

Report of the Woking Design Review  
Panel

# Goldsworth Road, Woking

6th May 2020

## The design review meeting

<b>Reference number</b>	1408/210420
<b>Date</b>	21 <sup>st</sup> April 2020
<b>Meeting location</b>	Online via Zoom
<b>Panel members attending</b>	Chris Bearman (Chair), Architecture, Housing Richard Portchmouth, Architecture, Urban Design Murray Smith, Architecture, Public Realm Design
<b>Panel manager</b>	Xan Goetzee-Barral, Design South East
<b>Presenting team</b>	Matt Turner, EcoWorld Ltd Prue Hay, EcoWorld Ltd Nigel Bidwell, JTP LLP Josh Cherry, JTP LLP Katy Davis, Carter Jonas Charlotte Hutchison, Carter Jonas Jenna Murray, Carter Jonas Sheena Bell, Gillespies LLP Jamshid Soheili, Systra Consultancy Ltd David Taylor, Montague Evans
<b>Other attendees</b>	Brooke Bounague, Woking Borough Council
<b>Site visit</b>	This review was carried out during the Covid-19 outbreak in 2020. Independent site study including desktop research prepared by Design South East and a digital walk-around (in a similar fashion to that which would have been conducted on-site) was carried out prior to the review.
<b>Scope of the review</b>	As an independent design review panel, the scope of this review was not restricted.
<b>Panel interests</b>	Panel members did not indicate any conflicts of interest.
<b>Confidentiality</b>	This report is confidential as the scheme is not yet the subject of a detailed planning application. Full details of our confidentiality policy can be found at the end of this report.

## The proposal

<b>Name</b>	Goldsworth Road Neighbourhood
<b>Site location</b>	Land north and south of Goldsworth Road, Woking, GU21 6LN
<b>Site details</b>	This 1.15 Ha site is located to the west of Woking town centre, consisting of land both to the north and south of Goldsworth Road. The site is occupied by a mixture of uses, including Woking Railway Athletic Club and York Road Project homeless shelter, and buildings reach four storeys. The site is bound by a railway to the south and the forthcoming tall building development at Victoria Square lies to the east.
<b>Proposal</b>	The proposal is for the creation of a neighbourhood area, comprising of development along Goldsworth Road in the form of three sets of tall buildings on the southern side, reaching 21, 29 and 40 storeys, joined by a podium with pavilion courtyards between the buildings. On the northern side, a 28-storey building is proposed, behind which the new location for the York Road Project homeless shelter is proposed, reaching 9 storeys and accessed via Church Street West. At ground level, a new public square and public realm improvements are proposed, including the closure of Goldsworth Road and the provision of cycle routes.
<b>Planning stage</b>	The proposal is at pre-application stage and a full planning application is expected to be submitted in May 2020.
<b>Local planning authority</b>	Woking Borough Council
<b>Planning context</b>	The site is allocated within Council's Site Allocations DPD.  Two tall building schemes in the eastern tall building cluster of Woking Town Centre, 81 Commercial Way and Crown Place, have been refused planning permission in March 2020 due to their height, scale and massing, as well as provision of affordable units, amongst other reasons.
<b>Planning history</b>	In 2016, Prime Place submitted plans to develop part of the site, with 560 flats in buildings of up to 35 storeys, on the land south of Goldsworth Road. Planning permission was granted in October 2016, but the development was not brought forward. A 'resolution to grant'

exists for the 20-32 Goldsworth Road part of the site, on the south-eastern side.

<b>Planning authority perspective</b>	The local authority sought advice on the slenderness of the proposed towers, how the proposal will be viewed in the context of Victoria Square, balconies (policy says these should be recessed) and materials and detailing, in particular the emphasis of vertical and horizontal elements.
<b>Community engagement</b>	The applicant informed the panel that public consultation has commenced and is ongoing, and that statutory consultation has taken place with Thamesway, Network Rail, Surrey County Council and Woking Borough Council.
<b>Previous reviews</b>	This scheme has previously been reviewed by the same panel on 7 <sup>th</sup> February 2020. Following that review, our report stated that we supported the overall strategy but that further refinement was required in the proposals for the open spaces, including the podium courtyards, as well as in the elevational treatment and internal arrangement. The panel expressed their confidence that these issues would be satisfactorily resolved.

## Summary

The proposal has progressed well, with significant areas of the landscape design, architectural concepts and internal arrangement well resolved.

It seems that some of the efforts carried out to develop the 'geode' concept have been undermined in the latest proposal, as the design appears to have a lessened sense of verticality and a bulky appearance. Further refinement of the articulation and elevational treatment is required to ensure this is well resolved, particularly with consideration for far views from the west. Also, the landscape proposal requires further work to ensure soft landscape spaces are of sufficient size to be usable without diminishing their function of unifying the variety of design concepts in a high-density site.

In the absence of a tall building framework or wider public realm framework for Woking Town Centre to guide the location of tall buildings, we cannot comment on whether this is the correct location for buildings of this height or on whether these proposals are the appropriate height for this location. We can comment on the design quality of the proposed scheme and on its impact on the town and surrounding environment, but we are conscious that we are commenting on the scheme without clarity about its potential future relationship with others coming forward, despite the fact that the impact on the townscape will be collective. As tall building developments in Woking town centre progress, issues arising out of the absence of a tall building or public realm framework will become more prevalent; this is of increasing concern.

## Key recommendations

1. The relationship and proximity between the BA tower and the York Road Project building should be carefully considered and explained as the design progresses.
2. The external spaces should be more clearly connected, visually and conceptually, to ensure the podium courtyard and street level public realm relate to each other.
3. Landscape proposals at street level should be reconsidered to ensure both hard, and soft spaces are equally valued whilst ensuring the overall concept is not diminished.
4. The articulation and elevational composition of the tall buildings should be reconsidered to prevent a bulky, top heavy or abrupt appearance.

## Detailed comments and recommendations

### 1. Design strategy

- 1.1. Despite the lack of a broader strategy, such as a town centre masterplan or tall buildings strategy, the applicant has approached the scheme as a masterplan, ensuring the proposal is well integrated into the urban fabric to promote a sense of place around tall buildings. The applicant is commended for this and the panel hope forthcoming tall building proposals in Woking follow suit.
- 1.2. The scheme has progressed well in terms of the site layout, with greater clarity in how movement across the site might work. The site's connection to Victoria Square is very important for the proposal to be successful as it signifies the westward extension of the town centre beyond the psychological boundary of Victoria Way. The proposal should seek to provide a road crossing that encourages movement across it, such as a wide 'tabletop' crossing.
- 1.3. The BA tower is in close proximity to the proposed York Road Project building. Given the sensitivities of the latter, it is important this relationship is well resolved, both at ground level and in the upper storeys, including the relationship between living spaces and bedrooms. This relationship was not discussed in any great detail in the review but should be carefully considered and clearly explained as the proposal progresses.
- 1.4. There is provision for the Woking Railway Athletic Club on the western side of the T1 building. This is discreetly located and animating the façade as well as the public realm, as with the proposed cycle hub, should be considered to maximise the presentation of its identity and community value.

### 2. Energy strategy

- 2.1. The approach to energy efficiency was not discussed in great detail at this review. Our guidance is that at the planning application stage the proposal must produce a clear energy strategy which details how the development will optimise thermal performance, minimise the demand for energy, supply the remaining energy requirements efficiently and optimise the use of renewables in order to align with the Government's emerging zero carbon policy. This strategy should be informed by detailed modelling work informed by respected calculation methods.

### 3. Landscape design and public realm

- 3.1. Overall the landscape design has progressed well, and the street level proposals have been rationalised to form a clearer and more effective design. Given the density and

mixture of uses in the development, the landscape proposal is under pressure to unify the various design elements both conceptually and visually. The street level and podium open spaces have a distinct form and articulation, with a finer grain design in the latter, which works effectively according to the uses of these spaces. However, a stronger visual connection between the two landscape areas is required to ensure the podium courtyards relate to the context and vice versa.

- 3.2. Street level trees will be particularly important in mediating this relationship, and their placement, height, canopy size as well as overall scale in the new streetscape should be further considered. Visualisations demonstrate some trees at ground level that seem somewhat diminutive, and a more significant vertical relationship between street and podium, including perhaps vegetation that works with the perforated brick wall of the car park, should be considered. Having trees or other suitably scaled soft landscape in the podium courtyards as well as in the 'lantern' podium spaces and loggia terraces could help, particularly if these are visible from street level.
- 3.3. The proposal for the podium courtyard has developed well, however the new building placed within it seems out of scale with the rest of the development, particularly as demonstrated in the section drawings. This area should be designed together with consideration of the public realm proposals as well as the scale, massing and views from the surrounding buildings.
- 3.4. In the previous review, comments were made regarding the fragmented nature of the street level landscape proposal. It seems this is still somewhat an issue as the proposal has small green areas that appear under-scaled and potentially lacking function and therefore seem to be left-over spaces from the large linear cross-routes, or 'cuts' of hard standing across the grass and vegetation. To resolve this, the location and size of the cuts should be refined, and a hierarchy should be established to ensure these are purposeful and promote wayfinding principles without compromising the green infrastructure.
- 3.5. The ground floor public realm plans did not clearly indicate the ground floor entrances; these should be visibly marked to ensure the design responds appropriately. It would be preferable to see the entrance lobbies described fully in plans and sections as a key spatial interface between street and buildings.
- 3.6. The drawings provided indicate there is roof space that has not been activated; the design team is encouraged to maximise green and external amenity spaces where possible.

#### **4. Height, massing and elevational composition**

- 4.1. The proposals for the buildings have developed significantly, with architectural concepts, such as the colonnades, balconies and green spaces further refined since

the previous review. However overall, the buildings appear to have a bulky mass and end abruptly at the top, particularly as viewed from the west. It is uncertain what the appearance of the buildings from afar will be and therefore the extent to which the towers need to be distinct in their placement and articulation so that they do not appear bulky, both individually or as a cluster, from a distance. As the design progresses it is important that far views are analysed.

- 4.2. Previous iterations of the design, shown in a wooden model at the previous review, demonstrated a clear expression of verticality in the T3 and BA towers, with the elevation wrapped around a serrated form to provide a sense of solidity. This clearly presented the geode concept. Unfortunately, it seems the concept has become diluted in the latest iteration, particularly so on the outer elevations facing away from Goldsworth Road.
- 4.3. The tops of the T3 and BA towers have been articulated distinctly to the rest of the building, without brick and with horizontal elements instead, further weakening the geode concept and compromising the vertical expression. Brick is used as an enclosing skin around the towers, and therefore terminating this before reaching the top results in a sense of fragility as the building envelopes do not appear to hold the inner crystalline forms with such strength or confidence.
- 4.4. The outer elevations of the T3 and BA towers could more clearly relate to the materiality of the T1 buildings, referred to as The Foothills, to contrast with the elevational treatment of the inner elevations facing towards Goldsworth Road. This will provide a distinctively stronger outer skin and articulate the geode concept with greater clarity. Also, the elevational treatment should be extended throughout the height of tower, driving the building's vertical expression and reducing its bulky appearance to allow for a more elegant design.
- 4.5. The T1 buildings, referred to as The Foothills, have a more successful massing, composed of three buildings that are staggered in plan and step up sequentially in height; this breaks up the apparent scale. Also, they have been articulated more successfully, utilising distinct elements at the top of the buildings and balconies to emphasise a sense of verticality. Employing these design elements in other buildings within the proposal could be considered.
- 4.6. Given that each of the three T1 buildings, together known as The Foothills, has a distinct massing, height and placement, the design team should question whether it is necessary for them to have a distinct articulation at the top too. The tallest of the three buildings has a series of canopies above the top-level windows; it is unclear as to whether these serve a function other than being purely decorative, such as shading. In any case, the open frame of the smallest of the T1 buildings works most successfully and applying this design to the other two T1 buildings should be



considered. Extending the open frame to a height of two stories should be considered to ensure the building does not have an abrupt termination.

## 5. Internal arrangement

- 5.1. The proposals for the internal arrangement have improved overall. The circulation spaces in the T1 building now have natural light and the corridors are shorter. The corridor in the T2 building is staggered, and whilst the length is not ideal, this shift in the plan more comfortably allows for 11 units to be accessed. The quality and amenity for the T2, T3 and BA buildings would be significantly enhanced with the incorporation of natural light into the common circulation areas.

## 6. Materials and detailing

- 6.1. For the development to be successful, it is important that the podium courtyards relate to the street level public realm to establish a clear and unified relationship. This should be considered in the landscape proposal, through to smaller scale design decisions of materials and detailing. A mixture of hard and soft materials should be employed.
  - 6.2. As the elevational strategy is developed, the design team should consider the orientation of the building, in terms of its context and the immediate environmental conditions, to inform the composition and materiality of the elevations.
  - 6.3. Incorporating details of the local context into the facade is welcomed, however the panel questioned how visible the detail will be at higher levels, such as 20 storeys and above, and this should be considered in the design.
  - 6.4. Paragraph 130 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2018) states: *'Local planning authorities should also seek to ensure that the quality of approved development is not materially diminished between permission and completion, as a result of changes being made to the permitted scheme (for example through changes to approved details such as the materials used).'*
  - 6.5. In order to be consistent with this national policy, the applicant team and local authority should note Design South East's guidance on material quality and detail. At planning application stage, the quality of the detailing should be demonstrated through large scale drawings at 1:20 and 1:5 of key elements of the building/landscape and should be accompanied by actual material samples which should be secured by condition as part of any planning approval.
-

**Confidentiality**

If the scheme was not the subject of a planning application when it came to the panel, this report is offered in confidence to those who attended the review meeting. There is no objection to the report being shared within the recipients' organisations. Design South East reserves the right to make the contents of this report known should the views contained in this report be made public in whole or in part (either accurately or inaccurately). Unless previously agreed, pre-application reports will be made publicly available if the scheme becomes the subject of a planning application or public inquiry. Design South East also reserves the right to make this report available to another design review panel should the scheme go before them. If you do not require this report to be kept confidential, please inform us.

If the scheme is the subject of a planning application the report will be made publicly available and we expect the local authority to include it in the case documents.

**Role of design review**

This is the report of a design review panel, forum or workshop. Design review is endorsed by the National Planning Policy Framework and the opinions and recommendations of properly conducted, independent design review panels should be given weight in planning decisions including appeals. The panel does not take planning decisions. Its role is advisory. The panel's advice is only one of a number of considerations that local planning authorities have to take into account in making their decisions.

The role of design review is to provide independent expert advice to both the applicant and the local planning authority. We will try to make sure that the panel are informed about the views of local residents and businesses to inform their understanding of the context of the proposal. However, design review is a separate process to community engagement and consultation.

The North Kent Architecture Centre Limited

trading as Design South East

Admirals Office

The Historic Dockyard

Chatham, Kent

ME4 4TZ

T 01634 401166

E [info@designsoutheast.org](mailto:info@designsoutheast.org)

The logo for Design South East, featuring a stylized yellow shape that resembles a speech bubble or a map outline of the region, with the text "Design South East" inside in white.

**Design  
South East**