

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

Date of meeting:	23/06/2020
Site:	Land South of Heather Close West Ashling West Sussex
Proposal:	Former paddock site to be developed with 17 new build houses (mix of 1, 2 and 3 beds) with associated parking and amenity space
Planning reference:	SDNP/20/01855/FUL
Panel members sitting:	Mark Penfold (MP) (Chair) Richard Eastman (RE) Robyn Butcher (RB)
SDNPA officers in attendance:	Ben Terry (Design Officer) Rafael Grosso-Macpherson (Case Officer) Tania Hunt (Support Services Officer) Ruth Childs (Landscape Officer)
SDNPA Planning Committee in attendance:	None
Item presented by:	Michael Saunders (MS) (PDP Architecture)
Declarations of interest:	None

The South Downs National Park Design Review Panel is an independent assessment of development proposals by a panel of multidisciplinary professionals and experts, who aim to inform and improve design quality in new development. It is not intended to replace advice from the planning authority or statutory consultees and advisory bodies, or be a substitute for local authority design and landscape skills or community engagement

The Panel's response to your scheme will be placed on the Planning Authority's website where it can be viewed by the public

The SDNPA operate a transparent service, whereby pre-application and application details, although not actively publicised will be placed on the online planning register. This is unless the applicant gives reasons why the enquiry is commercially sensitive.

Case Officer Concerns:

The site has progressed after the Pre-App suggestion but there are some areas for improvement. I feel that today it would be good to give the applicants a steer on what to do next and how to review the application in terms of design.

- 1) **Highways** – It is not possible for the road to be adopted by the Highways Authority (HA) as the approach to the site is from Portal Close is accessed via a private road. This was raised in the consultation response from the HA. This needs to be clarified with the applicants as this is not the case in their presentation. If the site is not adopted then it could be possible to create spaces that prioritise pedestrians.
- 2) **Outbuildings** – Could be rationalised and used to frame spaces?
- 3) **Boundaries** - There is a lot of closed border fencing facing outwards to the open countryside and to areas that are semi-public spaces, like the parking areas. From a planning officer perspective, I would be happy with this between properties, but not where is it visible to the public, or when it creates the edge of the settlement.
- 4) **Surface water** – The applicant is proposing a drainage strategy that the Drainage Officer is happy with but this is not providing multiple benefits as per the Eco-System Services Policy that we are trying to implement here. How is this going to be addressed?

Panel Questions:

MP – The entrance into the site seems to use a standard road layout, yet I understand the road beyond is not adopted and therefore this road does not need to be adopted?

This gives the opportunity to have a courtyard space, rather than a road. This would give pedestrian priority over cars, creating more of a public realm rather than a highways realm. I think if you could incorporate that space and get rid of the predominance of the car on the road, you could lose all the highways led references. The entrance dwelling to the site is dominated by the curve of the road, with only a small space to the front, because it is then against the road. Could this be altered to a courtyard type space as the road will not be adopted?

MS - There is potential to downgrade the road from a highway standard. If we go as far as to create a courtyard space, or a rural, less adoptable type design, I will have to check with the client. We need to be mindful of refuse lorries getting into the site, but we could check with the Landscape Architects on this point.

MP – How does the landscape led design apply to the thinking in this development and what has been influence by the landscape led approach?

MS - We have established green infrastructure on the east and west boundaries, which have been a key factor on how we came to the layout. The east boundary forms part of the entrance space and allows access to the dwellings on the south side of the site, using the path that runs alongside, opening this area out and making this area more purposeful landscape, rather than an overgrown buffer. At the other end, the buildings are set back from the boundary allowing this area to be in the public realm. A hedgerow has been introduced on the southern boundary to enclose and form the boundary of the site. These three elements link in a U-shape, which creates a defined boundary that the buildings are set back from; they either overlook or are set away this space.

RB – In relation to the policy SD91 – Housing Allocation Policy, it sets out that the allocation should not allow opportunities in the future for vehicular access to the adjacent fields. Looking at

the layout I wonder how this works with the field to the west, as it looks here that there is that opportunity to create access here in the future. How is this going to be addressed so that this is not possible going forward?

MS - We have put a tree at that end, which will become a focal point and there will be substantial landscaping in that area. It was something that we were aware of during the planning stages and that we are required to create a buffer so that the road cannot continue. Elsewhere on the site this is more achievable as there are more landscaped areas. This area is smaller but by putting in substantial landscaping plus the tree, which will become a focal point, this will take away the option of access to the field on the west side of the scheme.

RB - How does the scheme contribute to the Eco-System services – particularly with water management and making a positive contribution to the landscape design? Rather than being a hidden away permeable paving, is there an opportunity for something that has multiple benefits, such as rain gardens, swales, or something that creates a more positive contribution?

MS - We have had a drainage design undertaken in conjunction with the landscape architect. I thought that there was an opportunity for swales, but I will need to double check this. The original intention was to have a swale area in the central space, I need to check this and come back to you, as this is something that might have got lost in the dialog with the landscape architect. We talked about soakaways, which have been put in, but there is an opportunity to incorporate swales.

RB – There is an access route running around the outside of the site, down the eastern boundary and along the south, yet it seems to stop at the north-west corner and there is a dead end approaching that corner? I just wondered if there is an opportunity to create a circular route around the whole site. I feel this would help with the back boundary, which seems a bit confused. On some of the proposals it suggests closed border fencing and on the landscape plan it suggest post and rail with netting?

MS - The issue that we have with this is the security side of things. If that is an open route almost anyone could walk through. It's something we could look at to see if it works being completely opened up. It was just the security issue that was the concern. Due to the remoteness of the site, it may be worth opening it up and then if there are any issues, that can be addressed further down the line. It needs some thinking as to how it would work, but we are happy to explore this.

RE – You've done some research on existing properties in West Ashling. What other part of west Ashling have you looked at for positive inspiration?

MS - We have taken the key aspects of West Ashling that we felt we could reuse in a positive way, for example, linking the buildings and narrow routes through. We wanted to highlight these key elements, rather than throwing the 'kitchen sink' at it.

RE – Outbuildings play an important role in West Ashling, they link buildings together and help create boundaries between properties and plots. They tend to be a garage scale, or much, much smaller. Are these outbuildings flexible, or useful enough? Could there be some mid-size buildings that could be used as workshop, or studio space for home working? What are the small outbuildings, and can they be made larger? Is there more that we can do here?

MS – Initially, we put garaging in as this tends to be what people want, and it is what the developer wanted to see. However, in this case, the developer did not want lots of outbuildings. I fought hard to keep the ones that we have and to keep the linking buildings to the entrance. They are the same size as what you would traditionally see. However,

there is nothing to stop them being different sizes other than the cost. The key thing is their siting and what contribute to in the wider context. The client is talking with the housing association, who would not want the outbuildings. I think it is important that we keep the 4 key outbuildings that positively contribute to the layout and the spaces this creates. I can discuss the issue with the client and the driving factor of importance for having the option for home working space.

RE – The development is predominantly brick yet in an earlier slide in the presentation it shows timber, render and flint. What was the rationale on settling on just the one material as there may be a need for different material to create a hierarchy of buildings and define spaces?

MS - We have explored this. We are meeting with the Parish Council tomorrow and one of the items for discussion is materials. Initially, we looked at a secondary material to break things up, to create a hierarchy of built form, but we are also striving to ensure its overall appearance is less contrived. Heather Close could be viewed as out of keeping with West Ashling, yet it should not be overlooked as it's an interpretation of 1960's design. We are building 17 houses in one go, let's be bold and do this all as a similar style of architecture. We did look at the recess panels being flint and I'm not adverse to this, but I didn't want it to look like a modern village of West Ashling, I think it should stand in its own right, as with Heather Close. If there is a strong feeling about materials then we can address this, but for the moment we have gone with the bolder, 'less is more' option.

MP – Regarding materials – I agree, what you don't want to do is create a poor pastiche, but sometimes you want to put that little pulse of something that leads the eye, which puts a little bit of variety into the scheme. In terms of hierarchy, traditionally you would have the main house and, often, the outbuildings would use a different material. I wonder if you could introduce something like this? Outbuildings might be built in a completely different way to the house. I do not know what you are thinking of doing, but a barn is a timber frame and cladded, where the house might be solid masonry. You do have the opportunity to put little pulses of variety in there - Is that something that you would be looking at?

MS - We did not want to go down the model village route, where the houses all look different ages. If the Parish Council have strong views and are picking up on the same things and this approach needs to be taken, this will not be a deal breaker, and it is something we can address. The approach was trying to be a little more honest and show the build was all at the same time and of the same ilk and to not play the timeline game.

Summary:

Thank you for presenting the scheme to us. The design has moved on a long way since we first reviewed it in early 2019. We have identified a number of areas that can be improved, and we trust these will be considered in the final iteration of the design.

The main issues

- Road entrance to site
- Route to the west
- Eco Systems
- Access route around the site
- Boundaries
- Landscape & Hedgerows
- Existing architecture in the village, and Materials

Main Issues

Road entrance to site – Revise the access road design. It should form part of the public realm; a space shared by cars, people, and everything else; becoming a less car dominated space. Your design should be able to overcome this as the road will not be adopted and therefore does not need to follow a Highway Authority standard.

Route to the west (access to adjacent field) – The landscape design should be substantial enough so that access is unachievable – this could be achieved through a review of private land ownership options

Eco-Systems – Water management: You should review the design and investigate options such as swales or rain gardens; we advise you should investigate the dual purpose of the systems to achieve bio-diversity net-gains.

Access route around the site – At the moment there are issues with security, but a path that stops as a dead-end in the north-west corner of the site seems to be a bit awkward – we advise that you review movement and access in this area, and revise the layout design accordingly.

Boundaries, Landscape & Hedgerows – There seems to be some discrepancies in the documents between closeboard fencing and post and rail to outer boundaries. We suggest the site should be kept as open as possible and appear less suburban. In relation to the landscape and hedgerows and how boundary treatments are dealt with, we advise that should be consistent, with post and wire fencing to keep the views open becoming hedgerows in time.

Existing architecture in the village - There is logic for not following the architectural variety in the village. But some variety in the materials used, on outbuildings and boundary walls, might contribute to the overall appearance in the public realm. **Materials** – The rationale behind using a simple pallet of material was discussed. It is important to stick to your approach and be clear about the reasons why you came to this decision.