

21 May 2020

By email from info@mitchamcricketgreen.org.uk

For the attention of:

Councillor Martin Whelton, Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration & Transport, Merton Council  
Councillor Linda Kirby, Chair, Planning Applications Committee, Merton Council

Dear Councillors

Dear Martin and Linda

#### OPERATION OF DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

The Design Review Panel provides important, independent and expert insight on key development proposals put forward in Merton. It is valued by both applicants and the local community and we are writing to ask for your support in ensuring the process is robust and effective during the period of managing the Covid-19 pandemic.

We are concerned that recent Design Review Panels have been conducted by email. This denies the scope for a collaborative approach which is the very essence of the process. It works against the:

- opportunity for the applicant to explain their design thinking and answer any questions
- chance for a shared panel view to emerge through discussion
- ability to correct any misconceptions such as if the panel suggests something that has been explored and discounted
- transparency of applicants and officers hearing the panel's view emerge during the meeting
- scope for the chair to moderate the discussion, especially if different views are expressed, or points are unclear
- process for arriving at a shared outcome (Red/Amber/Green) among independent members, leaving it to officers and members who are also responsible for advising on and determining the application
- ability of the public to observe and record proceedings in those instances where a planning application has been submitted

We believe the approach is not consistent with the approach set out in *Design Review Principles and Practice* (Design Council et al, 2013/19) which is recognised as the industry standard.

Many of these issues could be addressed during the period of social distancing by adopting the same approach to online meetings as Merton Council has taken for Cabinet and Planning Applications Committee. It also points to the benefit of having an independent secretariat for managing the Design Review Panel and the opportunity for further strengthening the process post Covid-19.

We are sharing this letter with others who have an interest in the effective operation of the Design Review Panel in Merton and look forward to your response.

Tony Burton  
Secretary

Stephen Davy  
Director



stephen davy | architects  
peter smith