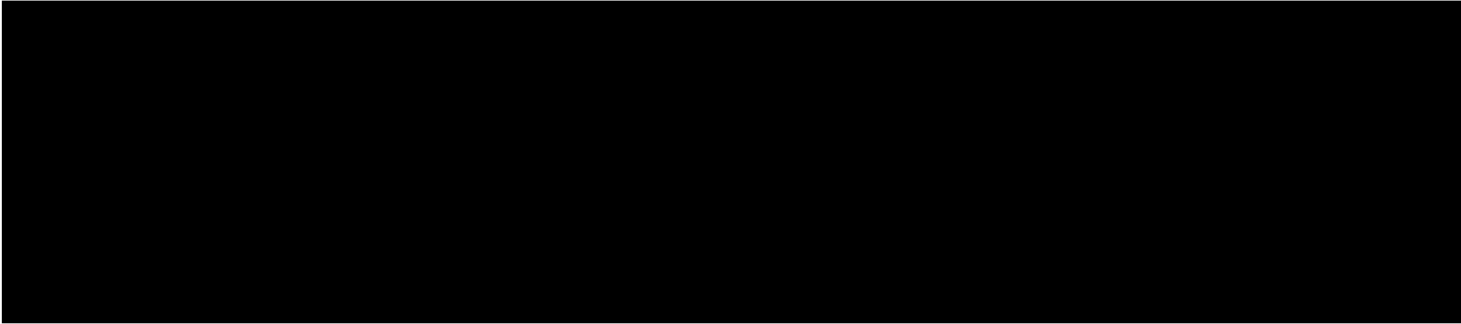




From: Simon Davis
Sent: 12 November 2018 11:05
To: Planning.Responses
Subject: FW: Planning Consultation on: AL/57/18/OUT

2nd comments from Independent Design Review Advice Consultation

Please ensure up-loaded in colour

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 09 November 2018 11:49
To: Simon Davis; Planning Scanning
Subject: RE: Planning Consultation on: AL/57/18/OUT

Hi Simon,

Initial responses inserted below in RED.

Best,

David

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 05 November 2018 16:45
To: Simon Davis; 'Alex Bateman'
Cc: Rachel Aherne; Samantha Davies
Subject: RE: Planning Consultation on: AL/57/18/OUT

Dear Simon,

Thank you for forwarding the consultant's comments upon our proposals. I must say that my heart sank when I saw the attached drawing suggestions and the reason is because they do not capture all that we have considered to be of importance in our response to this site. These are the four main considerations for us:

1. Orientation for solar gain, to benefit from the Active House standards of design.
2. Communal public realm as the heart of the project. The substance of the scheme which binds all other concepts.
3. Softening of conventional rectilinear patterns helping to assimilate buildings and landscape, public and private.
4. A response to existing site constraints and wider patterns of development.

I would now like to expand on each point and in so doing also, hopefully, address some of the specific concerns of the design consultant.

1. Solar Gain

As architects we have just commenced the construction phase of a development of 13 apartments to Active House Standards. When we initiated the project we needed to engage a German architect based in Italy to certify the scheme, due to the scarcity of expertise here. However the principle is very simple - you embark on a design with Passivhaus principles but allow greater use of southerly orientation for solar gain as a primary energy source. The other difference is that Active House IS concerned with the embodied energy of materials in construction and the health and wellbeing of occupants and wider community in future use. As a design principle it has a lot to recommend it in line with wider realisation of our impacts upon the planet.

We have positioned our buildings, as best we can, to have facades open and oriented to the south and more closed to the north.

We have devised an original cross section through the house types to permit greater penetration of sunlight into the depth of the plan. In all accommodation we have sought to link open plan living areas to the south facades so that we achieve maximum benefit from passive solar gains.

Connection of southerly living areas to external amenity is obvious. With large south facing window apertures the living areas visually and physically connect with gardens to offer a more generous presentation of space and enhanced opportunities for living both inside and out.

From an architectural and sustainability perspective, the purpose of orientating new homes to maximise solar gain is apparent. However, through focusing on a southerly aspect, passive surveillance of the street and the central open space is reduced, dwellings along the southern edge face commercial activities, there is some ambiguity over public/private areas and through this, maintaining 'defensible' space while flexibility for future change is limited.

Additionally, given the core intent for maximising solar gain/ minimising heat loss, it was also noted that there is limited variation between the current north and south elevations of the apartments.

It is understood that materials have been selected to support Passivhaus qualities. However, at present, it is unclear how these relate to a local context - this is significant to ensure that new development will become well integrated with the existing community rather than a self contained entity.

2. Communal Public Realm

For the communal realm to be viable it MUST be made to feel integral to the project and it must feel safe, legible and accessible. It must be provided with every opportunity to become a well-used, active space.

We have sought to bind the common gardens into the heart of the proposal, enclosed by buildings which act like the walls of a courtyard garden. The function of the buildings is to therefore preserve the space for the use of this small community, creating visual and acoustic screening from traffic and nearby commerce.

At present, it is unclear if the public realm will be adopted or if roads and open space will be private (residents only). Having located the park in the middle of the layout, the intent for this is clear. However, at present, this has limited passive surveillance from the north or south, which, coupled with boundary walls may limit the core intent for this. In its existing arrangement, there is a concern that the 'communal green' will become a semi-private space for residents of the apartments.

Roads within the development are pushed to the perimeter to allow direct and safe pedestrian passage to the gardens from the immediately adjacent houses and more importantly from the apartments. The open space creates direct amenity for the apartments and is casually policed by their overlooking.

The roads are devised as two no-through legs to enforce speed control within the development. The only connection between these two legs facilitates occasional usage such as for fire brigade. In this way the linking road can have the appearance of a pedestrianised zone maintaining the sanctity of the common garden, threading

together communal lawn, orchard, allotment, play space, communal hub, BBQ area, rain gardens and pond with ecology.

At present, radi of some intersections appears excessive, it is unclear how the location of the access has been determined while a sweep path analysis would be useful to test turning circles for service vehicles at the end of cul-de-sacs.

The position of the apartment buildings is fundamental here. These smaller accommodation units are more likely to attract older residents who have downsized and who also have preference for living at one level. We have suggested balconies which overlook the active space to mitigate the potential for isolation.

The apartments also form an acoustic and visual screen to the commerce behind enhancing the internal views within the development and enhancing the quality of the communal areas. It is our contention that the site requires an inward focus to create a sense of place because there are no obvious connections and views out from the perimeter (discussed further below).

While the apartments may help to buffer the negative impact of existing commercial activities, being orientated towards such activities, there is a concern for the quality of this accommodation -- especially if south elevations will have more expansive areas of glazing. Additionally, rather than clustering affordable homes alongside commercial activities, a greater distribution of these is advised.

3. Non Rectilinear

The concepts described in one and two above naturally create a development unlike those found in the immediate context. The proposal is driven by different demands to the historic pattern of development locally. Also the building groups which immediately bound the site are varied in type, use and character. Further, the site itself is well screened with a mature planted perimeter screen and due its topography.

The confluence of all these things led us to the conclusion that we should create a unique architectural response which responds more closely to our principle objectives above. In plan layout and form the buildings undulate with curves. The intention is to erode the normal juxtaposition of building and landscape, highlighting the prominence of landscape in the setting and enhancing its legibility.

It is fully understood that the intent is to create something unique and akin to a model community. However, through this, there is a concern that new development will become isolated at a settlement scale -- this is particularly significant given the location of proposed development at the edge of the village. At present, it is unclear how the proposed layout relates to the wider urban grain.

4. Site Constraints

The site has a hard boundary on all four sides. Two sides are bound by roads (one busy, one private), one side by commercial use and the last side by a caravan park. All four edges provide no opportunity for enhanced connection or linkage from the proposal site. The preservation and reinforcement of the existing planted perimeter, as proposed, is also a consideration here in terms of wider landscape amenity and ecology.

The pattern, or grain, of development in the immediate context of the site is mixed due to the variation in use type. The established housing nearby tends toward a ribbon development pattern, where private houses and rear gardens spread back from the road edge. Houses are not typically terraced, at their highest density they are semi-detached.

Many bungalow and chalet style homes have been built up along the road sides representative of a narrow era of development. More historic and indeed more modern nearby developments have a tendency to be two storey. This creates a variation in building type which is also displayed in a varied use of material and colour.

We do not see a strong existing development pattern which can be seized upon, so that any development could seamlessly infill within the setting. We also do not see a pattern which satisfies our other design objectives, which are considered important.

We would not wish to create a development which is overly conspicuous by its difference. We have therefore sought to create similar development densities and built volumes as found in the locale and to enhance the landscape buffer to the site's perimeter, reinforcing an already mature screening of the site. Our aim is to make a development which is discreet in character and makes best use of otherwise under-utilised land bounded by roads and development on all sides.

Essentially, it is noted that there are many merits to the proposed development. However, at present, it is unclear how the proposed layout relates to the wider urban grain or, how proposed building styles and materials relate to a local/ regional context. Within this, there is a fear that new development will become conspicuous by its difference. It is understood that the predominantly post war development context might not represent the best benchmark for the proposed development intent. However, at present, it is unclear how proposed development will become well integrated.

At present, there remains a concern that proposed development does not maximise the scale of the development opportunity to provide new homes according to the HELAA.

Response to specific consultant comments (using text from the summary):

'Self-contained, under developed and... limited relationship to the existing context'

I hope that the above explanations go some way to illustrating our view that the site is already self-contained in character and that enhancement of this character best serves the quality of the development and the wider context. The site has a hard border on all four sides with no permeability to adjacent land or public realm and the character of existing buildings in the location is not well defined or dominant in its form or pattern.

'The planning statement notes that the layout completely follows the context'

We have included in our submission a drawing 1423-P-103 Block Plan which shades all of the current buildings, existing and proposed, in dark grey. We have hoped to illustrate here that the proposed detached buildings and space separation is similar to the layout pattern of neighbouring buildings. The consultant's proposed layout shows terraces which are not found within this setting.

'In its non-conformity, there are a number of aspects that don't represent contemporary 'best practice': over engineered roads (1), lack of private space (2); inflexibility of layout (3); lack of passive surveillance of street scenes (4); clustering of affordable units (5); lack of clearly defined defensible boundaries (6)'

- (1) In the detail the roads and parking have been designed by a highways / transport specialist, in direct response to planning policy. In concept our approach is described in section 2 above.
- (2) Private garden space is provided for every house and generous private balconies for the apartments overlooking common gardens. The communal gardens provide additional amenity space for ALL so that each individual can negotiate their own relationship with the public realm of the community.
- (3) The site layout has been designed holistically with buildings, landscape, ecology and transport requirements all having equal representation within the evolution of the proposal around a shared ethos. It is intended to serve a very specific brief which includes a mixture of accommodation types and different graduations between public and private space creating varied opportunities for individual's own engagement within the scheme.
- (4) Of course the site is not within a town centre and has hard boundaries on four sides which naturally limits use somewhat, to those who live here. The proposed houses to the centre of the site edge the road in a conventional manner, to the north the front gardens are private and contained which is more unusual, but not uncommon. We believe the benefits of orientation outweigh other concerns here. To the south, the communal gardens and road are well overlooked by adjacent buildings and are also highly accessible.
- (5) Although best practice in design often advocates mixing of affordable units, registered social landlords themselves have preference for clustering for ease of definition, maintenance and operation. We have sought to mitigate the impacts of clustering by linking the affordable units with the active communal garden areas which are

shared by all. This also speaks of the importance of the common gardens within the heart of the development. (6) The houses all have designated front yards for parking and cycle storage and a recessed front doorway and threshold. The landscape is clearly defined to mark the division of private and public demise. The apartments are designed so the that each access level is shared by a maximum of two units. In this way the space immediately outside an apartment is not passed by others, only those wishing to access this specific apartment.

I understand many of the consultant's comments but feel that we have nurtured our scheme from a fundamentally different starting position and therefore have derived different conclusions. When taken in the round we believe that our proposal does represent high quality design. As a practice we have a strong reputation for design quality and for creating bespoke solutions to our client's brief and importantly to the needs of the site.

It is clearly noted that there are merits in the proposals. However, most significantly, through the proposed arrangement, style and selection of materials, there remains a concern that, as noted, development will become conspicuous by its difference rather than becoming well integrated with the wider settlement. Additional images to substantiate this would certainly be very helpful.

At a development scale, there remain concerns for the overlooking of the public realm, boundary treatment, maintaining defensible space and clustering affordable homes in arguably the most constrained area of the site. Again, the preparation of any material that would help to allay these concerns would certainly be helpful.

We would welcome a meeting to discuss the above points and I will follow up with some sketches to illustrate and reinforce the points made.

Yours sincerely

Nick Stickland
Architecture Director



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