



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/25/0101/PINS S62A/2024/0075
Applicant	Saffron Walden LLP
Site Location	Land North of Knight Park Thaxted Road Saffron Walden Essex
Proposal Description	Consultation on S62A/2024/0075 - Reserved matters (appearance, landscaping, layout and scale); pursuant to outline planning permission ref: S62A/2023/0031 for the erection of up to 55 dwellings, associated landscaping and open space, with access from Knight Park

Summary

The proposals relate to reserved matters under the consented outline scheme UTT/23/3112/PINS (S62A/2023/0031) approved in April 2024. As such, the principle of development is agreed, although it is worth noting that this site was previously included in the draft allocation for the emerging local plan as a commercial development site, given its access and proximity to the commercial development at Knight Park. It was subsequently removed from the allocation in response to the above outline application.

The scheme overall is a typical suburban development and is in general compliance with the consented design code, with some areas that do not comply or could be improved, as discussed below. There is little demonstration of compliance with the Uttlesford Design Code within the Design & Access Statement (which is in itself a requirement of the code), however, there are no significant areas of non-compliance, other than the extensive presence of triple tandem parking (M3.11C), as noted below.

Given the access to the site is through a commercial and retail development and is adjacent to a household waste and recycling centre, a significant transitional buffer is required, which is provided through a landscaped zone. This and the adjacent public open space within the application site boundary, does however serve to create a rather isolated community, which the applicant has attempted to mitigate through onwards walking routes.

More could be done however, to reduce this sense of isolation, by acknowledging the emerging local plan allocation, admittedly still in draft form, and providing potential future connections to increase permeability and linkages to new communities that may be delivered as part of the emerging local plan.

Layout & Character Areas

The layout broadly complies with the framework plan supplied as part of the outline application. However, this is not an approved plan and therefore can only be considered as illustrative and layout is a reserved matter. The submitted layout is a series of cul-de-sacs resulting in eight dead-ends. Given

my previous comments regarding the location of this site and the resultant isolated nature of the development, there is an opportunity to improve the quality of the place by making it more connected and permeable. This could be achieved through better connection of the street pattern, linking streets and removing dead-ends to improve navigability and wayfinding. As currently drawn, the layout indicates that most streets are shared surface, with no segregated footpaths, which is acceptable in principle, however, these shared surface streets should link up to one another so that pedestrians and cyclists can easily move around the development in a clear and legible way.

The purpose of character areas within a development is to create areas that feel varied and interesting and have a unique identity. There is no discernible difference in the three character areas proposed and the way that they have been assigned appears arbitrary. 'Knight Park' character area is essentially the same as 'Rural Edge' character area – they both have similar house types using similar materials and both have development on one side of the street only. The 'Internal Streets' character area appears to relate to only two or three houses within the north-easterly cross-streets. I would suggest there are only two different character areas within this layout, internal streets with development on both sides and external streets with development on one side only. Within these two character areas, there should be difference in more than just materials, such as typology, grain, roofscape, landscape and public realm.

Movement & Access

The Design & Access Statement summarises the movement strategy on p.10, comprising a single vehicular access from Knight Park and two PROWs, one along the northern edge of the site and one through the middle of the site, between the development area and the public open space. There are two pedestrian connections from the development to the northern edge footpath and one connection from the western edge of the development out of the site, but otherwise there are no other onwards connections for pedestrians, cyclists or vehicles. The existing PROW in the middle of the plan appears to run between two hedges and is therefore not directly accessible from the site itself. This minimal onwards connectivity creates a development that will likely be heavily reliant on cars for primary modes of travel and there appears a missed opportunity to make provision for future connection into active travel routes that will form part of neighbouring development under the draft allocation with the emerging R19 Local Plan.

Regarding vehicle parking, there are numerous instances of triple tandem parking – plots 55, 54, 53, 29, 28, 27, 26, 12, 11, 10, 9 all have triple tandem parking which is unacceptable under the Uttlesford Design Code M3.11C. The applicant suggests that these are required for the larger homes and that to remove the triple tandem parking would impact overall site viability (DAS p.29). I would suggest that there would be scope to review this arrangement as the current garden size provision is in excess of the Uttlesford Design Code requirements and through a reconfiguration of the plan there may be opportunities to provide the required parking but without resorting to triple tandem arrangements, for instance, providing more space within the public realm, linking cul-de-sacs and using on-street parking in conjunction with on-plot parking.

It is positively noted that two car club spaces are provided within the layout, and that provision is made for electric cycle spaces. Notwithstanding previous comments regarding active travel, these are positive aspects and an important part of a sustainable travel plan.

The rear parking courts to the flat blocks are poorly overlooked, contrary to Uttlesford Design Code M3.4C. The plans of the flat blocks indicate that rear windows to the parking courts are all from non-habitable rooms, i.e. kitchens, bathrooms, hallways and the like. Whilst it is acknowledged that the

internal layout of the apartments responds to the solar orientation of the building, this results in a car park court of 18 car spaces with minimal overlooking from the apartment block. Details should be provided of suitable lighting within the car courts that provides a feeling of safety to users without causing nuisance to the neighbouring properties.

Landscape & Public Realm

Generally, the landscape strategy is acceptable. There are substantial numbers of trees proposed to be planted, and the public open space has mown paths for dog-walking routes (including dog waste bins) and naturally planted attenuation basins. It is not clear from the drawings whether the mown path connects to the existing PROW or just stops at the hedge. If the latter, it would be better to form a loop, linking back to the mown path. There are other positive aspects to the landscaping plan, such as hedge planting to deter opportunistic parking and tree planting within landscape build-outs for visitor parking. Within the main development plot area, a LEAP is provided within the buffer strip in the south-eastern corner of the site along with seating and tree planting. The LEAP is proposed as naturalistic play features and ground contouring. This approach is supported. Whilst there is good provision generally across the site for tree planting, it would be desirable to see more trees proposed to be planted along streets, as the tree planting appears to be mostly concentrated to the peripheries of the site, (refer to DAS p.24) and the quality of the street scene would be improved by the inclusion of more street trees.

The examples of boundary treatments within the DAS (p.28) are not good examples and within the main development plot area, boundary treatments could be softened. There is extensive use of timber fencing and brick walls as boundaries which create hard surfaces of no ecological value and are visually harsh. In certain locations, hedges to garden boundaries would be preferable and create a more attractive streetscene. For example, plot 9 and plot 4 present long runs of brick wall to the public realm. A boundary hedge in these locations would soften the streetscene and reduce the sense of enclosure to plots 5, 6, 7 and 8, whose building lines are set back from the boundary lines of plots 4 and 9. The street serving plots 47 - 52 has poor levels of active frontage with much of the length of the street being brick boundary walls and car parking bays. It is acknowledged that plots 47, 48 and 51, 52 have their primary facades onto this street, however the middle section of the street, approximately 30m, is all blank walls and car parking. To facilitate plots 47,48 and 51, 52 having their primary frontage onto this street, these plots as a result have rather convoluted parking and access arrangements. Plot 52, for example, parks at the rear and then has no pedestrian access to the front door. At the turning head of this road, there is a footpath which links to the existing PROW. This footpath is poorly overlooked by plot 55 which has only a first-floor bathroom window overlooking this route.

Prepared by

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Date

12 February 2025