



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/24/1898/PINS S62A/2024/0057
Applicant	Chase New Homes
Site Location	Former Friends School Field, Mount Pleasant Road, Saffron Walden
Proposal Description	Consultation on S62A/2024/0057 - Erection of 91 no. dwellings with associated infrastructure and landscaping. Provision of playing field and associated clubhouse.

Summary

The proposal is for 91 dwellings and sports pitches and associated clubhouse on the site of the former playing fields of the Friends School. There are two listed buildings in the vicinity of the site (9&10 Mount Pleasant) and the site is in a Conservation Area and is designated as Protected Open Space.

It is noted that the site has been the subject of previous unsuccessful application, UTT/19/1744/OP, in 2019 that was refused on several reasons, including the design being inappropriate to the character of the area and loss of protected open space.

Overall, the scale, layout and uses proposed are considered acceptable, subject to further comments below. However, given the sites location within a Conservation Area and its value as a Protected Open Space, the design quality should be exemplary and whilst this scheme meets the threshold for acceptable design quality, it falls short of exemplary.

It is noted and appreciated that the applicant has prepared and submitted a Design Code Review document, assessing the scheme against the code, to which it broadly complies.

Character & Identity

The site is located within the Saffron Walden Conservation Area and adjacent to and part of the former Friends School and the site itself is designated Protected Open Space. Given these factors, it should be a prerequisite that any proposals be of exceptional design quality to mitigate the loss of open space and of developing within a Conservation Area. The proposals note their adjacency to The Avenue and use this as a contextual reference and design precedent.

The Avenue is a scheme of exceptional design quality and a benchmark locally for high quality design, so it is positive that the design proposals are aspiring to meet this design standard. However, it is important that the design proposals take those design strengths and cues and make them their own, rather than imitate. It appears that house types, The Willow, The Aspen and so on, are standard house types used on other schemes, but with different cladding (timber shingles for example) to match The Avenue.



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Whilst this may be acceptable in design terms, it should be noted that these design features are integral to the proposed design and – if approved – any subsequent amendments to the scheme to revert to less site-specific design details (removing timber shingle cladding or reverting to standard pitched dormers, for example) should be resisted and considered to be a fundamental and material change to the overall design composition.

The DAS states that corner buildings have been designed to “include additional windows to the secondary streets to provide passive surveillance and add interest to the street scenes” In reality, this is two windows to living rooms in plots 50 and 56 and small windows to hallways and landings elsewhere, so is of marginal benefit to the streetscene.

The layout is broadly acceptable in design terms, with shared surface homezones linking to the primary street (rather than cul-de-sacs) which is positive, as are views through to the playing fields on the approach to the sports pavilion and to the crescent housing.

The crescent housing is a successful layout in relation to the sports pitch, although the façade design would benefit from a little more articulation and the integral garages limit passive surveillance and engagement with the street. The detailing of these buildings is important, and facades should be curved in the form of a crescent, rather than the faceted form as shown in the drawings.

Streets and the public realm

There are positive elements to the overall street layout and public realm with the inclusion of some street trees and landscaped build-outs as traffic-calming measures and to bookend parking bays. Some aspects of the landscaping seem less successful, for instance the frontages to properties appear to be mown grass, which is unacceptable as this will not create sufficient buffer between street and built-form. There is little information supplied on SuDs strategies or other mitigative measures such as rain and grey-water harvesting.

Parking provision generally seems high, given the location of the site and its proximity to the town centre. There are bus routes outside the site on Mount Pleasant Road and it is walkable to the centre of town. Development proposals should be promoting sustainable travel options, such as walking, cycling and public transport over a reliance on the private car. There are 7 instances of triple tandem parking within the plan which is unacceptable (M3.11C). Cycle storage is provided and generally located in the gardens of properties, but there appears insufficient room to move cycles from storage to the street past the parked cars (contravening code M3.12C).

Plots 1-7 have gated access, which is unacceptable and not clear why this is necessary. There are a number of parking courtyards which are not well overlooked (in contravention of code M3.4C), for example, plots 50-55 and the apartments. The parking arrangements to plots 8-11 look awkward and, if fully occupied, unlikely to work in terms of manoeuvrability of vehicles in and out. There are several instances of long, timber fenced corridors, such as to plots 32-36 and 65-69 and plot 14, as well as timber fenced parking bays to plots 19,20, 47 and 48.

Use and Compatibility

In terms of use and provision of housing, the vast majority of the development is proposed as 3-bedroom houses, with all of the smaller dwelling provision of 1- and 2-bedroom apartments falling within the affordable provision. It would be preferable to see a wider mix across both tenure types



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to create a more mixed and integrated community. The proposed sports use and associated pavilion and parking, whilst being a positive asset and valuable addition to local amenities, does have the potential for nuisance and the impact on new residents and existing adjacent residents in terms of noise and parking impacts should be carefully considered.

Prepared by

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Date

5 September 2024