

## SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

### Session Notes

Date of meeting:	01.06.23
Site:	North Street Quarter, Lewes SDNP/23/00526/OUT
Panel members (DRP):	Mark Penfold (Chair) Paul Phasey Chris Blandford Graham Morrison Richard Eastham
SDNPA officers in attendance:	Mark Waller-Gutierrez (Design Officer) Tania Hunt (Support Services Officer) Kelly Porter (Case Officer)
Applicant and Project Team:	Jeremy Walker (Human Nature Head of Design) Xavier Smales (Human Nature Architect) Cany Ash (Ash Sakula Architect – Parcel 1) Jonathan Smales (Human Nature CEO) Andy Tugby (Human Nature Head of Sustainable Materials & Construction) Gareth Giles (Whaleback Planning & Design)
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**

### Main Presentation Points

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- Parcel 1 is entirely housing and presented as a detailed application to show how the parameters and the design code come together.
- North end of site in a key location on the edge of Pells Meadow, on the river edge and at the end of the development.
- Keen to get to 30% affordable housing.
- Key elements:
  - Riparian landscape – it responds to this by addressing fluvial flooding through the flood wall and rain gardens at the heart of the courtyards masterplan. The building being

built into the flood wall, giving a strong edge to the scheme and reducing embodied carbon.

- Evidence base – LVIA detailed study of the whole site. Key highlights of this are that there is an impact on the baseline, but there are positive benefits by removing the awkward waterside building and creating a very strong corner condition on the site. Views – Views are created to the Castle and the Downs beyond. Sustainability and holistic approach, embodied carbon (parcel 1 exceeding targets). Shared living and transport offering behavioural change, build and design process. Engineering characteristics of Lewes translated into golden threads.
- Design code – approved parameter plan, area schedules and design code, these all modulate each other to create the final design.
- Golden threads – a commitment to a series of underlying principles rather than a prescriptive rule, allowing for creative freedom to create delightful places. These golden threads will be embedded into the design code.
- Evolution of the parameters –
  - The current waterside T-shape building was originally promoted for re-use. However, this prevented a courtyard that framed views and it left spaces around the site which were difficult to make sense of with good architecture.
  - Moved toward terraces, this made sense from a sustainability perspective and allowed for framing of the courtyards.
  - These terraces were played about with in aggregated forms to incorporate the flood defences.
  - The parameter is bigger than the buildings, as it is taken right up to the edge of the flood defences.
  - Working with the design code using 3 prompts; design code and golden threads, build and design sourcebook to push out casual whims and use least resources, and making a model to play with design scenarios. With these 3 things the project team felt there was rigour and placemaking embedded into the scheme.
  - Top floors have been set back with terraces, so when walking along The Pells, it doesn't feel like a 3-storey building. This breaking down of the scale and edge was put forward in the last DRP.
- Materials - Hemp and lime render on the outside used on terraces, this material comes from this area and will be used alongside flint and reused bricks at low level.

## Questions

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- MP – Questions - The connections to the surrounding landscape, particularly from the courtyard. The courtyard stops, but the landscape continues towards the next block and at pool? Parking – phased development – what will happen with the parking at the earlier phases as the CoMo building will not be built yet?

*We have a new Project Director who is trying to speed up the delivery of the project. He is making the case to bring the CoMo Hub forward to the earliest stage inhabitants live here. The key thing being the services for behavioural change. The hub is designed to intercept traffic from The Causeway and hold it there – the services lead to behaviour change, together with character of the streets. This will be addressed in Section 106, I think. A legally binding commitment early on.*

- MP– key views towards the Downs and within setting is getting pretty close, but it is access to the middle of the development. This is crucial in the parameter plan, particularly North Street and how this route is used for connections and connectivity? The pentagonal building and how the routes work around it are not currently very cycle friendly.

*We feel the majority of pedestrians will come from the Waitrose site, across the crossing and down the footpath to the mixed used facilities at the soap factory. From here there are a series of 'twittens' to a modern intimate square.*

- MP – this is where the design code and golden threads across the whole development need to be used to assure the SDNPA that this is set in stone.
- MP– is there PV on this at all?

*We have put PV on roofs that are not visible. This is coded in the design code.*

- GM –I think this has been a successful process. The architectural design is very skilful, and I enjoyed it. How might the rules that you are applying across the whole site be tested by the design of a parcel? If you took the parameter plan and expressed it as a dull maximum block are you building within it?

*Yes, there are a couple of clumsy parameters that need to be addressed.*

- GM – what proportion of the volume of the parameter plan are you occupying, and will that start to become a rule? Is there a maximum volume in the parameter plan? Should the parameter plan have rules within it?

*This has gone into the design code, as it allows 3D expression of the rules. For example: the roofscape of one of the riverside blocks has a 6-storey area, the design code specifically says that there is certain amount of articulation required. It does not express an overall volume, but there are other rules of roof scale massing and so on.*

- GM – If I was looking at Parcel 1, I would be very interested to know what would be the maximum that could be developed in the parameter plan volume compared with what you are applying for? There is a gap between the design code and the parameter plan.

*We didn't need to do pitch roofs, but it was a golden thread.*

- GM –I am interested to know what proportion of the building in the design reached the top part of the parameter block? Could you start to set some rules from this block to create a clever response to each block from parcel 1? You want flexibility and the SDNPA want fixability. The parameter plan modified by the design code does not give enough protection long term. In the final phases there could be no one involved in the scheme that there is currently and therefore it relies on what rules are set now. Would there be rules about a cross section? There is a duty to each building– what would be the duty to each of these buildings in relation to the parameter plans to create something worthwhile? What guarantees for the SDNPA are there to enforce the rules you are imposing on yourself for all the buildings and how they respond to creating a sense of place? This is not covered in the design code or the parameter plan. The key nuances of detail don't offer the fixity necessary for the outline approval, but by further articulating the parameter plan they wouldn't compromise the flexibility that you seek, as you would just be enlarging on the duty of each of these buildings to a public space. Therefore, what I am trying to say is that I understand there are parameter plans for blocks and I understand there are design codes for the buildings within those blocks. That's all well and good. What is missing is a description of the spaces that are created by the blocks. This is as least as important as the buildings themselves. Therefore, any street, lane, square or public space ought to have a description that sets out what that space is going to be like, how it will be formed by the buildings that are proposed on all sides, and how it then links to other spaces. It's parameter plans for the voids, not the objects that will protect the sense of place and the quality of the public realm. The final thing is regarding

the carbon rules. Would these rules apply to all the plots? If you were to sell, this produces an imposition that limits flexibility.

*We are mindful of capturing the clear intent with regard to the use of timber, but being mindful of how building regulations might change and how that would prevent us from what we want to do.*

*We have put cut-outs in the design code, showing you can't build within that cut-out of the parameter. Maybe we could use a similar technique on other parameters to make sure that part of the building isn't built out? We do accept that there could be more rules on The Pells edge, which is currently very clunky.*

- PP – The challenge is the outline approval in a landscape-led scenario. The planners wanting to know the detail against the flexibility moving forward. There could be more variety in the roofscape, particularly on the river edge. There is a disconnect in the design code and diagram for the roofscape. Seeing the 3D model would be useful.
- PP – It would be good to get a sense of the new views and where you can get these views. Will the views be enjoyed by everyone?

*Lewes characteristically has views at the end of narrow streets, twittens and streets under 8 metres, There are glimpsed views of the Downs at the end of the passage. So this is what we have tried to do. Especially a new view created of a framed view of the Castle.*

- CB – Perhaps there should be parameters for the public spaces and internal spaces. It's about the intention of these spaces, what the views are and how it is visually described. Describe it as a room with detail. Hierarchy of views.
- PP – There needs to be more detail for where things are placed- like the air source heat pump, bikes and bins and things that need to be hidden away (storage areas).
- RE – Pedestrians walking through the development – can you access off the river front?  
*There is a route, but it is not an accessible route.*
- RE – Are they private gardens on the western edge and on the other side of the block – into the space - can you walk around the internal edges?

*There are opportunities to approach from 2 different directions. We decided Malling Place was a good place to have the front door and that the pocket gardens where a nice thing to have under the rain garden areas.*

- RE – Would you feel welcome if you walked into this space or would you feel like to you are trespassing?

*No. this would be an area for people of Lewes to spend time in.*

- MP – How do you deal with blue badges and deliveries.

*There are allocated areas around the site and on North Street principally. There is a delivery drop of point and the bigger deliveries go to the COMO hub for delivery by the management company.*

- MP - This needs to be addressed in the design code to make sure this is kept to. At the moment these vehicles are going everywhere.

## Summary

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The chair thanked everyone for coming and mentioned how excited everyone was by this scheme. Some DRP members have been involved with this scheme since 2012.

The focus of our discussion was regarding the key themes of the masterplan and the parameter plan that comes out of it. How this then relates to the sourcebook, the design code, and the parameters. How that then works with the macro and the surroundings of the site. How you embed key views into the parameter plan is not clear. The key desire lines and mapping those desire lines through the scheme and how they work. Responses to the principle edges - those being; The Pells, southern edge to the pool, the Phoenix Causeway edge at the far end (including the River). How the public space, the connectivity and the desire lines are compelling how all this works together. The Causeway has remained a problem all the way through, this is such an aggressive space.

The golden threads and how they work with the parameter plan, how they reflect back to the parameter plan and how the parameter plan requires those golden threads and design codes to inform how much, how big, what form and what happens within those blocks, is key.

How they then respond to the public/ private / semi-public realm around those blocks and how they inform those places. There is a duty of each building to coordinate and work with the space around it, this includes between the parcels. Therefore, when designing a parcel, the next parcel along needs to respond to all of that.

Parcel 1 is a squeezed u-shape, but there is a building beyond (Block 1D) that is not reflected in details of the first parcel. This is important in terms of how that sits in terms of the private/ public space next to that. These spaces change from riparian wild landscape to a canal side arrangement. The character of those buildings needs to respond to those outside spaces and respond back.

There should be a public realm and parameter plan for every block so that the parameter plan increases in terms of its informativeness. How those buildings relate to streets, open space, public space, landscape and planted area. Therefore, the intentions of each parameter block, the spaces they address and how that effect the public and private realm is really important. Otherwise, those spaces may become places left over, as there is nothing that addresses these spaces. The streets have all been named, but from naming streets you need to describe each space and its character, what they do, what vistas they have and its hierarchy.

There is a challenge between fixability and flexibility. The play between the sourcebook, parameters, design code and the golden threads are key to that. How the threads come together to make everything happen in those spaces is key. The parameter plan needs to bring together how the codes work and how it informs the architecture and the edge condition all around. The river being the primary edge, yet the other edges being just as important but in a different character. The desire lines and public space connectivity need to be considered. The pentagon building in the middle and the small-scale building surrounding it is unexplained. How this sits with existing building and works with the desire lines is not clear. At the moment this looks a little contorted and needs to be justified. This is a hinge point and needs work.

It's a complex scheme that is very exciting and a scheme that is great for the panel to see. It is obvious that you care, but there are lots of things that need to be brought together, justified and assure the SDNPA have the necessary 'fix', while you have the flexibility with the scheme.