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**Sent:** 22 April 2022 11:43  
**To:** David Green  
**Subject:** Mike westley comments  
**Attachments:** Land at Retreat Drive Topsham 10 03 2022 MW DRAFT.docx

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Scheme Review- Urban Design, Placemaking & Landscape Design:  
**Land at Retreat Drive Topsham**

**Scheme: Land at Retreat Drive, Topsham.**

Ref.no. 22/0268/FUL

Officer: David Green

**Review Format:**

**A. Strategic observations in respect of the proposal's performance against: Layout & infrastructure in respect of Placemaking, Green / Blue Infrastructure aspirations as embodied in the relevant published advice and strategic documentation.**

N.B. Since there are no separate, specific landscape proposals as part of the application documentation, these notes are written in response to the information on landscape submitted by the applicant's agents as part of the following documents:

- 1420 The Chase Apartments Design Access Statement Rev A 1 of 2{db2-doc772220-manull-minull}
- 1420 The Chase Apartments Design Access Statement Rev A 2 of 2{db2-doc772221-manull-minull}
- Retreat P1 EA2 2 Final V2 with Appendices{db2-doc772223-manull-minull}
- A214 Latitude 50 Topsham BS5837 Arb Report 28022020 Final 28{db2-doc772230-manull-minull}.02.2020.

These documents are presented at a strategic scale of resolution, with no details of landscape treatments being proposed. Hence, the initial screen of first priority landscape and placemaking issues signpost issues requiring greater resolution and indicate directions for that further exploration and proposition on the part of the applicant.

• **Massing and scale of proposed development blocks in relation to scale of contextual urban form and proposed landscape mitigation.**

- The proposal seeks to combine the approval for a three storey block of residential accommodation on the corner of retreat drive and Exeter Road and Retreat Drive with a contiguous further block of development to the south west of this block along retreat drive. This produces a total building mass of significantly greater scale than the existing buildings opposite on the southeast side of retreat drive.
- In connection with this it should be the original permission for the block on the corner described above anticipated the retention of a line of existing trees which currently divide the site in half, running northwest to southeast from the motorway embankment to Retreat Drive.
- Thus, the current proposal both loses the existing belt of trees and adds significantly to the final perceptual impact of the development in terms of scale.
- With reference to the wooded embankment of the motorway to the northwest of the proposed development, the document (1420 The Chase Apartments Design Access Statement Rev A 2 of 2{db2-doc772221-manull-minull}) mentions "1. The existing heavy vegetation adjacent to the M5 will be fully retained to ensure maximum sound buffer from the motorway as well as visual screening.. ". This is factually incorrect, since although trees do have a perceptual effect on reducing the source of the noise, and a lesser effect on the actual noise itself, the depth of woodland on the embankment will have no such acoustic deadening effect. (see <https://www.trees.org.uk/Trees.org.uk/files/8c/8c69f212-a82e-424b-96d1-c8ff6dc02403.pdf> ). A solution which had relatively closed (less fenestration) elevations on the northern aspect facing the motorway, and a more open elevation overlooking more generous open space allocation facing the southern aspect might well be better in both acoustic, resident experience and energy conservation terms.
- The proposal seeks to mitigate this perception by stepping/ articulating the form and by the use of materials to reduce the overall impact. However, the resultant form remains of a

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greater scale than any present in the grain of the settlement immediately to the southeast along the Exeter Road. This strategy also results in a lack of any significant performative shared private/ public space public realm along the Retreat Drive frontage of the proposals.

- A possible mitigation against both this overweening scale and the negative effects of the adjacent motorway might be to explore a development footprint option that reconfigures the development as two separate buildings, separated by the block of existing trees mentioned above. Each building would then have more generous shared private space on the southwest aspect of the site and allow the retention of both the abovementioned existing woodland strip as well as the existing vegetation adjacent to the large retained oak tree (see [A214 Latitude 50 Topsham BS5837 Arb Report 28022020 Final 28{db2-doc772230-manull-minull}.02.2020](#) ), which visual screen might then be extended as a hedgebank, along the frontage of Retreat Drive. This would create a more substantial tree planted mitigation solution along the principal frontage of the development.
  - **Landscape Treatments for Amenity and for Visual and SuDS Mitigation.**
  - The document (1420 The Chase Apartments Design Access Statement Rev A 2 of 2{db2-doc772221-manull-minull}) mentions “3B. Significant landscaping along the Retreat Drive frontage is also proposed to help screen the proposed building. “. This apparently refers to a raised planter along the Retreat Drive frontage and (an estimated) six standard trees, which it could be argued is insubstantial compared to the scale of the proposed development.
  - The proposal at present offers no visual mitigation of the southwest elevation of proposals. Although the immediate neighbouring use is a boat storage yard of minimal sensitivity, views of the proposals would be possible from the estuary of the River Exe. Therefore, mitigation by tree planting and other means might be expected along this site boundary.
  - The document (1420 The Chase Apartments Design Access Statement Rev A 2 of 2{db2-doc772221-manull-minull}) mentions “(7.5 Landscape) Each apartment has their own private outdoor space, in addition to this there are a couple of communal gardens to the south of the site and on the opposite side of Retreat Drive.”. The private gardens are not immediately evident from the ground floor plan supplied. If this refers to balconies and roof top gardens then this should be made clear and the amenity offered should be described in detail.
  - The communal gardens mentioned are not detailed. It is worth noting however that the proportion of ground floor shared private / communal space is insubstantial when compared to the total building footprint, taking into account the proportion of the ground plane which should be available to perform primarily a visual mitigation function.
  - No SuDS strategy for the site is detailed, which matter is clearly relevant in this Estuary floodplain location, and to which the landscape and other level surfaces of proposed buildings would be expected to contribute performative solutions in respect of impact mitigation.
- B. Synopsis comment regarding Landscape & Urban Design matters in respect of the scheme, with key issues to address.**
- 1- Massing and scale of proposed development blocks is problematic in relation to scale of contextual residential urban form and as a percentage of the total site area.**

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- 2- **Massing and scale of proposed development blocks is problematic in relation to loss of existing vegetation and resultant impact on neighbouring residential development**
- 3- **Lack of sufficient detail provided to describe (apparently) insubstantial private garden space and communal garden space.**
- 4- **Lack of substantial mitigation solution provided along the Retreat Drive frontage of the development.**
- 5- **Lack of detail provided concerning SuDS site strategy.**

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