

## **DESIGN REVIEW PANEL**

**19 July 2007**

**PROPOSALS:** Outline planning application for approximately 220 residential units and community facilities

**LOCATION:** Former Victoria Ground site, Stoke-on-Trent.

**CONSULTANTS:** Barton Wilmore Planning

**DEVELOPER:** Stoke-on-Trent Regeneration Company

**REF NO:** 70

### **Site Description**

The site is approximately 6.8 hectares in total and was the location of Stoke City Football Clubs former home, the Victoria Ground and their associated training facility. It is located immediately to the south of Stoke town centre and the facilities contained therein and the city centre at Hanley lies approximately one and a half miles away to the north. The recently widened and improved A500 bounds the eastern edge of the site with residential areas of Stoke adjoining the site to the north and Boothem to the south and southwest. Bishop Stamer Primary School is situated to the south west of the site.

The site currently comprises derelict scrub land with little vegetation, the River Trent bisects the site but is canalised at this point and for a stretch is completely enclosed providing a bridging point across to the eastern half of the site. Finally, there is a gas main and sewer running across the site from east to west and there is a 6-metre easement on the sewer.

### **Planning Context**

This proposal forms a current outline planning application for access, scale, part layout (for the eastern half of the site) and landscaping with regard to the river corridor and with all other matters reserved for subsequent approval.

The site has laid dormant since the demolition of the Victoria Ground largely as a result of uncertainty over the proposed upgrade to the adjacent A500 (now complete) and the likely effects on the site as well as some recent changes in planning designation that now indicate this site as suitable for housing use. A range of consultations has already taken place including public meetings and a series of discussions with the Environment Agency over the canalised section of the River Trent that bisects the site.

## **The Proposal**

The proposal as submitted is for 220 residential units at an average density of 50 units per hectare. In addition as a part of the wider regeneration of the site a children's playing field, two children's play areas and landscape enhancements of the River Trent are being provided. Of the total 6.8 hectares of the site 4.71 will be developed for residential use.

The development is to be accessed by vehicles primarily from a new roundabout junction being provided at Campbell Road. Pedestrian and cycle access is to all sides of the site except along the long eastern boundary which is largely impermeable due to the location of the main A500.

The street pattern promotes a perimeter form of development to maximise passive surveillance and is consistent with the linearity of the surrounding terraced neighbourhoods. The proposal is for mainly 2 and 3 storey terraced houses with street frontages and straight elevations to create long vistas across the site. There are also a number of key sites identified where slightly taller blocks including apartments are situated and these occur on the entrance corner and at the end of the long vistas.

## **Panel Comments**

The Panel were very appreciative of the excellent Design and Access statement produced and the detailed analysis that it contained. There were however a number of issues that were discussed and these are detailed below:

### i) Site Layout

The Panel were unanimously supportive of the square street layout adopted with the perimeter blocks creating strong street frontages. There was also widespread support for the variation in street typologies including primary streets, side streets and lanes using different materials and on-street parking layouts. It was suggested that a 'Manual for Streets' approach as opposed to a 'Highways' solution was entirely appropriate.

The possibility of lining up the street grid of the proposed housing development with Gable Street to the west of the site was raised. The explanation that this had been investigated but ultimately rejected because of difficulties in spacing of the residential blocks was accepted. Overall, the Panel applauded the approach to site layout adopted.

### ii) Massing and Scale

The Panel were initially in agreement that the massing and scale of the houses was appropriate for the site and strongly applauded the use of a more urban as opposed to a suburban typology. The issue of density was raised however and it was felt that this could and should be higher and that this might further help to strengthen the creation of an urban neighbourhood as opposed to a suburban estate.

The Panel suggested that the streets might benefit from using three storey houses more frequently and that this too might assist in the creation of an urban neighbourhood. Finally, the Panel also applauded the identification of key building sites and considered the placement of higher buildings at these nodes as being a good urban design solution.

### iii) Open Space and the Public Realm

The Panel initially considered the playing fields to be isolated at the edge of the site bounded only by the river and the main road, however this location was accepted once it was explained that these would be for almost exclusive use by the adjacent primary school. It was also reported that public consultation events had shown a great deal of support for the location of the playing fields at the far south end of the site.

There was also general support for the opening up and enhanced treatment of the river edge although the Panel felt that the treatment of the edge would require more detailed work in the future. The Panel also felt that the bridging over the River Trent provided a great opportunity to add distinctiveness and character to the scheme as the proposal was worked up in more detail.

There was a concern over the public square on the eastern edge of the site, it was felt that this was inadequately resolved and would benefit from greater definition and potentially enclosure.

### iv) Local Character and Historical Significance

The Panel referred to the two local character studies in the Design and Access statement and said that this approach was to be applauded. It was suggested that there appeared to be an emergent Design Code. It was unanimously felt that robust design guidance would play a crucial role in ensuring that the quality of the initial proposal was not lost in the course of the development process and that this may shield the site from the imposition of inappropriate and ill considered standard house types.

The Panel regretted that the opportunity to in some way remember the previous use of the site by Stoke City Football Club had been missed. Various suggestions from the Panel included providing an indication of the pitch markings in the paving or even just marking the position of the centre circle.

## **Conclusions**

The Design Review Panel were generally supportive of the overall design approach adopted on this significant site and greatly applauded the comprehensive analysis undertaken and presented in the excellent Design and Access Statement. There was however a shared concern that the next stage of the process was of vital importance and the Panel expressed a wish to review the scheme again at full application stage.

## **Recommended Actions**

1. The Panel recommend that the historical analysis undertaken in the Design and Access statement be drawn upon to create a memory of the sites former use as one of the oldest football league grounds in the world.
2. The Panel felt that the public square located on the eastern edge is not fully resolved and would benefit from careful and considered landscape architecture at detailed design stage.
3. The Panel were generally supportive of the approach to street layout adopted across the site but recommend an increase in density to further enhance the qualities of a urban neighbourhood.
4. The Panel recommend that a more widespread use of three storey houses would strengthen the streets and again help to reinforce the urban character of the development.
5. The Panel consider the next stage as being crucial in the creation of a successful housing neighbourhood and recommend that the proposal be presented again to the Design Review Panel prior to submission as a detailed planning application.