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Ailtèarachd is Dealbhadh na h-Alba

Project Title: SLK04: Newton Farm Community Growth Area
Masterplan

Details: Masterplan

Location: Cambuslang, South Lanarkshire

Use type: Housing / Education / Retail / Public Realm /
Infrastructure

Client / Developer: Taylor Wimpey UK Ltd

Lead Designer: Barton Willmore

Planning Authority: South Lanarkshire Council

Planning Status and Ref: Planning Permission in Principle: ref.
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PDF

Introduction

This report relates to the masterplan for the proposed housing scheme at Newton Farm (Phase II) Community Growth Area, Cambuslang presented at an A+DS Design Review meeting held on 24th November 2009 in the A+DS Offices, Edinburgh.

A+DS Views

1 Analysis and Vision

1.1 Site and landscape analysis

We thank the design team for their presentation outlining their approach to the urban design of a new neighbourhood on an attractive and underused site. The included site analysis demonstrates an understanding of several important local factors, such as foot and transport routes, hydrology and local urban patterns. However it does not fully communicate the character and opportunities of the landscape, on a contained, bio-diverse and rural peninsula on the River Clyde on the periphery of Glasgow.

1.2 Incorporation of analysis

A greater understanding of the site and the context should inform the rationale of the designs. The new settlement must create an equally strong connection with the landscape and to the rail station, which are the basic grounds for development in this location. This rationale should better reflect the topography and be apparent in the layout and design of the local centre, new residential neighbourhoods, and landscape strategy e.g. to exploit views across the valley and minimise platforming.

1.3 Vision and character

A vision for a major new place to live needs to be well communicated in the design statement at this stage, in order for it to be understood by later developers and by the Local Authority who will eventually deliver it. While we commend the ambitions set out in the document and embodied in some illustrations presented, we do not believe that such a vision has yet been clearly demonstrated. In most aspects, this masterplan expands

on, and is more specific than, the intentions set out in the Council's previous Masterplan Development Framework (MDF) document, but still not adequately so in this regard. We encourage the project team to make clear how they propose to create a great place to live with a special character, unique to and informed by the best aspects of this site, and which is then communicated through the framework of urban design principles.

2 Urban Design Strategy

2.1 Framework of urban design principles

The design team have incorporated the principles of the MDF document and particular elements of the site analysis into the design guidelines presented. These have started to describe a framework of guidelines to direct the structure of the future development, to a reasonable level of detail. However, it appears that, as presented, they could still permit standardised developer solutions to be delivered, rather than the high quality and distinctive urban fabric that is stated as an ambition. We encourage the guidelines to be strengthened at this stage, in line with a clarified vision and site analysis, to form a better place-making proposal including consideration of the how a new community could be formed. We encourage the Council to raise the level of ambition for what can be delivered on this major project, especially given the low standard of place-making in the recent nearby developments.

2.2 Community facilities

While it is clear that the project team are working to the requirements set out in the MDF document, with regard to the quantity and general location of any non-residential uses, we do not believe that the proposed level of community facilities (i.e. a new school and a separate group of shops) is sufficient to achieve a truly sustainable development. We recommend that this issue be reviewed with the Council and consideration given to the incorporation of community facilities such as health or community centres, cafes or workplaces within the area, to help avoid the creation of a dormitory estate. It is also important to consider where the public facilities are best located to work to reinforce the neighbourhood, and how they are physically incorporated into the housing fabric in a way that will tie the settlement together. While this has been attempted at the 'local centre', there is very little set-out on the qualities of the 'secondary focus' area around the new school, and we would expect a clear strategy for the incorporation of this and any other facilities to be set out at this stage.

2.3 Building guidelines / typologies

We acknowledge that the masterplan report contains a methodical framework setting out a structure for the new neighbourhood and contains some sound moves. However, we feel that the guidelines on each character area could be strengthened, e.g. showing sectional relationships within areas, and we encourage the design team to also provide principles to define the residential typologies to be used, in addition to those on permitted building heights and plot layouts. While commending the consideration of the local street layouts as a way to develop a language of high quality suburban housing, we would suggest that a wider range of precedents needs to be presented to direct the design and type of the buildings to be built. This is needed partly to address the varied character and tenure types required throughout the area, but also to raise the level of aspiration for the architecture to be delivered.

2.4 Public realm / street guidelines

The principles for a local network of connections appear to describe a functioning network of streets, pedestrian routes and greenspaces. It is encouraging that the guidelines consider aspects of street-making and we commend the aspiration of defining a spatial hierarchy for the area, rather than just a road hierarchy. However, it is not yet apparent from the material presented that this aspiration has been achieved, or what the character of these routes and spaces will be. More detailed studies are required of how places with character will be achieved e.g. through three dimensional visualisations of the most important spaces or less generalised sections, which better describe the degree of enclosure, to enable the document to describe how these routes and spaces will work as places from the users' perspective.

3 Landscape design

3.1 Main landscape strategy

The masterplan landscape strategy sets-out components and guidelines for the greenspaces within the area, and the major restrictions placed on them, particularly from the existing infrastructure. However, the landscape strategy seems generic rather than being built from a keen understanding of topography, context or climate, and misses some of the opportunities the site presents. We acknowledge the efforts to engage with statutory bodies around ways to design around the electricity pylons to make a positive environment, and would want to see how the restrictions imposed on the designs by these and other infrastructure elements can be further creatively addressed.

3.2 Local landscape guidelines

The detailed guidelines for the principles of landscape design in each space appear somewhat generic and ill-defined, and these need to be strengthened to adequately describe the qualities that must be delivered to achieve the sought after high quality public environment e.g. the guidelines for the patterns and types of tree planting. Again we would suggest further study is required of the greenspaces, describing how each space might be used (on top of the designated play parks) and what the experience of these spaces might be.

4 Local centre

4.1 Shopping facilities and associated public space

The design of the 'local centre' will be crucial to the success of the whole scheme, as a main focal point and the location for many services for new and existing residents. We acknowledge the logic of positioning facilities at the entrance to the site where it is most accessible, and putting flats over the commercial units at a higher density. However, we find the spatial and architectural design solution proposed flawed, in that it fails to make this important location into an attractive place, either as a main gathering point, or as the built face of the new neighbourhood. The positioning of a large park-and-ride facility in front of the shops appears hostile to making a place to linger or enjoy, and especially so in combination with the existing roundabout and the rear fences of the Phase 1 housing adjacent. We are also not convinced that the proposals successfully integrate with housing beyond it. The layouts and design should be reconsidered to make better use of the important location and its sunny southerly aspect, and to establish a better relationship with the surrounding residential properties.

4.2 Train station

The rail station was one of the key reasons for allocating this site for housing, and an attractive and functioning way to use the rail service will be crucial to ensure that this vital link will be used as intended. However no evidence was presented about how the station was integrated with, or connected to, the site. It is appreciated that the station lies outwith the site, but the design and layout of this area needs to be significantly improved. We encourage the project team to re-consider the routes to and from it, and how they could be improved and integrated into the local centre, the park and ride, and the wider residential area. In conjunction with the Council, ways need to be found to improve the quality of the crossings over the local distributor road and the route under the railway bridge. Improvements to the currently windswept and unfriendly station are also vital, and further engagement with SPT and Network Rail should be pursued by all parties to achieve this.

5 Sustainability and delivery

5.1 Sustainability strategy

We acknowledge the submission of a sustainability strategy, and note that this should clarify how the ambitions for sustainable design will be achieved through the urban design guidelines e.g. how the form and arrangement of buildings can minimise energy use. This should also clearly meet the standards set out in the MDF document.

5.2 Delivery of future phases

It is of particular importance that that the 'local centre' and school are built in the first phase of construction as planned, to enable the neighbourhood to function successfully throughout development. In all matters, it will need to be clear how the masterplan will be delivered, so that all parties, including the Local Authority and future developers, understand the design qualities required when taking on construction on this project and that they will be fully engaged in delivering it over the coming years. The guidelines need to be seen as being more than just illustrative but rather as a real framework to shape the future of this as a great place to live.

Conclusion

We acknowledge that there is a thoroughness in the way the presented framework document has been put together. However, it lacks a level of clear visionary thinking to underpin the proposals, and which would provide a rationale for the decision making process. While the presented scheme demonstrates a considerable improvement in ambition over previous development models such as Phase 1, we do not believe that this has been brought together as a proposal for a place to live with real character. A better and clearer vision for the area is required, as an attractive neighbourhood that makes the most of the best aspects of the site. It also needs to be made clear how the masterplan will be delivered over time. If these matters can be addressed, along with particular issues such as the need for community facilities and the flawed approach to the local centre, then we might be able to support the proposals more fully. We trust that the framework can be reviewed to address our comments and wish to be kept informed of how the masterplan now develops.