

### The design review meeting

<b>Reference number</b>	2046/180723
<b>Date</b>	18 <sup>th</sup> July 2023
<b>Meeting location</b>	Surrey Heath Borough Council Offices, Surrey Heath House, Knoll Rd, Camberley, GU15 3HD
<b>Panel members attending</b>	Keith Williams (chair), architecture and urban design Chris Schulte, architecture and public realm John Pegg, landscape architecture and urban design Kevin Radford, architecture and urban design
<b>Panel manager</b>	Lizzie Atherton, Design South East
<b>Presenting team</b>	Des O'Dwyer, Michael Sparks Associates Carola Enrich, Townshends
<b>Other attendees</b>	Victoria Fairhall, Anglesea Capital Phil Brown, Savills Navil Rahman, Surrey Heath Borough Council Melissa Turney, Surrey Heath Borough Council
<b>Site visit</b>	A site visit was conducted by the panel prior to the review.
<b>Scope of the review</b>	As an independent design review panel/forum the scope of this review was not restricted.
<b>Panel interests</b>	Panel members did not indicate any conflicts of interest.
<b>Confidentiality</b>	This report is confidential as the scheme is not yet the subject of a detailed planning application. Full details of our confidentiality policy can be found at the end of this report.

### The proposal

<b>Name</b>	Watchmoor Park
<b>Site location</b>	Watchmoor Park, Riverside Way, Camberley, GU 15 3YL
<b>Site details</b>	3.7ha site located to the east of the A331 and accessed via Riverside Way. The site is part of Watchmoor Park, an established business park

situated towards the south of the York Town industrial area. The area comprises of seven commercially used buildings ranging from two to three storeys in height.

The site falls within a Flood Zone 2, whilst west of the site adjacent to the access from the A331, the site falls within a Flood Zone 3.

<b>Proposal</b>	Proposal to demolish the existing buildings and redevelop the site for flexible industrial and logistics uses within use Classes E(g)(iii), B2 and B8 with ancillary offices and outdoor sport along with ancillary changing room/café together with surface car parking, access, landscaping, and associated works.
<b>Planning stage</b>	Pre-application. Intention to submit full application in summer 2023.
<b>Local planning authority</b>	Surrey Heath Borough Council
<b>Planning context</b>	The site is predominately located within a designated Core Employment Area in the Surrey Heath adopted Policies Map. The western areas outside of the developable area are designated as 'Countryside beyond the Green Belt'.
<b>Planning history</b>	None of relevance
<b>Planning authority perspective</b>	The proposed principle of the development and general layout, scale and form of development is considered acceptable. The Local Planning Authority (LPA) is keen to seek the panel's advice on the treatment of the buildings and quality of the materials and landscaping which have not been seen in sufficient detail aside from indicative drawings. The LPA would also like the panel's advice on the acceptability of the padel courts and café.

## Summary

We welcome the ambition to redevelop Watchmoor Business Park to create a viable place which meets the developing demands of industry. We support the principle of the development. However, justification in sustainability terms should also be sought by the local authority and the greatest effort made to reduce embodied carbon impact by embedding circular economy principles into the design strategy.

The landscape, designed in the 1980's and now matured, is a key asset to the site, framing a formal view from the road. However, the view has not been adequately used as a device to drive the design and shape the architectural approach.

## Key recommendations

1. Describe how the proposal fits into the settlement identity and the wider movement and green infrastructure networks.
2. Resolve the southern portion of the site (in particular units 7-10 and associated parking, access and landscape design) and reconfigure the site layout to improve the public realm and connections and networks for people and nature.
3. Produce views of the proposal from the A331 and consider the landscape and architectural approach as a complete composition, recognising the vision and strategic intent of the original design.
4. Work to minimise the embodied carbon impact of the proposals and justify the scheme in sustainability terms.
5. Review and further justify the inclusion of and location for the padel courts and café.
6. Refine the architecture of Unit 11 to further articulate the building and break down its perceived scale; explore relocating the entrance and office accommodation to front onto Riverside Way.

## Detailed comments and recommendations

### 1. Design strategy

- 1.1. When Watchmoor business park was originally built it represented a strategic shift in industry practices and a change in office working. A similar change is currently underway as Watchmoor's identity continues to evolve to accommodate and attract flexible mid-tech, industrial and logistics uses. We applaud the ambition to not only revitalise the site for industry but also to enhance its physical environment and amenities for the benefit of its working population and visitors to the site. However, the team must carefully manage the potential conflicts that could arise from combining community and industrial uses.
- 1.2. Beyond the red line, the team should better analyse the site's relationship with Camberley, the M3 corridor, the two local train stations (Camberly and Blackwater), and the substantial adjacent open spaces of Crabtree Woods and Hawley Meadows Country Park. Connecting into wider pedestrian, cycle, and ecological networks will be important to demonstrate how this development can enhance and strengthen connections for both people and nature.
- 1.3. Potential tenants could be involved in the life science industry, including for the proposed largest 'flagship' unit, number 11. Rather than submitting a detailed application for the whole site, it could be that an outline or hybrid planning application might maximise the opportunity to attract high-profile tenants who will want to design and specify buildings to meet their specific needs and corporate identities. Subject to detailed market testing, this approach to obtaining consent for development could increase the pool of possible tenants attracted to the site.
- 1.4. Enhancing the collective 'community' nature of Watchmoor could also make it a more attractive place to work, sharing similar benefits to modern urban office developments and co-working facilities. Shared facilities within the site present opportunities for tenants to build a sense of community and enhance the opportunity to build a complementary cluster of complementary industries on the site. The team could consider incorporating shared and enhanced arrival and cycle facilities, allowing individual unit lobbies to be more generous while increasing sociability and interaction between tenants. A collective approach could also be applied to energy and water management. Exploring, for example, an ambient loop for the site, could reduce overall carbon emissions, make better use of the layout and characteristics of the site, and help some companies meet their Environmental, Social, Governance (ESG) objectives, which will be increasingly important for attracting certain types of tenant in future.

- 1.5. Whilst we support the inclusion of communal spaces for health and wellbeing, the padel courts and the café will be challenging to design sensitively when considering views from the road, as the courts divide the buildings from the landscape and encroach into the landscape qualities of the lake, and may have an impact on aquatic ecology. We are unconvinced by their recreational function, and how attractive the café will be, given its proximity to a busy road. If this approach is pursued, the team should be clearer about the benefits of this location for the courts and café and how they connect with the wider pedestrian network and enhance health and wellbeing, as well as better justifying their impact on the pond and its ecology.
- 1.6. We feel that this aspect of the proposal presents an overdevelopment, with tight layouts and awkward servicing arrangements, and with the padel courts and café shoehorned in on an inadequately sized plot. The current approach impacts negatively on some of the most visually and environmentally sensitive areas of the site. In reconsidering the southern half of the site we recommend remodelling adjacent units and consider that omitting units 7 and/or 10 might give more flexibility to enable a successful place by providing adequate space for each of the functions proposed.

## **2. Sustainable design**

- 2.1. Work is required to justify the demolition of the buildings in sustainability terms and approach to minimising embodied carbon by exploring how materials can be reused within the new proposals in the first instance, and recycled where this is not possible.
- 2.2. The emerging approach to sustainable design and renewable energy was not discussed in further detail at this review. Our guidance is that at a subsequent design review and at planning application stage the proposal must produce a clear strategy that details how the development will minimise embodied, operational, and transport-related carbon emissions, and optimise the use of renewable energy to align with the Government's emerging zero carbon policy. This strategy should be tied to measurable targets and detailed modelling work informed by respected calculation methods. The strategy should also address water use, biodiversity net gain, and waste reduction in construction and operation through circular economic principles.

## **3. Landscape, Public Realm, Ecology and Biodiversity Net Gain**

- 3.1. The landscape design conceived in the 1980s is now mature and due a rethink at various scales. We endorse the ambition to retain the mature central avenue of London Plane trees whilst developing and evolving the landscape to create a more naturalistic and wilder setting to enhance biodiversity and potentially reduce ongoing maintenance and carbon footprint.

- 3.2. A strategy regarding views from the main road into the park is required. The landscape of the lakes in the west of the site is mature and provides a characterful and well-kept frontage to the road. However, a cohesive analysis of the composition of the view from the road and the experience of entering the park from the west is lacking. The proposed view beyond the lakes will be expressed from north to south as carpark, the flank wall of unit 11, Riverside Way, and the padel courts foregrounding the backs of Units 1-3. This is not a cohesive approach and fails to recognise the vision and ambition of the original scheme when viewed from the A331.
- 3.3. There may be opportunity to make more of the aquatic ecology on site, by addressing the siltation issues in the lakes and focusing on improving the biodiversity and ecology of the lakes. Rather than the padel courts, greater enjoyment of the lakes could perhaps be achieved through subtler interventions such as the board walks and creating a sculptured and interesting edge. All of this might help to achieve minimum policy gains for greening and biodiversity.
- 3.4. The precedent landscape images suggest the highest aspirations regarding landscape quality. However, this has not been followed through into the design of buildings and other structures. The boardwalks express a more ambitious landscape identity, but we believe there is further opportunity to strengthen the landscape identity of the park by streamlining the number of proposed elements. Taken together the boardwalks, green gym, café, and courts add too many elements and overcomplicate what should be a simple and legible landscape.
- 3.5. The team should test that the proposed new trees have enough space to grow and reach full maturity particularly along the eastern edge alongside units 4-6.

#### **4. Site layout and connectivity**

- 4.1. The southern arrangement of the site appears convoluted and requires reconfiguring to optimise the public realm and enhance connections with Sainsburys to the south and other retail amenity, as well as the public connection to Crabtree Woods Park. The connections beyond the site to the local supermarket and cafes will be popular and should be made attractive and easy to use.
- 4.2. The buildings on either side of Riverside Way are not offset the same distance from the road. A more symmetrical arrangement (in terms of offset distance) could be explored by aligning the entrance of Building 11 with the entrance to the southern part of the site.

- 4.3. While we understand the existing physical constraints, we are unconvinced by the layout of proposed units 7-10, located in the southern portion of the site. The proposed layout of the units appears to be a result of constraints and appear to be placed to use up leftover space rather than to contribute to a cohesive and logical layout of the estate. Unit 7 is flawed as it does not relate to the existing movement network, landscape or uses immediately adjacent to the site. Reconfiguring or removing this unit could help to maximise the connections and legibility of Watchmoor Park whilst avoiding the proliferation of 'leftover' spaces which are vulnerable to litter and antisocial behaviour and detrimental to the development in general.
  - 4.4. If unit 7 is reconfigured, there may be opportunity to explore whether the padel courts and café could be relocated to the south-west corner of the site in a part of the site where the environment and conflicts between uses can be better managed. The café could overlook and activate the Sainsbury/Crabtree Woods access path whilst being more protected from the main road than the proposed location.
  - 4.5. The padel court arrangement and the padel court car park create poor quality spaces between units 1-3 and the courts. People should not have to walk across the car park to access the courts or to navigate north-south across the parklands.
  - 4.6. The team should review the access arrangements for each unit to avoid over-complicated routes. The disabled parking is located far from the main entrance and this should be addressed to create an inclusive environment that works for all users. Additionally, the team felt that the scale of roads accessing car parking areas could be reduced to c.4.8m instead of the 7m proposed which could provide more space for suitable planting adjacent to and integral with the proposed buildings.
  - 4.7. Further work is needed to improve the environment quality for non-vehicular traffic and ensure the pedestrian and cycle network is safe and generous. The footpath alongside Riverside Way is narrow and the presence of large trucks/ lorries will increase due to the changed use profile proposed, further compromising its qualities as a 'boulevard'. Although the team described cycle facilities relating to individual units, there is no improvement to the cycle infrastructure within the street network proposed - this is a clear missed opportunity to affect a shift toward active modes of travel to the site.
- 5. Architecture**
- 5.1. The architecture and landscape should be treated symbiotically. We were not presented with updated CGI's including the naturalistic landscape design therefore it was challenging to comment on the success of the architectural approach without the landscape in place to foreground the buildings.

- 5.2. We endorse the ambition to add architectural interest where possible and articulate the exterior of what will be very large buildings – for example by including vertical panelling to break up the long elevations of unit 11. Unit 11 requires further refinement to articulate the base of the building and ensure that it relates to people at a human scale, and, potentially, the eaves/roofline. The main entrance and office accommodation if moved to Riverside Way may contribute to this. We are not convinced that the 1930s aesthetic is appropriate in this context and encourage the team to explore different approaches informed by sustainable materials, responding to the climate crisis and the characteristics of the proposed reworked parklands in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- 5.3. The frontages to both the lakes and Riverside Way are key. Unit 11 is proposed to front onto the northern lake, while units 2-3 will back onto the lake despite there being a public route proposed between the buildings and courts. A consistent approach is required. The team could explore the further activation of Riverside Way by relocating the entrance and office component of unit 11 to its Riverside Way frontage. The western elevations onto the lake could then be addressed with greenery and climbers to soften the transition between the landscape and buildings.
- 5.4. We do not take issue with the heights of the buildings.
- 6. Materials and detailing**
- 6.1. The approach to materials and detailing was not discussed in great detail at this review. Paragraph 135 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2021) states: *'Local planning authorities should seek to ensure that the quality of approved development is not materially diminished between permission and completion, as a result of changes being made to the permitted scheme (for example through changes to approved details such as the materials used).'*
- 6.2. In order to be consistent with this national policy, the applicant team and local authority should note Design South East's general guidance on material quality and detail. At planning application stage, the quality of the detailing should be demonstrated through large scale drawings at 1:20 and 1:5 of key elements of the building/landscape and should be accompanied by actual material samples which should be secured by condition as part of any planning approval.



The report does not minute the proceedings but aims to provide a summary of the panel's recommendations and guidance.

**Confidentiality**

If the scheme was not the subject of a planning application when it came to the panel, this report is offered in confidence to those who attended the review meeting. There is no objection to the report being shared within the recipients' organisations provided that the content of the report is treated in the strictest confidence. Neither the content of the report, nor the report itself can be shared with anyone outside the recipients' organisations. Design South East reserves the right to make the content of this report known should the views contained in this report be made public in whole or in part (either accurately or inaccurately). Unless previously agreed, pre-application reports will be made publicly available if the scheme becomes the subject of a planning application or public inquiry. Design South East also reserves the right to make this report available to another design review panel should the scheme go before them. If you do not require this report to be kept confidential, please inform us.

If the scheme is the subject of a planning application the report will be made publicly available, and we expect the local authority to include it in the case documents.

**Role of design review**

This is the report of a design review panel, forum or workshop. Design review is endorsed by the National Planning Policy Framework and the opinions and recommendations of properly conducted, independent design review panels should be given weight in planning decisions including appeals. The panel does not take planning decisions. Its role is advisory. The panel's advice is only one of a number of considerations that local planning authorities have to take into account in making their decisions.

The role of design review is to provide independent expert advice to both the applicant and the local planning authority. We will try to make sure that the panel are informed about the views of local residents and businesses to inform their understanding of the context of the proposal. However, design review is a separate process to community engagement and consultation.