88 Maddles, Letchworth Garden City – Character Planning Statement

Introduction

The application site sits within the Jackmans estate, which was built to help alleviate the shortage of decent homes for people living in overcrowded London. Today there is still a shortage of decent homes and the proposed application at 88 Maddles, if approved, would help contribute to providing much needed additional housing.

The Jackmans estate has its own character as it was heavily influenced by the Radburn layout, which encourages separating pedestrians and vehicles by having most residential units located in cul-de-sacs off a main road. This particular character results in some streets not having many active frontages, as the road often provides access to the rear of properties and their garaging. In these cases the houses front a green in between streets. Even though this is a key characteristic of the Radburn style of layout, it is not in line with current recommended Urban Design principles.

The Jackmans estate is predominantly residential and made up of mainly terraced one and two storey dwellings, interspersed with 3 storey blocks of flats. The estate centre has the addition of Ivel Court, which is a 5-storey block of flats with retail units on the ground floor.

Proposal

The proposal submitted to NHDC includes extending 88 Maddles and introducing an additional dwelling to the terrace of houses. The application site is bounded by close-board timber fencing, which results in a very blank boundary treatment. The introduction of a new dwelling, as proposed, will result in an improvement in the character of the site, as a new dwelling will provide more interest in comparison to a large expanse of timber fencing. Adjacent to the site is a footpath which currently has no natural surveillance; the introduction of a new dwelling will provide an extra level of surveillance, which would improve the environment and make the footpath seem less threatening.

Precedents

Even though the Jackmans estate was clearly planned, various additions have been made to the estate within a close proximity to the application site.

These include the addition of 4 bungalows on the corner of Quills and Pryor Way. Figure 1 below shows the site from above and Figure 2 shows a street elevation.



Figure 1: Aerial view of bungalows on the corner of Quills and Pryor Way.



Figure 2: Street view of bungalows on the corner of Quills and Pryor Way.

These properties are an example of a dense residential development of a site which would not have originally been meant for housing units.

Figure 3 below shows the addition of the small estate off Radburn Way, which does not continue the characteristics of the original planning style of the Jackmans estate.



Figure 3: Aerial view of Alban Road, off Radburn Way.

The style of the properties is considerably different to the dwellings within the original Jackmans estate, even though it is within proximity of the site.

The proposal to 88 Maddles does is for the new dwelling to be set back from the existing dwelling. Even though the set back is greater than the row of dwellings it is attached to, there are existing examples within the estate (as shown in Figures 4 and 5 below) which include properties being set back by their whole depth in varying orientations.



Figure 4: Example of off-set properties on the Jackmans estate.

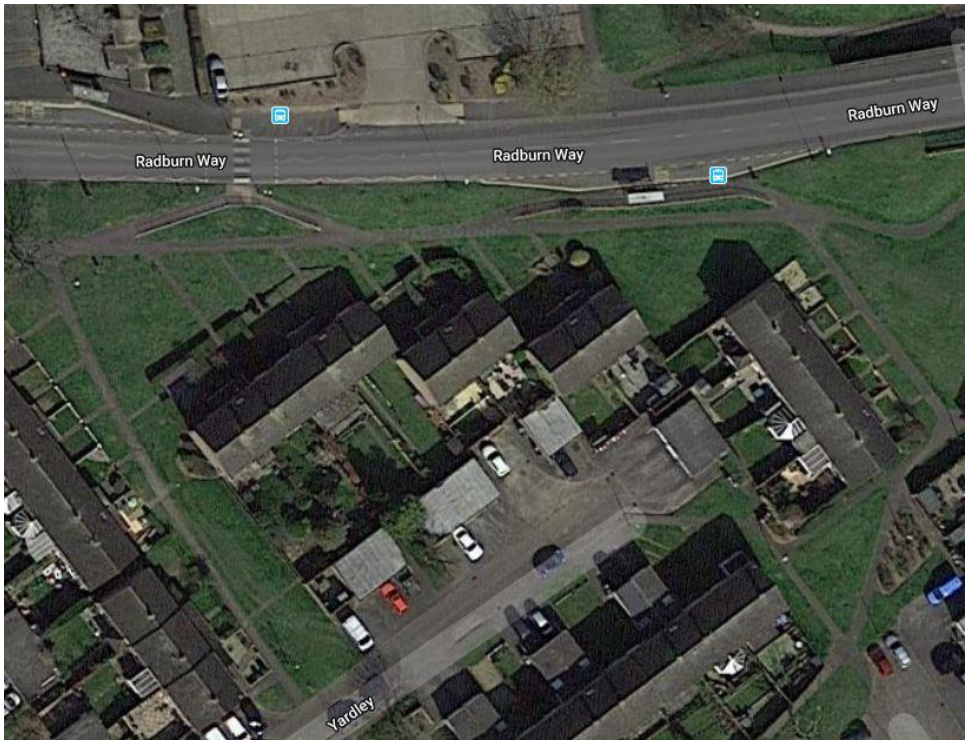

Figure 5: Example of off-set properties on the Jackmans estate.

These examples show that alterations have been made to the estate which have not been overly sympathetic to the original building forms. The proposals at 88 Maddles will result in an addition to

the estate which is modest in form and will have characteristics which are in keeping with the original style of property on the estate.

Design

The design of the proposed dwelling has incorporated several features relating to the existing terrace to ensure the building is in keeping with the character of the vicinity of the application site. These include:

- Matching existing storey heights
- Matching existing roof pitches
- The additional unit being set back from the existing building line
- Fenestration to match existing scale and proportions
- External finishes to match existing materials

In addition, both 88 Maddles and the additional unit will enjoy rear gardens which are of a similar size to the neighbouring properties, which is of added importance, as the property is part of the world's first Garden City.

Land Use

Providing an additional C3 unit on this residential designated land would result in the need for one less property being built on greenfield land. Therefore, approving this application would lessen the demand for housing on greenfield sites, resulting in retaining the character of those greenfield sites which are in threat of being heavily developed.

Housing Need

As we are all aware the need for housing is an ever-increasing problem, even more so in this part of the country. An additional unit in the Jackmans estate would provide a much-needed home in a sustainable location, therefore helping to contribute towards the housing shortage.

Street scene Improvement

Maddles has a considerable supply of off-road parking, including many garages. Whilst this does benefit the car users living on Maddles, it does have a negative impact on the street scene. In addition to garages many of the properties in Maddles back on to the street. Therefore, the proposed additional unit would provide an extra front facing unit, which would be an improvement in Urban Design guidelines, therefore making a positive contribution to the character of the road.

Conclusion

Jackmans is a planned estate with a vernacular of terraced houses. It is clear that 88 Maddles has an oversized plot for the location and therefore the opportunity to introduce a much-needed housing unit should be supported.

To ensure the character of the site is improved the proposed dwelling will include several characteristics to match the adjoining terrace of properties, to guarantee the new building sits well in its context.

The additional dwelling is not the first alteration to the planned estate and I feel this alteration will have less of an impact and more of a positive contribution compared to the other alterations to the estate in the past.

The new dwelling will increase the active frontage to Maddles and will also improve the environment of the pedestrian footpath, which in its current form could be seen as threatening to users.

The proposal also includes improvements to the existing dwelling, to make it a property which is more in line with the current demands and aspirations of modern day living.

Therefore, I think it is clear the benefits this additional unit will make to the local environment should warrant the application being recommend for approval.