



Project Title: ABS20 Bellfield, Banchory
Details: Mixed Use Development
Location: Banchory, Aberdeenshire
Use type: Retail / Housing
Client Developer: Banchon Developments Ltd
Lead Designer(s): Archial Architects
Planning Authority: Aberdeenshire Council
Planning Status and Ref: Full Planning Application (ref. M/APP/2009/3075)
Issue Date: 21 October 2009

The previous application was reviewed by an A+DS Design Review Panel in Aberdeen on 17 March 2009 and a report was subsequently issued on 8 April 2009, which suggested several matters of strategy and detail that needed be reviewed if the proposals were to result in a positive development for the centre of Banchory. Amended designs were sent to us by the applicants for comment in June 2009 and we issued a letter in response dated 20 August 2009, a copy of which was sent to your department. The designs now submitted are virtually the same as those sent to us in June, and therefore the comments below are very largely the same as those in the previous restricted letter.

In the previous report we questioned the demolition of the existing building, which we noted as being of high quality and forming a significant landmark in Banchory. We acknowledge the submission of the additional information on this matter in Appendix A, which appears to be as previously submitted. However, we note this report does not contain any study of alternative options incorporating the building as previously requested, but rather seeks to justify without plans why some alternative uses might not be viable in the current building. We trust the Council will study this document further to make their decision on this matter.

Notwithstanding the above, we acknowledge that the revised designs have started to address several of the issues highlighted in our previous report. We welcome the reduction in scale which appears to better match that of the rest of the High Street, and the improved form and materials proposed for the corner element. We also welcome improvements in the environments around the central external stair, but note that there is now little improvement to the rear court area, which remain dominated by car access requirements and requires further work to make it into a usable and attractive shared garden, circulation route and parking area. Within the building the changes in layout provide better entrance access to the flats on High Street, although the entrance to the flats on the corner, now relocated to the rear by the garages, is much less successful. The re-orientation of these corner flats so that they all have south facing living rooms is also an improvement.

However, there is still work required in several areas to make the whole development of the quality required by this important position within Banchory. While welcoming the less massive form of the building generally, to follow more closely the pattern of the rest of the High Street, we do not support the apparent attempt to combine different styles to achieve disparity. We would like to see the designs further developed throughout, to the standard of the more promising amendments, to become a better resolved and attractive group of buildings which work within the townscape but without tending towards historical pastiche or trying to be 'iconic'.

In conclusion, we acknowledge that the proposed amendments have begun to address some of the detailed comments made in our report. However, the issue of the demolition of the existing villa, and the loss of the open gardens at the street corner, remains to be resolved. The designs require further development if a quality building and a distinct place to enhance Banchory is to be achieved, especially as the minor changes made since the previous discussions seem to have made some aspects of the scheme less attractive. We trust that these and any further matters can be resolved

through discussions with the Project Team, and we hope that a quality project can be delivered through positive engagement around these issues.