

Report of the Medway Design Review
Panel

Land to the west of Hoo, Medway

3rd December 2025

The design review meeting

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| Reference | 2372/181125 |
| number Date | 18 th November 2025 |
| Meeting location | Chattenden Community Centre, Swinton Avenue, Chattenden, Rochester, ME3 8PH |
| Panel members attending | Paul Reynolds (Chair), landscape architecture, urban design Margaret Baddeley, planning, strategic sites Andrew Cameron, transport planning, masterplanning Louise Goodison, architecture, historic environment Jonathan Tarbatt, urban design, architecture |
| Panel manager | Clare Bond, Design South East |
| Other attendees | Reshma Upadhyaya, Design South East Dave Harris, Medway Council Madeline Mead, Medway Council Duncan Bernsten, Medway Council Paul Bratton, Medway Council Peter Hockney, Medway Council Gabby Bussley, Medway Council Roshni Nicholls, Medway Council Cllr Chrissy Stamp, Medway Council |
| Site visit | A site visit was conducted by the panel prior to the review. |
| Scope of the review | As an independent design review panel the scope of this review was not restricted. |
| Panel interests | Panel members did not indicate any conflicts of interest. |
| Attendee interests | Dave Harris, from Medway Council, has notified us that he is a local resident. This is not deemed a conflict of interest as he did not contribute to the local planning authority's presentation or comment on the local authority's perspective/position on the scheme, and his remit at the meeting was limited to answering factual questions only. |

The proposal

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| Site location | Land to the west of Hoo St. Werburgh, Rochester |
| Site details | <p>The 31.12 hectare site consists of open farmland in the countryside. The site occupies the south facing slopes of a stream formed valley, with views from the ridges into the Medway estuary, the ancient church of St Werburgh, and along the North Kent coast. The land level rises from the south to the north by approximately 30 metres with the Hoo Stream and a major gas pipeline running through the site from west to east. There are no existing buildings on-site, and there are some trees present including those with Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) particularly along the eastern boundary. To the north of the site, on Ratcliffe Highway, there is a Grade II listed building known as Mill House. The Mill was connected to a spring and brook falling across the site to the south into the Hoo Stream. The site is bounded by Ratcliffe Highway, Main Road, The Hundred of Hoo Primary School, and residential development in Hoo.</p> |
| Proposal | <p>The outline planning application (with access unreserved) proposes up to 450 dwellings, 500sqm of commercial floorspace, a 500sqm community-use building, associated public open space, landscaping, outdoor sports facilities, drainage, and earthworks. The proposed building heights are between two and three storeys, with the commercial element being three storeys. The illustrative masterplan identifies areas for open space, play areas, a cricket pitch, allotments, and a 'Local Area for Play' (LAP). The movement strategy includes active travel (walking and cycling routes within the site), alongside vehicular and public transport provision, linking to the wider Hoo movement network.</p> |
| Planning stage | Post-application (application reference number: MC/24/2022). |
| Local planning authority | Medway Council |
| Planning context | <p>The site is included in the Regulation 19 draft Medway Local Plan as a proposed allocation for up to 450 dwellings and supporting commercial (site ref. HHH8, 'Land west of Hoo St. Werburgh'). The Hoo St. Werburgh and Chattenden Neighbourhood Plan also applies to this site.</p> |
| Planning history | A previously refused scheme was dismissed at appeal (MC/14/3405). |

Summary

Whilst we support the principle of the residential-led development and consider the quantum of development achievable for the site, the parameter plans are not acceptable as proposed. We are concerned that the site layout and illustrative masterplan do not relate to or reflect the local/landscape character, there is a lack connectivity to neighbouring settlements and local amenities, there is limited high-quality landscape space, and we are not convinced that the mix of uses, building typologies or height and massing are appropriate. The proposed development is dominated by car transport.

The development does not sufficiently respond to analysis of the local character, culture or identity. Its relationship to Hoo and/or Chattenden is unclear, and it does not sufficiently integrate with or respond to the existing local settlements or other proposed allocation sites. A holistic masterplanning approach to the neighbouring allocated sites in the Local Plan (Regulation 19) as per the emerging Framework Plan is recommended. We are not convinced that the outline planning application is the best planning approach to secure design quality.

We would welcome the opportunity to review this scheme again at reserved matters stage(s) and to provide support with the wider masterplanning in the area.

Key recommendations

The local authority should:

1. Clearly define the purpose and intention for the “green gap” between the settlements of Hoo and Chattenden. This could be a positive landscape space that provides separation and reinforces local character, while also being a landscape resource of benefit to nature and the local community.
2. Review the proposed development in the context of the emerging wider Framework Plan/neighbouring sites proposed for allocation in the Regulation 19 Local Plan, particularly in terms of connectivity, landscape setting and local amenities.
3. Advise the applicant to either shift to a hybrid application from an outline submission, or to revise/omit the illustrative masterplan and Parameter Plan(s).

The applicant should:

4. Reconfigure the masterplan to create a more coherent layout with characterful residential clusters linked by meaningful landscape spaces. Clarify the purpose of the Green Gap and reconsider whether it is in the best location to achieve that purpose.
5. Fully analyse the culture, character, heritage and identity, and the historic urban grain of Hoo and Chattenden, to inform the fundamental design principles, including the identity of the development and its relationship to surrounding settlements.
6. Develop and reinforce safe, high-quality and effective pedestrian and cycle connections to existing and future settlements, informed by desire lines and journeys to local amenities, including connections to the east (to the Village Hall) and south (to the school and southern development parcels).
7. Develop the layout, massing and heights of buildings in relation to the topography of the site and surrounding landscape, to reduce dominance of built form in long views.
8. Review the location, quantum and provision of commercial uses in relation to local need, viability and integration with residential typologies.
9. Further develop the biodiversity net gain (BNG) strategy with a positive approach that considers on-site and off-site provision as an integral part of the green and blue infrastructure strategy, which may enable the minimum 10% requirement to be exceeded.
10. Working closely with the LPA, reconsider the planning approach and consider switching to a hybrid application or, as a minimum, amending the Parameter Plans and providing additional supporting information such as a Design Code and more illustrative sections to ensure design quality in the long term.

Detailed comments and recommendations

1. Green gap and relationship with the context and surrounding allocations
It is critical that the starting point for the design is an understanding of the purpose of the “Green Gap”. The concerns over protecting the landscape character and setting of Hoo and Chattenden as set out in the Neighbourhood Plan, and of preventing the coalescence of the settlements. must firstly be addressed in relation to the wider proposed site allocations in the emerging Local Plan as well as this application development.
- 1.1. of the “Green Gap”. The concerns over protecting the landscape character and setting of Hoo and Chattenden as set out in the Neighbourhood Plan, and of preventing the coalescence of the settlements. must firstly be addressed in relation to the wider proposed site allocations in the emerging Local Plan as well as this application development.
- 1.2. Preventing coalescence of the settlements of Chattenden and Hoo must be considered in physical, visual and perceptual terms, which as such addressing it both in the context of the proposed development and other developments and allocated sites coming forward in the area.
- 1.3. Terminology such as “gap” can have negative connotations, with an assumption that the space must be left untouched. Instead, this space should be considered in terms of its potential to be a positive feature in the landscape, offering benefits for nature and for the community, marking a transition between places.
- 1.4. The area between Chattenden and the south-western edge of the proposed development is unsuccessful, and the evidence put forward in the Green Gap analysis is unconvincing. The physical gap is minimal and unlikely to achieve a meaningful separation between the places, while accommodating a poorly located cricket pitch and isolated parcel of residential development.
- 1.5. Further consideration of how the required separation between settlements is achieved, for example through a larger physical green gap or by reinforcing the identity and character of these places, should be informed by historic and heritage studies of Hoo, Chattenden and the wider peninsula.
- 1.6. The option to provide a more generous landscape space could be achieved without a loss of unit numbers through the redistribution of dwellings elsewhere in the development and reconfiguration of the layout, although the location of the main access via the roundabout must be considered and mitigated. However, we are not convinced that the proposed site layout responds to historic settlement growth patterns which suggest that expansion has typically occurred concentrically, resulting in creeping suburban spread. The Peninsula’s relatively disconnected existing urban sprawl, both historical and proposed, conflicts with the landscape setting. Further analysis and development of the draft wider Framework Plan is required to mitigate this issue being exacerbated, in collaboration with the consortium of prospective developers and the local planning authority.

- 1.7. The edge-of-development location of the green gap could be reconsidered, for example relocating this further into the site along the Broo Corridor, to make positive use of the flood zone, connect to the wider green corridors and reinforce local connections. In this scenario, the southern parcels could be seen as part of Chattenden and the northern parcels as part of Hoo. The separation and perception of leaving one place and arriving at another could be reinforced through the character and identity of the development, revising the illustrative masterplan and establishing an integrated relationship between the development and neighbouring sites and settlements. This should be informed by in-depth analysis of the local historic identity, architectural character, landscape, and movement characteristics.
 - 1.8. The overall impact of the green gap must be considered in the context of adjacent developments, especially the emerging proposals for the land south of Main Road, which could compromise any ambitions to maintain a separation between Chattenden and Hoo. The spaces between the emerging developments and existing settlements should be treated as an opportunity to provide a new landscape resource and maximise the potential of the existing and proposed strategic green spaces in the local area.
 - 1.9. The green strip along the western edge is not substantial enough as a physical separation of the settlements and could be more meaningful as a landscape route. The landscape could undulate along its length in response to the site's natural features, create a green corridor and maximise the opportunities presented by the blue and green infrastructure, for example by integrating sustainable drainage system (SuDS) features.
2. Movement and connectivity
 - 2.1. The development will be car-dominated and not well-connected to Chattenden or Hoo. The Council's wider work on composite movement plans provides a positive foundation for this, especially the focus on public transport and active travel as the primary means of movement. However, a site travel plan is essential and should be embedded in the scheme's design at an early stage and include walking and cycling routes, travel times, and active travel strategies. This travel plan could be required by a planning condition at outline permission stage.
 - 2.2. The design approach should focus on creating a walkable neighbourhood, potentially with routes through a central green space and a network of safe routes to local amenities and neighbouring settlements, even connecting to Chattenden Barracks to the north and the marina to the south. The provision of connections (or future connections) could be included as a planning requirement.

- 2.3. An analysis of desire lines and journeys to community destinations should be conducted to inform the illustrative masterplan. For example, there is a lack of connection to Hoo, and residents in the south-east of the site may be more likely to travel to Chattenden for local amenities. Routes to schools, local shops and services (such as doctors' surgeries) should be explored in a radial way, addressing how people would move from within the development, rather than just at the site's edges.
 - 2.4. A direct connection to Hoo's Village Hall to the east is essential, and if an all-modes connection is not provided, a pedestrian/cycle route should be proposed as a minimum.
 - 2.5. The landscaped link to the south between The Hundred of Hoo Academy and Primary School is a critical connection and must be delivered as a high-quality route that can be used all-year round, including a safe, surfaced walking/cycle path and lighting. The potential for overlooking and passive surveillance along this should be considered given its crucial role in providing a safe route to the local schools, which is likely to be used by residents of the proposed development.
 - 2.6. The scheme currently relies heavily on the primary access point at the roundabout on Main Road, with only a secondary access to Ratcliffe Highway and potential onward connection to the north-east. We consider all three routes and access points to have equal importance in the movement hierarchy, with a further link to the east into Hoo to be provided if possible. There should be no restrictions on vehicle movements (e.g. a bus-only route) as it is highly unlikely that there would be rat-running issues due to the presence of both the A228 and Ratcliffe Highway as alternative routes. This could be established with a "monitor and manage" approach, so that if traffic management issues arise, the relevant connection could be amended or closed.
3. Site layout and phasing
 - 3.1. The site levels and embankments may result in the housing being at a higher level than the paths and streets, with steep slopes between them. This could be mitigated by introducing development platforms; however, a preferred approach is for the development to work in harmony with the site topography.
 - 3.2. The illustrative masterplan shows a high proportion of streets that are single-loaded or that have no homes or frontages, including more than half of the main street through the site. Subject to achieving suitable block depths to avoid backing homes onto open spaces or pedestrian/cycle routes, the street layout should be revised to introduce double-loaded streets where possible. This could improve the frontages, site efficiency and reduce the amount of infrastructure required and, as such, the build cost.

- 3.3. A phased, hybrid application approach to the development should be considered, with a detailed approach for a first phase of the development, which could be the parcel closest to the main access point. This could allow for earlier delivery, with subsequent phases covered initially by an outline application with reserved matters applications at a later date.
4. Height and massing
 - 4.1. We are concerned by the massing of the taller elements in the scheme as they are not varied in height and therefore appear bulky. Some building height above two-storeys could be acceptable; however, height should be used to accentuate important elements in the development, such as key nodes and gateways, in contrast with lower heights across the majority of the site, and should relate to the site's topography, much like a church tower or steeple.
 - 4.2. Clarification on whether three-storey buildings are considered three-storeys including roof space (i.e. 2.5 storey), or three-storeys plus roof space is required, as this significantly impacts the overall massing.
 - 4.3. The height and massing must be tested with reference to the relative heights and massing of adjacent buildings when perceived in long-distance views and in relation to the site's levels and topography. The height and massing should respond to and integrate with the gradient of the landscape.
5. Residential, commercial and community uses and mix
 - 5.1. The existing school playing fields immediately to the south of the site offer an important opportunity to provide a community resource outside of school hours. The potential for a controlled entrance from the development should be explored.
 - 5.2. We are not convinced that the commercial uses on site are necessary. However, if there is a desire for such uses, the mechanism for securing their delivery should be considered, particularly in terms of viability. As the guarantees provided through planning conditions or a Section 106 obligation would be limited, a strategy to mitigate future amendments to the application that omit the commercial uses or the possibility of unoccupied units should be explored.
 - 5.3. The proposed location for the local centre is neither appropriate nor likely to be viable. The southern area adjacent to the main roundabout could be a more suitable location for commercial uses as this would better serve the development, Chattenden, and sites to the south.

- 5.4. If commercial floorspace is to be provided, then additional detail on the intended typologies should be provided, as neither the proposed commercial blocks with residential behind or a typology with ground-level commercial and residential above appear appropriate as currently proposed. We are particularly concerned that if the commercial uses are not delivered, the impact on the quantum of housing must be clarified. For example, if the commercial uses are omitted, it is unclear whether these could be substituted with additional homes and whether this would result in exceeding the permitted housing numbers.
6. Landscape and biodiversity
 - 6.1. It is noted that the proposed development achieves the required 10% minimum biodiversity net gain (BNG). However, this site provides an opportunity to exceed the minimum requirement, and the potential for off-site BNG linked to the scheme should be pursued, to further enhance its benefits.
 - 6.2. The proposed sustainable drainage system (SuDS) ponds are dry basins and therefore do not provide significant opportunities for nature-rich environments or biodiversity. The approach to SuDS should be reconsidered in the assessment of ecological benefits, BNG and the wider blue-green networks in and around the site. Their potential role as part of the site's green infrastructure requires further exploration.
7. Planning application information
 - 7.1. As an emerging allocation, an outline application with all matters reserved except access is unlikely to provide sufficient assurance on what will ultimately be delivered on site and therefore presents challenges with securing design quality. Whilst the site could accommodate the numbers of homes proposed in principle, we are not convinced by the supporting parameter plan which raises several concerns, including the proposed connectivity of the development and the layout of development parcels within the site. This could be addressed through revisions to the submitted Parameters Plan and illustrative masterplan; however, it may be preferable for the application to be withdrawn and an alternative planning approach considered.
 - 7.2. We recommend a hybrid approach, with an overall outline application supported by a revised Parameter Plan and Design Code, along with a first phase covered by a full application, which could include the main access point and early development parcel/s.

- 7.3. Any application must be supported by a robust illustrative masterplan, with a focus on developing a landscape-led approach and producing Parameter Plans and a Design Code that support the delivery of a scheme that reflects the existing character of the local area. This should be illustrated with additional visual materials, including sections and a revised Landscape Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) and Green Gap analysis, setting out how landscape is used positively to reinforce the existing character of Chattenden and Hoo and integrate with neighbouring developments coming forward in the area.
8. Sustainable design
- 8.1. The emerging approach to sustainable design and renewable energy was not discussed in detail at this review, however comments and advice were given on creating a masterplan less reliant on car transport and encouraging pedestrian and micromobility connectivity.
- 8.2. The standing advice from Design South East is that proposals must produce a clear strategy that details how the development will minimise embodied, operational, and transport-related carbon emissions, and optimise the use of renewable energy to align with the Government's legal commitment to Net Zero Carbon by 2050. The proposal should demonstrate its compliance to a respected zero carbon pathway, for example the UKGBC Net Zero Whole Life Carbon Roadmap for the Built Environment. The sustainability strategy should be tied to measurable targets and detailed modelling work informed by respected calculation methods (as applicable), and also address water use, biodiversity net gain, waste reduction and circular economy principles.
9. Community engagement
- 9.1. The approach to community engagement in the development of this scheme was not discussed in detail at this review.
- 9.2. The NPPF (2024, Chapter 12, paragraph 137) states that *"Early discussion between applicants, the local planning authority and local community about the design and style of emerging schemes is important for clarifying expectations and reconciling local and commercial interests. Applicants should...work closely with those affected by their proposals to evolve designs that take account of the views of the community. Applications that can demonstrate early, proactive and effective engagement with the community should be looked on more favourably than those that cannot"*.
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This report is a synthesis of the panel's discussion during the review and does not relate to any discussions that may have taken place outside of this design review meeting. A draft report is reviewed by all panel members and the chair ahead of issuing the final version, to ensure key points and the panel's overarching recommendations are accurately reported.

The report does not minute the proceedings but aims to provide a summary of the panel's recommendations and guidance.

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 provided that the content of the report is treated in the strictest confidence. Neither the content of the report, nor the report itself can be shared with anyone outside the recipients' organisations. Design South East reserves the right to make the content 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 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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