Development Control and Building Control can work closer to identify issues that may affect the design and visual appearance of buildings.

Take steps to ensure that a Planning & Design Statement is submitted with planning applications that sets out how the application satisfies planning policy requirements and explains the rationale behind the project.

Take steps to ensure that contextual elevation/section drawings are submitted with the application to help assess the physical relationship between existing and proposed buildings.

Take steps to ensure that levels are shown on the drawings so that a direct comparison can be made between existing and proposed buildings.

Ensure that usable open space is provided on site by carefully positioning buildings.

Be careful to identify when detailed design drawings may be required.

Review the requirements of a Planning & Design Statement to make it a comprehensive and usable document.

When requiring a landscaping plan as a planning condition, consider how to reasonably ensure it will be built and consider the time frame stipulated. This is particularly important at outline design stage where after new items for reserved matters cannot be added.

1 Cob House, Cadhay – Kevin McCabe (DRP01A)

1.1 Urban Design

The panel considered the position of the building on the site and in relation to the road. It was felt that the building was too close to the eastern boundary (adjacent to the bungalow) and that the left over space was not really usable.

Generally it was thought that the building was too large and that there was not enough space around the building. It did not sit comfortably in its site. It was also felt that the building did not successfully address the road – the western boundary.

From distant views the house clearly breaks the horizon line by at least a storey. The adjacent bungalow is more sympathetic to the rural landscape context.

The windows in the roof create views into and across the neighbouring garden and may affect the amenity of residents.

1.2 Architectural Design

The proportion of house was considered as the building is large in terms of its height to the ridge, height to the eaves and the footprint. The panel felt it was more common to find the use of cob and thatch on cottages and houses with a lower height.

The chimney was discussed at some length. It was noted that the height of the chimney differs from that shown on the planning application drawings and is a more prominent aspect of the building than anticipated. It was felt that this was a result of Building Control requirements i.e. the distance between the end of the stack and the thatch. The panel also wondered why the applicant, Mr McCabe proposed a shorter chimney when he may well have known about the likely Building Control issues as he is experienced in the use of thatched roofing. It was noted that the planning application drawings were produced by an architect and not Mr McCabe himself.

The windows in the roof, the third floor of accommodation, were considered to be dormers. However, the use of thatch allowed them to be 'moulded' into the roof form and essentially disguise their appearance. It was questioned whether a tiled or slate roof with more conventional dormers would have been approved.

1.3 Landscape Design

It was noted that the existing mature trees were identified by the applicant as a means of screening the house and breaking up views of it. However, the panel thought that the apparent lack of an arboriculture survey of the trees meant that their quality was unknown and whether they could be expected to remain.

The panel thought that landscape design should be an integral part of the application and should not be considered separately.

1.4 Environmental Design

The panel congratulated that applicant on the environmental quality of the project. It was explained that 60% of the cob was made from material on site or from 2 miles away and the timber was bought from sustainable sources. It was noted that the thatch was French reed but that the source of this material fluctuates with weather conditions. The panel did question the use of concrete rather than timber lintels.

1.5 Project Summary

The panel concluded that in their opinion:

Overall the design of the building was good but more attention should be paid to vernacular architecture of this type and how it may be translated to suit contemporary life styles. The design extended the language of this type of vernacular architecture.

The building is too large for the site and is visually dominant from distance and close range.

The relationship in terms of height and massing between Cob House and the adjacent bungalow is unsuccessful.

There is not enough usable space around the building.

The lack of contextual elevation drawings meant that it was difficult to assess the relationship with the neighbouring property and whether the closeness and mass of the building was appropriate. The elevation drawing did not show any levels.

There was no Design Statement. Submission of a Design Statement would have helped to explain the rationale behind the position of the house on the site – close to the neighbour, why it's height and mass was appropriate and the environmental sustainability of the project in terms of energy and water conservation and the source of materials.

Closer links between the Planning Department and Building Control may have identified the changes required to the chimney stack and the resulting change in the appearance of the building.

The panel wondered whether the house would have been approved if it had been constructed from brick and slate or tile? The panel thought that the 'romance' of using of cob and thatch had worked in favour of the applicant and this may have mitigated some of the visual impact issues and in particular how the building sat next to the adjacent bungalow.

1.6 Recommendations

The planning department should work more closely with building control on applications such as this to identify any design changes that may be required to satisfy the Building Regulations.

Take steps to ensure that a Design Statement is submitted with planning applications that sets out how the application satisfies planning policy requirements and explains the rationale behind the project.

Take steps to ensure that contextual elevation/section drawings are submitted with the application to help assess the physical relationship between existing and proposed buildings.

Take steps to ensure that levels are shown on the drawings so that a direct comparison can be made between existing and proposed buildings.

Ensure that usable open space is provided on site by carefully positioning buildings.

2 Salter House, Lypstone – Stan Bolt Architects (DRP01B)

2.1 Urban Design

The panel discussed the appropriateness of the building in Lypstone. Although not a traditional vernacular house and perhaps not readily recognisable as a house, the question was posed if this house is not right for Lypstone, where is it more appropriate? It was noted that the site is relatively close to a conservation area, but it was not in one nor was it listed itself or surrounded by listed buildings. Even if that were the case, the panel does not accept that the building as designed would be inappropriate.

The panel thought that the house seemed to have a better relationship with the entrance to the site and street. It had created an entrance courtyard behind the red brick boundary walls.

The panel was made aware of local concerns about the project in terms of its visual impact from the street. The point was made that the new house turned its back on the street by concentrating most glazing and windows on the western side – facing the estuary and only having a few windows on the side facing the street.

The panel thought that this was the inevitable and appropriate response to the site as it had wonderful view out across the Exe Estuary.

The panel noted that the previous bungalow had a tiled pitched roof facing the street and therefore did not 'engage' either.

2.2 Architectural Design

Generally it was thought that the building was well designed and constructed and that a good deal of time and trouble had been taken to build a high quality house.

The panel discussed the architectural language of the architect – Stan Bolt. His buildings are distinctive and they use a similar if not the same materials regardless of the site. The question therefore, in terms of local distinctiveness, is what makes this an East Devon house?

The panel also noted that one-off, progressive architectural design is a tradition in itself.

The panel considered that the house addresses this issue of local distinctiveness in terms of detailed design – the use of white render - the predominant material in Lypstone, dark window frames and sliding sashes.

The project was considered successful in that it had respected the old – the red brick boundary wall was retained whilst making a modern insertion behind it to fit the client's brief. The boundary walls are a strong feature of the area.

2.3 Project Team and Drawings

The owner, Mr Salter is also a building contractor.

The panel thought that the combination of a good client, contractor (also the client) and architect had combined to achieve a high quality project.

There was no Planning & Design Statement, contextual elevations, detailed design drawings or environmental sustainability statement.

The panel thought that the drawings were difficult to understand.

2.4 Summary

The panel concluded that in their opinion:

Overall this was a successful project in terms of urban and architectural design.

The relationship between the street and the house appeared to be better than the previous bungalow.

The design took best advantage of the views across the estuary.

That despite the lack of detailed design drawings to support the planning application; the building had been designed and constructed to a high standard.

There was no Planning & Design Statement.

There was good use of corner windows to mitigate overlooking issues.

This project could be used as a benchmark in terms of the quality of detailed design.

2.5 Recommendations

Take steps to ensure that a Planning & Design Statement is submitted with planning applications that sets out how the application satisfies planning policy requirements and explains the rationale behind the project. This could have been used to explain the massing of the building and why the spaces and windows were arranged as they were.

Take steps to ensure that contextual elevation/section drawings are submitted with the application to help assess the physical relationship between existing and proposed buildings. This is important in terms of the buildings either side of the site and across the street.

Take steps to ensure that levels are shown on the drawings so that a direct comparison can be made between existing and proposed buildings.

Be careful to identify when detailed design drawings may be required. Although, as it transpired, they were not required for this project, due to the good combination of client, contractor and architect, it cannot always be guaranteed.

3 Vaysey House (South Beach), Exmouth – Squirrel Design (DRP01C)

3.1 Urban Design

There is an uncomfortable relationship between two very different buildings – they were considered to be too close. It was noted that the neighbour did not object to the closeness of the Vaysey House to theirs.

The panel thought that the boundary between the two sites was not resolved in an appropriate way. There was brick on one side and a second rendered wall on the other. Ad hoc additions had been made to it to increase its height and these are in different materials again.

The physical relationship between the main house and the swimming pool wing (not built) was questioned. The panel discussed whether the 45 degree angle of each wing dominated the site.

3.2 Architectural Design

Generally it was thought that the building was not well designed and the panel questioned its appropriateness for the site adjacent to such as different building. It was obviously the client's dream house but it was not the Miami art-deco designed envisaged.

The panel questioned how well the detailed design had been carried out and noted some instances where design quality was low - the stair edge behind the glass on the south side or the underside of the deck were two examples.

3.3 Project Team and Drawings

When compared to Salter House, another contemporary water front house, this project did not seem to have the same chemistry in terms of the client, contractor and architect. It was noted that this is outside of planning controls and is a client issue.

Whilst the panel thought that the combination of a good client, contractor and architect for Salter House had combined to achieve a high quality project the panel did not think the same could be said of the Vaysey House.

There were obvious problems with the project as it is not complete with the entirety of the landscaping and entrance area left to be completed.

However this was the only project of the three reviewed that had a Planning & Design Statement and contextual elevations. This also included some information about environmental sustainability.

Detailed design drawings were not required by the Council.

The panel also noted that regardless of a Planning & Design Statement or even detail design drawings it was unlikely to have affected how the project was managed on-site.

It was felt that by requiring the submission of detail design drawings, the Council could assure itself that the design would be carried out appropriately and that the applicant's project team understood how to build the house. The lack of this requirement meant that the applicant or their team did not deal with fundamental design issues until well into the build. This was borne out by the Grand Design programme.

3.4 Summary

The panel concluded that in their opinion:

Overall this was an unsuccessful project in terms of urban and architectural design.

The relationship between two houses was too close although no objections were received from the neighbours.

The detailed design is generally poor.

The Planning Department could have done more to assist the applicants in identifying the issues they would face building the house. A requirement to submit and have approved detailed design drawings would have made the applicant; contractor and designer look at the project in a different way and may have helped them design out potential problems.

The landscape at present is poor and in particular the boundary with the South West Coast Path and the entrance area.

3.5 Recommendations

Review the requirements of a Planning & Design Statement to make it a comprehensive and usable document.

Be careful to identify when detailed design drawings may be required. A good combination of client, contractor and architect cannot always be guaranteed.

When requiring a landscaping plan as a planning condition, consider how to reasonably ensure it will be built and consider the time frame stipulated. This is particularly important at outline design stage where after new items for reserved matters cannot be added.

Background Papers

- Project Summary – Cob House, Cadhay (DRP01A)
- Project Summary – Salter House, Lympstone (DRP01B)
- Project Summary – Vaysey House, Exmouth (DRP01C)

Steven Power x. 2785
Urban Designer