

DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

7 June 2007

PROPOSAL: Outline Planning Application for Residential and Commercial Development
LOCATION: Subaru Garage site, Brunswick Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme
DEVELOPER: Holdcrofts Staffordshire
ARCHITECT: Tarpey Barrett
TOWN PLANNING: Hulme Upright Manning
REF NO: 050

Background

This proposal involves the redevelopment of a site currently used for car sales and display at the junction of Brunswick Street and Hanover Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme, for residential, retail and restaurant purposes. The site is approximately 0.22 ha in size and is situated on the eastern side of Newcastle-under-Lyme town centre just outside the ring road and immediately to the east of the Jubilee Baths.

The scheme was first considered by the Panel as a preliminary proposal in September 2006, when it was welcomed in general terms as having the potential to make a positive contribution to this edge of town centre location, which would satisfy the Borough Council's planning policy requirements for the area. The Panel were greatly encouraged by the fact that the developer had prepared a model to illustrate and to test the proposal, as this would help anticipate and resolve issues in a way that would be understandable to experts and lay people alike.

In developing the designs further, however, the Panel thought that a number of issues ought to be addressed and made several recommendations to help achieve this. On 7 June 2007 the Panel considered a more detailed scheme for the site which had been prepared for the outline planning permission. The Panel visited the site prior to receiving a presentation of the updated proposal. The following paragraphs deal with each of the Panel's recommendations for the site and the applicant's response to them.

Response to the Panel's recommendations

- 1 *An urban design analysis should be provided as part of the required Design and Access Statement giving the historical background of the site, defining the urban character of the surrounding area, and demonstrating how the design has been generated in response to that built context.*

Although an urban design analysis had not been prepared for the site, the architect had produced a 1:100 scale model showing the proposal in the context of the surrounding buildings. This coupled with the Design and Access Statement provided a much improved sense of how the building would relate to its environs. Several of the surrounding sites appear to be candidates for redevelopment in the coming years, and it will be important to ensure that a consistent urban design approach is taken to ensure that a form of townscape is produced that reinforces the character of the area whilst enabling it to develop and thrive economically. The guidance provided by the Eastern Area Urban Design Study commissioned by the Borough Council for this part of the town centre, and the emerging Newcastle Town Centre Area Action Plan, will be crucial in delivering a successful urban form for this live-work quarter.

- 2 *All ground floor uses should have direct access points to and from the adjacent public streets. The interface between the pedestrian route connecting Brunswick Street with School Street and the western boundary of the site should be carefully designed to ensure that this route is safe and overlooked.*

The preliminary scheme had residential units which had no doors to the street on the School Street frontage at ground floor level – these have now been removed from the proposal. All other ground floor uses have direct pedestrian access at street level.

Little appears to have been done to ensure that the pedestrian footpath between the site and the Jubilee Baths is safe. This footpath is not overlooked at all (the only window in the elevation is to a toilet), and it connects into the internal courtyard via an unrestricted pedestrian route, raising questions of safety and security for residents and visitors approaching on foot. This and the presence of two other unrestricted pedestrian access points off Brunswick Street and School Street make the site too permeable and will allow unauthorised persons to use the internal residential walkways and access the private car parking areas.

- 3 *The height of the proposed development should be reduced by one storey in order not to overpower the adjoining two and three storey development, and to allow more light to reach the vertical garden proposed within the block.*

The Panel noted that the issue of the scale of the proposal had not yet been resolved. Five storey development of the site would not integrate well with the nearby two storey terraces. Over-intensive development of the nearby Brunswick Court had not been successful or popular, and the Panel thought it important to ensure that the aspiration for high quality residential accommodation should be given priority. This should have a more respectful relationship to adjoining buildings, particularly terraces Hanover Street in multiple ownership that would be unlikely to be redeveloped in the foreseeable future. The Eastern Area Urban Design Study indicated a potential maximum four storey development in Hanover Street, whereas this outline application proposes five storeys to Hanover Street.

The Panel considered that the aim of achieving a landscape internal courtyard with light penetrating to the first floor level would not be possible with a five storey building frontage to School Street. This would eliminate the possibility of direct sunlight into the internal courtyard and many of the units that front onto the courtyard. The Panel were concerned that the internal courtyard would be increasingly overshadowed at the lower levels, and that this would result in a very gloomy approach to many of the front doors of the residential properties which are accessed off galleries, and would limit the effectiveness of the landscaping.

4 An arboricultural report should be prepared dealing with the relationship between the proposed development and the existing street trees in Brunswick Street.

Whilst the Panel supported the aim of widening the pavement in front of the development on Brunswick Street by taking out one of the lanes of traffic, no arboricultural report on the quality and condition of the trees on the Brunswick Street frontage was available. This is considered essential to form a judgement on the best way of dealing with the existing trees as part of an improved footway on the main road.

5 Careful provision should be made to service the restaurant uses in order to protect residential amenity in the vicinity.

The current scheme includes a servicing bay in School Street adjacent to the restaurant's kitchen and storage area and removes ground floor residential units on the School Street frontage. These changes will minimise potential conflict between residential and restaurants uses.

6 Consideration should be given to providing smaller sized commercial units and to incorporating live work units within the proposed development.

The size of most of the commercial units within the scheme has not changed, with the exception of the restaurant use which is now proposed as a single operation on the ground floor rather than two restaurants each extending onto the first floor as originally proposed.

The Panel supported the local authority's aim of achieving a greater proportion of mixed use in the development, and considered that at the very least the scheme should be designed with the flexibility to enable the use to be changed at a later date. The Panel thought that the first floor layout could be designed to allow the possibility of live work uses being incorporated within the individual residential units at first floor level, for example by providing space for appropriate home working.

7 The length of the curved corner bay should be reduced, in order not to give too much architectural emphasis to this feature.

No change has been made to the curvature of the corner unit. The Panel thought that this was over-scaled for the location, resulting in some wasted space at ground floor level. The Panel

considered that the open terrace fronting the restaurant would not be pleasant for diners being near to a busy road with the associated noise and traffic fumes, and thought that the restaurant's open air terrace would be more attractive at first floor level where it would be equally prominent but more sheltered from the busy road.

8 The Design and Access Statement required for the future planning application should include systematic consideration of sustainable development issues and should demonstrate how these have been taken into account in the design.

The proposal satisfies the basic criteria for sustainable development by virtue of its town centre location, proximity to public transport routes and the fact that it is brownfield development. The Design and Access Statement contains general aspirational statements about low carbon development and resource efficiency, but very little specific detail.

One of the principal methods of minimising energy demand is through the use of passive solar gain by aligning windows to optimise the intake of sunlight. However, the height of the School Street elevation prevents sunlight reaching many of the units accessed off the central courtyard; and certain units, in particular those fronting Brunswick Street, will receive little or no direct sunlight.

Conclusion

The Panel thought that, providing the issue of building scale can be resolved, the overall impact of the development on the townscape would be positive. The use of materials, the articulation of the building and the perimeter block footprint of the proposal, would serve to integrate it with its surroundings better than the Brunswick Court development nearby and at the same time make it more attractive and marketable.

There remain however a number of issues which require attention at the detailed design stage, and the Panel recommend that these be addressed as follows.

Recommended Actions:

- 1 The permeability of the development at ground floor level be reviewed in order to ensure that pedestrian access and movement is safe and secure, and that potentially unsafe routes (including the pathway adjacent to the Jubilee Baths) are either eliminated from the layout or overlooked by principal ground floor windows providing good passive surveillance.
- 2 The scale of the development should be reduced on Hanover Street in accordance with the Borough Council's Eastern Area Urban Design Study, and on School Street in order to allow sunlight to penetrate the internal courtyard from the southern side of the site. The internal courtyard should be opened up to enable sunlight to reach all floors more directly.
- 3 The condition of the trees on the Brunswick Street frontage should be established through an arboricultural survey prior to a decision being made on how best to deal with them as part of an enhanced street frontage.

- 4 The first floor layout of the development should be revised to allow more commercial uses to be included in the development, for example, a restaurant terrace and live-work space.
- 5 A systematic statement of how the proposed development would be environmentally sustainable, including a schedule of specific features being provided to achieve this, should be provided as part of any detailed planning submission.