



CAMBRIDGESHIRE QUALITY PANEL

REPORT OF PANEL MEETING

Scheme: Darwin Green – Parcel BDW2

Date: Thursday 23rd May 2019

Venue: South Cambridgeshire District Council Offices

Time: 2:15pm – 4pm

Quality Panel Members

- Lynne Sullivan (Chair)
- Meredith Bowles
- David Pritchard
- Lindsey Wilkinson
- Oliver Smith
- David Birkbeck

Panel secretariat and support

- Stuart Clarke – Principal Planner, Cambridgeshire County Council

Local Authority Attendees

- Saeed Mahmood – Senior Planning Officer, Greater Cambridge Shared Planning
- Jane Green - Built and Natural Environment Manager at Greater Cambridge Shared Planning

Applicant and Representatives

- Asa Chittock - BDW
- Justice Nyakatawa – BDW
- Harriet Wooler – Bidwells

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- Rebecca Ford – Bidwells (Work Experience)
- Tristan Rodgers- Allies and Morrison
- Matthew Petford - Allies and Morrison
- Matt Jarvis - Rural Solutions
- Kwaku Tano-Yeboah - Patrick Parsons:
- Robert Masson - Patrick Parsons:
- Mike Priaulx - Code Environment:

1. Scheme description and presentation

Architect/Designer: Allies and Morrison

Applicant: BDW/Barratt Homes

Planning status: Pre-application proposal for reserved matters application.

2. Overview

Darwin Green is part of the north-west Cambridge growth area, which could see circa. 5,500 new dwellings being built on the Eddington (Cambridge University) and Darwin Green sites. Darwin Green 1 (DG1) is located on agricultural land primarily at the National Institute of Agricultural Botany (NIAB) between Huntingdon Road and Histon Road, Cambridge. It gained outline planning permission ([07/0003/OUT](#)) in 2013 for 1,593 dwellings (of which 40% will be affordable provision). A smaller 'frontage site' for 187 dwellings, predominantly apartments, has already been built and occupied and whilst it does not form part of the DG1 development it does form part of the gateway into the development from Huntingdon Road.

This pre-application proposal is before the Panel to inform a reserved matters planning application (BDW2) addressing appearance, landscape, layout and scale for 320 dwellings. BDW2 will form the second housing parcel of DG1.

The first reserved matters application was approved in June 2014. It provides for infrastructure including access roads, green corridors', pedestrian and cycle paths, public open space and the first allotment. Further reserved matters applications for Darwin Green Square, a primary school, the local centre (including a library) and the first housing phase (BDW1) which bounds the site, have all been approved.

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BDW2 is a residential parcel and its design has been guided by the parameter plans and approved design code for the DG1 development.



The Panel has previously reviewed the masterplan, design code, primary school and first phase schemes for Darwin Green but not this particular parcel. The local planning authority highlighted that although some pre-application meetings have been held with the applicant, further sessions will be necessary especially in relation to transport and highway matters with the County Council.

The Panel were asked in their pre-session briefing to focus on matters related to the linear park; character of the mews streets; provisions related to the ditch; uses and configuration for the pavilion; and details of the housing typologies and elevations.

No declarations of interest were made.

3. Cambridgeshire Quality Panel views

Introduction

The Panel's advice reflects the issues associated with each of the four 'C's' in the Cambridgeshire Quality Charter. The comments below include both those raised in the open and closed sessions of the meeting.

The applicant presented the proposal to the Panel and advised that new architects have recently joined the development team. Whilst the over-all development will be built out over the next 7 to 8 years, the parcel before the Panel for consideration is the second to come forward and is likely to be built out over 2 phases. The parcel is characterised by its tree edge setting, existing sports pavilion (to be retained) and adjacent existing 'grid iron' terraced housing. As well as the housing, it will include allotments, a linear park and a green, as well as being close to the new primary school, local centre and Central Park. The parcel has a walk time of around 5 minutes end to end.

The applicant explained the street hierarchy, vernacular style, potential palette consisting of 17 different housing types, approach to bins, bikes and cars and the situation regarding the ditch – which is discussed further below. Local Equipped Areas of Play (LEAP) and

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Local Area of Play (LAP) will be included in the green spaces in accordance with the design code. Housing will be predominately 2 or 3 storeys and include paired, terraced mews and detached housing as well as apartments. The applicant showed several designs being considered as they relate to paired housing, gable ends, mono-roof and chimney designs. Contemporary styles are also being considered.

The Panel thanked the applicant for their detailed presentation and prompt time keeping and sought clarifications on the linear park, courtyard housing, allotments and the ditch.

The applicant responded that the linear park will not provide for vehicular movement, only for pedestrian and cycles and this will be achieved through the narrowing of the space. The linear park will be defined by a changed surface and seek to be a place to dwell or pause *en route* to other destinations, such as the primary school, local centre or Central Park. It is not necessarily intended to be a destination itself. It was confirmed that the courtyard housing will have blind backs. The allotments area is of a fixed sized, as required by the approved design code, however, they will include facilities such as water, a drop off point, a toilet block and meeting room to encourage community use. The ditch was highlighted by the applicant as unnecessary and they felt they had demonstrated that it did not serve any purpose. However, existing residents outside of the development had concerns that its removal could cause flooding issues and the local planning authority required that it be maintained. In order to achieve this, a gated maintenance strip is to be provided alongside the ditch and a management company established to maintain both. Open space elsewhere on the development is to be adopted by the local authority.

Community

The Panel welcomed the proposed facilities at the allotments which they consider will encourage greater community use. They asked how the currently disused Pavilion will be re-used. The applicant advised that they have commissioned consultants to examine viable uses and that they would like to see a high-end restaurant use this retained building. The Panel asked if a crèche is a potential user and whether there will be one on the development or parcel. The applicant responded that they would welcome a crèche on site and would see it as a valuable facility for residents but most of the community facilities are focused on the local centre in line with the thinking on how Darwin Green will provide for its residents.



The Panel expanded this point by asking about flexible housing types, such as the ability to integrate a crèche in a ground floor area under apartments, but also for down-sizers or special-end projects (e.g. extended families). The applicant responded that they do have 17 housing types, however, their current product range does not specifically provide for these types, although some of their housing could be adapted.

Although outside of the parcel being considered, the Panel asked whether the supermarket – as a key destination - will still be provided at the local centre as it did not appear to be shown on the plans. The applicant advised that this matter was under review with the landowners and could not advise further.

The Panel queried where people, especially teenagers will 'hang out' as there appeared little opportunity to do so because the parcel is highly regimented in layout. The applicant responded that Central Park is close by and will act as the main place for leisure and recreation but within the parcel, Pavilion Green and the linear park are places to dwell and pause.

Connectivity

There will be a pedestrian and cycle access from the south east corner of the parcel (and development) direct to Huntingdon Road, which will provide a main link towards Cambridge city centre. There is no link to Woodlark Road – as requested by the local residents - but there will be a pedestrian and cycle link to Windsor Road.

There are no dedicated cycle routes through the parcel, cyclists will navigate their own route on street. The applicant explained how these movements fit into the cycle strategy for the site and the strategic cycle link that will connect from Huntingdon Road to Histon Road as part of an orbital cycle route to connect the University sites (Eddington and West sites) to the science parks and North Cambridge Station.

The Panel queried whether the route connecting to Huntingdon Road will get congested and therefore whether it is wide enough. Furthermore, they queried the alignment across the Pavilion green and why a route behind the pavilion was not provided as it seemed a

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logical desire line. The applicant responded that they had considered this option, but there are issues associated with an existing sub-station, service yard for the pavilion, security and housing layout to contend with.



The Panel suggested that road naming and other measures to ensure easy navigation for delivery vehicles should be thought about as more and more residents have home deliveries and this should be tested for wayfinding.

The Panel noted the choice of routes to the local primary school, but felt that more could be made of a clear child-friendly route through the proposed linear park.

The Panel felt that the hierarchy of streets should be more responsive to desire lines. The layout as shown seemed homogenous and needs some 'flex' to include more interest. The applicant responded that they are looking at features in the linear park such as an urban rill, but the Panel felt they should go further by designing it as a central landscaped space, moving beyond the current character of a 'greened' road.

Character

The Panel recognised that with recent appointment of new architects it may be premature to discuss certain elements of character, such as materials, but wanted to understand more about what defines the character of the place. The Panel liked the density of townscape but reiterated that more flex was needed and suggested that the layout was characterised by an almost ruthless efficiency - they questioned whether it delivers a Cambridge experience. The Panel acknowledged that adjacent, existing roads, such as Woodlark Road and Windsor Road have similar grid characteristics, but still questioned whether the layout of this parcel could do more to respond to the uniqueness of its setting.

The Panel were interested in the housing typologies shown and how this impacts on street scene and would encourage the applicant to develop this further to enhance the sense of place. More distinctive landscapes would help define these places and hierarchy of streets and assist with navigation both around and within the parcel – recognising that the linear park, allotments and Pavilion Green are key elements in achieving this.

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The Panel did highlight that the ditch backs onto the grandest houses in the parcel and provides only small garden spaces. The applicant responded that boundary treatments will enable visual enjoyment of the ditch, however, the treatment of the ditch itself is dictated by the requirements imposed on it. It was also recognised that some of the grandest houses on the southern fringe are constrained by Hobson's Brook.

The Panel were concerned about the parking courts and apartment buildings next to the linear park. Whilst the Panel welcomed the linear park, they questioned whether this could better enhance the apartments and the whole development if it could be organised as a central T-shaped feature; There was concern that the design of this space could be improved, as it was suggested that the parking courts could become just a football kick around area, and the applicant acknowledged that more defensible space would improve the design

A discussion on marker buildings emphasised that these can be defined differently. It does not have to be an end building it could be a mid-street building or higher building for example. The Panel also challenged the ubiquitous use of Cambridge buff as a building material, but the applicant responded that the design code is clear on this as a primary brick material.

The Panel would strongly encourage the applicant to explore more pockets of contrast and elements of surprise.

The Panel asked which housing standards are being adhered to as they are aware the local planning authority has adopted the latest standards – which is best practice. The applicant stated that they are building in accordance with their outline planning permission and the associated standards at that time. Post session it was understood by the Panel that the standards to be applied is subject to legal opinion, the outcome of which could materially affect the masterplan.

Pavilion Green includes railings and hedging which the Panel suggested is very formal, and might be more relaxed to enhance it as a key amenity space. Alconbury Weald was cited as a good example of how this can be space could be better treated.



Climate

The Panel noted that with the proposed build out period of several years, emerging standards will need to be taken account of to ensure that the development meets and provides for the best environmental performance and where possible seeks to go beyond policy compliance.

The applicant acknowledged that its response will be addressed on a phase-by-phase basis and its strategy is to provide a fabric first approach and future proof where-ever possible, stating that there are limits on the amount of PV you can install. Code 4 level will be achieved for several aspects of the parcel, such as ecology and water efficiency.

The Panel highlighted the government's stated aim to halve all energy use within ten years, and the Cambridgeshire Combined Authority's intention to establish a pathway towards 2050 and zero carbon provisions. In the near future there will be greater requirements for renewables and policy is likely to rule out gas boilers for example.

The Panel suggested the applicant consider air source heat pumps, water management and expanded electric car charging provision, and queried whether the housing layout/roof-scape maximises solar gain and PV usage or is determined by visual design of house types.

In the closed session, the Panel also reflected on provision for an electric future with measures such as battery banks and the ability of the local network to cope with increases in demand. They also questioned about water connections into new sites and impact on water resources in a drier region of the UK.

4. Conclusion



The Panel were generally excited by the promise for this parcel, which includes opportunities at Pavilion Green, the allotments and newly introduced central green route to create a place of distinction. However, the Panel emphasised that whilst the current layout is efficient, a little more flexibility could deliver a more distinctive character, and made the following recommendations, on which further details can be found above:

- Hierarchy of routes through the site should be guided by desire lines and amenities
- Work through the treatment of the large units and the ditch to ensure it delivers value and is not an eye-sore
- Relax the logical, efficient rhythms and re-interpret marker buildings
- Create more places of surprise, fun and delight
- Future proof for good environmental performance

[illegible]