

# Houndwood Somerset



*Houndwood masterplan – a strong rectilinear layout of terraces underpins a desire for maximising land use, sustainability and economy.*

## Basics

- Landowners and key drivers of the development – C & J Clark
- Feilden Clegg Bradley with Grant Associates and Arup led the masterplanning process
- planning authority – Mendip District council
- highway authority – Somerset County Council
- site of former shoe manufacture and distribution on edge of village
- scheme development 2003-2007. First phase on site: October 2007
- ambitious masterplan for sustainability and shared space
- around 400 dwellings. First phase 138 units
- site area: 10.65 hectares
- gross density: 37.6 dwellings per hectare.

## Particular features of the development

Houndwood's development process and design anticipated many of the key principles outlined in *Manual for Streets*. The streetscapes and public spaces are strongly landscape-driven, with a particular emphasis on the creation of a distinctive series of places integrated with the streetscape. A strongly rectilinear layout of terraces underpins a desire for maximising land use, sustainability and economy. The masterplan consciously avoids curvilinear street forms in favour of a simple rationale for permeability and circulation. It includes a low-speed street network, achieved through tight dimensions, avoidance of conventional highway elements, and an emphasis on a series of places over conventional road hierarchies.

The 1:1.5 ratio of parking was mainly achieved through integral parking and identified on-street spaces. Special provision was made for 'white vans' and the like, along with a recognition of the key role cars play in rural locations. Three street typologies were evolved, with widths of 7.1 metres, 9 metres and 11.8 metres. The first phase allows the testing of dimensions and refinement for subsequent phases, while the scheme shows a strong relationship between streets and water and urban drainage.

*The scheme includes a low-speed street network, achieved through tight dimensions and avoidance of conventional highway elements.*



## Objectives and guiding principles of the scheme

Development evolved from a decision by Clark's to develop a distribution centre, requiring a planning land exchange. The firm then appointed Alan Pearce & Nick Tyrrell of RPS (now Alder King) to handle planning and local consultations. Very extensive public consultation strengthened Clark's commitment to bequeath particular quality to Street, while a thorough planning and design brief was prepared to confirm objectives. The brief has underpinned the whole development process and Alder King Planning Consultants have been retained in a lead advisory role for the duration of the project.

The board members of Clark's supported particular emphasis on sustainability. Feilden Clegg Bradley Architects was appointed to develop 'hard' sustainability criteria (particularly low carbon targets) that could be incorporated into contracts with developers. Those built on the 'softer' qualitative criteria used in the 'Sustainability Spectrum' work by Hugh Barton at University of Western England that was being used in the public consultation process.

An important decision was made by the Clark family to remain leading the development right through to completion, supporting the core advisory team. There was also direct engagement with the local consultation process. A complex relationship between the family and the village of Street (positive and negative) led to a strong commitment to view the scheme as an opportunity for innovation, new standards and a distinctive identity.

## Process

Extensive site analysis, combined with input from the consultation process encouraged special emphasis on a landscape response. Feilden Clegg Bradley with Grant Associates and Arup led the masterplanning process. A development framework document was prepared (first draft April 2005, revised October 2005). Generous open space provision was through a linked series of open spaces, with four types of places identified through the planning design brief. The work involved 2.75 hectares in total, plus the public open space element of streetscapes.

First proposals envisaged an indirect, contorted route through the site in order to reduce speeds and rat-running. Clark's supported the design team's decision to adopt shared space principles as an alternative to conventional traffic-calming. This philosophy was presented to Somerset County Council to establish confidence in approach. Street character types were developed in detail to inform and test the masterplan and overall street network. The development of key spaces served as gateways into the site, with traffic function subordinate to landscape quality (Lime Tree Square, for example).

An unconventional approach was taken to the scheme development and technical approval for planning. Ian Morrow of Arup chaired eight monthly meetings with Somerset Highways, working through all aspects of infrastructure design. The publication of Highway Risk & Liability was particularly helpful, taking pressure off the highway authority, and avoiding having to deal with a major, innovative scheme at planning submission stage. This required a higher time input, but reduced the risk of major redesign. Meetings were carefully minuted to provide an audit trail. There was an unusual inclusion of

planned 'mitigation measures' in a contingency plan to allow scope for response to potential problems in use. It was particularly appropriate to allow a flexible response to parking pressure and control. Somerset County Council did not require a conventional safety audit – an internal team specialises in estate roads. Pre-1990, Estate Roads in Somerset, based on Design Bulletin 32 (DB32) was downplayed in favour of a 'come and discuss with us' approach. Technical approval at Section 38 stage serves as audit.

Clark's selected Crest Nicholson as developer following a competition, with emphasis given to track record and approach to sustainability rather than the financial offer. Paul Talbot of Crest convinced his directors of the marketing benefits of the innovative scheme with strong environmental qualities. CMS Architects was appointed by Crest to detail the first phase, now on site. Grant Associates was retained for landscape production drawings and Alder King was retained to deal with the reserved matters planning approvals. Some compromises were required in the buildings and streetscapes – such as the removal of perpendicular parking. The original advisory team noted the importance of persistence to avoid highway engineering to revert to conventional solutions.

Images: Grant Associates



*Lime Street Square is a key space that serves as a gateway into the site, with traffic function subordinate to landscape quality.*

## Lessons for elsewhere

- The scheme has the potential to establish new standards for street design, architecture, landscape provision and sustainable housing
- success will depend, in part, on the continued strength of the housing market
- the scheme is already influencing other developments and expanding the possibilities for sustainable housing. Monitoring of speeds, parking and resident attitudes will be critical.

Review by Hamilton-Baillie Associates.  
**For inspiration visit:**  
[www.cabe.org.uk/streets](http://www.cabe.org.uk/streets)