

Design Review: Fleet Marston

Designed by Turley Associates and Robert Adam Architects

Aylesbury

Planning reference: 10/01504/AOP

05 March 2012

The scheme has evolved since we last reviewed it and we welcome the changes to the layout. This is an interesting scheme and we applaud the client's passion and commitment to create a sustainable and vibrant community. The depth of the analysis and the clarity of thought apparent in the comprehensive presentation to the panel are impressive and the resulting scheme has many merits. We welcome the contextual approach, the rich offer of public spaces and the successful integration of existing natural features. While we welcome the basic strategies and the intention to embed the A41 into the scheme, we have some concerns regarding the proposal's setting in the landscape, the treatment of the A41 and the relationships of the different elements of the scheme.

Strategy and setting

The principles of this proposal appear sound and we applaud the strategy to separate the built area and to create two distinct parts of Fleet Marston. This move allows the creation of meadows between them which we welcome. Generally, we think that the scheme has a successful public realm strategy; it provides a rich variety of spaces for different activities. We are equally impressed by the analysis of historic traces and patterns which inform the layout of the proposed roads and the connections across the site. More information should be provided when the reserved matters application is submitted in order to explain how these contextual elements are embedded in the design. However, the size of the blocks and the rhythm of the street grid do not appear altogether logical and we would urge the team to fully test and verify their approach.

Overall, the form and structure of the development appear to be generated by a clear design process, but we have some reservations about how the proposal addresses the surrounding countryside. While we acknowledge that many edges of the scheme follow existing tree lines, for example at the western border of the site, we think that a more meaningful transition with purposeful spaces between built areas and countryside should be achieved. At present, this transition seems abrupt and we question whether it is defined by the redline boundary rather than a cohesive design rationale. In the sensitive countryside setting, this boundary zone is extremely important and could evolve further and we do not think that the alterations at the western edge have a noticeable positive impact on the transition between development and open countryside.

Road and railway

We welcome the decision to embed the A41 within the development; we think that the road could contribute positively to the life of the community and bring activity to the heart of Fleet Marston. However, we have some concerns over whether the impact of this busy A-road can be reduced successfully. In our view, the road needs to be treated very carefully in order to slow cars down. We note the different stretches of the journey from one end of the development to the other side but we think more could be done to structure the road, for example using the meadow between the built areas. Clearly, the most effective move to soften the impact of traffic would be to reduce the number of vehicles driving through Fleet Marston.

Providing a successful public transport concept is crucial for the success of the proposal, particularly as the proposed development is likely to generate more traffic and congestions on the A41. The strategic public transport concept would help and we urge the team to implement the additional rail station.

Relationships

We acknowledge the difficulties around the proposal for the additional rail station, both in terms of planning issues and costs, but we think that, apart from prioritising and promoting public transport, the station would be beneficial in order to provide an additional focal point. At present, the activities appear to be concentrated near the A41 while we feel that the commercial district could extend to the railway hub, capitalising on the commuters using the train. We question, however, whether the distance between the station and the A41 is too long to maintain commercial activities and we think that it is important to provide two equally strong centres of attraction at both ends of this route. While we support the decision to remove the neighbourhood of North Fleet, less housing at this side of the development also reduces the number of people who will animate the commercial district and we urge the design team to use the review of the masterplan to rethink the resolution of the whole route between the station and the A41, for example to create a more generous arrival space at the station.

Prior to the station being built, residents will use the existing Parkway Rail Station and the team will have to ensure that well designed, safe paths and cycle routes to connect to this

are provided across the site. In our view, the connections between Fleet Marston and Berryfields could also evolve further in order to allow the Berryfields residents to use the proposed new facilities.

Generally, the spaces and relationships between the different areas need particular care. We think that the employment zones, for example, which are located at key access points into the development could have a detrimental impact on the overall quality of the proposal if not designed to high standard. The success of the scheme also depends on the quality of the landscaped zones which connect the built areas. We welcome the rich diversity, meadows, allotments and orchards for example. However, while we note that a management plan is in place, these areas need great care and continuing maintenance. We welcome the larger churchyard around St Mary's Church which offers a generous green space at the heart of the development. However, this new big space needs to be well over-looked and animated to ensure that it is a pleasant and safe place to use.

Sustainability

For a development of this size, we would like to see a clear phasing strategy and we urge the team to develop a model to demonstrate how this scheme could evolve over time in order to ensure a sustainable growth. A large scale, ambitious scheme like this – and by virtue of its long timescale – should be equally ambitious in its sustainability targets. It is important that issues relating to the environment and sustainability are embedded into the design at this stage and we are not convinced that they have been fully addressed yet.

**Design Council
Angel Building
407 St John Street
London EC1V 4AB
United Kingdom**

**Tel +44(0)20 7420 5200
Fax +44(0)20 7420 5300**

**cabe@designcouncil.org.uk
designcouncil.org.uk
05 March 2012**