

Epping Forest District Quality Review Panel

Report of Formal Review Meeting: North Weald Park

Friday 5 April 2019

Committee Room 1, Epping Forest District Council, 323 High Street, CM16 4BZ

Panel

Peter Maxwell (chair)
Roland Karthaus
Jan Kattein
Vivienne Ramsey
Peter Studdert

Attendees

Ione Braddick	Epping Forest District Council
Sukhi Dhadwar	Epping Forest District Council
Alison Blom-Cooper	Epping Forest District Council
Anna Rowell	Epping Forest District Council
David Sprunt	Essex County Council
Allison De Marco	Frame Projects
Tessa Kordeczka	Frame Projects

Apologies / report copied to

Tai Tsui	Epping Forest District Council
Nigel Richardson	Epping Forest District Council
Michael Johnson	Epping Forest District Council
Deborah Denner	Frame Projects

Confidentiality

Material presented was not formally submitted to the local planning authority at the time of the review. This report is therefore confidential. As a public organisation Epping Forest District Council is subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOI) and Environmental Information Regulations (EIR), and in the case of an FOI/EIR request may be obliged to release project information submitted for review.

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1. Project name and site address

North Weald Park (former North Weald Golf Course), Rayley Lane, North Weald Bassett, Essex CM16 6AR

Planning application reference: EPF/1494/18

2. Presenting team

Colin Pullan	Lambert Smith Hampton
William Sheardown	Quinn Estates
Brian Sutherland	BDB Design
James Brett	BDB Design
Ricardo Rosetti	Redrow Homes
James Morton	Aspect Landscape
Nick Bradshaw	Connect
Paul Burley	Montagu Evans

3. Planning authority's views

The planning authority reiterates its objection in principle to development on the North Weald Park site – the policy context remains unchanged since the previous review. The site was found to be unsuitable for removal from the Green Belt in a Strategic Land Availability Assessment and is not allocated for development in the adopted or emerging Epping Forest District Local Plan. The site is a considerable distance from existing development; is on open land; and partially falls within a flood zone. Although a report on the potential impact of development on operation of the adjacent North Weald Airfield indicates that aviation – including police and air ambulance services – would not be hindered, intermittent disturbance to future residents cannot be discounted.

Essex County Council has objections to the quantum of development proposed and concerns about the sustainability of a community at North Weald Park – including in relation to transport from the site into Epping.

It is acknowledged that the revised masterplan for North Weald Park includes some significant improvements on its earlier iteration, but a number of issues remain to be clarified and developed further. These include the proposed development's relationship with the wider context, including North Weald Bassett; sustainable transport options; architectural expression, materials and sustainable design; public realm and landscape design strategy; tenure mix; and meeting the needs of all those living and working at North Weald Park.



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4. Quality Review Panel's views

Summary

The Quality Review Panel notes the planning policy context in which it has been requested to comment on proposed development at North Weald Park – to which the planning authority objects in principle. While not advising on site allocation or suitability of development on a Green Belt site, the panel raises fundamental questions about the feasibility of delivering successful and sustainable development in this location, irrespective of planning policy. It points to the absence of strategic connections within the wider context; a density that may not support the facilities and transport required for a new community; and uncertainty that a sustainable transport strategy could be delivered for North Weald Park. Ease of sustainable travel and disincentives to car use appear lacking. While acknowledging some positive refinements to the masterplan – notably in the location of the primary school and community facilities – the panel makes further recommendations in relation to phasing of development, including delivery of the linear park; tenure, including the proportion and distribution of affordable homes; density and housing typologies; and the public realm and landscape design strategy, which appears overly dependent on hard landscaping. These comments are expanded below.

Process

- The panel notes the objection in principle by Epping Forest District Council to development at North Weald Park on planning policy grounds. It also notes the Highway Authority's concerns. It is unusual for the panel to be asked by a planning authority to provide comments in such cases.
- The panel clarifies that it is not its role to advise on the suitability or otherwise of development on a Green Belt site or site allocation. However, the panel raises fundamental questions about the feasibility of delivering successful and sustainable development in this location, irrespective of planning policy. It points in particular to its isolation and absence of strategic connections to the wider context, including North Weald Bassett.
- Given the planning policy context, the panel reiterates that it is for the applicant to demonstrate convincingly how North Weald Park might be considered an exemplary development. This would include, for example, successful integration within the wider context and strategic coordination with landowners; its economic, social and environmental sustainability; and architectural quality.
- The panel concentrates its comments on broader issues of the quality of place to be created at North Weald Park.



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Strategic approach to the masterplan

- The panel acknowledges the significant amount of work undertaken to revise the masterplan for North Weald Park, including in response to its previous comments. This has resulted in improvements, for example relocation of the primary school to the south of the A414; clustering of uses around the proposed local centre and village green at the south of the site; and the street pattern.
- Notwithstanding these revisions, fundamental concerns remain about the site's isolation, limited coordination with other developments, and relationship with the existing settlement. Currently, this does not demonstrate a cohesive strategic proposal.
- The panel raises significant concerns whether the proposed density for North Weald Park will be sufficient to support the facilities and transport required for a viable and sustainable community. It also notes the potential impact of the airfield on the amenity of residents.
- It agrees that it is important for the development not to be solely residential and to include business space. The model proposed, however – with business space located towards the western boundary of the site together with extensive car parking provision – appears rather outmoded and would encourage reliance on car use (see also below). The panel suggests that a more successful approach might be to integrate employment use into the local centre.

Sustainable transport

- The proposals do not demonstrate a convincing approach to sustainable transport, providing ease of sustainable travel and disincentives to vehicle use. Without effective interventions, the panel is concerned that residents will rely on private car use.
- The panel is also not convinced by the approach to sustainable transport connections to the wider area. It questions whether a 'park and ride' scheme to North Weald Park would be viable – given anticipated traffic congestion.
- The hierarchy of routes within the masterplan remains unclear – and does not appear to optimise walking and cycling for local trips. At the moment, the panel is not convinced that people would choose to walk, rather than travel by car.
- In terms of quality of everyday life, the panel would also expect to see direct and easy access from streets to the central linear park.



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Phasing

- The panel seeks clarification of the phasing of the development. While the village green is expected to be delivered in Phase 1, it is currently unclear when the proposed linear park might come forward.

Tenure

- The tenure mix – including affordable homes – proposed for North Weald Park and its distribution across the development also lacks clarity. The panel thinks that a best practice approach would involve distribution of different tenures – for example, adopting a ‘pepper potting’ approach.

Density and housing typologies

- The plan and layout show a sharp distinction between large detached houses and terraces and apartments. In general, the panel thinks that the townscape quality of new communities can be greater where there is a more gradual transition between lower and higher density typologies.

Public realm and landscape design strategy

- For new communities of the density of residential development proposed, the amount and quality of green space is a key consideration. There appears to be an over reliance on hard landscaping – such as back roads, alleyways and mews streets.

Next steps

- The Quality Review Panel raises significant fundamental questions about the ability of development on this site to succeed as a sustainable community – and encourages the applicant to pursue dialogue with the planning authority on an appropriate strategic approach.

