

Comments on Planning Application BH2017/02943 41 and 42 Park Wall, Farm Cottages, Station Approach, Falmer, Brighton, BN1 9SD

1. We have no objection in principle to the use of this site for student accommodation.
2. We note that the site does not fall within a conservation area and that the existing buildings on the site are not listed, either nationally or locally. However we are disappointed that no attempt was made by the applicant to conserve the pair of Victorian cottages and integrate them into the development.
3. We appreciate that this is a difficult site, locked in between the railway line and the A23 and dwarfed by the Amex Football Stadium.
4. The student housing to the west of the site (Stanmer Court) is ugly and lumpen and its current appearance is a reminder of the problems associated with render finishes when not properly detailed and poorly maintained. It is unfortunate the architects of the current scheme have taken this as their inspiration.
5. We note that the quality of the design in the various iterations that accompanied consultations with the B&H Planning Department actually seemed to get worse rather than better. Earlier schemes exhibited better massing and a more interesting elevational treatment.
6. The design proposes the use of white and green render and stained timber boarding. These are materials that weather badly and require high maintenance. We suggest that a better strategy would be to use a red brick that matched the Sussex University campus to the immediate north of the A.23.
7. Vertical coupling of windows has been employed in an apparent attempt to reduce the visual scale of the buildings and to avoid the staccato 'hole-in-wall' effect that student housing often creates. This has not been entirely successful, partly because the use of white render amplifies the effect of the openings. We believe that it would work better if brick were to be used.
8. Although this is not a matter that pertains to the planning application we are concerned that the design employs a single staircase with excessive travel distances to the furthest room. It seems perverse that the single stair is not positioned at the knuckle of the plan.
9. We note couple of the statements in the DAS:
"Animating the Façade – creating a façade that responds to place-making": this is one of those fatuous aims that crop up regularly in planning applications – clearly this design fails to achieve anything of the sort!
"A monolithic design approach" – yes – we must concur – the design is monolithic in the worst possible sense.
10. While we acknowledge that the proposal is appropriate in terms of its function, its general massing and its location, we recommend that this application be refused on the following grounds: the use of totally inappropriate materials.

DGR 16/10/17