

DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

18 September 2008

PROPOSAL:	Consideration of a full planning application to provide a foodstore and 7 no. offices with associated car parking
LOCATION:	Bus Depot Site, Liverpool Road, Newcastle-under-Lyme
DEVELOPER:	Morbaine Limited
ARCHITECTURE:	The Harris Partnership
REF NO:	114

Background and Planning History

Previous proposals to provide housing on this site have been presented to the Design Review Panel in April 2007 and following this the planning application was refused by Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council on both use and design grounds. This decision was subsequently upheld at appeal where the design was cited as the reason for refusal. Following this a second application comprising a revised scheme gained planning approval but market conditions have made this not financially viable in the current economic climate and an approach from a food retailer has led to this outline application being submitted for the same site.

Site Description

The site is 0.826 hectares and lies to the east of the Liverpool Road dual carriageway a prime vehicular route into Newcastle-under-Lyme. The site is currently used as a bus depot where buses are garaged and maintained in a large steel-frame asbestos-clad shed and some other assorted out buildings. There are currently two points of road access, both on to the main Liverpool Road and these operate on an 'in' and 'out' basis. The site is bordered by Liverpool Road to the West with Newcastle College beyond and by brick walls of varying heights shielding a mixture of existing residential buildings of various ages and styles with some commercial and retail buildings to other the edges. The site although it appears level rises in level by approximately 1.0m from south-east to north-west and by 2.0m in a northerly direction along the main Liverpool Road frontage.

The Proposal

The proposal is for one foodstore of approximately 1,500 sq.m located in the centre of the site with two blocks of offices located to the north. It is suggested that these are sub-divided to provide a range of sized units for small businesses relocating closer to the town centre. The southern third of the site contains 92 parking spaces to serve the foodstore and this is entered off the Liverpool Road via an existing access point. The offices have their own parking courtyard accessed via the supermarket car park.

The foodstore has a predominantly glazed elevation to Liverpool Road and wrapping around the corner to the car park and is finished in a clean and contemporary style. The office buildings are to be accessed by individual front doors and utilises a similar palette of materials comprising local brickwork, render, glass and steel. A clear attempt has been made to strengthen the street frontage.

Panel Comments

The Panel welcomed the opportunity to comment on the proposals and after a site visit and presentation the discussion is summarised under the following headings:

Site Layout

There was broad support for the site layout as shown and the attempt to maximise the frontage to Liverpool Road was appreciated by the Panel. The decision to continue this frontage at least visually by articulating the supermarket building and the separate office development considered partially successful. However, there was a strong view that the street frontage could and should be strengthened further at the southern edge. The valuable street-level perspective illustrated clearly why this would be desirable. After a clear explanation of why the rear office block could not be moved to continue the building line along the main road, the Panel accepted a similar effect may be achieved by designing a wall at the southernmost end of the elevation and continuing the roof of the foodstore over the vehicular entrance, or by building a colonnade.

Architecture

The Panel were supportive of the clean and crisp modern approach to the architectural design for this gateway site and were pleased with the consistency between foodstore and office development. Similarly the use of a simple, unfussy palette of materials was felt to be appropriate and was welcomed.

Sustainability

The Panel briefly discussed the sustainability of the development and appreciated that this was to be further investigated when the detailed design process was underway. However, they were supportive of indications that the sustainable elements of the buildings might be in the form of air-tightness and good levels of thermal insulation as opposed to more visible and gimmicky micro-generation solutions.

Conclusions

The Panel had no clear objection to this type of mixed development in this location and felt that the solution as presented was reasonably successful. Overall, the Panel welcomed the clean and crisp approach to the design of the buildings and recognised the efforts made into strengthening the street by locating the foodstore at the edge of the road and not towards the rear of the site is often the case. There were however an umber of areas that were considered to require further work and these are detailed below.

Recommended Actions

1. The Panel recognise the efforts made thusfar to provide street frontage to Liverpool Road and recommend that every effort is made to continue this in some form at the southernmost end of the main elevation .
2. The Panel recommend that all efforts are made to retain the glass frontage to the foodstore and the simple, high quality palette of materials as the design process progresses.
3. The Panel recommend that all appropriate sustainable design features are investigated and that the building is made to be as thermally efficient as practicable.