

DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

17 August 2006

PROPOSAL: Full Planning Application for 72 Dwellings
LOCATION: Former Hanley Pottery, Stubbs Lane, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent
DEVELOPER: Haslam Homes
ARCHITECT: BM3 Architects
REF NO: 047

Background

This proposal involves the erection of 72 dwellings on land formerly occupied by Hanley Pottery which has now been completely demolished. The site is 1.36 ha in size and is situated on the north side of the Caldon Canal between Eastwood Road and Botteslow Street, Hanley. It lies on a south-facing slope, which runs from Stoke-on-Trent City Centre about half a mile to the north west down to the valley of the River Trent. The site is linear with a long frontage to the Caldon Canal, and has greater depth at its Eastwood Road (western) end. There are three recorded mineshafts on the site and substantial reclamation will be required to prepare it for development. The Panel visited the site prior to considering the proposal.

Strategic Planning Context

The proposed development is one of several major schemes being promoted by Renew North Staffordshire within City Waterside, which is part of the City Centre South Area of Major Intervention (AMI). This latter is a zone within the urban core of the North Staffordshire conurbation which the housing market renewal pathfinder has identified for priority action. The City Waterside Master Plan came to the Panel at draft stage in October 2005, and was welcomed as a well considered framework to guide future development. However, along with other detailed recommendations, the Panel recommended that an indicative building block layout be provided at an appropriate scale as part of the Master Plan to help ensure that written principles are successfully translated into real urban form. The Panel were advised that the Master Plan had been approved by the City Council for development control purposes.

The proposal occupies land within the Caldon Canal Conservation Area, but currently has no standing buildings or other built features of significance. Outline planning permission for residential development is in place for the site, subject to a Section 106 Agreement.

The development would provide 18 affordable homes, 25% of the total, which is in accordance with the relevant policy in the North Staffordshire Core Spatial Strategy Preferred Options report.

Contextual Analysis

A contextual analysis had been done on behalf of Renew by EDAW in preparing a strategic development framework for the North Staffordshire urban core and in producing the City Waterside Master Plan. The principles for the development of the site set out in the Master Plan include the provision of a central route bisecting the site aligned on an axis running from the City Centre to the listed bottle ovens on the south side of the Caldon Canal. This axis would allow a pedestrian bridge to be constructed over the canal in the future to connect the site with the City Waterside park proposed as a setting for the listed buildings.

The City Waterside Master Plan proposes that the development provides a continuous frontage to the canal whilst maximising opportunities for views out of the site to the hillside across the Trent valley. The Master Plan also stipulates that an east-west pedestrian spinal route be provided through the middle of the site linking Eastwood Road with Botteslow Street, rather than having a canalside walkway.

A Design Statement had been produced, but this largely consisted of illustrations and had little explanation of how the principles of the City Waterside Master Plan were being translated into detailed designs for this site.

Urban Design

Character

The site is completely cleared land with little or no trace of the former Hanley Pottery buildings surviving. The Panel were not made aware of any reference to the history of the site or its built form in the redevelopment proposals.

Continuity and Enclosure

The Panel were advised that the aim had been to create a perimeter block form of development throughout the site, with a strong frontage to the canal. However, this had not been fully achieved because of various constraints, including the requirement for a spinal pedestrian route running east-west through the site and the presence of old mineshafts.

Although the layout for the site had not yet reached a definitive form, it was clear that the east-west pedestrian route in particular is causing significant problems in designing a satisfactory layout. The Panel considered that this linkage as specified in the Master Plan is compromising the layout proposals. The impact of this requirement on the eastern end of the site is particularly problematic, as it had resulted in a series of shallow depth plots some of which back onto Botteslow Street. The Panel thought that there should be more flexibility and responsiveness to context in the way that the route is located.

The Panel fully supported the principle of providing an axial route across the site aligned from the listed bottle ovens to the City Centre. However, the Panel considered that the enclosure to this route could be improved by the placement and treatment of adjacent buildings.

The Panel thought that the building frontage to the canalside was fragmentary comprising too many different house types with too much space between them. In this respect the layout failed to satisfy the valid requirement of the Master Plan for a continuous built-up frontage to the canal.

Quality of the Public Realm

The Panel supported the general aim of providing a series of public spaces linked by shared surfaces. With the exception of the axis to the proposed pedestrian bridge, however, the purpose of these spaces was not clear. The Panel thought that the proposed landscaping scheme should be justified, and the purpose of the proposed private and public spaces and its relationship to the surrounding area should be explained, as required by Circular 01/2006.

Ease of movement

The proposed layout provides linkages across and through the site allowing easy pedestrian access throughout the development. The Panel thought that the reconfiguration of the east-west pedestrian route could be achieved without detriment to overall permeability, perhaps by re-directing it along the canal frontage near to the centre of the site.

With regard to vehicular access the Panel thought that an access directly off Eastwood Road would benefit the overall layout by enabling two perimeter blocks to be provided at the western end of the site, which is deep enough to allow this. This would provide more direct road access to the heart of the site, instead of the tortuous route via Stubbs Lane currently envisaged.

Legibility

The topography of the site elevates it above the canal and will make any development very visible from the east. The canal edge is therefore very important and a consistent built form with a strong and simple palette of materials is considered essential to present an attractive and distinctive public face for the development. The Panel thought this had not yet been achieved, and that further design work is necessary on this very important edge.

The central axis across the site effectively divides it into two and the architectural treatment of key buildings along this route will be important in aiding navigation around the rest of the site.

Architecture

The Panel were advised that most of the house types proposed for the site are bespoke designs. The Panel considered that, whilst efforts had been made to customise some of the designs, others had a very similar appearance to residential developments elsewhere, and as a whole the scheme is not notably creative or innovative.

The scale and massing of individual building blocks are in general terms appropriate to the context, but the overall architectural composition along the water front and to the main axial route is neither consistent nor coherent.

The Panel thought that the architecture of the development currently fails to realise the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of the area, as required by PPS1 *Delivering Sustainable Development*.

Sustainability

The Panel were informed that it is intended that the development will achieve Eco Homes Very Good standard, which would provide a basis for sustainability. However, no reference was made to the use of local energy generation in the design, or to the potential for passive solar gain

offered by this south-facing site. A more systematic approach to environmental sustainability would be advantageous in making the development future-proof in this respect.

Conclusion

Whilst recognising that this was a difficult site with significant physical constraints, the Panel felt that the site had great potential with its generally south-facing aspect, canal frontage, proximity to the City Centre, fine views, and central location in an area of major investment and intervention.

The Panel considered that the main design issue is the route structure within the site. The Panel questioned the wisdom of rigidly locating the east-west pedestrian way through the middle of the site, given the difficulties this causes for achieving a satisfactory layout particularly at the narrower eastern end of the site. A more flexible approach to the alignment of the internal footway network would be of great benefit in achieving a more functional layout and in avoiding problems of plot depth, poor orientation to the public realm, insufficient enclosure and circuitous vehicular access.

The Panel thought that more effort should be made to provide continuous built-up frontages to the canal and to the main axial route leading to the proposed footbridge. The canal frontage in particular requires a more consistent architectural approach, with fewer but more creatively designed house types incorporating some locally distinctive materials.

Recommended Actions:

- 1 The Design Statement for the proposal should be reviewed to explain
 - a how the design and development principles set out in the City Waterside Master Plan are being applied;
 - b why the location of the east-west pedestrian route proposed in the Master Plan should be more flexible in this case;
 - c how the history of the site is reflected or acknowledged in the design of the proposed development;
 - d the purpose and use of the proposed landscaping, and the private and public realm, and how these relate to their surroundings;
 - e how the principles of sustainable development have been systematically considered in the design of the development.
- 2 The layout of the site should be revised to provide more continuous built-up frontages to the canal and to the main axial route across the site, stronger enclosure to the public realm, and more direct vehicular access into the site.
- 3 The design of the canal frontage should be revised to provide a more consistent architectural treatment with fewer but more creatively designed house types incorporating some locally distinctive materials.