
Design statement

for redevelopment of

former industrial use site at Willenhall, to

residential use.

“Good design can help create lively places with distinctive character; streets and public spaces that are safe, accessible, pleasant to use and human in scale; and places that inspire because of the imagination and sensitivity of their designers”.

Quote from: By Design, Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards Better Practice (DETR and CABI, 2000).

Contents

- 1.0 Purpose of Statement**
- 2.0 National Planning policy in respect of design matters**
- 3.0 Summary of Main Planning Issues**
- 4.0 The site and its surroundings**
- 5.0 Access matters and highway issues**
- 6.0 Key design Features of any subsequent reserved matters submission**
- 7.0 Promoting sustainable development**

1.0 Purpose of statement

1.1 The purpose of the statement is to examine the design characteristics of the area and explain how these have informed the layout, design and general appearance of the application proposal.

1.2 A brief overview of planning policy with regard to design is given together with clarification of sustainable development issues.

2.0 National planning policy in respect of design matters

2.1 Planning policy guidance contained within PPG1 confirms that design is a material planning consideration and advises that significant applications should be accompanied by design statements. It states:

“Applicants for planning permission should as a minimum, provide a short written statement setting out the design principles adopted as well as illustrative material in plan and elevation. This material should show the wider context and not just the development site and its immediate surroundings. Inclusion of perspectives can also be of value. Such material will be particularly important in relation to complex or large scale development proposals, and those involving sensitive sites”.

2.2 In addition to this the department of Transport Local Government and the Regions released a document entitled ‘By Design, Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards Better Practice’ (DETR and CABE 2000). This document has been referred to in preparing this statement.

2.3 The Council have requested the submission of a design statement in respect of the development of this site. Meetings with the Council have already been held to discuss matters of principle, planning obligations, design and heritage.

3.0 Summary of Main Planning Issues

3.1 Principle of development

3.2 The Council have indicated that the redevelopment of this site (East of Bilston Street) and others within Walsall, accords with policy WH4 (6), of the Walsall UDP Review Revised Deposit Draft which identifies development and investment opportunities. It reads as follows:

DEVELOPMENT / INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Policy WH4: Development/ Investment Opportunities

The Council will particularly encourage the appropriate development/ reuse of the following sites in and around the District Centre, as shown on the Inset Map:-

I. 74 - 77 Stafford Street. These properties consist of a number of small retail units and are predominantly vacant. They offer the opportunity for conversion into larger retail units, for community uses, or possibly into residential units. Redevelopment may also be acceptable.

II. Indoor market, Union Street. This site relates well to the Primary Shopping Area and offers potential for leisure or retail use, possibly combined with 5-7 Union Street and 12-15 Stafford Street. Any redevelopment must relate positively to the adjacent public footpath, Malt House Lane.

III. Wolverhampton Street. This land should be developed to provide additional public car parking, for residential use, or for purposes in connection with the adjacent medical/ community facilities. The development opportunity has been defined to include the existing buildings on the frontage, numbers 9-11 Wolverhampton Street, but the

retention and enhancement of these properties is encouraged.

IV. R/o 58 Wolverhampton Street. The site provides an opportunity to extend the adjacent public car park and to improve its access.

V. South of New Road/ West of Bilston Street. The site is currently occupied by a number of employment uses: these could remain. However, the site also offers investment opportunities for retail (through an extension to the existing supermarket) and/ or leisure development. Redevelopment of parts of the area in isolation may be acceptable, providing that it would not prejudice wider redevelopment opportunities. Any redevelopment of land to the south and east of the existing supermarket must not prejudice the opportunity for a bus interchange facility and should ensure a good functional relationship with the proposed railway station. The amenities of nearby residential properties must be protected.

VI. East of the District Centre. This area has a wide range of uses, including employment, services and car parking. It has the potential for great change, given the changing requirements of many traditional industries and general social trends. Although the Council will encourage existing employment uses to remain and will facilitate their expansion where appropriate, when sites are vacated other forms of development might be appropriate in principle - for example leisure, residential or non-food retail warehousing (for outlets which might not be accommodated in the primary shopping area). The extent to which these alternative uses could be satisfactorily accommodated within the area will be determined by a number of factors including: their functional relationship with the Primary Shopping Area; adjacent land uses; and the improvement of vehicular access to and within the area. Any redevelopment must retain, and preferably enhance, public car parking in the area, in terms of quality, quantity and location. The Council will explore with developers the possible closure of redundant highways and their inclusion within

development sites. It will also seek improvements to other highways to enhance access to the area.

VII. 2-10 Union Street, 1-7 Stafford Street and 24-28 Market Place. The existing units are of modern construction and contrast markedly with the traditional design of other buildings in the centre. Ideally, the Council would wish to see the units redeveloped or refurbished in a more sympathetic style. Redevelopment would also provide the opportunity to accommodate a greater variety of units sizes in an important location within the Primary Shopping Area. However, proposals to amalgamate existing units, to produce units of a size not adequately represented within the centre, will also be supported, in principle. If the area is proposed for redevelopment, this should be done comprehensively. All servicing must be taken from the rear of the units, accessed from either Union Street or Upper Lichfield Street. The impact of any proposed redevelopment on the Conservation Area and on nearby listed buildings needs to be carefully considered.

17.7 This policy identifies those parts of the centre which could accommodate change most readily and provides broad indications of the Council's vision for these areas. The Council wishes to encourage developers and others to put forward schemes that will realise the potential of these areas to contribute to the overall strategy for the centre. Where appropriate, the Council will prepare Supplementary Planning Guidance to provide more detailed guidelines for developers and ensure that the development potential is realised and that development proceeds in the most satisfactory way. Development and associated traffic works should take account of the need for public transport and service access whilst minimising the environmental impact of this. Access for pedestrians should also be maintained and enhanced.

17.8 The areas of development/ investment opportunity are generally defined quite widely in order to maximise the potential opportunity. A comprehensive approach to development is encouraged and whilst individual proposals will be considered, the Council will need to be satisfied that a more comprehensive scheme cannot be

achieved, and that future more comprehensive development options are not prejudiced. It should be noted that the inclusion of property within one of these areas does not necessarily mean that redevelopment proposals will be made which will affect it. Neither are development proposals outside these areas precluded, if they are otherwise in accordance with the policies of the Plan.

3.3 Legal agreement

3.4 The Council have indicated that they will require a contribution of £100 per bedroom to improve public open space provision in the locality to meet the needs of this development. The applicant is prepared to make such a contribution

3.5 Outline application

3.6 This application is submitted in outline form. The reason for this is enable permission for residential development to be obtained and then for the site to be sold to a suitable end user in due course. Thereafter a detailed reserved matters submission would be made. This outline planning application does deal with matters of siting and access as these matters are very important considerations for the Council as buildings of local interest lie on the site.

3.7 Car Parking

3.8 The Council have indicated that they will require 1.5 car parking spaces per dwelling as an average figure. The applicant is prepared to accept a planning condition that sets such a restriction.

3.9 Other Environmental considerations

3.10 The Council have indicated that Archaeology study and noise will be material planning considerations. The applicant accepts that this is the case but considers it unreasonable to request detailed and costly reports on this brownfield site at this stage given the nature and state of the site and contents of policy WH4 (6). Planning conditions dealing with these matters would be acceptable to the applicant.

4.0 The site and its surroundings

4.1 The site lies to the north of Willenhall town centre and can properly be described as lying on the edge of the town centre. The area lies in an area that is characterised by large industrial buildings many of which are presently vacant or at least little used. The review of the UDP recognises that the area is undergoing structural change as traditional industry declines and new buildings and uses are required to replace them.

4.2 In considering the existing appearance of the site which occupies on an urban block it is appropriate to consider the appearance of the four external elevations to the site:

Wood Street

About ½ of this frontage contains buildings that the Council wishes to see Retained and these are described below. To the southern end of this elevation the site presents a small warehouse and a cement rendered building that may well have been a terraced dwelling in the past. This elevation generally is weak and harms the townscape of the area although the Council contest that two buildings should be improved and incorporated within the development. The attached photographs show the two building of local significance.

Gower Street

This elevation contains both the locally significant building referred to above together with a non-descript industrial building to the eastern side of it and which is to be demolished. Industrial buildings of a poor appearance also lie to the northern of this part of the site.

Moat Street

This elevation is also particularly poor and the appearance of the industrial building on site harms townscape quality. To the north-east of the site also within Moat Street lies a small brick building which has some townscape quality and interest.

Cemetery Street

In urban design terms this elevation is perhaps the most interesting. It faces towards the Cemetery which is open, green and a positive townscape feature. The elevation is a continuous two-storey terraced development finished in a grey coloured cement rendered finish. Such a finish normally does not look very attractive however in this case the elevation has a simple charm and attractive rhythm that is worthy of note but not protection. It is however the case that the scale, rhythm, simplicity and attention to design details ought to be respected in any detailed submission.

4.3 The site contains two buildings along the eastern edge which the Council considers to be of local significance and has requested that they be maintained. The largest of these lies in the north-western corner of the site and is a flat roofed, 3 to 3 ½ storey tall and perhaps some 80 years or so age. It has Art Deco references, detailing and materials to the west and northern elevations. It is constructed of painted brick with concrete detailing including string courses which give the building a horizontal emphasis. The smaller of the buildings front directly onto Wood Street. It is perhaps a late Victorian and is built of hard red brick with stone cills and lintels and detailed brickwork. It has a steeply pitched roof with either clay and concrete tiled roof.

5.0 Access matters and highway issues

5.1 Pedestrian movement and cycle provision

5.2 This is an urban site right on the edge of Willenhall town centre. It will be important that any scheme allows significant permeability through the scheme to maximise and encourage walking between the site and town centre. Adequate provision within the scheme for safe and secure cycle storage should also be made.

5.3 Public transport links

5.4 Due to its sustainable location the site is close to a host of bus services which connect the area either directly or via connections with the conurbation and West Midlands region generally.

5.5 Parking and vehicular access

5.6 Access will be via Gower Street and car parking will be at the ratio of 1.5 per dwelling on average in accordance with the stated request of the Council.

6.0 Key design Features of any subsequent reserved matters submission

6.1 Having regard to the above there are a number of siting and design considerations that ought to be addressed and reflected in any subsequent reserved matter submission. These are as follows:-

- The development ought to retain the buildings along Wood Street which the Council considers worthy of retention as they are of local significance albeit not listed. Should a scheme come forward which involves their demolition it must have a sufficiently good quality of design and townscape enhancement to replace any loss that may result.
- Site access ought to be via Gower Street for vehicles with pedestrian linkages within the development to maximise walking opportunities.
- Car parking ratios for the development should be at an average of 1.5 per dwelling.
- The development should be designed to reflect the industrial legacy of the site and the area in general. This may result in a built form that has the character and appearance of a converted warehouse and it should avoid appearing suburban or too domestic.

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- Unless a good design and townscape reasons advanced the scheme should not exceed 4 storeys in height for the greater part and may need to have a height and massing that is staggered to ensure it fits comfortably on the site.
 - It may not be appropriate to design a building for the site that has a traditional pitched roof and accordingly a flat, curved or mono-pitch roof may be a suitable design solution for the site. In order to protect amenity within the development and to contribute to the protection and enhancement of urban form it is suggested that a peripheral block form of development may be best for this site. The indicative plan submitted with this application makes this suggestion.
 - The scale and appearance of the development where it faces Cemetery Road shall be no taller than 2 to 2 ½ storeys in height and display continuity and rhythm along the frontage that respects the existing built form. If appropriate and despite the scheme generally needing to have the scale, detail and presence of industrial buildings, this elevation may if appropriate appear more domestic.

6.2 Most of the existing buildings and appearance of the site generally are unattractive and do not to enhance the character and appearance of the area, as the attached photographs and a site inspection will show. The Council have indicated that only two buildings along the western elevation of the building are too remain and a scheme can be designed to achieve this, although there may

also be other design solutions which lead to a better development and design. Should this be the case it would need to be demonstrated at a reserved matter stage how this would be achieved.

6.3 It is important in considering these matters that regard is given to planning policy law and precedent and in particular the approach that requires development not necessarily to have the highest design quality on each and every site but rather to only demonstrate that it is not worse in design terms than that which exists at present. Indeed even in respect of Conservation Areas new development must show that it preserves, it does not have to demonstrate enhancement to be acceptable to comply with policy and statute. This said it is strongly maintained that the scale and general appearance of that which is generally outlined in this statement is a significant enhancement in design and streetscene terms to the buildings on site at present.

6.4 This is not a detailed submission and accordingly details of fenestration and materials do not form part of this application and it is strongly contested that given planning policies relevant to sites such as that it is not reasonable to request these matters at this stage. The applicant has expressions of interest from a number of developers for this site and naturally they will propose; in due course, fenestration details that they believe are suitable. These matters can adequately be controlled by planning condition but it is expected that window styles and materials will need to reflect those surrounding the site.

6.5 It is the intention that this development will be landscaped and managed by a landscape contractor as there will be no private gardens. Accordingly it is neither right nor proper to deal with these matters at this stage although it should be noted that the scheme will be landscaped to a very high standard to serve the expectations of occupants and the Local Authorities.

7.0 Promoting sustainable development

7.1 The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill, which has brought in a new era for the planning process, has introduced a new duty for plan making bodies to have the objective of promoting sustainable development. This is now the key aim of the planning system and the need to ensure that residential development addresses this issue has been closely examined by the Sustainable Buildings Task Group (SBTG), a body set up by the Government on devising practical and cost effective measures to improve the sustainability of buildings. Whilst existing planning policies seek to promote higher density development on brownfield urban sites, such as this one are now widely accepted they have hitherto concentrated on locational and layout issues.

7.2 The “Better Buildings – Better Lives” report that SBTG have just produced together with the Sustainable and Secure Buildings Bill, which is going through parliament at present indicates clearly that the attention is increasingly turning to the need to ensure that new buildings demonstrate their contribution to the objective of sustainable development. With homes contributing about 27% of the UK’s carbon dioxide emissions such as timber and water the “ecological footprint” of UK homes has a major impact on the global environment.

7.3 With this in mind the proposal has been revised to focus on demonstrating that it can minimise its impact on the environment. These specifications together with the fact that the site is a brownfield urban site and is being developed at a density that

exceeds the local and national targets are significant material considerations weighing in favour of the application.