



Claire Hambleton  
Bloor Homes SW  
Unit 7, Latham Road  
Swindon  
Wiltshire, SN25 4DL

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Sent by email to: [claire.hambleton@bloorhomes.com](mailto:claire.hambleton@bloorhomes.com)

Dear Claire,

**DWSG025      Sodbury Road, Wickwar      29 June 2022**  
**Erection of up to 180 dwellings, a local shop and associated infrastructure (Outline) with access to be determined; all other matters reserved. P22/01300/O**

Thank you for asking the Design West Panel to review this scheme. As ever, we wish to support the project team in realising the maximum economic, social and environmental benefit from the scheme, through good design.

We are extremely grateful for the clear information provided to the Panel prior to the review and for the well-prepared presentation at the meeting. We were able to visit the site prior to the meeting, which was very helpful in understanding the setting. There were no conflicts of interest declared prior to the meeting.

We appreciated the constructive and open engagement of all those present and we offer the following observations, which we hope are of help in the development of the proposals for the site.

### **Project Context**

The project is intended to offer circa 180 residential units, with some additional commercial space. The mix of accommodation is intended to be policy compliant with market priced units consisting of approximately 20% 2-bed units, 35% 3-bed units and 45% 4-bed units. There will be 35% affordable that will include some 1 bed units. The 5% policy requirement for self-build or custom build is subject to discussion with the LPA. Parking provision will be policy compliant with household parking typically provided on plot and 20% visitor parking to be accommodated on street. The density across the developed area is c 40 dwellings/ha.

The scheme has been submitted for outline planning consent, with all matters to be reserved, other than the detailed design of the access points.

The Panel has been asked to consider the proposals on their merits at this stage, and we would like to stress that the Panel is not offering any comments on the planning principles associated with the development, or the broader policy issues. Our comments are largely related to the masterplan and associated design issues.

### **Site context**

The site benefits from proximity to several heritage assets. Immediately to the north is the listed South Farm farmhouse and to the west is the listed Frith Farm farmhouse. The Conservation Area of Wickwar lies to the north and there are some distant views available of the Church tower in Wickwar. The site is



currently agricultural land (grade 3B and 4). Two residential developments of c 170 homes and 110 homes have recently been completed, or are in the process of being completed, on the opposite side of Sodbury Road.

### **Landscape**

The project team explained the landscape context and approach. It was reported that there were some significant trees on site and evidence of newts on adjacent sites. There are hedgerows of significant ecological and landscape value, which the layout had respected. Overall, it was hoped the scheme would meet the statutory 10% biodiversity net gain (BNG) through on-site provision alone.

In general, we support the retention and enhancement of landscape features where appropriate. We encourage the team to maximise BNG and aim for above 10% if achievable on this site. This would provide enhancement from the site for residents and the wider community.

We noted that the public open space (POS) provision was concentrated along the open boundary to the west. We appreciate that surface water flow across the site had resulted in the current solution, but perhaps this is too engineering led and that an alternative solution may offer more overall value and benefit. The current layout, in placing the majority of POS to the west, means only a small proportion of the homes have aspect over significant POS. The POS appears peripheral to the scheme, whereas an alternative layout may place it as a more central element, offering greater potential for social interactions and improved aspect to homes within the body of the site (the houses along the west will retain an aspect over largely open countryside).

We were concerned that the SuDS provision should not be concentrated in a single large attenuation feature, as this may not offer the best landscape and ecology benefit. We suggest dispersing the SuDS provisions through a range of design elements including rain gardens. The swales mentioned are part of this dispersal and could provide significant biodiversity and landscape value. Seeking to hold some water within the site would be helpful in realising BNG.

The construction of swales and attenuation elements could likely create substantial quantities of fill material. It was explained that an engineering-led exercise would be carried out with respect to cut and fill across the site, with the aim of eliminating the removal of any material from the site. We welcome this but suggest the landscape architect forms part of the cut and fill planning from the outset. The land forming can offer significant design opportunities if considered at an early stage. Similarly, if not considered at an early stage, the changes in topography can create additional problems which earlier resolution can avoid.

The Panel suggested arrangements for the management of the landscape are considered at an early stage.

### **Transport and Connectivity**

The transport and movement patterns associated with the scheme were presented by the project team. The Panel suggest that some preliminary estimation of vehicular movements and proportions of transport modes would be helpful.

There are currently two access points (both off Sodbury Road) around the perimeter of the site. We noted that the PRoW through South Farm appeared underused. We suggest there may be benefit to the walking network, and to the farm itself, if an additional Non-Motorised User (NMU) connection was made through the northern part of the site, linking with the existing PRoW to the north west. This would utilise a field which is not part of the red line, but we understand is within the same land



ownership. Coupled with routes through the site, and improved crossings over Sodbury Road, there is real potential to enhance the PRoW network, with health and wellbeing benefits.

A movement strategy diagram, which clearly identifies site access points for vehicles, cyclist and pedestrians, might be helpful at this stage. This should include showing retained or altered networks of pedestrian and cycle use in the area. We understand a safe route to school assessment has been carried out to the primary school to the north, so it would be helpful to include this and other key routes as part of an overall movement strategy diagram.

The crossing points over Sodbury Road were explained. The current crossing point to the south does not appear to be ideally placed to serve the proposed shop location. It is likely to have been designed and provided to connect pedestrians from the east to the bus stop. Furthermore, volumes and speeds of vehicles on Sodbury Road were observed to be a barrier to pedestrian movements across the road, and the siting of the shop creates increased demand for this crossing. We note the recent traffic calming on Sodbury Road and support the Applicant's reported support for a gateway feature located at the shop, with improved crossing facilities, to address this issue.

It would also be helpful to ascertain if improvements to the bus service were envisaged, particularly if a southbound bus stop is planned near the shop. At present, there is a northbound bus stop near the site, and it was not clear where southbound bus users would catch the bus.

We noted a reference to a 30mph design speed for the principal road within the site, but this was agreed as an error and that the design speed within the site would be as low as possible. The possibility of running a bus loop through the site was raised. There appears no compelling rationale for running a bus loop through the site, given the proximity of services available on Sodbury Road. We suggest that sizing the carriageways for this unlikely scenario is likely to have an adverse impact on the desired character of the streetscape. We suggest the bus loop possibility is discussed and, if agreed, excluded at this point. This will allow the junctions, radii and carriageways within the scheme to be compressed as far as possible to create a low speed, pedestrian and cycle priority street design, suitable to provide the sort of residential neighbourhood and public realm quality desired. The homes will be provided with "fast" 7KW EV charging in line with Building Regulations, but we suggest the shop offers the opportunity for providing "rapid" 50kW charging points which could provide economic and community benefit.

The detailed junction design at the northern access point indicated a 6.5 m carriageway with a 2m pavement either side, all finished in tarmac. The loss of 2 willow trees to accommodate the access is regrettable, but we understand compensatory planting is proposed. Given the purpose and position of this access we are concerned that a 10.5m width of tarmac is unlikely to provide the sort of characterful public realm that is desired for the area (currently intend for community allotments and orchard as part of the setting to the listed building to the north). We understand that this length of road is intended to be adopted, but we nonetheless suggest that discussion with the design team and LPA are held with the aim of using a design layout and materials which would be more appropriate and attractive within the public realm.

The recent developments to the east and this current development could have the effect of establishing a new line of settlement, by extending the residential area of Wickwar to the south. Sodbury Road will therefore serve the purpose of a village street and less of a through road within the settlement area. Traffic calming has been introduced, but the Panel observed that Sodbury Road is relatively busy and is a relatively hostile environment for pedestrians and cyclists.



We therefore encourage the project team to consider ways in which their development might contribute to the changing character of Sodbury Road within the village. We suggest that the project provides the opportunity of establishing a clear threshold to the village on Sodbury Road close to the location of the proposed shop. Signage, planting, street furniture, crossing points and the shop itself would all contribute to creating a lower speed environment as motorists enter the village. This could be to the benefit of the shop, the new residents, and the village as a whole.

We welcome the reported use of managed access around the perimeter including public access across private drives to ensure ease of pedestrian movement around the development without requiring circuitous routes.

We recognise that parking is a reserved matter but recommend that potential parking requirements for the allotments and shops are considered at this stage as this has potential to overspill and affect the overall character of the development.

It was noted that Charfield Rail Station will re-open shortly. Any measures that might encourage cycle use to the station, or Yate, would be encouraged.

### **Heritage**

The heritage context and response was carefully explained by the project team. The impact assessments were reported and discussed, and the conclusions generally agreed with. The Panel welcome the early heritage assessments and the consideration of the setting of the heritage assets in developing the proposals. The Panel supports the approach taken.

With respect to the character of the area, the Panel suggests that the proposals should not seek to mimic the village centre, but rather seek to ground the proposals in their context through using similar patterns of variety in building form, material and detail. Commonly with new residential developments of this type, achieving this variety in an appropriate manner can be challenging, but we nonetheless recommend the design team seek ways to deliver this approach and to avoid potential perceptions of uniformity and banality which delivering repeated standard house types can produce.

It was felt that the mitigation measures proposed for any potential harm to the setting of the two farmhouses was appropriate, but that it was important that this is taken through into detailed design proposals, considering the impact of items such as signage and lighting.

### **Public realm**

We support the design team in their aim to create distinctive and appropriate public realm within and around the scheme.

We have mentioned potential improvements to the public realm in terms of the highway design at the northern entrance to the site and the contribution to the Sodbury Road streetscape in the area adjacent to the proposed shop. We also mention in the landscape section that the disposition of POS across the site could be reviewed. In this context there appears to be a potential solution that creates a greener heart to the development and in doing so would establish more opportunities for social engagement within a characterful neighbourhood place in the centre of the development. Reconsidering how play spaces for children and adults may contribute to this option for placemaking is something that might also be usefully considered.

We noted the illustrations indicating two nodes within the development, but we were not convinced that the use of hard landscaping and the sorts of houses enclosing the spaces would provide the sort of high quality distinctive public realm that is required. We suggest that developing more distinctive



public realm proposals, tailored more closely to the specifics of the site and the development would be beneficial. This would include utilising the existing hedgerows and proposed swales as part of a rich and varied hierarchy of hard and soft public realm spaces as one moved around and through the development.

We noted that the alignment of some streets, with some minor revision, may also allow distant views to the Church tower from some viewpoints. If this was achievable it would help root the development into its existing village context.

### **Layout and Sustainability**

The project team explained the rationale for the draft layout. On the site visit it was reported the electricity lines in the north of the site would be routed underground, and this was welcomed. The Panel noted that the road layout and building layouts appeared consistent with a relatively typical low density, suburban layout, of the sort commonly seen across the region in the past 20 years. The Panel commented that the form factor of this sort of semi-detached and detached housing, with private drives and car spaces in between plots, was significantly worse than that for terraced housing of at least 6 houses in length. If the houses were to offer the same operational energy performance there would need to be a significant increase in insulation thicknesses, beyond what cavity construction might easily accommodate. In short, the layout did not appear to offer the sort of inherently low carbon housing typology that the climate crisis will increasingly require.

The orientation of the units also does not appear to respond to solar orientation, so some thought at this stage to the likely requirement for roof mounted PVs may result in a layout more suited to improving the efficiency of on-site energy generation.

It was reported that the insulation and operational energy targets for the development would be consistent with statutory requirements and that there were no specific targets with respect to embodied carbon or whole life carbon.

We appreciate the commercial constraints to which this project is subject. However, we are aware building performance in terms of sustainability, and in particular energy use, is a factor in householder purchases which is of rapidly increasing significance. We therefore suggest that there would be benefit in the project team exploring options that provide building performance at levels above the statutory minimum requirements.

Perhaps the project is of sufficient size so that part of it may be used to develop layouts and types which are more consistent with the move to zero carbon, and evaluation of these might help the developer in evolving their residential offer in the future. Some appropriate use of terraced typology would appear consistent with this and would also increase variety within the development, as recommended above. Terrace typologies can also offer more consistent spatial enclosure within the streetscape, which can help improve the variety and distinctiveness of the public realm. These options are likely to require some revisions to the standard suburban street pattern currently indicated.

We queried whether the shop was better located on the Sodbury Road at the northern end of the site. It was reported that this had been the first option, but that due to consideration of the setting of the adjacent listed building and the space requirements of likely operators, the southern location was preferable. It was suggested that a Class E designation of the commercial premises would offer most flexibility in allowing for the most appropriate potential uses.

We noted the 10m strip of land left adjacent to the properties to the east. This was explained as being retained within the landowner's control. The Panel noted the civic aspiration of the landowner, but were unconvinced that this would be helpful to the scheme and residents in practice. It seemed possible that the land may simply be left, offering little benefit to either the existing or new properties.



If so the potential for antisocial use or behaviours may become an issue. If only some of the houses extend their gardens westward there is the potential for pockets of land to be left under no clear management. In short, the Panel suggest that the project team discuss this area with the landowner with a view to creating a proposal that will optimise the value of this land over the long term, in terms to amenity and ecology.

### **Conclusion**

The Panel welcome the opportunity to comment on the proposals and we are grateful for the comprehensive and clear information provided by the team. We hope the Panel's observations are helpful in supporting them in designing a project that optimises the potential of the site to provide a new housing development that meets the objectives of all stakeholders.

Yours sincerely,

**Prof Alex Wright**

**Chair of South Glos. Design Review Panel**

cc.

Panel members:

Michele Lavelle	Landscape
Lucy Barron	Heritage
Chris Carter	Transport

Julie Tanner	Design West
South Glos Council (observing only)	