

Report of the Woking Design Review
Panel

Goldsworth Road, Woking

9th June 2020

The design review meeting

Reference number	1422/200520
Date	20 th May 2020
Meeting location	Online via Zoom
Panel members attending	Chris Bearman (Chair), Architecture, Housing Richard Portchmouth, Architecture, Urban Design Murray Smith, Architecture, Public Realm Design
Panel manager	Xan Goetzee-Barral, Design South East
Presenting team	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 Muarry, Carter Jonas Sheena Bell, Gillespies LLP Patrick Conn, Gillespies LLP Jamshid Soheili, Systra Consultancy Ltd David Taylor, Montague Evans
Other attendees	Brooke Bougnague, Woking Borough Council
Site visit	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.
Scope of the review	As an independent design review panel, the scope of this review was not restricted. However, in particular the Council asked the panel to discuss the YRP building, including the proposed screening to the windows and balconies; the amended landscaping to the ground floor and podium levels; and alterations to the tops of the buildings, including the bay elevations and oriel windows.
Panel interests	Panel members did not indicate any conflicts of interest.
Confidentiality	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

Name	Goldsworth Road Neighbourhood
Site location	Land north and south of Goldsworth Road, Woking, GU21 6LN
Site details	<p>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.</p>
Proposal	<p>The proposal is for the creation of a neighbourhood area with approximately 965 residential units, 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 (T1, T2 and T3 buildings respectively), joined by a podium with pavilion courtyards between the buildings. On the northern side, a 28-storey building is proposed (BA building), 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, the provision of cycle routes and an access road to the west.</p>
Planning stage	<p>The proposal is at pre-application stage and a full planning application is expected to be submitted in May 2020.</p>
Local planning authority	Woking Borough Council
Planning context	<p>The site is allocated within the Council's Site Allocations DPD.</p> <p>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.</p>
Planning history	<p>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'</p>

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

Community engagement

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.

Previous reviews

This scheme has previously been reviewed on two occasions by the same Design South East panel. Following the first on 7th February 2020, 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.

Following the second review on 21st April 2020, our report expressed how the proposal had progressed well, with significant areas of the landscape design, architectural concepts and internal arrangement well resolved. Further refinement of the articulation and elevational treatment was recommended, to resolve the proposal's lessened sense of verticality and bulky appearance. Also, the landscape proposal required further work to ensure spaces were useful and not fragmented.

Summary

The panel commend the applicant and design teams on their thorough presentation and efforts in progressing the proposal through a series of design reviews in such an exemplary manner. Since the previous review the overall proposal has significantly improved; the concept and design strategy are sound, and the proposal now requires refinement of particular elevational design elements and architectural details. The panel is confident the design team will successfully resolve these to deliver a well-considered addition to Woking Town Centre.

The panel acknowledge and welcome all the proposed amendments detailed in the letter addressed to the chair of the panel, received following the review (dated 29 May 2020); the amendments are consistent with the advice provided in the review.

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 central green street on Goldsworth Road should be refined to ensure the layout responds to the wider public realm proposal and connections across the street.
2. The interface between the inner crystalline form and outer hard shell of The Geodes (T3 and BA towers) requires further work to ensure these elements appear as distinct from all perspectives; this will ensure the overall 'geode' concept is not undermined.
3. The design of the top of The Geodes should be reconsidered to articulate an extruded form throughout and ensure an elegant design with an emphasised verticality.
4. The elevational composition and treatment of The Foothills (T1 and T2 buildings) should be reconsidered so that this is informed by a clear rationale that relates to the layout and form and distinctly articulates the individual buildings.
5. The building entrances and canopies should be reconsidered to ensure they articulate the hierarchy of entrances and building scale.
6. The placement and arrangement of the patterned vertical panels and balustrades in the York Road Project building should be reconsidered to ensure these better relate to each other and achieve a balanced and elegant appearance.

Detailed comments and recommendations

1. Landscape proposal

- 1.1. The landscape proposal has progressed successfully; the overall landscape strategy appears to have been rationalised to allow this element of the proposal to effectively tie together the various design concepts across the site. The public realm proposal on Goldworth Road is now less fragmented and has effectively responded to the constraints here and better relates to the placement of the building entrances. There is a stronger link between the street level public realm proposal and podium courtyards, achieved with enhanced vertical planting as recommended in the previous review, as well as the planting emerging from the proposed pergolas at podium level. The proposed tilted lawn creates a softer character to the east of the site, which will effectively counterbalance with the hard landscape of the Victoria Square development further eastwards. The greening of roofs, as previously recommended, is welcomed, as is the design team's consideration of how planting and vegetation will appear at nighttime. The biodiversity function of the landscape should continue to be a primary consideration of the landscape strategy.
- 1.2. The proposed central green strip on Goldsworth Road appears to be not yet resolved. The patches of planting and vegetation here have acute and sharp corners, resulting in a disparate design. The design team should consider other configurations; for example the strip could be formed by rounded corners on the outer edges, relating to the layout of the access road to the west, whilst the 'cuts' of hardstanding across this could be formed by sharp corners to accentuate the pedestrian routes across.
- 1.3. The panel acknowledge that Victoria Way is a county road and therefore the proposal is limited in its scope to improve the pedestrian and cyclist crossing facilities here. However, the applicant should consider the rapid changing attitudes to car use and therefore the proposal for the area immediately west of this, within the site, should be future proofed with this consideration in mind.
- 1.4. The tree strategy, proposing a variety of tall and potted trees, is supported; the introduction of seven metre trees is particularly welcomed as this will be effective in creating a more robust and established set of trees from the outset. Celebrating building entrances with colourful trees, as per the panel's previous advice, is welcomed, as is the introduction of the Yoshino Cherry; this is particularly distinctive and will be a positive impact in a public realm setting.
- 1.5. Tree planter pots are proposed on Goldworth Road in the central reservation of the access road. Given the shallowness of the soil here, the design team should consider introducing tree planters that respond to and read as part of the materiality of the street, so that these effectively tie in with the public realm proposal and do not appear as simply ornamental.

2. T3 and BA towers (The Geodes)

- 2.1. Overall, the articulation of the geode concept has improved, successfully articulating how the inner crystalline form in the Goldsworth Road elevations is contained by the outer hard shell. The Geodes have a common architectural language allowing them to be distinct to The Foothills (T1 and T2 buildings), relate well to each other and to the Victoria Square development to the east. This is demonstrated well in the townscape views.
- 2.2. The interface moment of the inner crystalline form of the buildings and the outer hard shell requires further refinement, particularly in the T1 building as viewed from the east, where the floor slab of the balconies is flush with outermost concrete frame. This undermines the geode concept as these elements risk appearing as one, weakening the apparent solidity and structural function of the masonry frame around the crystalline form. Setting back the balconies should be considered as is the case on the Goldsworth Road elevation; this will give the outer masonry frame autonomy as well as emphasise the verticality at this highly prominent moment. The wooden model seen at the first review should continue to be the reference for the geode concept as this very clearly articulates how the concept can be materialised.
- 2.3. Furthermore, studies detailing how the inner crystalline elevation of serrated balconies hits the ground retail level should be produced to ensure there is a good understanding of this key moment.
- 2.4. The tops of the buildings continue to require further refinement as these relate poorly to the rest of the building and the overall form concept. The proposal is for a distinctly articulated top; unlike The Foothills this does not seem necessary or appropriate as The Geodes are extruded forms, not monolithic objects, and therefore having the same elevational composition throughout should be considered. Depth should be introduced in the upper stories, preferably by continuing balconies along the height of the building, as this will articulate the verticality of the building and result in a more elegant design. If this is not possible, deeper shadow gaps aligned with the balconies below could be introduced, resulting in bay windows that continue the building's vertical expression.
- 2.5. The use of brick in the frame of The Goedes should be carefully considered to allow the frame to remain distinct from infill brick panels; this will ensure the elevation is clearly articulated.
- 2.6. The elevational composition would benefit from more clearly articulating the horizontal joints between the vertical panels as this will help moderate the overall building scale.

3. T1 and T2 buildings (The Foothills)

- 3.1. Overall the design of The Foothills has improved, particularly as seen from the west. The materiality is now working more successfully, connecting the buildings to street level and ensuring a rhythm of distinct buildings along Goldsworth Road.
- 3.2. How the three T1 buildings relate to each other should be carefully considered, in particular the two precast concrete band running across the T1 buildings are confusing as they result in an inconsistent shift in rhythm of the tallest T1 building; removing the bands should be reconsidered to allow each building to appear as distinct.
- 3.3. The relationship between the stepping of the buildings and the elevational treatment and composition is not convincing as it seems arbitrary and does not appear to be informed by a clear logic. This is particularly the case as viewed from the west, where it is unclear how the use of brick and top-level frames relates to the building design in each of the individual T1 and T2 buildings.
- 3.4. The verticality of the T1 and T2 buildings fronting onto Goldsworth Road appears suppressed and the top-level frame here could be taller to resolve this, providing a more celebrated, distinct and elegant design. Also, a taller frame might work more effectively with roof level landscape proposals so that greenery is more visible from the outside.
- 3.5. The podium connecting the T1, T2 and T3 buildings appears to have the same red brick as the T2 building. Using a different brick colour should be considered to allow the podium and T2 building to be differentiated.
- 3.6. The proposed oriel windows add character to the buildings and are welcomed as they achieve a winter garden quality which is positive and relates to the elevated greenery throughout the proposal. Bay studies should be carried out to further inform their design and ensure they relate well to the scale and massing of the building.

4. York Road Project building

- 4.1. Overall the design has progressed well, and the panel welcome the use of patterns to articulate the building's unique yet simple architectural language.
- 4.2. Both the main entrance and bin store entrance to the building have a double storey frame. Having a single storey frame for the bin store entrance consistent with the elevational composition above would better reflect the hierarchy of the main entrance.
- 4.3. The elevation is successful in articulating a strong and simple façade, with an appropriate depth and ratio of glazing to brick. The patterned vertical panes are set

back from the façade and this risks undermining the setback of the glazing; having the vertical panels flush with the façade should be considered.

- 4.4. Despite the balcony balustrades having the same pattern as the vertical panes, these are of quite different proportions and do not seem to relate well to one another, resulting in an inelegant appearance. Whilst the panel acknowledge the particular and sensitive specifications for the balcony balustrades, the design team should explore alternative configurations that might result in a clearer relationship to the vertical panels. For example, a series of vertical panels could be used for a balustrade.
- 4.5. The lateral brick piers at the top level of the building are distracting and diminish the strength of the façade; these should be reconsidered.
- 4.6. The glazing on the south side of the building could be angled or the elevation could be serrated so that there isn't a need for a screen on the outlook, and instead this elevation could address the gap west of the BA building.

5. Building entrances

- 5.1. The several building entrances along Goldsworth Road are equal in scale and articulation, which does not reflect the significant variance of building scale. The entrance to the T3 tower is lesser in scale than to the T1 and T2 buildings (The Foothills). This results in a distorted hierarchy and the design team should consider tuning the entrance designs to reflect the buildings they serve. Whilst the scale of the entrances could be the same, the articulation of the façade could respond to the design of the building it serves.
- 5.2. The proposed canopies above the building entrances on Goldsworth Road straddle the openings by interlocking with the brick piers either side; this appears uncomfortable. Allowing the canopies to slide inside the opening so that the brick pier is fully visible would seem a more effective design. Also, as with the building entrances, the design of the canopy should reflect the building scale and be informed by a rationale that relates to the hierarchy of entrances.

6. Internal arrangement

- 6.1. The panel welcome the design team's efforts to reduce the quantum of single aspect north-facing units to none. The addition of windows with an eastern or western outlook will result in a significantly improved living experience for residents in north facing units.
- 6.2. The design team should continue to explore further opportunities to improve the quality of internal circulation spaces by increasing natural daylight and optimising access routes and connections to the main entrance.

7. Materials and detailing

- 7.1. 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).'*
- 7.2. In order to be consistent with this national policy, the applicant team and local authority should note Design South East's general 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.

8. Energy strategy

- 8.1. The approach to energy efficiency was not discussed in great detail at this review, although the panel acknowledge the comprehensive statement made regarding this. 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.

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.

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The logo for Design South East, featuring a stylized yellow map of the South East region of England. The text "Design South East" is written in white, bold, sans-serif font across the map.

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