

Design Review

Dunton Hills Garden Village

Dunton Hills Garden Village, Tilbury Road, West Horndon

Reference: 1178

Report of Design Review Meeting

Date: 5 June 2019

Location: Dunton Hills Golf Course, Tilbury Road, West Horndon, CM13 3LT

Panel

Jane Briginshaw (Chair), Housing, Architecture

Scott Adams, Urban Design, Regeneration

Annabel Keegan, Urban Design, Transport Planning

Richard Warwick, Architecture, Sustainability

Lindsey Wilkinson, Landscape Architecture, Historic Environment

Also attending

Sogand Babol, Design South East

Kay Pallaris, Brentwood Borough Council

Phil Drane, Brentwood Borough Council

Justin Booij, Brentwood Borough Council

David Ubaka, Brentwood Borough Council

Mike Overden, Brentwood Borough Council

Jeff Nottage, Broadway Malyan/CEG

Nick Norgate, Broadway Maylan/CEG

James Rayner, Broadway Malyan/CEG

Robert Hughes, Tyler Grange/CEG

Charlotte Robinson, CEG

Philip Ruck, CEG

David Barnes, Star Planning/CEG

Hollie Stacey, Crest Nicholson

Sarah Cornwell, Bellway Homes

Michelle Osbourne, Homes England

Cllr. Colin Foan, West Horndon Parish Councillor

Anne Clitheroe, Essex County Council

Matthew Jericho, Essex County Council

Natalie Hayward, Essex County Council

Brendan Johnston, Essex County Council

Adam Smith, Timmerman's Nursery

Connie Turner, Brooks Leney

Lindsey Wright, Brooks Leney

Martin Jordan, W&N

Site visit

A full site visit was conducted by the panel ahead of the review

This report is confidential as the scheme is not yet the subject of a planning application

Summary

This review is the first opportunity for the applicant team to demonstrate a single, coherent masterplan synthesising assorted advice from seven workshops, organised thematically, has been developed. The purpose of such a masterplan should be to address policy, embody the values of the garden village, and set an appropriate framework that sustains aspirations and assures of a deliverable project.

Progress has been made in the production of information since the last workshop, with a view to exploring detailed design integration. The aspiration and design intent put forward by the team is increasingly assertive, however, the proposal is not yet of the standard needed to support a distinctive garden village.

Our comments, therefore, focus on establishing a good spatial framework for the next level of detail, although that is not to say detailed work is not still required to inform the bigger-picture. The team need to progress at a much faster rate and work more effectively than they have done to-date, in order to be able to demonstrate an adequate level of design quality, at the time of submission.

At this stage, we would expect to identify both the earlier technical work on the landscape or heritage opportunities and key masterplanning principles, such as the three neighbourhoods, views and a distinctive 'core', clearly embedded within the proposal. Unfortunately, this is not yet the case. Some reflection and iterative working to 'overlay' and rework some of the original intent and landscape character into the masterplan proposal is needed, as well as some extended technical studies used to convincingly and iteratively marry the landscape with the architectural and urban design proposal.

For the masterplan to be truly 'landscape led', the team should look to embed landscape opportunities and reflect on the role of density, play and delivery to further support character.

Background

A significant amount of new information was received too late to allow the panel to fully consider and reflect upon proposals. Our advice is provided within this context.

The masterplan has been the subject of seven design workshops facilitated by Design South East between April and May 2019, with notes available upon request. The applicant team are aiming for an early Autumn planning submission, with a further design review meeting scheduled in July.

The masterplan site is situated on the south-eastern corner of Brentwood, in close proximity to Basildon, which lies to the east. The busy A127 Southend Arterial Road, intended as a major economic growth corridor, lies to the north. On the west, the site is bound by the A128, which carries less traffic but nonetheless, with fast-moving vehicles, could be considered a barrier to movement toward West Horndon station, which is around a mile away in this direction. Other constraints include a gas pipeline running roughly along the eastern boundary with Basildon, varied land ownerships to the north-east and a railway line to the south.

The proposal is for a new garden village of 3 neighbourhoods, with an average density of 38 dwellings per-hectare, rising to around 70 dwellings per-hectare mainly within the 'gateway' neighbourhood on the west, termed 'West Dunton', and the central neighbourhood of the masterplan, termed 'Dunton Waters'. The vision leads with future technological advances that support sustainable travel, including on-demand services and 'smart' facilities, alongside a walkable, polycentric community with a 'central heart', that is the natural destination for the village, in addition to a self-sustaining productive landscape.

The Council emphasise the need for a coherent placemaking strategy that supports sustainable travel and the importance of children. Four primary development principles affect the masterplan site. These include requirements to;

- Design and build with nature,
- Incorporate resilient smart and sustainable infrastructure,
- Promote health and well-being,
- Be flexible and accommodate change across the 20-year build-out.

A landscape-led masterplan framework

A distinctive, landscape-led proposal is the aspiration. However, our advice is that further work, both in terms of technical analysis and iterative design, is now needed to deliver this aspiration and form a convincing strategic landscape proposal. This requires a better understanding of the existing landscape, for example to include features such as tree and hedge-patterning at a species level, which is then used to inform the landscape strategy. The architecture and urban design proposal should be continually tested against this landscape structure.

We are reluctant to comment on the detailed landscape proposal until this technical work is collated and reflected in the spatial framework.

Our advice is that the landscape structure might start with the key features of the ridgeline, water bodies, and the existing underground utility, which will preclude future development.

It is felt the approach to play could be embedded in the masterplan more clearly. The play strategy should consider catchment areas, quantity, quality and accessibility, while also acknowledging the role the landscape has to play in learning. In detail terms, the edges and interface between open-space, play-space and the homes require further articulation, alongside indication of where there are opportunities for doorstep play.

Masterplan priorities and principles

It is encouraging to see an improved clarity around the masterplan drivers since the workshops. For example, establishing an internal visual outlook within North Dunton that relates to the landscape around Dunton Waters is a strong masterplan principle. We would like to see this demonstrated coherently through the site.

There is, however, a fear that focussed design intent such as this becomes pressured by the development process. While it is a good idea to embed masterplan principles in the

planning application, design codes and guidance, the first, most important and viable way the design and aspirational intent can be realised in the eventual development is by ensuring they are embedded in the proposal at their core, through a fully considered proposal for a 'place'. This has not yet been demonstrated.

Indication of achieving this would be that a masterplanning principle is clearly intelligible in the drawings produced and supported by research, analysis and three-dimensional design. The process to now embed the masterplanning principles at a framework level should be an exploratory and iterative one – it will require additional technical work, a reflection on existing technical work, and 'overlying' the design proposal to reflect on the impact the analysis and principles should have on the design.

The masterplan driver to develop three neighbourhoods should be drawn out in the proposal in this way. The principle of having three neighbourhoods is not legible, because they are ill-defined at the boundary. How the self-build plots interact with this requires clarification. This is not to say that the masterplan ought to be refined to demonstrate three distinctly defined neighbourhoods, but the original concept may need revision.

In terms of views, in addition to the newly proposed visual outlook at North Dunton, the masterplan intent to support scenic and local views should include (as a minimum, and in addition to the visual outlook established at North Dunton);

- Long distance views to the London skyline,
- Prominent internal views toward natural and existing features such as the wind turbine,
- Additional proposed views within the built form.

Similarly, a spatial hierarchy that supports the farmstead and village green as the 'heart' is not clearly legible in the masterplan yet. We felt there to be a tension between the role of Dunton Waters' local centre and the farmstead and village green, which could be considered competing masterplan elements. Each should be explored in further detail and a single place which fulfils a 'heart' function prioritised and supported in the design. Our view is that the village green ought to play a more prominent role within the masterplan layout. One idea might be to develop a series of linked villages, with the village green at the farmstead as the core centre for not only one village, but the whole masterplan.

Movement and connections

The framework for movement has progressed since the workshops. However, more work is needed to bring clarity. We encourage the team to consider hierarchy of movement and lines of sight in more detail. It is not yet clear how the hierarchy of streets will work. A strong east-west grain is needed, which is supplemented with additional, secondary north-south routes. The proposal should demonstrate it can accommodate movement between Thorndon Country Park and Langdon Hills.

Further consideration is required to clarify how public transport will be accommodated while maintaining the desired character of streets and lanes. 'Park Drives' and 'Residential Avenues' are proposed to accommodate buses; however, the sections do not show how this is achieved. Sections should, therefore, be worked up in more detail, showing critical dimensions, and more detail below-ground, including how utilities and sustainable drainage are accommodated.

The looped bus route should be reconsidered, as indirect routes lengthen journey times and are likely to discourage use of the service. Fast, direct routes are preferred. We would welcome a direct central east-west link for buses, connecting to Basildon via one of four connections on the east.

On the west, the connections to the A128 should consider hierarchy and mode of movement. We place importance on the central connection to prioritise sustainable movement to West Horndon, while the southern connection should be considered one that enables those from the south-eastern corner of the site to access the A128. The northern one should fulfil a similar function for the north.

Character and density

The team are encouraged to reflect on and scrutinise the proposed densities, as the rationale for higher densities, and the relationship between character and density is disjointed. Increased density is focussed around the southern portion of West Dunton, however, the impact this will have on the character is unclear, while opportunities to support the desired character, for example, to accentuate the visual outlook from the ridgeline neighbourhood, or in supporting the view from the A128 into the village green with built form on either side, are missed.

The team are, therefore, encouraged to critically reflect on where density is appropriate and what benefits it might confer to the character of the place, which may mean not pressuring density in one portion of the masterplan, but using it as a design tool to develop a convincing urban grain that moves away from a typical urban block.

This is a continued conversation from earlier workshops, where differing approaches to density (and typology) in typical villages – higher on the edge, or higher in the centre – was interrogated in more detail.

Delivery

Although we acknowledge our role in the process, in this instance, we are mindful that the procurement, phasing and interaction between eventual developers will significantly impact realisation of the masterplan drivers and aspiration.

The applicant should develop assurances for the Council in how the character will be secured, irrespective of future process scenarios. As a part of this, we would like to see the inherent incremental nature of development reflected on more clearly, with phasing boundaries, definition of neighbourhoods and development controls articulated early-on, so that they may be reflected on in design terms by the panel.

We would welcome detailed design provisions that ensure ground floor retail spaces are flexible to other uses, should retail not be viable in these locations once development has commenced.

Materials and detailing

We did not discuss materials and details at this review, instead focussing on the overall strategy and masterplan framework. However, Paragraph 130 of the 2018 National

Planning Policy Framework states:

Local planning authorities should also seek to ensure that the quality of approved development is not materially diminished between permission and completion, as a result of changes being made to the permitted scheme (for example through changes to approved details such as the materials used).

In order to be consistent with this national policy, the applicant team and local authority should note DSE's general guidance on material quality and detail. At planning application stage, the quality of the detailing should be demonstrated through large scale drawings at 1:20 and 1:5 of key elements of the building/landscape and should be accompanied by actual material samples which should be secured by condition as part of any planning approval.

Energy strategy

We would welcome further articulation of an integrated energy strategy and masterplan framework. The loss of the wind turbine feels at odds with the aspiration for a sustainable community and its' inclusion in the masterplan is something to be explored further.

Our guidance is that at the planning application stage the proposal should produce a clear energy strategy which details how the development will optimise thermal performance, minimise the demand for energy, supply the remaining energy requirements efficiently and optimise the use of renewables, consistent with Government and local policies. This strategy should be communicated in a robustly considered way, for example using detailed modelling work with respected calculation methods.

This review was commissioned by Brentwood Borough Council with the knowledge of CEG.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Since the scheme was not the subject of a planning application when it came to the panel, this report is offered in confidence to the addressee and those listed as being sent copies. There is no objection to the report being shared within respective practices/organisations. DSE reserves the right to make the guidance known should the views contained in this report be made public in whole or in part (either accurately or inaccurately). Unless previously agreed to remain confidential, this report will be publicly available if the scheme becomes the subject of a planning application and to any public inquiry concerning the scheme. DSE also reserves the right to make guidance available to another design review panel should the scheme go before them. If you do not require this report to be kept confidential, please let us know.

T: +44 (0)1634 401166
E: info@designsoutheast.org
www.designsoutheast.org

