



Hertfordshire Design Review Panel

Design Review

Land South of Froghall Lane, Walkern

21st December 2017

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Design Review Workshop for Land south of Froghall Lane, Walkern
Monday 18th December 2017

Attendees

Hertfordshire Design Review Panel

Chair: Jon Rowland, Jon Rowland Urban Design
Mehron Kirk – Building Design Partnership

Local Planning Authority (East Herts Council)

Fiona Dunning – East Herts Council, Principal Planning Officer
Ciaran MacCullagh– East Herts Council, Conservation and Urban Design Officer

Project and design team representatives

Julian Buttell, David Coles Architects
Peter Salisbury, Aldwyck Housing Group
Mike Lake, DLA Town Planning

Walkern Parish Council representative

Chris O'Brien

Chair of the Walkern Neighbourhood Planning Group

Michele Rist

Hertfordshire Design Review Service

Rachael Donovan, Natural, Historic & Built Environment Team Leader
John Rumble, Head of Environmental Resource Planning

Conflicts of Interest: None

Confidentiality: Unless expressly requested by the design team on the grounds of bona fide commercial confidentiality, the information within this report is not regarded as confidential.

This design workshop was commissioned by East Herts Council.

Panel Guidance

Introduction

The Hertfordshire Design Review Panel met on 18th December 2017 to review reserved matters planning application 3/17/1558/REM for an extension to Walkern on land south of Froghall Lane. This followed a unilateral undertaking to ensure reserved matters for this site are taken through a design workshop process prior to determination.

The session was run as an enabling workshop, to assist the developers and their team, East Herts Council, the Parish Council, community representatives to achieve a design for the site that addresses the differing aspirations of these key stakeholders.

The workshop took the form of brief presentations outlining key issues and concerns, a site visit and walkabout, and a discussion as to how the proposed plan performed.

The Panel offers its observations and comments on this site to assist in a good design solution and trusts that these comments will be taken as constructive, and as part of an advisory process supporting shared ambitions for achieving good design.

Background

The site is located to the south west of Walkern and has outline planning permission for up to 85 dwellings, including site access. The layout, scale, appearance and landscape are all reserved matters.

The site is currently in agricultural use and is surrounded by residential development on its northern, eastern and southern edge. The topography of the site slopes down from the north; the highest point is at the north-west corner. The south-western part of the site has a history of flooding.

Summary

Comments were made and advice offered by the design enablers and stakeholders. A broad consensus was reached between the design enablers and the developer that there were opportunities the site presented that could be strengthened. It was agreed that the developer and his team would revisit and refine the scheme, to take account of the issues raised.

These aspects are set out below under a series of broad headings. Not all issues were discussed in detail but the fundamentals of the scheme were considered to be the most important at this stage. Many of the comments and observations relate more to strategic aspects, being concerned with 'place-making' and promoting both market and social values. Detailed elements appropriate for a Reserved Matters Application also need addressing.

The design enablers are of the view that a series of key analytical aspects in the development of the masterplan need clarification and explanation to ensure an adequate narrative for the overall scheme.

The following tasks are to be considered by the developer and his team to validate the final scheme.

- A clear diagram is required setting out the constraints and opportunities of the site.
- A Landscape Strategy that sets out the issues of drainage, topography, access, broad functions, green fingers, ecology and other such aspects is required.
- A vegetation and tree planning strategy is required.
- An urban design strategy that sets out edge conditions, opportunities for a 'heart', key views and vistas into and out from the site is required.
- A Movement Strategy that indicates deliverable access, street hierarchy, and opportunities for footpath and cycle routes is required.
- A conceptual block masterplan that brings together the landscape, urban design and movement strategies into an overall framework for development is needed.
- A public realm strategy that sets out the 'place-making' elements would be helpful.

The Panel would be happy to provide further advice and input into the next iteration of the scheme via a desktop review.

Constraints and opportunities

The constraints of the site have been identified; however, further work is needed to turn these constraints into a positive design response. The treatment of sensitive rural edges needs particular attention and how they can penetrate successfully into the scheme. An understanding of the constraints and opportunities will also help define the developable envelope and define where careful consideration of edge conditions is required.

It was felt that the value of the site and setting needs to be maximised through the Masterplan design. The opportunities the site affords, particularly the views out into the countryside have not been fully exploited. The relationship with the open countryside and how the scheme can draw views in requires further careful consideration.

The design enablers felt that in moving this scheme forward *a clear diagram is required setting out the constraints and opportunities of the site.*

Landscape Strategy

The level of landscape detail is inadequate for a reserved matters application. Incorporating this detail now will help the various stakeholders gain confidence in the scheme and an understanding of how it will look and feel against a considered typology of built form.

A Landscape Strategy that sets out issues of drainage, topography, access, broad functions, green fingers, ecology and other such aspects is therefore required. Both functional and

aspirational aspects need to be considered (i.e SUDS, play etc.). More narrative is needed regarding the perimeter landscape space, i.e. how these spaces will be used, made more accessible and how they can bring value to both residents and villagers and create a sense of place. Further it would be useful to know how the swales actually work, linked to a SUDS strategy, maximising the benefit for the site and complementary amenity space.

A vegetation and tree planting strategy is also needed, the scheme appears to have taken a scattering approach to greenery, with the street scene appearing barren with little/no amenity/green space.

The design enablers felt that in moving this scheme forward:

- A Landscape Strategy that sets out the issues of drainage, topography, access, broad functions, green fingers, ecology and other such aspects is required.
- A vegetation and tree planning strategy is required.

Urban Design Strategy

An Urban Design Strategy that sets out edge conditions/treatments, opportunities for a 'heart', key views and vistas into and out from the site is required. This will result in a robust building envelope that integrates built form with landscape that will form the basis of a design philosophy for the site (please see sketches overleaf).

The design enablers felt that the heart of the development should not be defined by the intersection of routes but by incorporating a central space that has some meaning. A central route would be preferable with perimeter views.

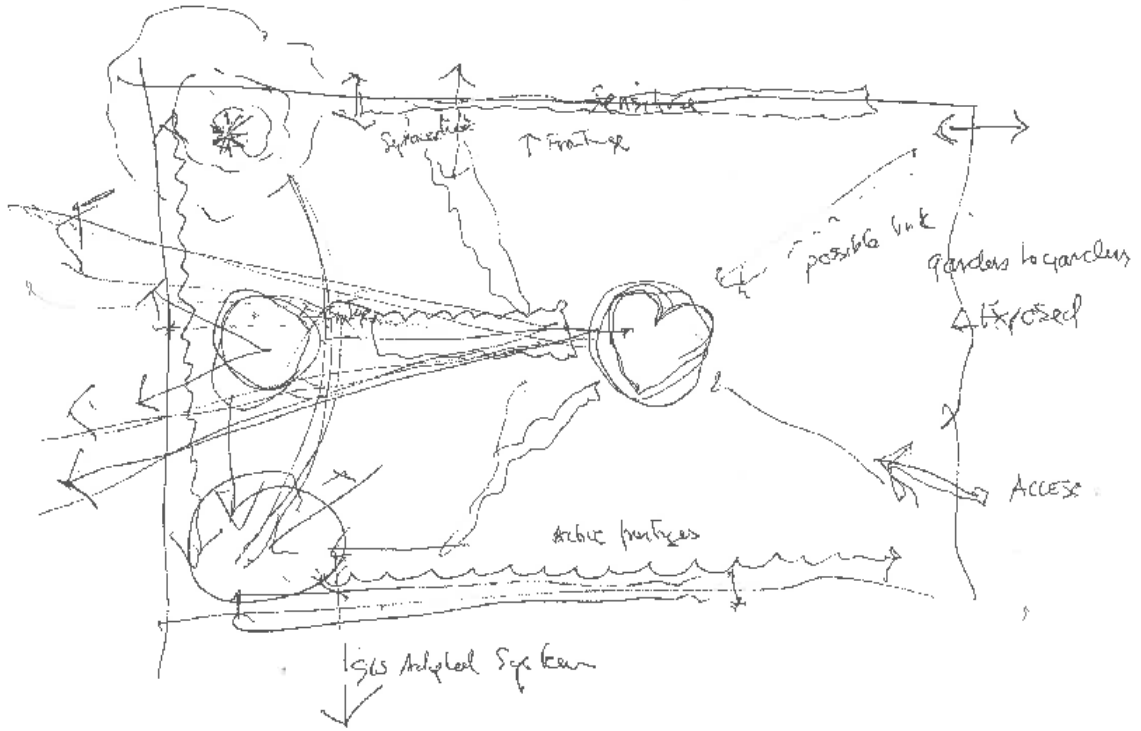
It was felt that the scheme needs some reorganisation/ spatial rearrangement so that more could be made of this value generating development; the scheme is not currently framed and views need to be drawn in.

Development parcels (with blocks side-on) could radiate from this central space to help create a feeling of space and maximise the opportunities to draw the view of the open countryside in. This would also offer opportunities to soften the western edge.

Further, attention needs to be given to the treatment of the northern edge which needs more breathing space. Throughout the scheme there is too much hard surfacing, raising the issue of who will look after this space. The streets need to be designed with consideration to both public and private gardens to ensure the desired character is achieved.

The design enablers felt that in moving this scheme forward:

- An Urban Design Strategy that sets out edge conditions/treatments, opportunities for a 'heart', key views and vistas into and out from the site is required.



NOTES:
 1. THE SITE PLAN IS SUBJECT TO THE APPROVAL OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY.
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Legend

- Proposed Buildings
- Proposed Roads
- Proposed Green Spaces
- Proposed Water Features
- Proposed Utilities
- Proposed Fences
- Proposed Landscaping
- Proposed Other Features

Scale
 1:1000

Author
 [Name]

Date
 [Date]

Project
 [Project Name]

Sheet
 [Sheet Number]

Movement strategy

A Movement Strategy that indicates deliverable access, street hierarchy, street lighting and opportunities for footpath and cycle routes is required.

The design of the streets needs further thought. A series of street X-sections and plans are required to show how streets can be used so that adequate visitor parking, tree planting and verges are integrated as appropriate. Shared surfaces and other traffic management and safety features should be identified, including safe routes to school. Adequate widths are required and the nature of the roads and their functions set out. It may be possible that the hierarchy can be reduced.

The design enablers felt that in moving this scheme forward:

- A Movement Strategy that indicates deliverable access, street hierarchy, street lighting and opportunities for footpath and cycle routes is required.

Concept Plan

A conceptual block masterplan that brings together the landscape, urban design and movement strategies into an overall framework for development is needed. This should take note of aspects such as sense of arrival, 'place', access to countryside and other perceptual and processional elements.

A public realm strategy that sets out the 'place-making' elements would be helpful. This would cover the nature and form of the 'heart' of the development and its role, (i.e shared surfaces, places to sit, meet etc), the landscape interface features such as the high points, low points, view-points, central points, wedges / fingers and their functions; as well as the interface with the built edge (crescent, terraces, detached dwellings etc). Vignettes would also be help.

This concept plan should also show how the ecological environment can be enriched. It should also include aspects such as density/development intensity, and form the basis for a series of parameter plans, the purpose of which would be to avoid 'sprawl' across the site, create character and identity so that this development is seen as a destination site rather than a default estate.

The design enablers felt that in moving this scheme forward:

- A conceptual block masterplan that brings together the landscape, urban design and movement strategies into an overall framework for development is needed.
- A public realm strategy that sets out the 'place-making' elements would be helpful.

The Reserved Matters Application Masterplan

The figure of 85 dwellings has been identified as the upper limit, as per the outline planning permission. The detailed masterplan should show how this upper limit can be accommodated incorporating the various requirements for garden sizes, parking, 'healthy' and secure development, etc. More consistent groupings of house types should also be considered to avoid gap-toothed development.

A Management Strategy will be required, as will an indication of early deliveries (i.e. site infrastructure, landscaping/planting and play etc.)

Dwelling typologies may need reconsideration in some parts of the site to ensure consistency and to enhance place-making, and to realise the aspirations for a greater spread of types of housing such as for the elderly (lifetime homes), large families and starter homes, further affordable housing should be equitably located throughout the site.

Sustainability

There was no time to discuss sustainable development; however the design enablers feel that greater clarification is needed regarding sustainability and energy resource efficiency.

The opportunity of 'giving back' to the local community the benefits of building on this land (Rural Area beyond the Green Belt) by such means as zero carbon construction, PassivHaus or other acceptable sustainable standards should be explored.

The Panel would welcome further discussion and review should this be considered helpful.