

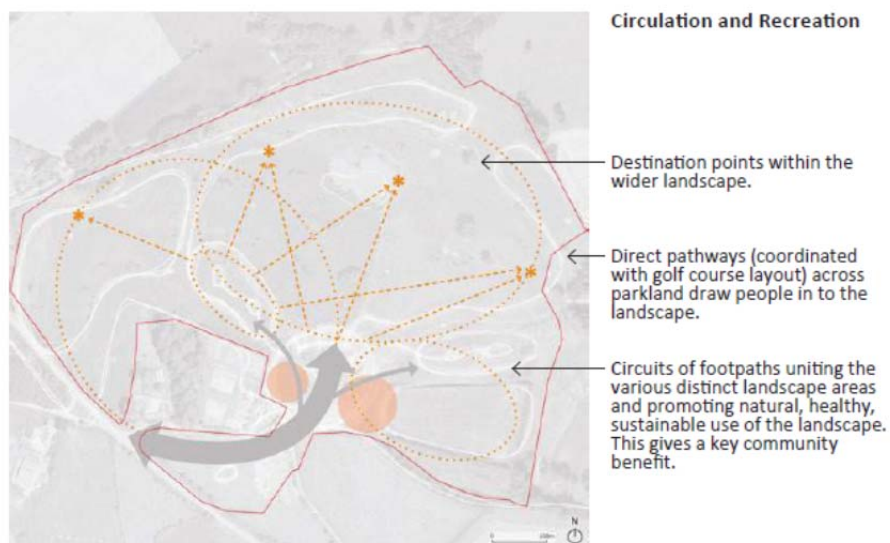
18/05086/FUL - Thoulston Park Golf Club, Thoulstone, Chapmanslade

Urban Design Response 16.8.18

There has, I believe, been some concern expressed over the terraced form of the holiday accommodation in this rural location, the size and bulk of the residential accommodation and the design of the main commercial/conference facilities. I have reviewed the application's Design and Access Statement for context and then the elevations of those buildings and provided some comments below from an urban design perspective.

Design Context

- The site is located close to the villages of Chapmaslade and Upton Sudamore
- The proposed development covers 6% area of a 62Ha area of 'park'.
- There are a couple of Public rights of way that cross and/or pass the application site. These do not seem to be acknowledged on the Circulation Plans within the DAS and views of the site from these locations are not shown:



- The site currently contains dilapidated buildings presenting an opportunity for improvement
- The vision is for a socially and environmentally innovative leisure/holiday facility to serve the existing community as well as guests.
- The site already has planning consent for a 54 bed hotel with leisure facilities.(14.6m ridge height) which the applicant deems is an inappropriate scale and mass for the location. Accordingly, the applicant states *“the proposed buildings are all of a deliberately small scale, arranged around the existing mature trees so they nestle discretely in to the landscape.”*
- Applicant states that *“While the detailed architectural proposals submitted in this application are contemporary, much of the design is informed by an awareness of that local character. The treatment of walls and roofs have taken cues from the traditional architecture that can be found in nearby villages.”*
- Woodland buffers are retained and enhanced along the western site boundary and south of the built up area to visually screen and seclude the development from the surrounding highways, which are in effect the nearest public realm. It appears that public rights of way to cross through/past the site however.
- 3D digital topography surveys have been utilised to inform a sympathetic landscape strategy.
- The vision for the central space is a functional focal point; a ‘market yard’ with flexible open space enclosed by farm shop, restaurant conference and leisure accommodation.
- The vision for the holiday accommodation is a series of ‘row houses’ distributed so as to respond to an access street which loops around the units, create various enclosed spaces behind the units. There do not appear to be private/enclosed gardens and units are all dual aspect overlooking walking routes which connect through the area.
- Bund and woodland wrap around the accommodations setting minimising its visual impact on surrounding areas.

Relevant Planning Policy

Core Policy 57

- I deem the designs compliant with the relevant part of core policy CP57 namely, parts i, iii, v, vi, and vii which relate to the form and appearance of the buildings.
- Regarding CP57iii, I suggest that as the buildings are not located within the context of a town or village, where they might clearly influence the existing character therein, this policy can be considered complied with in that the *“building layouts, built form, height, mass, scale, building line, plot size, elevational design, materials, streetscape and rooflines”* have generally been demonstrated to be effectively integrated the landscape setting; it is not unreasonable to expect that a new and secluded development in the countryside has, to a degree, its own sense of character which may vary somewhat from previous styles, a principle which corresponds with NPPF guideline 127(c)

NPPF

127. *Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:*

a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;

b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;

c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);

d) establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;

e) optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and

f) create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users⁴⁶; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.

128. Design quality should be considered throughout the evolution and assessment of individual proposals. Early discussion between applicants, the local planning authority and local community about the design and style of emerging schemes is important for clarifying expectations and reconciling local and commercial interests. Applicants should work closely with those affected by their proposals to evolve designs that take account of the views of the community. Applications that can demonstrate early, proactive and effective engagement with the community should be looked on more favourably than those that cannot.

131. In determining applications, great weight should be given to outstanding or innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability, or help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, so long as they fit in with the overall form and layout of their surroundings.

Caveat to comments

- Assuming that the accommodation units are visible only to guests and visitors, this leads me to recommend avoiding an attempt to strictly control the style of their appearance; the holiday homes are a private enterprise, not visually perceptible from surrounding formal public realm, and so a degree of freedom of taste should be permitted. As the intended operator, it is, I believe also in the applicant's interest that this development is a successfully and sensitively attractive place for people to visit. But this does not mean questions shouldn't be asked or recommendations made.
- If there are critical views from the PROWs then that might be considered an equivalent to public realm, and need further consideration, but this doesn't appear so.

- Notwithstanding the above, the applicant states that *“The material treatment of the buildings has been selected to sit sympathetically within the area which was one of the issues discussed in the public consultation events with carefully considered use of masonry elements in natural stone and brick, with timber cladding and a variety of roof finishes.”*
- I can therefore contribute some observations on the appearance, but I feel that once accepting the Design Context (as described above), and design policy compliance of the scheme (also described above), it is more reasonable to make only recommendations as opposed to any demands: Some observations then are:

Comments on Architectural Proposals – Holiday and Staff accommodation



- There is a fine grain level of detailing and a mixture of traditional and contemporary materials which appears to create an interesting, contextual and distinctive appearance.
- Elevation A shows the secondary frontage which faces the access street. Without front doors it looks a little bland and maybe strange, but I can accept that the main façades overlook the communal green areas, not the street and planting may soften those ‘rears’.
- The longer runs of houses do help create a stronger sense of enclosure to the spaces behind the units. Breaking them into smaller detached units would not create any obvious benefit.

Comments on Architectural Proposals – Main central buildings



- The long continuous form creates a strong sense of enclosure to the entry square. The gables break up the mass, and vary the scale and roof line. The perpendicular geometries are not so dissimilar to farm buildings which have all been joined together and the width is not so dissimilar to ‘stately homes’ which have become landmarks throughout the countryside.
- The Central building is primarily in red and buff brick with a metal standing seam roof. The combination of large areas of red/orange and buff brick, and particularly those ‘Bristol’ brick models seems to me a more formal style, more common in an urban context. It may look more ‘rural’ if this material/colour style was not such a feature of the main buildings – the ‘finer grain’ look and texture of stone or even heritage bricks might seem less formal and more rural. A representative CGI could help – the DAS images are small and desaturated looking so it’s hard to tell quite what it might look like.
- The Leisure building employs similar form and materials to the central building but is slightly subservient in scale.
- These units could potentially make more use of stone, timber and perhaps flint and would then better reflect the principles and pictures presented in the DAS eg “*The treatment of walls and roofs have taken cues from the traditional architecture that can be found in nearby villages*” or “*carefully considered use of masonry elements in natural stone and brick, with timber cladding and a variety of roof finishes.*”
- If there are views from the PROW of the central buildings, set amongst the ‘fine grain’ of tree foliage, then I think it could be a missed opportunity not to give them an appearance of finer grain detailing, and ensure that the ‘flatter’ appearance of generic contemporary buildings in towns and cities is avoided.

End