

DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

19 July 2007

PROPOSALS: Hybrid planning application for the development of a district retail centre

LOCATION: Trentham Lakes, Stoke-on-Trent.

ARCHITECTS: The Harrison Partnership

DEVELOPER: Stoke on Trent Regeneration Limited

REF NO: 69

Planning Context

The principle of a district centre on the site has been agreed with the local planning authority and has been subject to a previous planning application that was withdrawn on May 9th 2007. The current application is an extensive revision of the previous submission that was withdrawn as a result of concerns raised by the local authority and third parties. This remodelling includes the relocation of the foodstore and retail units and the removal of the rear service yard from the boundary adjacent to the existing houses.

The current application is a hybrid one, with outline permission sought for the majority of the proposals but full permission for the retail floor space element.

Site Description

The site is approximately 1.13 hectares (3.24 acres) and lies at the southern end of the Trentham Lakes South mixed-use development at the junction of Trentham Road and Stanley Matthews Way. The aforementioned roads border the site to the south and east respectively and there is a residential development bordering the site to the west, to the north there is a new access road and a pond. The site is well served by public transport with a new bus lay-by occupying its eastern edge. At present the site is clear from buildings and is covered in grass and assorted vegetation including two mature willow trees. The site is bisected north to south by a sewer easement.

Design Proposal

The proposal is for a retail food store of 1,484sq.m to be located at the northwest corner of the site with 5 retail units (93sq.m each) to be located in the southwest corner. The retail foodstore has been identified potentially as an Aldi supermarket and the five smaller shop units will be available for rent. The customer entrance to the food store is located on the southeast corner approximately in the centre of the site and fronting on to the car park. The smaller shop units are to be single aspect, facing east, again towards the car park.

In addition to this there are outline proposals for a restaurant or drinking establishment to be sited in the southeast corner at the major road junction and a community facility, surgery or nursery in the northeast corner. The remainder of the site is mainly car parking excepting a landscaping buffer zone to the western edge providing a barrier between the shops and the existing housing development.

Vehicles will enter the site via Stanley Matthews Way where there is a newly built access road and there are pedestrian access points located on Trentham Road, Stanley Matthews Way by the bus lay-by and to an existing footpath at the north of the site.

With regard to the detailed element of the application, the proposed Aldi store is to be constructed in ivory coloured Forticrete split faced blockwork, with contrasting pewter coloured piers. The south elevation facing Trentham Road and the shop units is predominantly glazed. The roof is to be constructed from grey profile steel sheeting with a bull nose eaves detail. The design of the smaller shop units is to echo that of the larger store.

Panel Comments

The Design Review Panel supported the principle of the development of a district centre in this location and felt that the provision of a supermarket and some smaller businesses would be of a significant benefit to the area. However, the Panel had some concerns over the proposal in the following areas:

i) Site Layout

The Panel had major concerns over the location of the blocks within the site. The provision of a central car park area surrounded by the four blocks in each corner was the most fundamental of these. It was felt that this approach neglected the creation of any active frontage and added nothing to the streetscape. The Panel also considered that the attractive aspect towards the pond at the north of the site had been neglected.

There was a unanimous view that despite the inclusion of additional pedestrian access points the proposal was too car dominated and the shop frontages addressed the car park as opposed to the street. The supermarket is disconnected from the public realm and the car park must be crossed in order to reach it.

ii) Landscaping

There were initial concerns over the long-term maintenance of the landscape buffer to the western edge of the site but the Panel were reassured that this would remain the responsibility of the freeholder and form a part of a wider maintenance programme.

Secondly, the Panel were disappointed not to see the two mature willow trees retained and incorporated into the proposed scheme. Despite an assertion that these could not be retained as they were in poor condition there was no accompanying report to support this conclusion.

iii) Detailed Design and Materials

The Panel support the principle of providing an 'enhanced' Aldi store but considered the selected materials palette to be unresponsive to the local environment. It was felt that the proposed ivory-coloured Forticrete blocks with contrasting pewter-coloured Forticrete piers had no precedent in the area and that a suitably sourced brick infill would be more appropriate.

The Panel were also concerned over the dead east facing elevation, enlivened only by the glazed entrance at the southern corner. It was suggested that this elevation might be more glazed to better address the public space in the courtyard.

iv) Sustainability

The Panel highlighted the opportunity to include number of sustainable initiatives as part of the development including the potential to use a sedum roof and ground source heating. It was suggested that Aldi, the potential purchaser of the large retail unit, would not entertain this additional cost but it was put forward that in their native Germany they are compelled to include such features as a matter of course.

Conclusions

Overall, the Panel felt that the proposals require significant alteration if the district centre is to be a successful and vibrant place. The major concern was over the proposal to situate four buildings at each corner of a large area of car parking and that this must be addressed if the development is to succeed.

Recommended Actions

1. The Panel recommend that the site layout be reconsidered with a view to creating more active frontages and enhancing the street wherever possible.
2. The Panel recommend that the materials palette be changed, specifying more locally sourced materials where possible in order to provide real local distinctiveness
3. The Panel recommend that the two existing mature willow trees have their condition investigated professionally and if it is at all possible that they be retained.
4. The Panel recommend that the opportunity to include number of sustainable initiatives, including a sedum roof and ground source heating be investigated further.