



UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Urban Design Consultation Response

The following notes are associated with Urban Design aspects only and are to be considered advisory and the opinion of specialist staff in relation to this particular matter.

Reference Nos.	UTT/24/1732/PINS S62A/2024/0051
Applicant	Chase Homes
Site Location	Land To The West Of Thaxted Road Saffron Walden Essex
Proposal Description	Consultation on S62A/2024/0051 - Approval of reserved matters following outline approval for the erection of 168 dwellings with associated landscaping and parking pursuant to application S62A/2022/0014

Summary

This application for 168 homes and associated landscaping is substantially unchanged from an application I have commented on previously (UTT/23/2962/DFO comments dated 13.12.23), therefore my comments remain and are repeated here again, having regard to the applicant's rebuttal to these comments (16.02.24) and in light of the newly adopted SPD, the Uttlesford Design Code.

Generally, the proposals for this site do not deliver sufficiently high-quality design for a gateway site such as this, sitting as it does on the south-eastern edge of Saffron Walden on one of the main roads into the town, Thaxted Road. The proposals also do not sufficiently promote connectivity beyond the site to local amenities, such as the open space to the north-west, the locally known 'green mile', or future linkages to the proposed sites adjacent within the emerging local plan, nor to existing adjacent development.

Regarding the Uttlesford Design Code, there are numerous areas where the proposals do not meet the requirements of the Code or do not provide sufficient information to demonstrate compliance. These are identified below.

Context, Character & Identity

The scheme lacks a clearly identifiable character or identity, having no focal point or destination. The public realm is predominantly streets, there are pockets of landscaped space, the two parcels to the west, but they do not relate particularly well to the housing or have a clear function. The large area of landscaped space labelled 'infiltration basin', has the potential to be a successful space if well landscaped but does not relate particularly to the housing either.

The excessive use of character areas – there are 6 proposed in the applicant's Design Code – does not reflect any meaningful sense of character, identity or place. The grain and typology of built form, architectural style and landscaping within the 6 character areas is not sufficiently different to create truly different character areas with a sense of place.



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The use of marker buildings is confused and contradictory, the applicant's Design Code refers to the same buildings as 'Corner Buildings', 'Focal Buildings', 'Key Buildings' and 'Statement Buildings'. These buildings, however, are not sufficiently different in scale, style, colour or form to function as intended, which is to aid wayfinding and navigability. See further points below.

Uttlesford Design Code

Does not comply: B1.4C, B1.5C, B2.6C, B2.7C, N1.5C, N1.6C, P1.1C, P1.3C, P3.5C, H2.3C

Insufficient information supplied to demonstrate compliance: C1.1C, C1.2C, ID1.1C, ID1.4C, ID2.5C, B1.1C, B1.2C, N1.7C, N1.8C, N1.9C, N1.10C, N1.11C, P1.4C, P1.12C

Streets, Legibility & Wayfinding

Overall, the primary street layout is excessively curvilinear with extensive reliance on private drives and cul-de-sacs and there are no clear opportunities to extend streets to connect with future or existing development. The layout of the street and the wide radii and carriageway width signify a car-prioritised road. Whilst the applicant maintains that the consented framework plan sets out this route, this does not change my view in respect of its design.

The entire site is served by a Type E Access Road, which is reasonable, and these should be designed to a 20mph limit. The wide radii and overly circuitous route do not support this aim. Additionally, no details are provided of street furniture provision or specification.

The supplied drawing 'Location of focal point buildings' indicates three building types placed in six locations to aid wayfinding. The large apartment block, according to the Applicant's Design Code, should be a 'Statement' building and a 'Corner' or 'Focal' building. The other 'Focal' buildings are standard house types clad in white weatherboarding.

None of these buildings are significantly focal to act as wayfinding architectural features. In addition, some of the focal buildings present largely blank gables and timber fences as a vista terminal (e.g. Plot 57). This does not comply with the applicant's Design Code as a carefully located and considered design. Other corners have splayed plots with garden fences and walls (Plot 37, 50) which do not adequately address the street and create un-overlooked pockets of ambiguous ownership.

There is an over-reliance on on-street parking and minimal street trees, for example, 36 on-street car parking spaces between Plots 37 and 50 with 3 street trees. Small pockets of landscaping help to mitigate, but this still creates a heavily car dominated street scene.

Uttlesford Design Code

Does not comply: M1.2C, M1.4C, M1.5C, M1.11C, M1.12C, M3.6C, P1.5C, P2.5C, P3.1C

Insufficient information supplied to demonstrate compliance: M2.4C, P1.2C

Walking & Cycling

The site is gently sloping, rising approximately 20m from Thaxted Road to the southern-most tip and there are two primary routes for walking and cycling. One enters from Thaxted Road through the middle of the site and the other enters to the eastern edge of the site. The routes form a loose figure of eight primarily following the site perimeter, onto open countryside to the east and the public



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open space to the north-west. The eastern loop is referred to as the Orbital Greenway and is a shared route for pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders.

Both the pedestrian/cycle way and the Orbital Greenway lack passive surveillance for the most part, with the majority of houses adjacent to these routes presenting largely blank flank gables offering very limited passive surveillance and no animation or street activity (for example, Plot 62, 70, 77, 78, 89, 90 and 106). Where windows have been included into gables, these are predominantly to non-habitable rooms such as stairs and bathrooms. Small windows to living rooms have been included to some house types, but these still do not create meaningful passive surveillance of these walking and cycling routes.

Where active frontages are addressing the cycle/footway, they are set behind the roadway. Similarly, the central cycle/footway has back garden fences addressing it (plots 12-16, 33 and 48, 17, 32 and 56) albeit with a strip of soft landscaping between fence and footway. It is not clear from the submitted information whether either route is proposed to be lit after dark, which coupled with the lack of passive surveillance raises concerns over the safety, or perceived feeling of safety, of these routes and therefore their likely usefulness as active travel routes.

There is a walking-only route (as indicated on the walking and cycling network plan) that follows the primary road, which, as stated previously, is unnecessarily curvilinear and circuitous, measuring approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ kilometre from the furthest dwelling to Thaxted Road. This route does not seem conducive to regular use. In addition, pedestrians using this as a walking route will need to cross the road three times along its length as there is not a consistent provision of footway on either side of the road. This does not support an active travel priority approach. The applicant has stated that this route is unlikely to be used as a primary walking route, given its protracted layout.

The pedestrian route exits the site by the pedestrian crossing on Thaxted Road, near to the One Minet Skatepark and opposite Cardamon Road. The central walking / cycle route exits by the junction opposite Tiptofts Lane (north). This section of Thaxted Road has three lanes, with a segregated right-turning lane and no cycle lane, so does not seem a good location for cycle traffic to merge.

Uttlesford Design Code

Does not comply: M2.1C, M2.12C

Insufficient information supplied to demonstrate compliance: M2.3C, M2.9C, M2.10C, M2.11C

Cycle, Waste & Recycling Storage

The majority of cycle storage is located in garden sheds with the remainder in garages. Neither location is suitably convenient to promote and encourage modal shift in travel behaviours. It is not clear from the supplied information where refuse and recycling are stored prior to collection day. The Applicant's Design Code states that waste and recycling storage space will be located in the garden where possible. In many cases, for example plots 57-62, 73-77, 107-144 etc., there does not appear sufficient room to manoeuvre either a bicycle or a wheelie bin from the garden to the street if on-plot parking bays are occupied. Other plots have convoluted routes requiring long walking distances to waste collection points through narrow fenced passageways, for example plots 17, 18, 32, 20-21, 45-48.



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Uttlesford Design Code

Does not comply: M3.12C

Insufficient information supplied to demonstrate compliance: H4.2C

Wider Connections

There are three pedestrian points of access to the open space to the west of the site. Two of these are accessed from the pedestrian/cycle path and one is accessed via a footpath from the end of a cul-de-sac. The Orbital Greenway, as stated in the Applicant's Design Code, "is a strategic link proposed by Uttlesford Council and Essex County Council, forming a route around the edge of Saffron Walden for walkers, cyclists and horse riders". There is one egress point for this route beyond the site boundary at the southern edge. The Orbital Greenway links to Thaxted Road opposite Tiptofts Lane (south). There is currently no footpath on the west side of Thaxted Road and whilst a footpath is indicated within the drawings this would be outside of the application boundary, so clarity should be sought on how this will be delivered and any mitigations required for the loss of the existing hedgeline. There is insufficient detail in the submitted information to ascertain how this will be achieved.

The pedestrian and cycle routes and the Orbital Greenway would benefit from more tangible connections so that they could provide more strategic routes through the site to the wider area, in support of the strategic linkages within the emerging Local Plan. The primary street pattern and secondary cul-de-sac streets also show no potential for future connections beyond the site. Whilst not a material consideration yet, the emerging Local Plan included this site within the Saffron Walden site allocation framework and promotes strategic connections across and beyond the framework masterplan. In its current form, the proposals do not offer any obvious connections beyond the site boundary to link into future development.

Uttlesford Design Code

Does not comply: M1.9C

Prepared by

Nick Phillips
Principal Urban Design Officer

Date

08 August 2024