

LAUD COMMENTS

TO: Hannah Gunner REF: MC/20/1478

CC: Landscape / Architecture / Urban Design

FROM: Duncan Berntsen/Stuart Foley

EXT: DATE: 12th October 2020

SUBJECT: Land at Upnor Rd, Upper Upnor

Dear Hannah

COMBINED LANDSCAPE, URBAN DESIGN & ARCHITECTURE COMMENTS

Current Understanding of the Project

Erection of 75No. residential dwellings including 19x affordable housing with associated car parking and infrastructure; new landscaping and public open spaces including new public rights of way and bus stop; sustainable urban drainage system and associated earthworks and a new vehicular access from Upnor Road.

GENERALLY

The scheme presented within this application offers 75 dwellings arranged within a site that is part of the Hogmarsh Valley Area of Local Landscape Importance (ALLI). The proposed site is in an urban-rural landscape (in that it is on the edge of the settlement, but the character of the site itself is essentially rural) and these transitional landscapes are the focus of Medway's Landscape Character Assessment 2011 (LCA). The site sits within the Principle Landscape Area of Hoo Peninsula and sub area 18. Hogmarsh Valley. The ALLI and LCA recognises the quality of landscape in which the site sits and presents policy and evidence base for design officers and developers to use when considering the appropriateness and sensitivity of new development proposals within the urban-rural fringe.

The challenge for urban-rural sites is to find ways of identifying the important characteristics of the landscape that assist the process of accommodating change, where this is both desirable and practicable, whilst maintaining the links with the past and the natural environment. There is a need to retain pattern and diversity in the landscape to ensure that character and local distinctiveness are maintained. In addition, we need to ensure that landscapes are visually satisfying and give enjoyment to those who visit them and those who live and work in them.

The Hogmarsh Valley is a broad and open, with gently rolling arable farmland and on its eastern flanks this is set below distinctive elevated woodland backdrops of Chattenden, Beacon Hill and

Tower Hill. All three are designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and the lower arable land rises to meet these elevated woodland features and combine to establish the Hogmarsh Valleys eastern landscape character and distinctiveness. The distinctive contrast of the low hills against the rising Hogmarsh Valley is an apparent feature in the open views at two locations in its southern extent. Below Castle Street under the woodland ridge of Tower Hill and below Upchat Road under Beacon Hill. There are few pedigree landscapes in Medway and the protection of distinctive and prominent landscape features that form characteristic elements of Medway landscape is highlighted given this understanding.

The Castle Street section of Hogmarsh Valley landscape is the better stocked area of the two, as some historic framework remains, including the triangular green near Frog Island Pond, footpaths linking the countryside and narrow country lanes, suitably tranquil in this location to be regularly used locally as pedestrian backwaters connecting Frindsbury, Wainscott and Upnor. A large pocket of rising, open arable fields is confined by the elevated wooded backdrop of Tower Hill (with its narrow horizontal line of dwellings) and woodland at Military Plantation along Upnor Road. It is this pocket of open Hogmarsh Valley landscape, highlighted by its woodland frame in views toward it, that is currently being proposed for development.

Development within an ALLI should be sited, designed, and landscaped to minimise harm to the areas landscape character and function. However, development proposals for this application remove most of the open Hogmarsh Valley character that currently washes over the entire site, permanently reinforcing the existing housing on Castle Street with a new suburban housing development.

While Castle Street is not the best integrated edge, it is by no means the worst. The proposed development has been cast by the applicants as an improvement of the existing edge, however significantly increasing the area of development will not result in an improved situation.

The addition of residential development to the open landscape weakens the currently attractive setting for a major gateway within the borough – the Medway Towns Northern Relief Road, devaluing a currently rural image and eroding the attractive rural backdrop that currently forms a green buffer separating Frindsbury, Wainscot and Upper Upnor.

Distinctive views across the river towards Chatham Historic Dockyard and covered slips are identified in Medways Building Height Policy Part 2 Appendix A Strategic Views and Landmarks. The proposed development enters views B1 View from A228 footbridge near Wainscott School and B2 View from A228 Frindsbury Hill (P.22). Visual impact of the development in both views has not been considered in the application package and though directed to by both the LCA and Medway officers in early PreApp discussions these visual impacts remain unaccounted for.

Higher intensity use of Upnor Road introduces a generic highway element that further divides the network of interconnected ALLIs at Chattenden Ridge, Deangate Ridge and Cockham Farm Ridge. Severing ecological corridors and pedestrian connectivity. Increasing suburbanisation of road corridors and settlement edges.

From the incline on Upnor Road excellent rural views to Manor Farm and Frindsbury Church spire will be lost as the proposed development will screen this view.

A proposed bus stop offers potential social benefit; however, this lower density urban area is likely to attract a small passenger demand and per passenger energy consumption cannot be predetermined

as low. The bus stop location on Upnor Road also introduces a misleading feature that will attract pedestrians to use the convenient historic desire lines between Wainscot Frindsbury and Upper Upnor. The proposed indirect pedestrian route through the development will appear inconvenient by comparison to the directness of Upnor Road and is unlikely to perform its intended function of leading all walkers away from road safety issues newly created on Upnor Road by the proposed development.

It is important that all new development proposals within the countryside are assessed in the context of their sensitivity to landscape context, avoidance of material harm to landscape character and provide evidence that proactive steps are being taken to strengthen and enhance landscape character and distinctiveness. New development, where it is allowed should be appropriately and sensitively sited and carefully designed and, in our view, this has not been adequately carried out.

The fingers of open space provided in the site layout are not a credible substitute for the openness that the sloping fields currently contribute to the Hogmarsh Valley landscape and this understanding was confirmed by design officers during PreApp discussions.

The natural rural setting separating the Upnors would be lost by means of building a housing estate on this pocket of open Hogmarsh Valley landscape. The current rural setting surrounding Upper Upnor would be replaced on its southern and eastern flanks by a suburban setting. The new development would merge with the existing development on Castle Street to increase the presence of residential development in the views towards the Upnors from the south and west.

The proposals would contribute to the threat of coalescence between Upper Upnor and the urban areas of Frindsbury and Wainscot by establishing development that crosses to the east slopes of the Hogmarsh.

Technical Addendum

This promotes the unfortunate view that the developments design 'celebrates the locality and enhances the environmental quality of the Hogmarsh Valley'. These claims are unsupported and overstated in our view.

The table in section 7 sets out to show how the design proposals accord with or deliver a selection of policy objectives of the ALLI and follow design guidance of the LCA. This is not apparent as is stated, but unmistakably questionable and conclusive landscape reasons for the development of 75 houses on this site are sparse. Each line is debatable and counter arguments can be made for assertions that generally promote the development on a site that it has not been adequately proven should be built on at all.

Unfortunately, this would be an intrusive development in landscape terms, that could not adequately protect the distinctive landscape character of the Hogmarsh Valleys east slopes but in fact would permanently remove it almost completely and replace it with 75 houses. The proposals would also undermine the wider role bestowed on the Hogmarsh Valley to maintain a green buffer, a distinctive Medway gateway and a green backdrop to Medway Towns. Given this understanding Medway Landscape Officers would not be sympathetic to this application.

BUILDINGS & ARCHITECTURE

Putting aside the challenges of this projects policy alignment and wider landscape relationships, the architecture is built upon the teams understanding of rural fringe architecture, which often requires a blended language that produces buildings of today which do not lose sight of the past, thus binding into the context as snugly as possible. This is particularly relevant for more sensitive contexts such as Upnor Road, something that renders the ability to approach such a challenging site the preserve of very few development teams.

The architecture has embraced this challenge through several iterations and is stronger for it. We support the development team to continue to pursue contextually bound unique architectural expression for each site across Medway and this scheme's architecture is far less generic than might otherwise be proposed by lesser development teams; as is also the case for the smaller urban / landscape treatments to spaces between buildings inside the development perimeter. As a result we do not feel it is necessary to overly criticize the architecture of this scheme, recognising that there is much to celebrate in good internal house planning and the careful tuning / crafting of an architectural language to suit the ambition of the project within its rural setting.

Not unexpectedly dwellings have been well planned, elevations match the ambition outlined within the views provided and the material pallet while not fully confirmed is well described in outline. It is worth noting that far more resolution appears to be available for the architecture than landscape architecture aspects, even though the impacts mitigated by landscape architecture are critical to the success of a scheme in this location.

We can however support the architecture with the following which are caveats we have discussed via past projects with the development team:

- All window frames and sills should all be of timber or timber composites and not UPVC
- All weather boarding should be of timber and not cementitious boards
- All fascia's, soffits, porches and brackets at ground floor level should be in timber
- Fascias and soffits above ground level can be of materials other than timber.
- All doors, door frames and sills should be of timber

Notwithstanding the above general comments, if the application were to be considered for approval it would be important to ensure architectural conditions are addressed well and that the material / component pallet is progressively confirmed through further mood boards, material samples and component assemblies on site to ensure continuing quality and appropriateness. Putting aside the wider challenges of this site the good working relationship with Esquire and the wider development team gives us confidence that further detail could be addressed through condition, rendering the architectural information adequate for the current stage.

Detailed information would of course need to be provided in due course and we have reiterated our standard checklist to help guide architectural aspects of the planning package below for reference. It is usual for us to discuss the level of information from the checklist that can be left to conditions on a case by case basis and many design teams wish to clear as many conditions at approval stage to assist later timeframes and processes. We do not see this being a difficult issue in this case, but it might be well to confirm the level of information for this stage and what is to be conditioned:

- We consistently require detailed drawings from developers for all projects at 1:5, 1:10 and 1:20 which for consistency and public probity is a standard we adhere to. Typical details required are - Ridge, eaves, verge, dormers, entrance recess soffits, solar panels & brackets, balcony structures, balustrades, handrails, parapets & capping's, balcony recesses, window and door cills – jambs – heads , ground connections, wall plane changes, junctions at material changes, visible flashings, roof vents, electricity cupboards, waste enclosures, boiler and other flu placements etc.
- These are likely best demonstrated for this project as continuous annotated wall / roof sections at 1:20 (1:10 if necessary) and related to annotated part elevations of the same scale for the varying house types coordinated with material / component samples. BIM images from models might likewise be used for this if available. It will likewise be important to demonstrate the finished floor levels of the houses and how they relate to corresponding land levels across the site.
- It is important such information is provided as a discreet package in a form that can be easily understood. Simple lodging of uncoordinated detailed & shop drawings for construction will not be adequate. Through this package the detailed design must be able to be adequately assessed in good time prior to construction.

Wider landscape relationships and hence appropriateness of this scheme, its impacts, volume, mitigation measures and built form within the Hogmarsh Valley landscape remain to be resolved as a broader issue.

Putting this aside however, urban design aspects of the scheme within the drawn site reflect the challenges and practicalities of residential development today. In the end this is a scheme for a large residential enclave but one where the internal impact of infrastructure (roads, footpaths, surfaces and small-scale landscape edge relationships) is deliberately not over engineered. When combined with the clustering morphology used, this assists smaller scale somewhat rustic internal place making to create an experience within that could correspond with the rural edge nature of the site. Such design principles rendered at smaller scales for the internal aspects of the scheme, appear to potentially offer differentiated place making qualities, though detail confirming these aspects is not present at more readable scales and without this material place making proposals are only inferred.

The following are specific aspects we would highlight in this regard:

LANDSCAPE

In contrast to the understanding of rural fringe displayed by the architectural proposals the landscape architecture proposals are less developed and details of the proposed language for the site is unclear, apart from a planting strategy.

Hard Landscape Treatments (Footways, Highways and Kerbs)

No hard works products or details are included in the package and will be required.

Soft Landscape Works

A landscape strategy is included in the package. Further soft works details including a planting plan will be required.

Lighting

A lighting strategy is not included in the package and will be required.

Play

A play strategy is not included in the package. A detailed strategy including products and layout will be required.

Street Furniture

Street furniture products, locations and installation details are not included in the package and will be required. A wayfinding strategy covering proposed signage and location will be required for the proposed footpath network.

Landscape Management

A landscape management plan is not included in the package and would be required.

Detailed information would of course need to be provided if the application were to be considered for approval and we have reiterated our standard checklist to help guide landscape aspects of the planning package below for reference.

The planning package should (with no priority) address the following:

- 1) Explain and illustrate the proposed landscape and urban design approaches (narrative, contextual, spatial & material) of the site and its hinterland, including key references, drivers & constraints, arrival points, movement connections and vistas. Clarify the key resources used and describe aims the proposal will be working towards.
- 2) Explain and illustrate proposed open spaces & green corridors around the site, e.g. central area, eastern, southern, western boundaries - north and south, including village green / community orchard.
- 3) Additional to street elevations key views into the site, from the site, streetscapes and open spaces will be important. In all views planting should be illustrated at scale in an accurate mature type form, demonstrated together with other urban & architectural elements. Materials should be mapped at scale within images and shadows conveyed within views if they are of significance for the project. In this case we would suggest a minimum of 1No. 3D view per street, demonstrating their character, scale, differentiation from others and their individual qualities. 2No. internal views of the central space, 1No. view of any LEAP or other play space and 4No. views from the external perimeter illustrating it from all approaches.
- 4) Show recreation and play elements, layout, qualities and equipment.
- 5) Show walking / cycle paths and possible SANGS routes.

- 6) Indicate future connections into existing footpath / cycle / greenway network.
- 7) Identify separate character areas within site showing key landscape, urban and architectural elements and relationships that make up that character and how it binds the contextual narrative of the site to the new development and its new narrative.
- 8) Illustrate road hierarchy and various landscape treatments e.g. site entrance, main avenue, distributor, residential streets, cul-de-sacs and lighting design across the whole site, demonstrated through a minimum of 3No. night time views, from three of the positions selected for day views.
- 9) Show residential hierarchy, affordable units and associated landscape elements e.g. mews, terrace, semis, detached including levels, step treatments, fronts & backs, front doors and pedestrian access.
- 10) Show hard & soft landscape elements for parking arrangements e.g. courtyard & frontage and the lighting design.
- 11) Surface materials hierarchy – palette and principles. Use product names and not generic treatment terms e.g. not just concrete pavers & asphalt.
- 12) Show how SUDS is integrated into the landscape design. Indicate depths of drainage features. e.g. AOD levels or contours for base and sides of ditches, swales and ponds.
- 13) Street furniture – palette and principles. Use product names and not generic treatment terms (Unless bespoke items, when descriptions, images and drawing should be used) e.g. not just wooden seating, bollards and bins.
- 14) External lighting– palette and principles. Use product names for lamps, lampposts, bollards etc. and include accessories to cowls if required if used. Generic treatment terms will not be sufficient e.g. not just 4m cast iron lamppost, illuminated bollards and paving lighting.
- 15) Wildlife corridors and patches.
- 16) Planting design - including specified tree sizes for key locations.
- 17) Boundary treatment – internal boundary treatment e.g. between private gardens and public realm within the site.
- 18) Landscape Management plan and phased adoption plan if this is being contemplated.

Note

Consider the potential cumulative effects of this development proposal and its high level of landscape sensitivity on the similar area of open field pattern with wooded back drop overlooking Hogmarsh Valley, just north of the development site near St Philip and St James Church. The locally distinctive contrast of the low hills against the Hogmarsh is an apparent feature in the open view here also and the application proposals under analysis here, if accepted will open the potential for development on this area of land.

End