

DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

17 August 2006

PROPOSAL: Outline Planning Application for Residential Development
LOCATION: Land at Ridgway Road, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent
DEVELOPER: English Partnerships
TOWN PLANNING: DTZ
REF NO: 048

Background

This outline proposal is for residential development on a 1.0 ha site off Ridgway Road, Hanley, which lies within the City Waterside area adjacent to the Caldon Canal. The land is in the ownership of English Partnerships who in developing this site are seeking to spearhead an exemplary standard of design for the regeneration of the area. English Partnerships, along with other local partners including Renew, have prepared a design brief for the site and are currently inviting tenders from interested developers in parallel with the submission of this outline planning application. The site lies in an elevated position between Hanley Park and the Caldon Canal, approximately 1km south east of the City Centre. The northern part of the land is occupied by a decommissioned electricity sub-station and one small working sub-station, but is otherwise vacant and disused. The Panel visited the site prior to considering the proposal.

Strategic Planning Context

The site is allocated for residential purposes within the Stoke-on-Trent adopted local plan. The City Waterside Master Plan, which was adopted by the City Council for development control purposes, identifies the site for housing development. The draft City Centre Area Action Plan, which includes the Ridgway Road site, seeks to provide new residential development along the canals to provide a better choice of housing.

The site is located between and immediately adjacent to the Hanley Park and the Caldon Canal Conservation Areas, although no part of it lies inside either conservation area.

The North Staffordshire Core Spatial Strategy Preferred Options report would require the development to provide 25% of the total dwellings as affordable homes.

English Partnerships are promoting the development of this site as part of their national strategic support for housing market renewal pathfinders. English Partnerships' key objectives for the site

are to help create sustainable communities, to offer a high quality design solution, and to widen housing choice.

Design Brief

The outline planning application consists of a red-edged site plan and the design brief prepared by English Partnerships. The Design Brief provides contextual analysis, including access, connectivity, and the diverse built form of the surrounding neighbourhood which varies from two storey terraces and semi-detached houses to the ten storey blocks of flats immediately to the north of the site. There are no built structures on the site of significance; the remaining working sub-station would be relocated within the new development.

In addition to its conservation area status Hanley Park to the west is on the English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens. The Caldon Canal towpath, which is on the opposite side of the canal to the site, provides excellent links to the west and north.

An ecological constraints survey has been carried out and precautionary measures identified for the preservation of valuable fauna and flora, and the removal of invasive species.

The Brief asks that detailed proposals celebrate and enhance the canal, the park and the architectural composition along Ridgway Road. No specific guidance is given regarding architecture, or housing types, although the Brief encourages innovative design, medium density development, good pedestrian access, and stipulates that car parking should not dominate the development.

The tapered corner on the southern end of the site is highlighted for its potential to accommodate a special accent apartment building with a maximum height of seven storeys; building heights elsewhere on the site should be a maximum of two and a half storeys. Otherwise the Brief asks that proposals demonstrate a positive relationship to the frontages of Ridgway Road and the Caldon Canal.

Car parking is proposed to be integrated within the built form to minimise impact on visual amenity and to increase security. Vehicular access will be limited to a maximum of two points.

Accessibility to and within the site is strongly encouraged, and provision is required within the detailed designs for an accessible public route along the north western side of the canal to be created in the future.

Developers invited to tender for the project will be expected to meet English Partnerships' Quality Standards: BREEAM Eco Homes Very Good, Building For Life Silver Standard; and Lifetime Homes.

Comment

The Panel supported the approach taken by English Partnerships, and wished to make the following comments.

The Panel were pleased that the proposal had been referred at this relatively early stage, and wished to see the more detailed schemes submitted in due course by the developers, preferably before a selection decision is made.

The Panel welcomed the high aspirations contained in the Design Brief, and were encouraged by the strength of its contextual analysis. However, the Panel were frustrated by the fact that the Brief presents a wide range of possible development options expressed in no more than diagrammatic form, instead of providing more specific guidance in respect of various design parameters like building scale, layout and quantum. The site is quite small and elongated, and the Panel thought that certain of the principles expressed in the Brief, such as presenting building frontages both to the canal and to Ridgway Road or the idea of providing a public access along the canalside, ought to have been tested by scale drawings with indicative layouts, as the physical limitations of the site might make these principles difficult to achieve in practice. The Panel thought that the Brief would have benefited if some key site dimensions and level changes had been specified.

The Panel considered that this was a special site being located next to a major historic park not far from the City Centre, with a long canal frontage and the prospect of excellent views across the valley of the River Trent to the hillsides beyond. At present the site has many mature and semi-mature trees and other planting along the canal edge, which reinforce and extend the landscape of Hanley Park into the surrounding area. The Brief, or any planning consent based on it, should seek to protect as many of these valuable trees as possible in order to retain that special character and to maintain some of the site's biodiversity, and not allow the site to become completely urbanised in the process of its development.

Recommended Actions:

- 1 That the prospective schemes for the site received in response to English Partnerships' invitation to tender be referred to the Panel for design review before one of them is selected for implementation.
- 2 That any outline planning permission granted for the proposal be conditioned to retain as many of the trees on the site as is practical, in order to preserve its biodiversity and its special landscape qualities.