

## URBAN DESIGN CONSULTEE RESPONSE

### 20/1070/FFU

**Erection of 34 dwelling houses, to comprise 10 No one bed, 6 No two bed, 12 No three bed and 6 No four bed, with associated parking, access and landscaping following demolition of existing dwellings.**

**St Margaret's Cottage and The Ferns Woodlands Lane, Windlesham  
Surrey GU20 6AS**

#### Location and context

The proposal regards the development of 34 residential units in the form of two large, flatted blocks in combination with detached and semidetached dwelling houses, associated landscaping and car parking following the demolition of existing buildings at St. Margaret's and the Ferns. The application site is situated at the eastern boundary of the Windlesham, an attractive village of Medieval origin with high cultural and natural values.

To the west of the application site is the existing residential area Heathwood Drive, and Heathwood Park, a consented major residential development scheme characterised by generous, deep front gardens and trees in an irregular pattern along a winding street, contributing to an informal and verdant character.

The application site is characterised by 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 vegetation within the site to the greatest extent, and to reinforce existing green boundaries to protect the local distinctiveness and to avoid any visual impact of proposed development on the streetscene and neighbouring properties. The rural, wooded character along Woodland's Lane is an essential part of the local distinctiveness and typical for the approach to Windlesham village. The retention of this character is important also in longer views from the open fields opposite the site, an attractive rural area well used for riding and walking.

#### Scale, height massing, density of development and interface

The proposed development consists of 34 dwellings within an area of 0.94 hectares, which equals a density of 36.17 dwellings per hectare, which is considerably higher than what is typically found in small scale, rural Windlesham.

The proposed development will create a new eastern extension to the village, east of the Heathpark Wood development, consented for 122 dwellings.

The National Design Guide (2019) puts an increased emphasis on the importance of development schemes to fully understand, respect and comply with local context. Whilst the Heathpark Wood scheme retains a natural, green edge of trees along Woodlands Lane with the major development set well back from the streetscene, offering a glimpse of the new community hall, the proposed development at St. Margaret's and the Ferns causes concerns from an urban design point of view due to the excessive height, scale and massing of the three storey flatted development blocks proposed as a domineering gateway in close proximity at the Woodlands Lane boundary. The proposed urban form as well as density,

scale, height and massing are considered incongruous with the small scale, vernacular Windlesham and will cause a detrimental impact on the green, rural character of the area. The steep three storey elevations at the site entrance, Block A and B, with their high pitched roofs represent an abrupt change in scale, causing an overbearing urban impact on the streetscene. From an urban design point of view a building height of predominantly two storeys would be acceptable, with some elements of two and a half storeys set well back from the streetscene. The large scale, unrelieved massing of these two flatted blocks as well as the three storey elements in the north-eastern part of the scheme, units Nos. 8-11, will have a permanent detrimental impact on the sensitive, small scale character at odds with Local Plan policy DM9 as well as the Windlesham Neighbourhood Plan. The scheme is considered unacceptable from an urban design point of view and needs to be redesigned to address these important aspects but also to reduce the density, ensuring that a robust green setting including valuable trees is retained and reinforced by robust landscaping, that attractive placemaking including a safe, communal central green and other useful amenity areas, including small children's play space, are delivered, free from adjacent, conflicting car parking areas.

### Design vision, layout and streetscape

The proposed layout is characterised by a simple, linear, geometric approach with a strong gateway entrance created by flatted blocks, leading to detached and semidetached dwellings arranged in an U-shape around a small green.

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. The masterplan would benefit from an irregular, natural pattern of trees along the frontages to create a sense of natural woodland rather than a few trees in straight lines.

There are no objections to the traditional building design cue, which includes typical elements such as gable ends, chimneys, large bay windows and porches, or to the proposed vernacular building materials such as deep orange-red brickwork, tiles hanging, grey slate roofs and timber details. The photographic examples of local building details are well chosen. Nether the less, the density of the scheme has to be reduced. However, dormer windows which break the eaves line and which are in close proximity to other windows, as proposed for House type 1, will not be permitted to prevent the clutter of rainwater pipes.

### Car parking layouts

The larger car parking courts currently do not meet Surrey Heath Residential Design Guide's standards, principle 6.6 and 6.8, and needs to be revised. 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". This is particularly important in order to retain the verdant, rural character of Windlesham.

The location of the car parking for the western dwellings is poorly integrated into the masterplan and affects the central green and sense of place negatively. The masterplan needs to be redesigned so that adequate car parking is integrated seamlessly without a domineering impact on the streetscape.

### Summary

High quality urban design is a material consideration and inseparable from good planning. The proposed scheme requires modifications to address the excessive density, overbearing building height, scale and massing, the urban gateway character, the lack of robust landscaping and open green spaces to conform to national and local design policy. The application cannot be supported from an urban design perspective in its current form.

M.Gustafsson  
MSc MA  
Principal Urban Design Advisor