



The Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel

Stapleford Retirement Village, Stapleford (PPA/22/0009)

11 August 2022, Virtual Meeting

Confidential

The [Cambridgeshire Quality Charter for Growth](#) sets out the core principles for the level of quality to be expected in new development across Cambridgeshire. The [Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel](#) provides independent, expert advice to developers and local planning authorities against the four core principles of the Charter: connectivity, character, climate, and community.

Attendees

Panel Members:

Maggie Baddeley (Chair) – Town Planner and Chartered Surveyor (planning and development)

Georgina Bignold (Character, Architecture) – Director, Proctor & Matthews Architects

Angela Koch (Character, Community) – Founder, Imagine Places

Vanessa Ross (Character, Landscape) – Chartered Landscape Architect, Director, arc Landscape Design and Planning Ltd.

Sarah Morrison (Character, Conservation) - Conservation Architect, Historic England

Paul Bourgeois (Character, Climate) - Industrial Lead at Anglia Ruskin University

Applicant and Design Team:

Will Coote – Rangeford (Applicant)

Daniel Perfect – Rangeford (Applicant)

Anne Marie Nichols – Life 3A (Architect)

James Gardner – Ares (Landscape Architect)

Halina Timms – Ares (Landscape Architect)

Matt Hare – Carter Jonas (Planning Consultant)

Richard Abbott – Stace (Scheme Project Manager)

Brian Farrington – Hoare Lee (Sustainability consultant)

LPA Officers:

Bonnie Kwok (BK) - Principal Urban Designer / Design Review Panel Manager

Katie Roberts (KR) – Executive Assistant / Design Review Panel Support Officer

Michael Hammond (MH) – Principal Planning Officer

Ammar Alasaad (AA) – Senior Urban Designer

Helen Sayers (HS) – Principal Landscape Architect

Tom Davies (TD) – Urban Designer/Youth Engagement

Scheme Description and Background

Site context

The site lies outside but adjacent to the development framework boundary of Stapleford and within the Green Belt. The site comprises agricultural land.

Planning History

An outline planning application (20/02929/OUT) was made by a land promoter in July 2020 for the site, proposing 'a retirement care village in Use Class C2 comprising housing with care, communal health, wellbeing and leisure facilities, public open space, landscaping, car parking, access and associated development and public access countryside park with all matters reserved except for access'. This application was refused by South Cambridgeshire District Council in April 2021, on the grounds of harm to the Green Belt.

An appeal against the decision was lodged and subsequently allowed by the Planning Inspectorate in December 2021. The decision letter's conditions include reference (in condition 3) to a series of approved parameter plans. Condition 3 states that the development 'shall be carried out in accordance with' those approved parameter plans that are for: access and movement; landscape; and land use and building heights ('up to' ridge heights). No more than a total floor area of 17,825sqm of floor area is a limitation stated in condition 19.

The Proposal

In advance of a future reserved matters approval (RMA) application, the current applicant (Rangeord Villages) entered into a planning performance agreement in April 2022 with the local planning authority for pre-application advice for a retirement village (55 years or older) (use class C2) for circa 150 homes following the granting of the outline permission. Officers have since attended several meetings and taken part in a workshop with the applicant, all of which have focussed on the design and layout of the scheme. The feedback of officers has been broadly taken on board throughout the process to date.

Officers have also visited one of the applicant's existing retirement villages

(Wadswick Green, Corsham), in order to better understand Rangeford's business model and design approach, including building layout and amenity space arrangements.

Rangeford Villages have undertaken a community engagement event on the pre-application proposals, and the applicant has agreed to work with the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service's Youth Engagement Team to ensure that the local youth population can have a meaningful input into the outdoor amenity space design.

Declarations of Interest

There is no declaration of interest to report.

Previous Panel Reviews

This scheme was first reviewed by the Panel on 23 June 2022.

Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel views

Introduction

The proposal, presented to the Panel by the Rangeford Villages team, seeks to demonstrate their responses to Panel recommendations at the last design review. In summary, revisions in the presented scheme include:

- The rotation of the northern block to provide a larger parking court;
- Detailing the design of parking courts, such that they have defensible planting and the main aspects of apartments do not overlook them;
- Centring the pavilion and 'pulling it apart' from the adjacent residential buildings immediately to the north, to improve permeability and access routes through the site;
- Reviewing site-wide routes and links to/from Stapleford, the pavilion and the country park, in terms of seeking to ensure maximum convenience for residents and other users;
- Replacing detached bungalows with semi-detached bungalows, while trying to retain a loose village grain. Sedum roofs are proposed on the flat roofs in-between;

- Using brick on gable ends, instead of metal fascia;
- Rotating on-street parking spaces on the western street to provide parallel parking, to improve the streetscape via a more spacious layout that can integrate swales and include incidental seating (13 fewer vehicle parking spaces are proposed overall);
- Trying to integrate sustainable drainage strategy (SuDS) features more, although 'bound by the parameters' and the limitations of the chalk soil on the siting of permeable features;
- Providing 20 fewer single aspect dwellings - apartments that are north-facing (now 6% of the total) are principally on the pavilion's first floor;
- Reducing the extent of glazing in master and second bedrooms, to help prevent over-heating;
- Proposing options for residents' cycle and mobility scooter parking, with integrated electric charging points;
- Introducing additional points of access into the pavilion, and bi-fold doors to the restaurant and well-being area, to increase openness; and
- Moving the petanque court onto the pavilion terrace.

There was no reference in this review to any scheme revisions having been made in direct response to community engagement feedback and comments so far.

There are other recommendations from the first design review that continue to be worked on, or that are being discussed with Officers, according to the applicant team.

They include:

- A whole life carbon assessment that is underway, that has already informed decisions such as using SIPs for bungalow construction;
- Exploring a green roof for the pavilion, within the height defined by the approved parameters plan;
- Considering the potential for rainwater harvesting appropriate for apartments;
- A Fitwell certification assessment that is being undertaken;
- Optimised roof design , locations and installation angles (between 30 to 45 degree) for PV (photovoltaic) panels to be demonstrated so maximum efficiency can be achieved, in conjunction with potential battery storage in the pavilion (and tying in with landscape lighting);

- Apartment building elevations being assessed block by block for overall distances, and window by window, to avoid overlooking;
- Introducing adjustable external shutters instead of reduction of window sizes to be considered preventing overheating in summer while supporting privacy, connections with the outdoors and landscapes as well as winter solar gain.
- Achieving distinct landscape character zones;
- Breaking up the on-street parking to the south of the central green;
- Looking into the outlook of each ground floor bedrooms and private outdoor spaces, with the hope of using landscape and shutters to provide choice and privacy; and
- The ratio of cycle to mobility scooter parking spaces.

It was previously understood from Rangeford Villages that their intention is to submit an RMA (Reserved Matters Application) at the end of the summer 2022; no update on timescale was provided in this second review. The applicant's team appears committed to not submitting any non-material amendments or minor material amendment application(s) (under S96A, or S73 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, as amended) e.g. to revise outline permission conditions, or substitute alternative parameter plans.

Climate

Overall, the Panel would welcome more information and reference to water, energy and construction material clearly demonstrating the commitment and desire for the project to be more sustainable, and achieve higher standards than current and proposed building regulations in every regard (it being understood from the applicant, for example, that the intention for U values is to go beyond Part L 2021, and meet the 2025 Future Homes Standard).

Noted by the Panel by its noticeable absence, there is an essential need for a sustainability and energy strategy document that also provides a design justification for scheme elements to date, and any further design development. Such a strategy is essential, not only for the development's delivery but also to demonstrate the scheme's benefits for future residents. The strategy should make it clear what options have been considered, and describe those that have been discounted and

why, before setting out the chosen approach itself.

This development can demonstrate Rangeford Villages' innovative and future proofed approach for energy, sustainability and affordability. Tightly related here is the use of sustainable construction materials and methods. For instance, in using more carbon neutral materials such as, but not limited to, cross-laminated timber (CLT).

As a key part of the energy strategy, the Panel recommends that consideration is given to using the [Energy Services Company](#) (ESCo) model. This in order to further reduce installation costs and residents' bills and enable lower maintenance and replacement costs. This is a model that is already being used successfully elsewhere in Cambridgeshire, including for smaller projects than here.

It is unclear why certain energy options have been discounted, such as ground or air source heat pumps. Noting that the applicant team is now considering the use and location of PV panels, photovoltaic thermal (PV-T) panels would maximise electricity production and provide hot water.

While passing mention has been made of mechanical ventilation and heat recovery (MVHR), this has only been in the context of a noise assessment concluding that opening windows could also be provided. The ability of all windows to be opened (tilt and turn) is considered critical in managing different comfort levels, overheating risks, security concerns, cross ventilation and connections with nature. Similarly, mention has been made of exploring options and the decision to utilise battery storage but only in the pavilion. The Panel suggests that elaborating on why this single point of storage is preferred to provision in each building block would be considered helpful.

The Panel is of the view that water collection and limiting its usage are key. There is the potential for the proposed retirement village to have an attractive landscape but water has to be collected properly: a water strategy is seen by the Panel as being absolutely key to the success of this development. Merely showing ubiquitous water butts, which in any event are inappropriate for apartment buildings, is an inadequate response in the knowledge that the landscape will have to be watered to be maintained. There are many creative ways that water can be collected and channelled across a site into planted areas, and this proposal needs to incorporate

the most appropriate system for doing so. An integrated blue and green infrastructure strategy is essential for this project to be termed one that is landscape-led. To this end, a key component that the Panel recommends for inclusion is the extensive provision of biodiverse green roofs that include water collection and do not just comprise sedum planting.

Character

The proposed pavilion is the hub of the development and the Panel remains concerned about the design qualities of this central part of the scheme. Without sections, it is difficult to understand how its two floors relate to each other; it is, however, unquestionably a huge building that requires reconsideration. In the previous design review, it was suggested that its facilities could be more distributed across the site and into the country park. While it is understood that this redistribution of uses has been considered but would present problems operationally, the Panel remains of the view that the proposed pavilion is not of sufficiently high-quality design. The approach taken to the current building creates many problems of bulk, scale and massing that in short, a farmstead typology could potentially help to resolve. Noting that its ground floor facilities are effectively fixed by the applicant's own design guide and the actual provision at Wadswick Green, the Panel nonetheless recommends that a farmstead/open courtyard typology would be more appropriate than the current sports pavilion-based commercial design approach. This view is held on the basis of the site's context, character and location and its outstanding long views: the building will be a prominent landmark. The Panel therefore refers the applicant team to [Historic England information on historic farmsteads in the Eastern Region](#) in this regard.

If it is decided ultimately however that the pavilion's contemporary design has to be retained, then issues around the roof height and the approved parameter plan's 8m maximum must be resolved. There is no doubt in the Panel's view that the extensive flat roof should be a biodiverse green roof that also collects water at least in part, and that it should otherwise provide space for PV/ PV-T panels. It is not considered an acceptable justification for not providing either or both, that the relevant approved parameter plan limits the ridge height to a substantial 8m. Unfortunately, the absence of sections in both reviews is unhelpful here. As discussed in the first design

review and repeated in the second design review, there is scope to amend the planning permission's conditions/parameter plans in order to achieve the most sustainable roof form. The Panel endorses the applicant's ongoing discussions with Officers around the degree of flexibility in potentially resolving the design of this key building and hub.

Also, if the current pavilion form is to be retained, the Panel suggests that options for a north/south 'split' - and pulling the single building apart - should be explored, whether only at ground floor, or preferably at both levels. A further option should also consider providing external, wrap-around generous veranda access to the pavilion's first floor apartments, instead of smaller terraces and central core. This would create better more sociable greened circulation space for residents, improve their connectivity with the facilities below and beyond, animate the facade of this key building and reduce the number of single aspect dwellings further. Given that residents in those apartments are likely to be the least mobile residents, often dependant on others to leave the home, enjoy the village amenities and wider landscape, the Panel's view is that this alternative to the internal corridor arrangement could be preferable.

There being fewer single aspect apartments is welcomed by the Panel, together with there being potentially more natural light provided in the long corridors of the residential buildings and on the pavilion's first floor.

It remains the Panel's view that providing more spacious circulation spaces with a good degree of daylight in the other residential buildings would be highly beneficial for the occupiers' well-being, and would help to strengthen the social fabric of the development – particularly in winter months.

With regard to promoting residents' well-being, the Panel retains its concern that the landscape buffer, where it is in closest proximity to apartment buildings e.g. on the eastern side of the development, could obstruct or even block outward-looking views. The Panel would recommend that the buffer planting plan is reduced and very carefully designed, using species that will not be overly reliant on cutting back to maintain structure, so as to ensure residents do not feel confined while in their homes.

The new silhouette of Stapleford and for instance seen from the country park and made up of the new buildings, existing buildings, trees and other landscape features should be considered as part of the design development.

Materiality has not been discussed in-depth to date; the above referred-to Historic England information could provide helpful guidance for a more granular approach. The nearby Conservation Area and Stapleford's existing development are points of reference that would help build materiality, including the possible introduction of clay was mentioned by the applicant's team. The Panel is mindful of how four types of bricks are already being considered and once chosen, it would be helpful if detailed elevations were provided. The extensive use of knapped flint – currently shown on bin stores – seems unwarranted in terms of detail at this stage, although with more analysis, its appropriate use could be incorporated successfully. Timber structures would appear at this point more appropriate for bin stores.

The intention to provide external flexible shutters for limiting overheating and heatloss in the colder winter months is endorsed by the Panel. External shutters could also assist with privacy choices and creating interest in the elevations.

Reflecting on sustainability and connectivity, the Panel would have found an insight into the proposed lighting strategy for the site helpful. Although noted by the Panel that a lighting strategy is not required at this stage by planning permission condition, it is considered to be an integral part of the development's character, landscape and designing out crime strategy and cluttering should be avoided.

Connectivity

Although the Panel finds the 'day in the life' analyses helpful for understanding how residents, employees and visitors will move around the site and access the country park, there are inadequacies in the assumptions made that need to be addressed if they are to have any realistic influence on design development. For example, none of the individuals uses a car for any part of their day, yet the scheme retains the character of a car-based development with copious amounts of surface parking. A more realistic understanding of movement patterns needs to be expressed and understood; the Panel considers that one potential outcome should then be a clearer

definition of route hierarchies within the site. It is currently unclear whether a mobility scooter can be used on all paths, for example.

The reduction in car parking spaces on the western street is endorsed by the Panel; one consequence is how it now provides an opportunity for additional tree planting to give shade to parked vehicles and to everyone passing by. While not significant in terms of numbers of spaces, the reduction in on-street parking on the western street has also facilitated an improved directness of the route from Stapleford to the pavilion. If the current level of parking provision cannot be reduced any further, the Panel recommends seeking to move as many spaces as possible into additional parking courts that could potentially be accommodated via the block-by-block review (looking at distances and overlooking) that is underway. This would be one means for improving the view of the development on its approach by car; at present, the 'fly-through' has highlighted how the view of the pavilion would be marred when spaces are occupied, by what could appear just to be a car park.

The Panel notes that a route remains within the landscape buffer on the western boundary of the site, linking Stapleford with the country park. A considerable concern remains that in principle, this is an unsuitable route for accessing the country park. To ensure safety, it would need to be well-lit, but this in turn could be damaging for wildlife. As in the first design review, it is suggested that the route be realigned; the Panel suggests it could potentially run alongside the swale that lies immediately to the east, however noting that some tree planting would assist to create shade for those using the path. The same route currently passes between two bungalow parking spaces at its northern end. A revised route at this point that is more suitable for visitors approaching/ leaving the country park at this point should be defined.

Employee and visitor cycle parking do not appear to have been provided for as yet.

To further enhance connectivity, a wayfinding strategy should be developed for the next layout iteration. The strategy should ensure that it will be clear to all site users which routes to where can be used by which mode, and what facilities are available at potential destinations.

Community

A key concern of the Panel is the omission in the revised scheme of an element of landscape that can contribute directly to creating a community. The proposed 'allotments' in the south eastern corner of the site should be more accurately termed 'raised timber beds' and have been explained in the review as not being for individuals' own use but as at Wadswick Green, they are to be used in conjunction with the pavilion's restaurant kitchen. This is despite their location being at some distance from the pavilion in this proposal. In terms of use, the beds do not currently constitute a community growing area either. While there is scope for the chosen area to be extended further into this 'leftover' corner of the site, it seems unlikely to thrive in the shadow of the extensive planting buffer immediately to the south east. It is not an ideal solution for dealing with this proximity that the applicant intends to maintain that buffer planting by cutting back. The Panel's overall view is that the raised beds are not of a character and intended use that will contribute positively to the new community. They are also seen by the Panel to be in an unsuitable location for their proposed purpose, one that should be reconsidered. Without a review of their function and their re-siting away from this location into a suitable position elsewhere on-site – one where there is similarly scope for their expansion - the Panel's conclusion is that the scheme's landscape-led justification is being unsatisfactorily undermined. The panel also questioned the size and anticipated use of the lawn areas in front of the pavilion, and recommend the need to provide shade to the seating areas.

Summary

The revised proposal has addressed some, but not all, of the Panel's key concerns that arose at the first design review. The reduction in car parking and its consequences is particularly welcome, alongside there being fewer single aspect apartments and only semi-detached bungalows.

Certain outstanding matters are however significant, as there is design development well-underway that should have been based on a cohesive energy and sustainability strategy, yet that strategy is not complete. Its absence is also preventing the proposal from being fully landscape-led; integrating a water collection component with proposed green infrastructure will be critical to achieving and maintaining the

proposed buffer planting and the extensive public green and private gardens throughout the new village. Until the proposed raised beds are re-considered and re-located, the landscape-led narrative is further undermined.

Other matters of concern that are currently being progressed relate to the siting and design of certain buildings and dwellings and the need to amend aspects of proposed parking provision still further. A further, fundamental element of design development is the recommended reconsideration of the proposed pavilion; for wide-ranging reasons relating to sustainability, character and community, the Panel's view is that adopting a farmstead typology could resolve many if not all of the identified deficiencies of the building as currently proposed.

1. Central Green
2. Parking Courts
3. Attenuation basin
4. Dining terrace
5. Arrival node
6. Courtyard
7. Bungalow close
8. Access to Chalk Hill Down
9. Access to Stapleford
10. Main site access
11. Allotments



Proposed site layout – extracted from the applicant's presentation document

The above comments represent the views of the Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel and are made without prejudice to the determination of any planning application should one be submitted. Furthermore, the views expressed will not bind the decision of Elected Members, should a planning application be submitted, nor prejudice the formal decision-making process of the council.

Contact Details

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