

Report of the Guildford Strategic Sites
Design Review Panel

Wisley Airfield workshop

18th December 2020

The design review meeting workshop

Reference number	1497/181220
Date	18 th December 2020
Meeting location	Online via Zoom
Panel/forum members attending	Lindsey Wilkinson (Chair), Historic Environment, Landscape Architecture Andrew Cameron, Urban Design, Transport Planning Jane Dann, Architecture, Historic Environment, Urban Design Philip Gray, Building Services Engineering, Sustainability Michelle Tomlinson, Architecture, Housing
Panel manager	Kieran Toms, Design South East
Presenting team	Charlie Collins, Savills Graham Kime, GSA Hannah Shopland, GSA Laura Bazley, WSP Rebecca Brookbank, EPR Jodie Southgate, EPR Alison Tero, CBRE Tanya Kirk, HAD Isabelle Smith, Atkins Rob Miller, Greengage Lee Davis, Taylor Wimpey Camille Soor, Taylor Wimpey Antonis Pazourou, Taylor Wimpey Mike Davies, Davies Landscape Sam Hart, Davies Landscape Duncan Coe, Cotswold Archaeology Mark Patchett, MP Consultancy Mike Murray, Causeway Land Charlie Reynolds, Hallam Land Management
Other attendees	Hannah Yates, Guildford Borough Council Tim Dawes, Guildford Borough Council Paul Fineberg, Guildford Borough Council Louise Blaxall, Guildford Borough Council Cllr Colin Cross, Guildford Borough Council Cllr Liz Hogger, Guildford Borough Council

Cllr Christopher Barrass, Guildford Borough Council
Cllr Catherine Young, Guildford Borough Council
Jenny Sutch, Lindsay Carrington Ecological Services
Peter George, Thompson Environmental
Martin Knowles, Transport and Highways
Garry Hall, Design South East

Site visit	This review was carried out during the Covid-19 outbreak in 2020. Independent site study including desktop research prepared by Design South East 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.
Scope of the review	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.
Panel interests	Panel members did not indicate any conflicts of interest.
Confidentiality	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

Name	Wisley Airfield, Hatch Lane, Ockham, GU23 GNU
Site details	<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. 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 northwest 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>
Proposal	<p>The proposal is for a residential development of 2,000 homes with 40% affordable units, 100 Class C2 residential 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>An extensive Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG), green corridors, linkages to adjoining habitats and associated landscape works also form part of the proposal.</p>
Planning stage	Pre-application stage with intent to submit an outline application in

early 2021.

Local planning authority	Guilford Borough Council
Planning context	<p>The site makes up the A35 Former Wisley Airfield site identified in the adopted Guildford Local Plan. 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 offsite SNCIs.</p> <p>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. 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.</p>
Planning history	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.
Planning authority perspective	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.
Community engagement	Two rounds of consultation have been held with the local community, and the applicant team also presented to council members in July 2020 and November 2020.
Previous reviews	This scheme has previously been reviewed by the Guildford Strategic Sites Design Review Panel on the 18 th August 2020. Following that review our report stated that much good work had been undertaken in developing the framework of the site, but that more attention to character and identity was needed in order to progress the design process.

Summary

There are many positives to take from the way the design has progressed from the last time it was presented to the Panel. The concepts shown are generally supported, and now need further refinement.

Landscape and movement strategies in particular need testing in detail so that the aspirations of the design team can be delivered.

More work is needed on making this a sustainable development through refining strategies around parking, energy and low-carbon movement.

Key recommendations

1. Match key concepts within the design to strategies that secure their delivery through time.
2. Examine the proposed movement framework in more detail so that it provides connectivity to existing communities outside as well as new residents inside the development
3. Develop a monitoring strategy that can influence the detailed design over time, so that design adapts to needs.
4. Focus on the 'place' qualities of key movement corridors and avoid letting traffic engineering standards harm their other functions.
5. Translate, rather than replicate, the evidence gathered from urban form studies of surrounding villages so that findings are applied appropriate to scale.

Detailed comments and recommendations

1. Vision and concept

- 1.1. The design approach is showing promising signs of embedding strategic concepts relating to landscape, movement and the lifestyle that residents can expect to enjoy. Next, the design team needs to develop the strategic thinking into a deliverable strategy.
- 1.2. As always with a project of this scale and long delivery timeframes, there is a danger that high-level ideas around the character and identity of this place will get lost during the detailed design process. Every effort should be made at this stage to identify and capture what is critical for delivering the kind of place the design team aspires to ultimately create, in order that the aspiration is not watered down or undeliverable later on.
- 1.3. Controlling mechanisms, such as parameter plans and design codes, have already been discussed, and a strategy for where and when to use them and what they might contain would be beneficial at this stage.
- 1.4. The sustainable movement corridor has a key role to play in the character and identity of this new place. Using this space to help mitigate air quality and noise issues is the kind of thinking that will make this place successful. There is scope to develop the role of this space further, both in terms of its ecology and its social function. It will be a key part of the overall experience of the place, so is critical to delivering the aspirations set out by the design team.

2. Green framework

- 2.1. The evolution of the landscape strategy since it was last seen by the Panel is positive, and the broad approach is well-articulated. The way green spaces link together to form a green framework for development is especially positive, although more work needs to be done on how these spaces support other aspects of the scheme, such as community, movement, and biodiversity.
- 2.2. The developing landscape concept is convincing and calling the masterplan 'landscape led' is credible and welcomed. The way that north-south routes mesh with the main corridor running east-west, based on well-chosen view-lines, is a strong concept with potential for local outlook to surrounding landscape features. The next step is to refine the details of these spaces further at an appropriate scale to show what they contain and how they work in bringing communities together by functioning as nodes for social inter-connection.

- 2.3. At the moment, the green 'gaps' are very regular in shape and the scale of these spaces needs interrogation. Varying the shape of these to create pinch points where people can meet and integrate would be beneficial in linking communities. The design needs to support this interaction by designing in activities, seating and play. The large size of the site masks the distances involved in these spaces and could negatively impact on the creation of walkable neighbourhoods. A balance should be found between access to open space and accessibility for all.
- 2.4. For neighbourhoods to be truly walkable, it is not just a matter of scale, but also of placing destinations and activity within walking distance of people's homes. Most of what is accessible within walking distances for the new villages is open space and there needs to be more urban uses and destinations to encourage people out of their homes for everyday activities.
- 2.5. The narrative of the tall tree glade upon arrival, making a connection to the Royal Horticultural Society, is welcomed and is a creative solution to air quality and noise control. This idea could be taken further into the site or into the sustainable corridor with a continuation of the same species of plants and trees. A narrative connecting to the woodlands and pastoral nature of the surrounding landscape could be further incorporated.
- 2.6. The school could have a fully integrated connection to its immediate landscape; the location appears to offer the ideal potential and promise for a Forest School initiative.

3. Community and stewardship

- 3.1. There has been significant work on understanding how this new place will relate to surrounding settlements, including useful studies of the form and spaces within existing places. What is now needed is further testing and refinement of ideas around how this site will work within this wider context. Movement studies that test trips to - and through- the site from neighbouring villages will help shape the proposed foot- and cycle-way network.
- 3.2. Community stewardship of site assets, spaces and facilities is a good way to engage people in where they live, and the ideas around this are positive. More work is needed to ensure these ideas, which are quite high-level at the moment, are delivered and maintained. A transparent 'scope of influence' document should be included, clarifying opportunities for people to contribute, to help avoid vague ambitions.
- 3.3. When providing community facilities, a robust management strategy is also needed to ensure what is put in place can endure. Early buy-in from residents is needed, and a strategy for how this is maintained over time is essential. A design code might have a role to play in long term management.

- 3.4. In-depth testing of walking distances is needed to ensure spaces work both as destinations and as streets across the development area. Sustainable management of the public realm and landscape spaces via the proposed management model is welcomed but would need integration and further interrogation to guarantee long-term commitments.
- 3.5. A jobs strategy for the site is encouraged, which will further people's buy-in to the development and the community. This should be linked to site assets, with long-term investments in commercial premises used to bolster a lasting legacy in this development.
- 3.6. Monitoring and performance measurements have a key role to play in developing and evolving the design over time. Rather than the traditional approach of 'predict and provide' being used to make design decisions, the community can help 'monitor and manage' the design as it progresses.
- 3.7. A study of how people will live their lives, including information about their day-to-day activities, would be a valuable resource that has the potential to meaningfully shape the detail of the place, as well as providing useful information that can inform developments elsewhere.

4. Connectivity

- 4.1. Movement across the site has, in general, been well-considered, and the emphasis on low-carbon travel and walkable neighbourhoods could be a defining feature of this development. Putting cycling and walking infrastructure in early would allow people to establish movement habits from day one, which should then carry through into the future. Cycling in particular has the potential to be a real factor in how people move in and around this development.
- 4.2. There is considerable scope to improve external connectivity via sustainable movement patterns for people in neighbouring settlements. Links across this site would open up new opportunities for everyone in the area and would help in 'selling' the new development to existing residents and the wider community. Linking places together will foster community and will enable people outside of the site to make use of the new facilities planned. Also, more detail on the pedestrian experience for the site and the relationship between housing type and road hierarchy is required in drawings at an appropriate scale to show detailing.
- 4.3. Cycling infrastructure needs both strategic thinking and detailed design to make it work effectively. At present there are good high-level plans for how the cycling network should be formed, but without a delivery strategy it could easily be undermined as the design progresses. How cycling is to be supported, both through the detailed design and through the planning process, needs to be set out now so that it is not lost later on. Again, establishing cycling infrastructure so that it is

available early in the phasing of the development would help in forming habits for residents.

- 4.4. The design of cycle storage will have a big impact on its viability as a modal choice. Putting bikes and cars close together, so that they are equally convenient, should be avoided. Make access to cycles the easiest option, with car parking designed so that it is not the default choice.
- 4.5. The current approach to public transport needs to be more innovative. As planned, the frequency of buses is too low, and the overall strategy is too reliant on traditional bus services. On-demand bus provision and buses that operate more flexibly should be explored.
- 4.6. There is scope in this scheme to be really innovative with parking solutions in ways which support the aspirations around low-carbon travel. Reducing parking standards should be explored. This could be informed by monitoring parking usage and car ownership patterns as the site is developed. Minimising on-plot storage for cars, by storing some or all cars remotely from their dwellings, should be investigated, especially for later phases.
- 4.7. How plots can evolve and adapt to changing car storage requirements should be thought about now, so land can be used efficiently. Space for parking should not dominate the plot and should be located so that the land take for this can be easily converted should owners not require it for a car. Sustainable future-facing parking strategies should be developed to reduce the dominance of vehicle movement.
- 4.8. The design of the main movement corridor through the site shows promise. There is more work to be done to define how this space will work in detail, not only as a movement corridor but as a place. Spaces along the main route for socialising, with seating and landscape, need to be provided. These should vary in their character, linked to the landscape strategy, and should be used to break up the linearity of the development. A design speed of 20mph along the main route through the site is critical to making a good place.
- 4.9. Traffic flow analysis and an overall masterplan with parking places outlined is required, particularly for the sustainable corridor and entrance points. This should illustrate that the proposed design is appropriate both for the volume of vehicles passing through and for the proposed parking arrangements on site.

5. Sustainability

- 5.1. As with other aspirations presented to the Panel, there are some good ideas under discussion around energy and sustainability. However, more information is needed to lend credibility to some of the strategies being proposed. More detailed

information about how energy and sustainability can work on site is needed at this stage in order to help shape the master plan.

- 5.2. The focus on 'fabric first' buildings to reduce energy demand is supported but comes with challenges. A key issue is likely to be overheating. Managing solar gain requires strategic design at the masterplan and landscape strategy level. In particular, tree planting within the new villages has the potential to really help with solar gain and heat management. This needs to be planned for now and embedded so that it does not get lost as the project progresses through planning.
- 5.3. Future flexibility needs to be incorporated, particularly as the proposals will need to adapt in future climatic changes.
- 5.4. Low carbon concrete and waste during construction were discussed as potential opportunities that could be explored further, as were ideas around modern methods of construction and post occupancy monitoring. If modern methods of construction are to be adopted, they need to be considered at this stage, as this could affect the plot widths and layouts for parameter plans.
- 5.5. The range of expertise within the design team is welcomed but needs to be coordinated and focused towards supporting the developing design framework at this stage. Technical expertise around water management and energy usage should be integrated with the master plan more directly. The distribution of land uses and the amount of land allocated for the various needs of the site need to be informed by the energy strategy. Results of environmental studies specific to the design proposals, such as air pollution and acoustics, need to demonstrably inform the design.

6. Sense of place

- 6.1. The studies of the existing settlements undertaken by the design team are useful. How they inform the layout of the new development needs care, as the scale, form and density might not translate well to something of this scale. In terms of the scale of spaces, metrics need to be developed that show how many people the existing open spaces, such as village greens, will serve.
- 6.2. Understanding the scale of existing spaces in relation to population densities will enable new spaces to be appropriately scaled for a larger number of people. More 3D massing views would be helpful, particularly in context with the neighbouring context, to compare densities, scale and roofscapes.
- 6.3. There is a fundamental tension between the design and detailing within surrounding villages and what is being proposed here. The scale of this new place makes

applying the design detailing of the smaller settlements problematic, as they may not translate well into this kind of setting.

- 6.4. The identity of the place could be more that of a 'market town' rather than of a village, and if this is the case, then the detailed design should not be afraid to reflect and support this. This would resolve some of the conflicts around higher densities and larger building forms that will feature here.
- 6.5. Managing design quality over time is critical if this place is to be a success. Some aspects of the detailed design can come later. Site-wide and critical design features need to be embedded now - within the parameter plans and possibly through a design code - with other detailed codes following on. Future flexibility should be incorporated into parameter plans when setting out elements such as building plots.
- 6.6. There is a danger that the main street through the site could be over-engineered in practice. The visuals for this space are encouraging, but they do not match the plan, in that there is not as much space for landscape and social uses. A strong and integrated landscape strategy is going to be a key selling point for this development, and the masterplan needs to allow space for this to be delivered.
- 6.7. There is a danger that the best qualities of the main street as shown in the visuals will be watered down, for example through adoption. Creating a simple street, de-cluttered and without excess lines and signage, is important for the quality of this space to remain high.
- 6.8. To help improve the character of the streets, the design team needs to move away from more common approaches to street design, such as junctions meeting at 90 degrees, and single design treatments along a street's length. Street widths should vary depending on their location, including along the same street. The transition points between the new villages are key examples of where the design of the street has a role to play in influencing character and identity.

7. Innovation

- 7.1. There are several areas where innovation within the design should be explored further, building on the ideas presented to the Panel. These are:
- 7.2. Flexible and adaptable parking, including parking that is remote from dwellings or outside of the urbanised areas.
- 7.3. On-demand public transport that can adapt to user needs more readily.
- 7.4. Infrastructure to support cycle usage, such as ultra-convenient on-plot cycle storage, charging for electric cycles and scooters, and early delivery of cycling routes

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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