

DESIGN ASSESSMENT

Kenneth Brown MRTPI, BSc (Hons), MA Urban Design

THE OLD CLAY PIT, BOTTESFORD

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CONTACT:

K Brown
Townscape Solutions Ltd
128 Park Road
Smethwick
West Midlands
B67 5HT

Tel: 0121 429 6111

Mob: 07711 262920

Fax: 0121 226 8789

E: kbrown@townscapesolutions.co.uk

I. INTRODUCTION

- I.1 I am Kenneth Brown and since June 2007 I have been the Managing Director of Townscape Solutions, a specialist urban design consultancy based in the West Midlands. My work involves masterplanning and advising on residential and mixed use development proposals throughout the country. From September 2005 until June 2007 I was employed as an Associate Director of Urban Design at Turley Associates in Manchester and Birmingham dealing with a wide variety of schemes including large scale retail led mixed use development. From 1997-2005, I held the position of Principal Urban Designer in Birmingham City Council's City Design Team based within the Council's Planning Department. Whilst there I co-wrote *Places for Living*, the Council's residential design guide and *Places for All*, the general City Design Guide. I have also appeared as an expert witness at numerous public inquiries in relation to design.
- I.2 I am a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute and sit on its Urban Design Network Steering Group. I have extensive experience of urban design issues and was a member of the Sounding Board for *Better Places to Live by Design*, the companion guide to PPG(S)3. I have also masterplanned and advised on numerous major developments across the country, as well as negotiating design issues for a large number of major developments' whilst at Birmingham City Council. I hold a BSc (Hons) in Town and Regional Planning and an MA in Urban Design.
- I.3 I have been asked by Melton Borough Council to review the design of the proposed development of 50 houses at The Old Clay Pit, Grantham Road, Bottesford and offer my independent professional opinion in relation to the design merits of the proposed scheme and assess the strength of the Council's design reason for refusal.

1.4 My role is therefore one of an independent auditor of the development scheme. To this end this report sets out an urban design assessment of the proposals. There is however no nationally accepted methodology in terms of how this should be carried out. In my opinion the crib sheet questions set out on page 32 of the CABE guide '*Design and Access Statements: how to write, read and use them*' (2006) provide a very good framework for the assessment of the main design components of any development. This is confirmed by the guidance itself:

"Design and access statements are required to provide information covering the design process and physical characteristics of the scheme. You can use this sheet as a starting point when checking the quality of a development scheme." p.32

1.5 As it suggests, the CABE crib sheet provides a starting point for any design assessment. I have also added where necessary additional criteria in order to address the full range of issues that arise from the reason for refusal. Before setting out the assessment I also provide a brief description of the site and context and proposal.

2. THE SITE AND CONTEXT

2.1 The site, measuring 1.8 hectares and roughly rectangular in shape, sits on the eastern approach into Bottesford. Location plans can be found in Appendices 1 and 2. The site occupies a former clay pit and landfill site. It has since been restored but has become over-grown with scrub and saplings. The edge of the site is ringed by a dense hedgerow.

2.2 To the south and east of the site lies open countryside. To the north runs Grantham Road across which sits housing development. Housing also sits immediately adjacent to the west.

2.3 The character of the surrounding housing is varied. Appendix 4 shows an aerial photo of the site and context with suggested nearby character areas identified. These identify a number of characteristics common to the local area. Appendix 5 shows the proposal in context as well as identifying comparative features and characteristics. Appendix 10 also lists a schedule of these characteristics in table format for ease of comparison. I will explain the character comparisons in more detail within Section 5.

3. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSAL

3.1 The appeal scheme comprises an outline application for 50 units on a total site area of 1.8 hectares resulting in a gross density of 28 dwellings per hectare. There is 0.2 Ha of the south east corner remaining undeveloped outside the main area enclosed by the hedgerow and will contain an attenuation pond. The developed area therefore comprises 1.6 Ha of housing and incidental open space resulting in a net density of 31 dph. The existing hedgerow bounding the main development area is proposed for retention as far as possible.

3.2 The proposed layout is however illustrative with all matters reserved except access. The suggested form is therefore only one way in which the site could be developed and could be altered at the reserved matters stage.

4. THE DESIGN REASON FOR REFUSAL

- 4.1 There are three reasons for refusal. The third reason for refusal relates to design which I have examined, namely:

"The development of 50 dwellings on a site of this size would result in an urban form in an edge of settlement location where the general character is of a more spacious and open appearance and the proposal fails to reflect the locally distinctive character of Bottesford and would be detrimental to the character and form of the settlement. The proposal would therefore conflict with the provisions of Policy BE1 of the Adopted Melton Local Plan."

- 4.2 The main issue is therefore whether 50 dwellings can be accommodated on a site of this size whilst still reflecting the locally distinctive character of Bottesford. I would agree that the character within the immediate area displays a 'spacious and open appearance' although it does not necessarily follow that the site cannot accommodate 50 dwellings without being spacious and open. Furthermore as I will explain within the next section, there are elements of the surrounding character that are not necessarily positive and a close reflection of that character may not be entirely positive and could undermine the achievement of local distinctiveness. I will return to this point in my assessment and conclusions.

5. DESIGN ASSESSMENT

5.1 My assessment of the proposal deals in turn with each of the key components required for a planning application i.e.

- Use
- Amount
- Layout
- Scale
- Landscaping
- Appearance
- Access

5.2 Each heading is dealt with in turn and set out with the key questions from the CABE crib sheet at the start of each section.

5.3 Before turning to the issues set out above, I deal with the process by which the design solution was finalised. Again, I refer as appropriate to the CABE crib sheet questions.

Process

5.4 **Does the statement show that the applicant has assessed the site's full context, including physical, social and economic characteristics and relevant planning policies?**
CABE (p.32)

The statement is mainly concerned with the physical characteristics and the assessment is lacking in depth, both in terms of the existing context and how it has informed the design. The section on layout for example (p.10) concentrates mainly on site characteristics and technical requirements

such as visibility splays and drainage. One bullet point does concern itself with context:

- *"The creation of a sense of enclosure within the development to reflect the characteristic form of development in the older parts of the village and to create a sense of place."*

The proposal is therefore not referencing the adjacent and nearby development but rather the older form of development within the village core in the main. I will return to the appropriateness of this approach under 'Layout'.

5.5 Has the applicant demonstrated how they have taken account of the results of any community involvement?

There is no community involvement section within the Design and Access Statement. Consultation issues are addressed within the Planning Statement however it does not appear to have been extensive as only a single meeting held with Bottesford Parish Council is identified. The resultant changes also appear to be limited in scope with only three of the nine issues discussed being addressed.

5.6 Does the statement show that the scheme has emerged from a rigorous assessment-involvement-evaluation-design process rather than trying to justify retrospectively a pre-determined solution?

The D&AS as stated above is lacking in the depth of the assessment and I would not describe it as rigorous. There is little in the way of evaluation of the design precedents used to justify the scheme. Whether this results in a scheme that is out of context is however another matter and will be examined below.

Use

5.7 Would the application help to create an appropriate mix of uses in the area?

The site, currently vacant, lies adjacent to existing housing and would continue the spread of development alongside Grantham Road extending east from the village core. The northern side of Grantham Road is also developed for housing and extends around 270m east of the site. As such, in compatibility terms a residential use would appear to be appropriate and in my opinion an appropriately designed development could sit comfortably on the site in design terms. There is however a strong policy objection to the principle of the use since the site is classed as open countryside and it is not allocated for housing in the Local Plan. The appellants however claim it is a brownfield site. These policy decisions are not however within the remit of this report.

5.8 Would different uses work together well, or would they cause unacceptable annoyance?

There are no uses either proposed or existing that would result in any mutually unacceptable annoyance since housing is proposed adjacent to either existing housing or open countryside.

Amount

5.9 Is the density appropriate?

There are 50 units proposed on 1.8 hectares. This results in a gross density of 28 dwellings per hectare overall and 31 dph on the developed part of the site measuring 1.6 hectares. In terms of recent Government guidance, there is no longer any national minimum density target, however the proposal would have just met the old PPG3 range of 30-50 dph. In today's terms in my experience this is not an unusual density to be proposed.

- 5.10 Of course density and the form it takes should also be appropriate to the context therefore a blanket standard is not always helpful. Appendices 4, 5 and 10 set out comparative densities within the area. It can be seen that in the immediate surroundings, densities range from around 5 to just over 20 dph. The proposal measures 31 dph net and 28 dph gross. This is undoubtedly higher and on the face of it would appear to be over developed. Density is however a crude measure and takes no account of site coverage (footprint), size and scale of the houses, landscaping and set-backs and the impact on the public realm in terms of what is visible.
- 5.11 The table in Appendix 10 demonstrates that the percentage built footprint is comparable to a number of the identified character areas within my appendices. Walkers Close for example, termed 'Area 5' in my appendices is exactly the same percentage built footprint as the proposal and that development is around 270m further east than the site from the centre. Some areas are however less densely developed to a significant margin such as Areas 3a and 3b. The densities concerned are however unusually low and would be unlikely to be developed today, particularly bearing in mind that there is still a requirement to make an efficient use of land. The table also details the extent of set-backs from the road frontage and the percentage of developed: undeveloped frontage. It demonstrates that the measurements are again comparable and in the case of the percentage developed: undeveloped frontage, the proposal is also comparable to even the low density Areas 3a and 3b.
- 5.12 The resultant form is therefore the key issue in my opinion not necessarily the amount of houses per hectare. I will examine below the proposed layout in terms of its appropriateness of form, however it must be remembered that the proposed layout is illustrative and could be changed.

5.13 Could the neighbourhood's services support the amount of development planned?

The site is within 15 minute walk of the railway station and village centre however the suitability of all required supporting services is beyond the scope of this report.

Layout

5.14 Do all spaces have a purpose?

All space on the site would appear to have a purpose whether for housing, gardens, sustainable drainage or play space, or in the case of the hedgerow, a visual amenity and biodiversity function.

5.15 Will public spaces be practical, safe, overlooked and inclusive?

The play space and roads/footpaths are well overlooked by the fronts of the proposed properties. The routes are well linked up therefore use of public space should be inclusive for all residents to easily and safely access. A minor criticism is that the units adjacent to the play space do not have any defensible space, however this could be addressed at the detailed design stage.

5.16 Will private spaces be adaptable, secure and inviting?

Much of the private space is in the form of gardens for the housing. These will be under the control of the householders and I do not foresee any problems. Some of the triangular and smaller rear gardens could be said to be less adaptable due to their shape (e.g. plots, 2,3, 14, 15, 33,34, 44 and 45) however the positive way in which the corners are turned compensates in public realm terms.

5.17 Layout does not just concern spaces however. How the buildings sit on the site should also be assessed. As discussed in paragraph 5.4 above, the appellants have referenced the older parts of the village (see D&AS, p.10). Certainly a decision has to be taken in terms of the general layout

and form of the development and it is quite proper to respond to the context. There are two questions however: which parts of the context and how successful is the response?

5.18 At first glance it would seem illogical to reference the older areas of the village, which are concentrated about a kilometre west of the site when there is housing immediately adjacent to relate to. My Appendix 4 examines the housing in the immediate vicinity, which can be broken down into 6-7 different character areas. Areas 2, 4, 5 and arguably 6 are not particularly good models of urban design however. They consist of fairly standard and uniform post war layouts set around a road system. Whilst they are perfectly pleasant areas to live with detached houses set in well landscaped and often generous plots, these types of developments do not score very highly in terms of 'good' urban design principles and place-making criteria set out in guidance such as 'By Design'. The sense of place is lacking and these types of layouts can be seen anywhere within the country and are certainly not distinctive or characteristic of Bottesford.

5.19 Areas 3A and 3B are more distinctive and whilst the design of the individual houses is nothing special, the spacious plots, large set-backs and generous landscaping does create a visually pleasing result. This form however could also be classed as 'ribbon development' a criticism that has been leveled at many inter war and post war developments which simply extend along roads leading out of towns and villages throughout the country. In fact the criticism of this form of development was partly instrumental in the creation of the 20th century town planning acts. Even within the Committee Report, the Parish Council and the CPRE use the term 'ribbon development' pejoratively (and wrongly) to describe the proposal. Even if Areas 3A and 3B were seen to be positive examples of urban design, it is inconceivable in my experience that any developer today would build at such low densities (5-6 dph) within this type of area and it certainly would not be making an efficient use of land which was part of the reasoning behind the

historic criticism of 'ribbon development' and consequent 'urban sprawl'.

- 5.20 If it is accepted that the immediate context does not contain highly regarded examples of urban design then relating to the most positive examples found within the village would appear to be a reasonable response. Whilst the appellant's rationale may be unconvincing and brief in nature, nevertheless the approach has some merit. Appendix 7 shows the illustrative masterplan on a 1921 plan of Bottesford. The cranked streets, varied building lines and general form of the proposal does relate reasonably well in general to the older development in the core areas of the village (although not of course proximity). Whilst it may not be absolutely convincing, the masterplan is illustrative and could be refined further at the detailed design stage. In any case the illustrative layout will in my view result in a more interesting and distinctive layout than for example, modern developments such as Walker's Close situated to the east.

Scale

- 5.21 **Will the buildings sit comfortably with their surroundings?**

The D&AS suggests the development will be two storeys in height and it also sets out scale parameters. With regard to the context, the scale would appear to be appropriate.

- 5.22 **Will they, and parts like doors and windows, be of a comfortable scale for people?**

The secondary scale of doors and windows is not illustrated but given the two storey residential nature of the proposed buildings there is nothing to suggest that it wouldn't be a comfortable residential scale in line with the primarily residential context.

Landscaping

- 5.23 **Has landscaping been properly considered from the start?**

Whilst a landscape scheme hasn't been drawn up, landscaping has been considered in general terms on the illustrative layout particularly in relation to the retained hedgerow. Spaces shown

around the buildings could accommodate appropriate landscaping at the detailed design stage.

5.24 Will it help to make the place look good and work well, and will it meet any specific aims for the site?

The landscaping will enhance and complement the building by for example softening the interface between the public and private realms and using planting to integrate the development into the context. The retained hedgerow will also function to reduce the impact of the development.

Appearance

5.25 How will the development visually relate to its surroundings?

The D&AS suggest that facing materials will comprise both natural stone and brick, with stone being used on the most prominent plots. The roofing materials will be both natural slate and tile. There is not a lot of detail to consider but appearance will of course be controlled at the reserved matters stage.

5.26 Will it look attractive?

This is a key test and one that echoes the question asked of Inspector's; "will it look good?" It is also however the most subjective. Since it is an outline application it cannot be answered at this stage, however there is nothing fundamentally to suggest that the proposal would not look attractive if the house plots illustrated on the masterplan were designed with sufficient attention to detail. Again the outcome is under the control of the Planning Authority.

Access

5.27 Will the place be safe and easy for everyone to move around?

The internal layout is easily understood in terms of street pattern with each street connecting and overlooked by housing fronts.

5.28 Will it make the most of the surrounding movement network?

I do have some concerns with regard to the lack of a pavement outside the site to connect to the village centre. There is however a pavement on the opposite side of the road which becomes a shared surface to the west. The appellants have identified the issue in the D&AS (P.13):

"There is a footway which runs along the northern edge of Grantham Road. On the southern edge, the footway stops just short of the site and therefore the scheme includes for the extension of the footway to a suitable point beyond the site to allow for better pedestrian movement."

It is not clear within the D&AS or the Transport Statement where the 'suitable point' is located. The illustrative masterplan shows the footpath extending only 12m beyond the site. There are no substantive measures proposed however such as a pedestrian crossing. This is not a design and character issue as it relates to the third reason for refusal but is perhaps an issue to consider when addressing Refusal Reason 2.

5.29 Has the applicant clearly described their policy approach and consultation process, whether carried out or planned?

General planning policies have been addressed within Planning Statement although not within the D&AS. Consultation does however appear to be limited as discussed above in Par. 5.5 with the Planning Statement identifying a single meeting held with Bottesford Parish Council.

Design Assessment Conclusion

- 5.30 All of the key components required for a planning application have been examined in terms of design issues. Whilst the proposal has not been subject to a particularly comprehensive or rigorous design process, the illustrative masterplan and suggested density would not appear to be inappropriate in its context; whether that context is taken to be the immediate area or the wider village.
- 5.31 A density of 28-31 dph is not particularly high in today's terms. Whilst the number of houses per hectare is higher than the immediate surroundings, the more meaningful determinant of the amount of built footprint compared to undeveloped land and amount of built: unbuilt frontage is in line with much of the immediate context.
- 5.32 In terms of the form resulting from the density, the proposal suggests that references have been taken from the older parts of the village. This is a valid approach given that the immediate context is composed of what could be termed 'ribbon development' and not generally a model of good or distinctive design. On the other hand I have shown a suggested potential layout that does relate more closely to the immediate neighbours in form, although may lack some design interest as a result . The key point however is that 50 units can be accommodated comfortably on the site in a variety of different ways.

6. LOCAL POLICY

- 6.1 It is also important to examine the local policy considerations that apply with regard to design. The main policy to address is BEI within the Local Plan, which is cited within the third reason for refusal. The policy is set out below and each point will be addressed in turn.

BEI: PLANNING PERMISSION WILL NOT BE GRANTED FOR NEW BUILDINGS UNLESS:-

- A) THE BUILDINGS ARE DESIGNED TO HARMONISE WITH SURROUNDINGS IN TERMS OF HEIGHT, FORM, MASS, SITING, CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS AND ARCHITECTURAL DETAILING;**
- B) THE BUILDINGS WOULD NOT ADVERSELY AFFECT OCCUPANTS OF NEIGHBOURING PROPERTIES BY REASON OF LOSS OF PRIVACY OR SUNLIGHT / DAYLIGHT;**
- C) ADEQUATE SPACE AROUND AND BETWEEN DWELLINGS IS PROVIDED;**
- D) ADEQUATE PUBLIC OPEN SPACE AND LANDSCAPING IS PROVIDED WHERE APPROPRIATE;**
- E) THE BUILDINGS AND THEIR ENVIRONS ARE DESIGNED TO MINIMISE THE RISK OF CRIME;**
- F) WHEREVER POSSIBLE, BUILDINGS ARE DESIGNED AND SITED TO MAXIMISE SOLAR GAIN AND UTILISE ENERGY SAVING FEATURES;**
- G) ADEQUATE VEHICULAR ACCESS AND PARKING IS PROVIDED.**

- 6.2 a) The buildings are designed to harmonise with surroundings in terms of height, form, mass, siting, construction materials and architectural detailing;

These are reserved matters, however as explained in the previous section, there is nothing to

indicate that a development of 50 dwellings could not be provided in a satisfactory form. The figure ground plans and measurements of form demonstrate that the proposal (or an alternative) can harmonise with the surroundings. If one were not familiar with the site I would be surprised if anyone would be able to point out the new development on the figure ground plans. The setbacks, built footprint and gaps in the frontage are in line with many of the nearby character areas. The scale and appearance at the detailed stage can be controlled to ensure these elements also harmonise with the context.

6.3 **b) The buildings would not adversely affect occupants of neighbouring properties by reason of loss of privacy or sunlight / daylight;**

The effect on neighbours has not been raised as a matter of concern. In any case the illustrative layout shows that there is around 70-85m between the fronts of the proposal and the fronts of the dwellings on the opposite side of Grantham Road along with intervening vegetation. The nearest neighbours are adjacent to the west but there is no direct overlooking of these properties. Some rear elevations face the gardens, however there is approximately 14m separation with intervening vegetation. A rule of thumb often used in my experience is a separation of 5m per storey, which this comfortably exceeds. In any case this could further increase if required.

6.4 **c) Adequate space around and between dwellings is provided;**

This point is largely addressed above. Furthermore the Area Schedules table in my Appendix 10 demonstrates that the proposal (or alternative) is similar to the surroundings in terms of the setback, built footprint and percentage of built frontage.

6.5 d) Adequate public open space and landscaping is provided where appropriate;

The proposal retains existing hedges and also provides a number of areas of potential new planting. A 'SUDS' area and play area are also provided. This is more than has been provided on the nearby developments identified in my Appendix 4 and in any case the issue does not form a reason for refusal.

6.6 e) The buildings and their environs are designed to minimise the risk of crime;

The D&AS addresses crime prevention (P.17). In my opinion the illustrative layout generally shows a clear division between public and private space and the houses provide surveillance of public areas. There are some matters that could be improved in terms of detail but these can be addressed at the reserved matters stage. Once again however this issue does not form a reason for refusal.

6.7 f) Wherever possible, buildings are designed and sited to maximise solar gain and utilise energy saving features;

The D&AS addresses energy and sustainability (P.14). There is nothing to suggest that the policy cannot be met. Whilst many of the units do not face due south, the benefits of this are not always clear cut and the layout has to consider the shape of the site and roofs can be sloped to face south even if the dwelling faces do not. Again this is a detail that can be addressed at the reserved matters stage and the issue does not form a reason for refusal.

6.8 g) Adequate vehicular access and parking is provided.

The D&AS addresses access and parking (P.13) which the Transport Statement expands on in more detail. Adequate vehicle access and parking can be provided and again this is a detail that can be addressed at the reserved matters stage and the issue does not form a reason for refusal.

Local Policy Conclusion

6.9 All of the main points in Policy BEI have been examined and in my opinion the proposal is in accordance with this policy. Furthermore the points can be conditioned in any case. The key consideration is BEI(a) in relation to harmonising with the surroundings. My appendices 4-10 demonstrates that this can be achieved.

7. NATIONAL POLICY

7.1 I have addressed the main PPSI consideration in Section 5 above, i.e. whether the scheme is appropriate in its context. In my opinion it is, subject to satisfactorily addressing the reserved matters. The companion guide to PPSI, 'By Design' is also important in this regard. In my opinion the main objectives (on P.15) are met, as summarised below.

7.2 **Character:** *A place with its own identity*

- As explained the proposal relates sympathetically to the spacious and open context and is not over dense as demonstrated within my Appendices 4-10. The built form on the illustrative layout responds to the older parts of the village rather than the immediate context. This is valid in my opinion given that the nearby 'ribbon development' is not necessarily a positive model and lacks distinctiveness.

7.3 **Continuity and Enclosure:** *A place where public and private spaces are clearly distinguished*

- A clear distinction of public and private space is provided with the use of a 'perimeter block' form;
- A good level of enclosure and use of 'active' frontages is to be provided;

- Enclosure is also provided by retained landscape as well as buildings, which is a distinct feature of the site.

7.4 Quality of the Public Realm: *A place with attractive and successful outdoor areas*

- Landscaped areas are provided including a play space and 'SUDS' location.
- Public areas are likely to be well overlooked by building fronts.

7.5 Ease of Movement: *A place that is easy to get to and move through*

- I have some concerns in relation to the lack of a footpath outside the site but it is not a reason for refusal. The internal layout however functions well in terms of access and movement.

7.6 Legibility: *A place that has a clear image and is easy to understand*

- The retention of the hedge enclosure retains the main positive feature on the site.
- The design is illustrative, however it does have a clear image with an attempt to relate to the more distinctive older parts of Bottesford rather than the more anonymous examples nearby.

7.7 Adaptability: *A place that can change easily*

- The permeable block structure and street pattern allows for flexibility of movement routes and phasing.

7.8 Diversity: *A place with variety and choice*

- There is a choice of house types and tenures proposed. The detailed design can be conditioned to ensure variety of design.

8. SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS

8.1 This report has assessed the proposed development in terms of the questions set out by CABI in the design 'crib sheet'. These provide a useful method to judge the design quality of any proposed scheme. I have also examined local and national policy in relation to the design reason for refusal and a comparative study of the site proposal with various 'character areas' within the local context as well as the older historic parts of Bottesford. Furthermore I have also carried out a design exercise where 50 dwellings are illustrated in a different configuration to the proposal which takes more references from the immediate context. In summary I would make the following points:

- Whilst an edge of settlement form is more likely to be built at a lower density, the proposal at 28-31 dph in general terms is at the lower end of the old PPG3 guidance on density. Whilst no longer applicable, the figure is a recognised benchmark for an efficient use of land, which is still a national policy objective (PPSI, Par.28 viii).
- The density in dwellings per hectare does exceed the figures found in the immediate surroundings, which range between 5-20dph. This is a crude measurement however as it takes no account of house size, built footprint or public realm impact. When the setbacks, percentage built footprint and built frontage are compared, the illustrative proposal is similar to most of the immediate area (See table in Appendix 10). Walkers Close, termed 'Area 5' in my appendices is exactly the same percentage built footprint and that development is around 270m further east than the site from the centre.
- The form the density takes is however as or more important in terms of the relationship to the context. The illustrative layout references the older parts of the village rather than the immediate context. This may appear illogical at first however the immediate character around the site is mixed and whilst it provides a pleasant and spacious living

environment, it is not wholly positive in terms of providing design references and these types of layouts can be seen anywhere within the country and are certainly not distinctive or characteristic of Bottesford.

- If it is accepted that the immediate context does not contain well regarded and distinctive examples of urban design, then responding to the most positive examples found within the village would appear to be a reasonable response. Appendix 7 shows the illustrative masterplan on a 1921 plan of Bottesford. The cranked streets, varied building lines and general form does relate reasonably well in layout terms to the older development in the core areas of the village. At the same time it still sits comfortably with the immediate context as the figure ground plan in Appendix 6 demonstrates.
- The illustrative layout will also in my view result in a more interesting and distinctive layout than for example the above mentioned Walker's Close.
- The proposal is however only illustrative and if it was decided that the immediate area was more relevant, then the layout could be redesigned in any case since layout is a reserved matter. My Appendix 8 shows an alternative layout which takes more reference from the immediate context. This again relates well in terms of the characteristics set out within the Table in Appendix 10. In fact the percentage footprint is even less at 14-16% with a built frontage of only 51%. Whilst subjectively I would actually say it is less interesting than the proposal, it is still a valid response and demonstrates that 50 dwellings can be provided in a variety of forms that still sit comfortably within the context.
- The degree of set-back from Grantham Road illustrated by the proposal is also similar to the context as Appendix 10 again demonstrates. Furthermore the existing retained hedge, as well as new landscaping will further break up the outline of the development and minimise any public realm impact.

- In terms of scale, the D&AS suggests the development will be two storeys in height and it also sets out scale parameters. With regard to the context, the scale would appear to be appropriate.

8.2 There are details such as the quality of pedestrian access and some issues in terms of the definition of public and private space that could be criticised, however overall the layout as proposed is not inappropriate in its context in my view.

8.3 The design process could also be criticised and the Design and Access Statement does not convincingly set out how the analysis or consultation has informed the design. This does not by itself however make the design inappropriate and the result in my view is acceptable.

8.4 I do understand why the Council refused the scheme on design grounds as the layout does look different to the immediate context and given the design references to the older parts of Bottesford which tend to be in the centre, it does on the face of it look more 'urban' in form. At the time they were built however the older areas would also have been on the edge of the village next to open countryside.

8.5 The concern however principally relates to density as layout is a reserved matter and can always be altered. My Appendix 8 illustrates another approach for example. The key question is whether 50 units is appropriate for the site. When examined objectively however, the proposal and indeed my alternative arrangement of 50 units, is no more dense in terms of footprint, scale, set-back and percentage built frontage in comparison to the surrounding context. The existing and proposed landscaping further integrates the development into its context. Were it to be developed, it is unlikely in my view that anyone passing the site would get the impression that it was inappropriate and overly dense.

8.6 My only caution would be that if 50 very large units were proposed for the site then it would be in danger of becoming over developed. As it stands, a range of unit types and sizes are proposed and it is unlikely that 50 large units would meet market requirements. In any case the form can be controlled at the reserved matters stage and a similar exercise could be carried out to measure the percentage footprint. It may even be possible to condition the percentage footprint subject to the practicalities of applying such a condition.

8.7 Having identified and examined the main design and character issues, it is my professional opinion that the proposal would not conflict with Policy BE1 of the Local Plan and that 50 dwellings are capable of being provided on the site without conflicting with the character and form of the settlement. The Council may therefore want to consider whether they would still wish to defend the third reason for refusal at appeal.