

DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

21 February 2008

PROPOSAL:	Consideration of planning application to develop 34,000m² 'Blue Planet' eco-warehouse and 1,700m² ancillary office building
LOCATION:	Land at Lowlands Road, Chatterley Valley, Newcastle under Lyme
DEVELOPERS:	Advantage West Midlands & Gazeley UK Ltd
ARCHITECTURE:	Chetwoods Architects
PLANNING:	Ancer Spa
REF NO:	093

Background & Planning Context

Chatterley Valley is designated as a key employment site for the North Staffordshire sub-region and the proposals discussed here form part of a wider programme of development currently underway. The overall development of the area is being guided by the Chatterley Valley Masterplan and Urban Design Framework and the site is being developed by Gazeley Ltd and the Regional Development Agency, Advantage West Midlands.

The site is currently owned by Advantage West Midlands and Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council and has an existing outline planning consent for uses falling within classes B1(c), B2 and B8.

Site Description

The site is approximately 12.5 hectares (30.9 acres) and is essentially linear along a north to south axis. The site is bordered by the west coast mainline to the western edge, with the main A500 beyond this in an elevated position, by the existing road network to the north and east and by a neighbouring development site at Goldendale West to the south. The whole area is currently open land and the site has already undergone extensive remediation. There is a neighbouring residential area in Tunstall to the south east of the site in an elevated position approximately half a mile away.

Design Proposal

The design proposal is for a 34,000m² warehouse building with a 1,700m² ancillary office development adjoining this. There are also three smaller commercial units and an on-site bio diesel facility. The proposal essentially splits the site into three sections with the large warehouse occupying the largest of these, three smaller units are situated to the northern end of the site and an environmental park to the eastern corner.

The main building is a bespoke warehouse shed development with a sweeping curved roof falling from west to east punctuated by 15% roof lighting forming continuous strips across the blocks width. The roof lights are to be made of ETFE so as to allow more light in during the daytime and less light pollution during the hours of darkness. The buildings incorporate a number of environmentally sustainable initiatives including the on-site bio diesel micro power station, total on-site water recycling, kinetic energy plates to make use of the projected 370 vehicle movements per day and an aspiration to include photovoltaic cells integrally in the roof lighting. The whole development will be carbon positive and will sell back energy to the national grid.

The environmental park is defined by the eastern edge of the building and is punctuated by three pools that collect the rainwater run-of from the large curved roof. It is put forward that this park will be open to the public and that each of the three pool areas will have a different character based on Entertainment, Education and Recreation.

Panel Comments

The Panel were pleased with the detailed information and analysis contained in the presentation and were supportive of the proposals put forward. There were however a number of areas that were discussed and these are summarised below:

Strategic Urban Design

The Panel appreciate the need for designated employment areas such as Chatterley Valley in the sub region and felt that the location with its excellent transportation links was suitable for large scale logistics development. There was also widespread support for the environmentally sensitive approach adopted and the way that this had been strictly conditioned from the outset.

Site Layout

The Panel supported the site layout as presented, specifically the orientation of the main building to present its softer edge, including the environmental park, to the nearby housing that overlooks the site from the southeast. There was also agreement with the decision to articulate the smaller units to the north of the site into three blocks. Finally, it was also recognised that the positioning of the main lorry loading area at the western side of the building meant that this was further removed from the residential area and would therefore have a reduced acoustic effect and this was applauded.

Sustainability

The Panel applauded the developers for aiming for an environmental performance above BREEAM 'Excellent' and strongly welcomed the whole series of innovative environmental initiatives included. There was however a discussion about the potential to further enhance the environmental credentials of the scheme with the use of a green sedum roof that would also have the advantage of blending the large building more harmoniously into the landscape. Although the Panel fully understood the technical and financial reasons given for this approach being rejected they regretted this decision and felt that the technical issues could be overcome as they are in countries, such as Germany, where legislation necessitates such features.

Landscape

The Panel welcomed the environmental park and the fact that this would be open not only to the users of the site but also to the wider public. It was felt that the position of the park was appropriate in that it presented a softer edge to the housing beyond. It was put forward that the park should not be only of architectural interest, but that its ultimate success would be wholly dependent upon the park being used and felt that there was an opportunity to encourage a wider-community buy-in via proper consultation and the possible involvement of local schools. The Panel suggested that the resulting park could and should be a valuable educational resource.

Architectural Form and Materials

The Panel applauded the bespoke development and considered the proposal to be an elegant design solution. They particularly appreciated the reduction in the main warehouse buildings height at the long east and west elevations and the successful attempt to make it sit into the landscape. The Panel also welcomed the articulation of the office block on the northern elevation and the use of a different palette of materials for this purpose.

Colour

The Panel were specifically asked for their opinion on the colour of the proposed building and reached a consensus that green would be likely to appear artificial in relation to the surrounding landscape and thought that in light of the absence of a planted green roof the more honest approach would be to utilise a palette of silvers and greys. It was also felt that this colour scheme would better compliment the dark-grey colour of the ETFE inflated roof lights.

Conclusion

In summary the Panel were supportive of the decision to provide a high quality bespoke development in this location and were also supportive of the extremely efficient high quality building presented. There were however a number of suggested actions and these are detailed below.

Recommendations Actions

1. The Panel recommend that the design of the environmental park is completed after detailed consultation with local schools so that maximum benefit can be achieved and the park can act as an environmental education resource.
2. The Panel commend the comprehensive approach undertaken to ensuring that the development is environmentally sustainable but recommend that this is further followed up by the specification of locally sourced materials wherever possible.
3. The Panel recommended that the impact of the large areas of hard landscaping are softened by a well-considered planting scheme.
4. The Panel recommend that the buildings colour palette is revised making use of a series of photo-realistic views and that a range of silver and grey materials be used for the cladding of the building in preference to green.