

11 April 2019

Robert Moreton,
Tortworth Estate Company
Tortworth Estate Office
Tortworth
Wooton-under-Edge
Glos., GL12 8HF

Dear Robert,

**CE Buckover Garden Village Design Review Panel
SWDRP239 3 April 2019**

Buckover Garden Village

*Restricted circulation: this letter is not for publication**

The Panel commends the Tortworth Estate and St Modwen for submitting this scheme to design review. This shows their intention to realise a scheme of exceptional design quality. We wish to thank the Tortworth Estate for hosting the meeting. The Panel was grateful to the design team for leading a site visit to the site and its surroundings, including Thornbury.

We were glad to have Officers from South Gloucestershire Council take part in the meeting. We note that the emerging West of England Joint Spatial Plan identifies land east and west of the A38 at Buckover as a Strategic Development Location (SDL) for a new settlement based on Garden Village principles.

The Panel was impressed by the vision and ambition of the project. If your bold aims are achieved, then Buckover will be outstanding not just in the South West but nationally. The scheme is based on strong analysis not only of the site and its physical context but of the social and economic role the scheme could have and the likely policy context over the plan period. The scheme is well considered and merits serious consideration as a Strategic Development Location.

The Panel supports the scheme in principle. Our role is to help you see through your vision and principles to an approved scheme, testing assumptions and building on the strong foundation and promising work already in place.

Landscape

We welcome the focus on the natural environment of green open spaces, wildlife-friendly landscaping and wetland corridors, and on locally grown food. Although predominant land uses will shift from rural to urban, we suggest that existing and new farming, horticulture and forestry practice should be part of the vision for the new settlement. It should be a garden village in the richest and most productive sense of 'garden'. Additionally, some of the quality

and character of the former agricultural landscape should be captured and clearly evident in the finished village.

We'd encourage you to articulate the current landscape character more fully. You should draw on character assessments regionally and nationally. It is important to understand the quality of the present landscape, its texture and form both in broad terms and in detail; nuances matter as much as salients.

The relationship of built form and landscape merits careful thought. It is easy to impose a sweeping line separating them, but a sensitive integration drawing on local precedent better reflects the way villages have developed in the past. Similar subtlety is called for also in the interweaving of woodland and mature trees within the built form.

It was good to see the consideration being given to retaining trees and hedgerows and other landscape features to enrich the form and character of the village. The protected ancient woodland to the south could be enlarged as part of the scheme.

Forming a visual and acoustic barrier to the motorway is sensible. Part of this might be the planting of willow, that is a useful screen as well as an energy crop.

There needs to be more on biodiversity. How will the scheme bring about a net gain – and exactly for which species and by what mechanisms will this be done? There should be a range of habitats, wet to dry, for flora and fauna, from the large scale such as bat corridors to the small such as bird bricks in houses. The green infrastructure should seek to improve ecological connectivity.

Transport

The movement aspirations, especially the proportion of sustainable modes, are ambitious, and you are evidently alert to the danger of forming a dormitory for Bristol. Proactive, and bold, steps will be required to shift emphasis from the car to other means - while still providing for some car use. We gather you are analysing possible demographic character of residents. The decline in driving licences among under 25s will be pertinent.

How we own and use cars is likely to change in the lifetime of the Village being developed, as you recognise. The future may lie in autonomous and/or shared vehicles with major implications of movement and parking. Public transport is likely to shift to mobility services, with real-time information available and some services summoned on demand. In view of these and other considerations, we support you in setting parking ratios for the changing situation. High provision of parking has marred the appearance and character of many recent neighbourhoods and you could show what a place based on sustainable travel could look like. And this could be a path-finding scheme in allowing for parking spaces to be suitable for conversion to something else such as an additional room or garden. Flexibility is what will be needed over the lifetime of the development as technologies and cultures shift. Conceivably, Buckover could break the mould.

Neighbourhoods or even the whole village could set a maximum 1:1 ratio (one parking space per dwelling) as a principle to be understood and accepted by those coming to live here. Every dwelling could be offered with a bike (perhaps electric). Even then your marketing colleagues will have a task to sell the sustainable culture of the place, but we believe it could be done. The scale and topography of the village should foster walking and cycling. A revived railway station at Charfield and a good bus service linking to it would be helpful. Car sharing such as car clubs should be part of the mix. Moreover, your stress on health and wellbeing will have appeal and people should come to see active travel as inherent in this.

The Panel backs you in locating the centre on the A38 and embracing the road as part of the scheme. Part of the road could be like a high street: the speed would then need to be *designed* to fall to 20mph at the centre. This would be an upgrade to a lower speed, not a demotion. This would involve some loss of efficiency in terms of traffic flow, but this would be heavily outweighed, in our view, by the gain to the scheme as a community and a place. Consideration of the role of the A38 as a relief road to the M5 is due but incidents are rare enough for this to be a secondary, not an overriding, matter.

The civilised A38 could enjoy a kinder name where it is under your aegis. We questioned the appropriateness of Dutch-style roundabouts envisaged here. They perhaps make overprovision for cyclists given that the cycle routes disappear at the edge of the village. We'd incline to something less elaborate, working up from the nature of the new high street, not down from highway engineering. Parallel cycle routes to the A38 might help remove the need for such roundabouts. It would help if the primary cycle routes were shown in a meaningful way i.e. leading to key destinations – in fact we need an overall pedestrian and cycling network diagram. In general, the Panel would encourage study of examples where comparable levels of traffic have been handled while allowing street life to flourish.

Centre

The Panel agrees that Buckover should have one centre and one only.

The square at the centre to give a focus and sense of place is a strong idea. We'd encourage you to think through how it will be used and to set its dimensions accordingly. Microclimate should be studied.

Whatever the size of the space, but especially if it is to be as large as shown to us, a special public building should preside. Some combination of farm shop, café and market would be apt and could give Buckover its identity from the outset. We'd see the building as drawing on the barn tradition, rather than emulating it. A strong piece of architecture is called for and you might think of holding an architectural competition to build the building which formed the centrepiece and established the quality of the ongoing development. This is something we'd be happy to discuss further with you.

Should full use of the square have to await later phases then interim uses would be welcome, Part of it might be a temporary car park for the farm shop but part could be a tree nursery perhaps.

Density, energy and layout

We support the notion of a compact, self-sustaining settlement with services within walking and cycling distance of where people live.

Energy is relevant since infrastructure cost per unit tends to be lower at higher densities and innovations are more likely in higher density settlements. It would be wise to gear densities to how heat is to be sourced in each area: ground source heat pumps in particular are likely to be suitable in the less dense areas but not centrally. The emphasis on live/work is fine and this implies more buildings being used efficiently (against the conventional pattern of a residence being heated for one part of the day and a workplace for another) and we'd welcome other measures to moderate the ratio of peak to trough energy demand.

The Panel welcomed the focus on emerging trends in working life, transport and energy. In taking account of possible future change, we'd advise, where possible, to also factor in psychological aspects. Technology adoption is rarely a linear trend and may well oscillate as people react or over-react to a change; humankind is more given to ups and downs than

smooth linear change. Use of cars to store and return energy is one example of a likely divergence between rational prediction and human behaviour.

Reference to some standards in energy performance for the buildings would be advisable; We would strongly encourage Passivhaus standards in the absence of anything else.

The central area is to be at a high density. This might imply apartment blocks and buildings at three or four storeys. We see no need for inhibition about some substantial and/or taller buildings, provided they are well located and well designed, with high quality public space. Nonetheless, we suggest testing of 60 units per hectare with 50% parking in one or two specific blocks. Possibly, a small area within the Estate's wider landholdings could actually be constructed – not just to test but to showcase and help subsequent units to sell (values might rise in anticipation). There have been such small test sites at Nansledan and Stamford.

The central green spine is good, and we would advocate making it the defining feature of the Garden Village, rather than the A38 which tends to seize attention. A simpler crescent shape - like a backbone - which then defined cross-streets like ribs emerging from it might help unify the spine and make it more legible. Attention should be given to the programming of social and cultural uses of this key public realm element.

The hierarchy of streets is fine. The primary street to the east of the A38 is only one block away; it may function better if moved further eastwards. We wondered if there were too few east-west connections to the west of the A38, especially a lack of straightforward routes to the centre from the west and south west, not forgetting Thornbury and the probable Metrobus link. A pedestrian/cycle bridge over the A38 south of the centre, where the A38 is in cutting, might be worth investigating. You might look further at additional linkages to the north-west back to Gloucester Road. A Space Syntax analysis would be useful to show the benefit of these options.

The first primary school might be better nearer the centre as it is likely to have a socialising function. Allotments should perhaps be more evenly distributed, not just on the periphery. Workplaces for creative and IT based businesses might also be thought of architecturally as part of the central farm shop development.

Presentation

When portraying Buckover in context, we think a wider field should be drawn, perhaps at two levels. One is quasi-national, showing the scheme in relation to London, Birmingham and Cardiff and their airports. A second would show the scheme in relation to Bristol, its airport, motorways (including M5 J14), railways and stations (including Bristol Parkway, Yate, and that proposed at Charfield). We say this to help everyone including us to understand the scheme, but it is also a selling point for you that Buckover will be well located and connected - not just to the motorway network. It will also help you to envisage that this could be a scheme of national interest as well as regional significance.

The green gap separating the village from Thornbury is important and needs to be shown as it is now and drawn as it is to become through planned and approved development on the edge of Thornbury.

Conclusion

The Panel sees here an exceptional combination of an encouraging LPA, an excellent design team, a property development partner that stresses placemaking and a single landowner with a long-term custodial role intending to maintain ownership though to delivery.

with some parcels retained permanently. The meeting itself suggested shared values and harmonious relationships. We are excited by the potential of this combination to produce something extraordinary and exemplary. Indeed, we'd go one step further and prompt you to see this scheme as unique. In other words, have the courage of your convictions and raise the bar from very good to unique, giving you a more powerful pitch to draw in partners and supporters and a clear basis on which to be radical.

The Panel was pleased to be involved before design work was advanced and we welcome your intention to use this Panel further as you develop test plots and the central and defining features of the scheme

Yours sincerely

Timothy Cantell
Panel Secretary, Creating Excellence South West Design Review Panel

Panel Members for this review:

Peter Clegg	(Chair, Architect /Masterplanner)
Andy Cameron	(Highways, Engineering)
Garry Hall	(Urban Design)
Doug King	(Sustainability/Energy)
Peter Neal	(Landscape/Ecology)

cc South Gloucestershire Council, St Modwen

Declarations of Interest

Jon Tricker of Phil Jones Associates and Andy Ward of NEW Masterplanning declared that they are members of the Creating Excellence South West Design Review Panel – their participation in the meeting was solely as members of the design team.

SWDRP is independent, giving advice in its own name. It is managed by Creating Excellence, which is a member of the national Design Network. It is hosted by Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) South West, Bristol.



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**Confidentiality*

Since the scheme was not the subject of a planning application when it came to the Panel, this letter is in confidence to the addressee and those listed as being sent copies. There is no objection to the letter being shared within the respective practices/organisations.

CE SWDRP reserves the right to make the guidance known should the views contained in this letter be made public by others in whole or in part.

The letter would be made available as part of any Freedom of Information request or to any public inquiry concerning the scheme.

The letter would also be made available to a subsequent CE SWDRP session for the same site (or, if relevant, an adjacent site) or to another design review panel should a scheme go before them.

The letter could be made public when the scheme goes forward as a planning application if the applicants or the Local Planning Authority so wish. The letter should be made public in these circumstances and there will often be pressure from third parties to release the letter. Applicants often include a commentary on design review in Design and Access Statements showing both the Panel's comments and how the design developed in response. Design review can also occur at application stage in which case the resulting letter would supersede the first.

If you do not require this letter to be kept confidential, please let us know.