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Dear Tom

DESIGN WEST BRISTOL Design Review
DWB033 Brislington Meadows 26 January 2022 – CONFIDENTIAL

Thank you for asking the Panel to review this scheme. We very much welcome to opportunity to contribute to the design development process for the site.

We are grateful to the project team for their presentation of the proposals and for the documentation provided in advance of the meeting. The Panel was able to carry out an accompanied site visit prior to the meeting, which was extremely helpful. We also welcome the involvement of the LA officers.

Declarations of any potential conflicts of interest were requested at the start of the meeting and none were declared.

The Panel greatly appreciated the constructive and open engagement in the meeting of all those present and we offer the following summary of our observations, which we hope are of help in the development of the proposals.

Project context

It was reported that the possibility of housing development on this site has been a matter of discussion for more than 30 years. In 2014 the site was allocated for housing within the Local Plan. At that stage, access was indicated from the west. However, access through the allotments is not appropriate and access from School Road into the paddock was also rejected following detailed investigations. Such an access would require loss of trees and hedgerows of ecological value, and would also require a high degree of regrading, retaining structures and other civil engineering work. Measures were therefore taken to secure land to allow vehicular access from Broomhill Road. A separate application for this access strip was made in 2021. Whilst a single vehicular access for a site



of this size is not ideal, the design has been developed to accommodate a single vehicular access point.

Homes England (HE) acquired the site in March 2020, partly on the basis of its designation for development for up to 300 homes. HE has an established national track record for facilitating the delivery of new homes, including several notable projects within Bristol. In April 2021 the Mayor of Bristol announced a withdrawal of mayoral support for the development. In October 2021 HE announced its intention to proceed on the basis of the established designation within the Local Plan and in the context of a demonstrable local housing need. The site is also a sustainable location for new housing, benefitting from existing travel links and proximity to community facilities.

The project has been the subject of a PPA and the intention is that the proposals will be submitted for Outline Planning Consent in the spring of 2022. All matters will be reserved other than access. Four parameter plans will be submitted as part of the application (landscape, land use, building heights access & movement) in addition to the D&S statement, design code document and illustrative masterplan.

The Review Panel is happy to have the opportunity to consider the proposals on their merits at this stage. We are grateful for the explanation of the wider planning and political context, but as a design review panel we will restrict our comments to design related matters.

The proposals are for 260 new homes, 78 of which will be affordable units which will be pepper potted across the site. Car parking provision will be policy compliant (c 350 car spaces).

The residential mix will be 70% houses and 30% apartments, with the apartments to be 60% 1 bed and 40% 2 beds. This mix follows analysis of the local housing need and market.

The Site

The site has an area of 9.6 ha with 4.4 ha proposed as open space. The application site includes three 'corridors' not within HE ownership. These relate to the school link to the north, the pedestrian and cycle link to the west and the link to the south, which may be required in relation to drainage connections (subject to confirmation in detailed designed).

The site carries no special planning designations. It currently offers amenity space for local residents and has two PRowS crossing it, in addition to various informal pathways which are believed to have been established for in excess of 20 years. It is intended to recognize these informal pathways as established rights of way and to regularize them through official relocation within the proposed masterplan.



The topography of the site offers challenges and opportunities, with some areas having a fall line of up to 1 in 6, and a considerable area of the site for housing having falls of c 1 in 12. There are fine distant views to the south and west available in some site areas and accordingly the site is visible from various distant receptors. Key viewpoints are currently subject to agreement through discussions with the LA.

The local Broomhill centre is in close proximity to the north, including bus routes to Bristol city centre. A nursery, an infant school and junior school are immediately to the north of the site. The residential areas of Broomhill are to the north and west of the site and it was noted that the local building stock includes very few recent developments. The employment area is immediately to the east and immediately to the south is Victory Park. The site also has links to the other large open space amenity areas to the north in the form of Eastwood Farm Local Nature Reserve and Nightingale Valley.

Brislington centre is within easy walking distance as are a number of other local community facilities.

The site has various existing hedgerows of ecological value and a number of trees which are subject to preservation orders. The existing power lines, including one pylon within the site, are to be retained and these require a 30m zone, free from development, beneath them. The existing telecoms mast is intended to be relocated.

It was reported that the development needs to address 3 crises: housing, climate and biodiversity. We have offered some comments relating to each of these areas below.

The housing layout, density and typology

The extent of the housing shortage and some of the related statistics on local housing need were reported to the Panel. We accept that there is a pressing and significant local housing need and although development of green field land always requires appropriate justification, we understand the site has been designated for up to 300 new homes. We agree that in terms of its proximity to supporting local infrastructure, and its potential in terms of sustainable transport, it offers the opportunity to make a significant contribution to meeting local housing needs and to providing high quality homes.

We support and admire the landscape-led approach, but we note that the density offered by the proposals is relatively modest. There are areas of the development where the layout and typologies illustrated appeared sub-urban, or even similar to contemporary edge-of-village developments. For example we noted 10 units in the central area of the site, along its southern edge, which appeared to occupy a frontage of more than 100m overlooking open parkland. We also noted some areas, such as the deep northern verge to a significant length of the access street, where the land value did not appear to be fully exploited. We suggest that it would be worth considering options for some areas that might offer higher density than that currently indicated. We appreciate the masterplan at this

stage is only illustrative, but we are also aware that such illustrative masterplans at the outline planning stage can often persist through the procurement process, and heavily influence the final outcomes.

There appear to be relatively few housing typologies employed across the site and we encourage the design team to consider adopting more bespoke typologies to suit the aims of the development and the specific site conditions. This may help to deliver a more diverse mix of housing types within the site and this in turn may help to develop more diverse and distinctive character areas within the site.

This variation may also result in more space being provided for special landscape character areas with a more intense landscape character. Similarly, it may result in housing areas having a more urban character, with the public spaces formed by the housing offering distinctive places for social engagement, but with greater definition of their built edge.

We noted the use of a so-called Village Green and wondered if this was the most appropriate typology to refer to, given this is a rare open site within a city experiencing a housing crisis. Clearly a considerable amount of creative thought has already been successfully applied to establishing a variety of distinctive places within the proposed public realm. However, we would encourage you to be bold in your aims for distinctive placemaking, in streets and hard and soft spaces. Less uniformity in the housing layout may assist this.

We hope agreement can be reached quickly on the key view locations into the site, as the initial LVIA could usefully inform the massing on the site and hence the most appropriate layout, which will eventually be manifest in the building heights parameter plan.

Movement strategy and connectivity

A key aspect of the scheme was presented as being to improve permeability across the site. We noted that the site, informally, already achieved a high level of permeability. The potential gains for the site appeared to be most significant in relation to cycle movement and access to all across the site. The school link has rightly been identified as critical.

The Panel support the intention to improve connectivity as a way to encourage active travel to, from and within the site. We suggest the layout is checked to confirm compliance with LTN 1/20. We would encourage the design team to try and meet the requirements for a fully inclusive public realm, although we appreciate the particular challenges offered by the steep topography.

We enquired about the overall people and vehicle movements on site, understanding this is key data for the development of a suitable access and movement network. We suggest using the full range of available data (number of people cycling, walking, using buses etc) to help inform the highways



design and demonstrate projected people and vehicular activity has been part of the evidence-based use in the masterplanning.

We commented on the need to ensure separate cycle and pedestrian pathways in the 'arm' links to the school to the north and School Road to the west. We suggest there may be merit in facilitating pedestrian movement through the paddock to School Road to avoid a closed pedestrian cul-de-sac at the western end.

We are aware that there are 7 access points around the site that will be subject to detailed design within the outline application. We suggested that this detailed design area should include the full length of the school link and link to School Road.

Importantly we suggested that the main access route from Broomhill Road may benefit from consideration being given to alternative options. A starting point for these might usefully be the consideration of detailed layouts for the access road and the junction (including radii, crossings etc). The 2m footpath width here might be reconsidered and similarly the layout/width of the separate cycle path. We understand that a minimum 12m wide ecological corridor is recommended here, linking to the landscape of Easton Farm. We also understand underground attenuation tanks may be required in this location. We suggest swales or other SUDs features integrated with the landscape and ecological design may be preferable.

The six houses in this strip did not appear to be the most valuable plots and greater overall value might be achievable by increasing density elsewhere on site, as mentioned above. This might, in whole or in part, allow the access street to pass through an area of more intense landscape character, as a threshold to the development. This offers a more generous landscape extension to what exists to the north, and as part of the required ecological corridor which extends to the south. We suggest the detailed design of the main access point might also usefully include any offsite improvements which would facilitate easy pedestrian access to Easton Park, as the existing crossing may benefit from relocation.

The illustrative layout indicated the potential for large areas of car parking which we suggest is given careful consideration in terms of amount related to sustainable movement and layout arrangement. Consideration of future proof provision for ev charging may have implications for the parking layouts and we suggest consideration of the potential for car clubs could usefully form part of the movement strategy at this stage.

Sustainability

We noted the project's key aim of addressing the climate crisis. We fully support the project team in this aim. We encourage you to think holistically at this stage, but also to use the Design Code to establish clear and ambitious targets in relation to sustainability. Too often the sustainability section of design codes offers encouraging aspirations, but little in terms of detailed undertakings or specific

targets. Establishing challenge targets can help drive design innovation and ensure design decisions at all stages are made with sustainability in mind, as a key parameter in the decision-making process. You may wish to adopt specific targets for operational energy, embodied carbon, whole life carbon and water use. This may then drive strategic design in relation to typology, orientation and layout, as well as decisions relating to construction methods and material choices. There may be commercial advantage in positioning the scheme now, so that on completion it can offer homes which meet the ever-rising expectations of homeowners, who have a growing awareness of the benefits of truly sustainable developments.

Landscape and ecology

The Site consists of a mosaic of meadows, hedgerows, scrub, and woodland and supports a variety of species including badgers, bats, reptiles, breeding birds, and some invertebrate species of conservation concern. The Site is also in a pivotal position, connecting Eastwood Farm LNR, the adjoining SNCI designated paddock SNCI, Victory Park, the allotments, and Nightingale Valley (via Brislington Brook). Furthermore, the local authority has declared an Ecological Emergency and the Mayor has expressed opposition to the development for ecological reasons, and there soon will be a mandatory requirement for new developments to achieve a 10 % biodiversity gain under the new Environment Act. Despite these considerations a large proportion of the Site would be developed under the proposals. For all these reasons, HE recognizes that biodiversity protection/enhancement must be one of the primary stated aims of the project.

The team is clearly addressing these issues carefully within areas of retained habitat and the scheme offers great potential for well-integrated ecological and landscape design. The Panel believe the project has the potential to be an exemplar scheme in these terms, and as such could help raise future development standards in the region. Although there is already much to admire, we would encourage the team to maintain their efforts and use the application documents to help ensure the landscape potential of the scheme is fully realised. This includes ways of ensuring high delivery standards and creating management frameworks for effective place-keeping as well as place-making.

Efforts have clearly been made to work with the existing topography. However, we believe there are areas where closer adherence to the existing levels in the layout would be beneficial. Running the principal lines of homes along existing contours will help minimize problem areas and although this has been done generally, there are areas we identified where the relationship between topography and layout was less apparent. As a Panel we are aware how difficult the resolution of levels can be and it requires considerable skill to marry a layout with the complex 3-dimensional form of an undulating site. Too often the layouts appear driven by other concerns, with roads then engineered to offer max 1:20 falls, resulting in individual plots having to reconcile exaggerate changes in level.

We suggest that in your next illustrations it would be useful to show the sections through the most steeply sloping sections of the site. We understand why split-level house types are often not



preferred, but we suspect detail analysis will reveal the extent of cut and fill required, and the extent to which some form of retaining structures will be needed may be far more than currently indicated. The problem areas can create discontinuities in pedestrian networks which have otherwise been inclusively designed.

We noted two large attenuation areas. We suggest that where possible a variety of SuDS measures should be employed across the site so that the two (or possible more, but smaller) attenuation ponds are not too dominant in the landscape. Opportunities for providing some permanent standing water should be sought, which would greatly enhance their ecological interest.

We observed the character of the link to School Road could have an attractive landscape character with productive allotments to either side. However, at present its character is dominated by inappropriate, large leylandii, which shade the route and offer little in ecological terms. Although these trees are off site, we hope that the project may find a way to exploit the potential which the removal of these trees would allow.

We understand that the development will necessitate the removal of some TPO trees and that compensatory measures will be put in place. The more ecologically rich hedgerows have been largely retained but the central hedgerow will need to be removed. We noted that the Village Green includes a remnant of the existing hedgerow. Although retention of hedgerows is often preferable where possible, their value to some extent resides in their continuity as habitat corridors. In the instance of the remnant in the Village Green, the need for roads and people to cross the line of the hedgerow has resulted in a degree of loss such that options for greater overall value and appropriate placemaking might be facilitated if these remnants were not required to be retained in the space.

We noted that the expectation was that a 10% net gain in biodiversity (NGB) was unlikely to be achievable within the site. This is particularly with reference to the loss of grassland. Where possible design review Panels will always encourage teams to deliver as much as possible of the 10% NGB within the site. This inevitably requires the design team to use every effort in creatively designing the opportunity for biodiversity throughout the scheme. There is much potential already evident, but we nonetheless encourage additional efforts to be made to find gains wherever possible, and in some instances, this may necessitate revisions to the road or housing layout. We suggest that this thinking could be manifest in the design code with respect to the apartment building roofscapes and facades, to ensure that these are fully exploited to maximise a balance in their contribution to amenity, ecology, and energy generation. Given the significant loss of breeding bird habitat that will occur, a major program of bird (and bat) box installation should occur across the scheme and in neighbouring Victory Park. Starlings and sparrows might be particularly attracted given their prevalence in neighbouring 1930s style housing.

We suggest thought is given to which species enhancements you wish to target and perhaps aligning this with any local ecology plans. We encourage consideration is given to use of non-invasive non-native tree species in some instances as one means to facilitate resilience to climate change and

species loss. We also encourage you to consider how off site NGBs might be best targeted. In this context some relatively degraded areas of Victory Park were mentioned, and perhaps investment here could maximise the excellent amenity which the park offers. Victory Park will need to work increasingly hard to accommodate biodiversity and recreational use displaced from the development area. Efforts should be made to create habitat mosaics off-site to compensate for the loss of this habitat type within the Site. We suggested a dead wood strategy for the site should form part of the design code. Large trunks and branches from felled trees could be imbedded within retained areas and also Victory Park providing valuable habitat and also opportunities for natural play.

We noted there was a strip of land along the boundary to Bonville Road which is not in HE ownership. The masterplan proposals should strictly not include this strip, although we appreciate its future use is unknown.

We observed an existing brook (seemingly a tributary of Brislington Brook) in the southwest corner appears to be currently underexploited and we suggest enhancement to the brook could provide another valuable and distinct landscape area. Currently it is heavily shaded by dense scrub, although with selective clearance of this vegetation and minor soft-engineering works, it could become much more morphologically/ecologically diverse, providing new opportunities for wildlife and for nature-based amenity. The brook is the only area of permanent water on Site and it would seem a major opportunity missed not to make more of this important feature. The woodland in the north-east corner creates a wonderful naturalistic arrival experience. After passing through this woodland gateway a wonderful panorama of the city is revealed, extending beyond to Dundry Hill. This impressive entrance should be exploited as much as possible as the first moments of returning can influence, either negatively or positively, the level of anticipation, expectation and ultimately the enjoyment of homecoming. Can the woodland be slightly opened up to enhance its appeal without reducing its biodiversity value? Perhaps this would provide the opportunity to establish colourful woodland flowers.

The scheme should celebrate its pivotal position between various wildlife sites and clearly explain how different species will be encouraged to readily move through the Site to these adjoining areas. Nature-based recreational connectivity is also important and should be reflected in the proposals, in particular integration with the Brislington Greenway. The Site sits in a key location along an existing underutilized greenway extending from the Bath Road/A4 to Eastwood Farm LNR. This route could be celebrated and improved as part of the scheme to compensate for on-site net losses in recreational amenity. The existing entrance on Bath Road near the junction with West Town Lane is very unwelcoming. This could be transformed into an attractive gateway to Victory Park and a new long-distance Victory-Eastwood Farm LNR Park greenway. The entrance to the Site is also unwelcoming from the west due to heavy shading from non-native leylandii, detracting from otherwise attractive views across the neighbouring allotments.



Proposals should also set out clearly how new and existing greenspaces will be managed and how management will be funded.

Placemaking

We have mentioned aspects related to placemaking above. However, we wish to stress that the successful delivery of the overall project is likely to depend on maintaining the vision for, and control of, the distinctive character of the public realm. This applies equally to hard spaces, landscape characters spaces and the hierarchy of streets to be used within the site. Alongside the landscape, the sequence of places would benefit from clear architectural intention, and as mentioned above this could be through variation of typology and potentially an urban edge. Having clear and bold proposals for each of these elements, expressed through the design code and the various application plans is essential to this process. Whereas illustrations of attractive precedents can help, we suggest that these can also sometimes mislead. Applying design resources to the illustrations of the principles and details which will effectively control the quality of the public realm as delivered for this project should be where your focus can be most productively applied.

We understand that the project is subject to Building for a Healthy Life Assessment and we support this assessment, as part of the design development process.

Conclusion

Overall, we were glad to have a chance to contribute to this project at this early stage. We fully appreciate the importance of this site to the area. We observed a skilled, experienced and dedicated project team engaged in producing a project which has the potential to be exemplary.

The Panel appreciates the very considerable complexity of the project and understands that the design synthesis required to provide the best possible outcome for all concerned is an extremely demanding task.

We hope our comments are helpful to the project team and we would be happy to continue to support you in this journey if required.

Yours sincerely

Prof Alex Wright
Panel Chair on behalf of the Bristol Design Review Panel

Cc Richard Sewell, BCC
Nitin Bhasin, BCC
Paul Connelly, LDA Design

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IN ATTENDANCE

Panel:	Alex Wright (Chair)	Architect
	Lincoln Garland	Ecology
	Michele Lavelle	Landscape Architect
	Yuli Cadney-Toh	Architect/Masterplanner
	Richard Latcham	Urban Designer/Transport Planner
Project team:	John Boutwood	Developer (Homes England)
	Paul Connelly	Planning (LDA Design)
	Rebecca Frost	Urban Design (LDA Design)
	Rachel Roberts	Ecologist (The Environment Partnership)
	David Tingay	Transport (Key Transport Consultants)
	Tristan Tucker	Engineering (CampbellReith)
Design West:	Pippa Goldfinger	Panel Manager
	Pippa Box	Design Officer