

PlacesMatter

Design Review Report USDAW, Fallowfield

27 April 2021

USDAW, Fallowfield Manchester

Reference: PM_2021_011

Report of the Design Review Panel

Date of Review:	20 April 2021
Location:	Remote Design Review
Site Visit:	The Panel used 3D digital maps and 'street view'.
Design Lead:	Tim Groom with Layer, for Watkin Jones

Findings

Thank you for bringing this scheme back to Places Matter Remote Design Review and for the very clear presentation of your scheme. Due to Covid 19 this review was undertaken in 'remote' format.

The Panel supports this scheme in terms of building heights, scale and mass. The changes which you have introduced have responded well to the Panel's previous comments.

You need to demonstrate your thinking in relation to the landscape proposition better, through a clear narrative and to strive to make sure that the very generous space has a defined set of functional uses.

Background

The site is the existing USDAW head office complex on Wilmslow Road, Fallowfield, Manchester. This consists of the original villa c.1840 and the C20th 3-storey office additions to Langley Road. The site is bounded on two sides by Platt Fields Park, with a bank of splendid mature trees to the North.

This is the second Design Review for this scheme and this report should be read in conjunction with the one from October 2020, reference PM_2020_050.

Design Review

The Panel thanked you for your very clear presentation and for referencing how you had responded to the previous Design Review.

From a strategic urban design and heritage context everything appears to be “going in the correct direction”. This is a controlled, rational and well-mannered scheme. You have split out the buildings and created a more regular street frontage to Langley Road. There are welcome moves in relation to pulling the tower away from the villa and the tower itself is of better proportions, being slightly taller, it now feels right.

In respect of the tower the Panel was very clear that there is no need to pretend that “it isn’t there” and that in this respect the Panel supports breaching the tree line. This is all part of the drama of an urban park, which should be characterised by views of the surrounding developments which in turn overlook it. This building has a dynamic form and is good enough to merit being seen.

The Panel debated the material strategy with you. On balance this was felt to make sense and is rational with references to its context – there is no need for the tower to take up a red brick colour. You were asked though to look at giving the top two floors a more definition in relation to the lower floors of the building. As presented, this is still too subtle.

The larger than average size of the rooms were welcomed, but you were asked to see if you could add further windows in the gable ends of the common rooms. The focus for this should be amenity enhancement rather than just pure aesthetics.

The Panel felt that the Landscape design needs more narrative. It should be able to answer a series of key questions: where has the design come from? what are the key drivers? how do you envisage people using the space? A series of key views in and out of the development are needed to show more clearly how the site has responded to the park and what the sense of place and character you are trying to achieve is.

Some of this thinking may already be there but it needs explaining better through a few drawings and sections. It would be good to see a zonal plan for the site in terms of landscape functions. Some site sections would also be useful, particularly in relation to the boundary with the Park and you were asked to explore whether you might introduce some visual openings in the boundary wall to allow for passive surveillance through creating 'windows on the park'.

The planting palette looks attractive and the look and feel of the courtyard suggested in the visuals looks good. You were asked again to introduce external working environment for the students. Whilst there is mention of water attenuation and SUDs, more detail on this and how it would work, as well more details of the hard materials palette are still needed. Overall, you were asked to ensure that the very generous external space, which will be a key selling point for this scheme, has clearly delineated functional areas.

In summary, the Panel supports this scheme in terms of building heights, scale and mass. The changes which you have introduced have responded well to the Panel's previous comments.

You need to demonstrate your thinking in relation to the landscape proposition better, through a clear narrative and to strive to make sure that the very generous space has a defined set of functional uses.

The Panel thanked you for bringing this scheme to Places Matter Design Review and for your constructive response to participating in the 'remote' format. We have the option for Desk Review once you have refined your proposition and the discussions with the Planning Authority are concluded on this current proposal.

PlacesMatter

RIBA North, 21 Mann Island, Liverpool Waterfront, Liverpool L3 1BP

Telephone: +44 (0)7841 458696

richard.tracey@placesmatter.co.uk

www.architecture.com/placesmatter

@PlacesMatter_1