

Report of the Guildford Strategic Sites  
Design Review Panel

# Wisley Airfield workshop

4th September 2020

## The design review meeting workshop

**Reference number** 1432/180820

**Date** 18<sup>th</sup> August 2020

**Meeting location** Online via Zoom

<b>Site visit</b>	This workshop was carried out during the Covid-19 outbreak in 2020. A site study prepared by the applicant team and a digital walk-around (in a similar fashion to that which would have been conducted on-site) was carried out prior to the review.
<b>Scope of the workshop</b>	As an independent design review panel, the scope of this workshop was not restricted. However, as one of the four strategic sites identified in the Local Plan, discussion was centred around the vision and the six established design principles: community, sustainability, connectivity, green framework, innovation and sense of place.
<b>Panel interests</b>	Panel members did not indicate any conflicts of interest.
<b>Confidentiality</b>	This report is confidential as the scheme is not yet the subject of a detailed planning application. Full details of our confidentiality policy can be found at the end of this report.

## The proposal

<b>Site location</b>	Wisley Airfield, Hatch Lane, Ockham, GU23 GNU
<b>Site details</b>	<p>This is a circa 135 Ha site located 8.6 miles north east of Guildford town centre. The site is a former airfield and is dominated by a tarmacked runway 2.5km traversing the site in an east-west direction with arable land either side. The landscape conditions are varied with the most notable features being: the remnant hedgerow trees to the south east and west, a Tree Protection Order (TPO) woodland bordering Elm corner to the north, a strip of young woodland between the airfield and sunken hangar area, a wet wooded stream corridor along Stratford Brook that extends towards Hyde Lane and Ockham Lane to the south, fine mature trees around Bridge End Farm (to the south) and a Great Crested Newt breeding pond to the south of Bridge End Farm.</p> <p>The Surrey Hills AONB is located south and within view of the site. A series of small settlements surround the site and RHS Wisley is located north west of the site, across the A3 road.</p> <p>A National Air Traffic Services (NATS) beacon is located to the east of the site and is due to be decommissioned. Highways England's proposed Wisley Lane Diversion will cut through to the site to the northeast and is due to be completed in 2021. A number of Public Rights of Way (PROW) traverse the site.</p> <p>Taylor Wimpey owns the majority of the site, 115 of 135 Ha, and CBRE and Hallam Land own smaller parcels of land at the southern end of the site. Together, all form part of the masterplan proposal.</p>
<b>Proposal</b>	<p>The proposal is for a residential development of 2,100 homes with 40% affordable units, including aged care provision and 8 gypsy and traveller pitches. In addition to this a primary and a secondary school, a local centre (with food, retail and community space) and 4,300 sqm of commercial employment space is proposed.</p> <p>Extensive Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG), green corridors, linkages to adjoining habitats and associated landscape works also form part of the proposal.</p>
<b>Planning stage</b>	Pre-application stage with intent to submit a hybrid application in March 2021.

<b>Local planning authority</b>	Guilford Borough Council
<b>Planning context</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The site makes up the A35 Former Wisley Airfield site identified in the adopted Guildford Local Plan.</li><li>• The western end of the site and the northern boundary are designated as a Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI), forming part of a wider ecological network together with other off-site SNCIs.</li><li>• The Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA) lies north of the site and it is proposed that harm to this will be mitigated by the on-site SANG.</li><li>• A number of Grade II buildings lie in close proximity to the site's southern boundary and the Ockham Conservation Area abuts the same boundary too. Also, there are a number of TPOs around the site boundary.</li></ul>
<b>Planning history</b>	An application was submitted in 2014 for a proposal of approximately 2,000 residential units, schools, employment area and associated services and landscape work. The land was under different ownership at the time and the current local plan had not been adopted yet.
<b>Planning authority perspective</b>	The local authority was particularly concerned with how the site, despite being constrained by its long and thin size, will be broken up and how the gaps between the proposed villages will work. The local authority stressed that the proposal should address edge conditions and arrival moments sensitively with particular consideration for residents in neighbouring settlements that will be entering the site for services and amenities.
<b>Community engagement</b>	The first round of consultation with the local community took place in July 2020 and the applicant team also presented to council members in July 2020.

## Summary

The applicant and design teams provided a thorough presentation of this proposal for a complex and sensitive site. Sound design decisions, such as the proposed framework, have been made and the development of a more clearly defined character and a richer sense of place should be the focus of attention in advance of the next design review. This will require study of the neighbouring communities and a movement analysis that will help inform the identity of the villages and the green spaces in between.

## Key recommendations

1. The proposal for a series of three villages seems most appropriate for further development.
2. Attention should be given to establishing what is unique about each village in order to provide a distinct sense of place and character.
3. Ambitious sustainability targets, exceeding those set out in policy, should be established and fed into outcome-driven targets to ensure sustainability is maximised across all elements of the proposal, including modal share.
4. A movement analysis should be carried out to inform where the main node of the development should be, taking into account the opportunities RHS Wisley and the Wisley Lane Diversion could provide.
5. The neighbouring communities should be studied to understand their interrelationships and the existing provision of services and amenities that may impact on the proposal.
6. The design of the green SANG links between the villages should be refined to ensure they are multi-functional spaces that deliver characterful and quantifiable environmental and user benefits, ensuring they are protected from possible encroachment from future development.
7. The housing mix breakdown and housing typologies should be developed to inform the disposition of services and amenities and a more detailed plot design.

## Detailed comments and recommendations

### 1. Vision and concept

- 1.1. We support the concept of a series of villages with a clear hierarchy as the most effective and appropriate approach, particularly as the alternative proposal for a linear park seems too urban for the site's context. The design team should now define what is unique about each village so that their identity and hierarchy is clear. Also, heritage information should be overlaid on the proposed framework so that the design team is able to understand how the proposal can contribute to the site's heritage.
- 1.2. The location and dispersal of services and amenities should take into account where activity and movement will be concentrated, as informed by a movement analysis, and this should be reflected in the proposed village hierarchy. Locating services at the edge of the development could attract residents from existing neighbouring communities and help establish this important relationship.
- 1.3. The nearby RHS Wisley is a valuable resource that the development should seek to maximise, perhaps by integrating access and services into the site or by locating the heart of the development towards the west of the site. This will achieve synergies between the development and RHS Wisley as well as greatly contribute to the sustainability strategy by addressing the scheme's legacy.
- 1.4. The proposed Wisley Lane Diversion is an opportunity to promote activity in the development. Whilst we understand this proposal is out of the applicant's control, engaging with Highways England might realise additional connections that can be made, potentially linking to RHS Wisley too.
- 1.5. The proposed village greens in Approach 1 seem overly urban; a more appropriate and rural feel could be achieved by reference to village greens in the local area; for instance, some local examples open out towards the countryside on one side.
- 1.6. The proposed frameworks respect the existing PROW, which is welcomed, although we question the actual usage of these routes and whether they follow the most appropriate alignment.
- 1.7. We question whether there is sufficient open green space at the southern arrival point.

### 2. Green framework

- 2.1. As a principle, given the site's strong external green framework, the design team should seek to respect and maximise its qualities, for example by embedding the

hedgerow networks and tying these in with the wet woodlands to the south of the site. In particular, the latter could add value in terms of building distinctive character.

- 2.2. It is important that the green SANG links between the villages are multi-functional spaces that have a strong sense of character and do not simply act as buffer space. They should be pleasant spaces that attract residents and visitors whilst ensuring a sense of open space. From an environmental perspective, they should also attenuate surface water, provide wildlife habitats and support wider bioclimatic design. Strong boundaries should be established to prevent encroachment from future development.
- 2.3. The use and proposed activities for the shared public green spaces in the villages should be defined.
- 2.4. The density of the development should consider the balance of open green spaces for shared public use with private residential green spaces, such as gardens. Studies of the structure of local villages, including the local figure ground, will help to inform this.

### **3. Community**

- 3.1. We are not yet convinced that there is a sufficiently full understanding of the existing neighbouring communities. Further work should be carried out to understand these vital interrelationships – how people from different communities meet and interact with each other.
- 3.2. Potential pedestrian and cycle routes should be plotted to help establish desire lines, as informed by the topography, and cycle parking facilities should be sensitively distributed and incorporated into the proposed masterplan. In addition to this, the design team should explain how routes and facilities will work with existing neighbourhood plans.
- 3.3. The provision of schools as part of the proposal should consider where students from outside the development will travel from. This should be accommodated accordingly to minimise traffic and travel distances and maximise opportunities for walking and cycling.
- 3.4. The architecture needs to be effectively integrated with that of the wider setting, with consideration for massing, density, layout, rooflines and architectural articulation.
- 3.5. The development blocks in the current proposal appear overly similar, which is likely to change as housing typologies demand different dimensions. How plots might be broken down should be presented for appraisal at the next design review to ensure



they convey a village feel and respond to the existing neighbouring settlements successfully.

- 3.6. The breakdown of the housing mix should also be presented at the next design review, as this will identify what kind of residents will live where and how the proposal can respond to this.

#### **4. Connectivity**

- 4.1. There appears to be a coherent pedestrian and cycle network, which is welcomed, and ambitious mode share targets should be established to promote sustainable transport modes. More information on how the proposed bus system will work is required. Also, alternative and innovative proposals that are deliverable should be explored, including bike and scooter share schemes.
- 4.2. In principle, a better balance of living and working functions across the development should be sought as this will reduce car dependency.
- 4.3. Whilst we understand the applicant is abiding by the established parking standards, alternative approaches should be considered to diminish the impact of parking on the streetscape and minimise car ownership. The use of car clubs, rental vehicles and taxis should be explored, as should locating parking at a distance from homes. This will allow for flexible spaces that can respond to changes in car ownership demand, promote sustainable modes and potentially be transformed into areas for interaction or play in the long term.
- 4.4. Pavement widths should be sufficient to ensure they promote walking, as well as be mindful of recent challenges felt by communities associated with Covid-19 and a move to outdoor trading and shared surfaces.

#### **5. Sustainability**

- 5.1. We are pleased to see an embedded sustainable approach throughout the proposal, and this should be reflected in outcome-driven targets. As the design develops, sustainable approaches should be pursued at the building level through detailed consideration of orientation, massing, depth of units and in particular, how overheating risk is mitigated.
- 5.2. The proposal should aim to go above and beyond sustainability policy targets, ensuring all aspects of the design achieve a net zero carbon emission. The LETI Climate Emergency Design Guide should be referred to throughout.
- 5.3. At the next design review, we would like to see results of environmental studies and analyses, such as ground contamination, acoustics, air pollution and bioclimatic

conditions. This will have a fundamental impact on layout and should therefore inform the proposal.

- 5.4. The location and use of electric car charging points and associated infrastructure should also be considered sufficiently early on to be fed into the masterplan design.

## **6. Sense of place**

- 6.1. We are pleased to see the design team has an informed view on the site's heritage assets and encourage these assets to be considered throughout the design development.
- 6.2. How the development sits in the landscape should be considered in full and it is not essential that the development is completely hidden from view. Where it can be seen in long views, the placement of built form should be sensitive yet confident and the composition designed as an attractive and contextually appropriate element. The proposal should sensitively draw on, but not copy, local architecture, including local materials, colours, characters and how thresholds and streets operate.

## **7. Innovation**

- 7.1. We discussed a number of alternative and innovative solutions for the design team to consider:
  - A landscape proposal with fine grain moments to enable informal social interaction.
  - Streets designed as places for walking, sitting and play – not primarily designed around the needs of a car.
  - Integrating technology to support the proposal in achieving a net zero carbon design, including the use of battery storage and energy sharing.

### **Confidentiality**

If the scheme was not the subject of a planning application when it came to the panel, this report is offered in confidence to those who attended the review meeting. There is no objection to the report being shared within the recipients' organisations provided that the content of the report is treated in the strictest confidence. Neither the content of the report, nor the report itself can be shared with anyone outside the recipients' organisations. Design South East reserves the right to make the content of this report known should the views contained in this report be made public in whole or in part (either accurately or inaccurately). Unless previously agreed, pre-application reports will be made publicly available if the scheme becomes the subject of a planning application or public inquiry. Design South East also reserves the right to make this report available to another design review panel should the scheme go before them. If you do not require this report to be kept confidential, please inform us.

If the scheme is the subject of a planning application the report will be made publicly available and we expect the local authority to include it in the case documents.

**Role of design review**

This is the report of a design review panel, forum or workshop. Design review is endorsed by the National Planning Policy Framework and the opinions and recommendations of properly conducted, independent design review panels should be given weight in planning decisions including appeals. The panel does not take planning decisions. Its role is advisory. The panel's advice is only one of a number of considerations that local planning authorities have to take into account in making their decisions.

The role of design review is to provide independent expert advice to both the applicant and the local planning authority. We will try to make sure that the panel are informed about the views of local residents and businesses to inform their understanding of the context of the proposal. However, design review is a separate process to community engagement and consultation.

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