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30th April 2020

The Society's response to 20/01655/F - Old Rail Depot, Clanage Road.

The proposal

Vistry Partnerships (the Developer) proposes to redevelop the former railway maintenance depot that is a brownfield site cleared of buildings to build a residential led scheme, including affordable housing (social rented and shared ownership), across five buildings between 4 - 9 storeys, townhouses, flexible retail/café space, public realm, landscaping including ecological mitigation measures, access and associated groundworks. The scheme would build 253 new homes on a 2.73-hectare site, a density of 93 dwellings per hectare.

Planning background

The Local Plan Review (the Review) identifies the site for development with an estimated capacity of 150 homes. We recognise that the advised figure of 150 homes is not determinative, but the advice is based on recently assessed material planning considerations. A development that exceeds the advice by 68% requires to be fully justified.

Conclusion

The Society supports the principle of redevelopment of this derelict land with a residential led scheme. The Society supports aspects of the proposal. We regret that overall, we cannot support the scheme. Our principal objection is that the 7 - 9-storey buildings, Blocks D & E, at the northern end of the site would have a significant negative impact on the character of the area. The Core Strategy proposes a minimum density of 30 dph in this area of the city. The Society supports the advice of Urban Living, Making Successful Places Higher Densities (Urban Living) that some suburban sites could support higher densities than the policy minimum. However, the consequences of the development intensity of Blocks D & E on the city boundary would harm to the public realm and compromise the future residents' open space amenity. We support the height and massing of the lower rise blocks A – C, and the town houses. The Society could support a development that did not exceed the height of the Paxton Drive estate which should be treated as the benchmark.

Part 1 of the Urban Living provides advice to applicants of major development schemes. The questionnaire sets out best practice in relation to urban design and place making at a city, neighbourhood, block and street level.

City

Q1.1 Has the scheme adopted an approach to urban intensification which is broadly consistent with its setting?

This development is on a sensitive site with a distinctive character to protect. It will be prominent in a viewing arc from Cliftonwood through to Bower Ashton. There will be close views from the Brunel Way, the allotments, and Paxton Drive. The development will form the boundary to the city's built-up area. To the west are allotments, a cricket ground, and the Ashton Court Estate all within the Green Belt where further development is unlikely. The boundary of the Green Belt is a highly unsuitable site for a landmark, contextual tall building of 9-floors above ground. Blocks D & E are not consistent with their setting. The development will be grouped visually with the Paxton Drive estate as a separate 'urban village'. All parts of the scheme should harmonise and not exceed the form of the Paxton Drive estate if it is to be consistent with its site on the edge of the built-up area. The traffic noise and pollution from the elevated Brunel Way will blight the north end of the site which is the area with the highest population density.

Neighbourhood

Q1.2 Does the scheme contribute towards creating a vibrant and equitable neighbourhood?

An additional residential population will complement the existing, physically isolated Paxton Drive estate, support the local social infrastructure and, possibly future transport.

Q1.3 Does the scheme respond positively to either the existing context, or in areas undergoing significant change, an emerging context?

We support the proposal to build a row of town houses on the edge of the development which would shield the taller Blocks A – C when viewed from the west. The possible redevelopment of the Western Harbour is not a material planning consideration and cannot justify the height of Blocks D & E. There is no adopted policy to develop the Western Harbour. The proposal is aspirational and faces considerable impediments that include the need to obtain a Department for Transport capital funding grant, highways management, and flooding, of which there is recent experience. The local landmark buildings, the former bonded warehouses are too distant from the Blocks D & E to form a visual connection or supply a comparable scale. The elevated Brunel Way forms a visual barrier to the east of the site.

1.4 Does the scheme provide people-friendly streets and spaces?

The creation of a Metrobus Street to separate the development from the Paxton Drive Estate makes a positive contribution to mitigate the constraint of the busway. The single access to the estate, negotiated with Transport Development, inevitably determines the linear form of development. We comment below on the area of surface car parking. Currently, the 'non-car park space' is laid out as a linear park separated by a wide promenade from Blocks A - C. The Society supports the provision of substantial landscaping. But we support the comments made by other respondents who were concerned about the proximity of green/amenity spaces to the site car

parking. To attract use by the future residents the amenity space needs to have 'intimate' areas. There are many examples of open spaces around flatted blocks in the city that were poorly planned and are unused. The open green area will be exposed to the prevailing south-westerly wind.

The Festival cycling route from Ashton Court to Ashton Avenue Bridge and the city centre is from Clanage Road (A369) through the site. The route through the site is a dogleg with two right-angle bends. This is not ideal. It reflects the site constraint of the single-access road on a north-south axis, and the rectangular block layout of the site. Faster cyclists will tend to take the more direct route across the access road to the Metrobus route. It would be sensible to make provision for this. The desire line for walkers and cyclists coming from the same south-west access point to the south-east access point, via the Metrobus route to Ashton Gate, does not seem to have been considered.

Block & Street

Q1.5 Does the scheme deliver a comfortable microclimate for its occupants, neighbours and passers-by?

See answer to question 1.4.

Q1.6 Has access, car parking and servicing been efficiently and creatively integrated into the scheme?

This is not a highly sustainable site. The only destination of the Metrobus is the city centre. Currently, there is no Sunday service. Public transport does not serve the Ashton, Southville, and Bedminster local retail centres. The level of car ownership on the Paxton Drive estate suggests that the scheme should supply the car parking calculated using the schedule to the Sites Allocation and Development Management DPD. The consequence of supplying a more realistic and higher number of surface spaces is that parked cars would dominate the site. The Society suggests that the developer consider a separate parking area to release the remaining space for a soft landscape and children's play area. A reduction of the height of Blocks D & E to the height of Blocks A-C would reduce the number of car-owning households and mitigate the demand for car parking. The provision of car parking for 253 new homes will have a negative impact on the external amenity space. The Society would support undercroft parking if it did not increase the height of the apartment blocks.

Q2.1 Does the scheme make building entrances and shared internal spaces welcoming, attractive and easy to use?

The entrances appear well planned.

Q2.2 Does the scheme provide practical, attractive and easily accessible communal amenity space that meets the needs of its target resident profile? And

Q2.3 Does the scheme provide sufficient private outdoor space? And

Q2.4 Does the scheme create attractive, well designed and well maintained private outdoor spaces? And

Q2.5 Does the scheme creatively integrate children's play? We refer to our answers to questions 4 and 6.

Individual homes

Q2.6 Are internal layouts ergonomic and adaptable?

Few of the flats will get much sunlight; they are mostly aligned north south which will limit the sunlit hours for the single aspect flats. The fronts of the terrace of houses face south west but each house has another house projecting in front of it. Will layout adversely affect the available sunlight? The main windows face Clifton. We cannot judge whether the flats' balconies are large enough to be habitable.

Q2.7 Does the scheme safeguard privacy and minimise noise transfer between homes?
And

Q2.8 Does the scheme maximise opportunities for daylight and sunlight of internal spaces; avoiding single aspect homes?

The response assumes that the scheme achieves the Council's minimum space standards. The Society draws attention to the proportion of single aspect flats.

Visual quality

Q3.1 Is the tall building well located? And

Q3.2 Does the scheme make a positive contribution to the long-range, mid-range and immediate views to it?

We refer to the answer to Question 1.1

Q3.3 Does the scheme demonstrate design excellence?

We note the strong criticism by this developer of the design of the Paxton Drive Estate. We support the view of other respondents who found the elevations monolithic and unsuited to the character of this city boundary site. We would prefer to see greater articulation and response to local context. The flat roofline adds nothing to the character of the area. Subject to sample, the Society supports the choice of materials. We question the use of the bond warehouses as a design model. We doubt whether today's planning regime would permit them.

Functional quality

Q3.4 Does the scheme ensure the safety of occupants and passers-by? And

Q3.5 Does the scheme interfere with aviation, navigation or telecommunication, and does it have a detrimental effect on solar energy generation on adjoining buildings? And

Q3.6 Has the scheme's future servicing, maintenance and management been well considered?

The Society makes no response to these questions.