

Jane Curley

Senior Planning Officer (Majors & Commercial)

Sent via email:

Date: 18th August 2022

Our Ref: 22-051-ltr-001

Re: SMD/2022/0249 - Land Off, Cheadle Road, Upper Tean, Staffordshire - Full Planning Application for residential development of 67 houses with a mix of two and two and a half storey dwellings, consisting of new access to Cheadle Road, new public open space, sustainable urban drainage, landscaping, pumping Station and associated works

Dear Jane

Thank you for inviting us to provide feedback on the above planning application. Please find our detailed response below.

In summary, the proposed layout has been designed around the highways infrastructure and from this issue most other problems have stemmed. The result is a scheme that is not encouraging of pedestrians and places them below the car in the road user hierarchy. The proposed layout lacks positive design elements detailed within both the 2015 outline permission and the proposal shared at pre-application advice stage. For example, the proposed children's play area has been replaced with the pumping station and not relocated.

Opportunities to improve connectivity, enhance the existing footpath and encourage walking and cycling have not been taken. Streets are illegible, are dominated by wide roads and front of plot parking, and lack surveillance and enclosure. The landscape proposal lacks detail and is insufficient for a scheme of this size in an edge of settlement location. A detailed comprehensive strategy accompanied by a planting plan and hardworks plan is needed.

Design assessment

The following design assessment is based on the National Design Guide, Staffordshire Moorlands Design Guide and Building for Healthy Living. All documents set out key design principles that should be considered during the design stages to ensure the proposal makes the most of opportunities available on the site, is contextually responsive and offers a standard of design quality that will stand the test of time.

The proposal has been assessed against the following themes, centred on the National Design Guide; context, identity, built form, movement, nature, public space, use, homes and buildings, resources and lifespan. Actions are suggested following each element of the assessment and a series of recommendations are made within the conclusion. Actions written in red are those of the highest priority.



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Design principle	Assessment	Actions
Context – site's relationship with local context considering heritage, history and culture (looking beyond the red line – what to connect to, routes through the site)	The layout has a poor relationship with the site edges. There is little edge to edge connectivity particularly for pedestrians due to the limited number of pedestrian access points into the site. More thought needs to be given to how people will want to travel to and through the site and how these trips can be encouraged. For example, the opportunity to improve access to and the quality of the bus stop on Cheadle Road has been missed.	Increase and improve the pedestrian routes into the site and incorporate access to the bus stop into the layout.
	The existing footpath is given limited room and the route fragmented by the distributor road.	Public footpath to be given more space and more priority in the hierarchy of road users.
	The red brick of the materials palette is largely appropriate given the context however, the buff facing bricks appear incongruous. The proposal is not supported by an assessment of local character (a national requirement) and so opportunities have been missed to provide a style, form and architecture that link into the context.	Character assessment of local area to be provided and amendments made to materials and architectural style and detailing as a result.
Identity – response to existing local character and identity, good design quality, creation of character and identity	This links to the previous point regarding the need for a character assessment that demonstrably informs the design. Whilst the housetypes are not unattractive they do little to contribute to the identity and character of the settlement or surrounding landscape and offer a standardised design.	As above, provision of a character assessment. How has the local landscape character informed the layout and landscape strategy?
	A lack of street hierarchy internally results in most parts of the layout having the same non-descript character. More about this in the movement section.	Redesign layout around a hierarchy of streets and spaces.
	Existing features on the site could be better incorporated and celebrated through the design. The group of trees within the centre of the site could be made a focal point surrounded by a more generous area of public open space. Currently the trees appear tightly bounded by the distributor road, the pumping station and the substation appear to act as unattractive gatekeepers to the main expanse of open space. It is also unclear how many of these trees are to remain as there is some inconsistency between plans.	Tree survey plan to be provided without proposed layout on top to enable understanding of the trees staying and those being removed.



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	Whilst retention of the boundary hedge to Cheadle Road is welcomed, the planting to the front of the site is limited and could be enhanced both in terms of habitat creation and softening of the main view of the site. It could also be used to create an internal pedestrian route. There is a dominance of parking to the front of the site with three bay wide tandem spaces. This will be the primary view of the development from Cheadle Road and is unacceptable.	Reconfiguration of tandem parking to the front of the site adjacent to Cheadle Road. Frontage of site to be enhanced with greater space given to planting.
Built form – appropriate building types and forms	Again a character assessment is needed to provide the justification behind the chosen housetypes. The link to local vernacular is very unclear in terms of the scale and form of the properties. Three storey dwellings are not necessarily inappropriate but no justification has been given as to why they are located where they are and how this form complements existing character.	Character study to demonstrate scale, form and style of housetypes.
	The streetscene is inaccurate as it does not take the topography into account and so the true impact of the scale and form of the properties cannot be assessed within the context.	Accurate streetscene from Cheadle Road required.
	The topography of the site cannot be appreciated on any of the plans and so several sections are needed to outline how the dwellings will relate to the changes in levels. This is particularly key in understanding how the levels will work and whether any retaining walls are proposed.	Provision of several sections and confirmation of levels and use of retaining structures.
	Some attempt has been made to address corners but this is largely done through facing one property around the corner, often resulting in a break in the building line. A house type that turns the corner and has dual aspect would be more effective in ensuring surveillance and interest at these key parts of the layout.	Use of corner turning dwellings and plots to avoid poor surveillance and excessive inactive frontages.
Movement – connected networks for all modes, active travel, parking and servicing and utilities (cycle parking, existing cycle network, routes in front of homes not behind them) connections to public transport stops	The layout lacks permeability and pedestrians will have to travel further than is necessary to reach certain parts of the site or to walk through the site. The overly dominant road widths and visibility plays create greater distances for pedestrians to cross the road and there is no provision to slow traffic and give pedestrians priority at key crossing points. The scheme is highways led and lacks consideration of other road users.	Layout to be less dominated by highways features and more encouraging of pedestrian connectivity.



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	A clear hierarchy of streets is needed to aid legibility. This can be achieved through varying street widths and uniform building lines, heights and setbacks within each street.	Amend the layout to provide a hierarchy of streets that ties in with building lines, heights and setbacks in addition to the arrangement of car parking and private amenity space.
	Ideally all routes will be fronted by dwellings using perimeter blocks but top tier routes are to be the priority in providing frontage and passive surveillance. Currently the main distributor route has very little frontage and thus will feel less pleasant and less safe for pedestrians. There are long stretches of pedestrian routes and pavements that are not overlooked at all.	Passive surveillance needs to be greatly improved for all routes but particularly the main distributor road and the public footpath.
Nature – network of high quality, green open spaces, variety of landscapes and activities including play, water management, rich and varied biodiversity	Landscape character is crucial for this site due to its edge of settlement location and the significant amount of green infrastructure on the site. The proposed landscape strategy lacks detail and is insufficient for a full application in this location. The proposals are very basic and miss opportunities to soften the hard elements of the layout including parking and highways infrastructure. There is no detail on the mix of species to be provided and the use of planting and trees within the residential parts of the layout extremely limited. No reference is made to protection and enhancement of existing features on the site.	A detailed landscape strategy is needed with overarching landscape plan, planting plan and hardworks plan. Planting to be used to soften the hard elements of the proposals such as expanses of hardstanding due to excessive highways routes and parking that dominates dwelling frontages.
	Little effort has been made to encourage wildlife corridors and networks and the spaces created lack individual identity and character.	Landscape proposals to demonstrate how habitats are protected and enhanced on the site.
Public spaces – well located high quality public space, safe and well designed to encourage social interaction	Green infrastructure lacks integration with public spaces and routes and planting appears to be homogenous and limited in provision. Reference to a trim trail is meaningless without any specific detail on what this will entail and who it is aimed at. The layout lacks spaces for people to spend time and socially interact and nothing is done to encourage such activities. Play areas previously proposed at pre-application stage have been removed.	Landscape proposal to explain how green infrastructure is used to enhance resident's amenity and opportunities for play and social interaction.
	There is a lack of surveillance of public routes and spaces e.g. the trim trail. As previously mentioned the substation and pumping station are too prominent and form unattractive gateways into the main area of space to the west of the site.	Reconfigured boundary treatments to provide more soft planted boundaries and fewer tall boundaries beside key routes to improve surveillance.



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	Frontages across the layout are dominated by high walls, fences and parking. There is little provision for front gardens or small pockets of social space. Front gardens provide the opportunity for residents to have a stronger sense of ownership of where they live, this opportunity is missed when frontages simply consist of parking.	Rearrangement of parking provision to offer greater variety of forms and to avoid frontages dominated by parked cars. This should provide more opportunities for front gardens.
Uses – a mix of uses, tenures, types and sizes which are socially inclusive	There is some housing mix across the scheme but no provision of affordable housing.	-
	There are some left over parcels of land that serve no purpose and for which ownership will be unclear causing longer term maintenance issues.	Open space strategy that defines the purpose of every piece of land avoiding any left-over parcels. Landscape management plan
Homes and buildings – healthy, comfortable, well related to external amenity and public spaces, attention to detail (storage, waste, servicing and utilities)	Rear garden sizes appear generally sufficient however, concern must be raised about the amenity of plot 22 and 24 given their proximity to a large tree.	Relationship between existing trees and gardens to be improved. Daylight and sunlight assessment requested if relationship not improved.
	Many gardens are located directly adjacent (side on) to the main distributor road which not only creates a long stretch of inactive frontage on the main route but also creates potential for amenity issues for residents.	Layout to be rearranged to ensure fewer main routes are dominated by expanses of blank walls and fences enclosing garden space.
	There is an overreliance on tandem parking with the majority of spaces being provided in this way. The result of this is less convenient for residents compared to side by side or courtyard parking. The arrangement of parking also interferes with access to front doors on foot creating awkward longer paths to front door from the street in some areas, for example plots 10-17, 27, 32, 57 and 59.	Previously mentioned – parking to be reconfigured and alternatives explored.
Resources – energy hierarchy, selection of materials and construction techniques, maximising resilience	The orientation and topography of the site appear to have not been considered as an opportunity for conserving resources. Very few of the properties are orientated to benefit from passive solar gain. Insufficient information has been provided to assess whether the buildings have been aligned with the contours and it appears that there will be artificial mounding and use of retaining walls. This can be avoided through design that works with the contours of the site.	As previously mentioned provision of sections will enable the relationship between the proposal and the site's topography to be assessed. It is likely more work could be done to improve this relationship.



	Trees have been randomly spread across the site rather than being placed where they can improve the environment by providing shelter or shade. The existing trees to be retained have not been incorporated well into the proposal and so their long term maintenance and retention may be under threat.	The incorporation of trees into the scheme could be more intentional in terms of creating pleasant spaces to spend time in near existing trees. More work is needed to ensure long term maintenance or amenity issues are avoided through poor relationships between trees and properties.
Lifespan – well managed and maintained, adaptable to changing needs and evolving technologies, sense of ownership	No information has been provided on whether the dwellings will be adaptable as needs change for example with evolving technologies or simply through the lifetime of those who will purchase the properties.	Additional information regarding flexibility of the proposal to changing needs.

Key recommendations

By way of summarising the specific actions outlined in the table above, the following section provides an overview of the most pressing concerns raised and how they should be addressed.

Street hierarchy: The layout as it stands requires redesign in order to address the lack of hierarchy of streets and the resultant poor legibility and connectivity. The design is highways driven and lacks connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists. The proposal actively discourages walking and cycling and makes crossing and travel across the site difficult for those not in a car. Passive surveillance on some routes is very low. The street hierarchy should be accompanied by a parking strategy that ensures streets are not dominated by parked cars.

Landscape plan: The landscape plan is very vague which is of real concern given how key landscape is to this site and its context. There has been no consideration of local landscape character and the site's position on the edge of the settlement has not been given special weight in the design process. There is insufficient detail on existing trees and habitats on site and little is contained within the proposal to assure that these assets will be protected and enhanced. The loss of trees should be resisted and a comprehensive landscape strategy needs to be provided containing a detailed planting plan and hardworks plan. A significantly greater amount of new planting is needed and hardstanding should be reduced.

Frontage to Cheadle Road: The frontage to Cheadle Road is proposed to be dominated by tarmac with some minimal planting. The tandem parking across the site is not ideal however, the three bay deep tandem parking to the very front of the site certainly needs to be removed. The proposed streetscene is not accurate and does not show how the properties will be viewed from the road given the change in levels. More space is needed at the Cheadle Road frontage to provide more meaningful areas of planting to enhance the existing hedgerow and create a wildlife corridor with value for pedestrians and residents.



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Housetypes: The proposed architectural style and form has not been informed by a character assessment of the local area including local vernacular. The proposed housetypes appear standardised and some of the proposed materials seem to lack a grounding in the immediate context. The scale, height and mass of dwellings should be used to better define the hierarchy of streets and spaces proposed.

Topography: Multiple sections across the site are needed to aid in understanding how the buildings, streets and spaces interact with the topography. Detail needs to be provided on any proposed retaining structures and how the levels will be approached across the site.

Please note that some design elements are positive and should remain. This includes the building line to the front of the site in line with existing properties on Cheadle Road. However, plot 52's position reduces its effectiveness and should be repositioned. There is one area of the site that has a different character – the area near Breach Lane. However, the main way this has been distinguished is through a buff brick material not appropriate within the locality. Generally, in conjunction with the street hierarchy, more character areas or streets with a more varied character would benefit the design.

Overall, we consider the proposal requires significant work to raise the standard of the design and to ensure a positive contribution to the locality. Please do contact me if you wish to discuss any of the above matters in further detail.

Yours sincerely

Jo Gregory

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