



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/25/1343/PINS S62A/2025/0107
Applicant	Chase New Homes
Site Location	Former Friends School Field Mount Pleasant Road Saffron Walden Essex
Proposal Description	Consultation on S62A/2025/0107 - Erection of 75no. dwellings with associated infrastructure and landscaping. Provision of playing fields and associated clubhouse

Summary

The proposal is for 75 dwellings and sports pitches and 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 applications, 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. A subsequent application UTT/24/1898/PINS (S62A/2024/0057) was also refused on several reasons including design, layout and appearance, impact on the character of the conservation area and loss of a significant area of playing field.

The submitted scheme is similar to the previous refused scheme, except with some layout changes and a reduction in housing numbers, but these do not materially alter the design intent. I have provided comments on this previous scheme on 5 September 2024. Therefore, I repeat here a lot of my previous and still relevant comments.

Given the site's location within a Conservation Area and its value as a Protected Open Space, the design quality of any scheme coming forwards 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 Uttlesford Design 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.

There are supplied street elevations within the DAS and some CGI's which do indicate some variety in terms of elevational treatment and roofscape. It would, however, be helpful to supply street elevations of the key streets; Grand Avenue, Grand Avenue Link etc. so that the quality of the streetscene in these key spaces can be assessed. As an example, The DAS states that corner buildings have been designed to "respond to their corner location where they address two streets" However, the drawings for plot 24, house type 'Bronte' have an entirely windowless long façade which is presented to the pedestrian footpath as well as the garden boundary treatment. Similarly, the additional windows added to plot 64 only on house type 'The Villa' do not provide sufficient active frontage and passive surveillance to the pedestrian footpath along the eastern edge of the site. This coupled with large extents of garden boundaries will make this pedestrian footpath unattractive after dark.

The crescent housing could be a successful layout in relation to the sports pitch, although the façade design would benefit from more articulation and the integral garages limit passive surveillance and engagement with the street. The elevation presented to the sports pitch is lacking in variety or animation, with a uniform ridge line. This remains unchanged in its design 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

The layout has been revised since the last application and has some positive merits. The inclusion of two pedestrianised routes – Grand Avenue and Grand Avenue Link – is welcome. However, as stated above, street elevations should be supplied. In placemaking terms, it would be beneficial to use these routes to lead to a destination, such as a small square or amenity open space. The Grand Avenue is a slightly curved tree-lined route running east-west and whilst this will create an attractive environment, it seems overly formal for its destination, which is a pedestrian footpath running north-south on the eastern edge of the site. Similarly, the Grand Avenue Link, is a more informal pedestrian route, and is a positive asset, however, its design results in a lot of courtyard parking and lack of street animation or passive surveillance to the surrounding one-way street, in contravention of code M3.7C.

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.

Prepared by

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Date

11 June 2025