

Planning Committee - 12 December, 2007

Report of the Development Manager

Miscellaneous Item

FIREPOOL LOCK MASTERPLAN SUBMISSION OF DETAILS PURSUANT TO CONDITION 02 OF 38/2006/135 AND APPLICATION FOR NON COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS 02 AND 07 ON PERMISSION NUMBER 38/1999/394.

Location of site

The Firepool Lock (formerly known as East Goods Yard) site is located between the railway line to the north of the site and the Taunton and Bridgwater canal to the south. The whole Firepool Lock site occupies approximately 13.1 ha and is largely surrounded by former railway and industrial buildings. The site is presently vacant with the exception of a number of redundant railway buildings the majority of which have now been demolished except for the Pumphouse and water tower which is Grade II listed building.

The site of the subject of this report forms a part of the total area amounting to some 4.6 ha and forms part of the larger Firepool Area identified in the Taunton Vision Urban Design Framework document produced by Terrence O'Rourke. Adjacent to the site is the extensive Project Taunton redevelopment of the Cattle Market and car park

Planning History

The Firepool Lock site was granted outline planning permission for the redevelopment to provide approximately 3.3ha of residential development; approximately 0.9 ha of B1 employment uses; conversion of pumping station to provide a public house/restaurant; new access road, canal side walkway, new infrastructure, landscaping, earth moving and demolition of existing structures; construction of new walls and fences and all associated engineering works' at Taunton East Goods Yard, Taunton Station, Taunton, on 20 August, 2004 (application reference 38/1999/394), The scheme was only submitted in diaphragmatic form.

The application was subject to legal agreement relating to highway works; provision of or contribution to non-car modes of transport: provision of strategic footway/cycleway link, a contribution to suitable off site related transport, an education contribution, a public open space contribution, 20.7% of the total units to be provided as Affordable Housing via an RSL, an obligation to ensure that the access road connects to the strategic road to the west. Numerous conditions were also imposed on that permission, many of which still remain to be formally discharged.

The access road was not reserved for future consideration and a separate detailed consent for the road exists. The site requires extensive remediation,

regrading and re-profiling as part of the remediation strategy, this provides natural terracing from north to south and a separate permission has also been given for these works subject to a variety of conditions.

Requirements of the relevant Condition

The original 2004 issued planning permission contained the following condition which is the reason for this report:-

“07 A development brief indicating a draft layout of the whole site indicating the following:-

- (a) access arrangements including cycleways and footpaths;
- (b) the specific areas of land allocated for housing, B1
- (c) employment uses and public house/restaurant;
- (d) the density, form, scale, height and massing of the development;
- (e) location of landscaping, amenity open space and play areas,

shall be submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority prior to the submission of any reserved matters. Any material deviation from the approved brief shall not take place other than with the prior approval of the Local Planning Authority.

07 Reason: The application site forms a large part of the major mixed-use redevelopment site at Firepool as allocated in the Taunton Deane Local Plan and will require a co-ordinated approach.”

This condition and condition 02 (relating to the time limit for submission of certain details) were subsequently modified by application 38/2006/135 approved on 19th May, 2006. The revised condition now reading as follows:-

“02 An indicative Masterplan for the entire site shall be submitted to the Council for approval with a supporting statement prior to any application for reserved matters. This application shall be approved by the Council prior to the determination of the first application for reserved matters. The indicative Masterplan shall indicate the following:-

- (a) general access arrangements including strategic cycleways and footpaths;
- (b) the broad areas of land allocated for housing, B1 employment and public house/restaurant;
- (c) the density, form, scale, height and massing of the development; and
- (d) the general location of landscaping amenity open space and play areas.

02 Reason: The application site forms a large part of the major mixed use development site at Firepool as allocated in the Taunton Deane Local Plan

and will require a co-ordinated approach in accordance with Taunton Deane Local Plan Policy T3.”

The details now submitted are made pursuant to the requirements of the latter condition.

Outline of Masterplan Details

Since withdrawal of an earlier scheme the Architect Director of the Gadd Group has been developed the Masterplan in conjunction with Barton Willmore Town Planners, LHC Architects (office development), Stride Treglown Architects (Area A residential and landscape strategy) and Highway Field Associates (Pumphouse redevelopment); Hydrock Consultant Engineers have produced the highways and infrastructure strategy and detailed design.

The following matters have been identified as the main Statutory Constraints to site development and taken into account in preparing the Masterplan:-

- The Pumphouse is a Grade II Listed Building;
- The site is not within or adjacent to a Conservation Area or other designated zone.
- Network Rail have the right to approve development within parameters set in their Deed of Sale and transfer, this includes access arrangements, and limits on types of development including minimum and maximum provision of land class uses. etc.
- British Waterways Code of Practice for works to or adjacent to a canal applies.
- The Environment Agency set minimum flood protection levels and are involved in storm water discharge rates and ground remediation and regrading.
- Somerset County Council Highways Department have defined the vertical and horizontal alignment of the Northern Inner Distributor Road and Bridge, which bisects the site.
- SCC Highways are responsible for the design and construction of the bridge.

Following these considerations in developing this Masterplan the applicants have adopted the following principles which can be summarised as:-

- Street layout opening up views to waterfront and beyond.
- “Towpath” canalside walkway on the bank of the Canal.
- A mixture of apartments and townhouses fronting the canal.
- Three to seven storey buildings accentuating higher ground.
- The provision of part of the strategic cross town route, the NIDR (Northern Inner Distributor Road).
- A mixed use development at the western entrance to site with active frontages.
- New bridge with viewing points and access for all to the river and towpath to be designed and constructed by Somerset County Council Highways.

- Pumphouse restored as focus for bars/restaurants with surrounding public open space.
- Characterised landscaped areas for the enjoyment of the public provision of the footway/cycle routes linking to existing routes.
- Access to the Canal for water uses.
- Perimeter development allowing for better surveillance of private areas and streets.

With regard to site access the proposed strategic route (labelled spine road) and the associated new bridge over the river and canal have been incorporated into the Masterplan. With two secondary access roads to serve the residential areas A, B, C and D and E.

An extensive cycle network links all the residential courtyards to the office and mixed use accommodation, as well as the Pumphouse Piazza and railway station, canal-side path. The cycleway is linked to the Sustrans National Cycleway network, which runs along the southern towpath of the canal via the existing canal bridges at Winkworth Way and Canal Road; this will be further enhanced with the construction of the NIDR bridge access.

In terms of density form and height an almost continuous line of buildings are proposed along the northern site boundary to divide the residential accommodation from the existing railway using the Strategic Road as the division.

This comprises an office development in Area I. The building proposed increases in height from 5 to 6 storeys from west to east with the 6 storey element of the building set back to reduce the visual impact of the building. The block is staggered in footprint to create a strong avenue approach to the site. A detailed planning applicant (38/2007/193) for an office building on this site in compliance with the parameters set in this Masterplan appears later in the agenda.

The multi-storey car park at Area J is to be fronted by office suites on the NIRD elevation of the building. This provides 150 spaces dedicated to serve the proposed offices, 116 spaces to serve the dwellings proposed in the areas for residential development. A further 75 spaces are dedicated to the converted Pumphouse restaurant and Area H.

The existing listed Pumphouse will be converted to provide a restaurant and ancillary bar set within a piazza which provides access from the NIDR to the canal, by means of pedestrian access to the west and east, and a combined cycleway to the west. This public space includes disabled parking for the restaurant and convenience store, as well as providing an appropriate setting.

The piazza is to the west of the Pumphouse, surrounding development in Area H has been positioned over 40 m from the Pumphouse, to allow an appropriate setting for the listed building. Area A to the east has been designed to form a curved screen providing a dramatic 'backdrop' to the Pumphouse, deliberately providing the latter with its own setting.

The residential accommodation covering the majority of the site is proposed to be divided into separate areas. The buildings have been orientated to maximise the views of the canal.

The residential accommodation ranges in height from three to six storeys plus undercroft parking in some instances. The distribution of building height articulates the roofscape, in line with the guidance of Terence O' Rourke, with the higher elements on the northern plateau, with the form stepping down towards the canal, following the natural contours. The six storey part of the residential development will be located at the northern part of the site to ensure views of the canal are not restricted, with the buildings stepping down following the natural contours. The higher element of the dwellings is located at the corners of the residential blocks. The three storey buildings are primarily located in front and between the higher elements of the buildings.

Excluding the 2 houses in Area H, the overall area of residential development is 3.284 Ha, occupied by 460 dwellings comprising 443 apartments and 17 houses at an average density of 140 dwellings per hectare. The recently approved Midas scheme at Tangier comprises 225 apartments on a site area of 1.1Ha, with a resultant coverage of 204 dwellings per hectare. The mixed use development at Castle Moat Chambers on Corporation Street has a site area of 0.127 Ha, with 50 dwellings located over retail at a residential density of 394 properties per hectare.

Area A the residential area to the west of the Firepool Lock site between the NIDR and the canal and adjacent to the Listed Pumphouse comprise three separate buildings. A 6 storey high buildings with an undercroft level forms the north side running parallel to the NIDR, The height of this building allows views from the upper floors out above the southern buildings. The other buildings located adjacent to the canal the southwest and southeast buildings are 5 storeys, these are linked at roof level, but separated by the courtyard; the lowest level corresponds to the undercroft of the northern block.

These provide a total of 100 apartments and 4 townhouses. With parking within the private parking courts and multi-storey car. Cycle parking will be provided, one space for each apartment, centrally located in the north building undercroft and the ground floor of the southern blocks.

A link from the Canalside walkway is created through the courtyard to access the reflective garden within Area A with associated landscaping. A feature of this area of the Masterplan is the faceted wall which forms a backdrop to landscaping around the Pumphouse and courtyard setting.

Area B adjacent to the canal in the centre of the Firepool Lock site between consists of 56 apartments and 6 townhouses with 54 car parking spaces and further 8 in the multi storey car park.

The main buildings is five storeys including the undercroft with two three-storey townhouses in between, orientated to make the most of the view and southerly aspect. This area has been designed to maximize the views of the canal and river. All the residential buildings have been designed with low-

pitch 'butterfly' roofs to lower the height and to provide an interesting and variable roofline.

The three buildings in Area C contain 102 apartments and varies in height between 4 and 6 storeys. The lower storeys are at the end of the buildings nearest to the canal. 82 spaces are provided around the townhouses accessed from the private access roads and a further 26 spaces in the multi-storey car park. In front of the south elevation are two buildings which contain 6 townhouses.

Area D situated at the eastern end of the site provides predominantly four-storey with undercrofts reducing by a storey at the canalside housing 72 apartments and 18 three storey townhouses. The parking for 82 cars are provided on site and undercroft with parking reached by access roads from the secondary road with a further 8 spaces are provided within the multi-storey car park.

Area E has been identified to meet the "Affordable Housing" requirements of the scheme consists of 102 apartments in two buildings with a staggered footprint the highest part of which being 6 storeys within the north eastern corner of the Firepool Lock site.

The private spaces and terraces for the dwellings and apartment residents will be landscaped with a mixture of native trees, hedge planting, grass and shared surfaces. All the landscape areas face south towards the canal affording views towards the Blackdown Hills.

Regarding public areas of open spaces and landscaping, large structure trees are proposed which create a formal entrance. Trees planted along the main road will be set at the back edge of the pavement contained by tree root barriers, and underguyed. It is anticipated that some of these trees will be semi matures when planted to give immediate impact and focus acting as a back drop to the development.

Other landscaping involves a strategy which aims to define the area into character zones that visually and physically be linked together to form an overall cohesive plan. Urban landscaped areas are proposed between the residential areas, with further areas allocated as open space with appropriate landscaping.

The areas designated as public open space are intended to be areas of high quality surfaces and finishes, street furniture, matching seating bins and bollards with primarily structure tree planting. These areas will have key art works to link them together.

The landscape along the canal will be of native species to enhance the existing environmental corridor reflect the planting opposite the site of the Children's Woodland.

An area identified as a “Reflective Garden” has been incorporated into Block A accessed from the towpath. A central sculpture piece has been designed by local children it is hoped that this will engender a sense of belonging.

A large area, identified as an environmental area has been set aside for an attenuation pond set amongst a wild flower meadow once again enhancing the wildlife/environmental corridor along the canal. This will have a footpath and cycle path linking it to the rest of the development.

The canal side frontage is to be landscaped with indigenous species trees and shrubs and the retention of natural vegetation is included to enhance the existing wildlife area.

The approach to the sustainable development of Firepool Lock has been an intrinsic part of the design and evaluation process; this has been benchmarked against the Code for Sustainable Homes and developed through a series of focused Sustainable Development Workshops.

Phasing of the development is intended as set out below:-

1. NIDR as required for construction of following phases
2. A – residential accommodation
3. J –offices and multi-storey car park (concurrent part overlap with Phases 2, 4 and 5)
4. I – offices
5. E – residential accommodation (Knightstone Housing Association)
6. B – (residential accommodation)
7. C – (residential accommodation)
8. Pumphouse
9. D – residential accommodation
10. H – mixed use development

Policy Background for Consideration of Proposal

PPS1 - Delivering Sustainable Development

PPS3 – Housing

PPG4 – Industrial and Commercial Development and small firms

PPS6 – Planning for town centres

PPG13 – Transport

PPG15 – Planning and the Historic Environment

PPG16 – Archaeology and planning

PPS25 – Guidance on flooding

Circular 02/99 – Environment Impact Assessment

Circular 01/06 – Changes to the development control system.

RPG10 - Regional Planning Guidance for the South West 2001 (RSS10)

RSS – The Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West (Submitted version August 2006)

At present the RSS is RPG10, although replacement RSS is at an advanced stage of preparation. This guidance identified a need for Taunton to accommodate a significantly higher level of housing and employment growth. This prompted a

strategic review of the future role and function of Taunton as a potential major growth centre.

The Draft RSS identifies Taunton as one of 21 Strategically Significant Cities and Towns in the Region, which are to be the primary focus for development. In Taunton's case this will involve a significant increase in its rate of growth, and an enhanced strategic function. As a consequence of the high level of proposed housing growth, and the increase over past levels, Taunton has also achieved New Growth Point status.

TDBCAP

S1 – General Design Requirements

S2 – Design

M4 – Residential parking requirement

M5 – Cycling

M6 – Traffic Calming Measures

C1 – Education Provision for new housing

C4 - Standards of Provision

C8 - Development Affecting Disused Railway Tracks and Canals

EN25 – The Water Environment

EN28 – Development and Flood Risk

EN32 – Contaminated Land

EN34 – Control of External Lighting

T3 – Firepool – Major Site Allocation

T33 – Taunton's Skyline

Taunton Design Code

A 'Taunton Vision Commission' was established to steer and co-ordinate this review. This involved a partnership comprising the Borough and County Councils, SWERDA and the Environment Agency. The resulting product, informed by extensive community consultation, was the 'Taunton Vision', published in 2002.

Since then, the Borough and County Councils, SWERDA and the Environment Agency have formed the nucleus of a strong partnership. A significant product of this partnership was the establishment and funding of 'Project Taunton', a dedicated delivery team that is now steering the majority of work associated with the Taunton Vision. This partnership has now extended to embrace a wide range of bodies and organisations, including the Taunton Deane Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), Somerset College, Local Skills Council and others.

Terence O' Rourke (Planning Consultants) were commissioned to prepare an Urban Design Framework and Design Code for the Town Centre. This work was published in 2004 and has provided the basis for the development of this Action Plan. The quality of this 'Masterplanning' resulted in the Taunton Vision winning the RTPI national award for 'spatial strategies' in 2005.

Somerset County Council has received major transport scheme funding to enable the delivery of the Inner Relief Road (Third Way) and the Northern Inner Distributor Road, both of which are key components of the Taunton Vision.

With regard to this documents guidance on the Firepool Lock area covered by the Masterplan the following comments were made:-

“Upper Canal Street – Eastern Area

A new bridge link will be created to the eastern area over the River Tone and the Taunton and Bridgwater Canal via Priory Fields. The bridge will mark the transition point into the new and expanded Taunton town centre, for pedestrians and cyclists along the river as well as for motorists. There should be viewing points within the bridge to acknowledge this and the new bridge must be sensitively designed to create a high quality gateway to the new residential and leisure area.

The abutments should provide a strong canal like structure whilst the main structure should be lightweight to minimise visual impact. This bridge must give sufficient headroom for cyclists and pedestrians to continue to use the existing riverside paths.

At its entrance over the canal, Upper Canal Street widens, with a central planting area, to create an appropriate sense of arrival into this new residential area, and to have the effect of slowing traffic to an appropriate speed. A signalised junction at the northern end of this street again restricts traffic speed, provides access to parking for the business units and minimizes loss of development land to road building. The design of the employment building fronting this junction should reflect its prominent gateway position.

Undercroft parking alongside Upper Canal Street in this area utilises changes in levels to ensure that active frontages are presented to the road. Building heights of between 4-6 storeys will provide an appropriate sense of enclosure.

The changes in levels across the site allow for a stepping down of building heights from the railway to the riverfront. This allows for taller buildings on the higher ground, reinforcing the topography of the site whilst avoiding the main views of the towers.

The development blocks on the higher ground must however be a series of buildings and not a ‘monolithic’ single mass of development. This should ensure that views across the town are maximised without impacting on the sensitive skyline.

Distinctive rooflines and a variety of storey heights must create an attractive and interesting skyline.

A more informal, residential scale (3-4 storeys) of development is appropriate along the riverfront, incorporating a mix of town houses and apartments.

The design of the residential blocks should also retain views and pedestrian links to the riverfront, with a series of informal spaces at the end of each vista.”

Taunton Urban Design Framework

The above document identifies Firepool as an area that will be a vibrant mixed use quarter of the town centre and playing a key role in changing market perceptions of Taunton as a place to live and work.

With regard to Upper Canal Street this envisaged a new access across the River Tone and canal into the eastern residential area. The bridge will need to be sensitively designed to minimise visual intrusion whilst maintaining access for cyclists and pedestrians (as well as the Environment Agency) along the canal walkways.

The area east of the Pumphouse is to have a predominantly residential character. This eastern area will contain a mix of housing and apartments, with a riverside setting and views over the town.

The housing blocks along the riverfront are expected to provide for views and linkages to the riverfront and also produce a series of informal spaces along the north bank of the canal for residents and visitors.

The river and the canal provide important pedestrian and cycle links from surrounding residential areas, including the urban extension at Monkton Heathfield, through to the town centre and new development areas.

On the north bank of the canal a 'towpath' walk is required to provide a gradual transition from the rural green spaces east of Firepool, via the Pumphouse to the new urban space at Station Boulevard.

On the south bank of the Tone, the informal character of the pedestrian and cycle links are to be retained.

Firepool Weir provides a natural focus for leisure activity at the meeting point of the River Tone and Bridgwater and Taunton Canal. It is at the heart of Firepool and can serve the business and residential communities.

An improved weir can increase flood protection and be a visitor attraction in its own right. A new marina would bring increased visitor activity and visual interest along the waterfront.

A new riverfront space will provide an appropriate setting for the converted Pumphouse. This will be a landmark feature for the town and be a focus for individual bars or restaurants.

Proposal for Change in Taunton Town Centre Taunton Town Centre Area Action Submission Stage Consultation

The above document has recently been published for consultation and contains the following policy with regard to Firepool Lock

Firepool Lock

The Firepool Lock development should provide:-

- a. a minimum of 500 dwellings
- b. at least 7,000 sq m of office space
- c. refurbishment of the listed pump house building

In terms of phasing the plan envisages that a detailed planning application for development would be submitted in 2007 with development progressing in parallel with and following construction of Northern Inner Distributor Road in 2008 to 2014.

Consultation Responses

As part of the process for consideration of the Masterplan consultations have been undertaken with the following:-

South West Design Review Panel,
Taunton and District Civic Society,
Project Taunton,
County Highways,
British Waterways,
Environment Agency,
Conservation Officer,
Environmental Health,
Leisure and Recreation and
Planning Policy.

South West Design Review Panel - 9 October, 2007

“We welcome development of this brownfield site close to and well connected to the town and we recognise that this development will set a standard for subsequent schemes under Project Taunton, both in the adjacent Firepool area and in other parts of the town.

The Panel felt disappointed that the guidance it gave in July 2007 on your scheme for Phase A had had little impact on these proposals for Firepool Lock.

The route of the Northern Inner Distributor Road is unchanged. This is outside your control of course but with the county and district councils in mind simply record our disappointment and our preference for the road to be shifted back to the north next to the railway (as appeared to be the case in the originally agreed Taunton Vision Master plan) to give a less divided and road-dominated Masterplan and place the two sources of noise together.

We were not convinced by the arguments for the alignment shown. If the road is to remain as shown, then we hope sufficient space will be allowed for trees, though this would not by itself make a road into a street: conflict between a through route and a street is inherent in the Masterplan. Incidentally, the design of the bridge will be important for this scheme, especially views along the canal from east and west.

While we support both higher densities and higher buildings for schemes in Taunton such as this, we formed the impression that the Masterplan may be seeking too much of its site. We have to say 'impression' as no density figure was given to us; this should be fundamental to your work and Taunton Deane's assessment of it. The result is a large footprint and a dearth of really appealing open space. We suggest fewer residential units would lead to a more satisfactory scheme.

If, as we suspect, the density is appropriate for a city centre such as Bristol, then the parking strategy should be consistent with that. 1:1 would be too high. Lower provision could work here given the ease of access to the town centre by foot and cycle and the closeness of the railway station (plus a possible bus service). We would prefer to see a more radical 'continental' approach with the residential parking wholly accommodated in the multi-storey car park, allowing a residential development of blocks in a landscape rather than blocks with parking.

A less dense residential development could be more open and it may be that U-shaped blocks would give a simpler and better form. It would relate better to the canal and offer a more attractive landscape setting. Rethinking the built form and landscape strategy might bring a bonus too in cost saving.

We question the mix of blocks and individual houses. Such a pattern has no tradition in this country and it is hard to see them working in architectural or commercial terms, especially if rectangular and diagonal blocks are juxtaposed. Separate terraces of houses or even housing beneath flats could work more successfully.

On particular points about the layout as shown to us, the courtyard of westernmost block (Area A) appeared tight and would need careful consideration, preferably through a physical model. The central space in Area C is a large expanse of tarmac without an obvious purpose and Area D to the east might work better with a terrace along the access road.

Two of the open spaces are not well located. Both are next to the Distributor Road. One is close to the railway and an unappealing building (outside your control) with lorry access to it. Another, as we said before, is on the north side of the Pump-house; and it will partly double as disabled parking. The third, the Reflective Garden, sounds promising but seems to focus within the scheme not on the waterfront. None of the three in fact exploits the site's greatest asset, the canal. We ask you to see if as well or instead a space could be created where people could enjoy the sun, the canal and the views across the canal and river to the town.

We welcome your interest in public art and hope an artist will be involved in the hard and soft landscaping, creating points of interest within the development. We'd encourage you to work closely with Caroline Corfe, Arts Development Officer, Taunton Deane Borough Council, on the development of an integrated public art commissioning plan for the whole site.

On sustainability, we were glad to hear that you are in discussions with Project Taunton. We consider that sustainability should be fundamental to the design of Firepool Lock from the outset. We suggest you devise an energy strategy showing

what the demand will be and how the scheme will meet current and future standards. On the supply side, this area would seem well suited to CHP but only if it is planned from the start. There seems to have been little development in this area since we last saw the scheme and we would urge you to make progress with your discussions

We hope our points are helpful and that you will be prepared to reappraise the quantum, form and spaces and come forward with a scheme that is an exemplar for the many subsequent schemes that Taunton will have as a growth point. We would be willing to look at a revised scheme and proposals for individual sites should that be thought helpful.

Note of interest: Peter Clegg notified the interest that Feilden Clegg Bradley were engaged in work for a scheme on an adjacent site.”

Taunton and District Civic Society

“We are aware that there has been an earlier application related to this site, 38/2006/579 (which has disappeared from your website), and that the current Masterplan has been evolving since a much earlier version shown to during a public consultation in May 2007. Are details of the Masterplan continuing to change?

Our first comment is that it is a great pity that Condition 07 did not require a number of (outline) cross-sections of the site, particularly in a north-south orientation, as the differences in ground levels make it very difficult to assess the height and massing of the proposal from the proposed density form/height drawing, which merely indicates “Levels”. Without a specific relationship to a site-wide datum it is impossible to tell, for example, if level 04 at centre north of Area C will appear to the observer to be at the same height as level 04 at the southern (canal side) end of Area B. Confusingly the Design and Access Statement indicates that the lowest level (02) is three storeys high!

Can cross-sections showing height above datum be made available?

However, we do consider the general massing and profiling sequences to be good, with the possible exception of Area E, where the lowest levels are to the north, and where there is no barrier between the residential accommodation and the noisy railway line. Area E is affordable housing: we think that TDBC should not permit the concentration of such housing into noticeably inferior accommodation or areas.

As regards the plans of the residential areas A to E, we consider that they are good as they achieve quite high densities (466 dwellings on less than 5 ha), without losing a sense of space, and exploit the high south facing nature of the site to good effect, giving good views and a sense of openness. Importantly, the waterfront as seen from the footpaths to the south by the canal and Children’s Wood will be varied and will avoid the monolithic effects of other waterfront developments in the town. This is most welcome.

We have some concern that the units on the inside corners of the main blocks in Areas C, D and E may have too little external wall (and hence insufficient and overly directional natural light), but that is susceptible to resolution at a reserved matters stage.

We are pleased to see the proposals for the conversion of the Pumphouse, the provision of public space adjacent to it (and the lock) and by the provision of the Mixed Use Area.

We cannot identify Area F from any plan.”

Parking Provision and Traffic Management

“We have serious concerns about the effects of this site on the NIDR, and vice versa. The NIDR is a two lane road which can be expected to carry high traffic levels, and which makes a quite tight right angle turn as it passes between areas C and E. We calculate that up to 314 vehicles may travel to and from the residential blocks using this road, with a further 116 residents crossing it on foot to reach their vehicles in the multi-storey car park (MSCP) in area J. We think this is a recipe for congestion at peak times, and potentially unsafe – and this without factoring in the impact of a further possible 150 office worker vehicles and 75 restaurant/shopping users in the MSCP. The NIDR design shown on the Masterplan does not seem suited to such a high level of turn-off accesses.

Having said that, we are pleased to see a parking allocation of 1 space per open market dwelling, which is a lot more realistic than some other town centre proposals. However, we think that just on privacy and crime grounds it is not desirable to allocate resident’s parking in an MSCP, and that it is even worse if they have to cross a busy road to reach that parking.

There are 66 spaces in the affordable housing area (E), which has 102 dwellings. It is likely that occupants will require more spaces – what options are open to them?

The Design and Access Statement specifies the use of 341 spaces in the MCSP, but does not give the total capacity. Plans indicate about 77 per floor. Please require the developer to state the total capacity.

Given the high use of undercroft/ground floor parking, will the ground active frontages?

Phasing

We are generally content with the proposed phasing, except for the Mixed Use Area (H) being the last phase developed. There will surely be a strong need for some local retail provision (and public space) once the offices at areas I and J, and residential areas A and E, are in use. Area H should be brought forward to coincide with phase 4 or 5.

Conclusion

Despite our reservations about the management of the car and traffic flows, we consider this to be a proposal that has much to commend it. “

Project Taunton

“We are supportive of their Masterplan. We look forward to seeing the first phase details in due course.”

Forward Plan Unit

1.0 **General**

- 1.1 There seem to be a number of unresolved issues with the layout of this scheme, which we have indicated below. For example, the position of the individual development blocks and the degree of setback from, and alignment with respect to, the Northern Inner Distributor Road, are matters of principle that need to be resolved before the Masterplan can be considered satisfactory.
- 1.2 It appears that the developers are trying to fit rather too much development onto this site, with adverse effects on the quality and appropriateness of the scheme.

2.0 **Site Plan Masterplan**

- 2.1 Issues addressed below in the comments on the Individual Masterplans.

3.0 **Land Use Masterplan**

- 3.1 The colours on the Masterplan are somewhat confusing but, on the assumption that offices are to be confined to the area between the NIDR and the railway lane, and to Area H, the general distribution of land uses is acceptable.
- 3.2 It will be important to achieve good quality building elevations and boundary treatment to the main railway line – millions of people pass this way by train every year. An effort is needed to secure the replacement of Network Rail's standard galvanised palisade fencing by a higher-quality secure fencing system. Coloured mesh-type fences appear to have been accepted along rail and light rail lines and around railway depots elsewhere in the UK.

4.0 **Access Masterplan**

- 4.1 There are likely to be quite significant pedestrian and cycle movements in this area owing to the nature of the proposed development and the proximity of Taunton railway station.
- 4.2 The scheme as submitted does not appear to provide a westbound cycle lane on the main road carriageway. An eastbound cycle lane is shown, but not one for cyclists travelling west. In what is essentially a town centre, or at least edge of town centre location, utility cyclists should be able to cycle comfortably on the main vehicular carriageways. As it is, what is proposed resembles Silk Mills Road, most of which is outside the urban area of Taunton and therefore different in context.
- 4.3 Provision for pedestrians appears inconvenient in some cases. The toucan and puffin crossings are sited at some distance from the street corners where pedestrians are most likely to want to cross the road.

4.4 It is not clear why a right turning lane is required from residential cul-de-sac Road 4 onto the NIDR, which will inconvenience pedestrians. The traffic flows from the housing surely cannot justify it.

5.0 **Density/Form/Height Masterplan**

5.1 There is no objection to the overall block form as it relates to the NIDR. However, there is an issue of an absence of setback of the residential building line from the highway. Areas A and C appear to have virtually no front garden between the building line and the NIDR, a road which will be carrying 15,000 vehicles per day. Considering existing busy highways in Taunton, such as the A3259 (Priorswood Road and Greenway Road), there should be a setback of at least 5m. If there is to be no setback, then what in reality is being created is an urban street, and the ground floor of the buildings needs to be given over to commercial uses.

5.2 Area C – it is not sufficient merely to provide ‘landscaping’ between the buildings and the NIDR; for residential uses there must be properly enclosed private garden space. The same holds true for the respective parts of Areas A, B, D and E.

5.3 Area D – there needs to be a more continuous block form to create stronger edge definition to the canal, probably at a scale greater than 2 storeys. As drawn, the relationship between this area and the canal is unsatisfactory, with buildings sitting in space, rather than defining space.

5.4 Area I – offices are not generally considered to count as an active ground floor use. It will therefore be important to maximise glazed areas at ground level of this block fronting the NIDR to create an impression of activity.

5.5 Area J – there is some concern at what this block will look like, especially when viewed from the east or west and from the railway line. What must be avoided is the ‘dead’ effect of a multi-storey car park and spiral ramps.

Assuming that there are around 7,000 sq m of offices, 150 parking spaces to serve them seems too many. Appendix 4 of the submitted Town Centre Area Action Plan contains a standard of 1 space per 100 sq m, which would equate to around 70 spaces. A smaller car park would reduce the scale of this building, which will seem rather high in the context of typical interface distances of around 20m (little wider than much of North Street) across the NIDR.

5.6 Generally there seems to be too much parking being proposed for the converted Pumphouse and the mixed-use Area H. The scale of the proposed multi-storey car park could be considerably reduced, with beneficial effects on the design of the scheme as a whole. One further point about this that has occurred to me, assuming the issue has not been picked up before. It will be essential that any multi-storey car park, or other parking not within the curtilage of residential properties, is subject to an appropriate management and charging regime. Any spaces in excess of the appropriate parking

standard for a particular development would need to be charged for on the same basis as parking elsewhere in Taunton Town Centre.

6.0 Open Spaces and Landscape Structure Masterplan; Landscape Masterplan

6.1 With the exception of four trees shown in front of Area C, there appear to be no trees within the highway. For the proposed 'avenue planting' along the NIDR to be effective, the trees need to be planted between the footway and vehicular carriageway, so that they create a 'boulevard' effect, and where there is more room for significant trees to grow. Planting them at the rear of the footway means that there is no psychological separation of pedestrians from the traffic, nor will there be much shade from the sun – an increasingly important issue in an area of climate change. The type of median strip and tree planting shown in front of Area C needs to be provided on both sides of the NIDR and along its full length.

6.2 There appears to be a children's play area within a 'tunnel' under the buildings in Area A, which does not seem appropriate.

7.0 Ground Surface Level Masterplan

7.1 Without provision of any sections, it is not clear exactly how 'ground surface' within the buildings relates to the level of the NIDR. However, the drawings show the ground floor of Areas A, C, D and E facing the NIDR largely given over to car parking. If these parking areas are to be at street level, then this would not be acceptable. The street elevations of all buildings must have habitable space at ground level, not car parking.

7.2 It appears that access to individual ground floor flats will only be from communal hallways. An important urban design principle is to provide individual access to as many ground floor properties as possible, so as to encourage pedestrian activity along the street.

7.3 The office building in Area 1 should be aligned parallel to the NIDR, rather than the railway line, to create stronger definition of the street than provided by the proposed staggered building line.

8.0 First Floor Level Masterplan

8.1 Many of the flats in Areas fronting the NIDR seem to be single aspect, which presumably will preclude placing the more sensitive rooms on elevations away from the main road."

Leisure Development Manager

"OPEN SPACE

Whilst the open space along the river front and around the attenuation pond will be a welcome enhancement to this area, the Masterplan shows very little regard for the open space needs of children and young people. Indeed the Planning Design and

Access Statement fails to include PPG17 on Sport and Recreation (which covers play and open space), in the list of relevant National Planning Guidance.

PLAY FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

There is a planning condition on the outline permission for this development requiring on site play provision. On a development of this scale the council normally requires on site play provision for all ages of children.

On this site there should be play areas for young children safely accessible to children living on both sides of the new road and an area for older children and teenagers as well.

Failure to cater for children and young people will lead to problems with this estate in the future as young people in particular must have somewhere legitimate to go to socialise and “let-off steam”.

YOUNG PEOPLE

The open space proposed along the water front offers no scope to cater for the activities of young people, who need to play football and ride their BMX bikes and skateboards. If provision is not made for them to do this, they will do it in areas where such activities are unwelcome, close to houses and parking areas, creating demands on the Council in the future to address what could be considered to be antisocial behaviour.

There has been a proposal to put such an activity area on land between the River and Canal, but this land is laid out for nature conservation, is likely to flood and it is likely to raise objections from the Environment Agency as it would have to be fenced and thus would pose an obstruction to debris in flood situations. It is also very isolated from the development and not subject to the informal surveillance such sites need.

There is the possibility of taking a sum in lieu of such provision and investing this in new provision on a park or open space elsewhere in the town that is accessible to the young residents of this site. However there are major barriers to accessing these sites on foot or cycle from the East Goods Yard site which would have to be addressed:-

- a major road through the centre of the site
- the surrounding railway line and waterways
- Priorswood Road
- Priory Bridge Road.

Proposals to demonstrate safe and direct access to the proposed site must be made before approving the Masterplan as currently proposed.

(The off-site sum would be calculated on the basis of the number of family dwellings on the site. There would need to be an addition of a percentage to cover the fees for consulting the community, for designing, tendering and supervising the investment project and a maintenance sum for the future.)

CHILDREN

There is scope in the areas of open space along the waterside footpath and cycle route for some innovative and creative play provision for young children which could be integrated into the open space scheme providing the safety issues are addressed. This could discharge the obligation to provide for young children on site but the proposals would need careful design and siting.

It is vital that use for play and general recreational activity by young people is clearly acknowledged in the design of the open spaces and not restricted to fenced areas of play equipment.

The suggested combination of a tranquil garden with a natural play area is unlikely to be a successful solution to the need to provide on site for young children's play needs. "

County Highway Authority

"The Masterplan submitted is generally ok in terms of the form of development. However the Hydrock Plan CO7091\C008Rev G does not show the currently agreed bridge alignment which is some metres further to the west. This could possibly affect the Block positions. The developer is aware of this and has I understand amended his drawings."

British Waterways

"British Waterways is a public body set up to maintain and develop the network of canals and other inland waterways in a sustainable manner so that they fulfil their full economic, social and environmental potential. In addition to statutory navigation and safety functions, British Waterways has to: -

- Conserve our waterway heritage and environment
- Promote and enable rural and urban regeneration
- Maintain and enhance leisure, recreation, tourism and education opportunities for the general public and
- Facilitate waterway transport.

After due consideration of the Masterplan details, British Waterway has the following general comments to make:-

British Waterways are concerned that the Masterplan looks at the site in isolation and does not address the waterspace adjacent to the development. The provision of some residential, long term and visitor moorings along with boater facilities as part of the scheme would have added waterside interest and activity benefiting the town, canal and development.

As things stand this is probably the only/best opportunity Taunton have of bringing boats/waterside activity permanently into the town centre.

There would appear to be no DDA/cycle way link between either the New Spine Road Bridge or Obridge Bridge and the 'new canal side walkway'. Good accessible connections will be essential if the canal frontage is to become anything other than a formal empty space.

The 'new towpath' adjacent to the canal within the new 'Environmental Area with Attenuation Pond' leads to nowhere. This area is not included within the scheme and may never happen but its future seems a little vague at this stage. If the area is included then a path to the water's edge should be created with a purpose, perhaps forming an area for disabled fishing might be an option.

Whilst there is plenty of green spaces shown on the plans all the planting adjacent to the boulevard/canal side walk must be of native origin. However, with so much indigenous planting the key to its success will be a management agreement. The canal has steep banks in this location so would require a low timber bollard and metal rail type barrier in the range of 670 mm to 790 mm. The details of this are crucial to the successful integration of the waterscape and hard landscaping.

The canal bank should be left to vegetate naturally if it is disturbed during construction and be kept as soft bank as this is water vole habitat.

If the developer intends to discharge surface water drainage into the Canal then our agreement must be sought and early discussion initiated."

Principle issues arising from Consultation responses

Arising from Consultee responses on the submitted Masterplan the following areas of concern have been identified in those responses:-

- Concerns about the route of the NIDR.
- Too much development sought on site in density terms suggest fewer units.
- Possibly lower than 1:1 car parking due to proximity to town.
- More U shaped blocks to give better relationship to canal.
- Mixture of blocks and houses questionable.
- Central courtyards are tight and dominated by hard surfaces.
- Open spaces next to distributor road not well located.
- Energy Strategy required.
- Concentration of Affordable Housing in Area E should be rethought.
- Concerns about inside corner residential units.
- Concerns about congestion on NIDR from residential traffic and crossing.
- Proximity of blocks to NIDR needs to be a greater setback or commercial use in those areas.
- Stronger edge definition to canal at Block D needed.
- Scale of multi-storey car park possible overprovision.
- Parking management and charging regime required.
- Necessity for active street frontages to NIDR.

- Should be play areas on site for young children safely accessible to children living on both sides of the new road and an area for older children and teenagers as well.
- No scope to cater for the activities of young people, who need to play football and ride their BMX bikes and skateboards in open space along waterfront.
- Sum required for in lieu provision and investing on a park or open space elsewhere in the town that is accessible to the young residents of this site.
- Combination of a tranquil garden with a natural play area unlikely to be a successful solution.
- Concerned that the Masterplan does not address the waterspace adjacent to the development.
- No provision of residential, long term and visitor moorings along with boater facilities to add to waterside interest and activity benefiting the town, canal and development.
- Good accessible connections will be essential if the canal frontage is to become anything other than a formal empty space.
- The 'new towpath' adjacent to the canal within the new 'Environmental Area with Attenuation Pond' leads to nowhere. A path to the waters edge should be created with a purpose, perhaps forming an area for disabled fishing might be an option.
- Water edge design important.

Amendments proposed to address matters raised

The concerns above have been the subject of discussions with the applicants and a variety of changes to the original submission have been proposed addressing the majority of concerns raised.

The design of the NIDR and the junctions onto it have been the subject of extensive consultations and negotiations with the Highways Authority over the past five years, and the design put forward has been agreed in principle by the Highways Authority. The proposed layout, with the NIDR as a central spine road produces a significant number of positive benefits to the development; the location of the office accommodation to the north creates an acoustic buffer between the railway and the residential development. It also contributes towards forming an active street frontage, which together with the residential and mixed use development to the west provide 24/7 surveillance, increasing levels of safety and community usage.

The residential blocks at Area A to the east of the Pumphouse has been designed to form a curved perforated screen in stepped in form providing a dramatic 'backdrop' to the Pumphouse, deliberately providing the latter with its own setting. The heights are higher than those in the Design Code produced by Terrance O'Rourke but with the southern blocks set at two-storeys lower than the northern block, and with the northern block also stepping back at its upper levels at the western end this will further reduce the 'apparent' scale and massing.

The provision of accommodation and associated landscaping within the various courtyards has also been revised with various of the freestanding houses been removed in Areas B, C & D.

Further step backs have also been introduced at the upper levels of Areas B and D.

Additional areas of Open space have also been provided along the canalside providing opportunities for play areas and general sitting out areas.

Assessment of Masterplan

The requirements of the relevant condition as set out above in asking for a Masterplan was contemplating a "broad brush" approach to set a frame work against which future decision on individual parts of the site could be assessed.

Many of the comments made relate to matters of greater detail than is considered necessary at this stage. Furthermore the master plan is only able to provide a framework for land within its control. Other documents as mentioned above provide the context for the nature of surrounding development into which this scheme must fit.

Your officers are satisfied that the details you now have before you are adequate to discharge the requirements of Condition 2. They provide an acceptable level of development and on-site arrangements that provide a pattern for the future development of the site.

However it must be accepted that some variations to what is established by this framework will inevitably arise when detailed development control scrutiny is undertaken of the separate phases of development.

Recommendations

The submitted details be accepted as complying with the requirements of Condition 02 of 38/2006/135.

In preparing this report the Planning Officer has considered fully the implications and requirements of the Human Rights Act 1998.

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