


Objections to planning application SE/09/1283

From:

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Residents Response

We welcome some alterations made concerning building detail and the lay out in this revised plan for parcel 2B including breaking up the previous severe frontage of the 'Gateway' entrance. However there are still significant objections remaining.

Our objections are in the following areas:

- 1) The overall Density and Height of some of the buildings
- 2) Lack of functional green spaces
- 3) Narrow streets and parking issues
- 4) Infrastructure plan
- 5) Community facilities
- 6) Request for additional information to be included in revised plans
- 7) Linked planning matters

We also wish to emphasise that our objections and comments are made with a view to promoting good housing and environment within Haverhill to support communities to thrive, for now and for the future.

1) The overall Density and Height of some of the buildings:

Height

At the Haverhill Town Council meeting, May 9th, Stuart McAdam (project manager for Persimmon) claimed that the new plans addressed concerns previously expressed by councillors and residents about the inclusion of 4 storey flats on the site. The design was one of the issues raised, however as importantly, the height and density of the building development was also the focus of the objections made. The 4 storey buildings were seen as being too dominant on the landscape, did not adhere to the 2.5 storey design code (2015) and were not in keeping with surrounding adjacent established development.

The new plans have in fact increased the density of housing by 2 properties but even more crucially replaced 4 storey apartments in part of the 'Gateway' with what is labelled as 3.5 storey apartments which are even taller than the previous 4 storey proposal. When looking at the design they may technically fit the definition of 3.5 storey but in reality, visually, they present as being 4 storey and with the extra height will

continue to be very dominant in this setting. This proposal is in direct conflict with The Design, access and compliance statement for 2B:

“High ground at the eastern part of the site, north of Boyton Hall, is more visually sensitive and should be considered during the development of the masterplan” (P6) and “The Council would not be supportive of 4 storey elements particularly on the northern parcel” (P11,D,C&A)

Density

As residents, we now understand, after much research and enquiry, that in 2015, the 2B parcel was allocated as an area for development with a range of 45-55 density per hectare(dph). This is a higher density than the 2B parcel which is also a higher density than on the Phase 1 of the development.

It appears that density level was passed at the same time Phase 1 was passed.

It would appear there was no direct consultation with residents adjoining parcel 2B about this very impactful decision. After consulting with other residents, they have been completely unaware of this density level being allocated or the significant implications of this to the character of the area. Residents had believed that the development had a design code for a maximum height of 2.5 storeys and therefore believed that these plans would be designed to be in keeping with similar surrounding dwellings.

As the development proposals have unfolded it is now seen that the 2B plot is not suited for the higher level of density allowed within the range permitted to Persimmon. At various meetings about the development, the Persimmon project manager has stressed that there are many constraints to this site, which presumably refers to the topology of the site, including features such as ditches, drainage and hedgerows. Were these constraints factored in when this density range was agreed and was it understood that this could be achieved by also adhering to the design code of 2.5 storeys? It appears that Persimmon have been given the right to build to the highest level of density set and to achieve this using a 'justification clause' apparently attached to the design code. This seems to allow Persimmon to build significantly higher storey properties if they so wish to achieve the maximum density allowed within the brief. This seems like a 'Catch 22' for the community in that Persimmon can set a density level which, if not achievable within the original plan allows them to override parts of the agreed design code and build upwards to compensate. This is very unsatisfactory and concerning. What is more, the move was not even a move to alter plans to three storey elements from 2.5 storey but to 4 storey - a huge and significant difference of the impact on this development. There is an implication that the estimation of houses achievable on this site was incorrect and unrealistic in the first place. The revised plans by Persimmon now propose what can be technically called 3.5 storey properties (which in fact will be even taller than the previous plans) is inappropriate and does not take into consideration the sensitive nature of this part of the site as mentioned in the design code.

The height of this proposed buildings is not acceptable and so much removed from the original 2.5 storey design code as to being not tenable.

“Lower density areas should include the easternmost end of the site and areas around Boyton Hall, where a lower density will reflect the existing pattern of residential use. (P5,DC&A)”

2) Functional green spaces:

One of the other features being compromised, is the amount of green community space within this parcel. Very narrow roads and limited parking are now a feature of parcel 2B. Presently there remains a nominal green space within the plot design with a path dividing the space. There are a considerable number of properties without any garden and these plans fall short of providing any meaningful green space to socialise or meet with neighbours. This is also true of phase 2A and Phase 1. The claim that there are green spaces on the periphery of this development is misleading because these spaces are there as a result of needed pathways and bordering ditches and hedgerows. They are not spaces where residents within the community can meet up, sit down or relax. The claim by Persimmon's project manager that there is a proposed public space presently labelled as allotments is inaccurate. Allotments are actually private spaces, not public and would benefit a few people who rent them (who may come from any area within Haverhill) rather than people with in this localised area. A private space is not the same as a communal space and should not be seen as a communal green space for residents with in plot 2A or 2B. Again because of Persimmon's drive to build the maximum number of properties set in the design code for this parcel, green community spaces have been sacrificed. By contrast a visit to other estates in Haverhill will show much more generous community spaces- Chalkstone Estate, Hanchett End Estate and as we understand it, the proposed Red Row Estate all have more functional green spaces.

3) Narrow streets and parking issues:

It is pertinent to point out that issues with narrow roads and parking have been reported to be an issue in Phase 1 where the density of the development is significantly less. (Reading reviews by home owners on Phase 1, one commentator states, 'narrow streets and no parking'). To understand the negative affect this has on promoting a healthy community environment, a visit to some areas in Phase 1 will show how such limited parking and narrow roads cause problems. A visit to Meadowlands where parking and green spaces are very restricted will also clearly illustrate this point.

This lack of parking for residents of this estate is bound to lead to parking on other roads in the area such as Anne Suckling Road.

4) Infrastructure plan:

Residents and Councillors have been repeatedly asked to pass proposals for housing parcels within this 'total' development without any clarity concerning an infrastructure that adequately supports it. This piecemeal approach makes it very difficult to make 'measured' decisions about the areas of building development. Allowing concentrated housing development to continue without this overall more detailed vision is an unhelpful way of making positive progress. More than ever before, as a result of ever pressing environmental issues, and, problems highlighted by the current pandemic, new communities need the assurance that where they live is supported by easy access to public green spaces as well as the more structured playgrounds and sports pitches presently planned (but as yet not delivered). Other communal facilities such as green spaces to sit, and socialise are also needed to ensure a healthy environment for such development.

The 'concept' by Persimmon of creating a central urban hub with a plaza which then justifies high density levels of housing around it continue to be of great concern. We still have no idea what will be in this plaza though the last suggestion was it would contain a newsagent's premises. Not quite the illustration shown for effect in the design code. This area of Haverhill is not set in the centre of a large town or city. Higher density accommodation in such areas can be more easily supported in established cities or towns, attached to the centre because of the concentration of various venues, shops and restaurants etc. This development is not close to the town centre. Without a more detailed infrastructure plan making good decisions, the planning for surrounding housing parcels and what support is being provided must be seriously questioned.

In connection with the development of community facilities, the 'North Ward' in Haverhill, as a whole is clearly short of community facility and spaces as compared to other wards. Similarly, concentrating areas of housing density seems poorly thought through in such an area not more centrally placed to the town. We contend that there is a very strong case for the density of housing allocated for the entire building development to be more evenly distributed throughout the parcels planned for the entire site. We propose that the 2009 concept plan should be revisited and the density distribution be altered in light of what has been learned from current construction works.

5) Community facilities:

The proposed sports pitch and playground area adjacent to 2A is continuously mentioned by the developer as being a justification for pressing ahead with the development of new housing parcels. However, as yet, these areas still remain at the planning stage. As a result, no community support has yet been given for Phase 1 of the development and soon Parcel 2B will have more residents in a similar position. With the concentrated building work on going, a large area of the fields attached to the different Phases being developed, families within Phase 1 continue to have no access to any safe places to socialise or play. Since the play area and sports pitch are still at the design stage, some children will have grown up for several years without these facilities. The lockdown restrictions we have all experienced make us all more aware of how much access to such spaces is needed. The police report referring to Phase 1 show many reported instances of social disruption and some domestic issues.

6) Request for additional information to be included in revised plans:

At the Haverhill town council planning meeting, councillors and residents have asked for some illustration showing the development in relation to Ann Suckling Road and also more diagrams and information concerning the proposed 2.5 storey property in the vicinity of the Grade 2 listed Boyton Hall cottage. On several occasions now the Persimmon project manager has agreed that these would be supplied. It is important that these are submitted for scrutiny before any deadline for the closing of comments happens. In the case of the 2A parcel a similar request was made for views from Ann Suckling Road in the summer of 2020 at a local planning meeting and then requested again in December with agreement that this would be supplied by Persimmon. However, no diagrams were presented before the proposed 2A plans were passed at the West

Suffolk Reserved Planning Matters in that month. As a result, 3.5 storey buildings are presently being constructed upon some of the highest points of the plot which was originally deemed as an area with a sensitive skyline. Already, without the completion of roof lines, these dwellings are very dominant against the landscape.

It is understood that Persimmon need to make a profit from the developments they make but it is also to be expected that as a developer, their responsibility is to build houses for the future where communities can thrive and not be restrained by limiting design quality as a result of the overriding focus of packing in properties for profit. We also propose that when a design code is set then the developer should work within those constraints to deliver a development that is more in keeping or improved from what was initially proposed in the original framework. Using the example of 2B, since the density level was set between 45-55dph, if this site proved too difficult to achieve the decided design code for this area as 2.5 storey (which was set for good reason to fit with setting of the site) then surely what would be expected of the developer would be to adjust the highest density level aspired to, to a slightly lower level within the density band agreed upon. We were told that some flexibility was built in to the density level chosen. We believe there is a very good case for Persimmon to show this flexibility so that they produce a residential parcel that will be seen as a good place to live and thrive as well as an asset to the community without so many compromises being made.

7) Linked Planning Matters:

This area (2B) is specified as a 'Character Area'. So, let's build with care and build some character into it by considering the environment surrounding this area:

Allotments/Community Orchard: Although this is not directly part of 2B it is so integrally connected that we need to mention it here.

We are not sure at what point the decision about choosing between a communal orchard and allotments was decided about the space facing on to Ann Suckling Road. Although we enthusiastically support the idea of allotments being integrated in to the plans for the overall area, this particular position does not seem ideal. Instead a communal orchard with mixed trees would be a space that could be enjoyed by the new and existing community, rather than restricted access for only a small group of people. This will also filter out sound and air pollution for the 2B section of the estate and create a greener tree lined boarder on Ann Suckling Road. Such a group of trees will be the only significant group of trees or green area running east to west from Ann Suckling Road through the estate. Trees running in this direction will certainly have a huge effect on softening and greening the landscape as well as creating a bridging corridor for insects and other wildlife.

Attenuation Basin We're not sure when, or even if this will come up for discussion; however, it is as with the area above, integral to the estate, existing and new. We are wondering about whether this will be a landscaped nature area to be worked in as a feature as part of the proposed community area / centre. We understand that the attenuation basin's main function is for holding land flood drainage water; however, it would seem ideal to develop this necessary area as a design feature which capitalises on

the natural environment by making it also a recreational space. There is a feature of this type, which could be used as a model, in the Research Park in Haverhill.

Anne Suckling Road We continue to be concerned about the proposed and developing use of Anne Suckling Road and would like some clarification as to whether our objections to this in previous planning meetings are still considered in forward planning or whether we need to re-submit these at every stage.