

## **DESIGN REVIEW PANEL**

### **19 October 2006**

**PROPOSAL:** Outline Planning Application for Mixed Use Development comprising 146 Residential Units, Business Units, 4No A1/A2 Units, and 3No A3/A4/A5 Units with associated car parking

**LOCATION:** Former Twyfords Factory, Shelton New Road, Stoke-on-Trent

**DEVELOPER:** Modus Group and Over Tabley Developments

**ARCHITECTS:** NCH Architects

**URBAN DESIGN:** Barnes Walker

**TOWN PLANNING:** Emery Planning Partnership

**REF NO:** 053

#### **Background**

This mixed use proposal involves the development of 113 residential apartments, 33 dwellings, and a range of commercial uses, including business start-up and move-up units, offices, local shops, and eating establishments on the Etruria Works site, formerly occupied by Twyfords, sanitary ware manufacturers. The site is some 2.07 ha in size and is located on the north side of Shelton New Road between its junctions with Etruscan Street and the Trent & Mersey Canal. Stoke-on-Trent City Centre (Hanley) lies approximately 1 mile to the north east of the site. The planning application is in outline, seeking consent for siting and access, with external appearance, design and landscaping reserved for later approval.

The Panel visited the site before commenting on the proposals.

#### **Strategic Planning Context**

The site lies within the City Centre South and University Quarter Area Action Plan (AAP), which is at an early stage of preparation. The vision of the AAP is *"to reinvigorate the heart of the City by creating modern urban villages on the doorstep of the City Centre and Stoke Station, maximising advantages arising from their proximity to waterside and green environments."*

On the opposite side of the Trent and Mersey Canal immediately to the east of the site is the City Centre South Area of Major Intervention, designated by RENEW North Staffordshire the housing pathfinder as a focus for public and private sector regeneration activity, with the principal aim of uplifting the housing market.

The Trent and Mersey Canal is a designated conservation area, which the local authority is

seeking to preserve, enhance and regenerate. On the opposite side of Shelton New Road is the Cliffe Vale Pottery, also formerly occupied by Twyfords, which is a Grade II listed building currently being redeveloped and partially converted for residential purposes by Countryside Properties.

As far as is known there is no design brief or other area-specific guidance for the site.

### **Contextual Analysis**

A Planning Statement and a Design and Access Statement have been produced to support the proposal. The latter deals with the design principles and concepts which Circular 01/2006 requires in a Design and Access Statement, namely the amount of development, its layout and scale, its appearance, the proposed landscape treatment, and the access arrangements.

The Design and Access Statement is presented primarily in illustrative form, with minimal written explanation. Whilst this approach successfully conveys the nature of what is proposed, it is not entirely satisfactory in explaining how the designs have been arrived at from the analysis of context, including assessments of historical significance, movement networks, and physical characteristics such as topography, views, and gateways.

The presentation given to the Panel served to clarify many of these questions. From this it was apparent that the designs had evolved from recognised urban design principles.

### **Urban Design**

#### Character

The analysis of the character of the site and its setting given in the Design and Access Statement is cursory, although a number of important factors likely to influence the design of the development are identified. These include its central strategic location in the conurbation adjacent to the canal, and its relative proximity to the City Centre and the main inter city railway station at Stoke.

There is only very limited appraisal of the local built fabric, the historical significance of the site, the nature of surrounding land uses, topographical conditions, and landscape setting. Whilst the site does not appear to contain buildings of architectural or historic interest, proper consideration of the site's significance is not provided in the Design and Access Statement.

A structural assessment of the condition of the existing concrete frame building dated 1953 has been carried out and from this it is proposed to retain the block on the corner of Shelton New Road and Etruscan Street. The remainder of the site would be redeveloped.

#### Continuity and Enclosure

The existing buildings on the site provide a strong built-up frontage to Shelton New Road and Etruscan Street. The canal towpath is some 3m higher than the site and its canal frontage is currently quite weak, comprising low quality industrial buildings lying some 3m below towpath level.

The Panel were informed that the proposal had been designed to reinstate continuous built-up frontages to the Trent and Mersey Canal, to Shelton New Road, and to Etruscan Street. The two road frontages would be redeveloped to three storeys on an increased building line behind a

landscaped strip. Buildings would be oriented outwards on all boundaries, with large windows to the business units on the two road elevations which would provide active frontages to the public highway.

The canal frontage would be redeveloped at four storeys in a mix of apartment types, with undercroft car parking accessed from the rear. The ground floor units would be set back some 6m from the towpath with gardens fronting the canal slightly elevated above towpath level.

There is an existing public footpath along the northern boundary of the site, which is currently narrow, unlit and unsafe. It is proposed to widen this pathway and to orientate a block of four storey town houses towards this route. This would introduce activity and lighting, thereby increasing natural surveillance, making the footpath more inviting and less prone to anti-social behaviour.

### Quality of the Public Realm

At present the site comprises a number of former industrial buildings used for storage purposes, which cover around 72% of the site area, and has no soft landscaping within its boundaries.

Landscaping is reserved for subsequent approval, but the indicative plans submitted show that the four boundaries of the site would be planted with trees in grass verges to soften the interface with the industrial environs and to frame and form welcoming views of the development. A sectional drawing of the canal boundary shows a grass verge buffer zone between the towpath and the private garden areas, which would be raised above towpath level and bounded by dwarf brick walls.

Within the development access roads and car parking would be provided to the rear of the commercial uses fronting Etruscan Street and Shelton New Road, with restricted access roads to the town houses and the apartment blocks. The declared aim is to provide a clear distinction between the public and the private realm throughout the development.

The Panel endorsed the proposal to set the café back from the canal frontage with a convivial space fronting the canal.

### Ease of movement

The Design and Access Statement identifies the existing footway network and main bus routes in the vicinity of the site, and indicates how the development would link with this network. The proposal would provide a new access to the canal towpath from Shelton New Road, two pedestrian links from the site to and from the towpath, an enhanced public footpath along the northern boundary of the site, a new vehicular access off Etruscan Street, and new pedestrian accesses off Shelton New Road and off the improved public footpath.

The site would thus be accessible by pedestrians from all four boundaries, and would be permeable to walkers along its north-south and east-west axes.

The Panel questioned the rationale for the asymmetrical apartment building in the centre of the site. The layout of the development is governed by perimeter blocks and with the orthogonal arrangement of the access and internal service roads which together create a focus at the heart

of the development. The Panel thought that this could be celebrated by aligning the apartment block on the axes formed by the rational planning of the rest of the site.

### Legibility

The proposal would retain the splayed block on the corner of Shelton New Road and Etruscan Street, which is emphasised by vertical fenestration, a raised corner parapet with an inset date inscription (1953). This would give the development a definite presence when approaching the site from the west, whilst retaining an element at least of the site's historic fabric.

The main vehicular access off Etruscan Street is aligned to give direct views of the route through the site onto the canal towpath.

At the junction of the canal and Shelton New Road it is proposed to provide a three storey building plus undercroft car parking. The Panel thought that this node could be given greater emphasis by increasing the height of the development to four storeys plus undercroft, thereby giving the development a potential landmark element on the approach from the east.

### Diversity

The proposal comprises a good mix of uses including business units, offices, local convenience shops, services and eating establishments. The aim is to make the site self-sustaining with residential, employment, service and recreational needs catered for. The proposed range of uses would also be of benefit to the new local communities such as the Redrow and Countryside developments, which are entirely residential in character. Nevertheless an assessment of the impact of certain use classes, particularly retail uses, on the surrounding area is advisable in order to determine whether any limitations of scale would be appropriate in this situation.

### **Architecture**

Although external appearance and design is reserved for subsequent approval, the proposal is illustrated with drawings showing a site-specific, contemporary form of architecture with strong three dimensional qualities. The elevations are well proportioned and have considerable, but rational, variations in their outer planes, which give movement and vitality to the facades, as well as the opportunity to provide balconies to most of the outward-facing residential units. The line of the roof on the residential blocks fronting the canal is uniform and the Panel thought that the design would benefit if the roof line to the canal frontage could be articulated.

The indicative palette of materials includes red brick, glass, exposed structural steel, textured metal panels (not specified), and render. These sorts of materials would make reference to the industrial history and context of the site whilst helping give the scheme an overall architectural coherence.

The use of generous glazing, particularly to the business units, invokes the existing industrial building with its expanse of horizontal windows on the two main road frontages.

The Panel thought that the scale and massing of the proposal was generally appropriate, but that the height of the development at the corner of the site where Shelton New Road crosses the canal should be increased, if only by one floor.

The Panel were satisfied that the scheme respects the public realm, will fulfil the needs of users and occupiers, and, if implemented in accordance with the indicative designs, would be capable of realising the potential of the site.

### **Sustainability**

The Design and Access Statement contains a section on the sustainability of the site, although this focuses on the advantages of its location, connectivity to facilities in the surrounding urban area and the provision of a mixed use package on the site.

The environmental aspects of sustainability such as energy generation, the source and supply of materials and labour for the development, the impact on the natural environment, and waste and recycling issues, are not be dealt with. The Panel considered that these matters should be addressed systematically to create a fully sustainable development when details plans are prepared for the approval of reserved matters.

### **Conclusion**

Overall the Panel considered that the approach taken to the design was very good, although it was not well articulated in the Design and Access Statement. The development has a good mix of uses, which are sited sensibly across the site with business uses in the blocks fronting the main roads and residential uses on the upper floors and in the blocks next to the canal. The site planning is generally sound with good access provision from all sides, although there is a need for further thought on how the centre and northern end of the site are laid out in order to rationalise the orientation of the central apartment block. With this proviso the Panel wished to commend the scheme as an outline proposal.

Details of external appearance, design and landscaping are reserved for subsequent approval and the Panel thought it vital that the positive indications given in the drawings submitted with this application are carried through to detailed stage, through the use of planning conditions as recommended in Circular 01/2006 (paragraphs 72 &73).

The Panel considered that this proposal has the potential to make a significant contribution to the regeneration of the area and would complement the local authority's Area Action Plan, as well as the work of RENEW North Staffordshire in reinvigorating the housing market in the City Centre South Area of Major Intervention. The Panel wished to make a number of recommendations to help ensure the promise of this scheme is fulfilled when detailed designs are prepared.

### **Recommended Actions:**

- 1 A more comprehensive written Design and Access Statement should be prepared to support the production of detailed designs required under the approval of reserved matters.
- 2 Further consideration should be given to the orientation of the apartment block in the centre of the development, as described in the body of this report.
- 3 The part of the development at the south eastern corner of the site should be increased in height, in order to give a more emphatic landmark quality and aid legibility on this important approach to the site.

- 4 A systematic appraisal of the environmental credentials of the proposal should be provided as part of the Design and Access Statement accompanying the reserved matters application.
- 5 That the design principles indicated in the illustrations accompanying this application are fixed in any outline planning permission granted and are carried through consistently at the reserved matters stage.