



Report of the Oxford Design Review Panel

# Old Marston Paddock

25<sup>th</sup> February 2021

## Introduction

This report reflects the review held on the 11<sup>th</sup> February 2021 following the presentation of the proposed scheme. The scheme relates to the development of residential accommodation in a currently vacant site within the Green Belt.

An opening summary of the discussion is provided on the following page which highlights the main items that were raised during the session. Afterwards, we provide the key recommendations aimed at improving the design quality of the proposal. The details of the review are presented under headings covering the main attributes of the scheme and at the end we provide the details of the meeting (appendix A) and the scheme (appendix B).

## Summary

We commend the clear presentation of this scheme. However, the site strategy is unclear and a holistic vision of who the users are is missing. Without this it is uncertain who the users of the public space will be and what it will be used for.

We believe that site strategy options need to be explored, turning constraints into opportunities. Public spaces and architectural expression should be more inventive. We would like to re-engage with the design team once our recommendations have been taken into consideration and before a formal application is submitted.

## Key recommendations

1. A stronger design narrative should be developed, based on the community that will use the spaces created. This will include future residents of the Old Marston Paddock development and the existing residents of the village and caravan park as well as the passers-by who will use the cycle route.
2. The site layout should be simplified and other alternatives explored, including a layout with three terraces surrounding a central green, with all front doors facing the green.
3. The affordable units should be interspersed with the market units and there should be no distinction between the two.
4. Cross sections showing the relationship with the A40 should inform the design of the units on the eastern side of the plot.
5. A noise survey should be undertaken to determine A40 noise mitigation measures required, taking into account the trees in the wooded area close to the road.
6. Car parking spaces should closely align with individual dwellings but form part of the public space, which should be recognisable as belonging to all residents.
7. In order to have active frontages along the main lane, kitchens and dining rooms should face the street. Living rooms should enjoy privacy at the rear.
8. Consideration should be given to Passivhaus certification and using ground source heat pumps instead of air source.

## Detailed comments and recommendations

1. Design strategy
  - 1.1. The approach to energy efficiency and sustainability is one of the main principles that should guide the design strategy. The proposal must produce a clear energy strategy which details how the development will optimise thermal performance, minimise the demand for energy, supply the remaining energy requirements efficiently and optimise the use of renewables in order to align with the Government's emerging zero carbon policy. Consideration should be given to using ground source heat pumps instead of air source, perhaps using a common borehole, depending on the results of ground contamination surveys.
  - 1.2. The site layout (diagram) should be simplified. We would like to see other alternatives explored; the introduction of many different typologies appears unnecessarily busy and the car park at the rear of the site is not the best option as it raises questions on safety and inclusion. It would also impact on the trees which currently provide a thick canopy and restrict long views.
  - 1.3. We recommend a simpler layout with three terraces surrounding a central green, with all front doors facing the green.
  - 1.4. The approach to car parking should form part of the design strategy and be fully incorporated into the site layout. There are examples of developments that have incorporated car parking as part of their main public spaces and these spaces are vibrant parts of the area. The example of Elliot Square, NW3 is one of the main instances where car parking does not affect the enjoyability of a public space.
  - 1.5. The movement strategy and wider connections are missing from the design. We need to know how the new residents will be getting to local shops, schools and health facilities in the area. The adjoining caravan park should form part of the movement strategy; the proposed public open space is open to everyone and it appears logical to provide direct access from the adjoining sites.
  - 1.6. The cycle route provides great opportunity for making the public space inviting for all. It is one of the few cycle routes linking Marston with the A40 and as such, it is likely to be frequently used. The design strategy should acknowledge that and create a story around the public space that will encourage cyclists to go through this route as part of their cycling experience.
  - 1.7. The design strategy needs to integrate the affordable with the market units. This will secure the sense of equity and will put the future community at the heart of the design. This principle should be reflected in the landscaping and site layout proposals too.

2. Landscape
  - 2.1. It is encouraging that thought is being given to combining Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) and biodiversity. These two factors need to be combined with appropriate new planting and incorporated into the landscaping strategy. Given the location of the site close to a wooded area, and next to a swale/ditch, there are opportunities here for SUDS. As noted on the drawings, there are possibilities within the current design for the central public space to include SUDS but this should avoid them turning into inaccessible wetlands area in winter.
  - 2.2. The principle of equity in the future community should be reflected into the landscape strategy. The public open space should incorporate different spaces for all residents – especially the ones living in the flats – where the community can socialise.
  - 2.3. For example, defined play areas for perhaps the younger children, allotments and small growing areas, or sitting areas surrounded by high quality and well maintained flowering shrubs and perennials could be incorporated into the design. Areas of different habitats that will bring in bees and other insects are some of the ideas that should be included in the landscape plan.
  - 2.4. The biodiversity of the site should be enhanced. It is a serious consideration that the wooded area on the eastern boundary should not be made accessible to the public in order to promote a quiet area for wildlife. New species could be planted to create a green barrier in winter too. For example, species like yew or holly could screen some of the pollution, provide an enhanced noise barrier and filter the views throughout the year.
  - 2.5. The removal of the group of Aspen (group G) is likely to impact the long views and the views along the M40 as these appear to be the tallest trees in the wooded area. Whilst Aspen are not a long lived tree compared with say an Oak, they can however live for 150 years or more. Their removal should not be taken lightly, and they should be retained if at all possible for the benefit of the A40 and longer views. The arboricultural report estimates that the Aspen can contribute at least another 20 years or more, and they have used this 20+ years for the majority of the trees in the report.
  - 2.6. The removal of a few of the hybrid, black poplars is also of concern as these trees are becoming extremely rare and their removal will be unfortunate. We encourage the design team to explore options around either retaining the poplars or replanting the same species either on or off site in an appropriate location, bearing in mind that they can grow to 30m.
  - 2.7. We find the idea of green roofs on the bin and bike stores very promising. However, we have concerns on their maintenance and encourage the applicant to look into

ways of maintaining these without relying on individual residents who might not have the relevant horticultural knowledge.

- 2.8. The tree lined central lane is envisioned to be an inviting space; long term maintenance of this is fundamental in securing its success.
  - 2.9. There should be adequate space in front of each unit to accommodate green areas and soft landscaping, with appropriate construction so that concrete does not prevent plant growth. If the flats are retained in the design then the ground floor units need to be redesigned to allow for defensive space that is private in front of them.
3. Public spaces and movement
    - 3.1. The planning policy requires that 10% of the site is allocated for public open space. Notwithstanding the provision of the correct number of square meters, this space needs to have a meaningful role in the lives of the community members as part of the series of public open spaces of the village.
    - 3.2. The journey from the village down the central lane to reach the public space needs to be inviting and the existing community should have a reason for visiting this space. The provision of play areas, the cycle route, sitting areas or a small pond could be some of the reasons local residents will visit the space.
    - 3.3. Car parking could form part of this; it does not have to be entirely remote and isolated. As mentioned above, there are examples of developments that have incorporated parking in their central spaces, and we recommend that this is explored further.
    - 3.4. The green verge by the entrance cannot be considered as part of a meaningful public space. We appreciate its significance from a heritage and visual amenity point of view, and we welcome its location; we question however its meaningfulness and how inviting it will be to residents.
    - 3.5. Further consideration should be given to the integration of cycle and refuse storage at the front of the dwellings for ease of access for residents. As noted by the design team these could discretely include EV charging points.
  4. Architecture and detailing
    - 4.1. Passivhaus principles have been tested and partially applied in the current design; nevertheless, the applicant will not be moving towards a Passivhaus certification which is disappointing. We encourage the design team to apply the holistic principles of Passivhaus into the design and architecture of the buildings.

- 4.2. The houses are currently trying to combine deference to the traditional village vernacular and an ambition to achieve a contemporary form inspired by, for example, the Cambridge southern fringe (Abode). Greater conviction is needed to achieve a successful outcome, and a simpler approach should be taken.
- 4.3. To improve the form factor of the houses the alleyways should be omitted and the houses pushed together to form terraces. This should be considered in tandem with the refuse and cycle storage strategy.
- 4.4. The roofplan appears complicated and should be simplified. The idea of having a terrace that appears as individual houses needs re-thinking; the pitch of the roofs could be more gentle and additional testing is needed to achieve a high quality design. Thought needs to be given into how to integrate photovoltaic panels into the design with the optimum slope and orientation. We do not think that the proposed buildings should be any taller than they are.
- 4.5. Elevations of the block of flats have not been presented and we would like to re-iterate the importance of tenure-blind design. There is opportunity to integrate the affordable units as maisonettes within the terraces and replace the block of flats with another terrace. This links with the points made on site layout and car parking, as well as landscaping and the noise survey. The architectural expression of any building on the eastern side of the site should reflect all above.
- 4.6. The lifestyle of the future residents is likely to be based on the outdoors and as a result, quite muddy; therefore, we consider that the provision of an entrance lobby to accommodate this would be beneficial. The entrance sequence to the homes should be considered further to provide the homes with a sense of arrival.
- 4.7. Kitchens and dining rooms should create the active frontage towards the main lane and living rooms should be placed at the rear facing the gardens. The preliminary layouts appear to show overly small living rooms, particularly the 4 bed units.
- 4.8. The ground floor of the block of flats is still not fully resolved. The relationship of the ground floor flats with the public spaces should be better defined. Opening doors to private outdoor amenity could work well in relation to the public open space.
- 4.9. The rooflights on the southern slope of the block of flats should be replaced by dormers to match the architectural expression of the houses and to avoid overheating and sleep disturbance from the noise of rain.
- 4.10. The approach to materials and detailing was not discussed in great detail at this review. Paragraph 130 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2018) states: 'Local planning authorities should also 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).'

- 4.11. 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.



## Appendix A: Meeting details

Reference number	1531/210211
Date	11 <sup>th</sup> February 2021
Meeting location	Online via Zoom
Panel members attending	Joanne Cave (chair), urban design, planning Paul Appleby, energy and sustainability Catherine Burd, architecture, historic environment Hari Phillips, architecture, housing Penny Wagner, landscape architecture, urban design
Panel manager	Kiki Gkavogianni, Design South East
Presenting team	Paul Comerford, Prior + Partners Thomas Corbin, Prior + Partners Hannah Deacon, TSH Architects Nicholas Hardy, TSH Architects Simon Speller, Stantec – Highways/SuDS Michael Dray, Stantec - Sustainability Mike Habermehl, Adam Habermehl Nick Worlledge, Worlledge Associates Ian Ashcroft, Lucy Developments
Other attendees	Michael Kemp, Oxford City Council Rosa Appleby-Alis, Oxford City Council Maura Cordell, Oxford City Council Clare Golden, Oxford City Council Nichole Avan-Nomayo, Design South East (observing) Joanna van Heyningen, ODRP co-Chair (observing)
Site visit	This review was carried out during the Covid-19 outbreak in 2020/21. Independent site study including desktop research and a digital walk-around (in a similar fashion to that which would have been conducted on-site) was carried out prior to the review.
Scope of the review	As an independent design review panel, the scope of this review was not restricted. The scheme is work-in-progress, so the review focused on placemaking, site layout, movement, and landscaping.
Panel interests	No interests were declared.

Confidentiality

This report is confidential as the scheme is not yet the subject of a planning application. Full details on our confidentiality policy can be found at the end of this report.

## Appendix B: Scheme details

Name	Old Marston Paddock
Site location	Marston Paddocks, Butts Lane, Old Marston, Oxford OX3 0PU
Site details	<p>The site is a 0.80ha undeveloped area of paddock land located on the north eastern edge of Old Marston Village. The site is accessed via Butts Lane, a narrow access which also serves as a public right of way.</p> <p>The Old Marston Conservation Area extends up to the south western boundary of the site. The historic core of Old Marston lies to the south of the site, which contains a number of vernacular unlisted buildings and the Grade I listed St Nicholas Church.</p> <p>Other development to the west consists of recent development comprising 1990's and 21st century dwellings. Buswell Parks to the north west is a caravan site.</p> <p>To the north of the site is a dual carriageway section of the A40 Northern Bypass. To the west and south west are two further undeveloped areas of paddock land, consisting of a small and much larger paddock which extends up to Elsfield Road.</p> <p>There are no existing buildings on the site. The site contains a number of mature trees concentrated along the southern, eastern and northern boundaries, which are important in visual terms and provide screening.</p>
Proposal	<p>The proposal involves a development of 39 dwellings: 23 houses and 16 flats. The 16 flats and 3 houses will be affordable and 20 will be released for private sale; this leads to a provision of 50% affordable homes.</p> <p>The proposal includes the provision of 10% public open space which is a policy requirement.</p>
Planning stage	The project is still at a pre-application; the applicant has had two meetings to discuss design, planning and heritage considerations.
Local planning authority	Oxford City Council
Planning context	The site is allocated within the Oxford Local Plan for residential development under site allocation Policy SP23. The site policy requires that a minimum of 39 dwellings shall be provided on the site and a minimum of 10% of the site shall be provided as public open space.

Planning history	None.
Planning authority perspective	<p>The initial proposals presented are in officer's view responsive to the site's semi-rural context and its location adjacent to the historic core of Old Marston and the Conservation Area. The approach towards scale, massing, heights and use of materials is generally well-reasoned with the exception of some uncharacteristic flat roofed elements.</p> <p>The site layout has some contextual justification as does the siting of the public space though additional detail on the design of the public realm and landscaping in general would be welcomed. Further detail is also needed on the approach to the space in the north east corner of the site which features several mature trees.</p> <p>The location of the site unfortunately will necessitate parking close to maximum standard. The impact of parking will need to be mitigated in design terms as this dominates the public realm. The impact of additional traffic generation along Butts Lane will need to be carefully considered in highway safety terms in consultation with the local highways authority.</p>
Community engagement	No indication of community engagement at this stage.

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#### 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.

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