



Cuerden Strategic Site, South Ribble

Masterplan and Design Code Audit

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. This document has been prepared by Andrew Gilsenan MPlan, Director of Urban Design at Pegasus Group and a Recognised Practitioner of Urban Design. Specialising in Masterplanning and Detailed Design, Andrew has prepared a number of large scale strategic projects across the East Midlands and in the North West and has appeared as an Expert Witness on design grounds for a number of successful Planning Appeals.
- 1.2. This report has been prepared to provide an Audit of the submitted Masterplan and Design Code as Part of the Outline Planning Application LCC/2022/0044 by Lancashire County Council and Maple Grove Developments Ltd for the Cuerden Strategic Site.

The Site

- 1.3. The Cuerden Strategic Site is located at a key gateway within Central Lancashire between Leyland and the City of Preston. The Site covers an area of 65 ha, which is to be developed for high quality employment uses including commercial, industrial, retail and leisure, with an element of residential development. The site is owned by two major landowners; Lancashire County Council, having transferred from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), and Brookhouse Group. The Site was allocated in the 2015 South Ribble Local Plan as a Strategic Site under Policy C4.

Planning Policy Requirements

- 1.4. The opening paragraphs of the 2015 South Ribble Local Plan, Chapter C – Major sites for Development sets out the overarching desire of the council for the allocated sites. It is clear from the wording in the introduction of this section of the Local Plan that great emphasis is put on Major Sites coming forward with a comprehensive Masterplan agreed by all landowners / developers of the site in advance of the submission of any planning applications. It is intended that all stakeholders and interested parties should be consulted as part of the process and that the Masterplan should set out a vision for the site and a strategy for implementing the vision.
- 1.5. A Design Code for the Cuerden Strategic Site has already been adopted by the South Ribble Borough Council, alongside the masterplan at committee 2017. It is therefore unclear why a new Design Code is being proposed, and what status that has. The latest Design Code falls well-short of that previous document

2015 South Ribble Local Plan, Policy C4 – Cuerden Strategic Site.

- 1.6. Policy C4 sets out again the baseline requirements for any planning application coming forward on the site. The key requirements are for:
 - An agreed Masterplan for the Comprehensive development of the site;
 - A Phasing and Infrastructure delivery schedule;
 - An agreed programme of implementation in accordance with the Masterplan and agreed design code.
- 1.7. Again there is a clear policy requirement that the site should be brought forward via a Comprehensive Masterplan and Design Code for the whole site, rather than piecemeal development.

2. The Design Code

- 2.1. The Design code as presented as part of the application should be assessed in accordance with the minimum expectations of a Design Code as set out in the NMDC¹. The assessment will follow the 10 characteristics of good design as set out in the NDG². Scoring is set out using the industry standard traffic light system.

Section	
Context	
	Character Types, Site Context, Site Assessment, Historic Assessment, Heritage Assets
	<p>Very limited context is set out in the design code aside from a strategic level understanding of the location and basic condition of the site.</p> <p>The assessment of the site is very basic and the section on constraints and opportunities fails to grasp the potential of the site, purely focusing on the it's constraints. As a large high profile site there are plenty of opportunities that should be addressed here to underpin the goals of developing the site.</p> <p>A single page on heritage is included showing a plan of the site from 1909. There is hardly any information here, and none regarding local heritage assets and history of the wider urban area.</p>
Score	
Movement	
	Street Network, Public Transport, Street Hierarchy, Walking + Cyclin, Junction + Crossings, Inclusive Streets, Car Parking, Cycle, Services + Utilities
	<p>Well-designed places are accessible and easy to move around. This is primarily achieved through a well thought out connected network of streets, with good access to public transport. Sustainable travel modes such as walking and cycling should be promoted thoroughly through good design. Proper consideration should be given to parking and servicing. Detailed information is provided in Guidance Note Code Content: Movement.</p> <p>The Design Code confusingly talks about the Movement Strategy in two places, Section 3 (Character Areas) and 5 (Access & Security). Unfortunately the level of detail given here is wholly inadequate. No detail or specific information is given in either of these sections on what the hierarchy of streets is or how they can be implemented through detailed design.</p> <p>Some very basic detail is given regarding the Residential streets, but this is very vague, using language. For example:</p>

¹NMDC – National Model Design Code, 20 July 2021: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-model-design-code>

²NDG – National Model Design Code, 1 October 2019: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-design-guide>

“Close – A shared surface street that promotes slow traffic speeds and create a pedestrian friendly environment. The absence of a formal carriageway is intended to encourage motorists to drive more cautiously and provide a more organic streetscape.”

There is no detail here regarding Street Design, Carriageway Widths, Surface Treatment, Inclusivity and Pedestrian Safety. It is impossible for one to visualize what this street type would actually look like, and what it should achieve. There is also no aspirant standard for parking provision and typologies. For Residential areas the Code states:

“Allocated parking should be provided for all dwellings. A range of parking options should be considered including private driveways located at the side of properties or frontage parking spaces set with in a landscaped framework. Where apartments are proposed, communal parking areas in a landscaped courtyard may be appropriate.”

In essence nothing more is said here than Suitable Parking should be provided. There is no guidance on how this could be achieved.

The design code describes principal access and key gateway into the site as: *“an attractive landscaped link road connects with a new internal roundabout that acts as a focal distribution point.”* Although this sets a vision for the gateway into the site, the submitted plans show a very uninspiring standard estate road, with little interest or landscaping included to create a sense of arrival. This is a typical theme throughout the design code where, when detail is given, the accompanying plans do not match the description of the proposals.

More information is provided for the delivery of the public rights of way, however the accompanying indicative access plan makes no attempt at providing a viable design solution.

Score		
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Nature

Network of Spaces, OS Provision, Design, Working with Water, SUDS, Flood Risk, Net Gain, Biodiversity, Street Trees

The Design Code covers a basic Network of Spaces in Section 3, however key elements are missing and the plans provided give little information on how the site is designed with Nature in mind. There is little to show how the site will respond to Biodiversity and SUDS features within the open spaces proposed.

There is no Green or Blue infrastructure strategy shown, and the plans submitted within the document lack, scale bars, North Points and Keys. The landscape parameters plan should provide clear detailed information on the quantum and location of various uses and features. The proposals should typically include:

- o Existing vegetation, e.g. woodland, trees, hedgerows;
- o Proposed Vegetation, including Trees Shrubs and wildflower areas;
- o Root protection areas;
- o PRow's;
- o Existing ponds;
- o SUDS Ponds / Rain Gardens;
- o Ecology mitigation measures / Areas for BNG;
- o PRow / Footpaths, tracks and pedestrian routes.

Score		
Built Form		
Density, Party Wall, Types and Forms, Blocks, Building Line, Height		
<p>The Design Code goes some way to outline the Density, Building Heights and Block Layout envisaged for the site. Land Use and Quantum is shown through each Employment Zone and some design elements are shown. There is some detail covering Built Form within the Design code, however there is no real rationale or story that shows how the conclusions have been reached, This is an issue that stems from the weak initial context work, which fails to show how design decisions are reached.</p>		
Score		
Identity		
Local Character, Legibility, Masterplanning, Design of Buildings.		
<p>There is a distinct lack of identity in the proposals, through both a lack of detail provided and no character assessment having been carried out to inform the proposals. As the Design Code does not cover the whole of the Cuerden Strategic Site, it is impossible to deliver a legible design. Having failed to include a third of the site means that the proposals will be fundamentally flawed for such a large site.</p> <p>The aspirations for the design of the commercial elements are very generic, with a wide selection of basic styles shown as examples in the code.</p>		
Score		
Public Space		
Primary, Local and Secondary, Tertiary, Meeting Places, Multi-Functional, Home Zones, Secured by Design Counter Terrorism.		
<p>Open Space is mentioned in the round within the Design Code, however there is very little to show how that space may function and what it may consist of. Much of the Open Space is to be delivered to either buffer each Employment area, or is incidental open space left over between development.</p> <p>The Code provides no details on how users of Open Space might engage with and navigate these areas. AS such it is impossible to tell what the quality of these spaces will be like. Although Landscape is to be detailed as part of the application, there are many inconsistencies in the plans submitted, and still a lack of cohesive design and placemaking.</p>		
Score		



Uses		
Land Use, Mix, Active Frontage		
A Land Use Quantum Table and Illustrative Development Zones Plan are provided at the start of the Design Code and demonstrate how the site will deliver the required Uses outlined in Policy C4. It would be beneficial to include information as to how future development will positively front on to open space and towards key views. There is no information provided regarding Active Frontages on the site.		
Score		
Homes and Buildings		
This section is not required within this Design Code.		
Score		N/A
Resources		
This section is not required within this Design Code.		
Score		N/A
Lifespan		
This section is not required within this Design Code.		
Score		N/A

3. Conclusion

- 3.1. The Design Code scores 5 red, 2 amber and 3 N/A Sections. The submitted Design Code fails to meet much of the aspirations set out in the NMDC and as such cannot assure that any future development will maximise the site's potential.
- 3.2. As the site proposal comes forward excluding a third of the land in the allocation there is no possibility of delivering a cohesive design for such a key site. The removal of all land not belonging to Lancashire County Council has created an awkward shape and pattern of development, essentially splitting the site into two separate areas and removing the key frontage to the north adjacent to the roundabout.
- 3.3. As such it is somewhat impossible to deliver a Design Code that can deliver the connections and permeability that is needed to bring the site forward. Therefore no aspirational standard is being set for creating an important new gateway to the south of Preston.
- 3.4. The Design Code is far too generic to provide any kind of real placemaking or set any future standards for development to adhere to. There is no sense of place in and around the site, with many areas looking very generic or repetitive.
- 3.5. There is little to no information on how the proposals have been informed, with much of the design being a generic replan of the adopted masterplan. Indeed much weight is given to adhering to the adopted masterplan and policy C1 but very little is given to following the criteria of key legislation or design advice that is crucial for delivering large sites.
- 3.6. There is no evidence of design evolution or adhering to the key principles of designing good places. The Design Code states: 'The proposal sets out to create stimulating, enjoyable and convenient places that will meet a variety of demands from the widest possible range of users. Therefore, it seeks to weave together different building forms, uses, tenures and densities by identifying unifying characteristics.' However there is no information on how this may be achieved or implemented.
- 3.7. The information supplied in Character Areas section is very generic and offers little information on what the site might actually look like. Generic photographs of developments are included as an indication of what may be acceptable, but lack any local inspiration or design cues. As such they future development could lack any cohesion.
- 3.8. There is very little on Landscape strategy, again with generic aspirations for the site rather than any level of information required for an application that aims to fix in detail the Strategic Green Infrastructure.
- 3.9. The areas of detail that are provided in the Design Code envisage dull, uninspiring places that do not create memorable places for such a key site. Much of the employment allocation consists of large urban car parks with little to no landscape buffer or interest. This will create poor quality streetscape and public realm, contrary to the guidance set out in the NDG.
- 3.10. It is recommended that a full Design Code be prepared for the site including all Land included in Policy C4. The level of detail provided so far is inadequate for coding such a large and important site.

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Expertly Done.

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