



FRAME PROJECTS

## **Epping Forest District Quality Review Panel**

### **Report of Chair's Review Meeting: Land North of Chelmsford Road**

Friday 27 October 2023

Via video conference

#### **Panel**

Peter Maxwell (chair)

Valerie Beirne

#### **Attendees**

Muhammad Rahman

Epping Forest District Council

Peter van der Zwan

Epping Forest District Council

Lucy Block

Frame Projects

Yingli Tang

Frame Projects

#### **Apologies**

Krishma Shah

Epping Forest District Council

### **1. Project name and site address**

Land to the North of Chelmsford Road, Ongar, Essex.

### **2. Presenting team**

Matt Atton	Persimmon Homes Essex
Paige Milner-Harris	Persimmon Homes Essex

### **3. Planning authority briefing**

The site comprises an open parcel of agricultural land situated on the eastern section of Ongar Town, located off Chelmsford Road. It sits opposite the Great Stony Park Conservation Area. The site is bounded by residential development to the west, northwest and south, playing fields to the northeast, and agricultural land to the east. The site allocation ONG.R4 has been taken out of the Green Belt and is allocated for a residential development of 163 homes in the adopted Local Plan 2023.

Policy P4 of the Local Plan sets out site-specific policy requirements relating to design quality and heritage impact on Wantz Farm, a Grade II listed building, and Great Stony Park Conservation Area. It also sets out expectations in relation to the existing trees and landscape design, including a new Defensible Green Belt Boundary to the north, east and south edges of the site. Transport infrastructure, including improvements to Four Wantz Roundabout, plus active travel measures, will be required as part of the movement strategy and should be developed in collaboration with site allocation ONG.R1 and R2.

Since the previous Quality Review Panel meeting, the applicant amended the scheme in response to the panel's comments. The application now proposes 145 dwellings with associated parking, landscape, and vehicular access onto High Ongar Road. Officers would welcome the panel's comments on the revised masterplan layout, the building typologies, and landscape design.



#### 4. Quality Review Panel's views

##### *Summary*

The panel appreciates the updates to the site layout, which are a significant improvement on the previous masterplan. The additional connectivity and public realm enhancements are positive, and result in a more genuine landscape-led approach. However, the panel would like to see further development on the interface between streets, buildings, and landscape. Thresholds should be considered as an opportunity to introduce characteristics of the local area, such as low brick walls and reasonably tall hedges.

The traditional architectural approach seems appropriate, but the panel would like to see special moments at key buildings, defining corners and marker buildings, as well as better articulation to the gable ends. The panel would also like to see traditional architectural designs developed to sensitively incorporate sustainable features, such as shading, photovoltaics panels and air source heat pumps. The sustainable drainage strategy is positive, but the panel would like to see a more integrated approach within the street design and pocket parks. The retention pond could become a great community asset for residents and the wider area, and the panel would like to see further detail regarding public access to this area.

The panel appreciates the need to deliver larger homes on this site, and it notes the corresponding pressure to apply the high level of parking defined by Essex County Council standards. However, the panel would like to see consideration of ways to reduce private car ownership through shared means, such as car clubs. It also recommends future proofing car parking spaces, so these can be turned into green spaces or community uses should car ownership reduce over time.

##### *Layout*

- The overall site layout has improved significantly since the previous review, and the panel feels that the denser urban form adopted is more successful.
- The formal avenue arrangement, lined with mature trees, helps give clarity and hierarchy to the site.
- The use of terraced housing forms is positive, but the panel feels that this could be used more, to release additional land for communal uses and green space.
- The panel questions the placement of the apartment buildings on Chelmsford Road. Using forms more akin to the scale of larger houses, may be more appropriate than the L-shaped blocks, which feel out of place, given the traditional style used elsewhere.
- The character of the eastern area of the site feels less well-developed, and the streets off the main avenue should be developed further, to address fronts / backs and overlooking onto the parking courts.



- The new connection to the north is positive and will help improve permeability, providing links from the school, leisure centre and playing fields through to the public right of way to the south.
- However, the route through from Chelmsford Road to the central pocket park lacks definition and should be explored and improved.

### *Architectural character and identity*

- The panel feels that the design is still lacking identity and character. This should be developed to ensure that the development feels of its place.
- The panel appreciates that a lot of the design work has been done in-house but maintains that a development of this size and significance would benefit from appointing a professional design team.
- The panel is comfortable with the traditional architectural approach adopted, using brick and pitched roofs, but it would like to see further cues taken from the surrounding areas, such as banding and rustication features.
- Alongside the standard house types proposed, the panel would like to see special attention given to focal buildings. For instance, a distinct architectural language could be introduced at important corners and where buildings face onto the open spaces or form gateways into the site.
- Care should also be given to the design of gable ends, especially where these do not have front doors and risk becoming blank elevations.
- Further work is required to positively incorporate sustainability features, such as photovoltaic panels and shading devices, into the traditional architecture proposed.
- The location and design of enclosures for air source heat pumps, bikes and bin stores should be dealt with sensitively, and integrated with the design of the homes.

### *Landscape*

- The introduction of more meaningful green spaces allows the scheme to feel more genuinely landscape-led. However, the panel feels that there are still strategic issues to address which will further maximise the landscape value across the site.
- The pocket parks are a positive addition, and the panel encourages the team to develop the design with an understanding of how they will be used. The landscape design should align and relate with the architecture to ensure that these spaces are framed with active frontages for passive surveillance.



- The panel would like to see how the landscape and planting choices can be used to help people navigate through the site. The avenue of trees goes some way to achieve this, but the panel also suggests considering low level planting through the pocket parks, as well as along streets.
- The panel strongly encourages the applicant to plant mature trees and planting upfront. This will be incredibly positive for habitat and ecology on the site, as well as an attractive selling point for the development.
- The thresholds between the buildings and public realm could provide a great opportunity to add character and interest. Developing different responses for the main and side streets would help differentiate the character and hierarchy of these spaces.
- A key characteristic of the neighbouring streets in Ongar is the clipped hedgerows, for instance along Queensway. These are a higher than what is currently proposed. Introducing these types of landscape features, alongside architectural elements, would build on the existing landscape character of the local area.
- There is a good opportunity to work with a wide palette of species, from trees to ground cover. Resilient planting species should be proposed, to respond to climate change.
- Edible planting and grow spaces could also be incorporated, for instance herbs and fruit trees. This would be a great benefit for the local community.
- Climbing plants could be considered to add vertical greening to gable ends and blank facades.
- The sustainable drainage strategy is positive, but the panel would like to see a more integrated approach, so that the system picks up water the moment it hits ground. Creative solutions, such as rain chains, could add interest to the architecture.
- SUDS features should also be incorporated more meaningfully within the street design and pocket parks. Swales and rain gardens would add visual interest, as well as help to improve biodiversity value across the site.
- The retention pond at the east of the site could become a great community asset, with paths and planting added to help create smaller dwell spaces around the pond. Further detail should be provided on public access to this area should be provided.
- There is still a significant amount of hardstanding proposed. Permeable surfaces should be used to help water management on site.
- A maintenance and management strategy should be developed for the landscape and open spaces.



### *Access and parking*

- The panel recognises the pressure to apply the high parking standards defined by Essex County Council standards. However, it feels that measures to reduce private car ownership, such as car clubs, should be considered.
- Car parking should be designed to be flexible, so that these spaces can be turned into green spaces or community uses should car ownership reduce over time.
- The panel feels that the placement of some of the parking courts breaks up the street scene. It would like to see how these could be better organised and orientated to maximise active frontages.
- Where car ports or garages are proposed, these should be sensitively designed to be subservient to the homes.
- The design of the parking courts should be developed further to address concerns around passive surveillance and activity.
- The panel would like to better understand how people navigate through the site. Wayfinding using the building form and landscape should be considered to help intuitively guide people through the space, without the need for signage.
- The wider improvements beyond the redline, including improvements to pedestrian and cycle infrastructure towards the roundabout and village centre, will be fundamental. These should be delivered early in the phasing, so that these are in place from day one.

### *Sustainability*

- The panel welcomes the sustainability strategy and targets, but these should be more ambitious and go beyond building regulations. The panel suggests pushing for Net Zero by 2030.
- The applicant should provide a clear response against the EFDC sustainable checklist to quantify the scheme's energy and carbon performance, including energy use intensity, on-site renewables, operational carbon, efficient water use and space heating. This should provide a clear statement about whether this is Net Zero by 2030, 2050, or some other target.

### *Next steps*

- The panel would welcome the opportunity to review the scheme again, if helpful to planning officers.

