

Civic Offices QRP Summary Reports:

20.03.20 – Formal review of Epping Town Centre Sites

- While supporting the emerging work, the panel thinks there is scope to be bolder.
- The panel recommends further work to define, proactively manage, protect and measure 'quality', through each RIBA stage of work.
- The panel recommends embedding clear sustainability commitments at RIBA Stage 1 or 2, which could include precedent research for criteria such as Passivhaus.
- It highlights the benefits of early community engagement.
- The panel encourages options testing for the mix and location of key Town Centre functions and non-residential land uses. It also suggests broadening the spatial scope of the Brief, to look beyond red line boundaries and consider the relationship between the five sites and the high street, including potential public realm improvements.
- The panel urges a holistic view of the whole town centre to inform key design moves on each site.
- The panel thinks the current approach to car parking is unresolved. It highlights the huge potential to encourage sustainable travel and adopt a flexible future-proofed strategy to car parking and travel.

10.07.20 – Formal review of Epping Town Centre Sites

- The panel thinks a more convincingly comprehensive approach is developing.
- It strongly welcomes reconsideration of the leisure centre location and multi-storey car park proposals.
- The panel is yet to be convinced on the analysis undertaken to support the current approach to town centre functions, or rationale for the housing typologies, tenure and mix. While it broadly supports the uses suggested, it is unclear why specific uses are being directed to specific sites.
- It strongly recommends further work to ensure exemplary housing design, including revisiting typologies, internal arrangements and layouts. The panel would like to see more detail at a framework level before planning application details are developed, including on: routes, broader connectivity, servicing, edges, integration and retail arrangements.
- It continues to strongly urge early engagement to develop the project vision – so people can feel genuine agency in informing proposals.

17.09.20 – Workshop review of Epping Town Centre Sites

- The Panel applauds the substantial work undertaken since the last review.
- The approach taken to engagement is commendable and should be valuable in informing ongoing design work.
- The panel continues to stress the importance of looking beyond physical building elements – to engage with the social, not just physical development of the centre. It would have expected to see mapping – analysing the social and cultural offer that already exists in the centre. This would then be used to inform an approach to 'fill in these gaps'.
- The panel encourages developing a meanwhile strategy, and exploring the potential for small scale public realm interventions.

- Greater clarity is needed on how individual sites and public realm will be phased, funded and delivered including the delivery of public realm improvements.
- The panel continues to strongly urge that the council re-consider the 'no net loss' approach to car parking – and follow an evidence-based approach to parking and sustainable travel.
- link to Cottis Lane Car Park is reconsidered to provide safe accessibility.
- The panel supports the simplicity of the building form, and encourages the use of a robust material palette, with careful attention to detailing.

16.10.20 - Site Specific Workshop review

- The panel is very supportive of the ambitions underpinning the development proposals for the Civic Offices site, but suggests some alternative approaches to site access, layout and massing, that could help unlock the challenges of the site.
- It strongly urges the applicant to look at the creation of a second access point from Homefield Close to allow for better site planning to the front of the site, a better arrangement for the apartment block and resolve the movement conflict that is inherent from having a narrow access route from the High Street.
- The panel warmly welcomes the celebration of the existing pond as the centrepiece of the landscaping strategy to the land at the rear. However, it is undermined by the amount of hard landscaping and car parking to the front of the site. In the current arrangement this will create a poor setting for new homes in the apartment block, and compromise both pedestrian safety and place making quality at the entrance to the site.
- It encourages a reduction in the parking provision to improve the outlook to the apartments and 'future-proof' the scheme from changing patterns of car usage.
- It is not convinced by the approach to the architectural expression of the apartment block and the way in which this aims to break up the massing. It recommends expressing the architecture of this block more confidently.
- The scale and height of the houses to the rear are appropriate, but the design team should explore a terrace typology to achieve a more efficient site plan, as well as reducing the extent of external walls.
- A more unified material palette with subtle variations in detailing would be welcomed.
- Whilst the panel applauds the aspiration to achieve Passivhaus standards, it would welcome further information on how this can be delivered for the apartments.

05.03.21 –Site Specific Formal review

Summary of scheme specific comments:

- The panel is broadly supportive but recommends further thought about north-western area.
- Whilst it recognises that protection of the Great Crested Newts is a priority it feels that a more nuanced approach to integration of the pond would be appropriate to benefit from educational and place making value of the pond.
- The panel would like to see the extent of vehicle carriageway reduced and priority given to pedestrians. It suggests car-free development or consolidating parking in one or two locations to create more generous open spaces, and a sense that people are prioritised rather than cars.
- The panel recommends further thought about the best way of responding to the listed Civic Offices, and older listed buildings on the High Street.

- It feels there is scope to consolidate the houses into simpler terraced forms, with less subdivision. It suggests that efficiencies could be achieved by using the same terraced house type on this site as at the Sports Centre site.

General comments relating to all five town centre sites:

- These developments on council owned land create an opportunity to deliver exemplar development, in terms of design quality and environmental sustainability.
- A lot of valuable work was done looking at the relationship between the five Qualis sites and Epping town centre. This should be captured in an Area Action Plan, or similar document, endorsed by the council, so that this work is not lost.
- Generally, a more site-specific approach to environmental sustainability is needed, so that the layout and façade design of buildings responds to orientation and context.
- Achieving modal shift will require new development to make car use less convenient, so that walking and cycling become preferred options.
- The panel thinks the relationship between the architectural character of each site needs further thought.