

# Urban Design Observations

**To:** Stephen Ashdown, Development Management

**From:** Anna Kramarczyk-Dillon, Architect/Urban Designer, Mid Sussex DC

**Application ref:** DM/23/2866

**Date:** 29/01/25

**Address:** Land East Of Ansty Way, Cuckfield Bypass, Cuckfield, West Sussex

**Description:** Outline planning application (All matters reserved except for access) for the redevelopment of land to the east of Ansty to create a new Garden Community, comprising of the erection of up to 1,450 homes (including 30% affordable housing), up to 90 residential care units (C2 class), a primary school, a SEND school, health hub, sports facilities including all weather hockey pitches and tennis centre, allotments, retail, community and employment uses together with ancillary and associated development including new and enhanced pedestrian/cycle routes, open spaces, and landscaping

**Stage:** Outline planning application (All matters reserved except for access)

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The site is not currently allocated for development through the adopted development plan, but it is being actively promoted to MSDC for inclusion in the further Consultation stages of the emerging Local Plan.

No pre-application advice has been sought at this stage. An outline planning application is intended to be submitted.

This is an outline scheme in which appearance, design, landscaping and scale are reserved matters. Being an outline proposal, the scheme is short of information, with only an indicative layout and partial site sections being supplied. This makes it difficult to assess its design merits in detail. These observations are therefore initial comments.

All significant housing allocations must be delivered in accordance with the development plan policies when read as a whole, and site-specific requirements set out in individual allocation policies (which in this case doesn't exist)

In my opinion the scheme doesn't sufficiently address the principles set out in the Council's Design Guides and risks not according with policy DP13 and policy DP26 of the District Plan; I therefore would like to highlight some elements of the scheme that are problematic and raise concerns about the overall form and quality of the potential layout. I understand that the layout is a matter reserved for later approval, but it will be informed by the perimeter plans. The perimeter plans, as currently shown, give cause for concern about the quality of the layout that may be achieved at the Reserved Matters stage.

## 1. Access:

Vehicular access to the site is proposed to be at three points:

- a) At the northern edge of the site onto the A272.

Dwgs: *Designers Response Northern Access\_2207280-R13, Designers Response Cycle Scheme\_2207280-R16*

Comments: I have no comments.

- b) At the western edge of the site onto the A272

Dwgs: *Designers Response Western Access\_2207280-R14, Designers Response Bolney Mini Scheme\_2207280-R19*

Comments: It appears that the proposed pedestrian footpath ends abruptly and is not connected to the existing footpath on the north-west side of the A272. This Signalised crossing would be recommended if the two were to connect. The existing footpath leading to Ansty is very narrow and, it would benefit from being included in the plans for widening.

Also Dwg: *CYCLE ROUTE IMPROVEMENT PLAN (SHEET 1) in doc: Designers Response Cycle Scheme\_2207280-R16* Doesn't show the proposed shared foot/cycleway to continue to Ansty.

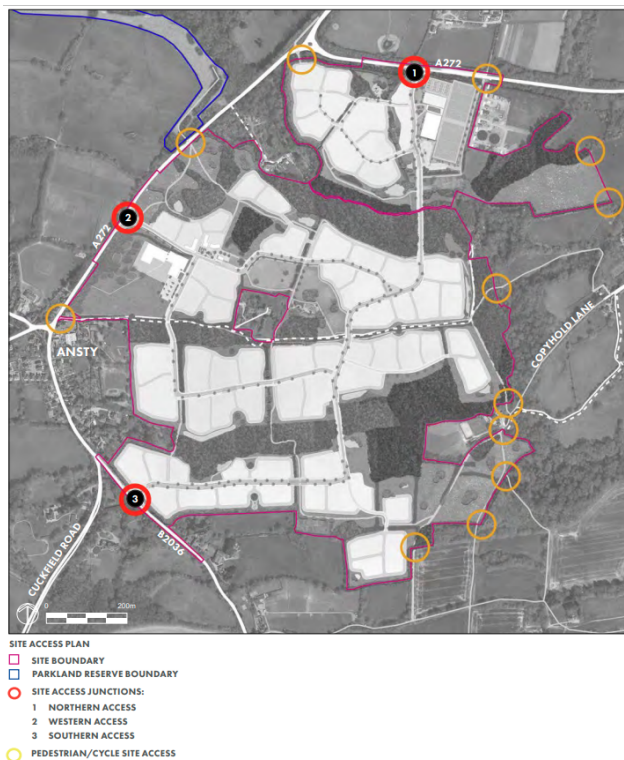
- c) At the south-western edge of the site onto the B2036 Harvest Hill

Dwgs: *Designers Response Southern Access\_2207280-R15, Designers Response Ardingly Mini Scheme\_2207280-R1,*

Comments: No comments.

- d) There is no new vehicular access from the existing settlement of Ansty to the site. The only direct connection to the village is via a pedestrian and cyclist Public Right of Way (PRoW). To ensure the scheme achieves the highest possible degree of integration and connectivity between the new and existing communities, the direct connection to Ansty, defined by the PRoW, should be improved, and its legibility enhanced through thoughtful design. I would suggest that these details be secured by condition.

- e) All other pedestrian and cycle access points to the site are vital, and their design will play a key role in its success would suggest that these details be secured by condition.



All proposed pedestrian/cycle access points. From: *Design and Access Statement 5* document, p.80.

## **2. Issue of coalescence:**

- *DP13: Preventing Coalescence p.58 of the District Plan*  
*Strategic Objective: 2) To promote well located and designed development that reflects the District's distinctive towns and villages, retains their separate identity and character and prevents coalescence. Evidence Base: Mid Sussex Landscape Character Assessment; Capacity of Mid Sussex District to Accommodate Development Study. The individual towns and villages in the District each have their own unique characteristics. It is important that their separate identity is maintained. When travelling between settlements people should have a sense that they have left one before arriving at the next. Provided it is not in conflict with Policy DP12: Protection and Enhancement of the Countryside, development will be permitted if it does not result in the coalescence of settlements which harms the separate identity and amenity of settlements, and would not have an unacceptably urbanising effect on the area between settlements.*  
*DP26: Character and Design Strategic Objectives: 2) To promote well located and designed development that reflects the District's distinctive towns and villages, retains their separate identity and character and prevents coalescence; 4) To protect valued characteristics of the built environment for their historical and visual qualities; 12) To support sustainable communities which are safe, healthy and inclusive; and 14) To create environments that are accessible to all members of the community.*

There is a real risk that this development is too close to the neighbouring settlements, potentially causing them to visually merge. This would have significant adverse effects on the immediate site and its setting, creating the perception of coalescence between Ansty and Cuckfield.

a) Issue of the settlements edges to visually merging.

There is a clear perception regarding the approach to how the place is experienced at the moment, particularly in relation to movement routes. Overall, when travelling between Ansty and Cuckfield you have a sense that you have left one settlement before arriving at the next. The route coming from the east (from the junction of Broad Street and Tylers Green, where Cuckfield has already lost its definition and is visually merging with Haywards Heath) is experienced as rural, clearly separating the settlements located to the south, east, and north.

The proposed masterplan shows a reduction in the intervening agricultural landscape between Ansty and Cuckfield. Any retained vegetation to the north and open views to the north (along the A272) are likely to be compromised due to the need to provide vehicle access from the roundabouts into the development. Furthermore, the masterplan proposes buildings located close to the northern edge of the site, which would remove the perception of rural separation and create a sense of coalescence between the two villages.

b) Issue of the new settlement eroding the perception of rural separation.

The proposed built form on the most exposed ridgetops, visible over long distances, can further erode the perception of rural separation. In my opinion the *Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment* (LVIA) informed the site design, layout, capacity and any mitigation requirements to some degree but it omitted the importance of coalescence, subsequently resulting in the masterplan that should not be followed.

In my opinion, the design of any part of the site north of the central ridge edge needs to be carefully managed and, ideally, kept free of development where it could contribute to the perception of coalescence.

To conclude, it has not been demonstrated that the Masterplan will ensure the essential preservation of the perception of Cuckfield and Ansty as distinct settlements

### **3. Masterplan/Layout/Perimeter plan:**

In my opinion, the development cannot be considered an 'extension' of Ansty, as Ansty is nearly 2.5 times smaller than the proposed development.

Both settlements would be in close proximity and would only be linked by a pedestrian and cycle connection. In my view, this aligns more with the creation of two villages that collectively provide what most people need for their daily lives.

- a) As described in point 2, a primary design consideration, long before site layouts and capacity drawings are prepared, is how the site can accommodate three-dimensional forms in relation to its wider landscape context, while simultaneously maintaining the perception of Cuckfield and Ansty as distinct settlements (however, new development should be good enough to be seen).
- b) Quite often settlements grew up around the intersection of routeways bounded by greens/commons which were used for trading. Its remaining greens are an integral part of its character. This type of settlement form is highly characteristic of High Weald villages, with clusters of buildings punctuated by a myriad of routeways and built form facing onto lanes and greens of varying scale. New developments near the High Weald could also be similarly well-integrated in the landscape. (as demonstrated in the example of Frant, a village in East Sussex within the High Weald AONB, as outlined in the High Weald Housing Design Guide).

To optimise the site's potential through the masterplan and enhance connectivity with the existing settlement of Ansty, while fostering a strong sense of place that complements the landscape, I recommend incorporating a central open space "the commons"(similar location to the green space shown on the masterplan to the south-west of the new school). This should be located directly off the PRow and adjacent to Ansty, with higher-density housing nearby.

To create a more meaningful space, the new development should be oriented to establish a positive edge with Ansty, framing and facing the shared open green space. Unfortunately, this has not been achieved, as the primary school currently frames the commons with its rear elevations and fencing.

I generally agree with the proposed location of the Village Centre. However, the design, which includes the highest densities on the site, feels underdeveloped and incomplete. The small "flexible space" (as seen on p.1 and p.31 of the Design Code) is framed on only three sides, limiting its potential. More could be done to create a more meaningful space with visual connections to the new Commons linking two settlements, encouraging

people to approach from the Ansty direction and, ultimately, ensuring the success of the new settlement.

I am also unconvinced by the proposal for a “Zone for Flexible Residential/Commercial Ground Floor Use” running along the entirety of the primary routes. I believe it would be more beneficial to concentrate those uses closer to the Village Centre, with a clear and well-defined streetscape created through the use of carefully chosen materials, robust detailing, a strong ‘street line,’ clear demarcation, hard boundary treatments, and a repetitive linear arrangement. This new, dense street could begin at the currently proposed ‘flexible space’ and extend eastwards, framing the buffer zone to the north of the listed building.

The scale, massing and density should increase here together with an increase in height. This creates a natural sense of place and help people to gravitate towards key services located there. The success of the Village Centre relies heavily upon the services which are to be provided and how these relate to the needs of the surrounding community.

- c) The remaining street layout should be developed once the coalescence issues are resolved and the Village Centre has been designed.

#### **4. Design Code:**

Overall Design Code that will govern the later design is unconvincing and is missing some crucial information.

The partial sections, along with partial plans of the chosen zones and inspirational images, do not fully align with the detailed analysis in Chapter 2. While the sections are helpful, they do not provide a complete understanding of the site’s characteristics or the changes in levels.

Although promising, the CGI snippet views in the Design Code, which aim to explain the character of the areas, are insufficient to fully understand the three-dimensional forms and how they will be used to define street ratios, establish hierarchy of the streets, mark corners, and frame views. It is also unclear how these elements will contribute to the legibility and sense of identity of each place.

Full explanations are needed regarding the street hierarchy and its characteristics, which will form the structure of the masterplan.

Design guides and codes can be prepared at an area-wide, neighbourhood or site-specific scale, and to carry weight in decision-making should be produced either as part of a plan or as supplementary planning documents. Landowners and developers may contribute to these exercises, but may also choose to prepare design codes in support of a planning application for sites they wish to develop. Whoever prepares them, all guides and codes should be based on effective community engagement and reflect local aspirations for the development of their area, taking into account the guidance contained in the National Design Guide and the National Model Design Code. These national documents should be used to guide decisions on applications in the absence of locally produced design guides or design codes (NPPF).

It is my understanding that public consultation was conducted in the early stages of the masterplan development, but not at later stages, particularly during the Design Code development phase.