

## SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

### Session Notes

Date of meeting:	18.09.2024
Site:	Wenban Smith & NCP car park site in Lewes SDNP/24/02043/PRE
Panel members (DRP):	Mark Penfold (Chair) Paul Phasey William Hardie Maria Hawton-Mead Andrew Smith Richard Eastham
SDNPA officers in attendance:	Kelly Porter (Case Officer) Roselle Goacher (Design Officer) Mark Waller-Gutierrez (Design Officer) Ashia Ciesielczuk (Senior Support Services Officer)
Applicant and Project Team:	Beatriz Huezo (Lomax Design) Gareth Roberts (Lomax Design) Matt Hoad (Cayuga Developments) Rob Winniffrith (Accel Consulting)
Observers	None
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.**

### Summary

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Thank you

1. The most important thing here to is to be able to assess all the baseline information. We understand that this information (such as the LVIA, the baseline heritage statement) is being collated, but its assessment will inform so much of the design, and it will change what you are doing here.
2. The panel were concerned about the north corner and the relationship with The Causeway. The plaza space is not characteristic of Lewes spaces, it is not a street or a twitten. Concern also about how the podium works, how this is an alien, very urban approach in the Lewes context, how do people use it, what would the quality of the experience be like?

3. The panel questioned the scale of the buildings and how they respond to the river, how big the spaces are between the river and the edge of the scheme and how you deal with that. There is so much that needs to have that baseline information applied to it before you can make a lot of design decisions. As a panel we need to see how all those line up so that your design decisions are based on all of those things, which at the moment it has not got. We know the applicant is commissioning these studies, but they should have been done from the start and that would have informed how you would design this. We will need to see this again once you have applied all that and designed your scheme in accordance with those criteria. It has got to follow those.
4. Sustainability strategy also needs to inform the design.
5. Are six storeys justifiable? It looks too tall at the moment. Historic analysis would show the filigree of the former buildings and spaces and the boats in the river that the current proposals do not seem to respect.

## Discussion

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Do you have an LVIA?

*The LVIA has been started but not completed.*

LVIA is critical to your design and response to this. So, the baseline is not before you or us at the moment?

*LVIA yes, they set up the views. We talked about where we wanted to see certain views.*

The Causeway is an aggressive road, and the scheme needs to acknowledge and respond to this fact. We need to see different options for addressing this.

How will you respond to the need for flood defences and how those work out in terms of having an understory carpark, what happens in the future?

*The car park wall to the east becomes the flood defence wall. At the end of the wall there will be a gate that will link up with the existing flood defences.*

One of the problems around car parking is how people experience them as part of the public realm. How people enter the site and what the first impression of the site is when driving in.

*The idea is that the car park is hidden by commercial units on the ground floor so you would not see the parking from that outside. If you are driving down Eastgate Wharf you will see the public ground and the commercial units wrapping around it, so the first point you will see the car park is when you come in.*

It is also about how that car park, which is public realm, responds to what is above in people's houses. When people drive in, do they know they drive into an understory car park? How does that happen? How does it respond to the gardens above or is it just an undercroft?

*I think we need to explore it more. There is the opportunity to opening the podium up to allow some natural light and ventilation to come through.*

I presume the heights shown (up to six storeys) are generated by the fact that you have got an undercroft adding a floor.

*Yes, correct.*

From the explanation, the flood defences on the edge of the car park will mean you will not have light and ventilation in the car park.

*We have got an enclosed car park, so we have mechanical ventilation.*

My point is this is 3½ meters tall so there is enough space to put natural ventilation in as well after a certain height. This could negate the need for mechanical ventilation.

*Essentially yes, but you are going to need something. It is our desire to put in more natural ventilation if we can, but this can be costly. The viability of sites like this, where you have to balance the build cost versus providing affordable housing, so it is making sure we have got a design solution that is sensible.*

Will the riverside walk run alongside the flood defence or on top?

*Alongside.*

Do you have a baseline heritage assessment?

*Yes, there is. It is not included with what you have seen, but we can provide you with that.*

You are aware that a visual relationship exists, because one of your diagrams says 'views to the South Downs'. So correspondingly there are views 'from' the South Downs.

*Yes, that will be included with the LVIA which we can provide you with.*

Do you have an ecology and BNG baseline?

*Yes, that has been part of the process.*

Is the 'Podium' private, communal, and not public open space?

*Correct*

In relation to the balance of open space, how are you in terms of quantum public open space including playable space?

*There will be play areas in both the communal private and public realms.*

In the South Downs local plan there is a requirement to provide a riverside walkway.

*We are also proposing to make a footpath and cycle path up to the north, which should be useful in terms of dog walking, running, that sort of thing. We have not really thought about what that design is going to look like yet but that is something we are conscious of. This would be the final connection through from North Street Quarter to the town centre. Our understanding is that it is in County Highway's control, but we are making provisions and cost allowances to make that connection.*

If the circumstances change in the future, is the plan going to allow for that final connection to Cliffe Bridge?

*Yes, the plan will be future proofed.*

Where are you on your thinking with sustainable drainage and rain gardens?

*We talked to the Environmental Agency about drainage. We are looking at the podium as providing some attenuation, as a blue roof. The idea is that it discharges into the river as there is a Southern Water outlet there. When the river comes up, we attenuate it. The EA are quite on board with that. The landscape designer has been looking at the introduction of swales and ways of reducing pollution in the runoff. This is still in its early days. We have done some water monitoring and as we are not going to be able to infiltrate, it is going to be into the river. It is about managing it on site while the river comes up.*

How will people be able to move though and use the site?

*At the north end by The Causeway, we have introduced a pedestrian link to the site from the first floor. There is a bridge that will then connect to the podium.*

It would be good to see your thinking with how the conservation area has influenced the design, what has driven the roof types, local examples? See different arrangements that test relationships to the road to the north.

*The architecture along the river's edge is largely gable ends and is almost a play on gable roofs.*

It would be useful to see all that without the architecture on it, to see it as just blocks first and with more of the context. See all the interim steps and make sure to get the principles right.

*The design is very different to how we started with simple forms. We are happy to show you the steps we have already taken.*

Was there a design without a podium?

*None without a podium.*

Concern about the podium because it is a dead space underneath that contains cars. Is that the best thing to do? Is it the right thing to do to put the podium in that location?

*The access link from The Causeway to the podium makes sense because you then have an external space that you can access. If you lose the podium, you still need to have the flood defence wall running along somewhere.*

The podium could be communal space and public space which would make the site more accessible. It feels like it is an impenetrable block across the site, reducing the connectivity to the High Street. Could there be a clearer way for pedestrians to get through the site? To open it up so it becomes a public space as well. The access going on to The Causeway is very small and tight and it is likely to have a large flow through of people as well as along the path by the river.

*With the bridge access we have the trees that we need to retain, so it is the balance of not losing trees and managing the size of the bridge. Currently the podium is private communal space so there would not be a big flow through of people.*

Could you create a multi-level route with the bridge above so people can access the car park too? It feels a bit like you are closing off a possible north to south route and not having a free-flowing feeling.

With the plaza area you stated it is about 16-20m wide and looks like a fairly large space. Is this to meet minimum requirements or is there another driver for the scale of that?

*Originally, we had the plaza narrower, and it felt like it all got too close together. We are also trying to retain that view through to the brewery which is key.*

So, it was a design decision then?

*It was designed to maximise that view.*

You have given yourself a very generous space in the plaza and the dimensions of it are fairly regular. It could be made more funnel shaped with a narrower end that frames the view of the brewery. The thing about Lewes is that it has a very distinct character, and large wide-open streets do not exist. The Plaza needs some more design and maybe play with the dimensions, possible large tree in this space? Also look into ways that this can enhance The Causeway relationship with landscape and architecture, but also bringing the larger building further down from northern boundary.

*We have the group of existing trees that we need to retain but we can look at how we can enhance that whole space.*

Context is very important. We need to start with the macro landscape issues, including views in and out. How will scheme respond on river, The Causeway, Phoenix development and the character of the town?

Concern that riverside walk, which may well be a more popular space than the proposed plaza is too mean and pinched at the moment.

You need to look at the heritage in more depth which included yards and dry docks here.

Perhaps these are better precedents than a plaza typology?

Old buildings could also inform architecture and building forms along the river.

LVIA: Assess how big gaps between buildings, as currently proposed, impact on LVIA, also views of Downs.

Will there be balconies?

Yes

For the properties to the south, how will they receive their deliveries?

*There is a 6m wide access. Plenty of room for lorries to deliver their goods. There is also a turning point for emergency vehicles in the southeast corner.*

This is a very tricky area in terms of children and the precinct and existing buildings. From the podium you look onto Waitrose roof, so how will that relationship with what you are inheriting outside function, and function safely?

*The landscape designer was looking at the treatment along that particular edge.*

The landscape designer needs to come forward a lot more on this because the landscape response and the macro context response will inform a lot of what we are alluding to. This will give you design decisions to make which may be different to what you have at the moment.

Natural ventilation was mentioned, is this just on the balconies outside or is this in the units? All the units are dual aspect, so this allows for cross natural cross ventilation.

Have you thought about what energy targets you are going to set for the site?

*I am not sure we have got that far down the track yet. It will obviously be off gas and follow new building regulations, and we have talked previously about PV panelling which obviously has its own impact in terms of LVIA and how we can manage that in the right way. We are also looking into two different systems. One is communal air source where you have a district heating network that you can plug into. You also have the individual exhaust air source heat pump for each unit.*

Have you looked into ground source heat pumps? Do you have an energy consultant?

*We have looked at ground source heat pumps. We do have an energy consultant. We have a full design team on board we just did not want to get them going in a certain direction before we had this meeting. We will be looking at making this as sustainable as we can.*

You mentioned that you wanted a high percentage to be affordable housing. Have you got a target at the moment?

*We have not at the moment. That is down to where we land on density and massing. There are some very heavy fixed build costs that will happen no matter how many units we build. Particularly the podium will make a difference, and it does inform an important role in terms of drainage. We have been aiming for as high as possible and the last iteration for affordable housing was 30%. Again, this will need to means tested. The more sustainability we do the more the cost goes up.*

This is why we have all the questions to do with building and engineering today because you need to be able to build it and be sustainable at the same time.

*The riverside works, and the flood defences are big costs, and they increase the closer you get to the river. We do want to deliver as much affordable housing as possible. The commercial aspect was only introduced recently something that we understand adds a huge amount of value.*

Have you done research into what is needed in Lewes?

*We have been engaging with a local charity who are already on our site and wish to remain on site. We have a pre-agreement with them in place for them to take on a bigger shop area. A lot of the space is potentially pre-let. The other idea is what we do on the corner. It could potentially become a nice café and be something that we retain as a company as we manage our commercial units ourselves.*