

The Design Review Panel

www.designreviewpanel.co.uk



Site	Buntingford West, Land to the west & south of Luynes Rise, east & north of the A10
Proposal	Outline application for up to 400 residential dwellings, employment area and local centre
Local Authority	East Herts Council
Applicant	Vistry Group Limited
Agent	DLP Planning Limited
Review Date	13 th April 2022

The design review session was carried out on 13th April 2022 and was booked by DLP Planning Limited. This is the first time The Design Review Panel has reviewed this scheme. The session incorporated an in-person site visit, which the Panel considered was extremely helpful in understanding the site topography and context.

The information submitted for review is considered to be clear, comprehensive, and professional, and this is welcomed by the Panel. It is felt that the comprehensive and professional presentation material is of benefit to the design review process. The Panel supports the multidisciplinary approach undertaken by the design team.

Paragraph 133 of the NPPF states: -

“Local planning authorities should ensure that they have access to, and make appropriate use of, tools and processes for assessing and improving the design of development. These include workshops to engage the local community, design advice and review arrangements, ... In assessing applications, local planning authorities should have regard to the outcome from these processes, including any recommendations made by design review panels.”

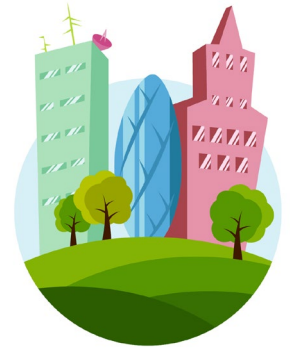
The Panel raised the following points: -

The early engagement with the design review panel process is welcomed, and this feedback document should be read in the context of this early formative stage of the design process.

Subject to the comments within this document, it is considered the site is appropriate for a development of the type proposed. The site boundary is currently felt to be defined by a ragged arrangement of back gardens and has an ill formed relationship with the boundary; the stated aspirations for this

The Design Review Panel

w w w . d e s i g n r e v i e w P a n e l . c o . u k



development have the opportunity to create an appropriate urban edge to Buntingford, which it is felt is currently missing.

The detailed analysis that has already been carried out is acknowledged and in particular it is noted that the design team have provided precedent images regarding the existing character of Buntingford, which is welcomed. It is noted that Buntingford incorporates a classic historic town centre that is characterised by more intense historical development. The town also comprises a number of 20th and early 21st century estates that appear bolted on to the town that incorporate a distinct character representative of their time. The Panel does not yet feel it is clear what the vision/character aspirations for the proposal site is, and there is a concern that the proposed character could become a reflection of the inefficient low density, car dependant, housing in the surrounding area, which would not be supported. It is considered the development offers an opportunity to provide an innovative development that may provide a wider public benefit in helping to provide an appropriate settlement edge to Buntingford.

Buntingford is a compact town that provides a good range of local services within walking distance, and therefore the site represents a sustainable location. It is noted the local council have relatively high parking requirements, which it is felt may not be appropriate for this sustainable site. In terms of parking, careful consideration should be given to the extent of on-plot versus on-street. On a scheme of this size the Panel advocates a mixture of parking solutions.

The general local design policy requires both high quality design as well as innovation. It is questioned if reflecting the local character of the existing settlement could be considered innovative and it is suggested that it may therefore be beneficial to explore a different approach, to provide a contemporary, less car dependant, proposal. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to consider the proposed development in terms of what benefits it can bring to the existing town and residents.

The site has a range of constraints, of particular note is the noise from the road (A10) as well as the potential odour nuisance from the sewage works, and it is considered to be imperative that the design team demonstrate an understanding of the impact of these aspects.

In terms of noise mitigation, the proposed buffer corridor incorporating a bunding is welcomed, however it will be beneficial to now give careful consideration to the required width of this corridor as well as to how this space will appear and be utilised. Retained hedgerows and trees should also be carefully considered to ensure that the masterplan acknowledges from an early stage required widths around existing planting are established and maintained throughout the design process.

In terms of the odour constraints, it is felt that the design team have taken a logical and appropriate approach in this regard by placing the proposed industrial uses in the area affected. Notwithstanding this, whilst an industrial use may more appropriate than residential in the area affected by odour, careful consideration should still be given to building orientation and use to ensure it is appropriate. The public route proposed behind the industrial uses should be reconsidered, as it is felt that this may not be well used and could result in an antisocial space that does not benefit from adequate natural surveillance or natural daylight.

The Design Review Panel

www.designreviewpanel.co.uk



In terms of landscape, it is felt the design team have carried out an intelligent and well-rounded analysis of the landscape characteristics of the site and surrounding area. Generally, the Panel is supportive of the stated green infrastructure approach proposed within the vision document, which it is felt is particularly positive in terms of creating articulated corridors, sub-spaces and play routes. However, there is a concern that the plan as drawn may not reflect this and appears overly rectilinear. It is important to ensure that sufficient space/widths are allowed to accommodate detailed aspects such as driveways, pedestrian and cycle routes. It is noted an initial green and blue infrastructure plan indicates around nine hectares of public open space, which is welcomed. However, it is questioned if the calculation for this area includes the banded noise attenuation area. It is felt that it would be beneficial to explore redistribution of the proposed public open spaces to provide a larger centralised green area.

The proposal to incorporate allotments is supported. Notwithstanding this, the currently proposed location of the allotments and green space to the northeast corner of the site is questioned. It may be better for the proposals to be tighter to this boundary so that the open space currently proposed in this location could be utilised in another part of the site where it may provide a greater benefit. Furthermore, the number of allotments proposed should be carefully considered to ensure viability in terms of an ongoing residents management committee.

The retention of the two well used footpaths is welcomed and as the design proposals now evolve further it would be beneficial to explore how these will be integrated within the scheme. The reasoning and logic behind seeking to divert the public right of way to the south of the site is noted. Notwithstanding this there is a concern this route could become fairly convoluted. Furthermore, in an effort of helpfulness, it is suggested that as this aspect is linked to the primary access this could slow the delivery of the project on site at a later stage. It may be beneficial to therefore reconsider this aspect, even if it resulted in a slightly less efficient block structure.

Whilst the framework currently presented appears logical, there may be a more obvious and stronger connection of green spaces, and movement corridors that could be established across the site. It is felt that for this site a high-quality green infrastructure master plan that focuses on subspaces and key frontages may help in the creation of an appropriate sense of place.

As the design proposals now evolve it would be beneficial to further consider the relationship between the proposal site and the existing settlement of Buntingford and explore how the proposals may provide a wider public benefit for existing residents. Creating clearer gateways and interfaces into the site from existing residential areas would be beneficial in this regard.

Whilst high-quality analysis has already been undertaken to date, as a result of the early stage of the design process, this has not yet led to a design. It would now be beneficial for the design team to test design ideas/optioneering against the analysis undertaken.

Notwithstanding the above, it is felt there are some areas of analysis that have not yet been undertaken that would be beneficial. As above it is felt that the relationship with the existing settlement should be a primary design driver in the approach to planning the site; looking physically and socially at how linkages can be developed.

The Design Review Panel

www.designreviewpanel.co.uk



It is considered it would be beneficial for an LVIA to now be carried out. The site is undulating with a very distinctive topography. It is noted the current proposals are very two dimensional and it would be beneficial to now consider the implications in three dimensions. It would be helpful to begin to consider the site from the near distance and far distance. Long distance site sections that demonstrate how the site sits within the wider topography would be beneficial in this regard.

Linked to the above, it would be helpful to now carry out an analysis to determine what building heights may be appropriate within different parts of the site topography, and what impact they may have on neighbouring properties. For example, it may be appropriate to incorporate taller elements around the local centre as this may help to reinforce the idea of a nodal of centre.

The Panel welcomes the incorporation of a proposed local centre. It is felt the local centre should be located in the most commercially viable location that is also positioned so as to be within walking distance for the largest number of residents, of both the proposed development as well as the existing settlement. In order to determine the most appropriate location in terms of convenient sustainable accessibility for the largest number of end users it would be beneficial to produce empirical information demonstrating the number of users likely to commute by walking, cycling or bus, versus those that would be arriving by car.

To ensure the viability of the local centre the design team have stated there is to be a broad mix of different uses, which is supported. Notwithstanding this as the design now develops further it would be beneficial to ensure the local centre retains a cohesive identity as a space and as a collection of different buildings. It may be helpful to produce a clear vision of what the space around the local centre will feel like for end users.

It is suggested it may be helpful to carry out a public consultation exercise at an early stage of the design process to establish what needs the local community may have that could be provided by the proposed development. This exercise may lead to the emergence of a set of design aspirations and a narrative that is very specific to this site, which would help to demonstrate a credibility and authority to the design.

The Panel welcomes the stated aspirations around sustainability. However, it may be helpful to also consider embodied carbon and embodied energy and this may inform the proposed form of construction as well as proposed materials and finishes, which will in turn have an impact upon the aesthetics and therefore character of the development. Notwithstanding the early stage of the design process and the outline nature of the proposals, it is suggested these aspirations should begin to consider aspects such as building orientations and establish quantifiable performance level aims. It may also be helpful to consider how the amount of ground remodelling can be minimised as well as how the arisings will be treated, as this will have a significant impact on the carbon footprint of the development. Whilst it is acknowledged this will involve added input at this stage of the process, early consideration of these aspects can be significantly advantageous at a later stage and may also provide added financial value in terms of the final development.

So as to ensure the aspired to sense of place and high quality of development is achieved on the site once constructed, the use of design codes or design guidance may be important, for both landscape

The Design Review Panel

www.designreviewpanel.co.uk



design and architecture. Therefore, design codes (or design guidance) and parameter plans should be utilized to give an indication of the vision for the site. It may be helpful for draft parameter plans to be discussed and agreed with the local authority prior to submission of an application. These should be used to establish key aspects, with the aim of ensuring the stated aspirations are delivered. There is a concern that, as is the case with many strategic proposals of this type, laudable aspirations can be diluted down in the on-site delivery if appropriate design codes and minimum requirements are not clearly established at an early stage. It is suggested that matters that it may be appropriate to address within these are:-

- linear green spaces linked with the SUDS strategy,
- provision of large specimen trees in street / public realm,
- important long-range views out of the site,
- inclusion of cycle and pedestrian only routes linking to key destinations
- consideration of density areas,
- variety in verticality
- carbon and energy conservation standards
- materials/mood boards for landscape and buildings, to reflect the vernacular (albeit in a contemporary manner)

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS, (to be read in conjunction with the above).

In summary, the main conclusions of the Panel are: -

- Early engagement with the design review panel process is welcomed
- Subject to the comments within this document, it is considered the site is appropriate for a development of the type proposed
- The high level of character analysis of the surroundings is noted
- The vision/character aspirations for the proposal site are not yet apparent
- The development offers an opportunity to provide an improved settlement edge to Buntingford
- Relatively high parking requirements may not be appropriate for this sustainable site
- A contemporary, less car dependant, proposal would be supported
- An understanding of the impact of key constraints (noise & odour) should be demonstrated
- Generally, the Panel is supportive of the stated green infrastructure approach proposed
- Redistribution of public open spaces to provide a larger centralised green may be beneficial
- The number of allotments proposed should be carefully considered to ensure
- Explore how the retained public footpaths will be integrated
- Consider links/interfaces between the proposal site & the existing settlement of Buntingford
- It would be beneficial to test design ideas/options against the analysis undertaken
- It would be beneficial for an LVIA to now be carried out
- Further consider the proposals in three dimensions in terms of a topographical response
- The proposed local centre is welcomed, & further analysis should be carried out to empirically determine the most viable & sustainable location
- Ensure the local centre retains a cohesive identity as a space
- It may be helpful to carry out a public consultation exercise at an early stage

The Design Review Panel

www.designreviewpanel.co.uk



- It may be helpful to also consider embodied carbon & embodied energy
- Use of design codes or design guidance may be beneficial, for both landscape design & architecture

The Design Review Panel

NOTES:

Please note that the content of this document is opinion and suggestion only, given by a Panel of volunteers, and this document does not constitute professional advice. Although the applicant, design team and Local Authority may be advised by the suggestions of the Design Review Panel there is no obligation to be bound by its suggestions. It is strongly recommended that all promoters use the relevant Local Authorities pre-application advice service prior to making a planning application. Further details are available on the Council's website. Neither The Design Review Panel nor any member of the Panel accept any liability from the Local Authority, applicant or any third party in regard to the design review Panel process or the content of this document, directly or indirectly, or any advice or opinions given within that process. The feedback and comments given by the Panel and its members constitutes the members individual opinions, given as suggestions, in an effort of helpfulness and do not constitute professional advice. The local planning authority and the applicants are free to respond to those opinions, or not, as they choose. The Panel members are not qualified to advise on pollution or contamination of land and will not be liable for any losses incurred by the Local Authority or any third party in respect of pollution or contamination arising out of or in connection with pollution or contamination.