

BH2018/00868

King's House, Grand Avenue, Hove

The Regency Society wishes to recommend that this application be refused.

The Society has no objection in principle to the development and accepts the overall strategy of restoring the surviving 19th C. south-facing block and converting it back to residential accommodation, while demolishing and replacing the post-War block facing Grand Avenue.

However, we are very concerned that the current proposals constitute a blatant case of over-development. This is evident from a study of the general site plan. As well as replacing the block that faces Grand Avenue, a new block is proposed on the existing open parking area. The resulting three blocks will thus have almost no open space between them. Almost half of the proposed apartments will face into sunless internal spaces and will be totally devoid of any views. The new west block facing Grand Avenue has a building depth of 19 meters, which is truly excessive. This results in single-aspect flats that have an overall plan depth of 9 meters – dining spaces are placed 7 meters away from the closest window and will need artificial light throughout the day.

The so-called 'outriggers' on the rear north side of the Queen's Gardens block are effectively north-facing and will be in shadow for most if not all of the day. They were originally intended to provide service accommodation and were split between adjacent houses. They now contain entire dwellings and have been increased in height from 3 to 5 storeys. The west elevation of the western-most outrigger faces a blank wall across a 4-meter gap. This is unacceptable. The other outriggers are separated by a gap of 8 meters: they will receive very little direct sunlight and will have severely compromised privacy.

Sadly, this type of over-development is becoming all too common. Developers feel constrained to limit building height and therefore resort to much denser footprints, reducing open space and compressing the spaces between buildings. Control of plot-ratio is just as important as control of building-height.

In this case we suggest that the developer should be asked to omit the block facing Second Avenue in order to create a small area of open space and allow in more light.

This is an important site occupying a prominent corner on the seafront. It deserves careful and sophisticated handling – qualities that are sadly lacking from the present proposals.

The façade of the five-storey east-facing block on Second Avenue is the most successful in terms of articulation, scale and elevational treatment, though this block removes the only opportunity to provide any open space.

The restored elevation facing Queen's Gardens is awkward and inarticulate. Mid-Victorian Italianate represents one of the low-points in the history of British architecture and this survival offers little to cherish. The present design does nothing to uplift its gloomy repetitiveness: the pattern of doors makes very little sense and the quartering of the window lights seems nonsensical in today's terms.

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The façade of the nine-storey west-facing block on Grand Avenue is ugly and ungainly. The pairing of floors to create double height window reveals represents a totally unsuccessful attempt to shrink the apparent visual height of the building and is nothing more than a gimmick that fools nobody. Indeed, it only succeeds in exaggerating the ungainly mass of the building. The irregular application of protruding balconies only serves to add to the ugly confusion of the composition. The architects might cast their eye on the façade of No. 4 Grand Avenue, a few steps to the north, for a lesson in how to create a lively façade with a happy pattern of balconies.

No clear strategy for the provision of affordable housing is articulated. Perhaps the intention is to designate the dark and viewless outriggers as such?

We call on the Planning Committee to refuse this application on the grounds of over-development and poor architectural design.

16 April 2018

