

PROPOSED KING'S MOAT GARDEN VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT (25/04012/FUL)

CHESTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY COMMENTS

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Through force of circumstances, we only offer summary comments on this proposed development.

2.0 The Principle of the Development

2.1 We strongly support the principle of a mixed-use development in this new residential area. We drew attention to the need for a local centre in our response to the *Local Plan Issues and Options* consultation. However, the layout of the proposed development and the design of the shops in particular suggest a failure to understand the essential qualities necessary to such a centre.

2.2 The purpose of a local centre is to allow people to meet their everyday needs and socialise within easy walking or cycling distance (reasonably set in the emerging *Local Plan* as c 800 m), without having to use a car. We therefore look critically at capacity/ range of services, layout and building design.

3.0 Capacity/Range of Services

3.1 We applaud the co-location of the development with the new school and the incorporation of a care home. However, the range of shops – a mini-supermarket, veterinary practice and chain coffee shop, with one unit unallocated – is very restricted (the absence of a pharmacy, hairdresser, pub, multi-purpose community centre and possibly a GP surgery and dentist, immediately comes to mind), and without rebuilding there is no capacity for expansion to accommodate more businesses, especially independents, in the future. Why not add extra storeys to the buildings from the outset? Without a 'critical mass' of shops, patronage is likely to suffer.

4.0 Layout

4.1 The layout of the development is dominated by the needs of motor vehicles (hence the emphasis in the Design and Access Statement on the provision of dedicated pedestrian routes), witness the large amount of parking, with minimal pedestrian space in front of the shops and the gap between the two blocks giving vehicle access to a delivery/service area. The need for people to cross these car parks, even by the several designated crossings, increases the likelihood of collisions and injury. The proposal is in fact for a small traditional, car-focused retail park that takes no account of the Council's supposed aspirations to promote active travel and reduce car use. If the expectation is that people will use their cars to reach these shops, are they not more likely to drive a few more minutes to reach the more extensive Broughton or Caldley Valley retail parks? Moreover, the provision of ample parking would only encourage car use in the area, whereas in the vicinity of a school it should surely be discouraged.

4.2 In a local centre such as this, the balance should be reversed, to maximise pedestrian space, hard and landscaped, in front of the shops, with parking, except for disabled access, being minimised and marginalised – think of Town Hall Square in Chester, used for outdoor markets and performances. Ideally, the route for delivery vehicles and unloading bays would be at the back. As designed, this is a meeting place for cars, not people. Pedestrian routes and cycleways should be physically separated, given the growing popularity of e-bikes of increased speed and weight.

- 4.3 In master-planning for this area, land should be reserved (unless it has already been sacrificed) for a western relief road providing a connection from the A483 to the west side of Chester, avoiding the city centre and the increasingly built-up Wrexham Road.

5.0 Building Design

- 5.1 We acknowledge the proposed use of traditional materials in the care home and shops, and some thought has been given to the design of the former. However, the Design and Access Statement characterises the shops as being of ‘contemporary suburban design ... [with] an understated functional appearance’ and having ‘a distinct character’. Surely a local centre should offer a ‘sense of arrival’? The only sense of arrival here is provided by the car park. Despite the materials and brickwork, the appearance of the shops is instantly forgettable. Why should the shops be ‘of functional appearance’? Are people not entitled to see buildings that are attractive?
- 5.2 Chester is a city that is rightly proud of its many fine buildings. However, these are in danger of becoming exclusively heritage – a feature restricted to the past – in contrast to the mediocrity of the present. We should be constructing the ‘Listed Buildings of the future’, and there is no reason why these should not be found in suburbs as well as the city centre. In our response to consultations on a design code for the borough, we have argued that it should cover buildings of all types, not just houses.
- 5.3 In the Design and Access Statement we see no mention of environmentally friendly features such as solar panels, heat pumps or grass roofs; these should be the norm.

6.0 Conclusion

- 6.1 We welcome the principle of this development. However, when the proposal is examined closely, it is immediately clear that it is outmoded in its implicit car-first planning, inadequate in retail capacity, and unambitious in design. In a summary response such as this we do not intend to refer extensively to local or national policies or guidance. However, it may be worth quoting from the recently released *Design and Placemaking Planning Practice Guidance* (consultation draft):

(page 34)

Liveable places that support movement for all have:

- Design measures that limit the impacts of car use by *prioritising walking, wheeling, cycling* and public transport, and improving air quality
- *Streets and spaces that promote activity and social interaction, including the movement of children*, and enhance health, wellbeing, accessibility and inclusion

(page 41)

Liveable places have:

- *Memorable features or groupings of buildings, spaces, uses or activities that create a sense of place, promoting inclusion, cohesion and belonging.*

(our italics).

- 6.2 Cheshire West and Chester Council should reject the proposal in its present form and require a scheme that prioritises people over motor vehicles and provides a wider range of facilities in high-quality, memorable buildings.

Dr P Carrington FSA

Chair, Chester Archaeological Society, 1 February 2026