

Urban Design Comments

F/22/93194 – The Ageas Bowl

From: Urban & Landscape Design Team to Development Management

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Date: 09 January 2024

Proposal: Full planning application for the erection of 172 dwellings, a 71-bedroom care home (Use Class C2), a 142-bedroom hotel (Use Class C1), a well-being centre (Use Class E / F2), improvements to existing stadium, new vehicular access, car parking, pedestrian circulation, together with associated tree planting, landscaping, SuDS and biodiversity enhancements (Amended description).

Summary:

- The quantum of residential development has been reduced leaving more space for public realm and soft landscaping.
 - The revised proposals deliver connectivity improvements for pedestrians and cyclists.
 - Concerns about the landscape design of the parking courts and its parking dominance in terms of views. Also, concerns about the location of some of the bin's storage outbuildings.
 - The proposed location for the Care Home is contrary to Policy WE4.
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These comments are made in relation to the plans dated 01 December 2023 and should be read in conjunction with comments from the Landscape, Ecology and Planning Policy Officers.

Site Context

The application site lies within the urban edge next to a Settlement Gap. It is an allocated site under Policy WE4 - Land at Ageas Bowl and Tennis Centre, Botley Road, West End.

To the south of the site beyond the red line, Telegraph Woods and part of Boundary Lakes Golf Course is designated as a SINC. To the west, land at and to the south of Telegraph Heights is covered by a Blanket TPO.

Within Telegraph Woods are two SAMs – Hickley Wood Hillfort – and to the southwest of this is Telegraph Woods Beacon.

General Comments

The proposal has positively evolved to address some concerns raised throughout the pre-application process and it is considered to be more consistent when compared to the previous scheme. The layout of some elements (i.e., apartment blocks, overflow car park) take more reference from the existing stadium's form to ensure that the different elements work as a whole.

It was suggested on previous comments the need for further work on key topics, such as the quantum of residential development proposed, the limited connectivity with the surrounding

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area and the location of certain type of land uses within parts of the site which is contrary to Policy.

Residential Area

The quantum of residential development proposed has reduced significantly increasing the degree of space retained between dwellings and consequently providing more public realm space within the residential area. Therefore, it is considered to be more acceptable and has moved in the direction of addressing the concerns over density.

The re-introduction of the shared surface connection across the residential site is considered to be a positive amendment and creates a finer grain of route type across the site, making it more permeable and pedestrian friendly. However, when we look at it in detail, it will be encouraged to take more careful consideration on two topics - the importance of the end vista on both sides of the route (i.e. frame better the view towards the northern end by re-aligning Plot 1&2 and reducing the dominance of parking) and not relying on trees which are planted on private domain to make a positive contribute to the public realm (i.e. the proposed tree within Plot 72 rear garden).

The relocation of the parking courts behind the apartment blocks is welcomed; however, the design arrangement is poor in terms of landscaping and tree planting and parking would dominate the site or views into it. The proposed Landscape Strategy needs to be revisited to include additional tree planning in accordance with the Quality Places SPD.

These areas of new parking should not struggle to accommodate the right level of tree planting and more landscaping need to be sited to break up long runs of car parking rather than being located as currently shown in peripheral locations. Additional landscape and trees are therefore required.

Also, the revised location of the bin's storage of the northern block of apartments, along the main access to road to the residential area, creates an undesirable gap within the continuous tree lined avenue. It would be encouraged to propose integrated bin storage.

In terms of scale, it is acknowledged that the latest scheme re-introduces the flat roof solution on the block of apartments. The roof design has a significant impact on the appearance and character of buildings, as well as how they relate to the context in general. Whilst this change is acceptable in design terms, it is unclear why the inclusion of flat roofs is not facilitating the introduction of green roofs on these blocks.

In terms of visual impact of the development on the wider context, I will differ to the Landscape Officer's comments on this crucial matter. It's important to see it in context with the surrounding buildings and also to understand how visual impactful it is from distant views.

Furthermore, the re-positioning of the potential northern access to the Pitters site seems to be more acceptable; however, in terms of levels, it remains unclear how it will be feasible to grade down more than 6 meters in such a small space. It is also a shame that the proposed arrangement for Plot 5 parking spaces makes it impossible to have a continuous footpath on that side of the road.

The parking arrangement of Plot 5 to 14 also remains of poor design. Well-considered parking is convenient and attractive to use provided that does not dominate the local environment such as parking in front of properties with little or no opportunities to mitigate this with generous front gardens or street trees.

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In some instances, it is considered that the proposal is trying to squeeze parking spaces wherever possible, being another example of that the 4 parking spaces located at the southern end of the internal access road next to Plot 71 which creates an undesirable end vista.

Lastly, if the Council were seeking for this site to be taken forward, all materials should be of a high quality. Samples should be required by condition as part of the planning approval.

Connectivity

In terms of connectivity with the surrounding area, it is acknowledged that an effort was made to improve the pedestrian and cycling network on site. It is welcomed that a dedicated pedestrian access was re-introduced parallel to Marshall Drive on a shared surface and extended until the West Gate, giving priority to the pedestrians at least on event days.

The submission of the Access and Circulation Strategy Plan was helpful on clarifying a few points; however, it doesn't mention an alternative vehicular route that could be provided for future residents, through the golf course towards Moorhill Road on exceptional occasions. Was this proposal discounted?

Care Home

The proposed Care/Retirement Home is within the urban edge; however, it is contrary to Policy WE4 clause dii that states "any residential development is located solely in the northwest corner of the site". More information should have been submitted to justify the location outside the area identified in the Local Plan. Therefore, we would support the detailed comments submitted by colleagues in Planning Policy.

As previously mentioned, residents in older people's accommodation are generally much less mobile than the general population and many may rarely, if ever, leave the premises. For these reasons the amount and quality of the available usable external space for those residents is at a premium. The design should celebrate its location with a landscape led approach.

The level changes across this part of the site are challenging and whilst that might look well-integrated within the surrounding area of the building, it remains unclear how they are providing high quality and accessible private amenity space for future occupants.

Also, given the form and shape of the proposed building, some of the rooms are exclusively facing north with views towards the stadium which is not considered to be the most pleasant of the outlooks.

Furthermore, it is a shame that the pedestrian southern gateway has been removed. The previous scheme was proposing a welcoming and high-quality open space whilst reducing parking spaces and giving that area to the pedestrian use.

Hotel, Well-Being Centre and Pavilion

There are no objections in principle to the layout and design of the hotel, pavilion, and well-being centre.

As previously mentioned, it is a shame that the hotel building is offering rooms facing directly to the car park instead of proposing communal spaces at ground floor level.

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Overflow Car Park

The parking design should be landscape-led, responding to the character of the place; it should be well-integrated, with good landscape treatment and avoid a public realm dominated by cars and hard standing.

I will defer to comments by the Landscape Officer regarding any amendment to the overflow car park given the fact that they are more landscape related.

Conclusion

It is felt that the scheme is now more consistent in urban design and that the improvements mentioned above are welcomed; however, if the Council were seeking for this site to be taken forward, it is advised that the following is considered:

- The apartment parking courts layout need to be careful considered in terms of surfacing materials and landscaping to ensure that the parking would not dominate the site or views into it.
- More refined design quality approach to the shared surface route within the residential development (careful consideration of the end vistas).
- Bin's storage location of the northern block of apartments needs to be careful considered to allow for a tree lined avenue and should not be located in an overly prominent position. Ideally should be integrated within the building.