

Design Review

Dunton Hills Garden Village

Dunton Hills Garden Village, Tilbury Road, West Horndon

Reference: 1178-2

Report of Design Review Meeting

Date: 17 July 2019

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

Panel

Jane Briginshaw (Chair), Housing, Architecture

Scott Adams, Architecture, Urban Design, Regeneration

Andrew Cameron, Urban Design, Transport Planning

Richard Warwick, Architecture, Sustainability

Lindsey Wilkinson, Landscape Architecture, Historic Environment

Also attending

Sogand Babol, Design South East

Kieran Toms, Design South East

Kay Pallaris, Brentwood Borough Council

Justin Booij, Brentwood Borough Council.

Bill Newman, Brentwood Borough Council

Phil Drane, Brentwood Borough Council

Anne Clitheroe, Essex County Council

Natalie Hayward, Essex County Council

Brendan Johnston, Essex County Council

Matthew Jericho, Essex County Council

Mark Robinson, Essex County Council

Dominic Collins, Essex County Council

Graham Thomas, Essex County Council

Cllr. Colin Foan, West Horndon Parish Councillor

Hollie Stacey, Crest Nicholson

Jonathan Alldis, Homes England

Jeff Nottage, Broadway Malyan

Jessie Watson, Broadway Malyan

Nick Norgate, Broadway Malyan

Janice Burgess, Highways Environment

Barbara Moss-Taylor, Environment Agency

Sheila Stones, Historic England

Heather Read, Natural England

Kerry Harding, NHS

Leigh Norris, Essex Police

David Bigden, Thames Chase

Site visit

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

Summary

This proposal is progressing. The team are encouraged to maintain the pace of improvement to ensure that commitments are locked into the planning process through suitable design guidance or design coding.

The underlying framework for the masterplan has evolved. The link between the proposal and the landscape is increasingly convincing. We commend the development of more distinct characters and boundaries to the western and north-eastern neighbourhoods, while reinforcing the inherent character of the southern area with a dispersed, informal wetland neighbourhood.

Some further improvements to the strategic design are needed, such as a review of how key spaces are framed and interact with built form, as well as the function and character of the public spaces of the market square, village green and centres. This should be carried out in tandem with the development of detail in the schools, neighbourhood centres, movement network and landscape. While we commend the diverse and varied landscape, attention should be paid to the need for biodiversity, play and a depth of detail that counters possible erosion of design intent through the development process.

Complex design thinking has been demonstrated. This needs to be articulated and secured through accurate and detailed technical work.

Background

The proposal is for a new garden village of 2,700 to 4,000 homes in 3 neighbourhoods, with an average density of 38 dwellings per-hectare, rising to around 70 dwellings per-hectare mainly within the western and southern neighbourhoods.

The masterplan has been the subject of seven design workshops and a design review meeting facilitated by Design South East between April and June 2019. The team are aiming for an early autumn planning submission, with a further design review meeting requested.

The vision leads with the self-sustaining productive landscape and future technological advances that support sustainable travel, including on-demand services and 'smart' facilities, alongside a walkable, polycentric community with a 'central heart' as the primary destination for the village. The proposal focusses on the link between learning and landscape, with a central secondary school in the southern 'wetlands' neighbourhood. Primary schools are proposed within local village centres. Three connections on the west with pedestrian, cycle and bus priority over the A128 toward West Horndon are proposed, alongside three futureproofed links on the east.

Connectivity and movement

We commend the provision of three connections on the east and a further three on the west. This contributes to a better-connected masterplan than previous proposals. The need for a continuous, public route with pedestrian and cycle priority at the junction to Station Road is strongly emphasised. Technical drawings presented do not illustrate the intent described during the review. Alternative drawings are needed to evidence the intent.

The A128 route between the two gateway roundabouts need to be suitably speed restricted to support pedestrian and cycle priority.

There is a convoluted route from the southern neighbourhood to the A128. A direct, east-west link from the southern neighbourhood centre joining the western link to Station Road is important.

We welcome the fourth link on the east, toward the south, in order to promote wider strategic walking links between the two country parks. Should these connections not be delivered in the future through collaboration with the adjoining authority, this will prove problematic for the social viability of the settlement.

We are broadly comfortable with the potential strategic bus route indicated. Ambiguity in pre-determining a route for a demand-responsive service is acknowledged, however, clarity is needed on how the street hierarchy and public realm design supports buses, balanced against the desired character.

There is little explanation around the numbers and impact of vehicles. The intent to internalise 60-70% of vehicular movements should be supported with more detailed modelling and studies. Deliverability should be proven. With higher densities, there is particular concern over impact of vehicles on West Dunton. A clearly articulated strategy for vehicular movement, as well as parking, is required.

We applaud the anticipation and encouragement of behavior change through the exclusive use of a north-south link for pedestrians and cycles between the north-eastern and southern neighbourhoods. The accommodation of vehicles at predetermined times could be a consideration. However, a heavily engineered solution would be an unfavourable outcome. If accommodating vehicles along a central north-south route is not felt to be appropriate, this should be accompanied by justification, for example by demonstrating that more vehicle miles will not be the norm.

Landscape

The landscape proposal has vastly improved since the previous review, reading as well-embedded and a fundamental green infrastructure supporting the wider masterplan. The risk of losing important landscape structure seems less likely than in previous iterations. This is because landscape is used effectively to both shield and define the settings for neighbourhoods, there are diverse spaces with ecological variety, and the proposal builds on inherent qualities of the landscape, therefore reinforcing the existing condition. This is demonstrated, for example, by the wooded neighbourhood in the north-east. Complex, thoughtful design thinking has been demonstrated and embedded into the scheme.

The balance between 'green' and 'blue' infrastructure, with a greater emphasis on green infrastructure, is comfortable and care should be taken not to erode this through iterative technical design.

Supporting biodiversity through positive ecological interventions, developing the character and detailing the landscape proposition should now be the focus. The need for more detail is emphasised, for example by detailing the interfaces between spaces.

Maintaining a balance between landscape character (amenity or visual) and ecological character is important, in order to safeguard against any erosion in provisions and enable the commitments proposed in the masterplan to be realised as the project progresses.

Opportunity for informal and formal play is described, however there is a lack of drawn material to support this. In the light of the proposed integration of play with the landscape, an overlay of a strategy with a landscape proposal is needed to allow the proposal to be properly evaluated.

Urban design

The level of complexity we would expect in a masterplan of this scale is still evident while the definition of the neighbourhoods has improved and proposal simplified overall. There is improved definition to the western and north-eastern neighbourhoods, while the dispersed, informal nature of the southern neighbourhood is a fitting response to the inherent character of this portion of the masterplan.

Refining the urban design proposal at a finer scale should now be the focus. One such alteration is the need for a stronger rationale around the sense of enclosure provided in the transition from the market square, through the village green to the secondary school and wetlands in the south. Further exploration and study through sections and three-dimensional drawings is needed.

The proximity of the main centre to the village centre of the southern neighbourhood should be reviewed. Further exploration of the role of the two schools in linking activity from the north-west to the south-east is needed. A public, landscaped route to a fourth eastern connection will help support the viability of the southern village centre.

More definition to the north of the village green with built-form would contribute to an improved sense of enclosure. Enclosing the market square to the east should also be explored, albeit accompanied by a daylight and sunlight assessment. Similar assessments across key public spaces should be carried out.

In the southern neighbourhood, the form of the secondary school and the resultant urban design proposal is not yet convincing. A sense of character linked to the school's relationship with the landscape must be articulated. This can be achieved through an alternative physical form that considers the enclosure provided for adjoining public spaces, the function and character of those spaces and the link with the pond and wetlands further south.

The project is at a stage where the detailed design and spatial experience should now be described. More detail is needed on the design of the schools in particular. Drawings at a larger scale and in varied media are required.

A design code structure that assures of quality for the homes, schools and community spaces, while not proving onerous and prescriptive for future building practices should be developed as the next stage of progression. Such a code might focus on specific areas, such as the village centres or market square.

Communication

The visual communication of the scheme is less convincing than the verbal. Moving forward, emphasis should be on detailed design work in varied media, including sections, three-dimensional information, and details at a larger scale. This will help articulate the intended character.

Materials and detailing

The applicant team and local authority should note general guidance on material quality and detail, which accords with national policy. 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).

At the 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

The energy strategy was not discussed to a notable extent in this review. However, we would welcome assurances, secured through the planning process, that the homes will not just be built to minimum levels of compliance with building regulations.

Our guidance at the planning application stage is that 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.

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