

OHH - The Folds

1. General Comments

The proposal demonstrates a clear ambition to establish a coherent place identity through the creation of character areas with distinct built form and landscape roles. This placemaking structure provides a strong conceptual framework and should help legibility and orientation across the site.

The movement strategy prioritises walking and cycling, with a legible street hierarchy and clear connections between neighbourhood areas, green corridors, and public spaces. The emphasis on permeability and direct routes supports sustainable travel objectives and aligns with best-practice urban design principles.

The variation in building typologies and densities across the site—ranging from more compact forms around the Central Greenway and the Central Green to lower-density housing at the edges—responds well to principles of spatial hierarchy and creates opportunities for visual interest and legibility.

The integration of green corridors, landscape buffers, and a network of open spaces is a major strength of the proposal. The emphasis on multifunctional green infrastructure—supporting movement, biodiversity, and social interaction—reflects contemporary urban design best practice.

The proposal promotes active frontages along primary routes with buildings generally addressing the street and public spaces, which will support natural surveillance and a strong sense of enclosure.

The articulation of distinct character areas provides a useful framework for design coding and future phases. Each area has a clear narrative and spatial role, supporting both legibility and variety across the site.

The treatment of site edges, particularly where the development meets existing residential areas and open countryside, shows sensitivity through landscape buffers and reduced densities.

Overall, the proposal presents a well-structured urban framework with strong emphasis on placemaking, walkability, and green infrastructure. The strategic layout, character areas, and public realm principles provide a sound basis for a high-quality, sustainable neighbourhood.

2. Street scenes

Clear hierarchy of base, middle and top: The elevations demonstrate a well-articulated vertical hierarchy, with robust ground floors expressed through brickwork and banding, more refined mid-level detailing, and simplified upper storeys capped with soldier courses. This creates legibility and avoids flat, undifferentiated façades. The approach is consistent across apartment and housing typologies, reinforcing coherence within the street scenes.

2.1 Scale and Built Form

The street scenes demonstrate a clear transition from lower-rise housing (typically two storeys) to three-storey townhouses and four-storey apartment buildings. This stepped approach successfully manages density while maintaining a human-scaled street environment.

Building lines are consistent and well-defined, creating a sense of spatial enclosure along streets and greenways. The proportion of building height to street width appears balanced, supporting legibility and a comfortable pedestrian experience.

Gable-fronted buildings, L-shaped apartment blocks, and corner-emphasising typologies create visual punctuation along key routes and at junctions, enhancing wayfinding and place identity within the neighbourhood.

Opportunity for Improvement

- Perceived bulk of apartment blocks

Although upper-level articulation and material softening mitigate mass, some four-storey blocks may still read as dominant in closer views. Additional stepping back of upper floors on the most prominent elevations, or more pronounced vertical breaks, could further reduce perceived scale.

- Transition at sensitive edges

Where taller buildings address more domestic streets or landscape edges, a more explicit modulation of height (e.g. three-storey shoulders, roof form variation, or intermediate building types) would strengthen the transition between urban and suburban character.

2.2 Materials and Detailing

The combination of buff brick as the dominant material, with selective use of red brick and dark vertical boarding, establishes a unified architectural language while allowing for localised emphasis. This is clearly expressed in the street scenes, where material changes mark corners, gateways and principal routes.

Brickwork, soldier course banding, recessed panels, and framed openings provide depth and shadow, giving façades a tactile quality. This supports a sense of permanence and architectural quality appropriate to primary streets and civic spaces.

Opportunity for Improvement

- Material Strategy and Variation Across the Site

At first instance, the materials plan on page 86 of the DAS appears balanced, both in the range of materials used and in how this variation is distributed across the plan. However, when this is considered alongside the proposed elevational treatment of the house types—particularly the maisonette typology, which carries significant weight in achieving this balance on the plan (11 buildings)—it is evident

that the principal street-facing elevations are uniformly buff brick, with the dark boarding relegated to the rear elevations.

If the maisonettes are therefore read as a buff-brick house type, the site as a whole offers limited material variation. I would encourage the introduction of more red brick dwellings across the site, particularly in prominent locations, in order to strengthen colour contrast and enhance visual interest. Additionally, the southern part of the site would benefit from greater material variation.

That said, I am of the view that this can be achieved without any changes to the elevational treatment of the maisonette house type, which is a strong and successful design.

3. Character Areas

3.1 Arrival Plazas & Central Drives

Character Area 1 performs a critical gateway and movement function, forming the principal arrival sequence into The Folds from the southern edge. The organisation of two central drives framed by arrival plazas establishes a clear spatial hierarchy and a strong sense of orientation. The use of plazas as threshold spaces is particularly effective in marking transition from the wider movement network into a more local, neighbourhood environment.

The framing of the plazas by four-storey apartment buildings creates an appropriately urban and civic character, reinforcing their role as gateways. The scale is assertive without being overbearing, and the use of building height to signal arrival is consistent with best-practice townscape principles.

However, given the prominence of this location, there is scope to further refine the massing of the tallest elements through greater articulation of upper storeys or modest setbacks on the most visually exposed façades. This would retain presence while improving human-scale perception at street level.

The shared-surface treatment of the arrival plazas is a significant strength, visually integrating vehicular, pedestrian and parking areas into a single civic space. Tree planting, seating and soft landscaping contribute to a welcoming and sociable environment rather than a purely functional access point.

3.2 Mews Streets

Character Area 2 provides the fine-grain residential fabric of the scheme, characterised by intimate mews streets, small parking courts and pedestrian-priority environments. This area successfully contrasts with the formality of the Central Drives, introducing a more domestic scale and fostering a strong sense of neighbourhood character.

Two- and three-storey terraces, maisonettes and flats-over-garages are well suited to the intended character. The consistent building lines and relatively narrow street widths create a comfortable sense of enclosure, supporting legibility and pedestrian experience. The use of “corner-turning” buildings and FOGs at key points is particularly effective in activating junctions and avoiding inactive edges.

Care should be taken to ensure that building heights, particularly three-storey elements, are carefully distributed to avoid any localised sense of overdevelopment within these more intimate streets. Transitional moments where mews streets connect to larger routes could benefit from slightly more articulated massing to mark entry points.

The treatment of parking courts as enclosed, landscaped spaces rather than exposed hardstanding is a notable strength. Grouping parking into small clusters, combined with tree planting and soft landscaping, prevents vehicle dominance and supports a high-quality residential environment. Shared-surface treatments reinforce low-speed movement and pedestrian priority.

Clear wayfinding within and between parking courts, through lighting or surface differentiation, would further improve legibility and user experience.

3.3 Woodland Edge

Character Area 3 establishes the interface between development and landscape, forming a soft, permeable edge to the surrounding woodland and green infrastructure. This role is handled sensitively, with lower-density housing, informal paths and green corridors reinforcing a gradual transition from built form to open countryside.

The predominance of two-storey detached and semi-detached houses is appropriate to the edge condition, ensuring that development does not appear abrupt or overbearing when viewed from the landscape. The arrangement of buildings to front onto green edges and paths is particularly positive, creating active, overlooked boundaries rather than defensible or rear-facing edges.

There is, however, potential to strengthen enclosure along key paths through occasional use of slightly more prominent building forms or carefully positioned corner elements, ensuring that the edge feels spatially defined rather than dispersed.

The network of informal paths and green routes is a key strength, offering accessible connections to nature and contributing to a high-quality living environment. The landscape-led approach ensures that the development edge reads as intentional and designed, rather than residual.

Ensuring strong natural surveillance of these routes through consistent frontage and avoiding rear boundaries will be critical to long-term safety and usability.

3.4 Central Greenway / Central Green and Parking Courts

Character Area 6 is clearly positioned as the spatial and social heart of The Folds, structured around the Central Greenway and Central Green. The area performs multiple functions: strategic movement corridor, civic open space, and setting for higher-density residential development. This dual role is well conceived and aligns with best-practice placemaking, where landscape-led movement routes are combined with active built edges to create animated, legible public spaces.

The consistent orientation of buildings fronting onto the Greenway establishes a formal, urban edge that contrasts effectively with the more domestic character of mews streets and woodland edges elsewhere in the scheme. This reinforces hierarchy across the masterplan and ensures that the central spaces read as shared, community-focused places rather than residual landscape.

Four-storey apartment blocks and three-storey elements are used deliberately to frame the Greenway and Central Green, providing a clear sense of spatial containment and urbanity appropriate to the neighbourhood core. The arrangement of buildings along consistent building lines reinforces legibility and creates a coherent townscape.

The stepping of height and the articulation of blocks into L-shaped and corner-turning forms help to break down overall bulk. This allows higher-density development to be accommodated without overwhelming the public realm.

Opportunity for Improvement

- Transitions to adjacent character areas

Where Character Area 6 interfaces with lower-density streets, a more explicit modulation of height and mass (e.g. three-storey shoulders, intermediate building types) would strengthen the sense of spatial progression and soften contrast.

The treatment of parking courts as landscaped communal spaces rather than purely functional areas is a notable strength. Buildings enclosing the courts provide natural surveillance, while tree planting, planting beds and low hedging soften the visual impact of vehicles and prevent the dominance of hardstanding.

Shared-surface treatments unify vehicular and pedestrian movement, reinforcing a people-first character and supporting a calm, low-speed environment consistent with residential placemaking.

Greenway as a social spine - The combination of structured planting, generous paths, and consistent overlooking ensures that the Greenway functions as both a strategic route and an attractive linear public space at the heart of the neighbourhood.

To further reinforce placemaking, there is an opportunity to introduce one or two distinctive focal elements—such as a feature building, public art, or a signature landscape intervention—at key nodes along the Greenway or Central Green. This would strengthen memorability and provide a visual anchor within the wider masterplan.