

Mark Pearson

Head of Design South West and a Member of the Cranbrook Design Review Panel

Cranbrook – Strategic Design Guidance

Comments on Final Document (November 2006)

Global Observations (about the whole document)

The relationship between the new settlement and the former A30 is ambiguous – what is the intended role of the former main road (will it be further downgraded to encourage traffic to use the new spine or will it provide an immediate by-pass?). This question is crucial in determining the form, size and nature of the retail core - its initial viability and its economic sustainability into the future needs to be driven by a clear understanding of its visibility to passing trade. A strong connection (elongated 'market square') between the A30 and the new spine might be one obvious solution and this would then be the prime retail zone – leaving the perpendicular High Street as the secondary area? A market square at this orientation would also provide better protection from prevailing driving wind and rain than the current orientation of the proposed High Street.

The relationship between 'incidents' within the pattern of urban design (the 'town squares' and 'hamlets') and the social infrastructure of the place is weak except at the "High Street". The urban pattern sets up expectations for the occurrence of convenience shops, pubs/cafes, and community facilities but none seem to exist in these locations? Form and content need to come together effortlessly for the place to become meaningful and satisfying to both residents and visitors.

The over-reliance on 'perimeter block' urban form is probably at odds with the stated desire to create locally distinct development – there is a sense that a general 'mat' of medium density settlement will prevail whereas it might be more efficient and characteristic of Devon to further increase densities along the spine and further reduce them at the periphery?

The 'water park' flood plain that embraces the settlement is undersold – it could be a very special environment and a high quality landscape designer needs to be employed to get the most from this great opportunity that could characterise the place. Rather than treat it as a 'neo-classical' natural opposition to the man-made environment, its presence could permeate some of the residential areas if principles of sustainable urban drainage are followed and a more relaxed, less formal, approach to open space is allowed. If, in this way, the net balance of environmental assets and biodiversity can be increased then perhaps the over-reliance on saving existing hedgerows might be usefully relaxed – good towns have never to my knowledge been designed around hedgerows...

Illustrations to demonstrate principles would be best in the form of diagrams rather than photographs. It should be made clear what the principle is that is being illustrated. Diagrams and the text should include suggested numeric

dimensions where these can be specified with confidence. In this way the document would move usefully from having the feel of a marketing brochure to being a useful technical manual. Statements about design that can not be illustrated (as above) or in some other way turned into useful and practical guidance should be avoided.

Specific Comments (page by page)

P8 Item 4 is laudable enough but where do we learn how this is achieved? What are the essential strategies and tactics that achieve this?

Item 5 – again how will the heart grow and adapt over time – seems to suggest a phasing diagram, but none appears – should the strategy for growth be flexible enough to accommodate several socio-economic scenarios ie rates of growth? How will the initial heart be successful if it appears incomplete?

p14 Some mention of solar orientation is needed + urban form generating benign 'micro-climates?...

p17 It seems rather strange that a decision has been made that red brick will predominate in the 'hinterland' – tactics for the best location of thermal mass whilst minimising the carbon footprint are unlikely to produce brick facades? If special character areas are desired then these might be created by self-built 'one off' houses rather than copies of the historic local vernacular.

P35 Not sure if here is the place to state it, but surely somewhere there ought to be stated the 'in principle' approach to the disposition of social and affordable housing amongst the market housing?

p28 Perhaps a section is missing "Quality of the Public Realm"? This might include proposals for the employment of artists as part of the development.

p33 No mention of access and management of service vehicles/HGVs? Adoption of 'homezone' and shared surface ideas in some housing areas?

p34 Some statement about the location of front doors (particularly to flats) would be welcome – ie fronting onto primary public realm rather than car parks!

p37 No mention of the space within perimeter blocks (or are these all parking courts!) Some communal and shared green space would be good. Local food production (allotments?) Biodiversity? Pocket parks?

- P38 See CABE's 'Start with the Park' publication – whole proposal needs to fit within a green space strategy and management plan for a wider area – possibly the whole district?
- p39 Perhaps the title should be expanded to “Resource Use and Waste Management Strategy”? Local composting? Recycling Points? Landfill(bigger picture)? Local Food Production?
- p40/41 Illustrations would be better as diagrams showing general principles and typical relationships rather than photographs that may be taken too literally or misinterpreted – deliberately or by accident! For a proper account of why Devon's buildings look like they do then refer designers to Peter Beacham's “Devon Building” but then try to reconcile with contemporary construction...
- p50 I do not know why 4 storeys should be the maximum height – traditional urban form throughout UK and Europe shows that it can be highly successful at 5 storeys and still retains a conventional relationship to the street.
- P52 How will a medium or large scale food store be successfully accommodated within the town centre?
- p54 Again no mention of Homezone principles?
- p58 The Hamlet idea needs a functional basis not just a formal one (see earlier comment above) A social raison d'etre...
- p60 It is noticeable how much of the Parkland Frontage is facing North! – less than ideal...
- p62 Many of these open spaces are compromised by traffic movement – it might be better to have less of them and more local pocket parks that were locally ‘owned’ and possibly managed as opposed to these big civic spaces – there's no real history of this scale of space being successful in Devon's climate – more shelter required...
- p65 Unfortunately the illustration proves exactly why this is a difficult idea to make a success of...
- p78 Perimeter blocks will work and be a good solution in many instances but why can't the herringbone form of ‘burgage’ plot development be re-interpreted as an alternative development form – that is more locally distinct?
- P80 The top left illustration has no merit whatsoever that I can discern.
- P82 Much too weak and seems prescriptive rather than opening up creative opportunities – but why here do we not, for instance, rule out UPVC? Much discussion of walls but little of roofs?

- P83 I think the higher densities should be higher and the lower densities should be (a little) lower...
- P91 If they are mentioning chimneys then it might also be appropriate to discuss service entry points / meters / flues / etc.
- P92 No mention of artists /craftspeople to make new distinctive work?
- P93 Bin Storage or to be expanded to deal with local recycling, individual and neighbourhood composting – and future-proofing the amount of space required for storage.
- P100 Really ought to draw closely on the recently published English Partnerships work on car-parking in residential areas – suggesting, for maximum efficiency, 50% of spaces should not be allocated to individual dwellings! This predicts much more on-street parking than is conventionally suggested...
- P101 No mention under town centre parking of the relationship between a potential big food store and its parking and the general provision?

mdp 29.11.2006