

## **DESIGN REVIEW PANEL**

### **14 December 2006**

**PROPOSAL:** Full planning application for 307 residential units with open space and road infrastructure (unregistered)  
**LOCATION:** Land off Scotia Road, Tunstall, Stoke-on-Trent  
**DEVELOPER:** Barratt Homes (Chester Division) Ltd  
**ARCHITECTURE:** John R Paley Associates  
**REF NO:** 055

#### **Background**

This proposal involves an 8.89 ha site originally used for the extraction of clay and subsequently for landfill tipping, located on land rising eastwards from Scotia Road, approximately 1 km south east of Tunstall town centre. The scheme has been submitted to Stoke-on-Trent City Council as a full planning application for 307 dwellings, but the local authority has invalidated the application due to lack of sufficient supporting information. The Panel visited the site prior to considering the proposal.

#### **Strategic Planning Context**

The North Staffordshire Core Spatial Strategy Preferred Options report, which completed its first stage of public consultation in August 2006, states that "Development other than local needs and strategic regeneration initiatives will be geared towards the North Staffordshire Urban Area" and that "particular emphasis will be placed on Areas of Major Intervention, General Renewal Areas and other Areas of Housing Intervention" defined in that document.

The site lies within the North Staffordshire Urban Area, but not within an AMI, GRA or AHI. The Panel were informed that RENEW North Staffordshire regard the proposed development to be in direct conflict with RENEW's Prospectus 2006-08, which sets out the approved strategy for housing market renewal in the sub-region.

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

#### **Design and Access Statement**

A Design and Access Statement was provided with the planning application. This document summarises the requirements of DCLG Circular 01/2006 in respect of the contents of Design and Access Statements, but fails to provide what is required. Instead it merely reiterates national and local planning policy without showing how it is being applied to the specific circumstances of the

site. It refers to the objectives of good urban design defined by CABE and makes a series of unfounded assertions that the proposal achieves these objectives. The Panel considered that the Design and Access Statement fails to explain or justify the proposed design, or show it is based on a thoughtful design process; consequently it does not satisfy the requirements of DCLG Circular 01/2006.

### **Summary of Panel comments**

The Panel was very disappointed with the quality of this proposal. The approach to housing layout is dated and formulaic which, when built out with standard house types, will result in a large characterless housing estate. This is likely to have a depressing effect on housing market renewal rather than serve to raise standards or provide an exemplar for new residential development. The Panel thought that the design of scheme is little more than an exercise in plot coverage and demonstrates a poor understanding of the principles of good architecture and urban design. The design of the proposal has nothing to commend it and only reveals the applicant's low aspirations for the site.

Specific design shortcomings include

- The layout provides poor connectivity with its surroundings, particularly the residential areas, it is not permeable, it has too many culs-de-sac and too few access points.
- The distribution of open space has no rationale, and appears to have been determined largely by the location of undevelopable land.
- The orientation and alignment of building blocks on the site is almost arbitrary, with only a minimal attempt at the creation of visually coherent streets and avenues.
- The use of standard house types is in direct conflict with the claim in the Design and Access Statement that the proposal has a site-specific design.
- There is a need for a special gateway treatment of the entrance to the site off Scotia Road and this is not met by the siting of a standard apartment block in the most prominent position.
- No reference is made to the way in which the design of the scheme would contribute to national, regional and local policy requirements for sustainable development. 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 dealt with. These matters should be addressed systematically to create a fully sustainable development

The Panel considered that the proposal fails to realise the opportunities available to improve the nature and character of the area and the way it functions, which is a requirement of PPS1 *Delivering Sustainable Development* (paragraph 34). Therefore the design of the proposal is not good enough to receive planning approval.

Notwithstanding the clear inadequacies of the present proposal, the Panel wished to make the following recommendations, should the principle of development on the site be agreed in the future.

### **Recommended Actions**

- 1 The developer should appoint a design team with recognised architectural and urban design skills and a track record in the design and delivery of high quality housing developments on brownfield land.
- 2 The site has several characteristics, which should influence the design of any development proposal, including the topography and level changes, ground conditions, and views out to local landmarks like the Sacred Heart RC Church. A thorough urban contextual analysis should be undertaken to provide a proper understanding of the built environs so that the design of any new development on the site can be fully integrated with its surroundings.
- 3 The site is of a significant scale and a master plan should be prepared to guide its development. This should include an open space strategy, which shows how the site can provide connections between the major public open spaces in the vicinity (e.g. Tunstall Park to the north and Bycars Park to the south) and identifies a specific purpose or function for each and every piece of open space within the site.
- 4 A systematic appraisal of the way in which the proposal addresses issues of environmental sustainability should be provided as part of the Design and Access Statement.