

DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

7 June 2007

PROPOSALS: Outline Application for 76 Sheltered Accommodation Units
LOCATION: Silverdale Road, Marsh Street and High Street, Wolstanton.
ARCHITECTS: Taylor Young
DEVELOPER: Keyworker Homes
REF NO: 068

Background and Planning Context

The proposal is currently an outline planning application for the development of sheltered housing in Wolstanton, Newcastle-under-Lyme. The application seeks permission for layout, scale and access with landscaping as reserved matters. The elevational treatment had initially formed part of the application but was withdrawn.

The proposed sheltered housing development is in line with a range of policies nationally, regionally and locally from Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council. In addition, the housing to be provided is complimentary to the aims of RENEW the Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder for North Staffordshire and they have indicated support for a scheme of this type in the proposed location.

Site Description

The site is located on High Street in Wolstanton and is bounded to the northeast by Marsh Avenue and to the southeast by Silverdale Road. The area is on the fringe of the commercial centre and comprises mixed commercial and residential premises. There are large semi-detached dwellings on Marsh Avenue and smaller terraced properties along Silverdale Road whilst the High Street is predominantly a mix of independent shops and takeaways some of which are presently unoccupied.

The site is located close to the district centre of Wolstanton within easy walking distance of the amenities therein, it also sit on a bus route with a bus stop directly in front of the site. This connectivity makes the site an ideal location for sheltered housing of the type proposed. The site is currently occupied by a filling station and a car showroom that is in a poor state of repair.

Design Proposal

The sheltered residential building proposed is for a total of 76 units, of which 51 are one-bedroom and 25 two-bedroom, with car parking and amenity space. The sheltered accommodation proposed is for over-55s and included warden assistance and communal facilities and is targeted toward a specific housing need in the locality.

The proposed development fronts onto the High Street and essentially forms the whole block between Silverdale Road and Marsh Avenue. The building is a perimeter type development forming a U-shaped residential block surrounding a courtyard garden area and car park that is accessed from Marsh Avenue. The development initially comprised two, three and four storey elements but after consultation the corners were reduced in height and it now is a maximum of three stories. Though notional elevations were provided these have been removed from the outline application by the client at this stage.

The internal layout features two wings along Marsh Avenue and Silverdale Road with units accessed either side of an internal corridor and the High Street block comprising units accessed from a corridor that runs the length of the main elevation at the front of the building. This decision was made in response to the higher traffic levels along the High Street and the need to provide a buffer from the increased noise levels.

Panel Comments

The Design Review Panel focussed on the specific matters up for consideration in the outline planning application, layout, scale and access and these are considered under the relevant headings below. However, the discussion did go beyond this remit and this report reflects this.

i) Layout

The U-shaped perimeter layout with an internal courtyard and parking area was considered by the Panel to be the obvious and most suitable solution for the site as it helped to re-instantiate the streetscape and provide a secure and private open space for the residents. The issue of the internal planning creating a long corridor the length of the High Street elevation was raised by the panel and it was explained that this was in response to the traffic noise survey undertaken and that the corridor would act as a buffer to the properties located along this edge. It was pointed out that a proposed bypass would reduce the traffic using the route considerably and that the noise would be reduced proportionally.

The Panel accepted the existing reasons for the proposed layout but suggested that the corridors were long and that designing such long corridors well was difficult. It was put forward that the corridors should be considered as streets, with points of interest occurring intermittently where the residents could stop, sit and socialise with their neighbours. The result of this might be areas of seating adjacent to oriel windows so that the residents could survey the street. It was further suggested that by doing this along the length of the corridor the long High Street elevation may be improved, with changes to the building line providing more interest to the existing streetscape.

ii) Scale

As stated earlier, the building was initially proposed to rise to four stories at the corners of Marsh Street and High Street and Silverdale Road and High Street and this was the submission that had been circulated to the panel members before the meeting. However, in the intervening period this had been amended and the four storey corner elements had been removed. The resultant building presents three storeys to the High Street and Silverdale Road and 2 storeys to Marsh Avenue, although this it is actually three storeys to the inner courtyard.

The Design Review Panel felt that the scale was appropriate for the site and despite initially applauding the treatment of the two corners as higher elements did not object to the revised building as presented. It was appreciated that the surrounding buildings were of no more than three storeys and that the proposed development was of an entirely appropriate scale for the site.

iii) Access

The only vehicular access to the site is via Marsh Street and this leads to the car parking area to the rear of the site. The panel thought that this was an appropriate point of vehicular access. However, there were concerns over the separation of the car park and communal garden areas. The panel felt that by carefully designing the courtyard area utilising shared surfaces and well considered location of the car parking spaces the result could be a courtyard with car parking as opposed to a courtyard *and* a car park.

With regard to pedestrian access to the building the main entrance falls on the corner of Silverdale Road and High Street with the only alternative entrances/exits being for emergency purposes. The Panel felt although this entrance was at the end of the building closest to the commercial centre of Wolstanton and the shops and facilities therein there was a potential for another access point located towards the centre of the High Street elevation and this would have the advantage of being close to the existing bus stop. The Panel also felt that the pedestrian access point as shown was restrictive, especially for the increasing number of elderly people with motorised buggies and would benefit from some internal reorganisation, relocating the WC by the main doors.

Conclusions

In general the Design Review Panel were supportive of a development of this type in the location and saw some merit in the layout proposed with some significant conditions. There were concerns over the long internal corridors and it was felt that these could be addressed in a more satisfactory manner, producing more interesting elevations in the process. Similarly with regard to the parking and courtyard area, the Panel felt that although there were no issues over the point of access the space could be better resolved by carefully integrating the two functions. Finally, the resident access was considered to be unsatisfactory and in need of potential relocation and improvement.

Recommended Actions

1. The Panel recommended that the long corridors be treated as streets, providing points of interest and places to stop, rest and socialise. It was also felt that by breaking up these corridors with indents that the long street elevation to High Street might be made more interesting.
2. The Panel recommended that the courtyard and car park areas be reconsidered with a view to incorporating the car parking harmoniously into the landscaped area.
3. The Panel recommended that the main pedestrian access entrance be reorganised and that the WC be relocated to provide a wider access point. It was further recommended that a secondary entrance/exit be considered.
4. The Panel recommended that when considering elevational treatment that each street frontage should be considered independently and the elevations should reflect this.
5. The Panel recommend that the overall success of the development will be dependent upon the design of the elevations and the selection and specification of a palette of good quality, locally relevant materials used imaginatively and constructed to a high standard.