

Design Review of Proposed Bio Park Scheme



Graham Morrison OBE

Graham Morrison OBE is an architect and a partner of Allies and Morrison. He lectures both internationally and across the UK. He was a Professor of Architecture at the University of Nottingham, an elected National Member to the RIBA Council, the chair of its Exhibition Committee and a director of the RIBA Journal. He has judged several major architectural competitions, served as a Civic Trust assessor, a CABE Design Review Panellist and a Royal Fine Art Commissioner. He has chaired a number of Design Review Panels.

He has commented as follows on the proposed scheme:

'If I was on a design review panel, I would have the following to say about the scheme:

The problem with this project is the brief. I feel for the architect who has been asked to place too much development on the site. A series of compositional tricks have been used to mitigate the overbearing scale of the development and it is not the architect's fault that these simply produce a project that is visibly uncomfortable and out of place.

1. A defining first impression.

Welwyn Garden City is a garden city. The site for the 'biopark' is adjacent to the railway and will form an indelible first impression to anyone visiting for the first time. Nine storey buildings would seem out of place anywhere in the garden city but to place such a project on a site that defines the first impression defies common sense.

2. An ill-fitting architecture.

The architecture sends its own signal. Two full floors before it completes, it's already inhabiting a steeply pitched dormer and it tells you it is time to stop. It's as uncomfortable as a child wearing clothes that were already too small two years before. It uses a compositional trick based on pretending it is smaller than it is. Architecture here ought to be comfortable.

3. An inappropriate urbanity.

The long elevations of the proposal are 'broken down' into smaller sections in order to avoid the impact of the scale of the larger urban terraces. This is an architecture found in dense cities where such density is now unavoidable. Such urbanity seems to be a contradiction and an anathema to the values of a garden city. It seems overscaled and out of place.

*I wish you every success in defending the original decision to refuse permission for this development'.
Graham Morrison OBE, June 2022*