

DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

To accompany an application for Outline Planning Permission for a Use Class B1 development at Mount Vernon Green, Liverpool L7.

The format of the Statement follows the guidelines set out in the document, *'Design and Access Statements; How to write read and use them'*, published in 2007 by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment.

The Applicant

The applicant is the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Liverpool which owns most of the site. A small area of the site is in the ownership of Liverpool City Council and is the subject of negotiations between the Council and the Archdiocese regarding its acquisition. The extent of the two ownerships is shown on the application drawings.

The site is currently occupied by an existing building, a former secondary school (built in the 1960's) which closed in the early 1990's. The building was then converted to house the headquarters of a social enterprise, 'Local Solutions', the management of which are aware of the redevelopment proposals and hope to be tenants in the new development.

Assessment

The site is on the periphery of the city centre and is bounded on three sides by roads. The fourth side abuts a Catholic primary school.

The site's immediate surroundings are undergoing considerable change. A new major road, the Edge Lane extension, has recently been constructed and now forms a generous curve to the southern and western boundaries. At the time of writing the new road is not yet open to traffic but, when it is brought into use, the narrow, currently congested roads which bound the site to the east, Hall Lane and Mount Vernon Green, will carry very little through traffic but will provide access for local traffic to the housing, schools and offices in the neighbourhood.

In addition to the extensive alterations to the road network in the area the site to the north west of the application site is the location for the new Royal Liverpool Hospital, a very large NHS/PFI project. We have been in contact with the hospital's development team to obtain details of the massing and scale of their proposed buildings in order to ensure the compatibility of the respective schemes.

To the south east of the application site, diagonally across the newly constructed road intersection, a five storey, Liverpool University building (completed about 4 years ago) makes a strong visual statement at the junction of West Derby Street and Minshull Street. Directly opposite the site, on the southern side of the new dual carriageway, is Archbishop Blanch School the future of which, on its present site, is currently under consideration.

Close to the site, to the east, is an estate of two storey terraced housing and to the south east an interesting row of early 19th century houses and Edge Hill Parish Church, (built 1812-13).

The site is near the top of gently sloping ground which rises steadily away from the city centre for almost half a mile. It is a prominent location which has been further enhanced by the recently constructed sandstone faced retaining wall which, at its highest point, is 5m above the adjacent new road.

This retaining wall will, in effect, provide a plinth for the new development when viewed from the south or west, and will make the new buildings highly visible to traffic using the new road.

The applicants and their agents recognize that this prominence makes the massing and external design of the development of particular importance.

Use

The existing building represents a considerable under-use of the site. When originally designed (as a school) the building occupied only a small part of the site, the remainder forming external play space and some car parking provision. The applicant is seeking to redevelop the site with a total floor area of 16,350 sq metres of offices, laboratories, or light industry (Use Class B1), or a combination of all three.

It is intended that part of the new development will be occupied by the current tenants, Local Solutions, and the remainder, comprising the bulk of the floor space will be taken by, as yet, unidentified tenants.

As mentioned above the site abuts the Royal Liverpool Hospital and Liverpool University and it is likely that the presence of both these establishments will attract private companies, or other organizations, in the health, higher education or related sectors who would regard the proximity of the two large institutions as advantageous to the operation and growth of their own companies.

Although companies within the health and education sectors are the most likely occupants of the proposed premises the site's good location, road infrastructure and parking provision would almost certainly prove attractive to other categories of business.

Amount

In determining the size of the proposed development a number of factors were taken into consideration:

- The 'critical mass' needed to achieve financial viability for what will undoubtedly be a major investment of development capital.
- The desirability of devising a scheme which will make a positive contribution to the streetscape and which rises to the opportunity presented by a prominent, highly visible location.
- The need to leave sufficient of the site available to provide adequate car parking.

The submitted scheme meets these various requirements.

Given the number of variables it is not possible, at this stage, to be specific as to the number of jobs which will be created when the development is completed and occupied but a proposal of this size will inevitably contribute to the vitality of the area and provide added custom for small shops and local services.

Layout

In devising the initial proposals for the site Liverpool City planning directorate was approached at the outset of the design process to ascertain its parameters for the development of the site. Two further consultative meetings have been held with planners to explain the proposals and to obtain feedback.

The layout of the site is a direct result of the topography and the constraints of access.

Vehicular access is only possible from one of the abutting roads, Hall Road/Mount Vernon Green, and the location of the new entrance towards the northern end of the site, away from the junction with the new dual carriageway, enables the necessary car parking to be screened from the principal view points by the new buildings.

Because of the prominence of the site the Planners preference is for any new buildings to present a near-continuous elevation to the sweep of the new road.

The application drawings show how this has been achieved but we have, in addition, sought to vary the massing, depth and heights of the building to articulate the main frontage in a way which provides a human scale to what is, in reality, a large building.

To further enhance the southern and western elevations the building has been set back from the site boundary by 5 metres allowing the formation of a landscaped strip which not only benefits the new building's occupants but also provides a degree of 'softening' to the top of the retaining wall and the building itself.

The natural fall on the site has allowed the car park area behind the buildings to be stepped, and linked with ramps, which, coupled with areas of soft landscaping, helps to break up the overall car park into smaller, less homogeneous zones. A coincidental bonus resulting from the continuous form of the main building and, especially, from the height of the perimeter retaining wall is the intrinsic site security which they provide. This will facilitate good control over access to the site without the need for excessively intrusive security fencing.

Scale

The assessment of the site (see above) has already detailed its topography and surroundings and its prominent position in relation to the new dual carriageway. Because of these factors any development of the site should have a 'presence' to match the existing and, in the case of the Royal Liverpool Hospital, future neighbours.

We have, however, been anxious to maintain a 'human' scale to the proposals. This is of particular significance given the tendency of new road schemes, driven by the need to safely accommodate large volumes of free flowing traffic, to produce a sterile, uninviting environment for pedestrians.

The maximum height of the proposed development is seven storeys, and although the current planning application is only for Outline Permission the accompanying drawings indicate the general massing of the buildings to form an articulated and varied block. The building's footprint echoes the curve of the new road and the change of roof height from one section to another, coupled with the irregular outline of the floor plan, provides a broken and interesting skyline.

The elevational design and choice of materials will be the subjects of a Full Planning Application in the future but the current proposals provide an early indication of how the buildings could successfully contribute to the fabric and streetscape of the area.

The car parking requirements of a development of this size can often result in a bland, uninteresting approach to the building. The proposed car park utilises the natural contours of the site, and landscaping (hard and soft), to break up the overall car park area into smaller, more individual zones.

Landscaping

Landscaping is one of several reserved matters but the broad principle which has been adopted for the scheme is to provide a perimeter swathe of soft landscaping to the east, south and west boundaries and a number of smaller areas to help divide the car park.

All grassed areas will be accessible as an amenity for staff. On the southern boundary the perimeter strip of grass and trees (approximately 5m wide) expands to form a small copse between the main building and the Local Solutions building.

With the exception of the planting in the heart of the car park all the soft landscaping will be visible not only to the users of the new development but also from the surrounding area.

Hard landscaping to the car park and providing access routes to the building for foot traffic should be of high quality and differentiated to highlight pedestrian priority within the car park.

Appearance

The elevational design is also a reserved matter but appearance is a product of a number of other factors such as layout, scale and landscaping, all of which are referred to above.

The proposed scheme is large enough to establish its own character within the locality. The buildings in the immediate surroundings vary so greatly in age and have such disparate architectural styles that we do not envisage that the new building will, or indeed should, seek to replicate any of its neighbours. Although showing the massing of the scheme the drawings accompanying the application are not intended to indicate a particular elevational treatment. They do, however, present a clear image of how the buildings will impact on the site and the locality.

Access

The fact that vehicular access is practical from only one end of the site has been explained earlier in this Design & Access Statement.

The vehicular entrance to the site is 95 metres away from the junction of Mount Vernon Green with the new road and at a point where good sight lines can readily achieved.

Once into the site the access divides to provide separate entrances into the two elements of the development.

It is intended that the larger of the two buildings will be capable of being let/sold as four individual units. If this occurs each of the four entrances will be fully visible from some distance away within the car park and the opportunity for clear signage will help visitors identify each tenant/owner.

The whole site and all buildings will provide level access for wheelchair users and will conform to the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

A pedestrian gate will be located in the southern boundary to allow access for Local Solutions staff and visitors. The exact position will be determined when the location of the bus stops on the new road become known. At present seven bus routes pass within 300 metres of the site; (nos. 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 78 and 79).

The site is not in an area of Liverpool served by Merseyrail. Edge Hill railway station is a 1km walk from the site but it is unlikely that it would be used, to any measurable extent, by users of the new development.

There is a network of cycle routes centring on the University of Liverpool and these may be useful to some of the new buildings' staff for their daily commute. A location for secure storage for bicycles is indicated on the site plan.