

Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended)
Appeal by: Avant Homes Central

An Appeal Against the refusal of
Full Planning Permission for 74 no. dwellings at land off Moorthorpe Way, Sheffield.

PINS reference APP/J4423/W/20/32558555
Planning Application Reference: 19/03143/FUL

Proof of Evidence

Client:

Avant Homes (Central)

Project:

n1276 Land off Moorthorpe Way, Owlthorpe, Sheffield

Report Title:

Proof of Evidence

nineteen47 Reference:

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Date:

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Contents

	Page
Section 1: Qualifications	1
Section 2: Scope of Evidence	2
Section 3: The Site and its Context	5
Section 4: The Design Process	9
Section 5: Design Related Policy	13
Section 6: Design Response to the Reasons for Refusal	30
Section 7: Conclusion	50

Appendices

Appendix 1: Prevailing Character	
Appendix 2: Local Character Analysis – Woodland Heights	
Appendix 3: Local Character Analysis – Moorthorpe Way East	
Appendix 4: Local Character Analysis – Stoneacre	
Appendix 5: Local Character Analysis – Moorthorpe Way West	
Appendix 6: Relationship to Green Infrastructure	
Appendix 7: Building Heights	
Appendix 8: Building Types	
Appendix 9: Townships Density Calculations	
Appendix 10: Split Level Housing	
Appendix 11: Retaining Structures at Woodland Heights	
Appendix 12: Figure Ground (Snippets)	
Appendix 13: Plot Ratios	
Appendix 14: Avant Masterplan	
Appendix 15: Avant Masterplan with Urban Design Framework Overlay	
Appendix 16: Bid Layout	
Appendix 17: Feasibility Layout	
Appendix 18: Open Space Provision	
Appendix 19: Building for a Healthy Life Assessment	
Appendix 20: Density Calculation	
Appendix 22: Proposed Park Layout	
Appendix 23: Density Variation	
Appendix 24: Detailed Tree Protection Plan	
Appendix 25: The Design Process	
Appendix 26: 3D Visuals – Urban Heart	
Appendix 27: 3D Visuals – Woodland Edge	
Appendix 28: Affordable Street Scenes	
Appendix 30: Topography Plan – Wider Context	
Appendix 31: Topography Plan - Site	
Appendix 32: Masterplan with Site E and D	
Appendix 33: Masterplan with Site E and D with Urban Design Framework Overlay	
Appendix 34: Urban Design Framework Overlay	

1 Qualifications

- 1.1 My name is Richard Walshaw, and I am Director (Design) of nineteen47 Ltd, a Planning and Design Consultancy with offices in the East Midlands, Sheffield and York. I hold a First Class Honours Degree in Urban Environmental Studies from The University of Sheffield and a Masters in Urban Environmental Design (Merit) from Leeds Beckett University.
- 1.2 I have 15 years of experience working as a built environment professional in the private sector primarily as a consultant advising land owners, national and regional housebuilders and public sector clients on a broad range of design issues, with a particular focus on residential development. I have also worked internally for a well-respected, design-led regional volume housebuilder. This blend of experience gives me a unique insight into the built environment sector and enables me to provide expert urban design advice.
- 1.3 I have provided urban design advice to Avant Homes (Central) on their proposals for Land off Moorthorpe Way, Owlthorpe (Site E) from their initial involvement with the site at bid stage and through the planning application process.
- 1.4 The Evidence that I have prepared and provided within this Proof of Evidence is true and I confirm that the opinions expressed are my own professional opinions.

2 Scope of Evidence

- 2.1 This Proof of Evidence is prepared in relation to the appeal (appeal reference APP/J4423/W/20/32558555) against the refusal of full planning permission, originally for the erection of 74 no. dwellings, formation of access road, associated landscaping works, open space works and flood storage works (planning application ref 19/03143/FUL).
- 2.2 As set out in section 4 of the revised SOCG the proposal consists of the following:
- a. A total of 72 dwellings
 - b. Of which 21% (15 dwellings) will be shared ownership affordable homes
 - c. The proposals include the formation of highways access from Moorthorpe Way and landscaping works, including a stand off to the woodland to the north of the developed area
 - d. The remainder of the site will be retained as informal open space (0.68 hectares), a LEAP to the south of Moorthorpe Rise (0.14 hectares) and a SuDs attenuation basin, situated to the east of the proposed housing area (0.71 hectares). These areas will be subject to a Management Plan.
- 2.3 The appeal site is one of three sites that are owned by the Council. The Council acquired the land as part of the development of the Mosborough Townships.
- 2.4 The recommendation by officers was to grant permission conditionally subject to a legal agreement. Notwithstanding the positive recommendation in the Committee report the Application was refused by the Council on 2nd June 2020 for the following reason (CD2.37):
- This standalone proposal relating to the site known as "Owlthorpe site E" is prejudicial to the proper planning of the wider area, contrary to paragraph 3.2.6 of the "Housing Sites (C, D, E), Moorthorpe Way, Owlthorpe Planning And Design Brief" (July 2014; Updated November 2017), which supports a comprehensive scheme for the application site together with neighbouring sites C and D. The proposal does not respond sufficiently to the area's prevailing character of abundant green infrastructure and open space, contrary to paragraphs 122 and 127 of the National Planning Policy Framework. In addition, the proposal fails to make efficient use of land due to the low housing density proposed and fails to adequately integrate the affordable housing into the proposed layout, contrary to paragraphs 8, 122 and 123 of the National Planning Policy Framework, Core Strategy Policies CS26 and CS40 as well as policy GAH5 of the CIL and Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document and is not considered to be sustainable development.*

- 2.5 In relation to the reason for refusal there are four issues within the single reason for refusal: -
1. Whether the standalone proposals for Site E is prejudicial to the proper planning of the wider area and contrary to paragraph 3.2.6 of the Moorthorpe Way, Owlthorpe Planning and Design Brief which supports a comprehensive scheme for the application site together with Sites C and D.
 2. Whether the proposal responds sufficiently to the area's prevailing character of green infrastructure and open space.
 3. Whether the proposal fails to make efficient use of land due to the housing density proposed; and
 4. Whether the proposal fails to adequately integrate the affordable housing into the proposed layout.
- 2.6 During the preparation for this appeal the Council and OAG (the rule 6 party) agreed to the amendment of the layout to substitute house types to provide for the redistribution of affordable housing. In doing so all plans were updated, and in this process new survey information indicated that the original survey had incorrectly plotted the site boundaries and surrounding vegetation. Therefore, the drawings showing these consequential changes on moving the affordable housing have also picked up and adjusted the plans to account for this new survey information. There is also a subtly revised treatment of the areas that are not proposed for built development in terms of landscaping.
- 2.7 Having replotted the site boundaries as part of the development of our evidence a further plan substitution was proposed to try and further reduce the areas of conflict between parties and this was accepted by the Inspector. This second set of plan substitution simply removes plot 27 and 28 changes the house types on plots 26 and 28 it also removes the parking associated with two plots that are removed (plot 27 and 28).
- 2.8 These very limited further changes are proposed as a result of the more detail survey work that has been undertaken in the preparation of the appeal, and while addressing the Councils and Rule 6 objections to the scheme do not do so to an extent which would require a significant recasting of evidence or require wider public consultation.
- 2.9 This further substitution is referred to as "Scheme B" on plans and this is the scheme that forms the basis of the appeal. This scheme represents a reduction in the quantum of development from 74 to 72 units and an increase in open space along the northern edge.
- 2.10 In relation to this design related evidence, the second and third issues of the prevailing character of the area and density are inextricably linked and whilst dealt with as two separate issues there is significant overlap on these points.

2.11 Whilst some cross over is inevitable my evidence will focus on the design related elements of the reasons for refusal. I am not a planning consultant and my evidence does not deal with policy matters save for where I expressly say so and then only from a designers perspective. This evidence includes reference to the interfaces between development and the woodland edges and uses the parameters set in the Design Brief in terms of the developable area and the response to the design principles within the brief. My colleagues Mr Mark Topping and Mr Andrew Baker will deal with considerations regarding arboriculture and ecology respectively. Mr Roland Bolton will deal with the planning related elements of the case. Matthew Addison deals with highways and accessibility considerations.

3 The Site and its Context

Site Description

- 3.1 The site forms part of the Moorthorpe Way, Owlthorpe development area and is known as Site E. Site E is situated on the western edge of the area proposed for housing development off a roundabout connecting Moorthorpe Rise with Moorthorpe Gate and sits to the north and west of Owlthorpe Medical Centre.
- 3.2 The site comprises scrubland and grassland, a number of self-set trees and some remnant hedgerow. To the north there is an area of Ancient Woodland between the site and the Ochre Dike which is a Local Wildlife Site. There is also a Local Wildlife Site to the west.
- 3.3 The site is situated on the lower end of the hillside (see Appendix 30), as such there is a general slope downwards from the southern boundary to the woodland and Ochre Dike. There are localised undulations to the topography across the site, particularly to the south and west which makes the level challenging (see Appendix 31)
- 3.4 A public right of way defines the eastern edge of the site. This is a hard-standing path which runs from the woodland beyond the north east corner of the site to the roundabout and then proceeds southwards, round the Medical Centre, towards the Woodland Heights development.
- 3.5 The site is identified on the Environment Agency's Flood Maps within flood zone 1, which places it within the lowest risk category for flooding.

Site Context

- 3.6 The site, together with nearby areas has been identified for housing development in Sheffield since the 1960s as recorded by the plan on page 27 of the Design Brief. The land was located in an area formerly part of Derbyshire between the settlements of Mosborough, Beighton, Hackenthorpe. The settlements of Waterthorpe, Owlthorpe, Sothall, Westfield, Oxclose and Halfway, are known collectively as the 'Mosborough Townships'. The development of these areas has borrowed from the ideas of other new towns of the same period, such as Peterborough, Milton Keynes and Warrington.
- 3.7 The full development of the area is yet to be fully realised, with the site at Owlthorpe forming Site E, yet to be completed. The local area is, in part, characterised by an overly specified highway which was originally designed to form a link through to Moorthorpe Way to the north west, spanning Ochre Dike. This highway was put in to serve a substantial area of housing, sets the scene for the future development of the site and has an urbanising effect on the landscape in this area, together with the Owlthorpe Surgery which currently sits without the planned and expected housing development around it, awaiting the future phases of residential development coming forward.

- 3.8 The majority of the Mosborough Townships took almost 20 years to complete, with some progress made with the construction of Halfway, Westfield and Waterthorpe townships by the late 1970s. Infilling of remaining areas continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s including the Woodland Heights development, the first phase of the Owlthorpe allocation to the south of the appeal site, which like the medical centre of Owlthorpe Surgery appears visually detached from the surrounding residential areas.
- 3.9 A characteristic of the area are the corridors of woodland and greenspace which form a 'green necklace' around the periphery of the various neighbourhoods within the vicinity of the site. This is illustrated by the plan at Appendix 1.
- 3.10 This plan illustrates the prevailing character of the area with large parcels of housing set within a framework of green corridors around the edges of each estate, generally following landscape features such as watercourses and woodland. These green corridors provide separation between local housing estates such as Owlthorpe, Waterthorpe, Sothall and Westfield. They form the characteristic local approach to green infrastructure, such that areas of housing are surrounded by areas of green, rather than small areas of green sitting within the housing development.
- 3.11 The distance between areas of woodland and housing is generally quite small, with small tree belts directly abutting the boundaries of Woodland Heights and a line of trees cutting through the estate with no apparent stand off (see plan at Appendix 2). In other areas in Owlthorpe the woodland directly abuts the rear boundary fences. This is illustrated by the photographs at Appendix 6.
- 3.12 What is also striking about these areas is the very limited amount of internal green spaces breaking up the built form within each neighbourhood. The prevailing character is of residential development in clusters with green spaces around their edges. Appendices 2-5 illustrates this fact, looking at areas of development in the close vicinity of the site with these being: -
- Area A – Moorthorpe Way West (Owlthorpe)
 - Area B – Stoneacre Avenue (Hackenthorpe)
 - Area C – Moorthorpe Way East (Owlthorpe)
 - Area D – Woodland Heights
- 3.13 The network of green corridors surrounding the various neighbourhoods is a positive characteristic of the area. However, the interface between the development and the woodland edges is in most instances poorly conceived and is reflective of the approach to development prior to the turn of the century with housing development turning its back or 'siding on' to these publicly accessible spaces, with no active frontage or natural surveillance created. This can also be seen at Appendix 2-5 as well as on the photographs at Appendix 6.

- 3.14 The 2017 Design Brief for the site and other land advocates correcting this pattern of development and providing frontage to areas of woodland around the perimeter of the site, where appropriate.
- 3.15 Turning to the prevailing character of the built environment within the local area, in addition to the lack of internal green spaces (see Appendices 2-5), Appendices 7-13 respectively illustrate some of the common characteristics of the area.
- 3.16 It is evident that the area is dominated by detached housing (67%) with only a small amount of semi-detached and terraced forms with both Area B and Area D entirely made up of detached forms. In terms of building height dwellings are predominantly 2 storey (again, 67%).
- 3.17 The only evidence of 3 storey development is within the Woodland Heights area on Moorthorpe Rise, south of the appeal site, where split level housing is used to build into the slope and create level gardens at the first floor (see Appendix 10 and 11). This highlights the challenging topography in the area (see Appendix 30-31), and it is noted that all the 3 storey properties on Moorthorpe Rise/View have wide frontages, in excess of 8m in width and with 10m wide gardens. As such the change in building height does not increase density but is a design solution to respond to the topography.
- 3.18 The use of wide frontage buildings where tall retaining structures are required is particularly important to understand. The combination of a tall retaining wall, often with a 1.5m fence on top and a narrow garden (created by a narrow profile house) would create a poor garden, lacking in natural light and 'hemmed in'. The use of wide frontage properties mitigates this situation, creating a more open feel to garden areas.
- 3.19 In addition to the characteristics of the building forms another aspect of the prevailing character of the local area is density. Appendix 12 and 13 illustrate the urban grain of the area. These figure ground plans illustrate the loose form of development and the space between buildings. This is reinforced by the assessment of plot ratios, (the percentage of building footprints in comparison to overall plot size) with this ranging from 25-29% with plot ratios on the proposed scheme similar, but slightly more dense at 32%
- 3.20 The drawing at Appendix 9 illustrate the overall density of Areas A to D with this ranging from 21 dwellings per hectare (dph) to 29 dph again highlighting the prevailing character of relative low density family housing within this area, with the proposed scheme similar but with a slight increase to 30 dph overall. This point will be expanded upon later in this proof.
- 3.21 Based on the above it is clear that the following elements are intrinsic to the character of Owlthorpe: -
1. urbanising features exist in the immediate vicinity of the site in the form of a heavily engineered highway designed to serve a larger quantum of development- the future development of this area has been planned and is the subject of considerable (public) expenditure;

2. a visually isolated Medical Centre building designed to form part of a wider pattern of built form;
3. green infrastructure forming a 'green necklace' to large blocks of housing development with no/no notable internal greenspaces breaking up the built form;
4. close relationships between existing belts of woodland and dwellings;
5. a generally poor interface between green space and the edges of the local neighbourhoods with dwellings 'turning their back' on these public spaces;
6. low density family housing as the predominant form of development, below 30 dwellings per hectare;
7. building heights generally limited to 2 storey in height, the exceptions being related to topography rather than having the effect of increasing mix or density;
8. a predominance of detached housing;
9. taller split level housing only used to deal with the steep topography of the area with wider frontages used to mitigate the impact of retaining features within gardens.

4 The Design Process

The Design Process for the Appeal Site

- 4.1 Site E was brought to market by Sheffield City Council as land owner in late 2018 at which point Avant instructed nineteen47 Ltd to begin the process of developing their proposals for the site with reference to the approved Moorthorpe Way, Owlthorpe Design Brief.
- 4.2 From the outset Avant have viewed the development of Site E within the context of the wider allocation and sought from an early stage to approach the development of Site E with an eye to the future development of sites C and D. As such an overarching masterplan was developed by Avant for the entire allocation (see Appendix 14) and submitted alongside Avant's bid for Site E and to inform the planning application subsequently made.
- 4.3 An overlay of the overarching masterplan produced by Avant against the Urban Design Framework prepared by Sheffield City Council in the Moorthorpe Way, Owlthorpe Design Brief demonstrates that the Avant masterplan was developed in conformity with the Design Brief (see Appendix 15). The Avant masterplan replicates the development edges, integrates public rights of way, shows outward looking frontages to the public areas of green infrastructure around the periphery of the site and achieves the indicated stand offs to existing areas of woodland.
- 4.4 The Avant masterplan informed the preparation of the bid layout for Site E (see Appendix 16) and Avant were successful in securing the site. Oral feedback from the Council as landowner was provided to Avant that the proposed scheme was assessed by the Council's urban design team and was considered to be the best proposal in design terms.
- 4.5 The next stage in the process was to refine the layout in preparation for a planning application and as such pre-application discussions were entered into with the Council. Initial design comments were provided by the Council but as a result of the emerging technical information, in particular a stand off from the woodland edge to the north, the layout changed in order to accommodate a block structure that responded sensitively to the woodland edge. As a result, further pre-application discussions were sought and a response to drawing number n1276_007G2 (see Appendix 17) was provided by the Council in July 2019.
- 4.6 Feedback was provided on the proposed layout by the Council's urban design officer and alterations to the layout were made. This process is fully described in the 'Developing the Concept' section of the Design and Access Statement on pages 34-37 and given not all of these changes are relevant to the reasons for refusal these are not repeated here.
- 4.7 Instead, relevant feedback relating to comprehensive development, density, open space and the relationship to the woodland and affordable housing are set out below.

Comprehensive Development

- 4.8 The delivery of the site on a phased basis was accepted throughout the course of the application. During the pre-application process, and during the application no concerns were raised concerning how the site would integrate with future phases of development. The orientation of the development along all boundaries was not questioned. The masterplan prepared by Avant was welcomed and reference was made to the Council needing to set out the specific requirements for equipped play and surface water attenuation within the wider site and once these were established by the Council, Avant complied with these requests.

Density

- 4.9 At an early stage the Council identified that the density target of 40-60 dph (Policy CS26) was unlikely to be met on this site and identified in the first pre-application response: -

“the policy allows for densities outside the appropriate range to be allowed in situations where the proposal achieves good design, reflects the character of an area or protects a sensitive area. Subject to the details of the final design there is a good prospect that we will conclude that the proposal will meet these criteria”

- 4.10 No further feedback was received in terms of the density of the scheme from the initial pre-application meeting and the Committee Report (p48-49) concluded that:

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“In this case the density is just over 30 dwellings per hectare and is therefore lower than the guidance in Policy CS26. However, in this case it needs to be acknowledged that the character of the area is one of lower density 2 storey housing. The site is also located on a prominent hillside with a green setting where high density housing is likely to appear out of character. The site is steeply sloping and even with the lower density proposed the design cannot avoid significant retaining wall features which are necessary to provide level gardens and access roads. This would be accentuated if the density were increased which would impact negatively on the design of the development. Furthermore the need in the area is for family housing which tends to require larger gardens. Therefore it is concluded that whilst the density is below the range set in CS26 it is justified for the reasons explained above and therefore is consistent with the policy...”

The proposal is considered to be consistent with the NPPF in that whilst the density is below the local density guidance this is reflective of the type of housing needed; the need to be sympathetic to the areas character and to achieve good design”.

Open Space and the relationship to the Woodland Edge

- 4.11 From the outset an outward looking edge was proposed to the woodland edge to the north, and consensus was formed on this principle from an early stage but with differing opinions on how the edge should be approached/formed. During the preparation of the application the 15m stand off from the woodland edge to the north, as prescribed in the Design Brief, was amended. This resulted in the need to revise the entire block structure for the proposals, moving the edge further south.
- 4.12 The layout along the woodland edge to the north was one of the points raised by the Council's urban design officer. In the pre-application response dated 11.07.19 to drawing no n1276_007G2 officers pushed for a formal and hard edge to the 15m stand off and described the proposed layout as *"too loose"* and with *"a lot of left over green space"*. Officers recommended that at the northern corner *"development (should be) pulled as much forward as it can be"*. These suggestions run counter to the Council's apparent position at this appeal.
- 4.13 Our view was that a softer edge would be preferable in this area with a more informal, curved building line. The scheme was however amended to orientate more dwellings towards the woodland as advocated by the urban design officer but with the more informal and softer building line adopted, leaving pockets of space for additional tree planting which would naturally draw the woodland towards the urban edges whilst protecting the existing trees.
- 4.14 Following the receipt of additional survey data in November 2020 relating to the trees in the woodland along the northern edge a revised 15m stand off distance was plotted which affected plots 26-28 of the proposed layout. Given that throughout the design process it was Avant's approach to maintain an appropriate stand off from the woodland an alternative layout has been prepared, reducing the quantum of development from 74 to 72 plots (CD 1.3 B) . This ensured all houses, driveways and parking were outside of the revised 15m stand-off with this plan known as scheme B. This scheme has been accepted by the Inspector and is the scheme referred to throughout this proof.
- 4.15 In terms of open space provision, the only requirement made by the Council was in relation to the provision of the equipped play and surface water attenuation areas. No discussion was had on the quantum of open space to be delivered. It was clear from the outset that an over-provision of open space was to be provided. Indeed, in the Committee Report (page 51) the officer concluded: -

“Approximately 15% of the housing site will be laid out as informal open space primarily along the northern boundary to create a buffer with the Local Wildlife Site. This exceeds the policy guideline set out in H16. Much of the water storage area will only contain water in times of flooding and will provide a dry level area for recreational use along with an area of biodiverse planting. This will create opportunities for physical activity and support the health and wellbeing for existing and future residents. The scheme will also improve existing open space by providing a play area within an area of informal open space to the east of the housing site thereby it is in line in line with Policy CS45. Therefore, the scheme addresses the shortage of children’s play and meets the planning brief requirement whilst also providing facilities that will serve the Owlthorpe site as a whole and also benefit the existing community particularly residents of the Woodland Heights estate”.

- 4.16 It is noted that the exact provision of open space just within Site E itself (excluding equipped play and surface water attenuation) exceeds the above quoted figure of 15%. A plan summarising the open space provision is provided at Appendix 18 and establishes a figure of at least 22%, double the requirement.

Affordable Housing

- 4.17 Comments during the pre-application stage concerning affordable housing were focused upon the type and mix of housing proposed, with the precise mix then agreed during the process of the application with the Council agreeing to purchase the affordable properties based on the proposed layout. No additional comments were made concerning the provision of affordable housing.

5 Design Related Policy

5.1 In order to avoid duplication in this proof I cover only the policies strictly relevant to the design matters I address and from a designer's perspective, not as a planner. For a comprehensive assessment of all development plan policies please refer to the Proof of Evidence prepared by Roland G Bolton of DLP Planning.

5.2 This section covers the following policies specifically relating to design: -

- National Planning Policy Framework – Paragraphs 122, 123, 124 and 127
- The Sheffield Unitary Development Plan (1998) – Policies H14 and H15
- The Sheffield Core Strategy (March 2009) – Policies CS26, CS40, CS41 and CS74.

5.3 In addition, this section reviews the proposed scheme against The Moorthorpe Way, Owlthorpe Design Brief. An assessment of the proposals against the South Yorkshire Residential Design Guide is completed through the Building for a Healthy Life Assessment in Appendix 19.

National Planning Policy and Guidance

The National Planning Policy Framework

5.4 The National Planning Policy Framework advocates high quality design in new development. Paragraph 124 states that

5.5 “The creation of high-quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities. Being clear about design expectations, and how these will be tested, is essential for achieving this. So too is effective engagement between applicants, communities, local planning authorities and other interests throughout the process”

5.6 Paragraph 127 sets out relevant design principles stating: -

“Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:

- a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;
- b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;
- c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);

- d) establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive place to live, work and visit;
- e) optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and
- f) create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.

5.7 In addition, paragraph 122 of the NPPF states

“Planning policies and decisions should support development that makes efficient use of land, taking into account:

- a) the identified need for different types of housing and other forms of development, and the availability of land suitable for accommodating it;
- b) local market conditions and viability;
- c) the availability and capacity of infrastructure and services – both existing and proposed – as well as their potential for further improvement and the scope to promote sustainable travel modes that limit future car use;
- d) the desirability of maintaining an area’s prevailing character and setting (including residential gardens), or of promoting regeneration and change; and;
- e) the importance of securing well-designed, attractive and healthy places.

5.8 Paragraph 123 of NPPF deals with densities of development particularly where there is an existing or anticipated shortage of housing land. It states that low density housing should be avoided, but in part c) that relates to dealing with planning applications, the policy identifies that the pursuit of density should not be at the expense of other policies in the Framework (so this will include 122 d) or acceptable living standards. It is my view that given the context of the site and all the matters the Council argues in terms of character, the density provided is the correct design response to this site and that the steep topography of the site mean that wider plots with space in between buildings are required to ensure acceptable living standards for future occupiers. I shall go on to explain this further below.

5.9 With regards to the above-mentioned design policy, I believe that the design proposals achieve the right balance. Reference is made to the Building for a Healthy Life assessment provided at Appendix 19 which is a widely accepted tool for assessing the quality of residential design and its use is advocated within the South Yorkshire Residential Guide.

- 5.10 The Building for a Healthy Life Assessment demonstrates the urban design principles embedded into the scheme, reinforced by the 3D visuals at Appendix 26 and 27. I summarise the key design principles below, demonstrating compliance with the aforementioned national design related planning policy.
- 5.11 Key urban design principles are at the heart of the design proposals through the creation of key frontages, vistas along streets terminated by landmark buildings, dual aspect buildings which turn corners well and the careful use of built form and different building lines to create variations in density responding to site conditions.
- 5.12 The key features of the layout are considered to be: -
- an outward looking frontage to the public right of way along the eastern boundary which will be a highly visible and well used frontage;
 - creation of a 'woodland edge' frontage;
 - a primary route extending from the site access with a series of events along the route including a gateway feature, central hard landscaped node and a secondary green space;
 - a courtyard area to the south west of the Owlthorpe Surgery with open views from Moorthorpe Rise through the courtyard towards the central node.

Creating A Sense of Place

- 5.13 The proposed development has been designed to be contemporary in form as reflected by the generously proportioned window openings and additional window panels. The design and detailing of the proposed house types has been kept clean, simple and unfussy. A limited but high-quality palette of materials will be applied to the proposed houses with a combination of grey brick at key locations and an attractive brown brick being the consistent thread throughout the scheme. Both render and timber style cladding will be used in simple ways to compliment the brick and provide visual relief.
- 5.14 The proposals respect the prevailing character and setting of the area with respect to building typologies and height, being predominantly detached and 2 storey. The proposed layout also replicates the pattern of development in the area with an urban core and green space around the edges.
- 5.15 The improvement of this scheme in comparison to existing estates is the positive integration with the surrounding areas of green infrastructure through outward looking development and the deliberate creation of a woodland edge which draws the woodland towards the new houses as a key characteristic of the proposals.
- 5.16 Overall, the surrounding residential areas of Owlthorpe, Hackenthorpe and Waterthorpe are generally quite standard in appearance and the proposals demonstrate that this scheme will be distinctive and have its own strong sense of place.

Turning Corners Well

- 5.17 The proposed scheme turns corners well with specific dual aspect houses designed for this purpose. The Seaton/Paignton 3 storey combination and the 2 storey Easton house type perform this function as found on plots 1-2, 19-22, 28, 32, 42, 57-58 and 72.



Legibility

- 5.18 The proposed development uses taller buildings such as the 3 storey Paignton house type, arranged in terraced form and the 2.5 storey Napsbury with its distinctive front gable to provide definition and legibility to key spaces within the development. These 'landmark' buildings are to be constructed of grey brick which together with their height will add further legibility and character to the scheme. At the Site entrance at Moorthorpe Way and on the north east corner a pair of 2.5 storey Napsbury's are used to define these key gateways (plots 3 and 7-8 respectively).



- 5.19 In addition, the 3 storey Paignton terraced blocks have been used to enclose the central node within the scheme and give this space definition. Plots 19-22 will be visible when entering the site leading into this central node. This space will be complimented by a change in hard surfacing and boundary treatments.
- 5.20 Moving west from this space the visual journey continues with the introduction of new trees leading to a small green, enclosed again by positioning another pair of 2.5 storey Napsburys (plot 45-46) which terminate the view along the street. This feature introduces native tree planting into the scheme (in front of plot 50 in particular), drawing inspiration from the surrounding context and represents an improvement in layout in comparison to existing housing estates in the surrounding area by integrating some incidental green space. Overall, however the main body of the site retains an urban feel (see Appendix 26) with significant green space around the periphery, in keeping with but increasing density and improving the character of the surrounding area.

Frontages

- 5.21 A 'woodland edge' to the scheme has been created along the northern boundary. This sensitive edge is formed by a series of detached, wide frontage dwellings which follow an informal building line, benefitting from the setting of the existing woodland which will be protected and strengthened through pockets of new, layered tree planting which draws the woodland into the development.



- 5.22 An outward looking frontage to the public realm and future phases of development are proposed to ensure the wider site can be developed comprehensively. Plots 1-6 overlook the public right of way and plots 66 to 72 overlook the footpath and proposed play area beyond providing an active edge and good enclosure.

Navigability

- 5.23 A key priority for the site is to ensure that it is permeable and integrates well with the surrounding area. The perimeter block structure, the definition provided to the woodland edge and the events defining the primary route all work together to assist in navigation and make it easy to find your way around the scheme and indeed out to the surrounding fields and woodland.
- 5.24 The desire line footpath along the northern boundary will be retained as part of the proposals, with a low impact surface material introduced. A pedestrian link is also proposed from Moorthorpe Rise and the medical centre which also improves the accessibility of the proposed play area.

A Balance of Parking Typologies

- 5.25 The development to the south west of the medical centre is constrained by the existing turning head arrangement, however this area has been designed with an appropriate response to form a courtyard fronted by terraces to create a social space as well as a naturally surveyed area for parking.
- 5.26 A mix of parking typologies are proposed in order to integrate the parking within the street. Approximately one third of parking is positioned to the side of dwellings, another third are integral garage parking arrangements to the front which allow for a combination of parking and landscaping across the frontage of the house to ensure parked cars do not dominate. The remaining third of houses are front parked, with a significant number of these spaces provided in the courtyard area at the southern most part of the site. In addition to this 18 visitor parking spaces are also provided within the scheme, with these spaces ensuring that cars aren't parked in unplanned locations which may blight the proposed scheme.

Wide Frontage Houses and Good Private Amenity Space

- 5.27 A proportion of the dwellings within the site are wide frontage detached properties specifically used to create a lower density edge to the woodland and across the site to alleviate some of the challenges presented by the topography.



5.28 Retaining walls up to 3m in height in some areas form the rear garden boundaries and therefore a wider garden, by virtue of a wider house, helps to ensure suitable private garden spaces are created and overall amenity maintained.

5.29 Overall, the quality of the design proposals was acknowledged within the Committee Report which states:

'The housing layout has been designed to create a sense of place with houses sited to respond the roads and footpaths around and within the site. The same is also achieved by positioning houses to overlook the play area and open space and by creating a node point adjacent to the doctor's surgery which is defined by 3 storey units and a small open space area. The overlooking of roads, footpaths, parking courts and open space will all help to promote a safe and secure environment. The varied building line and varied width of properties helps to create an interesting streetscape. The layout creates a clear hierarchy of routes with development adjoining the main spine route having a more urban character. The 3 storey units are concentrated along this route and at the key focal points.'

Local Planning Policy and Guidance

Sheffield Unitary Development Plan (1998)

5.30 The UDP was published in March 1998 and comprises a series of saved policies which should be read alongside the Core Strategy. The UDP is to be replaced by the Sheffield Local Plan, but virtually no progress has been made with that document. I look at the design related aspects of policy only and not as a planning consultant, but from a design point of view.

Policy H14: Conditions on Development in Housing Areas

5.31 Policy H14: Conditions on Development in Housing Areas - Policy H14 states that new development will be permitted provided that:

- a) new buildings and extensions are well designed and would be in scale and character with neighbouring buildings; and
- b) new development would be well laid out with all new roads serving more than five dwellings being of an adoptable standard; and
- c) the site would not be over-developed or deprive residents of light, privacy or security, or cause serious loss of existing garden space which would harm the character of the neighbourhood; and
- d) it would provide safe access to the highway network and appropriate off-street parking and not endanger pedestrians; and
- e) it would not suffer from unacceptable air pollution, noise or other nuisance or risk to health or safety; and

- f) it would provide, where appropriate, an environmental buffer to shield sensitive land uses; and
- g) it would comply with Policies for the Built and Green Environment, as appropriate; and
- h) it would comply with Policies H16, LR8 and T28.

- 5.32 The Council have identified points a, b, c, f and g as the points to consider.
- 5.33 The scheme is in line with part (a) of policy H14 as the proposed development will provide a contemporary form of housing which represents a positive step change in the architectural qualities of the area but respects the scale and character of the neighbouring buildings. The proposal uses predominantly 2 storey detached forms in scale and character with residential buildings in the neighbourhood. Increases in height and massing are used at focal points for specific design reasons, framing views and defining key nodes. The Committee Report (CD2.38), states that the development would help to link the visually isolated Owlthorpe Surgery and Woodland Heights housing development back to the existing housing areas to the north.
- 5.34 The proposals accord with part (b) of policy H14 as the appeal site is well laid out with a clear hierarchy of streets. The primary route is well defined by the built form and lower order streets are reflected by their form with informal curves to the woodland edge and a courtyard to the south. All roads serving more than 5 dwellings are designed to an adoptable standard.
- 5.35 Turning to point c, the site is not overdeveloped. The site has been earmarked for development since the mid 1900s and doesn't cause a loss of garden space. A key focus of the proposals has been to design the site in a sensitive manner, particularly regarding the topography to ensure that new residents have satisfactory living standards and that the site can be designed without excessive hard retaining structures in the public realm.
- 5.36 Wide frontage properties and increased back to back distances have been designed in to ensure that residents enjoy light and privacy in their gardens and retaining structures within gardens are mitigated. This has an inevitable but necessary impact upon density. These factors provide the justification for the proposed layout and density which meet the provisions of policy H14 (c).
- 5.37 The woodland edge along the northern boundary is designed to have an informal edge which creates pockets of new open space that allow for additional tree planting that draws the woodland into the development, providing a buffer to the existing woodland.
- 5.38 The category B existing trees along the western boundary are protected and retained at the boundary to the local wildlife site, other category B trees are protected where possible or replaced as described by Mr Topping. The western hedgerow is also retained and has been assessed as part of the group of trees. As such the proposals are in accordance with policy H14 (f).

5.39 The proposals accord with part (g) of policy H14 in that all other appropriate Built and Green Environment policies are complied with, as demonstrated in the evidence provided by Mr Roland Bolton, Mark Topping and Andrew Baker.

5.40 It is my view that the proposal is in accordance with Policy H14. I note that the Planning officer also reached this conclusion CD2.38 page 72.

Policy H15: Design of New Housing Developments

5.41 Policy H15: Design of New Housing Developments - The design of new housing and development will be expected to:

- provide easy access to homes and circulation around the site for people with disabilities or with prams; and
- provide adequate private gardens or communal open space to ensure that basic standards of daylight, privacy, security and outlook are met for all residents; and
- provide uniform walls or fences around rear gardens next to roads, footpaths or other open areas; and
- provide pedestrian access to adjacent countryside where it would link with existing public open space or a footpath; and
- comply with Policies BE5, BE9 and BE10.”

5.42 It is considered that the proposals accord with Policy H15 with all homes and adoptable streets meeting the mobility standards as required by building regulations. As previously mentioned, the scheme has been carefully designed to ensure adequate private gardens are created. The boundary treatments plan (CD1.8.B) demonstrates the use of walls to create a high-quality boundary finish against the public realm and/or adoptable highway.

5.43 The scheme integrates with the existing public rights of way running around the edges of the site. The desire line path currently running along the northern edge is retained and will be surfaced as a low impact path. This is considered to be compliant with Policy H15 as all links to the countryside and public rights of way are all provided.

5.44 Policy BE5: Building Design and Siting - Policy BE5 requires the good design and the use of good quality materials on proposed new buildings. The proposed new housing have a high quality, contemporary appearance which complies with this policy and this point is not disputed by the Council.

Sheffield Core Strategy (2009)

5.45 Sheffield’s Core Strategy was adopted in March 2009 and provides the overall spatial strategy for the Council’s Local Development Framework, which aims to manage the city’s evolution up to 2026.

- 5.46 Policy CS26: Efficient Use of Housing Land and Accessibility - Policy CS26 states that the density of housing development should be in keeping with the character of the area and that subject to that character being protected there are certain densities which will vary according to location. It concludes that densities outside the ranges suggested will be allowed where they achieve good design, reflect the character of the area or protect a sensitive area. Subject to these important aspects of the policy, development near to Supertram stops and high-frequency bus routes in the urban areas will be expected to have a density of 40 to 60 dwellings per hectare.
- 5.47 The proposed development equates to 28/30 dwellings per hectare (see Appendix 20). The difference in between the two depends on whether the regraded area to the north of the site is included in the net area, but ultimately this makes limited difference. The key consideration is whether the proposal is in keeping with the character of the area. Densities below the ranges set out in the policy are permitted by the policy if they are driven by meeting the character of the area or protect a sensitive area and this point is expanded upon later at Paragraphs 6.19 to 6.48.
- 5.48 It is considered important to describe what a density of 40-60 dwellings per hectare would look like notwithstanding the conflicts this would create with topography and private garden amenity.
- 5.49 To put this into context the following recent developments within 800m of a tram stop all fall short of the ranges in the Policy: -
- Queen Mary Road, Manor (17/01443/FUL) – pg. 6 of officers report states 38 dph (total of 253 dwellings) – 40% townhouses of 2.5/3 storey.
 - Park Grange Drive (15/00665/FUL) – pg. 6 of officers report states 37 dph (9 apts and 83 dwellings) - 10% 3 storey apartments and 37% 3 storey townhouses.
- 5.50 Despite the extensive use of apartments and 3 storey townhouses within these schemes the density does not exceed 40 dph. To achieve the 40-60 dph range would require a combination of significant increases in building height and the use of even more apartments. This would be entirely out of keeping with the character of the area and not consistent with the objective and need to deliver family housing. In the case of this appeal site, there is also the backdrop of an urban fringe location and a site with challenging topography where careful consideration of overlooking and overshadowing is critical.
- 5.51 Policy CS40: Affordable Housing is addressed in the evidence prepared by Mr Roland Bolton.
- 5.52 Policy CS41: Creating Mixed Communities is addressed in the evidence prepared by Mr Roland Bolton.
- 5.53 Provisions A, C and E-H of the second part of Policy CS74: Design Principles are relevant to this appeal and states that development should respect, take advantage and enhance: -

- a) the topography, landforms, river corridors, Green Network, important habitats, waterways, woodlands, other natural features and open spaces;
- c) the townscape and landscape character of the city's districts, neighbourhoods and quarters, with their associated scale, layout and built form, building styles and materials;
- e) contribute to place-making, be of a high quality, that contributes to a healthy, safe and sustainable environment, that promotes the city's transformation;
- f) help to transform the character of physical environments that have become run down and are lacking in distinctiveness;
- g) enable all people to gain access safely and conveniently, providing, in particular, for the needs of families and children, and of disabled people and older people;
- h) contribute towards creating attractive, sustainable and successful neighbourhoods.

5.54 The site responds well to the natural features of Sheffield's landscape (a) ensuring that a frontage to the woodland is created, taking advantage of this attractive setting. Despite the sloping topography, retaining structures in the public realm are minimised and the sloping nature of some of the streets will reinforce character.

5.55 Turning to point c it has been clearly demonstrated within this proof that the prevailing character of the area is one of relatively low-density housing with green spaces around the perimeter. In addition, the site itself has a series of urbanising features within the townscape. As such the proposed development respects both landscape and townscape character as a predominantly outward facing development.

5.56 Points e – h relate to elements of good urban design. Paragraphs 5.9 to 5.30 fully justify the proposals, alongside the Building for a Healthy Life Assessment at Appendix 19 and as such it is integrating with the peripheral green spaces with a graded density aiding this transition.

5.57 It is considered proposals comply with the provisions of Policy CS74 for the reasons already stated at paragraphs 5.11 to 5.29. This is confirmed within the officers report which states that: -

5.58 'The proposal is considered to be in accordance with the design aspects of Policies CS74 and H14.'

GAH5 Design of Affordable Housing

5.59 Policy GAH5 Design of Affordable Housing of the CIL and Planning Obligations SPD states that: -

"Affordable Housing should not be able to be differentiated by design, quality, specification, location within the site, timing of the development or by significant difference in access to services and amenities".

5.60 I believe the proposals comply with this requirement by virtue of the proposed affordable homes having the same design, materials and parking arrangements as the similar sized market houses on the site and a beneficial location within the layout. This is demonstrated in more detail later from paragraph 6.106.

(Site C, D and E) Moorthorpe Way, Owlthorpe; Planning and Design Brief

5.61 Sheffield City Council produced a Planning and Design Brief for the Housing Sites (C, D & E) at Owlthorpe in July 2014, which was subsequently updated in November 2017.

5.62 The Brief particularly aims to:

- Promote high quality and sustainable development that contributes positively to the local neighbourhood;
- Enable a co-ordinated and comprehensive approach to the future uses of the site- which the brief goes on to show how;
- Enable commercially viable development; and to
- Optimise the value of the setting and site features, such as its distinctive landscape and topography.

5.63 The vision for Owlthorpe is that it will reflect the distinctive green character of its setting and utilise the site's natural assets.

5.64 Because the sites are close to the tram network, the Brief notes the terms of policy CS26, however it also notes the existing landscape and topography of the site and that family housing is likely to be the dominant house type for the site, both of which will reduce density. It notes that densities are likely to be lower than the CS26 range and that the Illustrative Masterplan shows densities of 30-40 dwelling to the hectare. Local policy also encourages a mix of housing types, prices, sizes and tenures and in accessible locations such as Owlthorpe.

5.65 The Planning and Design Brief identifies the key challenges and opportunities at page 30.

5.66 In order to illustrate the challenges and opportunities of the wider site the Design Brief includes a Constraints & Opportunities Plan, Urban Design Framework Plan and Illustrative Masterplan. These documents are to be used to guide the detailed proposals for each area of development, ensuring the vision for the site overall is realised and the site is developed in a comprehensive manner. In effect accordance with the Urban Design Framework and Illustrative Masterplan of the Brief is the means to achieve comprehensive development.

5.67 The Planning and Design Brief sets out a series of design principles that development should follow. I will now briefly address these principles in turn, expanding upon the key issues later in this document.

Density

- 5.68 D1 As well as using density to create character and value, the density of development across the site should be designed to promote public transport with higher density fronting Moorthorpe Way and near to the tram stop for example.

Response: Density has been used to create character with a lower density at the site margins and a medium density in the main body of the site which provides a more urban feel at the heart of the site (see Appendix 23 and 26). The appropriate density of the site has been carefully considered, factoring in the topography of the site, the character of the area and the green edges. Given Site E is adjacent to the woodland and local wildlife site, it is maintained that a lower overall density of development is appropriate in this area, with potential for increasing density fronting Moorthorpe Way and closer to the tram stop as mentioned in principle D1, both of which fall within Sites C and D.

Legibility

- 5.69 L1 The development should be distinctive and easy for anybody to find their way to and through. There is an opportunity to create a new character on this site as it is sufficiently remote from the influence of its neighbours.



Response: A new character is created by the contemporary design of the proposed new housing and associated landscaping. This approach is supported by the Local Authority. Taller buildings are positioned for good urban design reasons to accentuate key spaces rather than a blanket approach, particularly given the topography. These taller buildings are generally located centrally within the development to define the heart of the scheme around the medical centre (plots 19-22 and 57-58). Other taller buildings define key vistas along primary routes such as the 2.5 storey front gabled Napsbury (plots 7, 23 and 45-46). Key pedestrian and vehicular routes are also well defined by building frontages.

- 5.70 L2 The development should set a marker for high quality and sustainable design e.g. use of natural materials for the houses, robust detailing, considered response to solar orientation etc.

Response: The energy statement prepared in support of the application sets out building fabric and service enhancements will be adopted which will exceed the building regulation requirements and these in combination with PV cells on roofs will meet policy requirements as explained by Mr Bolton.

Movement

- 5.71 M1 The strategic movement framework should consider the surrounding neighbourhood context and optimise the value of the existing infrastructure. It should promote more sustainable transport modes and show how to enable a continuous and safe footpath and cycle network from people's homes to popular local destinations.

Response: The existing public right of way along the eastern boundary is incorporated into the design of the site and the layout will allow new residents direct access to this route which leads to the tram stop and Drakehouse Retail Park and Crystal Peaks beyond. The east-west desire line path along the northern boundary will be retained as a low impact path. In addition, a new pedestrian link from the southern boundary from Moorthorpe Rise to the Medical Centre improves the accessibility of this facility.

Green Environment

- 5.72 G1 It is essential that the interfaces between the development and open space or the woodland edges are carefully designed to provide value to new residents and to enhance landscape quality.

Response: The interface between the Site E and the woodland edge has been carefully designed to create a soft, outward looking edge with space for additional planting, drawing the woodland to the edges of the development in a managed way to enhance landscape quality and create an attractive edge which new residents will value and take ownership of. These principles are expanded upon later from Paragraph 6.66.

- 5.73 G2 The landscape setting must feature significantly in the development of character.

Response: The proposals respond to the landscaped setting more positively than the surrounding area by creating a direct relationship between housing and the woodland edge with outward looking edges proposed in comparison to the existing housing estates which often back on. Pockets of new planting along the edge draws the woodland into the development ensuring the woodland setting forms part of the unique character of this scheme. In addition, cladding with a timber appearance is part of the architectural detailing of the houses. Tree planting is also proposed along the primary route including a small 'secondary green' outside plots 46/50, in front of the front gabled 2.5 storey properties which head the street. These principles are expanded upon later from Paragraph 6.66.

- 5.74 G3 The development must contribute to the success of the green infrastructure in this area to enable more sustainable development and lifestyles.

Response: The proposals for Site E will deliver elements of green infrastructure included in the wider site masterplan including links to the wider footpath network and permeability through the site, the equipped play area and the surface water attenuation basin which all form part of the 'green necklace' which will surround the wider development and promote a more active and healthy lifestyle.

Topography and Drainage

- 5.75 T1 Development must be designed as a considered response to the complex and sloping topography across the site.

Response: The topography of the site is a principle that is clearly understood by Avant and has been carefully considered throughout the design process. This is demonstrated in the design response in terms of the selection of wider building forms, creating wider gardens to mitigate tall retaining structures, increased space between buildings to preserve amenity and a suitable density for the site which ensures an acceptable level of residential amenity and avoids overly engineered structures in the public realm. This matter is dealt with in more detail at paragraph 6.85 – 6.89 of the following section.

- 5.76 T2 The layout of homes must consider the weak solar benefit of the site generally sloping down towards the north east.

Response: Where possible a southerly orientation of buildings has been proposed but this is balanced against numerous competing priorities for the orientation of development on this site including the need for east facing development over the public right of way and frontage overlooking the play area.

- 5.77 T3 The design development should consider the inclusion of SUDs and the efficient use of the existing water courses at an early stage.

Response: The surface water attenuation proposals for Site E have been over-specified and will also serve future phases of the development. The proposals will form part of a wider strategy that has been considered from this initial phase. This enhances and assists in comprehensive development.

The South Yorkshire Residential Design Guide

5.78 The South Yorkshire Design Guide has been referenced throughout the development of the proposals with these principles closely aligned to the nationally accepted principles of Building for a Healthy Life (formerly Building for Life 12) which are referenced throughout the South Yorkshire Residential Design Guide. On page 7, paragraph 2.1 it states: -

“As stated in Section 1, a central element of the South Yorkshire approach is the Building for Life assessment developed by Design for Homes, CABI and the Home Builders Federation. A Building for Life assessment checks proposals against a set of twenty design criteria in order to judge the quality of the proposal. The Building for Life assessment process will be used as the basis for judging the quality of submissions for residential planning permission in South Yorkshire”

5.79 In order to demonstrate compliance with the South Yorkshire Residential Design Guide a Building for a Healthy Life Assessment has been undertaken, which is an updated on the twenty design criteria previously advocated and can be found at Appendix 19.

6 Design Response to the Reasons for Refusal

6.1 The Application was refused by the Council on 2nd June 2020 for the following reason (CD2.37):

"This standalone proposal relating to the site known as "Owlthorpe site E" is prejudicial to the proper planning of the wider area, contrary to paragraph 3.2.6 of the "Housing Sites (C, D, E), Moorthorpe Way, Owlthorpe Planning And Design Brief" (July 2014; Updated November 2017), which supports a comprehensive scheme for the application site together with neighbouring sites C and D. The proposal does not respond sufficiently to the area's prevailing character of abundant green infrastructure and open space, contrary to paragraphs 122 and 127 of the National Planning Policy Framework. In addition, the proposal fails to make efficient use of land due to the low housing density proposed and fails to adequately integrate the affordable housing into the proposed layout, contrary to paragraphs 8, 122 and 123 of the National Planning Policy Framework, Core Strategy Policies CS26 and CS40 as well as policy GAH5 of the CIL and Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document and is not considered to be sustainable Development".

6.2 In relation to the reason for refusal there is consensus that there are four issues within the single reason for refusal: -

1. Whether the proposal for Site E is prejudicial to the proper planning of the wider area and contrary to paragraph 3.2.6 of the Moorthorpe Way, Owlthorpe Planning and Design Brief which supports a comprehensive scheme for the application site together with Sites C and D.
2. Whether the proposal responds sufficiently to the area's prevailing character of green infrastructure and open space.
3. Whether the proposal fails to make efficient use of land due to the housing density proposed; and
4. Whether the proposal fails to adequately integrate the affordable housing into the proposed layout

Issue 1 – Comprehensive Development

- 6.3 The structure and method of disposal of the wider allocation site has been determined by Sheffield City Council as landowner, this precluded the site coming forward as a single proposal but instead in three phases, known as Site E, D and C.
- 6.4 Paragraph 3.2.6 of the Moorthorpe Way, Owlthorpe Planning and Design Brief states that “the sites need to be considered as a whole to ensure comprehensive development. Due to their total size, it is likely that development will be phased. Careful consideration is required regarding the delivery of infrastructure such as utilities, play facilities, and drainage”.
- 6.5 The above statement makes clear reference to the phasing of the development, acknowledging that bringing forward the scheme in distinct parts would not undermine the site being comprehensively developed. It also sits in the site description section of the Brief and does little more than identify the matters that the Brief itself goes on to provide a framework for; comprehensive development.
- 6.6 The very purpose of a design brief is to guide development proposals to ensure that key design principles are identified and can be followed as each parcel of land is released by the Council for development and that the phases of the development integrate well with one another. The preparation of development briefs and design codes is a widely accepted tool used to ensure that larger sites are developed in a coherent and comprehensive manner and on a phased basis. It is my view that there is absolutely no reason why standalone proposals for Site E would be prejudicial to the proper planning of the wider area and I will demonstrate that the proposals for Site E will compliment future phases of the wider allocation.
- 6.7 Sheffield City Council, as landowner, have an interest in ensuring the site is developed comprehensively and that the delivery of the first phase (Site E) should not harm or prejudice future phases for which the Council will seek to secure best value on future disposal. In putting forward this phased disposal strategy they did not foresee the delivery of the site in three phases as a risk to the comprehensive development of the site. Indeed, the Council were contractually obliged to sign off the proposed planning application scheme, which they did. Clearly this demonstrates there was no concern over the proposals for Site E compromising the ability to deliver the wider site.
- 6.8 As identified within Section 4 of this document, the design proposals for Site E emerged from the basis of a comprehensive masterplan prepared by Avant for Sites C, D and E (Appendix 14). This masterplan follows the guidance within the Moorthorpe Way, Owlthorpe Planning and Design Brief, and in particular the Constraints and Opportunities Plan, Urban Design Framework Plan and Illustrative Masterplan and design principles listed from paragraph 5.68 as I have shown within the previous section of this proof. The Council had this Avant masterplan for sites C, D and E from the moment discussions took place about the planning of site E and never raised any concerns. The Appeal proposal accords with this masterplan as well as the Brief.

- 6.9 The accompanying overlay (Appendix 15) demonstrates that the Avant masterplan conforms with the comprehensive vision for the site with the edges of development within the extents prescribed in the Urban Design Framework in the 2017 Design Brief, a similar perimeter block structure, public rights of way integrated, the standoff from areas of woodland and a multi-functional area of green infrastructure surrounding the development including sustainable urban drainage and equipped play.
- 6.10 The only difference between the Avant Masterplan and the Urban Design Framework in the 2017 Design Brief is the treatment of the south western edge of the scheme. The Avant Masterplan was based on a comprehensive understanding of the technical challenges this site presented, in particular the need for high retaining structures along the southern edge, essentially at the top of the slope.
- 6.11 As per the adjacent Woodland Heights development it was decided that the most appropriate orientation would be to 'back on' to the south western edge of the site to avoid fronting onto retaining walls 3m in height (around first floor in height).
- 6.12 The design for Site E benefited from an appreciation of the wider context and was designed as an outward looking phase of the wider development in order to ensure that the scheme would integrate well with later phases of the development ensuring good permeability and attractive edges.
- 6.13 This outward looking approach is demonstrated by the frontage of dwellings to the woodland and the active edges created both to the hard-surfaced public right of way along the eastern boundary of Site E and the proposed play area further south, providing natural surveillance to this route making it feel safe.
- 6.14 Since the application for full planning permission on Site E, Site D has been marketed by the Council. Avant have bid for this site. The outcome is not known. The proposals for Site E and Site D from Avant accord with each other, integrate and there is no question of prejudice. It would not remotely be in Avant's interests for either site to create issue for the other in terms of development and design. The layout prepared by Avant for Site D clearly demonstrates a cohesive and logical integration with Site E can be achieved. A plan demonstrating the relationship between the Planning Layout for Site E and the bid proposal layout for Site D is provided at Appendix 32. This plan shows that the phasing of the development does not prejudice the proper planning of the site and the principles established through Site E have the potential to inform future phases of development to produce the most successful overall scheme possible. For completeness this plan is also overlaid with the Urban Design Framework to show compliance (see Appendix 33).
- 6.15 In addition to providing housing on Site E, the proposals for this phase also include the provision of an equipped play area and a surface water attenuation area that will serve not only Site E but the future phases of development. These elements of green infrastructure within the 'green necklace' around the site are being delivered in advance of additional housing on sites C and D and demonstrate that the comprehensive elements of the masterplan within the development brief are being delivered and at an early stage to meet local deficiencies in equipped play.

- 6.16 The Proposed Park Layout (Appendix 22) prepared by Sheffield City Council illustrates how the other future elements of green infrastructure are planned to be delivered by the Council. This Council drawing transposes the Avant appeal proposals as part of the development of Site E on to their own landscape drawing of the wider area. It shows an integration and consistency of approach and at no stage did officers either in the planning team or the land team selling Site E, as well as Site D and in due course Site C, indicate anything other than that they were content that there was no prejudice.
- 6.17 Not only does this plan demonstrate the delivery of the wider elements of green infrastructure but it also superimposes the Avant proposed layout for Site E. This inclusion of the layout in this Council prepared plan is without doubt a clear indication that the proposals are considered acceptable and forming part of the comprehensive plan for this site and the green infrastructure.
- 6.18 Based on the above evidence it is my view that in no way is the development of Site E prejudicial to the proper planning of the wider area in design or layout terms and further that the proposals are contributing to the comprehensive development of the site. Other aspects of this refusal topic are explained by Mr Bolton.

Issue 2 – Density

- 6.19 The Council’s reason for refusal identifies two issues that are inextricably linked; the claim that the proposal fails to respond to the prevailing character of green infrastructure and open space but that the proposal also fails to make efficient use of land due to the housing density proposed.
- 6.20 It is my view that there is a conflict between these two assertions, and I am clear that at 28/30 dwellings to the hectare density is appropriate for this phase of the allocation site for exactly the reason of responding to the prevailing character; the resultant density is consequently the most appropriate response to the context of the area. Greater density and by that the Council must mean more houses on the site overall, can only be achieved by increasing the urban form, moving away from family housing with appropriate gardens, increasing terraces, apartments, town houses and having less space between dwellings. This increased urbanism does not accord with green or built form character and runs counter to the Council's argument that the proposal does not respond sufficiently to these features.
- 6.21 Given that the Council is also arguing to move development further from the boundaries of the site, which will reduce housing numbers as a consequence, there would have to be not only a making good of units lost by that to achieve the same density but a radically greater urban form in the rest of the site, inconsistent with the site's location and surroundings, to make any material difference to overall site numbers. I also note that the number of units proposed is almost exactly the same as the Council has approved for the site in the 5 year land supply, a position that I understand was approved by Members of the Council.
- 6.22 In this proof I deal with the issue of density ahead of the prevailing character of the area because an understanding of density within the context of the site conditions is crucial.
- 6.23 The exact definition of how density should be calculated is not set out in the NPPF or PPG. The most recent definition of density is found in Planning Policy Statement 3, Annex B which states: -
- “Net dwelling density is calculated by including only those site areas which will be developed for housing and directly associated uses, including access roads within the site, private garden space, car parking areas, incidental open space and landscaping and children’s play areas, where these are provided”.
- 6.24 This definition is also referenced directly in the Glossary in the South Yorkshire Residential Guide as the correct way of calculating density.
- 6.25 Based on the definition above it is my view that the density of Site E is 30 dwellings per hectare based on a developable area 2.42ha (see Appendix 20). The Council, incorrectly in my view, consider the density to be 28 dwellings per hectare.
- 6.26 This difference in opinion relates to the inclusion or exclusion of the green space to the woodland to the north. It is my view that this does not fall within the definition of density in Annex B of PPS3 as it is not incidental open space, landscaping or children’s play area but green space on the edge of the development.

6.27 Overall, it is considered that the difference between the Council's position that the site density is 28 dwellings per hectare and my view that the site wide density is 30 dwellings per hectare is a very minor difference.

6.28 Paragraph 123 of NPPF deals with densities of development particularly where there is an existing or anticipated shortage of housing land. It states that low density housing should be avoided, but in part c) that relates to dealing with planning applications, the policy identifies that the pursuit of density should not be at the expense of other policies in the Framework or acceptable living standards. In this regard it is clear that other policies of the Framework seek to achieve the right approach to character as well as density, such as 122c. In addition, Core Strategy Policy 26 does the same. I examine the matter through the terms of the Core Strategy below.

6.29 Core Strategy Policy CS26 makes provision for exceptions to the target density range of 40-60 dph within 800m of a tram stop where: -

- the development achieves good design;
- reflect the character of the area
- protect a sensitive area

I now consider these three provisions in turn.

Achieving Good Design

6.30 Creating the right density for a development is key to good design, and this includes reflecting the character of the area and protecting sensitive areas which I deal with later. Good design also relates to the consideration of site conditions, with the sloping topography of Site E being a key consideration.

6.31 Section L-L (CD1.6.B.1) shows the level of retaining structures required to facilitate the development. A 3m retaining wall is required along the southern boundary and an additional high retaining wall is required between plots 26 to 30.

6.32 It is crucial to understand the implications of the levels on the site as this has informed the proposed density in order to achieve good design.

6.33 Separation distances between the plots fronting the woodland edge and the primary frontages of the site has been increased from minimum standards (prescribed in the South Yorkshire Design Guide) of 21m back to back to 23m. This is to ensure that suitable private garden space is provided for each plot and mitigates the impact of the retaining structures in the garden.

6.34 In addition to this, wider frontage properties have been proposed where the topography and levels are most challenging. This is important as it delivers wider private gardens, again lessening the impact of high retaining walls. Narrower terraced or semi-detached properties would create narrow private gardens that would be 'hemmed in' and it is my view that the emphasis on wider, detached properties, particularly where the topography is most challenging is the correct approach.

6.35 Based on the above it is clear that to create the most appropriate design solution a lower overall density of development is justified.

Reflecting the Character of the Area

6.36 Core Strategy Policy CS26 also states that a lower density would be appropriate if it reflects the character of the local area. Paragraph 5.1.2 of the Design Brief identifies that family housing is likely to be the most dominant form of housing on the site due to the local demand and need and this would lead to a lowering of density.

6.37 This is reflected in the character of the surrounding area with predominantly lower density, 2 storey, detached family housing surrounding the site with a density ranging from 21 dph and 29 dph, as described within Section 2 of this document and Appendices 2-13.

6.38 As previously stated at Paragraph 5.48 – 5.50 of this proof the type and form of development that would be required to achieve a density of 40-60 dph has been described given that the other schemes recently permitted within 800m of a tram stop include 40% townhouses, 3 storey apartment blocks and even then fail to achieve 40 dph. Achieving a density of 40-60 dph would not be a minor intensification of the prevailing pattern of development in the area but a significant change in density and building height which would be out of character with the area. This view is reinforced by the visuals of the heart of the proposed development at Appendix 26 which illustrate a higher density at the heart of the scheme which equates to 34 dph (see Appendix 23). I consider anything above this would be out of context.

6.39 The assessment of the built and green environment in the local area illustrates that the proposals for Site E are entirely appropriate, reflective of the character of the local area and therefore the proposed density would meet the provisions of Policy CS26.

Protecting Sensitive Areas

6.40 The position of Site E within the wider allocation area is such that careful consideration has been given to the interface with the woodland to the north and local wildlife site to the west.

6.41 The proposed approach to the interface with the woodland to the north is to create a lower density frontage which is created by the use of wide frontage dwellings and a less formal and amorphous building line. This is illustrated by Figure 7 of Appendix 19: Building for a Healthy Life Assessment.

- 6.42 The increased back to back distances to work with the topography also has the impact of reducing built form and therefore density.
- 6.43 The drawing at Appendix 23 illustrates that the density along the northern edge of the scheme is much lower than the main body of the site, with 25 dph at the sensitive edges and 34 dph within the main body of the site, resulting in an average density of 30 dph.
- 6.44 The 3D visuals at Appendix 26 illustrate the higher density in the main body of the site, around the Medical Centre with a density of 34 dph. This includes some taller 2.5/3 storey buildings (plots 19-22 and 57-60) and terraced forms (plots 61-70) with 24% of the buildings on the site 2.5/3 storey in height. The visuals demonstrate the heart of the scheme is given a denser and more urban feel through the layout and scale of buildings. These buildings are taller than much of the surrounding area, but in keeping with Woodland Heights, the closest existing residential area to the south of Site E which includes some 3 storey development. I consider that anything taller or more dense than shown at Appendix 26 would not be appropriate for the area. The provision of taller buildings in key locations is highlighted by figure 9 in Appendix 19: Building for a Healthy Life Assessment. These denser building forms are used where there is clear urban design justification, where levels allow a closer-knit form of development, and not to increase housing numbers.



6.45 It is my view that the variation in density across Site E is entirely justified for the scheme. Design principle D1 of the Design Brief reinforces this stating that: -

“as well as using density to create character and value, the density of development across the site should be designed to promote public transport with higher density fronting Moorthorpe Way and near to the tram stop for example”

6.46 This statement suggests that, subject to topography, areas within Sites C and D fronting Moorthorpe Way and closer to the tram stop would be suitable for higher density forms but that a blanket approach to density is not appropriate.

Summary

6.47 It is my view that the evidence above demonstrates that the proposed density of the proposals is entirely justified and responds to the context of the site with lower densities around the edges and more standard residential densities in the main body of the site.

6.48 This is reinforced in the planning officers’ Committee Report which justifies the density stating the following (p48-49): -

“In this case the density is just over 30 dwellings per hectare and is therefore lower than the guidance in Policy CS26. However, in this case it needs to be acknowledged that the character of the area is one of lower density 2 storey housing. The site is also located on a prominent hillside with a green setting where high density housing is likely to appear out of character. The site is steeply sloping and even with the lower density proposed the design cannot avoid significant retaining wall features which are necessary to provide level gardens and access roads. This would be accentuated if the density were increased which would impact negatively on the design of the development. Furthermore, the need in the area is for family housing which tends to require larger gardens. Therefore, it is concluded that whilst the density is below the range set in CS26 it is justified for the reasons explained above and therefore is consistent with the policy”

Issue 3 – Responding to the Prevailing Character of the Area

6.49 Within the single reason for refusal the Council contend that: -

“the proposal does not respond sufficiently to the area's prevailing character of abundant green infrastructure and open space”

6.50 It is my view that the proposals are in full accordance with the prevailing character of the area and will demonstrate this through the analysis of the surrounding area and a review of the proposals against open space policy. In addition, I will explain in detail how the woodland edge to the north of the scheme is to be treated to achieve the aspirations of the both the developer and the Development Brief for the site.

The Prevailing Character

6.51 Section 3 of this document describes the prevailing character of the local area with supporting plans and information found at Appendices 1-13 respectively.

6.52 Paragraph 3.21 identified the prevailing characteristics of the area which are: -

- urbanising features in the immediate vicinity of the site in the form of a heavily engineered highway designed to serve a larger quantum of development;
- a visually isolated Medical Centre building designed to form part of a wider pattern of built form;
- overgrown and unmanaged areas of scrubland earmarked for development for years.
- corridors of publicly accessible green spaces predominantly in the form of woodland and watercourses such as Ochre Dike and the Westfield Plantation;
- green infrastructure forming a ‘green necklace’ to large blocks of housing development with little or no internal greenspaces breaking up the built form;
- close existing relationships between existing belts of woodland and dwellings;
- a poor interface between green space and the edges of the local neighbourhoods with dwellings ‘turning their back’ on these public spaces;
- lower density, mostly detached, family housing as the predominant form of development, below 30 dwellings per hectare;
- building heights generally limited to 2 storey in height;

- taller split-level housing only used to deal with the steep topography of the area with wider frontages used to mitigate the impact of retaining features within gardens.

6.53 It is my view that the prevailing character of the area clearly does include swathes of green space and woodland but importantly also includes large blocks of housing development encircled by connected green spaces and with very little green space permeating these estates.

6.54 As such the vision articulated by the urban design framework and illustrative masterplan on pages 31-35 of the Moorthorpe Way, Owlthorpe Planning and Design Brief replicates the prevailing character of the area with this planned final chapter of housing in the Owlthorpe area. The brief sets a vision for providing another urban block of housing with very limited internal green spaces and a strong 'green necklace' of open space around the edges, sensitively connecting the existing areas of green infrastructure with the development ensuring new residents can enjoy the benefit of these existing natural environments.

6.55 The planning layout (scheme B) has been overlaid against the urban design framework plan from the Design Brief at Appendix 34. This shows that Site E fully accords with the urban design framework, indeed the proposals are set back materially further into the site than specified in the Design Brief.

6.56 The prevailing characteristics of the built environment within the local area have been clearly demonstrated, namely a dominance of detached, two storey family housing at a relatively lower density, below 30 dph. Plot ratios are between 25-29% (footprint to overall curtilage).

6.57 The proposals for Site E fully respond to this character in terms of building types, heights and the overall pattern and grain of development. The scheme represents a slight increase in density and plot ratio (32%) compared to the surrounding area, whilst responding to the sloping topography and sensitive edges to the scheme.

6.58 It is my view that due to the contemporary and attractive appearance of the proposed new dwellings and the orientation of these dwellings towards areas, such as the woodland to the north, the site will have a much better relationship with the surrounding green infrastructure than is found within the surrounding estates. This scheme will respond to the prevailing character of the area and enhance the interface between development and green space.

Open Space Provision

6.59 Policy H16 of the Sheffield UDP sets the policy basis for the provision of open space in new developments with the appeal site meeting the threshold for on site provision. The definitions provided alongside this policy are: -

- Appropriate play facilities – 15 square metres per new home (equipped play for developments over 25 homes)
- A proportion of informal open space is defined as at least 10% of the site.

- A plan illustrating open space provision has been prepared at Appendix 18).

6.60 The proposals for Site E deliver 72 new homes and therefore generates a requirement for 1,080 square metres of equipped play space. The proposal will deliver 1,400 square metres of play space, well in excess of policy requirements.

6.61 Turning to informal open space, 10% of the total site area is open to interpretation. The total site area including the play area and surface water attenuation is 3.87ha, generating a requirement of 0.40ha of informal open space. As can be seen from plan at Appendix 18 the provision of 'other informal open space' would meet this requirement alone (0.65ha).

6.62 Excluding the surface water attenuation area from the calculation/provision the total amount of open space delivered is 0.82ha, 26% of the site (site area revised to 3.16ha to exclude the attenuation area) and taking the boundaries of Site E only (excluding the play area), the provision of informal open space is 0.55ha against a revised site area of 2.88ha which is 19% of the site, almost double the requirement.

6.63 In addition to Site E providing almost double the required amount of informal open space on site. A qualitative assessment of the provision shows that through the delivery of the play area and the surface water attenuation area the Council's vision for the open space within the wider allocation is being realised through the proposals for Site E as shown on the Proposed Park Layout (Appendix 22) prepared by Sheffield City Council. This shows the wider vision for the green space is being appropriately realised through, in the first instance, the development of Site E.

6.64 Based on the above evidence it is clear that in both quantitative and qualitative terms, the proposals for Site E provide a generous amount of open space and therefore respond to the context of the site in terms of preserving existing green assets, creating new opportunities for tree planting and connecting them with new elements such as equipped play. The Council agrees that the amount of open space provided is appropriate stating in paragraph 7.30 to 7.32 of the Statement of Common Ground: -

"The development exceeds the minimum open space requirement for new developments of 10% of the site area, as set out in Policy H16"

The location of the children's play provision is appropriate, avoids encroachment into site C and does not result in a detrimental impact on the amenity of existing residents of the Woodland Heights Estate

The appeal scheme will increase the quantum of children's play provision within the Owlthorpe Housing Area in response to the need identified at paragraph 5.4.2 of the Planning Brief and this will benefit residents of the existing Woodland Heights estate and future residents of sites C, D and E. This provision accords with Policy CS45".

Treatment of the Woodland Edge

6.65 The creation of an outward looking edge to the woodland is advocated in the Design Brief through principle G1 which states: -

“It is essential that the interfaces between the development and open space or the woodland edges are carefully designed to provide value to new residents and to enhance landscape quality”.

The Design Approach to the Woodland Edge

6.66 The proposed development creates a high-quality woodland edge with houses benefitting from a direct relationship to the trees ensuring this sylvan setting becomes an intrinsic part of the character of the development.

6.67 This is achieved through a sensitive, low density edge, transitioning from taller and more dense housing at the heart of the site through to detached, wide frontage houses which follow an informal building line along the northern boundary. The scheme shows the informal building line creates pockets of green space, for example, outside plots 7 and 23-26 which will enhance landscape quality through managed tree planting, allowing the woodland to permeate the built form. The drawing at Appendix 24 highlights the distances between the fence line to the north of the site and the built form which creates these pockets of space for additional planting with these being up to 30-40m in places. The overall relationship to trees is a matter that Mark Topping deals with.

6.68 The approach described above clearly responds to principle G2 of the Development Brief which states that “the landscape setting must feature significantly in the development of character”. In addition to the treatment of the woodland edge it is noted that these native species also permeate through to the plot landscaping within the scheme such as the heavy standard trees in front of plots 45-46 and adjacent to plot 69, reinforcing this character.

6.69 The landscape proposals between the housing and the existing woodland edge are designed to enhance and strengthen the existing woodland by creating layers of native vegetation from low level shrubs close to the proposed houses stepping up to small woodland planting and then large woodland planting close to the site margins. This grading of vegetation allows the trees and woodland to mature successfully, in a managed way, ensuring that large trees do not abut the proposed new dwellings. The landscape proposals clearly therefore contribute to principle G3 of the Development Brief in extending and enhancing the woodland to bring forward more sustainable development.

6.70 The interface with the woodland is suitable due to the orientation of the housing facing north, as such no overshadowing will be experienced by new residents, avoiding pressure for the removal of any vegetation. In addition, mitigation measures will be put in place such as guards over gutters and drains to prevent any blockages.

- 6.71 The combination of a lower density built form, and a layered planting strategy to strengthen and enhance the woodland ensures a successful interface between built form and trees is formed, creating value for new residents and a sense of place for the development as a whole.
- 6.72 The landscape proposals (CD1.15.B) create space between buildings and the woodland and facilitates the retention of the desire line path along the northern boundary which will be upgraded to a low impact path.
- 6.73 Following additional assessment and survey work, and the designation by Natural England as of 14 December 2020, it is accepted that the trees along the northern boundary of the site area Ancient Woodland. During the application consideration was given to the status of the existing trees, with the Council agreeing during the planning process that this was not Ancient Woodland and confirming the same in the Committee report and the Statement of Common Ground. Despite this fact throughout the design process Avant have always sought to respect an appropriate stand off from the woodland as mentioned in the Design Brief, and following the receipt of further survey data have adjusted the proposed layout to ensure this remains the case with Scheme B.
- 6.74 The design objective for the scheme was always to create a sensitive edge that: -
- celebrated the visual relationship with the woodland;
 - created space for new planting to strengthen, expand and enhance the woodland;
 - animated the interface between the built form and green space with outward looking frontages of new dwellings unlike other estates in the local area; and
 - ensure the woodland would be protected with no impact on the root protection areas of the trees in the Ancient Woodland (details of which will be provided in evidence given by my colleague Mr Topping).
- 6.75 The woodland edge is an important component of the design strategy for Site E, but it is not the only one. Within the context of ensuring the protection of the woodland, and an appropriate standoff from all new houses and their driveways the proposed development balances various design priorities to create a comprehensive scheme. These priorities are: -
- the creation an attractive woodland edge;
 - forming an active frontage to the existing public right of way along the eastern boundary and the play area to the south east;
 - creation of a well enclosed primary route through the scheme;
 - integration with the existing highway network and medical centre; and
 - safeguarding a route through to the potential north west connection across to Moorthorpe Way- a Council requirement.

- 6.76 Appendix 25 illustrates the composition of the layout which is based on a perimeter block structure (as advocated as good practice in the South Yorkshire Residential Design Guide page 110) which balances the above priorities to create a high-quality scheme.
- 6.77 The Illustrative Masterplan within the Design Brief indicates the necessary link road route between two fixed points, the turning head adjacent to the medical centre, from which point vehicular access is taken, and the future link to the north east, with this running diagonally across the site to the north east corner.
- 6.78 These fixed highway points determine the location of the primary street through the site, with good urban design always advocating frontage development to enclose both sides of a primary street at the heart of a scheme. This sets another fixed point to extend a perimeter block structure northward towards the woodland edge with this generally measuring 40m, factoring in 21m rear to rear elevation separation distance as advocated in the South Yorkshire Residential Design Guide. This sets the position of an outward looking frontage to the woodland in this location.
- 6.79 Due to the topography of the site the depth of the perimeter blocks is increased by several metres beyond minimum standards to ensure that private garden space is not compromised or overshadowed by the significant retaining walls within gardens that are an inevitable consequence of addressing site topography.
- 6.80 Another priority is to create an active frontage to the public right of way along the eastern boundary, once this is formed the perimeter block extends out approximately 40m, creating another frontage orientated towards the woodland edge.
- 6.81 Based on the above description and the plan at Appendix 25 it is clear that the relationship between the woodland edge and the exact position of the outward looking houses is complex. The frontage to the woodland is positioned where it is as part of a design process that balances the urban design priorities across Site E, ensuring that other priorities are positively addressed and that a suitable balance is struck. This balance ensures a good design, with all houses outside the woodland stand off and only some minor incursions to deal with highways, against the backdrop of challenging topography/levels but with no impact upon the root protection areas.
- 6.82 The alternative to this would be to not provide a frontage to the woodland edge and instead 'back on', leaving this row of development along the woodland out and repeating the mistakes evidenced locally (see Appendix 8). This approach would be contrary to national and local design policy and the design principles within the Design Brief as the woodland edge would lack natural surveillance and the stewardship that new houses would bring. The appearance of an array of rear boundaries of properties would also create a much poorer aesthetic than the attractive front elevations of new houses and the scheme would lose its relationship with the woodland.

6.83 My colleague Mr Topping demonstrates that all trees in the older area of woodland will be protected. The root protection areas will remain unaffected by the proposals. This is explained in detail by Mr Topping. The scheme creates large areas for additional, well managed, woodland planting which preserve and enhance the woodland and create a sylvan setting valued by new residents.

6.84 To demonstrate the interface between the houses and the woodland edge a series of illustrative 3D views have been prepared at Appendix 27. It is my opinion that these views illustrate the high-quality new woodland edge to be created which will not only enhance landscape quality but add value to new residents living amongst areas of new, and carefully protected, existing woodland.

External Works

6.85 Given the topography of the site, external works have been carefully designed to provide the most sensitive solution for the wider site and particularly the woodland edge which forms the low point at which the levels will tie into.

6.86 The approach to the levels is to get down to grade as soon as possible and to limit the amount of regrading. There is also the need to minimise the use of retaining structures, particularly any that would create significant level changes directly in front of new houses along the woodland edge which would be unappealing and expose hard engineered structures along an otherwise green and natural edge.

6.87 The proposed external works are considered to be the most sensitive option, being the complementary engineering solution to the aspiration to create a soft and natural edge through a gradual transition of levels without the need for consistent large, hard structures. This option includes some retaining walls along the primary route in the north west corner (in front of plots 42-44) but these are generally low, and given the dense planting proposals for the area when landscaped these structures will hardly be noticeable. Whilst the regrading and replanting of some areas close to the woodland will impact on some existing and relatively poor/young trees the overall long term benefit and ecological enhancement in this area are considered to outweigh the harm as explained by Mr Baker and Mr Topping. This is particularly true when balanced against the topographical and engineering challenges the site faces rather than considering arboriculture and ecology in isolation.

6.88 Additional site sections have been provided (CD1.6.B and CD1.6.B.1) which illustrate the works to be undertaken along the northern edge to understand the changes in levels and the implications of the batter slopes and regrading works.

6.89 The precise treatment of the woodland edge in engineering and arboricultural terms is provided in the evidence of my colleague Mark Topping and demonstrates no harm to the Ancient Woodland.

Treatment of the Western Boundary

- 6.90 The proposed development backs onto the western boundary which forms the edge of the Owlthorpe Local Wildlife Site. This boundary is delineated by a field hedgerow which is subsumed with newer planting and now has a number of young trees around it which are a mix of category B and category C trees. As per the Tree Protection Plan (CD1.10.B.1) all category B trees will be retained and most category C trees. The hedgerow is retained as part of this grouping.
- 6.91 A minor retaining structure of 450mm timber sleepers is proposed on the boundary of plot 34, and a 1.8m timber fence will be added to this and then continued along the boundary. The fence will serve to protect the Local Wildlife Site from any disturbance from abutting residential properties. Over time the existing trees will also mature and strengthen this boundary.

Summary

- 6.92 It is my view that the prevailing character of the local area is in part defined by the green spaces in the local area but the important distinction is the close relationship of these greenspaces to the adjacent blocks of relatively low density housing. The pattern of development in this locality is large cells of housing interspersed with corridors of woodland and greenspace, often with very little separation and harder edges that turn away rather than integrating with the green edges.
- 6.93 Whilst the proximity to the woodland is similar to other development in the area, the interface with the woodland is much improved. The proposals create a sensitive, outward looking and high-quality woodland edge which will be valued by future residents, creating stewardship over the public realm and a sense of place. The woodland is expanded through new planting in pockets of open space created by a looser form of development at the edge which will enhance the landscape quality and permeate the built form.
- 6.94 Based on the above it is maintained that the scheme complies with the Urban Design Framework and Illustrative Masterplan and Principle G1 of the Development Brief.
- 6.95 In addition, it has been demonstrated that Moorthorpe Way, an existing and over engineered highway, and a visually isolated Medical Centre have an urbanising effect on the landscape and need integration with new, sensitively designed built form. These are parts of the landscape that cannot simply be ignored.
- 6.96 It has been demonstrated that the design proposals reflect the prevailing characteristics of the built environment in the area in terms of building form and scale and that the treatment of the woodland edge creates a high quality, aesthetically pleasing edge, consistent with urban design best practice and a far better relationship to the surrounding landscape than any other development in the locality.

6.97 Overall, the open space provision on site, the majority of which is on the northern edge, is well in excess of policy requirements, creating the opportunity to extend the woodland, and as such it is maintained that balance between green space and built form is correct and the scheme responds to the prevailing characteristics of the area.

Issue 4 – Affordable Housing

6.98 The proposals for Site E deliver a total amount of affordable housing in excess of policy requirements and in three locations across the site as highlighted by the red asterisks on the planning layout (CD1.3.B)

6.99 The Council dispute the provision of affordable housing on the basis that it is distinguishable from the market housing in terms of design, scale, siting, form and parking. The policy basis for this is examined by Mr Bolton, but it is my view that this is not the case and these points will be addressed in turn below.

Design

6.100 The external appearance and materials used by Avant for both affordable and market housing is identical.

6.101 Streetscenes have been prepared for plots 1,16-18 / 38-42 and 66-72 of the proposed development (Appendix 28) which includes market and affordable housing. This reinforces the fact that although size of the houses will inevitably vary, the affordable houses are not differentiated from the market houses in terms of design or quality.

Scale

6.102 The scale of the affordable houses are reflective of the height and proportion of the similar sized market dwellings and sized to meet the need they are required to meet.

Parking

6.103 A courtyard area to the south of the medical centre includes both affordable housing and smaller market housing. This courtyard is proposed for design reasons responding to the irregular shape of the site created by the positioning of the medical centre. A central, overlooked area for car parking allows for an active frontage to be created along Moorthorpe Way, creating natural surveillance over the play area.

6.104 In addition, affordable housing is proposed at plots 16-17 where it is front parked and plots 38-40 where the parking is to the side of the property. These parking arrangements vary and mirror the same provision for equivalent market housing across the site.

6.105 Based on the above there is no difference in parking arrangements between market and affordable housing on the proposed scheme in each area of it.

Siting

6.106 The affordable housing is proposed to be delivered in three different locations as highlighted by the red asterisks on the planning layout (CD1.3.B) to the north of the Medical Centre (plots 16-17), in the south west corner of the site (plots 38-40) in the south east courtyard adjacent to the Medical Centre (plots 59-68). As such it is maintained that it is suitably distributed across the site.

6.107 The affordable housing to be provided within the courtyard is considered to be a beneficial position within the site as it provides direct access to the hard surfaced public footpath which leads to the tram/bus stops and other facilities in the local area and they are located adjacent to the children's play area as well as the medical centre.

Form

6.108 The affordable houses are proposed to be delivered as semi-detached and terraced units. Market housing of a similar size are delivered as semi-detached units. This is a minor difference and given the similarities in design, parking solutions and scale in isolation this will not make them distinguishable from market houses.

6.109 It is also noted that the provisions of Policy GAH5 Design of Affordable Housing as described at Paragraph 6.99 does not refer to building form as a feature.

6.110 Policy GAH5 Design of Affordable Housing of the CIL and Planning Obligations SPD states that: -

"Affordable Housing should not be able to be differentiated by design, quality, specification, location within the site, timing of the development or by significant difference in access to services and amenities".

6.111 The proposals for Site E clearly demonstrate compliance with the provision of this policy with the design, quality and location within the site considered to be key strengths of the proposals. The delivery of the site on a phased basis will also ensure that each area has an even distribution of affordable housing across the wider site.

6.112 The streetscenes at Appendix 28 illustrate the proposed affordable housing alongside their market counterparts. This clearly reinforces Avant's commitment to the delivery of tenure blind affordable housing in good locations.

6.113 For a full assessment of the all the policy references in the CIL and Planning Obligations SPD please refer to Mr Roland Bolton's Proof of Evidence.

7 Conclusion

- 7.1 The proposal represents well designed and high-quality residential development for Site E, both of which respond to a true and balanced understanding of the prevailing character of the local area and the site conditions.
- 7.2 The scheme creates a new residential development with a contemporary appearance that is a significant improvement on any of the housing estates in the surrounding area, including recent new builds. The proposals have a legible heart through the use of taller built form and lower density edges. As a result of the treatment of the woodland edge, and the space created for new tree planting, the woodland becomes an intrinsic part of the character of the scheme, permeating the built form.
- 7.3 It has been demonstrated that the proposal for Site E is based on a strong understanding of the context and character of the local area. These characteristics include significant urbanising features within the immediate vicinity of the site which need integrating, low density, predominantly detached family housing in the surrounding area, a close but often poor relationship between housing and existing trees and woodland, sloping topography and the need for retaining structures which require a space around buildings.
- 7.4 Based on the above I consider the proposal to be consistent with both national and local design policy, in particular paragraphs 124 and 127 of the NPPF, Sheffield UDP Policies H14 and H15, Core Strategy Policy CS74, the Moorthorpe Way, Owlthorpe Planning and Design Brief and the South Yorkshire Residential Design Guide. Good urban design principles have been applied as advocated within the various policies identified in this proof but rooted in a strong understanding of the site context with the design successfully balancing the various priorities and technical requirements for the site.
- 7.5 The Development Brief is the mechanism for ensuring that comprehensive development is achieved. It has been demonstrated that the scheme accords with the development brief both in terms of compliance with the Urban Design Framework and Illustrative Masterplan and also the response to the principles within the brief.
- 7.6 The proposal for Site E protects the sensitive edges of the site whilst ensuring they form part of the character of the development. The edges of the site are outward facing and will integrate easily with future phases and the proposals clearly demonstrate that the wider infrastructure for the site such as equipped play is being delivered comprehensively and in advance of all the housing. As landowner, Sheffield City Council approved the proposals for Site E which is a clear indication that they do not consider the proposals in any way prejudicial to the comprehensive development of the wider site, which they own.
- 7.7 The density of the proposed development is appropriate for the site and as such accords with both national and local policy in the form of paragraph 122 and 123 of the NPPF, Core Strategy Policy CS26, the Moorthorpe Way, Owlthorpe Planning and Design Brief and South Yorkshire Residential Design Guide.

- 7.8 The density is appropriate in that it achieves good design which responds to the topography providing more space around buildings, protecting amenity and providing suitable private garden space. The density also reflects the character of the surroundings as a family housing area in an edge of settlement location and protects a sensitive area by reducing the density at the site margins close to the woodland.
- 7.9 The proposal responds positively to the prevailing character of the area by creating a significantly better, outward looking relationship with local green infrastructure in the form of the woodland to the north. The proposals extend the woodland into the scheme in a careful and managed way which will allow it to mature and become an intrinsic part of the character of the area in accordance with principles G1, G2 and G3 of the Moorthorpe Way, Owlthorpe Planning and Design Brief
- 7.10 The scheme significantly exceeds the amount of open space prescribed by local policy, ensuring that space is created to extend and enhance the woodland area and that new, high quality elements of green infrastructure are provided in the form of a much-needed equipped play area as well as a sustainable urban drainage strategy.
- 7.11 The scheme also integrates the urbanising features of the local area, with the Medical Centre reading as part of a more comprehensive whole with the existing highway and footway network integrated into the proposals.
- 7.12 The affordable housing provision meets the requirements of Policy GAH5 of the CIL and Planning Obligations SPD. The housing is spread across three locations on the site. The appearance of the dwellings is the same as the similar sized market housing proposed and the parking arrangements for market and affordable houses are the same. Many of the affordable houses benefit from close proximity to the play area, medical centre and public right of way which connects the site to the public network and other local facilities.
- 7.13 Overall, it is my view that the proposal will deliver a well-designed and high-quality development with a sense of place that responds to the landscape setting.