



FRAME PROJECTS

Epping Forest District Quality Review Panel

Report of Formal Review Meeting: 13 – 15a Alderton Hill, Loughton, IG10 3JD

Friday 2 November 2018

Committee Room 1, Epping Forest District Council, 323 High Street, CM16 4BZ

Panel

Peter Maxwell (chair)
Tony Burton
Jan Kattein
Chris Snow
Richard Wilson

Attendees

Alison Blom-Cooper	Epping Forest District Council
David Baker	Epping Forest District Council
Ione Braddick	Epping Forest District Council
Lydia Grainger	Epping Forest District Council
Corey Isolda	Epping Forest District Council
Allison De Marco	Frame Projects

Apologies / report copied to

Nigel Richardson	Epping Forest District Council
Stephan Solon	Epping Forest District Council
Deborah Denner	Frame Projects

1. Project name and site address

13 - 15a Alderton Hill, Loughton, Essex IG10 3JD

Planning application reference: EPF/2115/18

2. Presenting team

Mark Curry	Elysian Residences
Richard Foot	DP9 Ltd
Roy Collado	Collado Collins
Dominic Hailey	Collado Collins
Peter Stewart	Peter Stewart Consultancy
Guillaume Baltz	BHSL
Sara Rocha	BHSL

3. Planning authority's views

The application site, 13 – 15a Alderton Hill, sits within site allocation LOU.R14 of the Epping Forest Local Plan (2017 Submission Version). The allocation identifies five properties, at 13 – 19 Alderton Hill, for redevelopment for 33 dwellings. The proposed scheme is the second application submitted by the applicant for this site – a previous application for 105 elderly person units was refused planning permission at Planning Committee on 18 April 2018, citing that by '*reason of its height and bulk the proposal would appear overbearing and incongruous within the context of the established pattern of development fronting Alderton Hill...*'. An appeal is scheduled to be heard at a Public Inquiry commencing on 26 February 2019.

The current application proposes 89 housing units for over-65s, as well as amenity facilities including on-site care, restaurant and multi-purpose activity spaces for residents, landscaping and 64 car spaces in undercroft parking at the rear and south side of the block. Planning officers note that whether the type of proposed accommodation conforms to a C3 allocation has been questioned.

Epping Forest District Council would welcome the panel's views on the quality of the proposed development.



4. Quality Review Panel's views

Summary

This is the second proposal submitted by the applicant for this site – it is unusual for Quality Review Panel comments to be requested by a planning authority in such circumstances. It is not the panel's role to advise on use classes or act as an arbiter on specific architectural styles; its comments therefore focus on the design quality of the proposed development.

The panel supports the applicant's aspirations for high quality development, including locating elderly care schemes within walking distance of town centre / high road facilities, and providing a non-institutional environment, with on-site support facilities.

While the panel commends these aspirations, questions remain to be answered across several key areas. It therefore encourages further dialogue between planning officers and the applicant team to resolve these, including: the scheme's relationship with the wider context; site and block layout; massing and height; landscaping, including microclimate; liveability; architectural expression; sustainable travel; and protecting design quality. It would like to see the proposal again, if possible. These comments are expanded below.

Relationship to wider context and connections

- The panel thinks that, subject to convincingly reinforcing connectivity with the high road / town centre facilities, the application site is in a sustainable location for development. It will however be critical to ensure good pedestrian and cycle connections to the centre and other facilities to ensure sustainable development.
- The panel recommends engaging with County and District Council officers to take forward measures that enhance connectivity, including ensuring that future residents can safely and easily cross Alderton Hill – which is heavily trafficked. There may be an opportunity to calm this road.

Site layout and landscape

- The panel thinks that the site layout is overly influenced by vehicular access, turning, servicing and parking – rather than prioritising the experience and amenity of residents and other pedestrians.
- The panel believes the location of the main vehicular entrance undermines the scheme layout and would support this being reviewed again.
- Opportunities to create a strong landscape and public realm strategy, which responds to the surrounding context, will be eroded if competing vehicular demands are not challenged.



- The panel suggests revisiting the current imbalance between hardstanding and soft landscaping. A more generous approach should be taken to greening and enhancing the urban realm.
- It recommends exploring opportunities for a 360-degree pedestrian route around the scheme footprint and reconsidering the current dead-end to the south block.
- In refining the approach to planting, opportunities to maintain and enhance ecological richness should be maximised. Clarification of how the proposed species will contribute towards a sustainable landscape strategy that promotes biodiversity would be welcome.
- A question is raised about the impact of overshadowing by the building – the courtyard will be overshadowed in winter until mid-March. The panel recommends exploring how the configuration of the building form could be refined. Particularly, how form can be further separated to improve sunlight and daylight access, as well as additional access points to the buildings from the landscape.

Block layout and courtyard

- There are concerns that block layout, location of entrances and cores will substantially limit the options for residents to move through the scheme. Residents of the southern section will have to navigate a particularly lengthy and circuitous corridor to access their homes – a long walk for elderly residents.
- While the panel understands the desire to provide a main single secured entry point, sheltered circulation and high degree of interconnectivity between units, it recommends considering how additional, shorter, routes could be introduced. Options providing more choice for residents could include routes across the courtyard and refinements to the building form.

Massing, including height

- The panel thinks that the approach to height is appropriate.
- The panel supports the approach driving the Alderton Hill elevation frontage, which visually breaks the long northern block, giving the appearance of two buildings fronting the street.
- It is, however, concerned that the illustrations provided may not give a full picture of the scheme's appearance – including scale and massing. Without illustrations from different perspectives / angles it is difficult to assess how the scheme will be perceived.



- The panel questions whether those areas of the scheme that sit behind the front façade would also be seen from Alderton Hill – for example, if the taller block to the rear of the site may be seen through the gap in the frontage.
- The panel would recommend providing further additional illustrations of the scheme from various viewpoints.

Architectural expression

- The panel understands that the approach to architectural expression has evolved through an iterative process, including engagement with residents.
- The panel suggests that it is important to take forward a single clear concept for the whole scheme rather than contrasting approaches to different elevations within the same building block.
- It suggests exploring how elevations might be simplified, including paring back the number of ideas and styles currently influencing the Alderton Hill elevation.

Liveability

- It will be important to ensure that residents enjoy good levels of internal amenity – particularly as people tend to spend more time in their homes as they age.
- The panel is surprised to see such a significant proportion of single-aspect units, in a scheme with such laudable aspirations for high-quality homes. It is particularly concerned about the two north-facing single-aspect units – it strongly recommends that these be designed out.
- It recommends looking at how plans could be rationalised. Consideration should be given, for example, to reducing irregular layouts and avoiding overly long corridors and awkwardly positioned windows.
- The panel is concerned that, without assisted cooling, units will overheat, making them uncomfortable. It suggests reducing unit depth and looking to increase daylight in kitchens.
- Balcony sizes should be reconsidered – there should be enough space for two people to sit comfortably. Other schemes promoted by Elysian Residences, that were shown to the panel, appear to adopt a more generous approach, some with recessed balconies which increases their usability.

Sustainable travel

- Given the emphasis placed on the strategic advantages of the site location, including proximity to the high road, the panel is surprised at the number of parking spaces proposed and would support a further reduction.



- While the panel understands the desire by residents to retain their cars to maintain a sense of independence, it strongly urges further consideration of how sustainable travel options can be embedded – including, accessible cycle and scooter storage and carpooling / sharing options, again to improve the overall landscape and amenity proposed.

Protecting design quality

- It will be critical to ensure that quality is not compromised by value engineering. The panel would like to know how high quality design will be maintained through to detailed design and construction.

Next steps

- The panel is available to provide further comments, if requested to do so by Epping Forest District Council Officers.

