

Planning Policy
Warrington Borough Council
New Town House
Buttermarket Street
Warrington
WA1 2NH

Date: 29 September 2017
Our ref: 41957/02/SPM/KHp/14587343v3
Your ref:

Dear Sir or Madam,

Warrington Council Preferred Option Consultation: Land at John Street, Warrington

Introduction

On behalf of our clients, the High Street Group Ltd Nathaniel Lichfield & Partners [Lichfields] is pleased to submit, representations to Warrington Borough Council's Preferred Development Option Consultation (July 2017) [PDO]. This document sets out the Council's proposed approach to meeting Warrington's need for new homes and jobs between now and 2037.

These representations are made exclusively in relation to our clients site at John Street, Warrington and do not provide any detailed commentary on the Council's calculation of objectively assessed need for homes and jobs.

When reviewing the PDO and preparing these representations, we have had due regard to the tests of 'soundness' set out in the National Planning Policy Framework [the Framework] [§182] which stipulates that plans should be positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with National Policy. With this in mind, the representation clearly demonstrates that the proposed allocation of the site for a *mix of uses* would be:

- 1 In accordance with the Plan's positive strategy which seeks to meet objectively assessed need;
- 2 The most appropriate strategy for this accessible brownfield site when considered against reasonable alternatives;
- 3 Represents an available and deliverable allocation which can easily be delivered early on in the plan period; and,
- 4 Is consistent with the Framework and Practice Guidance and will deliver the most sustainable form of development on this site.

Background

Our client's site is shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1 Site Location Plan: John Street, Warrington



Source: Pro Map

The site is a rotated L shape measuring approximately 0.8 hectare in size. It is irregular in shape, and slopes downwards from east to west. The site is located to the east of Winwick Street and south of John Street on the northern edge of Warrington Town Centre. The site was previously the location of industrial warehousing buildings, but these buildings have been demolished. The site was the subject of an approval for 284 apartments. The site has been cleared and works undertaken on foundations drainage and other related ground works pursuant to the previously approved residential-led scheme. These footings remain in situ with the development effectively stalled.

The site is surrounded by a mix of uses. Office buildings and industrial uses are located to the north and east of the site. Warrington Central Railway Station and an apartment building are located to the south; and several surface car parks that are used by passengers of the train station and visitors to Warrington Town Centre are located to the west of the site.

Planning History

As identified above, planning application [ref. 2006/08926] for a “new building to provide parking, financial and professional services (Use Class A2); restaurant / café use (Use Class A3); non-residential institution (Use Class D1) and Assembly and Leisure (Use Class D2) and 284 residential units” on the site was approved on 4th October 2007.

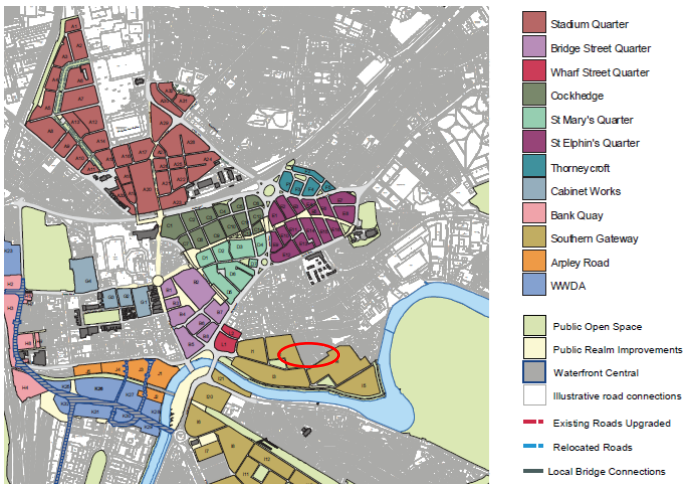
Preferred Option Local Plan

The City Centre / Waterfront area is identified as one of the main areas for growth within the PDO. The site itself lies in the Stadium Quarter and comprises Parcels A21 and A22. The Council has prepared the following detailed masterplans which seek to demonstrate that the level of growth identified can be accommodated by this area:

- Masterplan - Key Plan
- Masterplan - Overall Phasing
- Masterplan - Overall Land Use
- Masterplan - Trajectory Datasheet
- Character Area - Stadium Quarter

Masterplan

Figure 2 Masterplan Extract



Source: Preferred Option Consultation City Centre Masterplan

The 'Overall Land Use Map' (figure 3) identifies that this site is allocated exclusively for residential development.

Figure 3 Extract from Overall Land Use Masterplan



Source: Preferred Option Strategy: Overall Land Use Masterplan

We are aware that figure 4 of the Preferred Development Option Consultation was changed after it was published. In the original figure four, allocations A21 and A22 were shown as 'Commercial Development'. In the revised figure four (shown as Figure 3 within this letter) allocation A21 and A22 are shown as residential

development. This anomaly has been noted and these representations are made in the context that sites A21 and S22 are currently proposed to be allocated for residential development as is shown in the most recent Preferred Development Option Consultation and Character Area – Stadium Quarter Masterplan.

It is proposed that site A21 / A22 areas are both surrounded by a mixed use development allocation. The trajectory data sheet and overall phasing identifies that the A21/A22 allocation would be delivered within five years, accommodating 100% residential development and delivering a total of 129 units on a 1.02ha site over two years. The 'Character Area - Stadium Quarter' plan provide overarching guidance relating to the design approach for this area, it seeks to provide a '*colourful mixed use living and working community*' and '*provide strong and sustainable connections with the town centre*'.

The overarching plan strategy is to deliver the Council's 'New City' development aspirations. Whilst the allocation of the site solely for housing is not contrary to the Framework or the objectives of the emerging Local Plan *per se*, it does not make the most of the opportunity that this vacant, brownfield site in an accessible location represents. Nor does it strictly reflect the current emerging scheme that has been developed in part in co-operation with the Council.

It is unclear from the consultation document what status is envisaged for each of these documents and the degree of detail that will actually be included in the Local Plan. This remains a matter for a subsequent consultation, but it is considered that there should be specific policies for each of the Character Areas within the City Centre. Due to the lack of clarity about the content of the actual Local Plan the comments that we set out below should be applied to both the Local Plan itself and the supporting documents as appropriate.

I set out below some site specific issues in relation to the way that the site is addressed in the PDO and also how that aligns with both the previously consented scheme and my clients emerging proposals, which have been the subject of detailed pre-application discussions with the Council.

A mix of commercial and residential uses has been previously considered an acceptable and sustainable form of development on this site by the Council when it granted planning permission on this site (both the A21 and A22 sites). That scheme included ground floor commercial uses on the Winwick Street frontage which lies within Parcel A21, and residential development in the form of 284 apartments across the balance of A21 and A22.

Winwick Street is an important pedestrian link between existing commercial areas in the Stadium Quarter along Winnick Street up towards the Primary Shopping Area of the town centre. Additional town centre uses at ground floor level along this frontage would encourage the search and comparison of retail goods from outlying areas up towards the town centre. This would contribute to the overall vitality and viability of the town centre in accordance with §23 of the Framework, and would help to deliver the sustainable connections noted in the Character Area statement. In allocating both of the A21 and A22 sites for residential development, these benefits would not be delivered.

The existing A21 allocation includes a number of existing shop premises. These lie outside my clients land interest, but lie immediately adjacent to their site. However, if the entire A21 / A22 site were to be developed in accordance with the emerging Local Plan allocation, these existing commercial uses would be extinguished which is counter intuitive to the objective of supporting economic growth which LPAs should be promoting through their Local Plan [§21, the Framework].

It is considered important that ground floor commercial/retail uses on Winwick Street are supported as this is a key route into the town centre, and will be a focus for surrounding development. An active street frontage with complimentary retail and related uses will be critical to achieve the key aspirations of the Stadium

Quarter outlined above and set out in the supporting documents to the PDO. This should be explicitly allowed for in the PDO and supporting documents.

The approved scheme represented a site density of around 260 dwellings per hectare [dph] which is a more appropriate density for a town centre location such as this. My client's revised scheme incorporates 363 apartments a density of around 400 dph. This is more typical of modern apartment schemes within vibrant and diverse town and city centres. Furthermore, it reflects the likely yield from the site bearing in mind the high density office and commercial development that is proposed to surround this site. Therefore, whilst this is a higher density than could reasonably be achieved on typical apartment sites, it is justified in this instance.

The Trajectory Datasheet for the A21/ A22 area (which covers an area bigger than the application site) estimates the site developed for a scheme of 129 units only, significantly below that deemed acceptable by the Council and excluding the commercial components. This should be updated to reflect the points made above, as well as the relevant table on page 34 of the PDO.

It is worth noting that our clients have purchased the site on the basis of the scheme that has been granted planning permission i.e. ground floor commercial with residential units above. They have re-appraised the site on the basis of a scheme of 363 dwellings and an 800 space Multi-Storey Car Park [MSCP]. They believe there will remain some viability issues, but a scheme of this scale will be deliverable. My clients have serious reservations that any significantly reduced scheme would be deliverable, particularly given the economic uncertainty post Brexit and the upfront costs and risks associated with high rise development.

However, our clients are confident firstly that a high density mixed use scheme would have a greater level of return and secondly that they have the necessary expertise and resources to deliver this in the year 3-5 period (subject to planning). At present, Councils are being pressurised to boost significantly the supply of housing [§47, the Framework] and cannot meet their housing needs within existing urban areas. It is considered that the Council should maximise the efficient and effective re-use of this brownfield site which is inconsistent with paragraph 111 of the Framework.

Conclusions

We acknowledge that the Local Plan needs to provide clarity and flexibility and that it is not always possible to reflect every single point of detail in Policy. However, we would ask that the Local Plan and accompanying evidence base documents such as the Stadium Quarter Masterplan be updated to address the above issues. These can be summarised as:

- 1 Allow for and encourage commercial / retail uses on the ground floor of units fronting onto Winwick Street.
- 2 Allow for greater flexibility in the uses of the parcels surrounding A21 and A22 (and in particular A24-26 by allowing mixed use development in these parcels.
- 3 Reconsidering the categories used in Figure 4 and specifically change "Residential Development" to "Residential Led Development"
- 4 Considering whether a specific change is required to allow for part of A22 to be brought forward as a public MSCP.
- 5 Include specific policies in the Local Plan relating to the Character Areas.
- 6 Provide some supporting text to explain what is envisaged on the individual parcels within the body of the Local Plan.
- 7 Amend the evidence base and delivery trajectory to increase the amount of residential development capable of being delivered on the site to a minimum of 363 units.

These changes would give greater flexibility to the emerging Local Plan, making it more resilient to changing economic / market conditions in the future. These subtle changes would also enable a mixed use commercial scheme to come forward which represents the most sustainable option for the site which will deliver the Councils housing and employment aspirations, within the 0-5 year period of the Plan.

It should be noted our client has entered into pre-application discussions with Warrington & Co (development arm of the Council) regarding the future development options for this site including how it can contribute to the Council's development aspirations for this area which include unlocking under-used Council owned sites. These discussions, which have centred on a mixed use commercial scheme for our clients site, have been positive.

In conclusion, we consider that the allocation of both the A21/ A22 area in the Stadium Quarter solely for housing is not the most appropriate approach for this site as it could be interpreted in an overly rigid manner. The above aspects need to be incorporated into the Local Plan, or sufficient flexibility introduced that would indicate with no ambiguity that my clients proposals for this site are acceptable.

If you have any queries regarding any aspect of the above, including my clients emerging proposals, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

