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26th August 2015

Our Ref: DR2015-029

Dear Steffan,

**Re: OPUN Design Review Panel (110) – Tuesday 18th August 2015
Design Review of Toton Lane (Our Ref: DR2015-029).**

We write following the design review of Toton Lane and would like to take this opportunity to thank Broxtowe Borough Council and the Team for utilising the OPUN Design Review Service. We hope that you have found the process to be a constructive one, which will be of benefit in taking the project forward.

The OPUN Design Review Panel reviewing the scheme consisted of Chris Twomey (Panel Chair), Fiona Heron, Annabel Keegan, Andrew Cameron and Dharmista Patel (Panel Manager) and followed the ten principles of Design Review.

Site Context

The site is located within Toton in Nottinghamshire. It is bounded to the north by Brian Clough Way (A52) up to Bardills roundabout which is a key route connecting Nottingham and Derby, Bardills Garden Centre and newly constructed tram route and beyond by Wheatgrass Farm and open landscape; to the east by Field Lane and residential area; to the south by the residential area of Toton which includes both bungalows and two storey houses to the site boundary; and to the west by Toton sidings and beyond by the M1 motorway. Toton Lane runs through the site connecting with Stapleford to the north.

To the west of Toton Lane the site itself is predominantly agricultural land with areas of mature landscaping with the exception of the George Spencer Academy School which is split into two sites north and south of the A52, connected by a pedestrian footbridge over the dual carriageway. The topography of the site undulates slightly with a significant fall to the western boundary adjacent the railway sidings.

To the east of Toton Lane, the site includes the newly constructed Line 3 of the Nottingham Tram and Toton Lane Park and Ride site.

Background and Proposal

The site is a strategic allocation in Broxtowe Borough Council's Core Strategy (adopted in September 2014) and includes a minimum set of requirements for sites to both the west and east of Toton Lane. An illustrative masterplan has been produced for the site by Broxtowe Borough Council as well as an alternative masterplan by the developer's Design Team.

An outline planning application has been submitted for the land to the west of Toton Lane, the application includes the red line site boundary and proposed access points into the site only. The overall scheme proposes circa 500 new homes primarily in three areas within the site; a safeguarded route for the extension of NET Line 3 to connect to the potential HS2 railway station at Toton sidings; a community hub at the north eastern / main entrance to the site which includes a day nursery; primary school, pub / restaurant, retail and village square; a range of open / green spaces including a neighbourhood park and sustainable drainage central to the site adjacent the tram route, sports pitches to the north of the site and a green corridor to the south adjacent the existing housing; two access points to the north and south of Toton Lane and a bus loop through the development.

The Panel's Comments

Overall, the Panel was impressed with the Design Team's ambition for the development and, what they considered to be a comprehensive draft Design and Access Statement in support of the scheme.

The following comments and recommendations are made for your consideration:

Provision of a legible, permeable and well connected development

The proposals for the development have a particular role to play in connecting the new community with the existing community of Toton and wider links to Beeston town centre to ensure that the development does not become isolated - safeguarding future connections, specifically the extension to line 3 of the tram and the potential HS2 station at Toton sidings. Therefore, the provision of a comprehensive, well-connected, genuinely permeable development with strong linkages is considered to be fundamental.

The Panel acknowledged the existing issues regarding traffic movement in and around the site, eg. drop-off and collection of pupils at George Spencer Academy, and considered the proposed development to be a unique opportunity to address some of the above traffic and connectivity issues in a positive manner.

The team was encouraged to utilise this opportunity to undertake a strategic approach to movement and connectivity based on an in-depth analysis of movement patterns in and around the site as well as the wider area, the analysis should include identifying key routes, desire lines, location of key community facilities etc. i.e. Where do the routes go? How do the routes connect? Which routes need to be future proofed? Would the bus route connect with the HS2 station? Where should the north – south connection be provided? etc. The information should be utilised to produce a 'Movement Framework' for the scheme which should be a diagrammatic document (preferably a simple line diagram) to illustrate the connections both short and long term and the hierarchy of the routes (primary, secondary and tertiary).

The Panel also stressed the need for the design of the routes to be attractive and safe, creating a positive experience for all users, especially pedestrians and cyclists.

NET Line 3 – Safeguarded route

The Panel highlighted the importance of the safeguarded route for the tram to the overall scheme, which will be a principal route within the development. As proposed, the Panel encouraged further design work to be undertaken in connection with the proposed tram route; suggestions include exploring the possibility of running the tram along the main / principal street rather than the provision of two parallel movement corridors which would aid legibility / strengthen the street hierarchy; locating the tram route closer to the housing to the north of the site with a well defined link to the south of the site which will avoid un-useable areas of open space as currently proposed; strengthening the relationship between the tram route and the open space i.e. running the tram route along the edge rather than centrally to the neighbourhood park to reduce conflict and tension with users, and to plan for (future proof) a potential two way tram link to Long Eaton.

The Panel also considered it fundamental for the route to be integral and attractive from the very outset and urged the Team to consider this carefully - as an avenue / key route within the development rather than a highway, exploring the potential for greening of the route and to avoid unnecessary paraphernalia i.e. fencing, excessive signage, etc. to ensure a sensitive approach.

Approach to highways design

The Panel recognised that there is some tension between the Design Team's placemaking/design aspirations and the '6Cs' Regional Highway Guidance, with the latter considered to be over dominant, resulting in excessive carriageway widths, awkward junctions/crossroads, excessive radii, etc. which does not always accord with best practice and national guidance, specifically Manual for Streets 2. The Panel highlighted the need to challenge the above to ensure that the highways do not dominate, eg. the proposed multiple lane arrangement forming the main access to the site which appears heavily over engineered and needs to be resolved immediately, as this will not form part of the reserved matters when the outline planning application is submitted. The Panel suggested that the scheme should be utilised as a catalyst for amendments to this document which is currently under review.

Green Infrastructure and Landscape

With regard to the landscape framework, the Panel welcomed the ambition to create a landscape-led development. However, as currently proposed, the connections and the relationships between the proposed areas of open space were considered to be worthy of further development. The Panel encouraged the design team to undertake further work to create a clear, strong hierarchy of routes and spaces within the site and emphasised the need for the open spaces to be linked by strong, attractive, green routes again to promote usage and to assist in strengthening the green character and identity of the site.

With regard to the location of open space within the scheme, the team was encouraged to consider tightening the area of open space to the south, to allow the central area within the development to expand. The potential for the central green space to continue eastwards through to Toton Lane, should also be explored.

The Panel welcomed the provision of sustainable urban drainage system (SUDs) into the development although as proposed felt the scheme was missing an opportunity to create meaningful and robust SUDs and encouraged the team to pursue this further including identifying and clarifying the use and form of these features, eg. will the SUDs be formal or informal, wet or dry areas?, will they be able to be utilised as recreational / open spaces etc.? The above information should be integral to the overall landscape strategy.

The Panel also emphasised the importance of the landscape in contributing to the built form and highways in providing legibility, appeal and overall interest to the development and reiterated the need to overcome issues raised by the 6C's guidance to ensure an integrated approach to highways.

Northern Gateway/ Local Centre

The Panel highlighted good practice in locating / intensification of development at public transport nodes and expressed some concern regarding the design of the main access to the development in particular the lack of built frontage to Toton Lane resulting in the Local Centre being somewhat hidden from view with little street presence and a potentially weak relationship with Toton Lane tram stop. The Panel urged the design team to carefully consider the entrance and explore all opportunities to bring the architectural and landscape character of the development closer to Toton Lane. Suggestions include amending the layout to bring the new development closer to the entrance; undertaking a sensitive design approach to the highways (which was originally designed for 750 rather than less than 500 residential units) in accordance with Manual for Streets 2, i.e. rationalising the number of lanes, reducing the width of the carriageway, etc. and strengthening the proposals for the square to enliven the space and provide a robust visual and physical connection with the green corridor and Toton Lane , including potentially relocating the extra care facility from the north of the site to front / address the square.

Southern Gateway and Rose Cottage

The Panel considered the proposal to provide housing to the southern gateway to be appropriate although, they were not convinced by the layout and its relationship to the open space. The Team was encouraged to undertake a bolder approach including the provision of a more clearly defined and open space, forming a more distinctive gateway to the development, with houses directly fronting and addressing the space.

The Panel appreciated that Rose Cottage does not form part of the development. However, the Design Team was encouraged to consider how this might be integrated with the wider development, if the site were to come forward in the future.

Toton Lane East

With regard to Toton Lane East site, the Panel supported the Borough Council's desire to retain the land to the north of the tram as Greenbelt land, although they felt there was scope to sympathetically redevelop the 'brownfield' parcel (Bardills Garden Centre and environs) and consider a longer term development plan for the park and ride site for Toton Lane, with the tramstop becoming more of a 'hub'.

Summary

The Panel thanked the Local Authority and Design Team for a thorough site visit and the opportunity to comment on the project.

The main issues to be addressed include the provision of a more clearly defined 'Movement Framework' for the development, with further design work to truly integrate the proposed safeguarded route for the NET line 3; undertaking collaborative working with the Highways Authority to ensure that the routes and connections within the site have a strong emphasis on 'place-making' principles rather than highway engineering; strengthening the landscape strategy including specifying the use, form and links between the open spaces including SUDs; ensuring strong links are established with the western site, adjacent HS2; and reconsidering the proposal for the north eastern gateway to create a well defined 'hub' with a strong frontage to Toton Lane.

Other issues to be addressed include revising the layout to the southern gateway; the impact on the development if the Rose Cottage site were to form part of the site; and the long term plan for Toton Lane Park and Ride site.

We trust that the feedback provided within this letter will prove to be of benefit to you in seeking a successful resolution and outcome for this scheme and provide an opportunity for further discussions with the determining authorities. We would be happy to provide further design advice on the project, including assisting with a review of the reserved matters and where possible, we will seek to ensure that the composition of the Panel remains the same throughout any ongoing review process.

Yours sincerely,

Dharmista Patel
Head of OPUN Design Support Services
On behalf of the OPUN Design Review Panel

OPUN Design Review adheres to Design Council CABE's ten principles for design review as follows:

1. Independent: It is conducted by people who are separate from the scheme promoter and decision-maker, and it protects against conflicts of interest.
2. Accountable: It records and explains its advice and is transparent about potential conflicts of interest.
3. Expert: It is conducted by suitably trained people who are experienced in design and know how to criticise constructively. Review is usually most respected where it is carried out by professional peers of the project designers, as their standing and expertise will be acknowledged.
4. Advisory: It does not make decisions. It acts as a source of impartial advice for decision-makers.
5. Accessible: Its findings are clearly expressed in terms that decision-makers can understand and use.
6. Proportionate: It is used on projects whose significance warrants the public investment of providing design review at national, regional and local level, as appropriate. Other methods of appraising design quality should be used for less significant projects.
7. Timely: It takes place as early as possible in the life of a design because this saves the most time and costs less to make changes. If a planning application has already been made, it happens within the timeframe for considering it. And it is repeated when a further opinion is required.
8. Objective: It appraises schemes in the round according to reasoned, objective criteria rather than the stylistic tastes of individual panel members.
9. Focussed on outcomes for people: It asks how this building or place can better meet the needs of the people using it, and of the public at large who are affected by it.
10. Focussed on improving quality: It constructively seeks to improve the quality of architecture, urban design, landscape, highway design and town planning.