



## **Epping Forest District Quality Review Panel**

### **Report of Formal Review Meeting: North Weald Bassett Strategic Masterplan Framework**

Friday 1 September 2023

Epping Forest District Council, 323 High St, Epping CM16 4BZ

#### **Panel**

Phil Askew (chair)  
Laura Baron  
Garry Colligan  
Vivienne Ramsey  
Richard Wilson

#### **Attendees**

Nigel Richardson	Epping Forest District Council
Richard Schunemann	Epping Forest District Council
Krishma Shah	Epping Forest District Council
Lucy Block	Frame Projects
Aretha Ahunanya	Frame Projects
Tasnima Ahmed	Frame Projects

#### **Apologies / report copied to**

Nick Finney	Epping Forest District Council
Deborah Denner	Frame Projects

#### **Confidentiality**

This is a pre-application review, and therefore confidential. As a public organisation Epping Forest District Council is subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOI) and Environmental Information Regulations (EIR), and in the case of an FOI / EIR request may be obliged to release project information submitted for review.

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## 1. Project name and site address

Land south of Vicarage Lane, North Weald Bassett

## 2. Presenting team

Paul Gibbs	David Jarvis Associates
Clive Burbridge	Iceni Projects
David Fletcher	Strutt & Parker
Mawgan Pengelly	tor&co
William Wood	Vistry Group

## 3. Planning authority briefing

The site is in the village of North Weald Bassett, approximately three miles to the north of Epping Town, and four and a half miles to the south of Harlow within the Epping Forest District. Approximately 300 metres to the west of the site is the North Weald Airfield, which proposes 10 hectares of new employment land along with the retention and enhancement of existing airfield operations. The airfield masterplan is being brought forward by the Council, who are the landowners. This plan has been developed and endorsed by the Council on 13 March 2023.

The vision for the North Weald Bassett Strategic Masterplan Framework area is a landscape-led masterplan that respects the character of the village, uses existing landscape features, and places an emphasis on social focal points, connectivity, and integration with the fabric of the village. The masterplan proposes 1,050 new homes, as well as education, community, and sporting facilities. A dedicated east to west pedestrian and cycle link will run through the centre of the masterplan, connecting the eastern side of the village through to North Weald Airfield and the local nature reserve to the west. The masterplan aims to revitalise the existing recreation ground and memorial playing fields into a social hub for sports, health, community, and mobility facilities.

The Council would welcome the panel's views on the development of the strategic masterplan framework, and particularly how successful the proposals address the relationship with the existing village, the North Weald Airfield masterplan and the wider area. The panel is invited to comment on the development of placemaking and character, as well as the arrangement of social, community and retail uses in relation to public realm and open space. Comments are also sought on the energy strategy, sustainability approach and environmental design.



## 4. Quality Review Panel's views

### *Summary*

The masterplan has developed significantly since the previous review, and the panel thanks the applicant for providing the comprehensive document in advance. As the strategic masterplan is the first step in the planning process for the site, the framework should provide clarity about when the detail will be developed through design codes and reserved matter applications. The additional baseline evidence and studies are welcome, and this analysis has helped to inform decisions around layout, access, and public realm. However, the masterplan still lacks detail of how the new development will be integrated with the existing village, as well as the neighbouring North Weald Airfield masterplan site and the wider area. As such, the current proposal reads as three distinct places, with the masterplan area turning its back to the village, looking outward to the north and the A414. Opportunities should be explored to enhance connectivity beyond the site boundary, and to develop character areas and placemaking in response to the site's context.

The landscape focus is positive, and the site provides excellent existing natural assets which should be preserved and enhanced. Further detail should be provided on how the public spaces will be maintained, as well as how the landscape enhancements address climate change and resilience. There is still too little information on the approach to sustainability, which the panel feels should underpin the whole of the masterplan, informing broader decision making. If this approach is not explicitly set out within the strategic masterplan framework, there is a risk that it will not be delivered further down the line. The applicant should therefore apply the Council's sustainability checklist to develop a cohesive approach to energy, embodied and operational carbon, as well as broader environmental strategies that address sustainable drainage, ecology and habitat.

### *Strategic approach*

- The strategic masterplan framework has developed well. Its principles and aims are commendable, and the panel feels that the vision themes developed are successful.
- Further work is required on the masterplan area's integration with the existing village, the neighbouring airfield masterplan, and the wider area. The site allocation notes that this development should be an expansion of North Weald Bassett, rather than a distinct new settlement. Therefore, connectivity and cohesion will be fundamental to the success of the masterplan.
- The current layout feels too outward looking, turning its back on the existing village. This is manifested in the greater density and retail uses to the north, which feels counterintuitive.
- The disconnection of key community and retail uses from the 'heart' of the masterplan should be reviewed, to ensure that the 15-minute neighbourhood concept is delivered.



- As the airfield masterplan area is allocated for employment, the panel would like clarity on the types of uses on site, as well as likely employee numbers and analysis of how people will get to work. This information should be used to inform the site layout and access, as well as the placement of communal and social areas.
- Timescales for phasing and implementation across the two sites should also be coordinated.
- The panel appreciate the politics around the parcels of land and ownership. While designing the masterplan to discount these boundaries is positive, the panel would like to see an overlay of the ownership to ensure that the layout, open spaces and access routes are deliverable.

#### *Placemaking, character and identity*

- Further development of the masterplan principles should focus on creating a high-quality place with a strong identity. The panel suggests referring to the original concept illustration to challenge whether the intended vision is being achieved through the strategic masterplan framework.
- While the character analysis of North Weald is useful, the panel notes that the existing village is not of a particularly high quality. It suggests looking further across Epping District, to better examples of the rich architectural character of the area, as well as other contemporary examples.
- The panel feels that the individual character areas are not yet sufficiently differentiated. It cautions against relying on design code and reserved matter stages further along the process to deliver these.
- The village green at the heart of the site is successful. Providing a distinctive and complementary sports and leisure offer for the area will be positive and create opportunities to bring the new and existing communities together.
- The panel suggests exploring complementary uses alongside the sports and play facilities, to provide passive surveillance over these spaces. For instance, a pub or café use, similar to a traditional sports pavilion, could be considered.
- An employment hub may also be appropriate, given the increase in the number of people working from home. This should be reviewed against the employment offer on the neighbouring airfield site.

#### *Energy, sustainability and environmental strategies*

- The masterplan provides an opportunity for an exemplar environmental design that addresses the climate emergency, as well as enhancing green and blue infrastructure, ecology, habitat, and biodiversity. The panel strongly recommends adopting best practice targets, which could include an expectation of Passivhaus certification for all dwellings.



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- The panel is disappointed that the energy and sustainability section of the report is yet to be developed to the same level as the rest of the masterplan framework. This should have been addressed earlier to inform key decision making around layout, access, and open space.
  - The applicant should refer to the Council's sustainability checklist, working through each vision theme of the masterplan to directly apply the recommendations.
  - Given the scale of development there could be significant carbon generated by the scheme. An assessment of embodied and operational carbon should be carried out as part of the masterplan.
  - The proposed on-plot energy strategy is an appropriate approach. However, it will be important to develop clear expectations for how each building is designed to address orientation for optimised photovoltaic panels, minimising overheating, and achieving an efficient form factor.
  - Further clarity on the sustainable drainage approach for the site should be provided. Less engineered solutions, such as swales and raingardens, should be considered, alongside the attenuation ponds proposed.
  - Opportunities for integrating habitat and ecology within the buildings should be included, based on the outcomes of the baseline studies undertaken. For example, bat and swift bricks could be considered where appropriate.
  - Opportunities for rainwater harvesting and green roofs should also be considered.
  - As the masterplan develops a significant extent of green field land, the panel notes the social responsibility to make best use of the land. It questions the efficiency of the layout and suggests that additional density could be appropriate to make the development truly sustainable.

#### *Landscape and public realm*

- The panel welcomes the focus on landscape. The site presents an excellent opportunity, given the existing mature trees and hedgerows. Retaining and strengthening these features, to build upon the existing character of the site, will be vital to the success of the masterplan.
- Planting new trees and enhancing hedgerows is positive, but the species chosen should address both climate and disease resilience.
- Improvements to the safety and navigability of the existing byways and pathways is supported. However, the existing scrub and undergrowth is valuable habitat, and the extent of its removal will need to be carefully balanced.



- The location of the play space for teenagers feels isolated, which could result in antisocial behaviour issues. Relocating this in an area that is overlooked and integrated with housing should be considered.
- Early years play should be located close to active, social functions, such as health centres, cafes and shops. The panel feels that this would be attractive for parents and carers.
- Creating opportunities for 'play on the way' should be considered further. The panel would like to see further detail of how this could be integrated with the design of streets, as well as the green corridors.
- Opportunities for play for all ages should also be provided. Circular walking and running routes, as well as outdoor gyms, would help build upon themes around health and wellbeing.
- An approach to lighting should be included within the masterplan framework. This will be important, both for personal safety and for protecting the natural environment and wildlife.
- The panel would like to see further detail of the proposed boundary treatments, to ensure that the existing village and new development feel integrated. Privacy of back gardens should be considered.

#### *Access and transport*

- The panel feels that the connections beyond the redline will be critical to ensuring that the site is accessible, as well as positive and attractive to visit and live in.
- The proposed bus route will be fundamental to improving access to the site and promoting sustainable modes of transport. Further clarity on how the new route connects to the wider area, including Harlow and Epping town centre, should be provided.
- Broader improvements should be made to cycling and walking networks beyond the redline to support active travel.
- The panel questions the legibility of the primary road through the site. The masterplan should ensure that wayfinding is clear, with clarity of hierarchy and integration with the wider footpath and cycle network.
- As the primary road is likely to dominate the public realm, the panel encourages considering opportunities for sustainable drainage and public realm opportunities, while keeping people and cyclists safely separate from vehicles.



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- Further opportunities for improved site access from School Green Lane should be considered, particularly as this acts as a key desire line to the proposed location of the social heart of the scheme.
  - The link to Queen's Road is positive and is likely to be well used. However, the panel questions the legibility and safety of this route as presented, given that it passes between existing homes.
  - The panel supports the decision to reduce parking, despite Essex County Council standards.

### *Process*

- The panel appreciates that the strategic masterplan is the first step in the planning process for the site. The framework should provide clarity about when the detail will be developed, for instance through design codes and reserved matter applications, to establish clear expectations and deliverables.
- The community consultation undertaken to date is positive. Getting buy-in from existing residents and neighbours will be important to the successful cohesion on the village expansion. There will inevitably be tensions with immediate neighbours, and the panel urges the applicant to be clear and honest around expectations.
- Further detail of phasing should be provided. This will be particularly relevant to the delivery of the landscape design, given the extent of new planting proposed, which will need time to mature.
- Given the proposed footpath closures, and diversions to existing public rights of way, clear signposting will be needed, with changes clearly communicated to the community.

### *Next steps*

- The panel would welcome the opportunity to review the strategic masterplan framework again, particularly to address the development of the sustainability strategy.

