

Report of the Medway Design Review Panel

High Halstow

24th March 2021

The design review meeting

Reference number	1572/110321
Date	11th March 2021
Meeting location	Online via Zoom
Panel members attending	Tony Burton (chair), community engagement, urban design, neighbourhood planning Jane Dann, architecture, masterplanning, urban design Annabel Keegan, transport planning, urban design Paul Reynolds, landscape architecture, urban design Marcus Wilshere, architecture, masterplanning, urban design
Panel manager	Helen Goodwin, Design South East
Other attendees	Nichole Avan-Nomayo, Design South East Dave Harris, Head of Planning, Medway Council Catherine Smith, Planning Policy Manager, Medway Council Duncan Berntsen, Senior Urban Design Officer, Medway Council Camila Arujo, Urban Design Officer, Medway Council Stuart Foley, Senior Landscape Officer, Medway Council Olivia Lawson, Planner – Policy, Medway Council Lachlan Anderson-Frank, Senior Planner Policy, Medway Council Oliver Ansell, Senior Planner – DM, Medway Council Kemi Erifevieme, Planning Manager – DM West, Medway Council Andrew Bull, Strategic Infrastructure Planner, Medway Council Cllr Ron Sands, Medway Council Cllr Stuart Tranter, Medway Council Kevin Parker, Redrow Homes Jo Baker, Redrow Homes Michael Maskew, Redrow Homes David Banfield, Redrow Homes Tim Dean, Dean Lewis Estates Roland Brass, Knight Frank Ellen Bailey, Knight Frank Brian Sutherland, On Architecture Ryan Hilton, On Architecture Matthew Chard, Barton Willmore Claire McHarrie, Barton Willmore

Nigel Thompson, Arup
 Brendan Weaver, Arup
 Matthew Davey, Aspect Ecology
 Jonathan Clay, Neighbourhood Committee
 Jon Herbert, Troy
 George Crozer, Chairman, High Halstow Parish Council
 Ray Collins, Chair of the Neighbourhood Committee
 Marilyn Stone, Parish Councillor
 Linda Atkinson, Parish Councillor
 Mick O'Hanlon, Neighbourhood Plan team
 Bernard Hyde, Neighbourhood Plan team
 Ron Sands, Ward Councillor

Site visit	This review workshop was carried out during the Covid-19 outbreak which started in 2020 and has continued into 2021. A digital walk-around (in a similar fashion to that which would have been conducted on-site) was carried out prior to the review, including presentation of site photos and videos by the applicant team and Parish Council.
Scope of the review	As an independent design review panel, the scope of this review was not restricted.
Panel interests	No conflicts of interest were raised.
Confidentiality	Full details of our confidentiality policy can be found at the end of this report.

The proposal

Site location	Land east of High Halstow, Hoo Peninsula, Medway
Site details	The site is located to the east of the village of High Halstow, adjacent to the edge of the settlement. It is situated on the Hoo Peninsula, which lies between the River Thames to the north and River Medway to the south. High Halstow is situated 2.5km north of the town of Hoo. The site is bounded by the village to the west, Britannia Road to the north, Christmas Lane to the south and Sharnal Street to the east. Residential properties lie immediately to the west, and the wider countryside containing some scattered and ribbon development lies to the south, east and west. The site boundary wraps around a small pocket of woodland, Fishers Wood, on the eastern edge and another land ownership on the southern edge. The site is approximately 41

hectares (100 acres) in size, comprising open arable farmland. There is limited vegetation/trees on site and intermittent hedges at the edges of the site, and there are some existing drainage ditches on site and along the northern boundary. The site slopes gently towards the north east corner and there are long views across the open countryside. There is no public access to the site.

Proposal	This is a proposal for a mixed-use development comprising approx. 760 residential units, a two-form entry primary school and potential other community uses as an extension to the existing village of High Halstow which lies directly west of the application site. The proposal will double the size of the existing village.
Planning stage	Pre-Planning Application.
Local planning authority	Medway Council.
Planning context	Medway Council has identified a large site to the east of High Halstow as a potential development allocation in the new Medway Local Plan. The site benefits from the investments in strategic transport and environmental infrastructure through the £170m Housing Infrastructure Fund programme being delivered by the council. The proposed growth strategy in the emerging Medway Local Plan focuses on urban regeneration and the development of a small town focused around the existing settlement of Hoo St Werburgh, and expansion of surrounding villages. This provides for infrastructure upgrades to support sustainable development. The proposed allocations at High Halstow are over two sites, one with an indicative capacity for 760 homes, and a smaller adjoining site with indicative capacity for 59 homes (the Dean Lewis site). The sites are considered together in planning for growth, and there is agreement between the land promoters/developers on joint work on masterplanning. The local community has prepared a Neighbourhood Plan and supporting Design Code (both in draft).
Planning authority perspective	Issues that the authority raised for discussion include: the relationship with existing village – how to successfully absorb and integrate this scale of growth and change, including protecting village centre, but recognising need to provide additional services; relationship to the proposed rail station at Sharnal Street and wider growth at Hoo St Werburgh; how to accommodate such a significant scale of growth

within a rural typology and avoid creating a suburban character, particularly if delivered through one sales outlet of a volume housebuilder; delivery of development to avoid a predominance of similar housing products, and to achieve variety and local distinctiveness; how to accommodate self-build and custom housebuilding within the masterplanning and wider allocation; ensuring that the design reflects the distinctive landscape setting and openness of countryside; delivering attractive and multi-functional green infrastructure links within village and to countryside; responding positively to the drainage issues in planning for blue infrastructure; supporting a meaningful shift from car based transport and lifestyles; embedding the distinctive heritage of the Hoo Peninsula into planning and design; respecting and protecting the special assets of designated sites, particularly SSSI and SPA; an informed approach to density, reflecting the rural location, but also opportunities that a major extension could provide; delivering a quality of development that improves on post war development that was not particularly sensitive to the historic character of the village.

Previous reviews This scheme has not previously been reviewed by this panel.

Summary

We welcome the breadth of presentations and the range of voices contributing to the workshop discussion, particularly given the impact that a development of this scale will have on the community of High Halstow and on the sensitive and unique landscape of the Hoo Peninsula.

More work is needed to rethink the development from the outside in, situating the proposal within a much wider context. By stepping back to review the strategic framework, thinking beyond the red line boundary of the application site, there will be more likelihood of this development achieving the aspiration for a high-quality village extension with the connectivity required to integrate it successfully into its immediate and wider context.

The masterplan feels under-developed for the timescale suggested for submission of a planning application. More time and engagement are needed to get to the next level of detail in the masterplan to ensure that this will become a place with a distinct character and identity, which could allow for alignment with the Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plan processes in order that they mutually reinforce one another and inform the scheme. This will help to de-risk a controversial project and allow local aspirations to be a meaningful part of the masterplanning process.

Key recommendations

1. Situate the proposal within the wider context of the Hoo Peninsula to develop the strategic framework for the masterplan, ensuring well-considered links to the station as part of a wider plan for active travel.
2. Explain how analysis of successful local settlement patterns as well as of the existing village context is informing the masterplanning process, in addition to a landscape-led approach.
3. Look more critically and holistically at the whole site, including the Dean Lewis land and the existing village, to ensure maximum connectivity and permeability.
4. Clarify the vision for the place in relation to the existing village to inform the structure of the settlement and to address concerns about the monotony of standard housing types and suburban development within a rural setting.
5. Give further thought to the variety of streets patterns, as this will be important for defining the character and identity of the place and shaping the character areas,

which will in turn inform the variety of different housing typologies and densities. A more fine-grained approach with many more character areas should be taken.

6. Reconsider how the development will relate to the surrounding roads to ensure that it does not become an introspective housing estate hidden behind hedges.
7. Reconsider the location of the village centre as well as the density and mix of uses, to ensure optimum connectivity and viability.
8. Ensure that the green spaces will be actively used, that they follow desire lines and offer opportunities for a variety of recreational uses, including play and growing spaces, with a clear maintenance plan to safeguard quality for the long term.

Detailed comments and recommendations

1. Placemaking vision
 - 1.1. The vision for the development is not coming across in what is being proposed in terms of what kind of a place this will be, what kind of lifestyle it will support, what its unique character and identity will be and how it will enhance the existing settlement of High Halstow, with its vibrant community life.
 - 1.2. With a development of this scale that will double the size of the existing village, an overriding concern is that this must feel like a *place* and not a housing estate. With exceptional masterplanning and high-quality urban design and architecture, it may be possible to introduce sufficient variety to overcome the feeling of a housing estate, but this will be challenging with only one design team. As such, we would encourage different types of procurement, development and delivery models to provide greater variety that will enhance the overall character and identity of this place.
 - 1.3. To support Medway Council to meet its zero carbon target, this development should seek all means of reducing embodied carbon, promoting sustainable ways of living and minimising energy in use. There will be many opportunities to articulate this further as the design development progresses, from water management and renewable energy to active travel and biodiversity gains.
2. Contextual Studies
 - 2.1. Studies of successful villages in Kent should be undertaken to identify characteristic settlement patterns, many of which have evolved over time in a piecemeal way that

has contributed to their unique character and identity, to provide clues as to how to structure the masterplan.

- 2.2. A study of the range and location of densities within the existing village (and other villages) should be part of the masterplanning process to inform where density will best be located in the extension to the village.
 - 2.3. Whilst the existing village is not architecturally exceptional, the environment is nevertheless attractive. Without seeking to build more of the existing types and styles of housing, more studies are needed to draw out what are the characteristics that are valued about the existing village environment.
 - 2.4. A study of existing patterns of movement is required. This will determine how the extension to the village, in particular the new local centre and school, should connect with the existing village if the new centre is to become a successful and thriving focal point for the community that complements rather than detracts from the existing heart of the village.
3. Connectivity, street structure and movement network
 - 3.1. Supporting active travel and reducing reliance on the car must be a priority, as set out in the Department for Transport's new policy document, 'Gear Change'. Aspects of this are within the gift of the applicant to address and it is important that the masterplan considers the requirements and the guidance set out in Local Transport Note 1/20.
 - 3.2. There is a need for more critical thinking beyond the red line of the application site, not only to connect and integrate the extension with the existing village, but also to connect the development with wider pedestrian and cycle routes, including the new station to the south-east of the site. This could take the form of a local cycling and walking infrastructure plan which would be put in place by the council
 - 3.3. The south-east corner of the development, which lies closest to the proposed new station, needs further work to create a safe and legible link to the station and back to the village.
 - 3.4. There are currently no footways or segregated cycle provision on Christmas Lane, making this a hostile environment for pedestrians and cyclists. Without some remediation work to civilise the traffic, this would make the south-west corner of the site an inappropriate location for the school, so the development should be looking to offer improvements.

- 3.5. Decisions will need to be made as to whether existing hedgerows are retained in their entirety or in part and whether the new footways are located in front of or behind the hedgerows to create the safest and most pleasant environment that supports walkability and benefits from passive surveillance.
 - 3.6. Getting the street structure right will be fundamental to the success of this development and to its character. The usability and function of the green buffers between the houses and the streets requires clarification where perimeter blocks are set back, as in some places this is resulting in a doubling up of the infrastructure on plot frontages, leading to a necessity to rely on rear courtyard parking.
 - 3.7. Within the red-line boundary, the street network is connected only as far as the edges, with the streets ending in cul-de-sacs on the edges of green spaces. We would encourage a more connected network of streets and lanes wherever possible.
 - 3.8. The masterplan is only showing one connection onto Britannia Road, where there should be additional vehicular connections, as shown in preliminary design iterations.
4. Landscape-led approach
 - 4.1. We commend the investment in understanding the landscape character of the Hoo Peninsula as the starting point for the development of the masterplan. Other aspects of the masterplan, aside from the landscape strategy, now need to keep pace to ensure that the development will be fully integrated with the existing village, in particular those relating to connectivity and built form character.
 - 4.2. There is currently a tension in the landscape-led approach. By seeking to maintain and enhance existing hedgerows and planting along the site's north and south boundaries, the creation of green landscape buffers will potentially lead to a development that feels disconnected from the village and its wider context. The landscape character should not be treated as a given without questioning what is of value, both now and in the future.
 - 4.3. Further clarification is needed as to the use and function of the green open spaces within the development to ensure that these are usable, offering appropriate play spaces, growing spaces and opportunities for recreation.
 - 4.4. Adoption of the landscape is a matter for consideration from the outset, as the management and maintenance of the extensive green infrastructure will be essential to safeguard a high-quality environment. Opportunities for community involvement in the long-term management of the open space should be sought.

5. Masterplan structure and layout
 - 5.1. If it is to become a successful place, this must not feel like a suburban development in a rural setting. Character needs to be embedded within the structure of the place, which will derive as much from the variety of patterns of street networks as it will from the variety of forms, styles and densities of the buildings themselves.
 - 5.2. A stronger vision is needed for the bespoke character of each of the built development areas to inform the structure; a character derived from a cluster of farmsteads, for example, may have a different street layout from the perimeter block structure shown. This will require a more fine-grained approach and a significant increase in the number of character areas.
 - 5.3. The east-west landscape route leading out from the village should be a character area in its own right to elevate its status as the key piece of infrastructure tying the extension back into the existing village.
 - 5.4. There could be potential for additional density in the village centre to define something more urban in form and structure, with the addition of some mixed-use buildings. Uses should respond to identified needs, for example sheltered housing, co-working spaces or a new study centre, to enrich the life of the village and make the centre more viable.
 - 5.5. Designing for dual uses – for example, a primary school that becomes a sports and meeting facility for the community, or sheltered housing that incorporates a café – will support the viability of the local centre, providing a local employment hub and offering opportunities for social interaction to integrate new and existing communities.
 - 5.6. The existing village has buildings fronting onto Christmas Lane and Britannia Road, but the new development turns its back on these roads, with a green buffer separating the housing from the road. As a result, village life will hide behind the landscape rather than coming to the edges of the development. A layout that connects the buildings to the surrounding network of lanes would create a more outward-facing place.
 - 5.7. The best location for the school and village centre requires further consideration to capitalise on pass-by trips, including bus routes (which may also need to change). The possibility of the new centre addressing Christmas Lane should be explored, which would open up the development to the wider peninsula. Alternatively, further to the north, the centre could potentially benefit from connection with the east-west

landscape route leading out from the existing village. Further work is needed to ensure this route is strengthened and provides a strong link for its entire length.

- 5.8. The south-east corner could have more density instead of the density dropping off closest to the station. The wider connection to the new station should inform the character of this corner of the development, where the onward connection is not legible within the masterplan.
 - 5.9. The built development area is currently in two parts with a north/south open space between them. The shape of this open space is not supporting pedestrian desire lines coming from the village and turning south toward the station. Further consideration should be given to how the configuration of open spaces relate to and support pedestrian desire lines, so as to encourage walking and connectivity.
 - 5.10. In earlier framework diagrams, the purpose of the open space appears to be to create a green buffer and visual gap between built development that extends both the existing village and Sharnal Street. However, the curved shape of the open space as proposed means that the green gap will not be visible from either Christmas Lane or Britannia Road and so not be successful in performing this function.
6. Architecture, materials and detailing.
- 6.1. We encourage a contemporary architectural style that avoids standard house types or re-elevating a narrow range of house types to dress them up in terms of the local vernacular. In a development of this scale, there is a need for innovation to avoid monotony and repetition. The development must explore opportunities to create variety through the use of a broad range of typologies, each with a strong character and identity, that come together through the underlying settlement structure to form a coherent whole and a strong sense of place.
 - 6.2. Paragraph 130 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2018) 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).'*
 - 6.3. The applicant team and local authority should note Design South East'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.

7. Energy strategy.

Low carbon development should drive the design process from the outset. Our guidance is that at the planning application stage the proposal must produce a clear energy strategy that 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 in order to align with the Government's emerging zero carbon policy. This strategy should be informed by detailed modelling work informed by respected calculation methods. The scheme should be future-proofed for the provision of electric vehicles.

Confidentiality

If the scheme was not the subject of a planning application when it came to the panel, this report is offered in confidence to those who attended the review meeting. There is no objection to the report being shared within the recipients' organisations. Design South East reserves the right to make the contents of this report known should the views contained in this report be made public in whole or in part (either accurately or inaccurately). Unless previously agreed, pre-application reports will be made publicly available if the scheme becomes the subject of a planning application or public inquiry. Design South East also reserves the right to make this report available to another design review panel should the scheme go before them. If you do not require this report to be kept confidential, please inform us.

If the scheme is the subject of a planning application the report will be made publicly available and we expect the local authority to include it in the case documents.

Role of design review

This is the report of a design review panel, forum or workshop. Design review is endorsed by the National Planning Policy Framework and the opinions and recommendations of properly conducted, independent design review panels should be given weight in planning decisions including appeals. The panel does not take planning decisions. Its role is advisory. The panel's advice is only one of a number of considerations that local planning authorities have to take into account in making their decisions. The role of design review is to provide independent expert advice to both the applicant and the local planning authority. We will try to make sure that the panel are informed about the views of local residents and businesses to inform their understanding of the context of the proposal. However, design review is a separate process to community engagement and consultation.

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