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Our ref: DRP103/Darren Price (t:01782 790595; e: darrenprice@uvns.org)

Dear Hazel,

Re: DRP103: Pin-up consideration of planning application for various retail outlets including a B & Q superstore at Waterloo Road, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent

I am writing this letter to report the discussion at Design Review Panel on May 15th 2008 about the proposed development as detailed above. It was unfortunate that the design team were unable to attend and present to the design review panel meeting as a result of a national rail cancellation but I hope that the limited review undertaken and detailed below is still useful.

The Panel welcomed the opportunity to comment on the scheme but would have preferred earlier involvement, prior to a planning application being submitted. The comments below reflect the discussion:

Strategic Planning Considerations

The Panel regret the earlier consent for large retail warehouse development with extensive parking in an edge of city centre location, a type of development all too common in Stoke-on-Trent and one that causes significant difficulties to pedestrians in that it acts as a further barrier in what should be an easily walkable city. The Panel recognise that the Design and Access Statement refers to *'enhancing the experience and accessibility of the city centre for pedestrians and cyclists'* but consider that that this type of development with the associated large areas of car parking do little to aid pedestrian access and in effect provide an additional barrier.

Site Layout

The Panel regretted the siting of the buildings away from the edge of the proposed new ring road especially given that the adjacent hotel and casino now attempt to set up a frontage relationship with the road. It was understood however that this is itself a product of the earlier decision to permit this form of development in this location as discussed above.

Architecture

The Panel welcomed the attempt to provide some architectural interest to the provision of what are essentially simple retail warehouse units and were encouraged by the design of the two blocks that are subject to the detailed application. The reflection of the geometry used in the proposed casino on the entrance to Block 'C' was recognised and similarly the treatment of Block 'D' use of irregular angles and higher quality materials was recognised as reinforcing some local identity.

Landscape

The Panel felt strongly that the large area of car parking needed some well designed landscaping, including both the introduction of planting and the use of a range of appropriate hard surfacing materials. This was felt to be especially important on the edges of the site with the creation of a more gradual transition to Hanley Forest Park being the aim. It was also suggested that a Sustainable Urban Drainage System should be investigated to manage the surface water run-off from the large area of hard standing

The Panel were concerned about the potential visual impact of the large retaining wall and felt that this required careful handling if it were not to be overly obtrusive. One suggestion was that this might be stepped back with more of a landscaped edge. though it was understood that the result of this may be to lose some car parking spaces. Finally, it was suggested that methods of 'greening' the retaining wall could be investigated, potentially making the development more sustainable and also serving to soften the impact of the boundary treatment and make it a positive feature..

Overall, given the nature and location of this development the panel felt that a good, well-considered landscaping solution was crucial and that the whole scheme needs softening and making more accessible and permeable to non car users.

Once again it was a shame that the design team could not be in attendance for reasons beyond their control to respond to the inevitable questions that such a development raises but I hope that you still find this letter useful.

Yours Sincerely

Dr Darren Price
Architecture and Urban Design Advisor
on behalf of the Urban Vision Design Review Panel