

DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

4 October 2007

PROPOSAL: Full planning application for 10 residential apartments
LOCATION: The White House, Clayton Road, Newcastle-under-Lyme
DEVELOPERS: Alcock & Bailey
ARCHITECTS: Forshaw Greaves & Partners
REF NO: 076

Background

The proposal involves the demolition of a two storey office building and outbuildings, formerly used for residential purposes, and the erection of ten two-bedroom apartments together with associated car parking on land on the west side of Clayton Road, Newcastle-under-Lyme. The Panel visited the site prior to receiving a presentation and commenting on the proposal.

Description

The site is located within Clayton Village in Newcastle-under-Lyme. The topography of the land rises from Clayton Road on the eastern boundary to an elevated lawn towards the centre of the site. Part of the rear (west) of the site is currently used as temporary overspill car parking for the neighbouring Nuffield Hospital, and beyond is a recent housing estate. The northern boundary consists of a retaining wall to the adjoining residential properties within close proximity of the boundary. The site has a hedge boundary on the southern and eastern sides, with stone and fencing on the northern and western sides, with mature trees of various species on the boundary and adjacent to the existing buildings.

The proposal comprises a three storey block of apartments designed for elderly residents who may wish to downsize, and a lift facility has been provided serving three floors and secure basement car parking for 10 vehicles. Parking for a further 10 vehicles is provided at the front eastern part of the site which requires excavating part of the lawn area and the construction of a retaining wall.

Planning Policy Context

The site boundary has been drawn to bring the site below the size threshold for out-of-centre residential development above which restrictions on the scale of residential development are applied by the Borough Council (0.15 ha). The Panel noted that this has resulted in a distorted site boundary which leaves a large part of the front lawn area outside the site and potentially available for future development. The artificially constrained boundary also restricts the amount of amenity space available to future residents of the new development.

Certain of the trees within the site are the subject of Tree Preservation Orders; and the site is adjacent to the Clayton Village Conservation Area. The proposed

development will require the removal of selected trees currently protected by Tree Preservation Orders.

Panel Comments

1 Planning Policy

It appeared to the Panel that the site boundary had been drawn to satisfy a policy of Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council supporting residential development under 0.15 hectares outside of the town centre. As a consequence the site has been divided quite crudely to achieve the applicant's development needs and meet this policy. As a result little regard has been shown for the amenity space of future residents, with small irregular spaces surrounding the ground floor apartments. The sub-division has also left a prime site in the front garden of the new development, which potentially could be developed in the future. This has had an adverse affect on the site layout of the development now proposed and would set up the conditions for a future development in the front garden that would exacerbate the amenity problems of the occupiers of the apartment block.

2 Scale and massing

The Panel was informed that the apartment block has been designed with a variety of elements in order to breakdown the scale and massing in the street scene. However, the overall effect is incoherent creating a confusing and overbearing development on an elevated site, which would not sit well with the surrounding area. The Panel thought that the location of the three storey elements on the two sides of the building made the building over-dominant in relation to the residential properties adjoining the site, and also gave the building no central focus to its main entrance. The Panel thought that the main mass of the building (its three storey elements) should be concentrated in the centre to give emphasis to the entrance and to reduce the scale of the building near to the site boundary.

3 Architectural treatment

The Panel considered that the proposed elevational treatment does not create the differentiation between the floors and blocks that the applicant is seeking to break down the mass of the building. The design appears institutional and bland and the Panel thought that there is a need to introduce a system of ordering the elevations to achieve a more coherent architectural appearance. For example a simple hierarchy of window sizes between the floors would help provide a clearer structure to the elevations. The Panel welcomed the proposed terraces, but considered the false pitched roofs around their perimeter should be replaced with proper parapet and balustrade details. The blank brick-faced lift shaft is considered inappropriately sited in the centre of the main elevation and should be relocated to a less prominent position.

4 Public and private amenity around the building

It was evident from the plans shown that the allocation of amenity space for future residents had not been factored into the development proposal and is basically the land remaining after the site boundary had been very tightly drawn, apparently to satisfy the Borough Council's policy for out-of-centre residential development. The net result would be unsatisfactory in so far as the space around the development would be quite limited and at the rear and north side unusable. The large lawn area at the front would be mostly outside the site boundary. The possibility of using a S106 agreement to make this land available is a tortuous way of achieving what

could be done quite straightforwardly by requiring the front garden to be included within the site boundary.

The Panel thought better amenity space should be for residents, perhaps by creating small private plots of land accessible to ground floor apartments. This would also reduce maintenance costs for residents. The applicant should employ the services of a landscape architect with a remit to consider all of the land potentially available, ensuring a cohesive approach looking at the site as a whole. At present the proposal would affect some of the mature trees on the site and if a larger site were to be provided the Panel thought that there would be scope to avoid removing at least some of these trees.

Conclusions

The Panel were supportive of the principal of residential apartments in this location. However, the Panel thought that as the site is within a popular and attractive location the apartments should not be targeted solely at elderly residents but also at professionals seeking high quality residential apartments within a semi-rural setting. With this change in emphasis the design of the development should be re-considered, the site boundary drawn to allow a higher standard of amenity to be achieved, and the new building designed with greater architectural order. The Panel considered that in its current form the proposal would be an over-intensive development which fails to take the opportunities available to improve the character and quality of the area, as required by PPS1: *Delivering Sustainable Development*.

Recommendations

1. The site boundary should be re-drawn to include the whole of the front garden area and if necessary a case justifying an exception to planning policy to achieve this should be made.
2. The massing of the proposed new building should be adjusted to concentrate most of the higher elements in the centre of the block.
3. The treatment of the external elevations should be revised to incorporate a greater sense of architectural order, for example by using a hierarchy of windows, a greater emphasis on the central main entrance, the relocation of the lift tower, and the introduction of balustrades and parapets in lieu of false pitched roofs around the terraces.
4. The siting of the building should be reconsidered in order to provide more usable private amenity space and reduce the number of mature trees removed to the absolute minimum.
5. A landscape architect should be commissioned to design a comprehensive landscape setting for the development.