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Opun is the Architecture and
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Alan Oliver
Area Planning Officer
Planning Services
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23rd April 2008

Ref: 2007106

Dear Alan,

East Midlands Design Review – Sleaford REP

Thank you for bringing the above scheme to the panel. We have noted the previous comments from the desktop review that was carried out last year.

We were pleased to have the opportunity to comment on the proposals again and welcome the commitment of the client to good design. It was disappointing to see that there has been little reaction to previous comments and we would hope that progress can be made after this review.

Having seen the site and understood the requirements for the energy plant's processes, the panel accept the proposed layout and location. We believe however that the architectural and landscape treatments envisaged are not convincing solutions for this project.

Landscaping

We were glad to hear that it would be possible to address the landscaping buffer with scope to increase this as the current 3 metre solution would not be acceptable. It was also welcoming to hear that there is the opportunity for planting off-site as a means of mitigating the impact on views. It is important to clearly identify the locations which would be affected, including that of the church and sports ground.

The existing screen of trees on site is made up of mainly non-native species. The panel would query the intent to use further indigenous species alone to achieve the desired effect. A row of poplars would give a much less opaque shield than a row of non-native leylandii. It is also important to consider that the planting will take 20-30 years to mature.

Architectural Approach

The current approach gives an overall impression of non-descript buildings being styled to prevent from them being so.

There is no clear idea of what the building is and there are not many examples of renewable energy processing plants from which to draw precedence. Buildings of comparable size and function need to be the basis from which the design is informed, such as industrial and agricultural developments. For example the nearby Bass Maltings design is driven by function, giving a clear and honest indication of the activities that took place in it.

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We would question the use of Sleaford Enterprise Park as local precedence for the design approach. This appears to have been an after thought rather than a well researched conclusion.

A more remarkable scheme could be achieved if basic principles are employed with a simpler, more rigorous approach. It should not be necessary to use styling to impose a structure; curved roofs do not indicate the function and activities within the plant. There is a danger that these will look dated in the near future.

Materials and Colour

We would question the number and type of materials chosen. The selection and distribution of these is akin to a building of a smaller domestic scale and adds to the confusion over the building's purpose.

Painted metal does not mature well and can be difficult to maintain. It is unclear how it would weather as part of this design.

It is doubtful that white is an appropriate colour to use. We do not believe that it blends in to the surroundings and reduces visibility of the development. Colours in the landscape and natural materials would provide a better palette. It is notable that large, elegant industrial constructions of the 20th Century are often built from one good quality material and the colour is often uniform.

Conclusions

We are not convinced by the architectural approach. It strikes us as an exercise in cladding and styling. It needs to become an exercise in architecture in order for the purpose of the building to become clearer and one which residents could easily begin to associate with.

Landscaping will add to the scheme and benefit views, but it is insufficient to address the appearance of the scheme by screening with trees and planted bunds alone.

This is a new building type, which either has to invent an exceptionally high quality new language, or look closely at the precedents mentioned above and apply the lessons of simplicity and coherence.

We would like to hear about any subsequent alterations to the scheme.

Yours sincerely



Kate Lockhart
Design Excellence Manager
East Midlands Design Review Panel

cc. Andrew Toft, Eco2
David Williams, Eco2 Ltd
Graham McMorran, RPS Group
Alan Oliver, Area Planning Officer, North Kesteven District Council
Philip Rowson, Principal Planning Officer, North Kesteven District Council
Alex Jackson, North Kesteven District Council
Karen Bradford, Corporate Director, North Kesteven District Council

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