

Design Statement

Project:	Englishcombe Lane, Bath - Supported Living for Autistic Persons, BANES Council		
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Author:	CR		
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Client Signoff

Client	BANES Council
Project	Englishcombe Lane, Bath - Supported Living for Autistic Persons, BANES Council
Project No.	5208627
Client signature / date	

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Introduction

This Design Statement has been prepared on behalf of Bath and Northeast Somerset Council. It supports the revised Scheme for land to the rear of 89-123 Englishcombe Lane, Southdown, Bath (hereafter referred to as ‘the Site’). The purpose of this note is to set out the design development, including a high-level overview the various schemes that have been proposed for the site, the revised scheme and the site context that is relevant for the development of the Site.

The revised scheme’s core aspirations are as follow:

- Provide well-designed housing and community to meet the needs of people, this includes autistic people and/or those with learning disabilities who are ready to move to specialist person-centred accommodation for increased autonomy and independence.
- Follow Nature Base Solutions – including Building with Nature Accreditation – to provide sensitive and appropriate and sustainable preservation of the site’s biodiversity and habitat.
- Draw from vernacular architectural cues to minimise impact on the immediate and long-distance views, as well as tie the development into the edge of city location.

Design History

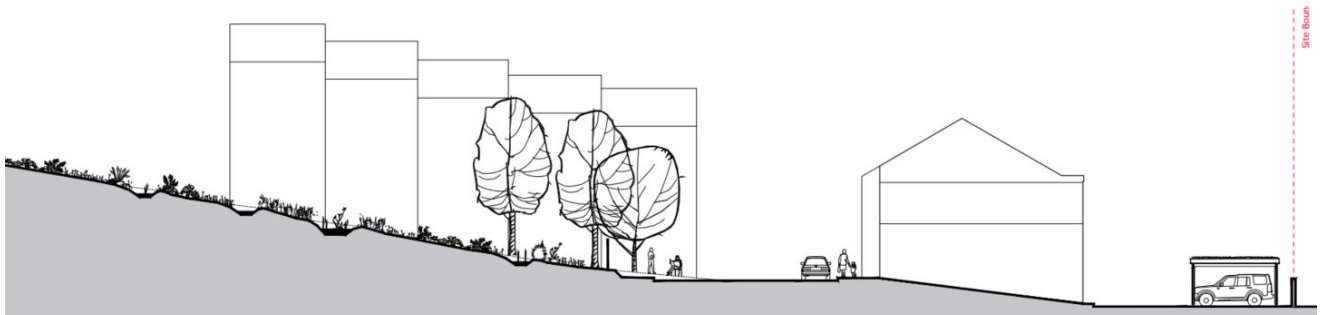
BANES has previously sought full planning permission in 2018 (reference number: 18/01516/REG04), for a scheme of open-market housing, as shown below. This was of medium density (following planning policy) consisting of 37 units, most of which were 2 or 3 stories or flats with split level access to accommodate the site topography (The images captured below are the 2018 illustrated proposed general layout and cross section).

BANES Planning Committee resolved in September 2020 to grant permission to the proposed scheme, subject to completion of a Section 106 (S106) agreement, and compliance with 34 planning conditions. However, a decision was made not to pursue the proposed scheme and a decision notice was not issued.



Site Landscape Plan (2018)

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Site Landscape Section (Consented 2018)

Shift in Housing Purpose

Following a review of local housing need and the unique site-based opportunities offered by the Englishcombe site, BANES has decided to revise the brief to provide an exemplar community of purpose-built housing for persons living independently in need of care and support with Autism and other disabilities. All units proposed be available for affordable rent. This necessitates a significant revision of the unit quantities, house types as well as the site layout approach to enable accessibility and inclusivity for those with neurodiversity related needs. Atkins are assisting the council with developing the right approach with a specialist consultant's advice and research into this field.

Ecological Considerations

The development process with Atkins leading was started with the objective of conservation of the specific habitats found through appropriate onsite interventions, i.e., buffer zones. Atkins Architecture's initial capacity studies for the new scheme (example pictured below) followed the advice and approach taken under the 2018 application, which was informed by the ecological assessments undertaken at that time, focusing on segregating development from the area of watercourses in the centre of the site and preserving offsets to the forest edge.



Initial Atkins Capacity Study Layout "5b" (2022)

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Following a revised 2023 ecological appraisal and the detailed input of our Landscape Architecture design team, a more nuanced approach has been developed. The intention is to use the residential development as a catalyst to enhance the site ecology for the benefit of residents and the wider environment. BANES Housing has committed to targeting greater than 10% uplift of Biodiversity Net Gain value of the Site. Therefore, the design team’s first step has been to identify with the help of Ecologists consultants the highest value natural assets on the site, to both mitigate losses and identify areas with the highest potential for enhancement to inform the scheme’s landscape design strategy.

Landscape Led Design

Building with Nature benchmark is an additional target for this revised scheme; therefore, the scheme must approach design with Nature-based Solutions in mind. The framework recognises inspirational design visions which demonstrate the integration of high-quality green infrastructure into the built environment, and champions a commitment to deliver that vision on the ground, ensuring that the multiple benefits of high-quality green infrastructure are felt by future generations.

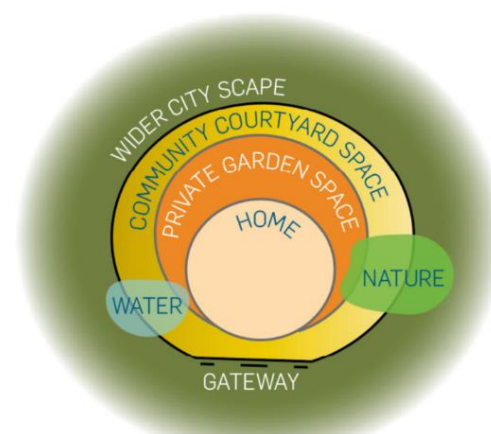
It is achieved through consideration of six Core Standards to create a solid foundation for the delivery of high-quality green infrastructure and themes relevant to Wellbeing, Water and Wildlife,

This framework awards schemes that have secured high-quality green infrastructure features at every stage of development: from planning, design, and implementation, through to management, maintenance, and monitoring.

The Englishcombe Lane site offers a secluded, nature imbued place, while still being closely connected to local amenities and the wider city. This has been identified as perfectly suited to residents with special needs which might involve the need for high or low stimulatory environments and also benefit profoundly from connection to nature. Despite the somewhat neglected appearance, the Englishcombe Lane site offers potential for high quality biodiverse habitat if returned to an appropriate management regime.

In particular the north-west corner of the site has been identified as offering good potential for grassland restoration and will be proposed as open space for habitat as well as visual amenity to residents and neighbours. The steeply sloped landform to the southern boundary would ideally form a managed meadow and extension of the Stirtingale Woodland edge, with excellent potential for retaining and conserving the natural habitat whilst affording some amenity. Additionally, the ephemeral watercourses which run through the site offer a unique sense of character to the site and provides some ecological interest. (See image below)

The requirements for garden spaces have also been examined and a strategy of a combination of appropriately sized private defensible individually owned areas to the rear of a property and social communal courtyards to the front will provide the most benefit of flexibility.



Extracts from the Landscape Design Strategy Report: The Strategic Site Plan and Diagram

For greater detail please see the **Landscape Design Strategy Report** including site appraisals.

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Architecture Response

The proposed housing type has departed from the previous iterations. The expected accessibility needs, and acoustic separation required of units, suggest single storey dwellings as the most appropriate form. This has generated a significant reduction in scheme density from the 2018 application, which is also seen as appropriate to the privacy needs of the proposed user group. The current expectation is approximately 16 units containing a mixture of one and two bed properties.

House Type	2018 Scheme		2023 Proposal	
	Number	Bedspaces	Number	Bedspaces
4 bed, 8 person	6	48		
3 bed, 5 person	12	60		
3 bed, 6 person	5	18		
1 bed, 2 person - M4(2)	4	8	10	20
2 bed, 4 person - M4(2)	10	40	2	8
2 bed, 3 person - W/C Accessible M4(3)			4	12
Totals :	37	174	16	40

Comparative Accommodation Schedule (July 2023)

Single story housing has little historic precedent in Bath and additionally on the hillside location formal patterning could seem incongruous. Therefore the designers have looked to the vernacular forms of rural placemaking local to the area such as farms and villages. With this type of settlement of small additive massings, that adapt their siting to contours, and use local, natural materials, the buildings become an integrated part of the landscape.



Typical examples of rural vernacular buildings from near bath

Adapting the scale, forms and materials exhibited in the examples above we think will provide dwellings appropriate to the city fringe location, allowing the development to integrate gently into the landscape viewed nearby as well as in long views from the city. It could also help them to feel deeply connected to the immediate surroundings and by inference the residents feel rooted in the site as home and they as “nature keepers”.

Extensive use of the local Bath stone used in vernacular buildings will likely be beyond the scope of the project viability, however baked clay and timber cladding could be used for extensive areas using interpretations of local detailing, with some masonry in buff tones to echo the locality and elevate the other materials.

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1. Artist's Studio Gloucestershire



2. Private dwelling, Cotswolds



3. Starfall Farm, Batheaston

Examples of contemporary architecture around the Bath countryside

The house types will need detailed development in later design stages with reference to best practice design for access and neurodiversity as well as client and user collaboration. Respecting the residents potentially complex needs for privacy and security, while at the same time providing opportunities for socialising, exercise and nature connection will require a careful integrating of internal and external spaces while at the same time avoiding complex spatial ambiguity which may cause anxiety due to unclear social cues.

With this in mind the current proposed site plan has adopted the farmyard form as a formal archetype, resulting in a scheme comprising of 2 clusters designed around inwardly facing courtyard communal landscaping, which will have a strong sense of defensible space to the houses around. The building footprints are arrayed predominantly strung along the contours, enabling connection of most properties along level paths with connections between levels made through terracing the courtyard spaces in small increments.



Concept Plan (July 2023)

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To the rear of each property is provided an enclosed private garden, which depending on orientation provide varied opportunities for prospect or external connections but could also be designed to be very introverted if preferred by the resident’s personal preference or needs. In this way the building forms naturally generate a strong sense of hierarchy between open and public, through enclosed public to increasingly private zones of occupation. Though the intention is to balance this organisation with a casual informality that allows for a homely sense of place.

It is currently proposed to maintain a largely car free site, with parking encouraged at the site entrance. While vehicle access will be required to all units on occasions (inc emergency) it is expected this can be provided using a rural hoggin-style road surface of a small scale, thereby generating a quiet, peaceful and safe neighbourhood, while also generating less environmental disruption.



1. Private house US

2. Private homes, Czech Rp

3. Housing, Norwich

Other clustered contemporary buildings inspired by rural vernacular buildings

The apparently casual jumble of forms and roofscapes apparent in some of the example images are designed to break down the scale of the built forms and their visual impact while adding interest. If incorporated into the proposals this would add a sense of individuality and identity to each home, negotiate the steeply sloping site topography and make the proposal sit gently into the site.

Conclusion

We trust this statement has conveyed the important design concepts that have been identified as a route to developing the Englishcombe Lane site in an exemplary manner for fairly rare and atypical typology of residential development for potentially vulnerable people.

Through this engagement process we aim to ensure these concepts are properly aligned with local planning policy and welcome the opportunity for dialogue with the LPA in adding value and providing the best design solution possible for those residents and this important site.