

Former Wimbledon Football Club site, Plough Lane

London Borough of Merton

planning application no. 03/P2407

Town & Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended); Greater London Authority Act 1999; Town & Country Planning (Mayor of London) Order 2000: statutory referral, stage I

Redevelopment of the site involving the erection of buildings ranging in height from 3 to 7 storeys, above covered car parking, to provide 570 flats (335 x 1 bedroom, 186 x 2 bedroom and 49 studio flats) of which 171 units would be for affordable housing; 2400 square metres of commercial floorspace (Food and drink- Class A3), Business use (Class B1) and non-residential institutional use (Class D1); provision of 518 car parking spaces; alterations to existing vehicular access and formation of new vehicular access from Plough Lane; alterations to the existing public highways including junction improvements; provision of publicly accessible open space, riverside walk and landscaping.

Context

1 On 28 November 2003 Merton Council consulted the Mayor of London on a proposal to develop the above site for the above uses. Under the provisions of the Town & Country Planning (Mayor of London) Order 2000 the Mayor has the same opportunity as other statutory consultees to comment on the proposal. This report sets out information for the Mayor's use in deciding what comments to make.

2 The application is referable under Category 1A of the Schedule of the Order 2000: "Development which – (a) comprises or includes more than 500 houses, flats or houses and flats;" and Category 3E "Development which does not accord with one or more provisions of the development plan in force in the area in which the application site is situated and....comprises or includes the provision of more than 150 houses or flats."

3 If Merton Council subsequently decides that it is minded to grant planning permission, it must first allow the Mayor an opportunity to decide whether to direct the Council to refuse permission.

4 The Mayor of London's comments on this case will be made available on the GLA website www.london.gov.uk.

Site description

5. The site occupies an area of approximately 3.8 hectares and is located between Tooting and Wimbledon town centres, within the London Borough of Merton. It is located at the intersection of Plough Lane and Durnsford Road, with the north of the site bounded by Weir Road and the east of the site bounded by the River Wandle.

6. The development site is a combination of two separate areas of differing characteristics. The first area includes the former stadium of Wimbledon Football club that has been mostly demolished and comprises the football pitch with surrounding detritus left over from the demolition of stands and associated support buildings. The second area comprises borough-owned land that has remained largely dormant and derelict for a number of years. It contains a pair of houses fronting Durnsford Road, a large warehouse and a 3 storey office building with undercroft parking. All are in a poor state of repair.

7. The surrounding area is representative of the transitional character of this area with the south of the site being predominantly residential in character and the north of the site characterised by mainly commercial uses. A designated travellers site is located adjacent to the north of the site.

Details of the proposal

8. The joint applicant's are Roseberry Homes and David Wilson Homes, and the architects are Halpern. It is proposed to develop the site for a mixed use scheme comprising the following:

- 570 new dwellings
- 30% affordable housing units
- 2,402 square metres of commercial floorspace
- Landscaped open space, new Metropolitan Open Land and a new riverside walk
- 518 Car parking spaces and highway improvements

9. The housing element of the scheme will incorporate studio, 1 bedroom and two bedroom flats, with the affordable housing element including only 1 and 2 bedroom units. The scale of development across the site rises from three storeys to seven storeys and includes undercroft, basement and sub-basement parking.

10. Open space is proposed both adjacent to, and between the proposed buildings with improved landscaping and access along the River Wandle. A parcel of regenerated Metropolitan Open Land, located adjacent to the River Wandle to the north of the site is also included in the scheme.

Case history

11. A number of planning applications have been submitted for redevelopment of this site since it was vacated by Wimbledon FC in 1991. The relevant applications are as follows:

- A currently extant permission granted in 1993 for 153 dwellings, 995 square metres of offices, 10 units of B1 studio use, a new hall, parking, public open space and a riverside walk. This planning permission remains extant by virtue of the construction of an approved garage block.
- Planning permission refused in 1994 for the demolition of existing buildings and erection of food superstore. Subsequent appeal dismissed in 1995.

- Permission refused by Secretary of State in 1996 for a retail food superstore.
- In April 2002, an outline application was submitted for erection of 2, 3 and 4 storey building for 176 residential units, erection of 250 square metres of B1 accommodation and 238 car parking spaces. The application was withdrawn, but prior to withdrawal it was considered by the Mayor in 2002. The Mayor welcomed the redevelopment of this vacant underused brownfield site, but made comments regarding the underutilisation of the site, the need to provide a greater proportion of commercial floorspace and the need to increase the proportion of affordable housing.

12 In September 2002, an outline application was submitted to redevelop the site to provide 284 residential units, a community facility, 250 sqm of business use, 307 parking spaces and the provision of landscaped public open space. Again the application was withdrawn, but was considered by the Mayor. The Mayor responded to Merton Council on 7 November 2002, commenting as follows:

“Having considered the report, the Mayor has concluded that the redevelopment of this vacant underused brownfield site is welcomed and that the increase in density compared to the scheme on which he commented in September 2002 constitutes a considerable improvement. However other comments that he made on that application are still relevant. As a site within a strategically identified Area of Intensification in the draft London Plan, the proposals represent a missed opportunity to provide a more comprehensive mixed use development, incorporating adjoining redundant sites, to provide a greater proportion of commercial development.

In addition the level of affordable housing provision remains unchanged from that proposed in the previous application, and as the site is effectively a “windfall site”, the Mayor has stated that the proposal should be considered for a higher level of affordable housing provision which is more reflective of the 50% target set out in the Mayor’s draft London Plan policy for the Borough of Merton.

Other issues relating to design, transport and highway matters are covered in the report and should be taken into account in a recommended redesign of the current scheme. A Section 106 contribution to highway improvements, particularly at the Durnsford Road and Plough Lane junction, will be expected.”

Strategic planning issues and relevant policies and guidance

13 The relevant issues are as follows:

- Regeneration/employment *London Plan; London’s Economic Development Strategy*
- Housing *London Plan; Three Dragons Report; PPG3*
- Urban design *London Plan: PPG1*
- Transport *London Plan; the Mayor’s Transport Strategy; PPG13*
- Parking *London Plan; the Mayor’s Transport Strategy; PPG13*
- Biodiversity *London Plan; the Biodiversity Strategy; PPG9*
- River Thames/flooding *London Plan; PPG25; RPG3B*
- Access/equal opportunities *London Plan*
- Loss of MOL *London Plan; PPG2*

Regeneration/employment

14 The site is an unattractive piece of underused urban brownfield land in a relatively prominent location. It is an urban site in obvious need of regeneration. Although the Secretary of State dismissed the supermarket appeal in December 2001, the Inspector's report did state that the site's "...redevelopment is urgently required and the regeneration argument is a weighty material consideration in favour of redevelopment".

15 In view of the clear rejection by the Secretary of State of the proposed retail use of the site, and thereby other similar uses that are subject to Planning Policy Guidance Note 6 scrutiny, most notably leisure, the main alternative uses of the site would be for residential and business use. The use of the site for 153 dwellings, 995 sq. m. of business use and 10 units for studio business uses was approved in 1993 and because work commenced on site remains an extant permission (there is some doubt, however, over the legality of the implementation of that permission as work commenced without compliance with, and therefore in breach of conditions imposed on the planning permission). Such uses would also accord with the designation of the site in the proposed Revised UDP.

16 These uses would also accord with policy 5F.3 of the London Plan as the Colliers Wood/South Wimbledon area is identified as an Area for Intensification in South London, and specific reference is made to this site and the area's residential and business related development potential for 2,000 new jobs and 1,300 new homes. The policy requires boroughs councils to promote development opportunities through higher density redevelopment to increase the number of jobs and new homes.

17 The development is substantially for residential purposes (total floorspace: 28,579 sqm), with less than 10% of the site proposed for non-residential uses (2,402 sqm including A3, B1 and D1 uses). This is substantially more than the 995 sqm approved in 1993. However, the site's location and surrounding uses to the north and east of the site, provide an opportunity for a larger proportion of the site to be considered for employment floorspace. Employment uses could be provided above the proposed car park to the north of the site.

Housing

19 The prioritisation of new housing and maintenance of housing sites is a position supported by PPG3 and the London Plan. This site has rightly been considered for redevelopment and will contribute to an increase in housing capacity.

20 The residential development proposes 570 units. This would give 1,227 habitable rooms on a developable area of 3.81 hectares at a density of 335 habitable rooms per hectare. This is now more in keeping with current thinking on maximising residential densities on brownfield sites in urban areas as required by PPG3 and as expected by the London Plan in policy 4B.3, and in the designation of the site within the Area of Intensification.

21 30% of the total number of units will be affordable. This equates to 171 units in total. It is not specified what percentage of these are to be socially rented or key worker/intermediate housing.

22 The overall provision of affordable housing is not in line with the London Plan, which seeks an overall target of 50% provision. Research by Three Dragons and Nottingham Trent indicates that a level of 50% affordable housing should be achievable on sites in Merton, assuming average land values and costs, and availability of social housing grant at norm rates. The London Plan acknowledges the need to achieve a mixed and balanced community in instances such as this, and therefore there may be sufficient justification for the proposed level of provision.

23 Assessing the appropriate level of affordable housing should involve undertaking a full financial viability assessment of the proposal, which evaluates a range of variables, in addition to the availability of public subsidy. Other factors include the individual site costs, economic viability, and the cumulative package of S106 benefits. SDS Technical report No: 1 'Affordable Housing in London' (July 2001), indicates the level of scrutiny and justification that the Mayor normally expects to accompany applications. The applicant should provide this information in an 'open-book' form so that the GLA can test the key financial assumptions behind the proposed level of affordable housing.

24 Within this 50% provision, the London Plan recommends that a guide of 70:30 for social rented to intermediate housing be followed. However, there should be some flexibility within the actual proportions for the mix between social and intermediate housing on any individual site depending on the borough's housing needs priorities, the level of affordable housing in the surrounding context, and the economic considerations of the proposal, including the availability of public subsidy. The applicants should provide this information prior to Stage II.

Design

25 The overall urban design concept is traditionally urbanist. It has a coherent pattern of streets and squares, and public and private amenity spaces are well defined. The overall standard of architecture envisaged is of a high quality. Altogether the proposal has the potential to have a satisfactory external appearance and to provide a responsive living environment for future occupiers.

Transport/Parking

26 The nearest London Underground station to the site is Wimbledon Park (District line), which is 1400 metres north of site. The nearest National Rail station is Haydons Road, which is 350m south of site. Thameslink trains have a frequency of 3 trains per hour in each direction at peak periods, providing links to London, Streatham and Sutton.

27 Two bus routes, the 156 and 200, are within walking distance of the site, providing links to Wimbledon town centre, Wimbledon Park station, Wandsworth town centre, Clapham Junction, Colliers Wood Underground station and Mitcham. Both routes operate at an average frequency of 6-7 buses per hour.

28 The site currently has a PTAL score of 2, though an additional bus route to serve the site directly could increase this. The number of predicted peak hour trips (378 in AM Peak) generated by the development may be significant enough to justify an additional bus route. If it proved viable for London Buses to divert an existing bus route to the site a financial contribution through a s106 agreement would be required. This is currently subject of negotiation between TfL London Buses, the borough council and the developer. The development proposals include the introduction of a southbound bus lane on Durnsford Road and bus pre-signal to improve the reliability of route 156.

29 Modal split data is required to determine the accuracy of the figures supplied for the car park discharge ratios. The potential impact of traffic flow to/from the residential car parking area access upon the southbound bus flow and thus the effectiveness of the bus lane can then be considered.

30 Overall, Transport for London supports in principle the package of measures to improve the reliability of, and enhance existing, bus services. However, the developer must discuss further the detail of the proposals with London Buses, the Bus Priority Team and NID (traffic signals) on issues such as alterations to signal timings, new and improved bus stops, bus lane

camera enforcement, road widening to facilitate bus priority and Selective Vehicle Detection. The development site is not located close to the Transport for London Road Network so it will have no significant impact.

31 Cycle and Pedestrian Access - TfL welcomes the high quality cycle and pedestrian facilities that have been proposed for the residents, although more cycle parking and facilities should be provided for visitors and employees of the non-residential uses, in line with LCN standards. Proposed improvements at the Plough Lane/Durnsford Road junction show a cycle advanced stop line with a feed-in lane for cyclists on the left hand side on just one arm of the junction. This should be provided on each of the other three arms for cyclists' safety. Any crossing improvements for pedestrians should include tactile paving and must be compliant with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

32 Car Parking - The proposed level of car parking complies with the standards outlined in the London Plan. Secure motorcycle parking should be provided at an appropriate level.

33 Travel Plan - TfL supports in principle the applicant's commitment to the comprehensive travel plan included in the Transport Assessment and its agreement to continue working in partnership with TfL's Travel Plan Advisor to improve the measures further. This development provides an ideal opportunity to produce a wide-ranging travel plan that could be used as best practice for other residential schemes across London.

Biodiversity

34 The River Wandle, on the eastern edge of the application site, is a Site of Borough Grade I Importance for Nature Conservation. There is no known biodiversity interest in the rest of the application site.

35 The Supporting Planning Statement refers to improvements to the existing riverside walk. There is room to improve the wildlife habitats adjacent to the river, and perhaps an opportunity for enhancements to the river itself. It is important that the detailed landscape plans for the riverside are developed with input from an ecologist, ideally with knowledge of local habitats and species. The proposed improved access to the River Wandle across the site is to be welcomed. Improving access to nature is a key theme of the Biodiversity Strategy.

Flooding /Sustainable drainage

36 The site is partly on the floodplain of the River Wandle. The current layout indicates that public open space and riverside path are located along the river. Should the proposals place dwellings or built development within the flood risk area then a flood risk assessment is likely to be required in line with PPG25.

37 The applicant should utilize sustainable drainage techniques to deal with rainwater run-off from the site. This is recommended by PPG 25 and required by policy 4C.8 of the London Plan.

Access/Equal Opportunities

38 In accordance with the London Plan it is expected that all of the new housing will be built to 'lifetime home' standards, and that a minimum of 10% of the new housing will be designed to be wheelchair accessible, or easily adaptable for residents who are wheelchair users.

39 The applicants should provide a comprehensive access statement, showing how the proposals will promote an inclusive environment. The access statement should be treated as more than a commitment to meet the minimum standards of Part M of the Building Regulations. It should clearly demonstrate the applicant's approach to inclusion, and show how all potential users, regardless of disability, age or gender, can enter the site, move around the site, enter the buildings and use the facilities. It is recommended that a marked-up plan at an appropriate scale, including sections showing relevant gradients and any changes in level, is submitted with the written Access Statement. This plan should illustrate: the main step-free pedestrian routes internally and externally, showing how people move up and down as well as around the building(s) and the spaces between the buildings; access to car parking and public transport facilities; staff and visitor entrances and other relevant facilities and features.

Sustainable design and construction

40 The London Plan advocates the principles of sustainable design and construction. The local authority should ensure that the scheme incorporates energy efficiency measures.

Metropolitan Open Land

41 The Revised UDP proposes the designation of part of the site as Metropolitan Open Land. The current application includes the provision of MOL on the northern section of the site, between the travellers site and the River Wandle. This will improve the layout of the site and the setting of the River Wandle and is welcomed as part of the site's development proposals.

Other relevant planning issues

42 The UDP Review of the designation of the site refers to community and open space. The proposed open space and its integration with the riverside is welcomed. With regard to the community use, in the previous application, the applicants offered to contribute to off site community facilities. Following negotiations with Merton Council, the applicants have agreed to provide a community facility on site and this is welcomed.

Local planning authority's position

43 The officers' recommendation is not yet known.

Legal considerations

44 Under the arrangements set out in article 3 of the Town and Country Planning (Mayor of London) Order 2000 the Mayor has an opportunity to make representations to Merton Council at this stage. If the Council subsequently resolves to grant planning permission, it must allow the Mayor an opportunity to decide whether to direct it to refuse planning permission. There is no obligation at this present stage for the Mayor to indicate his intentions regarding a possible direction, and no such decision should be inferred from the Mayor's comments unless specifically stated.

Financial considerations

45 There are no financial considerations at this stage.

Conclusion

46 Overall, the aspirations of the scheme in terms of the provision and improvement of the River Wandle, the provision of Metropolitan Open Land and the provision of a large number of residential units is supported by strategic planning policy. The design of the scheme successfully integrates the housing estate into the urban fabric and effectively modulates the existing scale of the buildings through variations in scale and texture.

47 The current application falls short of meeting the overall 50% affordable housing target identified in the London Plan, and the current proposals do not demonstrate why this target cannot be achieved. The applicant should provide this information in an 'open-book' form so that the GLA can test the key financial assumptions behind the proposed level of affordable housing together with clarification of the other issues mentioned within this report. Furthermore, the London Plan recommends that a guide of 70:30 for social rented to intermediate housing be followed. Clarification of the exact breakdown and justification for any deviance from this guide will also be required.

48 Whilst the increase in the density of the scheme compared to the previous submission is welcomed, a substantially increased percentage of affordable housing, closer to the Mayor's 50% target in the London Plan, should be given consideration on this "windfall site", with serious consideration given to key worker intermediate housing. There are other strategic planning issues relating to the mix of the uses, including the need to provide more employment floorspace, and transport and highway matters, which remain outstanding.

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