

# Urban Design Observations

**To:** Joanne Fisher, Development Management

**From:** Will Dorman, Urban Designer, Mid Sussex DC

**Application ref:** DM/22/2416

**Date:** 29/9/22

**Address:** Land South of Henfield Road, Albourne

**Description:** Outline planning permission for the erection of up to 120 residential dwellings including 30% affordable housing, public open space and community facilities. All matters are reserved except for access.

**Drawings:** Received 1/8/22

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This is an outline scheme, in which appearance, design, landscaping and scale are reserved matters. These observations are therefore initial comments on the illustrative proposals.

The illustrative layout benefits from being organised around a series of perimeter blocks with building frontages that address/face the streets and spaces including the existing public rights of way, retained hedgerows/tree belts, and proposed large area of open space in the southern field parcel. The central open space is well positioned in the middle of the development and succeeds in providing a focus for the layout. It would especially benefit from a play area (which is shown in some of the drawings) to help make it feel a useable space and the focus of the new community (and is a better location than the peripherally positioned play area shown on the western edge), but sufficient room needs to be allowed for recreational space that may require this central space to be enlarged or the attenuation pond reduced.

I have the following concerns in respect of the eastern boundary and the main site entrance:

- The additional land set aside for the potential expansion of Albourne Primary School generates an unfortunately hard edge and orthogonal alignment of houses along this boundary that sit uncomfortably with the more organic shape of the remainder of the development. A buffer strip is needed along the boundary to provide space for trees and shrubs to soften this edge. A contingency design strategy may also be needed in case the school do not utilise the space.
- While a community shop is a welcome proposal, it forms part of a random collection of buildings/building alignments set around a series of fragmented spaces at the site entrance that lack cohesion and creates an untidy and ill coordinated main site entrance. The proposed play area is also unfortunately tucked away behind the rear of the shop and bounded by the proposed school car park/drop-off zone to the south and is poorly overlooked by surrounding buildings. Unless the intention is to integrate the site with the adjacent Millennium Garden (however the proposed development would also need to address and coordinate with the spaces better), the play area would be better positioned in the

arrival space where it will be more visible from the entrance approach and adjacent houses.

- The proposed vehicle access on Henfield Rd as shown on drawings 005 rev C and the arboriculture survey do not clearly show how much hedgerow will need to be removed to meet WSCC's Highway's visibility splay requirements. This information really ought to be provided and assessed as part of this application as the site access is not a reserved matter.

I also have the following other issues:

- Along the diagonal spine road, a consistent dual line of trees does not seem to be achieved as suggested on page 45 of the DAS and this is partly because it is disrupted by parking and inconsistent building lines. This could be helped with more rear court parking provision including the incorporation of FOG's which would help free up the kerbside. However, a wider and more consistent verge is also likely to be needed to successfully accommodate trees along the whole stretch and allow this road to stand out from the others.
- The residential "character areas" set out on page 29 of the DAS are unconvincingly defined and oddly cut across streets, and do not coordinate with the landscape character areas. For instance, I would expect the spine road and the road with the swale to have their own individual character.
- Parking is unfortunately dominant in some parts of the scheme. Much of the smaller terraced houses and a few semi-detached houses feature right-angle front threshold parking which will result in hard edged environments and poorly enclosed streets and spaces; this is also problematic as it especially affects the affordable houses. The rear court parking serving flats also look unfortunately exposed to the street. The latter would benefit from FOG's that screen the parking from the street by filling the gap in the frontage.
- The site is sensitively positioned in terms of its relationship to the wider countryside to the south that reveal views to and from the South Downs that are also provided along the existing PRW which approximately forms the southern boundary of the residential development. Care needs to be taken to soften and screen the development with tree planting and shrubs on both sides of the PRW.
- In opening-up the southern field parcel as a parkland area, effort needs to be invested in retaining its existing rural character. I especially have concerns about the impact of the large attenuation basin in the middle of the field parcel as it is on sloping land that could potentially generate a large cutting and/or embankment that would sit discordantly with the landscape. While its impact will be less (as it is more tucked away), I also have the same concerns about the proposed basin on the NW corner of the development site. These attenuation ponds need to be designed so they contribute positively to the landscape and must avoid appearing engineered or imposed.
- Care needs to be taken to sensitively integrate the pumping station into the landscape to avoid it looking like an eyesore.
- It is a shame there is no commitment to renewable energy except where it is necessary to meet Building Regulations. Ground and air source heating should

be considered as well as solar PV's. While the latter is welcomed in principle care needs to be taken to ensure it avoids looking cluttered on roofs.

When the scheme is submitted as an REM application, the above issues will need to be satisfactorily addressed to enable the scheme to accord with the Council's Design Guide SPD. This will be particularly (but not exclusively) in relation to design principles DG3, DG5, DG7, DG12, DG13, DG14, DG17, DG18-20, DG23, DG25, DG26, DG27, DG29. No elevations have so far been provided; they will need to be considered in respect of the guidance set out in chapter 6 as well as the other placemaking principles in the guide.