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ARCHITECTS & INTERIOR DESIGNERS

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Design Statement

Project: Meal Hill Reservoir, Meal Hill Lane, Slaithwaite, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, HD7 5EL

Job No. 3236

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1. Introduction

1.1. This statement has been prepared to accompany the planning application for a new-build house on the site of a redundant reservoir in Slaithwaite, located in the Green Belt. The design takes a highly contextual approach, responding sensitively to the existing landscape.

1.2. Given the previously developed nature of the site, the reservoir aligns with the characteristics of Grey Belt land – a term used to describe brownfield sites within the Green Belt that offer opportunities for sensitive regeneration.

1.3. The proposal is rooted in a deep understanding of the sites' history and character, drawing inspiration from traditional reservoir features and infrastructure. Embedding these references into the language of the proposal, creates a home that is both contemporary and respectful of its setting.

1.4. Importantly, the proposal remains within the existing footprint of the existing reservoir, ensuring minimal impact to the openness of the green belt. The reinstatement of the water body to the centre of the site enhances the connection to its historic infrastructure whilst offering environmental benefits for biodiversity.

2. Context, Inspiration and Design Response

2.1. Whilst the existing Meal Hill Reservoir itself does not feature drystone boundary walls, spillways, or a pumphouse due to its relatively small size, these are characteristic elements found at other local reservoirs. The design takes inspiration from these larger reservoirs, translating their defining features into a contemporary architectural response that reflects the region's industrial heritage.

2.2. Drystone boundary walls are commonly found at the top of reservoir bunds, marking their edges within the landscape. The majority of the proposal is subterranean with a horizontal drystone wall at roof level, referencing the low stone boundary walls commonly seen at local reservoirs. This element grounds the building within its setting, reinforcing a sense of continuity with the historic function of the site.

Figure 1: View of proposal from a distance

Figure 2: Drystone boundary walls around local reservoirs

2.3. Cut-outs in the boundary wall are a typical feature of many reservoirs, historically used for spillways, steps, and drainage infrastructure. The proposal includes a series of carefully placed cut-outs within the boundary wall for both glazing and access. Inspired by spillways and functional openings, these interventions maintain the integrity of the embankment whilst providing natural light and connectivity with the landscape to the internal spaces. The access to the courtyard is via a shallow and long set of steps, reflecting the spillways seen in many other reservoirs locally.

Figure 3: Spillway at Butterley Reservoir

Figure 4: Shallow stairs into proposal

2.4. The entrance to the house is designed to mimic a bottom outlet, a key functional feature of many reservoirs. Bottom outlets are traditionally positioned at the lowest point of a reservoir embankment, controlling the release of water and often housed within discreet, tunnel-like structures. The design references this infrastructure by positioning the entrance within the bund itself, reinforcing the idea of moving through the embankment rather than simply approaching a conventional doorway. As well as this, the entrance creates a sense of compression and release, where the entrance feels enclosed before opening up into the expansive living spaces beyond—mirroring the way water is channelled through a bottom outlet before being released.

Figure 5: Bottom Outlet at Butterley Reservoir

Figure 6: Entrance to proposal

2.5. A garden room at first floor level, draws from the typology of reservoir pumphouses, which often stand as prominent vertical elements above the boundary wall, forming a distinct and striking silhouette in the landscape. Like a traditional pumphouse the garden room establishes a vertical counter to the horizontal emphasis of the drystone wall, whilst providing expansive views over the surrounding countryside. In contrast to the solid, grounded nature of the bund and drystone walls, the garden room is conceived as a lightweight, floating element. This juxtaposition enhances the design's dynamic relationship with the site, ensuring that the building does not feel overly imposing or monolithic.

Figure 7: Pumphouse at Butterley Reservoir

Figure 8: Pumphouse at Scammonden Reservoir

Figure 9: Garden Room in Proposal

2.6. By incorporating these references into the design, the proposal pays homage to the wider reservoir vernacular while creating a home that feels contextually embedded within its surroundings

3. Sensitivity to the Green Belt

3.1. Whilst the site is designated as Green Belt, it aligns with the characteristics of Grey Belt due to its previous use as a reservoir.

Grey belt: *For the purposes of plan-making and decision-making, 'grey belt' is defined as land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to: check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas; to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another; to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns. (NPPF)*

3.2. Development in the Green Belt is inappropriate unless one of the exceptions set out in paragraph 154 applies. This includes the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land (including a material change of use to residential), whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would not cause 'substantial harm' to the openness of the Green Belt.

4. Sustainability and Biodiversity Enhancements

4.1. The proposal incorporates passive features that enhance the biodiversity of the site and reduce the environmental impact of the project. The key feature being the reinstatement of a body of water to the central courtyard, which will create a habitat for local wildlife, contribute to water management and retention and provide natural, passive cooling in the summer months.

5. Conclusion

5.1. The proposal represents a thoughtful and well considered redevelopment of a redundant reservoir site within the Green Belt. The design is rooted in the site's historical identity, incorporating many elements inspired by traditional reservoir infrastructure whilst ensuring minimal impact on the landscape. Through careful massing, material selection, and sustainability measures, the project not only preserves the spirit of the site but also contributes positively to its long-term ecological and architectural legacy.