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FRAME PROJECTS

Somerset West and Taunton Quality Review Panel

Report of Chair's Review Meeting: Longforth Farm

Monday 7 November 2022

Via Zoom

Panel

Andrew Beharrell (chair)

Vivienne Ramsey

Attendees

Paul Bryan	Somerset West and Taunton Council
Sarah Povall	Somerset West and Taunton Council
Fiona Webb	Somerset West and Taunton Council
Karen Wray	Somerset West and Taunton Council
Alex Skidmore	Somerset County Council
Edward Bailey	Frame Projects
Deborah Denner	Frame Projects
Abigail Joseph	Frame Projects

Apologies / report copied to

Alison Blom-Cooper	Somerset West and Taunton Council
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Confidentiality

This is a pre-application review, and therefore confidential. As a public organisation Somerset West and Taunton Council is subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOI) and, in the case of an FOI request, may be obliged to release project information submitted for review.

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1. Project name and site address

Longforth Farm, Nynehead Road, Wellington, Somerset

2. Presenting team

Chris Winter	West of England Developments
Darren Beer	Focus Design
Robin Upton	CarneySweeney
Louise Baugh	Swan Paul Partnership
Richard White	Miles White Transport

3. Planning authority briefing

The proposals are for a mixed-use development on land to the north-west of Taunton Road and west of Nynehead Road. It comprises a mix of residential, employment, care, new railway station, infrastructure, drainage, open space, and ecological mitigation uses.

The site is currently agricultural land on the eastern outskirts of Wellington. The site forms part of an allocation under Policy SS3 'Wellington Longforth' of the Taunton Deane Borough Council Core Strategy 2011-2028. This allocation identifies a large area, including the application site, for 'a new compact urban extension to the north of Wellington.'

Policy SS3 requires the following:

- a green wedge of 18 hectares between the residential and employment areas
- a new neighbourhood which reflects the existing landscape character
- easy access to the town centre and a connected street network
- well-designed public open space, including playing fields, a children's play area, allotments, and associated community facilities
- phased delivery of 900 new homes at an overall average of 35 to 40 dwellings per hectare

A mainline railway borders the northern boundary of the site. The proposals provide land for a new railway station/halt for Wellington. The Council understands that Network Rail would intend to complete the station by 2024.

Officers asked for the panel's views on:

- integration of the new neighbourhood with the town centre
- the development layout and vehicular and pedestrian routes through the site
- the provision of a local centre
- how successfully the scheme achieves sustainable and low carbon design
- any aspects of the scheme where the panel recommends further work.



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5. Quality Review Panel's views

Summary

The panel supports the aspirations for a new neighbourhood for Wellington at Longforth Farm, but recommends more time to design before the outline applications are submitted. To give confidence to the planning authority about the quality of place that will be achieved, further work is needed to develop the illustrative masterplan, parameter plans and a design code. As part of this process, the panel asks the Council to reconsider its policy requirement for a green wedge. When this policy was established, employment uses were expected on the site, and now that a primarily residential development is proposed, the panel thinks integration with existing communities to the west should be a priority. It also recommends further thought about the setting that the scheme will create for the proposed new station. There is potential for a public square, framed by higher density mixed use development. More clarity is needed about the character of the route between the site access and the station. The panel questions whether this should be a curvy street, and whether it is intended to have an urban or suburban character? Cross sections would be helpful to explore this, and should be included in the design code. The masterplan should be designed to encouraging walking, cycling and public transport use. Considering how well routes are overlooked, and lighting, will be important to ensure they feel safe at night. The panel offers some comments on the masterplan layout, suggesting relocation of the care home, and a variety of residential densities in different areas of the site. The strategic approach to landscape design and environmental sustainability should also be included in the outline applications. These comments are expanded below.

Planning process

- The panel understands that two applications will be submitted for Longforth Farm: one covering the station carpark and employment areas; and the other for the residential area of the masterplan.
- The reason for splitting the application is that local phosphate issues may delay progress with the residential element of the scheme. Nevertheless, it is essential that a holistic masterplan for the whole site is produced as a basis for both applications.
- The panel would expect both applications to include parameter plans, accompanied by illustrative masterplans and design codes.
- The proposed boundary between the two applications is over-complex and constrains a holistic solution for the residential and mixed-use areas. The split urban block lying between the station square and green wedge is especially unresolved and should be revised to fall into one application or the other.



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- A density diagram would also be valuable to illustrate how the character and scale of development may vary across the site. For example, the panel would expect there to be higher density development around the station.
- Demonstrating how the scheme contributes to the Wellington Place Making Strategy would also be valuable as part of the planning submissions.
- The panel does not think the level of information included in the presentation would be sufficient to give confidence to the planning authority that high quality development will be achieved.
- Comments from a previous design review of the scheme were shared with the panel, and it notes the itemised response explaining those points taken on board, and those aspects unchanged. However, the focus of the session was on the design presented, and there was not time for a detailed discussion of the applicant's response to previous comments.

Green wedge

- The panel recommends that the planning policy requirement for a 'green wedge' should be reconsidered.
- It understands this was proposed in part because of plans to locate significant employment uses here. The scheme is now primarily residential, and it thinks integration with the Bloor Homes development should be a higher priority.
- Limited information was provided on the landscape design of the green wedge, but it would be disappointing if this was thought of simply as a green buffer.
- The panel suggests that more thought is given to the provision of green open space, and where this should be located. The aim should be to maximise its value for amenity, play and biodiversity, as well as creating an attractive setting for new and existing residents.

Development around the station

- The panel is pleased to see a mix of uses proposed in the area around the station, including residential above commercial uses.
- It would support higher density development in this part of the site.
- The green wedge does not seem the best use of land to the south of the station, which will have excellent transport accessibility. The panel feel residential development could extend into this part of the site.
- There is potential for the station square to create an attractive arrival point to the development, and it is disappointing that this is currently shown as a car park.



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- The panel would encourage a more aspirational approach to designing a civic space as a setting for the station, which should include a bus interchange and cycle hub.
- The buildings framing this space could be urban in scale, including shops and community space at ground level to generate activity, with residential or workspace above.
- Ideally buildings would wrap the square on three sides, as well as framing an entrance point from the access road to the south east.

Access to the station

- The route through the site to the station should be a fundamental driver for the scheme design – and will bring people from the surrounding area through the site.
- The outline application should set out the alignment of this route, and accompanying design codes should describe its cross section, and how carriageway, foot and cycle paths, tree planting and landscape design define its character.
- The curvy layout of this street suggests a suburban character, which the panel is not convinced is the right approach.
- Clarity is needed about whether this route has an urban feel, or is more of a greenway with buildings set back from it.
- It would also be helpful to explore the arrival of this route at the station. In the current drawings this faces the end wall of the mixed use building to the south of the station, with the route deflecting past this into the car park.
- The panel would encourage a more confident approach to the design of a station square, where people have priority rather than cars, and the way this meets the access route.

Walking, cycling and bus routes

- The panel recommends further work to encourage walking and cycling throughout the scheme.
- Considering how well routes are overlooked, and lighting, will be important to ensure they feel safe at night.
- The masterplan and related design codes should prioritise the creation of active frontages defining and enclosing each urban block and reinforcing the routes and other public realm.



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- The masterplan should also consider whether there are safe walking routes from this site to the town centre, and allow for upgrades to footpaths and street lighting if needed.
- It appears that currently the scheme would be served by bus stops on Taunton Road. The potential to bring bus routes into the site, and the experience of walking to and from bus stops should be given more thought.
- The bus stops currently shown are on a busy road adjacent to an existing caravan park, and the Lidl – which is unlikely to make catching a bus an enjoyable experience.
- A bus stop should be provided outside the station.
- Considering the quality of experience that walking and cycling to destinations such as the primary school should also be given more thought, to encourage sustainable transport in preference to driving.
- In general, the panel thinks the masterplan should do more to discourage car use, and make walking and cycling easy and enjoyable.

Care home

- In the current scheme, a care home is proposed at the entrance to the site, and the panel thinks its location should be reconsidered.
- Care homes have security and privacy requirements which mean they have limited potential to create active frontage.
- The current location would also not provide the best outlook for care home residents, with the Lidl carpark and caravan site in the foreground.
- A two to three storey care home may also not lend itself to creating a high quality marker building at the entrance to the site.
- It also thinks that the elderly residents would benefit from being at the heart of the scheme, with interest and activity around them.

Residential layout and character

- The housing mix and typologies should be discussed and agreed with Council, to reflect local need.
- Materiality should be described in the design codes and reflect local character of place. The panel is pleased to see reference to local mills, and agrees that this could inspire the architecture of larger buildings in the masterplan.



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- The illustrative masterplan shows an emerging residential layout, but the panel thinks more work would be needed to demonstrate the quality of place it will result in, if this is to be fixed through the outline application process.
- An alternative approach would be to allocate the land at outline stage, and resolve the residential layout as a reserved matter.
- The scheme currently proposes a density of around 45 homes per hectare, with part of the site being mixed use. The panel thinks that higher density could be appropriate in some parts of the site, especially around the new station.
- Parking will be a significant constraint, and the aim should be to minimise its visual impact, and incentivise walking, cycling and public transport use.
- The panel thinks there is scope to improve on the quality of recently completed developments in the area, and attract people willing to pay a premium for home here.

Landscape strategy

- Limited information was presented to describe the landscape strategy for the development.
- It will be essential that the outline applications gives confidence that the existing landscape assets will be protected and high quality green and open space will be created for the new neighbourhood.
- Clarity is needed about who will own, manage, and maintain the landscape. This will be essential to the quality of life for residents.

Sustainability

- The panel would expect clear targets for biodiversity net gain to be fixed through the planning process.
- Similarly, an energy strategy should form part of the outline applications, for example this could commit to Passivhaus standards for the new homes.
- A more detailed presentation on the sustainability strategy and targets would be welcomed at a future review.

Next steps

The panel would welcome a further opportunity to review the scheme, once parameter plans, an illustrative masterplan and design code are available.

