



FRAME PROJECTS

Epping Forest District Quality Review Panel

**Report of Formal Review Meeting: Chigwell Garden Centre, 245 High Road,
Chigwell, Essex IG7 5BL**

Friday 17 May 2019

North Weald Airfield, Merlin Way, North Weald Bassett, Essex CM16 6HR

Panel

Peter Maxwell (chair)

Kirsten Henson

Roland Karthaus

Chris Snow

Richard Wilson

Attendees

Ione Braddick

Epping Forest District Council

Ian Ansell

Epping Forest District Council

Ben Smith

Epping Forest District Council

Allison De Marco

Frame Projects

Apologies / report copied to

Alison Blom-Cooper

Epping Forest District Council

Nigel Richardson

Epping Forest District Council

Deborah Denner

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1. Project name and site address

Chigwell Garden Centre, 245 High Road, Chigwell, Essex IG7 5BL

Planning application reference: EPF/3195/18

2. Presenting team

Rob Scott	Scott Properties
David Roe	Signature Senior Lifestyle
Jill Lloyd	Landowner
Ian Pentney	PRP
Stephen Hynds	PRP
Tom Delhanty	PRP Landscape
Richard Clews	Strutt & Parker

3. Planning authority's views

The application site is currently within the Green Belt. The Epping Forest Local Plan (Submission Version), currently at examination, allocates the adjoining site to the west for removal from the green belt, for residential development of approximately 65 dwellings (CHIG.R5). The application site is indicated as remaining in the Green Belt. The application site had been considered in the site selection process but failed at Stage 2 when it was considered to be part of a strongly performing Green Belt, and sufficient other sites within the settlement ranked more favourably. The site allocation is being contested through the Local Plan Examination, with the site promoters seeking allocation of a larger site. EFDC officers welcome the panel's views on: impact of the development on openness and character; quality and design of the specialist care housing, including amenity and quality of life; built form and appearance; car parking; and landscape quality.

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. While not advising on site allocation or suitability of development on a Green Belt site, the panel raises fundamental questions about the quality of the scheme, including concerns about liveability, wellbeing and the feasibility of delivering successful and sustainable development based on the current approach, irrespective of planning policy. The panel's comments focus on the design quality of the development, to inform assessment of the application by Epping Forest District Council. The discussion focused on strategic design issues including: the scheme's relationship to the wider context and approach; layout and massing; architectural expression and frontages; sustainability; parking and landscape strategy. Overall, the panel thinks the submitted scheme would not result in an acceptable development in terms of design quality, regardless of site allocation and green belt planning policy. These comments are expanded below.



Process

- The panel notes the objection in principle by Epping Forest District Council to the proposals on planning policy grounds. 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 quality of the scheme, including concerns about liveability and the feasibility of delivering successful and sustainable development based on the current approach, that are separate from and irrespective of planning policy.
- Given the planning policy context, the panel thinks it is for the applicant to convincingly demonstrate how the proposals might be considered an exemplary development. This would include, for example, social and environmental sustainability; successful integration within the wider context, including adjoining site to the west (part of Chigwell Garden Centre); and architectural quality.
- The panel concentrates its comments on broader issues of the quality of the place that would be created.

Relationship to the wider context and approach

- The process through which the scheme has evolved has reduced opportunities and created constraints which are compromising design quality.
- The panel understands that the planning strategy has driven the design approach; however, it thinks this will not result in the best outcome. It highlights the limitations of not pursuing a more comprehensive approach – one that convincingly includes the adjoining site to the west (part of Chigwell Garden Centre).
- For example, a lack of clarity on the scheme's western boundary, including single-sided access road, shows where a masterplan-led approach could enable an improved outcome.
- The access road and scheme's western frontage would be better designed if there were greater certainty on the use and form of development to the west. The panel notes that the examples presented have very different relationships with surrounding streetscapes.
- The planning process normally provides a framework within which cohesive development across property boundaries can come forward. Because of the planning status of this site, the onus is on the scheme promoter to demonstrate that the scheme will be well integrated.
- While views to the site appear relatively contained, the panel feels it is still a fairly open site which plays a role in reducing the coalescence of surrounding development. It thinks the existing greenhouses within this setting have a different visual impact, compared with more solid and permanent forms of development such as the one proposed.



- The panel is concerned the scheme would facilitate the coalescence of the surrounding settlements.

Layout and massing

- The panel thinks the scheme's layout and form would benefit from further consideration. It recommends looking at a range of options that maximise residential amenity, reconsider the scheme's edges, access points and internal circulation.
- It also recommends further work to improve the relationship between building form and natural topography. It notes the way the natural topography falls towards the Brook running along the eastern boundary, and suggests exploring whether building form could be more responsive.
- There are concerns that the decision to create a single building footprint together with the layout and location of entrances, has created overly long circulation routes.
- Internally, elderly residents will have to navigate particularly lengthy corridors, approximately 50m long, to access their units. While the panel understands the desire to consolidate secure entry points, and create sheltered internal circulation, it is worried about the length and quality of these corridors – including lack of natural daylight.
- Externally, the panel highlights the circuitous route to access the primary entrance in the northern elevation, furthest away from the High Road. It recommends looking at options that allow pedestrians, including those arriving from nearby Chigwell Station, to access the main entrance more directly.
- The panel also thinks that pursuing an approach so heavily driven by mitigation and concealment has added further constraints. For example, cutting the building into the southern end of the site to create a two-storey appearance from the High Road, has increased the proportion of north-facing single aspect units and habitable rooms.

Liveability

- It will be critical to ensure wellbeing and health are at the core of scheme design. The panel understands that daylight and sunlight performance of the scheme's specific habitable rooms has not been tested, and has been limited to assessing standard typologies.
- The panel is concerned about the proportion of north facing units, which appear to include deep bedrooms. It urges that specific testing be undertaken, and highlights that residents are likely to spend significant time in their units, including bedrooms. Single aspect north facing units should be designed out.



- The panel understands that mechanical ventilation is not proposed in individual units. It will be critical to demonstrate good thermal performance and airtightness, alongside management strategies to ensure residents are assisted in opening their windows, if necessary, to allow natural airflow.
- It will also be important to understand the quality of unit layouts. The panel recommends showing and considering unit layouts in greater detail.
- The panel also is concerned about how much sunlight the central courtyard garden will receive. In the absence of any technical data, it is the panel's view that this area is likely to be overshadowed.

Architectural expression and frontages

- The building's primary pedestrian entrance is, unusually, located furthest away from the road, while the south road-facing elevation is angled away from the road. The panel thinks legibility and arrival sequencing could be further investigated and refined.
- Some panel members suggested exploiting the opportunities of the unusual rear-main entrance arrangement. Looking at precedents where main entrances are located away from a main road. For example, at Holkham Hall, Norfolk, the main visitor approach is rotated 90 degrees from the building's main entrance.

Sustainability

- The panel is unclear on the strategy for achieving a carbon reduction of 35% and a BREEAM 'Very Good' rating. It highlights that managing water consumption in particular will be a challenge, with care homes typically having heavy water use. It thinks there could be great opportunities to recycle water, which should be explored.
- It questions the use of a gas-based combined heat and power system, highlighting the move away from gas as momentum gathers to decarbonise the electricity grid. It recommends exploring air source heat pumps.

Landscape strategy and parking

- The panel thinks significant work is required to develop a landscape strategy for the site. It recommends reconsidering the current approach, emphasising opportunities rather than focusing on mitigation. It also asks for more information on the drainage strategy for the site, and greater clarity on how water flows through the site, including any flooding history, and on future climate change resilience.
- It likes the concept of meadow planting, and thinks this could be an important asset with broader benefits. It also likes the description of core and non-core parking areas, with non-core areas as discrete, softer elements.



- Given concerns about building massing and layout, the panel recommends reviewing how permeable the site boundary planting should be, how this changes during the seasons, and whether it is important to increase views into the site.

Next steps

- The Quality Review Panel raises significant questions about the scheme, and encourages the applicant to pursue dialogue with the planning authority. It would like to see the scheme again if in-principle matters are progressed.

