

DWNS007



Johnathan Coombes at Pegasus,

c/o Strongvox Homes  
York House  
Blackbrook Park Avenue  
Taunton TA1 2PX  
Somerset

05 May 2021

Dear Johnathan Coombes,

**DESIGN WEST North Somerset Design Review Panel  
DWNS007, 20 April 2021**

Thank you for bringing the proposal for Land at Butts Patch In Wrington to the Design Review Panel on the 20 April 2021. The proposal is submitted for Outline Approval and has recently been revised in response to comments from North Somerset DC. The proposal is for dwellings and associated street infrastructure, landscape and public open space. The site is a green field site to the south west of Wrington. The review was held on line under the Design Review Panel's remote working protocols.

The site is not allocated under the local plan and we note that it is not the panel's role to comment on its suitability for allocation but to advise on the design quality of the proposed approach. Ursula Fay, Case Officer for North Somerset outlined the key areas for reflection as; the design approach generally, pedestrian connectivity, the heritage context, landscape strategy, SUDS and ecology. The layout first proposed was thought to be too formulaic and not yet sympathetic enough to its historic village context with a particular concern about impacts on views from the south.

Bill Richardson introduced Strongvox's approach as a company to delivering attractive homes for the open market and as affordable housing and their interest in generating distinctive responses to local architecture and well considered layouts. The design team led by Darren Beer of Focus on Design introduced the planning context, the potential for connectivity to and access to amenity in the village, the approach to pedestrian and vehicular access, the initial visual and character assessment, the ecological baseline and the opportunities constraints. They highlighted how the layout had developed to respond to North Somerset's comments by locating public open spaces to enable key views to be maintained and enjoyed, by increasing the potential for integration with the existing streets and spaces by drawing landscape elements more strongly into the streetscape.

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The Design Review Panel is currently testing the use of the Draft Placemaking Charter from the West of England in structuring its advice and the panel's comments are organised to the five Charter themes;

### **FUTURE READY**

The panel welcomes the aim of delivering high standards of energy efficiency at the site by taking a fabric first approach and integrating electric car charging. It was encouraging to hear how at other sites you were seeking to go beyond current standards to future proof new homes.

The panel appreciated the close integration of landscape design and collaboration with the ecologist – we note that NS saw ecology as an emerging strength to the approach.

### **CONNECTED**

The site has good links to public transport and potentially good walking and cycling permeability. To create a resilient place there should be easy and direct pedestrian and cycle movement linking along desire lines to amenities in the center of the village. Therefore, it's the panels view that links to the north and north east are necessary and should be rigorously defined and pursued.

The structuring of a place where there is plenty to do is also an important part of supporting behaviour change and in this the panel encourages you to maximise opportunities for an active and interactive landscape and for linking to walking and cycling destinations beyond the red line - for example better walking and cycling links to the south could also be an asset for the village.

The identification of the main street as a slow secondary street in the revised layout seems right and the character of this street could be developed further as noted below.

### **HEALTHY AND BIODIVERSE**

The panel appreciated the early involvement of a landscape architect and an ecologist and the collaborative working evidenced by the team. The intention to generate a strong tree and landscape strategy and to work to the Building with Nature standard are very welcome. The panel would like to encourage you to strengthened this approach still further.

The groups of trees in the connecting street could have more impact. These trees and along with the arrangement of built form could be part of what makes the character of this street have a distinctive

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rural feel. Generally, it would be helpful to have some indication of the species intended to understand their contribution to character. It is also prudent to have appraised the viability of tree positions early on ensuring there are not potential conflicts with services.

The planting on the western boundary is also positive but this shouldn't have the purpose of hiding the development but rather help to relate it to or settle it into its context. The approach to creating play on the way spaces along the western edge of the site is clear and could be extended across the network of open spaces. This provision should be multi-generational with seating areas for older people and out of the way spaces with pull up bars for teenagers.

## **CHARACTERFULL**

Of the nearby historic assets, the panel felt the most significant were the views of the church the relationship to the Conservation Area. Wrington is an unusually intact and distinct village in which 2/3 of homes are in a Conservation Area. From an initial view there are some very fine buildings, streets, views and areas of distinctive mature landscape - these are not currently captured in your assessment.

The character appraisal is to be developed but the panel felt this should be more qualitative. It should evaluate the qualities of built form, landscape, boundaries and materials of the best examples in the village. It should tell us what's good, what's specific or distinctive, what works where and what from this evaluation inspires and informs the approach at the site. The recently approved proposal by Mikhail Riches for Nailsea is a good benchmark for making a qualitative response to architectural character and for working with rurality whilst achieving reasonable densities. Carefully documenting the historic development of the village would also contribute to the understanding of place. (see the National Design Guide and Model Design Code Guidance for reference).

The panel agreed that the views of the church framed by the proposed development should be tested and developed from key views to be agreed with NS.

We think there is scope to embed quality in the approach by thinking through the treatment of boundaries. For example, close boarded fencing shouldn't become a dominant character element by facing on to public realm. There is much emphasis in the sections on private gardens but front gardens on the main streets could contribute to the character and create small areas to sit out contributing to the sociability of the place. Taking an innovative approach and softening this street further integrating blue and green spaces and would contribute to the identity of the place.

Generally, we think it would be valuable to become more proactive and articulate clearer design and sustainability aims for the project that demonstrate the proposed contribution to this sensitive site in a special and distinctive context.

## **INCLUSIVE**

As noted above the panel felt it was important to think outside the red line and consider how this development would link to amenities from outside and provide amenity for new and existing residents. The character of the Paddock and other key public spaces and the interfaces between the fronts of buildings and these spaces is also important to develop.

In summary the panel's main points are to:

## **CONNECTED**

- Consider pedestrian and cycle connectivity as the primary movement into and out of the site – demonstrate a strategy for establishing new links.
- Show how the layout links to identified local amenities within 15 minutes by walking and cycling.

## **HEALTHY AND BIODIVERSE**

- The landscape strategy should become bolder and more specific – making a distinct contribution to character.
- The species of trees intended should be defined further and their proposed locations checked so that there are not conflicts with services.
- The landscape strategy and strategy for social interactivity should be demonstrated in clear diagrams that highlight their distinct role in the layout.

## **CHARACTERFUL**

- Develop a more qualitative approach to character appraisal focusing on the best examples in Wrington.
- Carefully document the historic development of the village.
- Develop how the proposals will frame key views especially those of the church.
- Consider the approach to boundaries in terms of sociability and character.
- Be bolder about the design aims and principles that are being established overall.



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**INCLUSIVE**

- Consider how 'eyes on the streets' and public spaces will be generated.

**Summary** – Thank you for bringing the proposal to Design West. The panel appreciated the opportunity to see this important proposal for North Somerset in the distinctive village of Wrington. We appreciated the approach taken - with developer and design team working collaboratively. We would like to encourage you to push the scheme on the points we have outlined to make it as good as it possibly can be. As the proposal is at an early stage we would be happy to see the project again once it has developed further.

Yours sincerely

Juliet Bidgood

Chair, North Somerset Design Review Panel, Design West

cc Ursula Fay and Peter Fletcher - North Somerset Council

Attendees:

**Project Team:** Darren Beer (Presenting) Architect - FocusDP  
Hannah Armstrong Heritage Consultant - Pegasus  
Lucy Foley Landscape Consultant – The Landmark Practice  
Andy Spargo Landscape Consultant and 'Building With Nature'  
Assessor - The Landmark Practice  
Jonathan Coombs Planning Consultant -Pegasus  
Bill Richardson Developer (Planning Manager) - Strongvox  
Simon Tannahill Developer (Land and Planning Director) - Strongvox

**LPA:** Peter Fletcher Urban Designer  
Ursula Fay Case Officer

**Design West:** Pippa Goldfinger Panel Manager  
Carl Ranscombe Design Officer