

## **The proposal**

Dovercourt Depot is an industrial site in Horfield owned and used by Bristol City Council. It occupies a piece of land bounded to the W by a lane behind the backs of houses on Dovercourt Rd; to the E by the Temple Meads – Parkway railway line; to the N by allotments; and by mixed woodland to the S, beyond which lies Muller Rd. The Council has published early design proposals and a timeline for building 120 – 150 houses on this brownfield site, with a mix of houses and apartments and a mix of tenures including some new council housing. The developer is the Council's housing company Goram Homes.

The site and the surrounding area were visited and explored by the writer and his wife on 25 March 2021. We were given entry and full access to the site by a local keyholder.

## **The site**

The depot occupies about 7.5 acres sloping down to the S and E. Currently the perimeter is secured all round by a high steel palings fence; very ugly, but obviously necessary for the site's current use. A partially-culverted but potentially attractive stream runs down a small valley between the site and the railway line; marked as a wildlife corridor on the map. The valley is rather overgrown but has potential as a mini-park or wildlife feature. There are some evergreen trees along the NW boundary which partially screen the site. The S side is woodland with some good trees. From most viewpoints the site is generally open and visible, but it is not overlooked by nearby houses or other developments although it is visible from the backs of the houses along Dovercourt Rd.

The Concorde Way main cycle corridor connecting North Bristol/Filton to the city centre runs along Dovercourt Road at this point, and is therefore a major opportunity for access and transport. The idea of rerouting Concorde Way to pass close or through this development should be considered. This might be an opportunity to take the cycle route off-road for this part of its route. Concorde Way is much used by commuter cycle traffic.

The site is close enough to the railway line (4 tracks) to make noise from passing trains a matter to consider.

## **Demolition**

The site will need to be entirely cleared and all current buildings and structures demolished. There is nothing of value on the site (except a disused steel weighbridge which might be kept as an interesting industrial artefact). Polluted land e.g. from chemicals or oil spills may require remediation.

## **Change of use**

Horfield is a residential area of Bristol. No change of use.

## Matters arising:

### 1. Access

The major question is **access to and through the site**. Currently there is only one vehicle access point. This is via a narrow gap between houses on Dovercourt Rd marked 1 on the site map. A second gap between houses further S, marked 2, is labelled as “potential pedestrian/cycle route access/emergency access”. This is definitely required. Additional access routes in and out of the site are needed from the N and S, ideally for vehicles such as cars. If that is not possible, then at minimum we strongly suggest that there should be new pedestrian and cycle access routes from these directions. The risk otherwise is of creating a “ghetto” development with limited local accessibility that is cut off from the neighbourhood and fails to achieve a sense of place. A gated community is surely to be avoided!

The pedestrian bridge over the railway line is the only access route to the E, with access by steps only, making it unusable by cyclists, disabled people on scooters, pushchairs, etc. However there is room to add a ramp to this bridge on the opposite side to the current steps to give wheeled access. Residents and other locals may want to use this bridge to access the large green space of Stoke Park.

We strongly urge the removal of the perimeter fence so that the site is as open as possible and can enjoy connections in all directions. There is a fence along the N boundary to the allotments which may have to be retained to suit the allotment holders. We would argue against retaining this but seek other ways to protect the allotments, perhaps by encouraging surveillance by local residents through careful street design or even by integrating the allotments with this development.

The lane along the W side of the site, running behind the garages at the back of Dovercourt Rd, is currently gated in at least one place, and it is blocked toward the S by a former farm building. We think this lane should be opened up and made into a new street running the full length N to S of the site. To make the new street continuous it can have a small detour into the site (ie to the E) around the farm building. This will greatly improve access and reduce the sense of a separate development behind the existing houses.

### 2. Permeability

High levels of **permeability through the site** on foot, by bicycle, and to a lesser extent by car are essential. Permeability gives ease of movement and avoids severing neighbourhoods. The aim for this development should be that people can and do pass through it safely and easily on foot and by bicycle, but motor traffic is discouraged except when necessary.

There is no local bus route that might be conveniently diverted to pass through or near to the site but bus services along Filton Avenue and Muller Rd are within 5-10 mins walk.

The site map in the public consultation document shows a number of pedestrian footpaths. Walking around the site however shows that almost all of these mapped footpaths do not in fact exist on the ground. These footpaths should be re-established if at all possible, to give permeability and to give access to the immediate surroundings for

residents. Opening up new access footpaths to connect the S of the site to Muller Rd for shopping and to access buses would be particularly desirable.

### **3. Sense of place**

There are no designs or layouts at this stage, so we reserve our comments until these are available. However we see this site as a golden opportunity for Bristol to create a new mini-suburb with a strong sense of place; an area that people will want to live in and which is acknowledged nationally and internationally as an example of excellent urban design. Starting afresh on a cleared brownfield site with few constraints on things like layout, streetscape, landscaping, use of materials, public realm, shared facilities and so on is a rare opportunity for Bristol to raise its game in placemaking.

### **4. Screening of view and noise of trains by trees**

The site is close to the 4-track mainline railway on the E side. While train noise cannot be eliminated, early consideration should be given to screening by trees and perhaps noise attenuation measures.

Screening along the W side of the site from the backs of houses on Dovercourt Rd should be considered, although - depending on how this is done - this may have the adverse effect of emphasising the separation between the existing and the new buildings.

Bristol Civic Society Major Sites Group thanks Bristol City Council for the opportunity to make early comments on this development. We look forward to seeing how plans progress and to making further contributions.