

DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

19 April 2007

PROPOSAL: Full application for the erection of 66 residential units,
LOCATION: Bus Depot site, Liverpool Road, Newcastle-under-Lyme
DEVELOPERS: Morbaine Limited/Castlegate Homes
ARCHITECTS:
REF NO: 063

Background

The site was acquired by Morbaine Limited with a view to developing retail units but after initial discussions with Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council the site was handed over to Castlegate Homes, the housing arm of Morbaine, with a view to developing direct to market housing. The proposal put forward to the Design Review Panel forms part of a full planning application.

Description

The site is 2.02 acres (0.81 hectares) and lies to the east of the Liverpool Road dual carriageway a prime vehicular route into Newcastle-under-Lyme. The site is currently used as a bus depot where buses are garaged and maintained in a large steel-frame asbestos-clad shed and some other assorted out buildings. There are currently two points of road access, both on to the main Liverpool Road and these operate on an 'in' and 'out' basis.

The proposal is for 66 dwellings, a mixture of flats and houses built predominantly at two and three stories but with four storey 'towers' at the entrance to the site. Development is largely to the perimeter of the site with parking spaces provided in the centre. The dwellings proposed are of traditional construction and the architectural style is described by the developer as being 'Georgian'.

Strategic Planning Context

Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council stated that residential development on this site is not in line with the proposed usage as indicated in the Town Centre Action Plan. This suggests that the site be used for mixed-use development including office space.

The Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder for the sub-region (RENEW) are opposing the proposed development with regard to the bed-spaces, as they have indicated a strong preference for family accommodation in this location.

Panel Comments

The Panel identified the following key areas:

Under 2.Highways Access, I

I suggest that sentence might also include a reference to the old-fashioned style of road proposed, with carriageway and pavements on either side.

1. Sustainability

The panel indicated that there were opportunities for on-site power generation, or at least the installation of the required infrastructure to make this easier in the future when it becomes economically viable to do so. The panel also suggested that recycled and recyclable materials should be specified wherever possible and that an environmental sustainability statement detailing such commitments be included in the Design and Access statement.

During the site visit the panel expressed concern over the felling of trees that the proposal indicated would be retained but were informed that a tree-specialist had reported that they were in poor condition with a life expectancy of only 1-2 years. Finally, the issue of site contamination was raised and the panel were reassured that this was not high overall but as a result of the recent usage as a bus depot there were hot spots of hydrocarbon contamination that would require effective remediation.

2. Highways Access

The panel noted the current provision of two access roads on and off the site and that the proposed development has only one route. It was reported that this was a requirement after consultation with Staffordshire County Council Highways Department. The panel regretted this advice stating that as a result the single, and therefore two-way road, road accessing the site required a large vehicle turning head and the scheme appeared overly car dominated. It was felt that the proposed road layout was old-fashioned in style with carriageway and pavements on either side. The panel reported that by maintaining two points of vehicle access on an 'in' and 'out' basis the roadway could be single carriageway and there would be no longer be a need for a large turning head. Furthermore, with well-considered use of surface treatments including shared surfaces the impact of the car upon the development could be reduced significantly.

3. Frontage to Liverpool Road

The panel were concerned over the levels of noise to the western elevation and questioned the proximity of the Liverpool Road elevation to the highway noting that the two and three storey Victorian houses further along the road were stepped back with small front garden areas. The importance of providing a strong street elevation to the main road was understood but the panel considered that this could be achieved with the buildings set back from the site boundary and with suitable planting providing a buffer.

4. Architectural style and materials

The panel noted that the market research carried out by the developer indicated that Newcastle-under-Lyme was a traditional area and that the market would only support a traditional-style development but were broadly critical of the neo-Georgian elevational treatment adopted. They were unconvinced by the assertion that this would help to provide coherence to a 'messy street scene'. It was felt that there the solution was unresponsive to the local area and that the

proposed palette of materials was unsuitable and over elaborate incorporating a smooth rendered section at first-floor level, 'ruled-render' ground floor sections and reconstituted stone portico entrances. It was also noted that although the scheme was described as being of 'Georgian' appearance the proportions and detailing were not entirely in keeping with such an assertion.

Conclusions

Firstly, there are fundamental strategic planning considerations that will need to be overcome if this site is to be developed for housing as proposed and without resolution of these the development has little chance of success.

With regard to the proposals reviewed the panel were particularly concerned over the dominance of highways on the development both with reference to the points of access and the resultant site layout. It was felt that the requirement to have a single access point had adversely affected the design and had resulted in a car/road-dominated scheme. The proximity of the dwellings to the site boundary by the busy Liverpool Road was also a major concern and it was felt that this too could be improved with a more suitable highways access solution and better design of the public realm within the site.

Recommended Actions

The panel recommend that:

1. The road layout including the access to the site from Liverpool Road should be reconsidered with a view to incorporating two separate main road entrances as described above. The panel strongly recommend that the Highways Authority review their position with regard to the access to this site.
2. There is a more imaginative treatment of the highways and footpaths within the site incorporating a range of shared surfaces.
3. That the architectural appearance is more responsive to the local environment.
4. There is greater consideration at a strategic level of the sustainability agenda.
5. The frontage to Liverpool Road be reconsidered with a view to moving it back from the road and specifically incorporating well chosen trees and plants.