

DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

18 September 2008

PROPOSAL:	Consideration of a full planning application to provide 70 no. houses and associated infrastructure
LOCATION:	Former Clanway Brickworks Site, Tunstall, Stoke-on-Trent
DEVELOPER:	Bloor Homes
DESIGN:	Astle Planning and Design
REF NO:	113

Background and Planning History

The site has a long and complex planning history with the original housing masterplan dating from 1998 and it was reported that there are numerous valid outline planning permissions in existence. The small section under consideration at the design review panel constitutes a reserved matters planning application to develop 70 no. houses that will form the first phase of development on the site.

Site Description

The site lies to the north of Stoke-on-Trent and consists of approximately 23 Hectares of remediated former brickworks including a re-filled marl pit and several mineshafts pepper-potted across the site. The site is bordered by the new Tunstall northern bypass to the south with a roundabout to the southeast corner that provides vehicular access to the proposed development via a smaller roundabout that is already in place. An existing established housing estate in the village of Sandyford lies to the east and to the west there is Scotia Brook and accompanying wooded valley with existing housing beyond. To the north there is open countryside.

The Proposal

The proposal for the first phase of development on the Clanway site comprises 70 houses located to the southeast corner of the site adjacent to the new highway access and the new small roundabout. The housing is arranged in three blocks separated by roadways of different grades, including block-paved home-zone type streets and is set back from the roads with a combination of frontage parking and rear parking courts. The housing proposed is a combination of 2, 3, 4 and 5 bed

units in detached, semi-detached and short terraces with the majority being 3-bed semi-detached properties. All houses are standard Bloor Homes products.

Panel Comments

The Panel welcomed the opportunity to comment on the proposals but regretted that they had not had the opportunity to be involved earlier during the masterplanning of the site as this predated the existence of a design review service in North Staffordshire. It was felt that many of the design parameters affecting this particular phase were formed as a result of earlier decisions and existing approvals. As such many of the discussions also relate to the proposals for the whole site and not just the phase currently subject to a reserved matters application.

Site Layout

The Panel were concerned that the proposed layout for the entire site, and by default the part of the site reviewed here, was a pragmatic response to the various constraints on the development and did not appear to take the various opportunities for creating a vibrant and successful place. PPS1 states clearly that: *“Design which fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area should not be accepted.”* (Key Principle (iv), para 13) and the Panel were unanimous in the view that the proposal fails in this regard.

The Panel accepted the comments that the layout would provide a safe environment with passive surveillance and a hierarchy of roads in a home-zone type approach and supported this in principle. However, it was suggested that the whole layout would benefit from being revisited after some detailed urban design analysis.

Sense of Place

In line with the general concern described above the Panel did not consider that the scheme was successful in creating a strong sense of place and regretted the bland and outdated design approach that underpins it. It was felt that this would result in a group of houses isolated from the neighbouring communities and the facilities there and these would be accessible predominantly by car. The lack of any facilities on the site for the first phase and the accompanying lack of clarity as to what the ‘Future Commercial/ Retail Scheme by Others’ might consist was also a worry.

The concerns over the sense of place were also apparent in the selection of unmodified off-the-shelf house types selected for the site. Although the Panel appreciated the uncluttered simplicity of the houses it was felt that more could and should be learned from the context and the specification of locally relevant materials would be a way of achieving this. Finally, the observation was made that the design solution should seek to provide special houses in special places, such as at bends in the roads, opposite roundabouts and at the end of vistas.

Connectivity

The Panel felt that the scheme presented had poor connectivity to the wider area and the facilities that they contain. It was suggested that pedestrian links should be stronger to both of the existing neighbouring residential areas and should also provide access to Scotia Brook as an attractive natural feature.

Design and Access Statement

It was suggested to the Panel that a Design and Access Statement was not required by the Local Planning Authority and so had not been produced. However, it was the clear view of the Panel that the scheme required a Design and Access Statement and

that the design would benefit as a result of the urban design analysis that this would entail.

Conclusion

In summary the Panel were broadly supportive of proposals to develop the site for housing and also supported the use of a home-zone type layout with a defined hierarchy of roads. However, there were serious reservations over the scheme as presented and the process that had been undertaken thus far. The Panel were strongly of the opinion that the earlier masterplan as well as this scheme would benefit from revisiting after some detailed urban design analysis as there was a general feeling that the design was an entirely pragmatic solution that did not seek to investigate opportunities to improve the character and quality of the area. It was suggested that this appeared to be an example of old policy being built out and that any solution should respond the more rigorous design agenda in place now.

Recommended Actions

1. The Panel recommend that the original masterplan is revisited in light of some detailed urban design analysis.
2. The Panel recommend that a Design and Access Statement is produced as this is not only a requirement but also would help to illustrate the urban design analysis process undertaken.
3. The Panel recommends that the layout of the site provides greater connectivity to the neighbouring areas and encourages greater pedestrian movement in what is at present a predominantly car accessed development.
4. The Panel recommend that potentially variations are made to the standard house types and that locally relevant materials are specified where possible in order that the development responds more effectively to its context.
5. The Panel recommend that all relevant environmental design solutions are investigated fully with a view to making the scheme as sustainable as practicable.