

DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

17 April 2008

PROPOSAL:	Preliminary consideration of proposed development of a 'Continuing Care Retirement Community' incorporating a variety of residential accommodation and associated facilities.
LOCATION:	Former Anzio Camp site, Blackshaw Moor, Near Leek, Staffordshire Moorlands
DEVELOPERS:	Courtyard Property Group & Smartwright Developments
ARCHITECTURE & PLANNING:	RPS
REF NO:	098

Background & Planning Context

After military operations ended the site was deemed surplus to Ministry of Defence requirements and marketed by Defence Estates. It was initially purchased by a different specialist care provider with the intention of developing a large care facility for which an unsuccessful planning application was submitted. The site was then sold to the current consortium comprising the Courtyard Property Group and Smartwright Developments.

The site lies within the planning authority of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council and it has been indicated that it is suitable for a variety of uses including the provision of elderly persons accommodation. The existing adopted local plan however pre-dates the closure of the military facility by some years and so no specific policy or allocation exists.

With regard to the current proposals, an outline planning application with an indicative Masterplan is scheduled to be submitted in May 2008 and it is intended that this is accompanied by an Environmental Statement, a Design and Access Statement and a Transport Assessment as well as a detailed sustainability appraisal and details of the stakeholder engagement work already undertaken.

Site Description

The site is 15.4 hectares (38 acres) and is located approximately 3 miles to the north of Leek on the A53 road to Buxton on the southern edge of the Peak District National Park. The Anzio Camp closed as an Army residential training base in 2004 having been located on the site since 1942 initially as a training base for US forces and more latterly British Army infantry.

The site was extensively redeveloped between 1980 and 1983 and currently contains 17 buildings of traditional construction comprising residential accommodation, training facilities and associated leisure blocks. In addition to this there is a large steel framed sports hall, a firing range, an assault course and an area of open space and woodland towards the eastern edge of the site. The site formerly housed up to 800 soldiers.

The Design Proposal

The proposal is for the development of a 'Continuing Care Retirement Community' comprising approximately 30% independent living houses and 70% divided between serviced apartments and a care home with the exact mix to be defined with reference to social services requirements. This type of development, providing accommodation for people with varying care requirements, from independent living units targeted at the over 55's through to a fully supported residential care home is not common in the UK though it is well established in the United States and elsewhere.

As the scheme was presented to design review panel prior to an outline application being submitted in the form of an indicative masterplan, the main design considerations were site layout and massing. The proposal seeks to provide the accommodation within the area of the footprint of the existing development thus reducing unnecessary sprawl across the whole of the large site. It is stated that the design approach adopted attempts to respect the high landscape value of the site and minimise the visibility of the development from both the road and the surrounding countryside. The approach also sets out to address the sustainability issue by re-using some buildings and working with the existing landform that had been comprehensively remodelled in the early 1980s.

It is proposed that the existing sports hall and the two buildings to the east of the entrance road are retained, these formerly housed a gatehouse and storerooms and it is proposed that they retain a similar function in the new development. All other buildings on the site are to be demolished and cleared.

The site is entered via the existing highways access and is zoned into four separate areas. The first of these comprises the retained buildings as described above providing a site office, storage and maintenance and the sports hall. The centre of the site contains the serviced apartments and cottages with the residential home to the eastern boundary. The north of the site houses approximately 75 no. English Courtyard independent living units. A number of other community facilities would potentially be provided on site including a shops, a library and craft spaces.

Vehicular access through the site is via a shared surface road situated approximately through the centre with a 'serpentine' curved pedestrian route threading around the different sectors of accommodation and passing in front of the residential home that also houses the community care and support functions. This curved route is loosely followed by a diverted stream that acts as part of a Sustainable Urban Drainage System and provides a landscape feature.

Panel Comments

As a result of the distance of the development from the meeting venue it was unfortunately not possible for all of the Design Review Panel to visit the site (although some did independently) however, Urban Vision staff conducted a site visit and undertook a photographic survey that was in part issued in the pre-meeting packs and also formed a slideshow at the start of the presentation. Following the presentation the discussion is recorded under the following headings:

Strategic Planning Considerations

The Panel raised concerns over the separation of the over 55's into a purpose built development but understood that this had arisen as a result of local planning considerations and a concern over the creation of a 'back-door' route to market housing in this location. The Panel strongly felt that real communities are mixed in age and it

would be desirable to integrate the development more closely with the neighbouring villages and encourage the provision of shared facilities. It was indicated that the development would not be gated but that there would be some site management and the Panel suggested that the passive surveillance on a site populated by retired residents would be great and would result in a large amount of self-policing.

Finally, the Panel enquired if the independent living units were to be freehold and were pleased to hear that they would be sold with long leases related to the on-site services that would be offered.

Site Layout

It was put forward that the aim was to create a village feeling to the development but the Panel highlighted that Peak villages were essentially linear and had evolved over centuries and that this would be very difficult and possibly not necessary to recreate. The general aim to create a village-like community was applauded however and it was suggested that the planned estate villages located in the Peak District National Park might provide a more useful reference.

The Panel noted that there was already a communal 'meeting place' indicated but that this was too far into the site and should relate better to the site entrance and act as a magnet to draw people in. There was further concern over the replacement of the existing parade ground with soft landscaping whilst other areas that are currently planted are replaced with hard surfacing. It was felt that by focussing the communal square on the area currently occupied by the parade ground this could be circumvented and in turn this would relate more directly to the entrance, the wider community and the three buildings that are to be retained and shared with that community, as discussed above. Furthermore, it was felt that by some way retaining the parade ground this would assist in providing a glimpse of the historical legacy of the site.

The Panel enquired about the potential re-use of more buildings and asked if a detailed assessment had taken place. It was reported that the buildings currently on the site have been subject to a detailed assessment and the majority have been deemed unsuitable for re-use as a result of their quality and performance. It was also suggested that the size and internal arrangement of the blocks would make it difficult and prohibitively costly to convert. The Panel understood but regretted this and felt that every effort should be made to re-use as much as possible.

There was also a concern over the imposition of the 'serpentine' route through the site as it was felt that this was contrived and did not relate well to the topography. This concern over the route was also true of the proposed redirected stream, it was felt that by using the sites natural slope more effectively a faster flowing and more attractive stream could potentially be created. Finally, the Panel enquired about the parking provision on the site and were supportive of the locations suggested, in addition they were pleased to hear of the initiatives such as car-sharing in the proposed green travel plan that would potentially reduce private car ownership.

Scale and Massing

The Panel applauded the decision to keep the building heights similar to those currently on the site and develop only on a tight footprint. It was felt that by careful selection of materials the development could sit down well in the landscape and not prove intrusive in what is a beautiful location. It was suggested that the current Anzio Camp development achieves this successfully and has surprisingly little impact on the natural surroundings.

Sustainability

The Panel were concerned over the sustainability of replacing buildings that were built in the early 1980s, as discussed above. There was also an overall concern about the sustainability of a scheme located 3 miles away from the facilities in Leek. The green travel plans reported to the Panel indicated the inclusion of a dedicated call and ride shuttle bus into Leek, as well as potential car sharing schemes and these were warmly welcomed but there was a concern that despite these initiatives private car usage would still be high in such a location as the facilities in Leek would be regularly visited by residents.

Finally, the presence of the SUDS element was welcomed both in terms of its sustainable and visual effects but there was concern over the route of the channel as it appeared not to fit well with the topography of the site.

Conclusion

The Design Review Panel welcomed the opportunity to see the scheme at pre-application stage and were pleased to see proposals to re-use this large attractive site that were of an appropriate scale and would not be likely to have a significant detrimental effect on the attractive landscape that surrounds it. There were however concerns over the use as a dedicated 'retirement community' as it was felt that the development and the facilities it will contain should be more widely used by the local community as a whole. There were also concerns over sustainability on two fronts. Firstly, the development of residential accommodation on an isolated site located some distance from the nearest town and secondly as a result of the amount of demolition and replacement of relatively new buildings. It was felt that though efforts had been made to assuage these concerns there was still further work required.

Recommended Actions

1. The Panel recommend that further work be undertaken into the potential re-use of buildings on the site in the interests of sustainability.
2. The Panel further recommends that the existing footprint of development be adhered to more closely thus further improving the sustainability of the development.
3. The Panel recommended that the facilities provided as a part of this development are opened as much as possible to the wider village community of Blackshaw Moor and that their location on the site reflects this.
4. The Panel recommended that the green travel plan as discussed provides as many alternatives as possible to private car ownership and recognises that residents will be likely travel into Leek on a regular basis.
5. The Panel recommended that taking into account the scale and significance of this development it should return to Panel at a later date when more detailed architectural work has been completed.