

Cottenham Village Design Group

Planning application comments

S/2317/11

Land At The Junction of Long Drove and Beach Road, Cottenham - Erection of 47 dwellings, garages, public open space, landscaping, vehicular access and associated infrastructure (Revised Submission).

Introduction

This comment from the Design Group follows the receipt of amended drawings and documentation from the applicant addressing comments received during the application process. The Design Group would like to thank the architects and developers for their time in coming to address the group following receipt of the amended proposals.

Comments on Amended Designs

The Design Group is pleased that a substantial number of our previous comments have been addressed, our comments/reservations on the main changes and omissions are noted as follows:-

- Most crucially that 'white'/buff brick for walls and grey slate for roofing have been made the dominant materials, the Design Group believe that this is a major improvement that will help the new development to assimilate better with the village's predominant architectural style. The actual choice of brick and mortar remains critical to the finished appearance, details of these would be required, a creamy mortar works best with the white/buff brickwork found locally. Slate is traditionally Welsh or could be a good quality man made version.
- Roofs have been adjusted on some houses to the appropriate pitch of around 30 degrees, the Design Group would still like to see more of the buildings amended with steeper roofs being the exception rather than the rule.
- Buildings using different materials or roof pitches to the above have been reduced from before and have now been better located so as to add variety to the streetscene. Timber cladding has now also been reserved for ancillary structures such as garages or the flats over garages, this better emulates the use of this material on outbuildings.
- The proportion of properties with bay windows has also been reduced and these have been confined to larger houses, they have also been used symmetrically, which is an improvement from before. The bay window design itself is not typical of those seen within the village, as these are predominantly used on later turn of the century Victorian villas, but they are of a tidier appearance than the previous.
- Appropriate local detailing has been increased / incorporated to add variety - for example:
 - Detailing to doors has mixed doorcases with semicircular or elliptical brick arches. The rounded arch detail is more successful on the houses fronting Landbeach Road than on those within the site itself and might still better reflect the local vernacular with a little more depth in the constructed detail rather than through the use of red polychrome brickwork.

- A variety of eaves detailing has been incorporated to reflect some of the local traditions, the use of this detailing should remain restrained as it is in the village's traditional buildings.

- Our comments regarding the treatment of the property boundaries to the street is one that remains unactioned, the Design Group would again request that property boundaries to the street should be defined by the use of low walls or railings. Details of these would be required.
- The section of affordable housing has now been split into two as our original comment suggested which we think is a better reflection of the historic and socio-economic makeup of the existing village.
- Some further investigation on the provision of a pedestrian cut through to Coolidge gardens from the new housing has been explored and this seems unlikely to be achievable. The Design Group remains committed to the integration of new areas in the village to form part of a linked overall pattern.

Further detailed comments now follow, these are based upon our original comments but have been adjusted to better reflect the new proposals.

Structure of Application and Site

Whilst we still have some reservations about the development of this green field site, which lies outside the village envelope, and the resulting loss of green space and wildlife habitat, we recognise that it's location makes it in some respects an obvious site for a medium sized infill development. We also recognise that the inclusion of a good proportion of affordable housing offers considerable advantages for the village.

The proposed site for the development borders the village on the corner of Beach Road and Long Drove. In the past it had been in use as agricultural land and before that orchards but has for some years not been tended, we believed that in some publicly distributed documents it had been inaccurately described as Brownfield land which we did not believe to be the case. It is likely that the site would have had some benefit for wildlife in it's overgrown state and it was disappointing to read that the interior of site had already been cleared before the Ecological Assessment was made.

The developer is aware of the importance, both for wildlife and visual amenity, of the hedgerow bordering Long Drove, and we are pleased to see that this is still to be retained. This hedgerow is vital, both for the rural character of Long Drove (which is one of the most popular recreational routes around the village), and to provide a soft screen to the village edge. We are keen to ensure that this hedge is managed in such a way that it's tall, bushy and essentially rural character will be retained and it will not be over-manicured.

The intent to maintain the character of Long Drove and the approach to the village along Beach Road should help to maintain the soft edge of the village in this location and keep the essentially rural character intact. The proposals still show a cul de sac arrangement with access into the site purely from Beach Road, a number of pedestrian accesses are then provided at key points onto Long Drove. The roadway then runs to the rear of the site and includes what could become some nice open spaces adjacent to the existing hedgerow.

Layout

There is an intent towards defining the boundaries to properties with walls and fences set behind the line of the houses, but there are no proposals regarding the property boundary to the street. The tradition in Cottenham is to mark this with a low wall or railings, the height of any walling being related to whether the boundary is to the rear or front garden and the distance back from the road and status of the house, railings are painted black and are confined only to frontages. The Design Group would expect to see the street constrained in this same fashion with the house sizes and frontage depths generally indicating that a low level wall or set of railings would be appropriate.

The presentation of the houses fronting Beach Road should still be carefully managed to maintain some semblance of the existing rural character of this section of the road.

The Built Form

Materials and mix

The proposals now include a number of houses with red polychrome brick detailing, the Design Group believes that the designs might better reflect the local vernacular without the use of these coloured bricks as the great majority of walls are in the local creamy-buff brick only with only a few late Victorian and Edwardian buildings using red brick for detailing.

Roof pitch

The slate roofs characteristic of Cottenham's traditional buildings are almost always to a relatively low pitch, around 30 degrees – still significantly less than most roof pitches proposed for this development even after the amendments. Steeper roof pitches are generally only found on surviving earlier buildings roofed in thatch (or where materials such as plain tiles have replaced thatch). The use of roofing of a more neutral grey colour as now proposed, in combination with lower roof pitches, should help to reduce the visual impact of the development on views into the village.

Complexity of facades.

House Type G, previously incorporating a projecting central weatherboarded feature, has now been improved by the omission of this detail, however the use of an arch over the open porch remains an odd detail, this house might be improved if this open porch could be filled in.

Landscaping

The outline landscape proposals show a small area of landscaped public open space planted with *Acer campestre* and a larger area planted with a specimen *Fraxinus angustifolia* 'Raywood' and a formal row of *Acer campestre* 'streetwise'. Planting along Beach Road includes *Crataegus* hedging and four *Amelanchier lamarckii*, while *Prunus x Hillieri* and a *Betula 'jackquemontii'* are specified as street trees.

The Design Group welcomes the submission of such detailed proposals and the use of a high proportion of native species, of particular importance on this village edge site. We are however concerned whether the prominent use of the exotics *A. lamarckii* and *F. angustifolia* is appropriate. The very high proportion of *A. campestre* does not reflect the general mix of native species found in the parish. Orchards, mainly of apple, but also of plum and cherry, were once a defining feature of the Cottenham landscape; we would suggest that some

orchard style planting might be used to reflect both the site's historic use and Cottenham's past heritage as a major fruit producing centre.

Conclusion

A great number of our initial concerns with these proposals have now been addressed, however some areas of concern do remain, we would expect to see these few outstanding items amended in order for this development to better reflect the local characteristics of Cottenham.

'C/1: Developers and planners should consult the Village Design Statement, which reflects the views of the community.' (Design Statement p.2)

'C/2: Developers, planners and public authorities should take relevant local advice concerning facilities (including education, sport, culture and entertainment) to be provided as a result of new development.

• Refer to South Cambridgeshire District Council's Development Control Policies for guidance on provision of infrastructure for new developments (policy DP/4) and retention of existing services and facilities (policies SF/1 and SF/9).' (Design Statement p.2)

'L/1: 'Landscape design criteria should form a key aspect in the layout, form and urban design qualities of new developments' Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines (Cambridgeshire County Council).

• In the case of significant landscape developments or changes, a professional design scheme should be prepared for consultation.
• New landscapes should be endowed with sufficient management resources for securing long-term care.' (Design Statement p.6)

'L/2: Essential elements of the parish's distinctive Fen Edge landscape character should be protected.

• New developments should minimise the impact on existing landscape qualities and features.
• New developments should contribute positively to the quality of the landscape and enjoyment of the environment.
• There is considerable room for the improvement of wildlife habitat and protection. This creates opportunities for developers to address these aspects within their schemes and enhance the assets of the village.' (Design Statement p.6)

'L/3: New developments on the village edge should give high priority to landscape design and management of light pollution, to protect and enhance the external view of the village.

• Do not form a stark edge to the village, or spoil the outside view by neglecting the backs of gardens or buildings.
• Shelter and contain the edge using appropriate native broadleaf species.
• Achieve well-designed compositions using hedge and woodland screens.
• Maintain dark skies in the countryside at night by minimising light spillage from new development.' (Design Statement p.6)

'L/4: Action by landowners, community groups and individuals.

• Plant native and/or locally typical species to retain landscape character and to benefit wildlife within the village.
• This is a landscape of wide views and open spaces. Efforts should be made to minimise impact of developments on the character of this landscape.
• Consider the impact when designing details such as bridges, signs, gates and stiles.
• When planting, relatively small groups of trees may be most appropriate.' (Design Statement p.6)

'S/1: Settlement patterns are a key to the distinctive nature of the village. Developers should recognise this and respect the characteristic layout.

• Create streets with a purposeful line: settlement should follow the street and should not be random. In general avoid closes and culs-de-sac.
• The settlement pattern is characteristically rectilinear not winding.
• Refer to the two patterns of house density. One is informal with houses built cheek-by-jowl; the other is in a regular linear pattern.' (Design Statement p.7)

'S/2: New developments need to be integrated with the village and form part of a linked overall pattern.

- *Build up a network of routes between homes, schools and shops, particularly for pedestrians and cyclists.*
- *Protect existing views within the village, and into the countryside.*
- *Create vistas into and within the newly developed areas.*
- *New infrastructure should not detract from the appearance of the village or surrounding area.'* (Design Statement p.7)

'S/3: Infill development or lateral extensions to existing buildings should maintain gaps which provide views out of the village.' (Design Statement p.7)

'O/1: A coherent overall strategy is needed to increase the extent and variety of public spaces suitable for informal recreation.' (Design Statement p.9)

'O/2: Landscape design advice should be obtained for the planning of open spaces.' (Design Statement p.9)

'O/4: New developments and community initiatives can add to the provision of open spaces in different ways.

- *Create linear transitional spaces within or on the edge of the village.*
- *Contribute to a framework of linked recreational routes.*
- *Allow for informal recreation or meeting spaces.*
- *Provide well-planned and furnished playgrounds.*
- *Create and plant incidental open spaces.*
- *Landscape and plant car parking areas.'* (Design Statement p.9)

'B/3: Relationships between buildings are as important as the design of buildings themselves.

- *Make skilful use of spaces between buildings: this can help new developments to be assimilated successfully.* (Design Statement p.19)

'B/6: New developments should acknowledge their Cottenham context and avoid pattern-book designs.

Developments can maintain and strengthen the visual cohesion of the village, and help to renew the specific architectural traditions of Cottenham.

- *Refer to local settlement patterns in layout.*
- *Respect local characteristics and context of the particular site.*
- *Refer to local building forms and proportion. There is a variety of proportions throughout the village: developments can reflect those which are adjacent.*
- *Use good quality materials – whether modern or traditional – which are appropriate to Cottenham.*
- *Where possible, roof lights should be located on rear elevations or otherwise away from public view. In more sensitive areas they should be mounted flush with the roof and the number of openings kept to a minimum.*
- *Refer to locally distinctive details; accurately match these to the chosen building form and avoid mixing styles or historical references in the same building.*
- *Respond to typical settings and garden forms and avoid large areas of hard surfacing.*
- *New-build garages and car parking areas should not obscure house fronts; avoid blocks of garages.'* (Design Statement p.19)

'B/7: The appointment of architects and, where appropriate, relevant specialists is encouraged for all developments.

- *Developers should provide perspective drawings, isometric drawings or artists' impressions to show how new developments will appear in relation to their overall surroundings.'* (Design Statement p.19)

'B/9: Carefully considered local energy saving or generating solutions should be supported.

- *Solar panels and other devices should be encouraged, so long as they can be installed without detrimental effect on the visual environment of the village.*
- *Locations should be selected for solar panels or similar equipment based on maximising energy savings and minimising disruption to the appearance or fabric of the building.*
- *In sensitive situations, solar panels should be mounted flush and finished to blend with the roof.*
- *Average wind speeds in Cottenham are generally too low for productive use of micro-generation turbines; their use is not recommended unless significant benefits can be demonstrated.*
- *Avoid locating equipment on public facing façades wherever possible.'* (Design Statement p.19)

'H/1: Roads should be designed first and foremost from a pedestrian and vulnerable road users' perspective.

- *Particular emphasis should be applied to the core of the village.*
- *Consider alternative road surfaces which may help slow traffic.* (Design Statement p.20)

'H/2: Road safety needs to be improved by the reduction of through traffic.

- *Highways authorities should ensure early consultation prior to significant road developments within the village.*

The Design Group has in addition requested that consultation should cover other significant road developments within a 10-mile radius.

- *Public transport services need to be improved and promoted, including a link to the Cambridgeshire Guided Busway.*
- *Traffic calming measures need to be well maintained. (Design Statement p.20)*

'H/3: More cycle ways are needed, and existing cycle ways need to be improved.

- *Develop safe and pleasant pedestrian and cycle routes for everyday travel around the village, for example safer routes to schools. (Design Statement p.20)*

'H/4: Agents for developments need to consult with the highways authorities at an early stage.

- *Plan road designs in new developments to reduce traffic speeds by unobtrusive safety measures.*
- *Encourage flexibility in the size and siting of visibility splays and other road engineering.*
- *Minimise the use of concrete kerbs and other urban elements.*
- *Additional highway access points should not be introduced in busy or dangerous locations without giving due consideration to road safety.' (Design Statement p.20)*

'H/5: Road surfaces should be in keeping with the village character.

- *Markings should be kept to a minimum and coloured surfaces avoided wherever possible.' (Design Statement p.20)*

'F/1: The streetscape needs a considered design approach employing professional landscape designers.

- *Developers can assist by entering into early discussions with the agencies responsible.*
- *Street furniture should suit its Cottenham context: designs of street lighting, for example, could renew the local tradition of metalwork.*
- *The muted levels of current lighting should be preserved: downlighting using white light rather than orange is preferred.*
- *Private security lights should be muted and carefully sited to light the required area without forming a hazard to road users.*
- *Simple designs are usually most appropriate.*
- *Seating and other street furniture of good quality, or specially designed, can enrich the character and enjoyment of the village.*
- *Gates and metal railings should generally be painted black.' (Design Statement p.21)*

Applications viewed and comments prepared on behalf of Cottenham Village Design Group by Alex Darby, John Williams, Mike Smith, Alex Thoukydides and Steven Poole, February 08th 2012. All quoted text is taken from the Cottenham Village Design Statement, Supplementary Planning Document: <http://www.cvdg.org/design-statement-2007.pdf>. Comments are based solely on the principles and guidelines set out in this document.