**Heyford Park Phase 9 – Urban Design Comments**

**Application No: 16/02446/F**

*Erection of 297 residential dwellings (Use Class C3) comprising a mix of open market and affordable housing, together with associated works including provision of new and amended vehicular and pedestrian accesses, public open space, landscaping, utilities and infrastructure, and demolition of existing built structures and site clearance works.*

**Existing Site Features**

In addition to tree & hedge retention some features of the former use of this site should be retained for their historical connection. The applicant has investigated the possibility of retaining the existing street layout but unfortunately this would have compromised the achievement of a satisfactory perimeter block layout. Retention of even modest features like the American style fire hydrants is a desirable link to the former use of the site and a connection with other parts of the Heyford Park.

**External Connections**

There are sufficient street and footpath connections to Camp Road, Izzard Road and Kirtlington Road to achieve a good level of external connectivity.

Given that the village of Upper Heyford is closer to this development than Heyford Park Village Centre it would be desirable to include a good footpath/cycleway connection with the village. This may help to support the future viability of a village shop or pub or, alternatively, a small shop within this phase of development that is also easily accessible from the village.

Potential footpath/cycle connections to the Heyford Park village centre are shown, however, the legibility of these routes beyond this site may need improving to ensure they are well used.

**Building Heights and Density**

The building density progression from east to west is commendable although the degree to which this is apparent may be too subtle to register**.** A greater apparent variation in density and character would be desirable.

Existing buildings on the site are predominantly single storey. The proposals are for two to three storey buildings. Whilst there may be some justification for a three storey ‘landmark’ building on the Camp Road/Izzard Road junction I am not convinced of the justification for other three storey buildings elsewhere on this phase of development so far from the village centre. Taller buildings generally imply centrality and have little relevance in relation to the context of this part of the former military base or local mainly two storey vernacular village architecture. Three storey buildings are more appropriate in the core area of Heyford Park.

The light render to the taller buildings may increase their visibility and visual impact in the wider landscape.

**Internal Connections & Street Hierarchy**

The street and footpath layout is well connected internally and the hierarchy of streets and routes appears to be logical, legible and well defined through built form and landscape.

**Street Design**

Streets are well defined with buildings fronting them and are generally well overlooked from the dwellings although in a few locations there is poor natural surveillance of secondary streets from single first floor windows in gable ends e.g. plots 643, 577, 558 514 rather than ground floor ‘active’ rooms.

**Western & Southern Edges**

The peripheral open space is potentially a good public and wildlife amenity although too narrow in places to accommodate adequate buffer/amenity planting together with swales, footpath, play and trim trail equipment. A 15-20m wide zone between the carriageway and the boundary hedge/fence would be wide enough to accommodate these features.

When considering the importance of the existing approximately 4.0m high western boundary hedge in mitigating the visual impact of the development on the landscape to the west it is important to remember that in order for this hedgerow to be retained as a hedge it must be managed which will involve periodic reduction in width and height to maintain its density. This will periodically also lessen its screening value.

Additional tree planting within the green corridor will be essential in maintaining sufficient depth of mitigatory planting, however, only 3 new trees appear to be proposed for the western boundary and only 22 for the length of the southern boundary fronting the housing.

Some cross-sections through these spaces should be submitted showing in particular the depth and bank profiles of the swales. Details of head walls should be submitted.

**Rain garden, Swales & Attenuation Pond**

The rain garden has the potential to achieve a very specific and distinctive character. Sections through this central north-south spine should be submitted to assist in understanding its design. Sections through the attenuation pond should show variable bank profiles to give it a more natural appearance. Details of head walls should be submitted.

**Parking Courts**

Shared rear parking courts are not desirable and should be designed out where possible. The parking should be redistributed as on-street or in front parking court arrangements. Only corner flat blocks should have rear parking courts which must be secure and gated with automated gates.

*‘Making sure people can see their car from their home**or can park it somewhere they know it will be safe. Where possible avoid rear parking courts.’* Building for Life 12 (2015).

Parking courts are shown with close-boarded boundary fences. More robust, attractive and noise attenuating brick walls should be used instead.

**Building Design**

The development of this site is an opportunity for more interesting and contemporary design to be employed to give it a distinctive character but this opportunity is, unfortunately, not represented in these proposals.

It is disappointing that there are no purpose designed individual corner building house types. Such buildings not only aid natural surveillance of the street but also assist with legibility, particularly if they are distinctive one-off designs.

A few ‘rogue’ buildings of unique, preferably contemporary design, should be incorporated to aid legibility and give greater character and identity to the development.

The three storey rendered dwellings in the centre of the site relate to the more modest scale of the existing two storey Carslake Circus houses – see comments above regarding the lack of justification for three storeys.

The landmark flat block at the junction of Camp Road and Izzard Road is intended to relate to buildings proposed for the Trident area but since these will not be visible from Camp Road it would be more logical to achieve a more specific relationship with the design of proposed buildings in the village centre. This would be a more appropriate visual connection. The design references should be shown.

For privacy and security the apartment blocks should not have ground floor French windows onto the street frontages.

Balconies should not have ‘slightly tinted glazing’ but sand blasted or obscured glass to hide from the street the domestic paraphernalia that is frequently stored on them.

All corner buildings must have ground floor windows to ‘active’ rooms to both street facing elevations. There are a small number of corner buildings where this is not achieved (see above).

Traditional form pitched roof houses should all have chimneys or flues punctuating their roof-lines. It is particularly important that this should apply equally to social housing to contribute to tenure blind design. Chimneys should be located in line with gable end walls or at party walls in terraced or semi-detached dwellings. Dummy chimneys are too frequently set in from gable ends in positions where real chimneys would not normally be found.

**Adaptability**

This site is a considerable distance from Heyford Park Village Centre and there are no shops in Upper Heyford Village. Whilst a small shop may not be viable on this site at present it is conceivable that it may be in future. There may also be an opportunity for other commercial uses. The ground floors of buildings in key locations should have a greater ground floor ceiling heights to accommodate potential commercial/office use. This may require some specific building types to be introduced.

The wider use of coloured window frames would help distinguish this development from so much ‘ordinary’ volume house building. I suggest that some key buildings should be identified for the use of a single ‘heritage’ colour.

**Street Design**

Consideration should be given to narrowing the perceived width of carriageways through the use of flush channel lines in a different material/colour/texture to assist with traffic calming.

**Plot Boundary Treatments**

There are a number of places within the development where there are on-plot arrangements of parking bays that are two and three bays wide. Where these occur the adjacent rear garden close-boarded boundaries are highly visible from the street. Close-boarded fences in these locations should be replaced with brick walls e.g. rear of plots 577/578, 579, 598/599, 602, 603, 610, 611, 621/622, 641, 642/643662, 666, 762, 763, 774, 775.

Where shared parking areas sit between blank elevations of buildings and/or 1.8m high fences/walls there is a need for some overlooking of the space for security. This may involve some lower sections of garden boundary topped with railings.

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