

DEVELOPMENT BY KNIGHTS AT HIGH TREES FARM, EAST BERGHOLT

This initial Design Appraisal looks at the principal drawings submitted by Knight Developments to Babergh District Council as a planning application for 144 new homes.

SITE LAYOUT

The housing is divided into six main clusters (or “cells” as the architect calls them) which are separated by three principal “avenues” which spur off the B1070, and by a large green open space and a 30m diameter planted roundabout. To the west the housing clusters are fed by roads of presumably different character, because they have no pavements, and are called “Village Street” and “Village Lane”.

The site slopes gently about 3 metres from the southern, Moores Lane, boundary down to the agricultural land that defines the village entrance and the main approach from the A12. **This slope will enable the mass of development to be more visible, with its many roofs and chimneys, from the A12 and the B1070 / Hadleigh Road as it comes into the village. In other words, it will not be just the first few houses on the northern boundary, but the whole development which will have a dense-looking, cluttered impact at this strategic entrance point to the historic village.**

Along the western side of the B1070 the properties of the Foxhall estate are set back 20m, and mostly 40m, from the road, and those of the Collingwood cul-de-sac 15 to 20 m away. **The twelve new residential properties proposed on the eastern field boundary of this road are built as close as 8 and 10 metres to the road. They will be very visible, in spite of existing hedges and trees.**

Ten large residential properties will have their private driveways delivering onto the B1070 (some may be in reverse!), and there are no less than three avenues discharging onto the same road serving the rest of the development, as well as the existing Moores Lane. **Apart from the traffic conflicts (discussed elsewhere), the amount of trees and hedgerows along this side of the road to ensure safe visibility has to be very limited. The roadside environment will be worsened forever.**

The housing clusters A, B+C, D and E are separated by three, almost radial, “avenues” which all have pavements, and bays of street-side “layby” parking. **So while there are nowadays great aspirations for off-street parking in new developments, with a scheme like this we end up with the clutter of vehicles in the street, which is not acceptable in terms of visual amenity and the safety of children in particular using the pavements.**

There are no trees planted along these avenues, (presumably no space left because of the cars).

So these important avenues are not really avenues at all; asymmetrical in cross-section (we have not seen any street detail drawings to encourage a view that this is a good quality design).

This aspect is particularly tragic in the grand circular open space. What could have been an attractive, focal point landscape feature is really just a traffic roundabout, lined with parked cars all the way round. It is questionable whether this circle would ever be a communal space (not big enough), or a play space for kids (not safe enough from vehicles), of a quiet reflective space (not beautiful enough, staring at parked cars).

The new roads to the east have no pavements; they are called “Village Lane” and “Village Street” and are presumably surfaced differently (gravel?) than the main avenues, giving these clusters in Plots F and G (larger detached houses) a more privatised and “exclusive” feel to the street environment . **So you walk on the road, because there’s no safe pavement, and it’s where cars and delivery vans are also parked. No trees lining the road either; it’s up to the house-owners and their front gardens to dictate the street environment.**

In spite of the scheme’s aspirations to avoid “weak urbanist planning principles” (P26 of the Design & Access Statement), but rather achieve “housing cells” around “amenity spaces”, **the layout has ended up looking like a run-of-the –mill housing estate layout, with nothing special, no particular focus, or innovation. It could be anywhere...**

Where are the rows of small one-bedroom terraced cottages needed as starter homes for local residents, or the bungalows and sheltered accommodation for the elderly? The communal open spaces have not been designed in this submission, what will they be like (apart from the childrens play equipment) and what is their purpose and interest to residents, and others in the village?

PLOT BY PLOT

Plot A: Groups of smaller houses here – predominantly 2 or 3-bed semi-detached

Generally, poor layout, of cramped clusters of housing, with extremely small gardens, surrounded by a sea of parked cars:

No garages, communal parking in cul-de-sacs or “lay-by” parking on roads

Front gardens are very minimal (1 to 3metres in depth)

Rear gardens are 6 to 8 metres in depth,

Some houses only 8m or less from a neighbour’s side elevation

Houses near the main road (B1070) are only 6m from the boundary (noise etc)

Corner houses very close to the line of the road

Examples of concern:

House A35 only has a small 28sq.m. back garden and no front garden – a 2-bed house

House A33 has a small front garden (2m), and a rear garden of only 8m facing house A31

Plots B + C : Detached, spaced –out houses of 3 and 4-beds facing the B1070 road, and terraced housing further in towards the centre.

Concerns: The 2 and 3-bed terraced housing has almost no front gardens, and only short rear gardens between 6, 8 and 10 metres. This is not enough for families.

A great deal of car parking is on the streets and lay-by's often with no clear footpath behind the parked cars.

Large free-standing double-garages are not acceptable in such prominent positions on street frontages, like shown

Plot D: As with B and C, terraced housing, corner housing, and large houses facing the B1070

Concerns: The 2 and 3-bed terraces have no front gardens and face right onto the pavement and road...especially on the circle "roundabout". Diminished privacy and no "defensible space".

The back gardens are too small for a family...only about 55sq m.

Large corner semis like D18 and D19 have hardly any decent garden space.

The large 4-bed houses, like D2, has no front garden (or about 3m) , but a huge back garden

Plot E: Apartments, terraces and large detached dwellings

Concerns: Terraced housing frontage gardens are non-existent (1m to 3m)

The "Village Street" is like an estate road, but with the inconvenience and hazards of either only a one-sided pavement or no pavement at all.

The large 4 and 5-bed houses have only 4 to 7metre front gardens (E10 has only 3m near the Circle)

Plots F and G: Mainly large detached houses with free-standing garages.

Concerns: No tree-planting or road/landscape definition on the village lane. Better developments invest more in the street and common areas.

Front garden depths vary from only 4m to 8m; this is not enough for such large properties.

ELEVATIONS DESIGNS

When looking at one house elevation after another, there may be people who find the individual designs "quite charming", inoffensive, and "in-keeping" with the character of the village. (That is not the view of this writer.)

However, being confronted with clusters of these elevations forming an all-embracing environment that is when serious aesthetic concerns kick in.

The obsession that every roof has to be 50 degrees in pitch (to keep in character with East Bergholt, according to the applicant's design statement.), has resulted in a clutter of roofs that in some cases are way too high. This leaves the village with a massive monotonous, repetitive development. Further, these aspects of the individual houses will make the entire development appear, from a distance, even denser than it appears on plan.

An interesting example is Unit 3BI (drg PA 30 08A) which is for a 3-bed bungalow. For a single-storey dwelling it has a pitched roof which is an unbelievable 7.3m high. There are no dormers or rooflights in it, so the cynic may assume it will eventually be converted into a 5-bed house.

Elsewhere there are many unit types (like 2H1a) which have steep roofs with small gable windows, but no accommodation up there (yet).

This is prevalent in the 3, 4 and 5-bedroom homes.

The tallest house? Probably Unit 5H1 rising to a staggering 9.65 metres at the ridge.

East Bergholt is not a village of tall pitched roofs; the village has all sorts. The prominent classical architect Raymond Erith built a number of elegant, simple houses in East Bergholt all with quite shallow pitched roofs. The lack of variety in forms and roofs, from flat to monopitch, is disappointing on such a large development, where in building form, use of materials, and fenestration, there is just a "variation on a theme" in terms of design, and that's all.

The scheme is too big. It also lacks quality, innovation and variety. It fails to provide a unique vision and character it has instead desperately tried to borrow from the existing village vernacular resulting in a style of house-building which is ubiquitous in many parts of the country, particularly in town-centre expansion schemes.

John Lyall RIBA FRSA

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