

PlacesMatter

Design Review Report Masterplan & Design Code

25 March 2023

Masterplan & Design Code, Edenfield

Reference: PM_2023_009

Report of the Online Design Review Panel

Date of Review: 15 March 2023
Format: Online
Lead Designers: Randall Thorp & Pegasus

Findings

The vision and design narrative are too generic – this could just be anywhere - and they don't flow from the analysis, despite the advanced stage that you have reached with this.

The landscape principles are strong but these don't penetrate the development, being confined to the edges only. The approach presents “one lump and wall of development”, so the landscape needs to break this up by integrating green spaces with built form positively.

There needs to be a much clearer narrative as to how key views translate to the masterplan layout. You must keep 'glimpsed views' to the countryside to help with the sense of place.

The nuance of existing topography on building layouts is not yet being convincingly responded to through the design and the quantum of development seems to just fill all the available space. Greater interrogation in 3D is needed.

There appears to be no obvious difference between your character areas and you need to translate the character in the landscape and typologies, so, again, think more in 3D drawings.

The arrival point off Market Street is a real challenge and needs a much more detailed assessment, as the approach looks arbitrary.

The movement network doesn't feel like it fits here. It needs to flow North-South and with the topography, to create a more legible, permeable place, that will be "walkable and lovely".

You are forgetting what makes this sort of village attractive and showing a suburban attitude to what the new place will look like that makes the new place seem very monotonous.

You are missing a regulating plan of the 'key moves' or "must haves", that includes the key landscape and movement design strategies. Everything should lead from that.

The character areas need to be more about place and to avoid being so similar and you need to weave your vision in to everything to avoid it being just an "anywhere place".

The materials are all poor-quality bricks and fake stone, when you should be using real stone and no cheap options.

When you talk about character you need better, and more, sketches to show what you actually mean.

The same Panel would be happy to consider the Taylor Wimpey application once this review has been reflected on and worked in to that application.

Background

The site is located on land west of Market Street in the village of Edenfield. It is formed by allocation H66 in the Rossendale Local Plan (2019 -2036). The site is in four distinct ownerships and the Masterplan & Design Code (November 2022) covers all of these ownerships, though not all have had an input in to its formation.

The vision for the site is to create a “characterful place that people will want to call home” and it falls with the ‘Settled Valleys’ Landscape Character Area. Across the four ownerships development densities are envisaged to vary from 32dph up to 45dph, giving a total quantum of c.400 dwellings.

The largest ownership (Taylor Wimpey) is shown as Phase 1a and is the subject of a full planning application (Ref 2022/0451), seeking 238 dwellings and associated access, landscape and public open space.

Design Review

The Panel thanked you for your thorough presentation. You were reminded that the Panel would always encourage the earliest possible review, but there is still time and significant merit in developing the approach further to enable the vision objectives to be convincingly translated in to the Masterplan and Design Code, and ultimately delivered on site, whilst maintaining a significant quantum of development.

The Panel’s comments relate to the Masterplan and Design Code as the Taylor Wimpey application can only be reviewed once this review has been reflected on and worked in to that application. The same Panel would be happy to consider the Taylor Wimpey application at a full Design Review once the comments on the Masterplan and Design Code have been reflected on and worked in to that application.

Masterplan

The Panel was struggling to see how your huge amount of analysis and information works with the context and has led you to the key decisions that you

seem to have made. This needs to be more thorough and make the connections/lines of thinking explicit. You were asked to return to historic maps and show how the street morphology, history, topography and mature landscape have seen this place evolve over time as a settlement.

This will help you to link townscape, height, massing and density more clearly to the decision making that underpins the masterplan. You were also asked to provide a land use and facilities map that goes much wider than site itself, to show walking distances from this new community to the places people will want and need to get too.

The vision and design narrative, as presented, were felt to be too generic – this could just be anywhere! It just doesn't flow from the survey you've done as greater interrogation of what is relevant and distinctive needs to be distilled from a process of critical analysis. You were urged to explore what kind of a place this is meant to be – an urban extension? A group of villages? – and to avoid being so constraints led. The 'key moves' all need to be stronger driven from a clear vision of the place that is intended to be created from what is valued now and needed in the future, as does the design narrative. Sustainability needs to be much more 'upfront' and have a greater clarity.

The landscape principles are strong but this intent is then missing from the developed proposals, as it is essentially all built form. The Panel felt that the opportunity for the landscape to penetrate the development had been missed, being confined to the edges only, when this does happen East to West in the village. The approach appears to present "one lump and wall of development", so the landscape needs to break this up by integrating green spaces across the whole piece. The dwellings backing on to the existing village on the Southern edge were not felt to work.

There needs to be a much clearer narrative as to how key views, in and out of the development, translate to the masterplan layout. You must keep 'glimpsed views' to the countryside as that will help with the sense of place. Whilst you have shown some play facilities, there are no allotments, orchards, or SUDs, so a much broader range of Green and Blue Infrastructure needs to be illustrated potentially relating to the needs of the existing as well as future community (note: in the context of a PPG17 POS assessment).

The potential impact of topography on housing layout is not yet being fully shown or interrogated at the masterplan and design code level, long sections across the valley are needed to understand and illustrate this key design driver. There may

be a risk of high retaining walls, cut and fill and awkward steps in the development pattern if proposals work against the contours, unless you define solutions now and use typologies that can deal with the inherited topography. This then needs to be reflected in the Design Code.

The quantum of development seems to be being defined by the constraints and seeks to fill all the available space. This gives it a sense of sprawl and sense of 'nowhere development', when you should be seeking to create distinctive places resonating what is quirky/unique about Edenfield e.g., create smaller pockets of development, broken up by landscape. This is expected to increase connectivity and make a better transition from the old place to the new.

There appears to be no obvious difference between your various character areas. There needs to be more variation, as the densities are all very similar, and you need to translate the character in the landscape and typologies from the distinctive nature of the place that has been defined through critical analysis work. It is not just a range of typologies that you need, you also need to show how they all work together, so think more in 3D drawings, for example.

You were asked to undertake a study to explore the transition to the village edges and show clearly how the existing settlement pattern connects to the new development. The corners, thresholds and edges also need to be considered in the Design Code and an urban design framework – with vistas, viewpoints etc – will help you with that, so is also needed.

The arrival point off Market Street was felt to be a real challenge, which does not feel like a logical connection and leaves a poor relationship to Mushroom House. This street needs a much more detailed assessment, as the approach looks arbitrary as presented and is unclear just how it will work.

The provision of car parking for residential vehicles displaced off Market Street was not felt to be the best use of this space and you are encouraged to find more suitable alternatives. This entrance point needs to either be a great piece of community landscape or you need to rethink it with a different typology, so much more detailed work is needed on this.

Overall, the movement network doesn't feel like it fits here, working as it does around the pattern of your regular and square blocks, when it really needs to flow North-South and with the topography, to create a more legible, permeable place, that will be "walkable and lovely". This level of ambition is totally achievable here in terms of Building for a Healthy Life.

There are a lot of cul-de-sacs in the proposed approach, which were questioned in terms of just how they work with the topography, when you should be seeking to design streets that work with the existing contours. The sweep of the road to the West creates odd geometries, dead ends and turning areas that don't feel walkable and enjoyable.

The Western edge, particularly, could be more lyrical, but at the moment just feels uncomfortable. You were asked to test the 15m landscape to the noisy road corridor, as this may need to be more like 30m to form a substantive wooded edge in the long term. Alternatively, a different edge treatment could be appropriate subject to an understanding of view lines from the west. Overall, the Panel encouraged you to seek a more confident landscape approach that will create a more integrated place. The absence of a key framework/structuring plan is resulting in a lot of the issues that have been raised.

Aligning the 'Principle Street' along the North South line of the PROW, was not felt to be a way to encourage walking and cycling. Creating this 'swan neck' road is atypical to the place and the geometry was not felt to be good. This existing strong connecting feature really needs to be in a 'green street' that is just for people and the key views to the church need to be incorporated. You can't post-rationalise all of this into your masterplan, as the faults are symptomatic of the analysis not flowing in to the proposed arrangements.

Design Code

There is plenty of really good national guidance on Codes now and we are all able to access all of that. So, you need to be careful not to duplicate this but instead draw out the site-specific issues that are not in the national guidance. The Neighbourhood Forum work has lots of good critical analysis on history and settlement patterns and so you can usefully draw from this. You need more vernacular analysis, but you shouldn't assume that everything that exists is all good – often places lose their way and you can say what is good and what is low grade and needs to be repaired, so be critical about what you choose.

Topography really is a particular issue here and yet you almost have an approach that is seeking standard house types, on standard flat plots. The existing village roofscape often has an awkwardness that is a part of its charm and you're missing any sense of that in what you are presenting.

You are forgetting about the things that make this sort of village attractive and showing a suburban attitude to what the new place will look like – with lots of detached properties and very few terraces or taller ones – that makes the new place seem very monotonous. So, you need to try harder to incorporate a more varied offer, that includes perhaps senior living, hospitality, apartments and even small retail. You could even go to three or four storeys in some parts to create new landmarks for the place.

The Code is missing a regulating plan of the “must haves”, that includes the key landscape and movement principles. Everything should lead from that. Whilst you have used the National Model Design Code (NMDC) structure, you have missed a number of headings off and these need to be put back in. It is hard to read and navigate, so you were asked to structure it for each character area, so that the reader can avoid having to flip between the various tables.

The character areas also need to be more about place and to avoid being so similar. The mandatory information is clear, but you need to weave your vision in to everything, so that this avoids being just an “anywhere place”. You were asked to state a quantum and density maximum for each character area and to include boundary treatments both within the development and between the existing and new development because this is so critical for achieving positive street scenes alongside precedent images and more visuals, that show what you think it should be like to achieve the stated vision.

The materials you are showing are all poor-quality bricks and fake stone, when you should be using real stone and no cheap options. When you talk about character you need better and more sketches to show what you actually mean and to avoid sending the wrong messages, as you do at present.

The boundary treatments need to be tightened up, with walls, gates and defined frontages, if you are to avoid having too many gaps in the new street scenes. Whilst the Taylor Wimpey application showed some street sections, these need to go much wider and be longer sections across the whole valley.

In summary, the Panel thanked you for your presentation. You were reminded that the Panel would always encourage the earliest possible review, but there is still time and significant merit in developing the approach further.

The Panel would welcome the opportunity to see the next iteration of this scheme once you have refined your proposition and the discussions with the Local Planning Authority are concluded on this current proposal.

The same Panel would also be happy to consider the Taylor Wimpey application at a full Design Review once the comments on the Masterplan and Design Code have been reflected on and worked in to that application.

PlacesMatter

RIBA North, 21 Mann Island, Liverpool Waterfront, Liverpool L3 1BP

Telephone +44 (0)7841 458696

richard.tracey@placesmatter.co.uk

www.architecture.com/placesmatter @PlacesMatter_1