

20/0318/RRM

Reserved matters application for 120 dwellings and community facilities with associated landscaping, open space, car parking and access from Woodlands Lane and the provision of SANG with associated works (appearance, landscaping, layout and scale being considered) and submission of details to comply with conditions 5 (drainage strategy), 6 (ground investigation in part), 7 (greenfield runoff rates), 8 (surface water management), 9 (programme of archaeological work), 15 (surface materials), 16 (visibility zones), 18 (travel plan), 19 (finished floor levels), 20 (tree reports), 21 (external lighting), 22 (badger method statement), 23 (landscape and ecological management), 25 (SANG management plan), 26 (bat survey), 27 (dormice survey), 28 (cycle and refuse storage areas), 29 (vehicle and cycle parking provisions) and 32 (sound attenuation) all pursuant to outline planning permission 15/0590 allowed on appeal dated 26 July 2017.

Heathpark Wood, East of Heathpark Drive, Windlesham, Surrey

Location and context

The proposal for the development of 120 residential units in the form of mainly detached and semi-detached 2-storey dwellings and two larger blocks of flats, a community hall, a central green and car parking is situated in an existing woodland setting, dense broad leaved semi-natural woodland along the boundaries, and large, cultivated pines in the more central areas. The woodland, which continues to the north of Chertsey Road B386, defines the eastern edge of the Windlesham, an attractive village of Medieval origin with high cultural and natural values.

The application site is situated to the east of the current village boundary. To the west of the application site is Heathwood Drive, a residential development characterised by generous, deep front gardens and an abundance of pine trees in an irregular pattern along the winding street, all contributing to an informal, peaceful and verdant character. Immediately to the east of the application site are two large detached residential properties set deeply back from the street in extensive gardens, followed by further woodland and the M3. To the north-east of the site is Uptown Court, a high end mansion residence, situated in a vast setting of landscaped gardens and woodland.

From an urban design perspective it's important to retain the existing woodland edges of the application site intact to avoid any visual impact of the proposed development or detrimental effects on the amenity of neighbouring properties. Also the natural, wooded character of the streetscene along Woodland's Lane, a main thoroughfare, needs to be retained intact. This is important also in longer views from the open countryside opposite the site, an attractive rural area well used for riding and walking.

Scale of development and interface

The proposed development is a major new development scheme which due to its scale will create a new neighbourhood and an extension to the village of Windlesham. The proposed site plan retains a natural, green edge of trees along Woodlands Lane, which is positive. The development has been set back from the streetscene, and will be presented by a glimpse of the new community hall, a large landmark building at an angle to the streetscene. At present time there are no detailed elevations available of the proposed community hall. An indicative impression on an elevational overview shows a single storey building in black stained weatherboarding with an extensive amount of finely paned glazing (main hall). Given the prominent gateway location and the sensitive setting at the village edge, a pure, vernacular

design approach with simple full height windows of good proportions echoing traditional larger openings of barns would have been preferable. The building proportions causes concern, as does the proposed fenestration which is considered is atypical and inappropriate. The Windlesham Church Road Conservation Area Appraisal gives baseline information with regards to suitable scale, massing, typical built details and materials to inspire a more contemporary approach as the Council has advised during pre-app stage. Fully detailed drawings of the proposed community hall are required to assess the building design and any potential impact it may have as part of this application. The cycle parking at the Community Hall would be better located in a less prominent position than at the main approach, to achieve a proper setting and to increase safety.

Design vision, layout and streetscape

The vision for the site layout, according to the Design and Access Statement, is to blend in with the rural character of Windlesham and the adjacent Heathwood Drive, the latter characterised by an organic, sweeping street pattern as the primary spine, with detached and semidetached two-storey late 1960s residential buildings set back in deep, open front gardens. The neighbouring streetscene is characterised by buildings positioned relatively closely together, their main elevation facing the street and garages and car parking integrated in front of the buildings. Trees in a irregular, natural pattern along the central approach creates a sense of woodland setting which softens this adjacent residential area.

The proposed layout of Heathpark Wood is characterised by an undulating street pattern at the entrance which is positive and echoes the character of Heathwood Drive. However, the organic street pattern is less well defined and loses its' strength as you move further into the site. The main reason for this is the siting of buildings which does not always follow or support the flow of the streetscape. Especially the section Nos. 5-11(-18) appears disintegrated in the masterplan, mainly because of the angular street layout and plot pattern and the disproportions between buildings and the separating car parking spaces. The Surrey Heath Residential Design Guide (RDG) SPD, of material consideration, emphasises the importance of well balanced, design-driven streetscapes with a focus on placemaking and the key objective to deliver a vibrant, small scale, green streetscene, an essential quality of Surrey Heath's local distinctiveness. However, the proposal suggests street elevations with detached dwellings separated by double car parking spaces of equal width as the building frontages. This creates an unnecessary harsh streetscene dominated by hard-standing and a regularity which is alien to the semi-rural village character of Windlesham. The lack of strong landscaping provision including structural tree planting along the spine contributes to the urban appearance. The same issue appears in key views of Nos. 10-11 from the central green. The streetscene would have benefitted from a stronger rhythm of buildings, bounded by strategic tree planting and structural hedge planting along the spine and along the central green. The National Design Guide, adopted 2019, states "well-designed parking is attractive, well landscaped and sensitively integrated into the built form so that it does not dominate the development or the street scene" as the expected norm.

Also buildings Nos. 1-4 do not support the movement of the streetscape, due to their angular position. As a result they do not integrate very well.

Character areas, legibility and placemaking

The proposed development has been divided into three character areas. One of them, "The village centre", is however split into two sections; the main part located at the northern end of the site, and a smaller one, 4 dwellings, at the south-eastern corner of the site. The location of the village "centre" at the far end, where the density is decreasing doesn't appear rational. The majority of the site, the development along the spine road falls within the "Woodland

edge” theme, whilst the central part of the development surrounding the green has a “Parkland edge” theme. From an urban design point of view the proposed application and distribution of the three different character areas is considered inconsistent and overly complicated.

In combination with the rich variation of building types and the many varieties of facing bricks, the variables are too many to create a distinct, well balanced scheme which provides legibility and clarity in line with good urban design practise. The masterplan also shows examples where the layout is a result of traffic movement, rather than integrating all required uses within a strong, coordinated design response. The streetscape south of No. 95 is an example of this. There are also inconsistencies how the hard landscape materials have been applied, for example with sudden changes of materials in one of the most important views along the green.

Apart from the central green, the layout does not demonstrate any additional placemaking which is regrettable and at odds with the SHRDG as well as the National Design Guide, adopted 2019. These could be small and informal places, created within the streetscape, for example north of No. 49, but are equally essential for people to meet, greet or rest a few minutes during a walk to make the environment inclusive and adaptable over time.

Density, building line and creating distinctiveness

The scheme aims to provide a variation in density between the central parts of the plan, which has a tighter grain, and the periphery of the site where the density eases out and plots increase in size towards the existing wooded boundaries. This principle may appear understandable in general, however given the scale of the site it is not consistent with good placemaking. For example, a continuous building line and a clear building pattern are required to create a strong sense of place along the village green. The current site layout does not optimise the opportunity to create true distinctiveness due to a lack of integration between built elements, streetscapes and open spaces. Whilst there is a strong focus on variation of building materials, the overall layout itself and the placemaking should assist better in the orientation and way finding throughout the site and should deliver a sequence of distinct, interesting and pleasant places.

From an urban design point of view a more traditional built form with smaller footprints, such as terraced buildings in combination with semidetached dwellings in a strong rhythm would have been preferable to create a stronger sense of place along the village green. The flatted blocks A and B at the junction with the main street with their substantial footprints and large massing are considered out of scale. Apart from the absence of a strong and consistent building line on both sides of the green, the lack of placemaking is exacerbated by the irregular building pattern with Nos. 90-94 and No. 99 turning their gables facing the green, whilst No. 42 appears disintegrated. The layout fails to create a proper contrast and backdrop to the open space and instead puts the emphasis on the junction. As the two blocks are not backed up by other buildings, due to the lack of structure and continuity along the green, the streetscape appear more unbalanced. A better building rhythm and a more distinctive streetscape would also enable a slightly higher density in certain areas of the scheme, without increasing the building height, which is desirable and in line with national planning guidance.

Building types, building materials, detailing

The proposed buildings are mainly two storey, residential dwellings in a wide selection of different house types, and two larger apartment blocks at the entrance to the park, all in a traditional, classic design approach. Apart from the main classic building type, there are landmark buildings in 8 pivotal locations, characterised by hipped feature gables, external

chimneys, tile hanging, finials and a 45 degree roof pitch. Also more bespoke than the classic range are the key buildings, with a 40-45 degree roof pitch, in important locations. The building materials are predominantly brickwork in combination with traditional hanging tiles to the south weatherboarding to the north, with clay tiles and slate as roofing materials. However, the built form and massing are considered rather uniform, except the blocks. A stronger degree of variation in built form and more slender proportions to reduce the massing would have been welcome, as well as more playfulness with details such as canopies to create interest. The design approach is more classical than based on small-scale vernacular, which influences the massing, proportions and detailing. In terms of building details, a stronger differentiation of fenestration would have been advisable in accordance with Surrey Heath RDG, which recommends a reduction of window sizes on upper storeys in line with traditional building character. Boxed eaves are not supported by Surrey Heath RDG.

Layout of open spaces, connectivity

The village green provides both a LAP and a LEAP, which is welcome. However, the central green is the only shared open space within this large, new neighbourhood. Shared amenity space should also be provided directly in relation to Block A and B, in line with Surrey Heath Residential Design Guide, and can be accommodated with a more efficient layout.

From an urban design point of view and in accordance with national design guidance open space should be organised to cater for a broad range of activities and to serve all residents in the area, and their potential visitors, and to make more efficient use of the space. The centrally located leap dominates the green space physically and visually. It is important to create a variety of opportunities where people can meet, talk, sit and rest. The green should offer additional seating arrangements not directly linked to the play areas. Some of the seating should be found in half-shade, and others located in more quiet areas. The LEAP would therefore be better located at a slight angle and to the side to optimize the usability of the central green space and to visually separate the play area from the pond.

Unfortunately the connectivity for pedestrians to the north from the green is poor due to the squeezed layout and the positioning of buildings which creates a tight pinch point and hidden corners behind No. 94, which is detrimental to good legibility and orientation and contrary to national Secured by Design guidelines. The same issue applies behind Nos. 19, 35 and 70. This is not acceptable and needs to be rectified.

In direct line from the LEAP to the east are two large attenuation ponds, which at times will create a nice water feature. From a spatial perspective the green should serve a wide range of uses for a broad variety of people living in the area. Views across the green, views to the pond and towards the woodland edge are also important considerations that have to be taken into account in the proposed layout.

Car parking layouts

Unfortunately none of the three larger surface car parks in the proposal meet Surrey Heath Residential Design Guide's standards, principle 6.6 and 6.8, and are therefore not acceptable. Principle 6.6, SHRDG, requires "parking layouts to be high quality and designed to reflect the strong heathland and sylvan identity of the borough. All parking arrangements should be softened with generous soft landscaping and no design should group more than 3 parking spaces together without intervening landscaping". Principle 6.8: "On-plot parking should generally be provided to the side or rear. Where front of plot parking is proposed this should be enclosed with soft landscaping and not dominate the appearance of the plot or the

street scene with extensive hard surfacing or multiple or over wide vehicle cross overs or result in vehicles overhanging the pavement or lying hard up against habitable rooms.”

The proposed car parking yards propose up to 10 car parking spaces without intervening landscaping. Also the proposed car parks at the flatted developments A and B cause concern because of their scale, visual dominance, proximity to buildings and the lack of screening vegetation between the buildings and the car park, which is also a potential safety issue.

Summary

High quality urban design is a material consideration and inseparable from good planning. Officers have given extensive advice during the pre-applications stage of this scheme. However, the proposed scheme requires modifications on a range of matters highlighted above and cannot be fully supported in its current form.

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