



UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Urban Design Consultation Response

The following notes are associated with Urban Design aspects only and do not include comments on wider Planning matters.

Reference Nos.	UTT/24/1618/PINS S62A/2024/0049
Applicant	Rochester Properties Limited
Site Location	Land South of Bedwell Road Ugley
Proposal Description	Consultation on S62A/2024/0049 - Approval of reserved matters following outline approval UTT/20/2908/OP for Up to 50 market and affordable dwellings, public open space and associated highways and drainage infrastructure

General

The proposal is for up to 50 dwellings on an undeveloped site on the north-western edge of the village of Elsenham. There is one listed building in the vicinity (Elsenham Railway Station) and the site is not in or near a Conservation Area. The M11 runs within 100m of the site to the west.

It is noted that this application is for approval of reserved matters following outline consent UTT/20/2908/OP allowed at appeal in 2023.

The proposal is, in general terms, compatible with the surrounding buildings in terms of scale. However, with regards to massing and layout, the proposal is primarily governed by the presence of the M11 motorway with the layout and massing a direct response to noise mitigation. As such, this does create incongruous massing in comparison with the existing neighbouring development.

Character & Identity

The dominating character to the proposed development is the design response to the presence of the motorway, the homogeneous apartment block curved along the north-western edge of the site. It creates a largely inanimate façade lacking passive surveillance onto the western edge of the site. There are porticoed entrances on this side, but these are unlikely to be used regularly with residents mainly entering from the parking courtyard. The ground floor of the apartment building on western side is largely blank comprising rears of car parking areas and cycle stores. This will not create a safe and inviting approach to these western entrances, particularly after dark, further limiting their likely use.

It is not clear from the Design & Access Statement or the drawings whether windows facing the motorway are openable or not and the internal layout generally positions all habitable rooms away from the motorway side overlooking the courtyard. Whilst this will mitigate noise impacts, it limits opportunity for cross-ventilation and natural cooling.

These apartments are very different to the detached and semi-detached houses elsewhere on the site and as the apartment block is entirely allocated as affordable, I do not agree with the statement in the Design & Access Statement that this will “create an ‘integrated community’ where affordable



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housing will be indistinguishable from open market dwellings.” Given that this block is clearly designed as an acoustic buffer and has an architectural language appropriate to this function, with small windows on the motorway side and a monolithic appearance that is very different to the rest of the site, it cannot be said that the affordable housing provision is tenure blind.

The parking court to the apartment building is enclosed on its eastern boundary by a 2.2m high acoustic screen, which whilst performing a noise mitigation function does not create an attractive arrival to the apartment building and further segregates it from the rest of the development.

Materials lack variety, predominantly being facing brickwork of a single orange colour. There are small elements of coloured render and timber boarding along the buildings facing Bedwell Road, but this seems tokenistic with the majority of buildings once inside the development all comprising similar materials. The use of street trees is positive.

Scale, Form & Massing

The scale, form and massing of the south-eastern portion of the site is predominantly two-storey detached dwellings, broadly comparable with the surrounding context. The apartment building to the north-west of the site, appears incongruous in massing and streetscape terms to the two-storey detached housing adjacent.

Landscape

The Design & Access Statement states that the development will be landscape-led, however, that is not apparent in the drawings. It is not clear what the landscaping strategy is that is leading the design. The large portion of retained woodland does not appear integrated within proposals and is essentially a sterilised buffer to the motorway.

The Design & Access Statement refers to a network of open spaces conveniently located for new and existing residents. Within the site redline boundary there is the pocket park, trim-trail and the area of play equipment adjacent to the PROW and an element of landscaping within the courtyard to the large apartment block. Given the woodland setting, there is an opportunity to propose more naturalistic play features and play-on-the-way elements along footpaths and trim trails, expanding the landscape strategy beyond the development boundary and integrating the woodland within the development.

Streets and the public realm

There are trees and landscaping to one side of the primary entrance road and swales along Bedwell Road which is a positive contribution to the public realm.

The public realm of the development overall could be improved and currently lacks a coherent centre or destination. The primary road ends at a dead-end adjacent to play equipment and the pocket park, which could form a centre to development, is only partially visible from the primary entrance road.

The street layout could be more efficient and easier to navigate. It currently has 8 turning heads and no direct connections, every turning leading to a dead-end. The street pattern would be more



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successful if it connected in a circular manner with the secondary street serving all the homes to the eastern portion of the site.

Parking arrangements lack clarity, with tandem parking, undercroft parking and parking in locations some distance from front doors (for example, plot 5, plot 6 and plot 3 and plot 27). Plot 20 would be better served from the south, where it is more typologically similar to its neighbours rather than from the shared access with the apartments. The turning area serving plots 1, 2, 3, 7 & 8 seems inefficient and lacks passive surveillance, primarily surrounded by 1.8m high brick walls. Parking to flanks of houses, such as type D, consists of un-overlooked tandem parking against blank gables with minimal room to pass parked cars with bikes and wheelie bins.

Summary

The development is proposed in a sustainable location, close to the railway station at Elsenham, however, the layout, massing and integration of affordable and market housing could be improved.

Prepared by

Nick Phillips
Principal Urban Design Officer

Date

11 July 2024