The Stamford Lodge
Wilmslow
DEVELOPMENT BRIEF

Borough of Macclesfield
YOUR COUNCIL, YOUR SERVICES

DECEMBER 2002
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December 2002
1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Stamford Lodge site, which is the subject of this Development Brief, extends to about 9.7 hectares and comprises a dispersed group of buildings which until recently were used in conjunction with the site’s former use for medical and pharmaceutical research (see Plan A).

1.2 The site is located on the A538 Altrincham Road, approximately 2 miles north west of Wilmslow town centre. To the west is the Bollin Valley and the Styal Country Park (National Trust), and to the south is the Jim Evison playing fields.

1.3 The majority of the buildings, which date from the 1960s, are grouped in the centre of the site. Stamford Lodge itself is of Victorian origin.

1.4 The site has been vacant for about 2 years and is now owned by Legal and General Plc.
2 BACKGROUND

2.1 The Stamford Lodge site was the subject of a planning application by the previous site owners, Bloor Holdings, for redevelopment for B1 use in 2000, which was refused. The subsequent appeal was dismissed following a Public Local Inquiry in June 2001.

2.2 Given that the reuse of the site was considered desirable, and in the light of the appeal decision, the Borough Council in January 2002 agreed to the preparation of a Development Brief. It was recognised, given the particular characteristics of the site and the important issues raised by the Appeal Inspector and the Secretary of State, that the following matters should be addressed in the Brief:

(i) The need to explore reutilising existing buildings on the site for employment purposes.
(ii) To limit new development so as to protect the character of the Green Belt.
(iii) To investigate measures which could enhance the openness of the site within the Green Belt.
(iv) Opportunities for supplementing the existing landscape framework of the site.
(v) Opportunities for improving public access to informal recreational facilities (the site adjoins both Styal Country Park and the Jim Evison Playing Fields).
(vi) Provision of safe access to the site, taking into account the problems already evident on the A538, and limiting the visual impact of any new access.
(vii) Addressing the nature conservation value of the site.
(viii) The development of sustainable transport facilities (eg cycling, walking and public transport links).
(ix) The scale of development in terms of employment and traffic must be less than that implied by the Bloor proposal.
(x) Very special circumstances will be required to be demonstrated for any development over and above the scale of that which is currently on the site. In any event, new development should have less impact than the existing development if possible.
(xi) Building 17 (an extant planning permission for a B1 development on the site) will not be taken into account in formulating options for the future of the site unless it can be conclusively demonstrated that it is a realistic fall back option for the new site owners.
(xii) Maximum heights of existing buildings will not be taken as a measure of the acceptability of new buildings on site. A comprehensive visual assessment will be incorporated into the Brief and will be required as part of any subsequent planning application, taking into account the zone of visual influence.
(xiii) The impact of reuse/redevelopment of the site on the regeneration of Greater Manchester is a critical factor. Emphasis will be placed on the need for new employment and catering for locally generated demand.
(xiv) Options for uses other than B1 should be considered for the site (but excluding residential and retail).

2.3 All the above factors have therefore been taken into account in formulating this Brief.
3 PLANNING POLICY

3.1 The site lies wholly within the North Cheshire Green Belt, as defined by the adopted Macclesfield Borough Local Plan (1997) and confirmed via the Local Plan Alterations (2nd Deposit - January 2002). The site is not identified as a ‘Major Developed Site’ in the Green Belt. (An objection in that regard has been submitted by Legal and General to the Borough Local Plan Alterations.)

3.2 As such, proposals for the site other than its reuse for research purposes, or uses related to agriculture, forestry or recreation would be considered to be inappropriate development. It is accepted however, that, subject to scale and impact on the openness of the Green Belt, a combination of reuse of existing buildings and redevelopment may be acceptable on the grounds that this is a brownfield site, which has the potential to contribute to local employment and which it is undesirable to see fall into dereliction. There are therefore very special circumstances which would outweigh the harm caused by inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

3.3 The site also lies within the Bollin Valley Area of Special County Value for Landscape. This has the effect of requiring proposals for the site which respect and, where possible, enhance the landscape characteristics of the area.

3.4 A small part of the eastern edge of the site falls within a Site of Biological Importance (SBI), the consequences of which are addressed in the constraints section of the Brief.
4 APPROPRIATE USES FOR THE SITE

4.1 The site has been extensively marketed over the past two years. The conclusions drawn from this exercise are:

(i) There is no demand for the reuse of existing buildings on the site as a whole.

(ii) There is limited demand for one or two of the existing buildings, but the reuse of these in isolation would not be viable.

4.2 Given the location, characteristics and planning policy for the site, it is considered that the following uses would not be acceptable:

- Residential
- Retail
- Industrial

4.3 Subject to the provisions of the Brief, and given the planning history of the site, the following are considered to be acceptable:

- B1 uses
- Reuse for research related development
- Educational/Institutional uses
- Training
- Leisure

4.4 In all cases, given the site’s close proximity to Greater Manchester and the need to support policies of urban regeneration in the conurbation, uses which favour local occupiers will be preferred.
5 BUILDING 17

5.1 An extant permission for a new 3-storey research block exists on the Stamford Lodge site.

5.2 The Inspector at the Bloor appeal did not give the unimplemented proposal weight in the consideration of the redevelopment of the site, in the absence of evidence that there was a realistic prospect of it being built.

5.3 Evidence has now been submitted which indicates that Building 17 is a viable development option. As a result it is taken into account in the Development Brief.

5.4 However, given the prominent proposed location of the new building and the provisions of the planning permission which required the removal of some existing buildings on site, in terms of building footprint, acceptable new development will broadly equate to that which is currently on the site, together with a net increase in floorspace arising from the Building 17 planning permission (i.e. Building 17 minus both buildings which were to be removed as part of the planning consent.) The location of the Building 17, at the north-west corner of the site is not considered to offer the best opportunities for limiting the visual impact of the new development. This will need to be taken into account in the siting of development, which will be guided by the Development Envelope, which has been defined as a result of the landscape assessment, and is considered in Section 6 of this Brief.
6 CONSTRAINTS ON DEVELOPMENT

Visual impact and landscape considerations.

6.1 Any proposals for the Stamford Lodge site must demonstrate that they would not detract from the openness of the Green Belt in this location, should achieve enhancement of the openness and of the character of the Green Belt, and respect the site’s location within an Area of Special County Value for Landscape.

6.2 A detailed landscape assessment of the site in its setting has been undertaken. One of the principal purposes of this assessment was to provide an objective means of comparing the visual impact of the existing buildings (including Building 17) on the site and any proposals for redevelopment.

6.3 The assessment has involved the following steps:

(i) The identification of the Zone of Visual Influence (ZVI) of the existing buildings on the site and Building 17.

(ii) The selection of eight viewpoints which are representative of views towards the site in both winter and summer.

(iii) An assessment of the impact of the existing buildings and Building 17, and the salient features within the existing ZVI (ie land forms, trees and woodland, principal hedgerows etc).

(iv) The identification of a theoretical envelope based upon the existing buildings including Building 17. This three dimensional envelope (TDE) identifies the limits beyond which new development is likely to have greater impact than that which currently exists.

(v) The testing of alternative redevelopment concepts.

(vi) Consideration of the effect of new structural landscaping in terms of reducing visual impact.

(vii) The definition of a refined development envelope which sets out parameters of footprint and height which must be complied with for the development demonstrably to reduce or, at least, not exacerbate visual impact. (See Plan B)

(viii) The preparation of a landscape framework for the site incorporating the strategic landscape measures referred to above, which maximises the opportunities to enhance habitat diversity, landscape quality and heritage value.
PLAN A
Brief Area
6 CONSTRAINTS ON DEVELOPMENT cont.

Landscape Strategy

6.4 The landscape strategy for the site is based on the need to consider Green Belt purposes and land management objectives as set out in PPG2. The aim is to reduce rather than increase the visual impact upon the landscape, and thereby enhance the perception of openness. This will be achieved through a combination of controlling building massing, and incorporating strategically effective landscaping. The landscape strategy is also informed by the opportunities for nature conservation arising from the ecological assessment, and by the opportunities to retain Stamford Lodge and reinstate its garden. The reconfiguration of Altrincham Road also provides opportunities for landscape treatment around the new site entrance.

6.5 The landscape strategy (Plan C) is based upon four quite distinct zones:

(i) Stamford Lodge and Garden
This area represents the southern quarter of the site and, whilst Stamford Lodge is prominent within it, its curtilage and garden has been degraded through the erection of security fencing, car parking and utilitarian buildings and structures. The landscape strategy seeks to open up this area visually, and, through the restoration of attractive gardens and grounds, to restore the local importance of Stamford Lodge itself, which is to be retained and refurbished. Views across the gardens to the woodland along the Bollin Valley will be opened up and planting along the southern site boundary will be reinforced. The roof of the Lodge is a significant bat roost which will remain undisturbed. The peripheral planting will reinforce the existing bat corridors and strengthen the connection between the roost and nearby woodland.

(ii) The Northern Field
To the north of the security fencing is a large, predominantly open field, the contours of which suggest that it has, in the comparatively recent past, been the subject of localised filling. This field abuts attractive woodland to the east and north where the Bollin Valley is deeply incised in the landscape. The strategy for this area is to retain its openness but to enhance its habitat diversity. Three new habitats would be created or enhanced:

- species rich meadow;
- ponds and scrapes;
- woodland edge.

Tree planting would be restricted to the southern part of this area to connect with other tree belts at the site boundaries, and thereby to enhance the function of the site as a network of bat corridors. This area once reinstated in this manner would be subject to a management regime which would secure its future.

(iii) The Central Development Cell
This is the area occupied by the existing buildings and part of the area of Building 17, and which contains the footprint of the Development Envelope. Within the constraints dictated by the visual analysis, architecture of high quality will be constructed in this area.
6 CONSTRAINTS ON DEVELOPMENT cont.

(iv) The Development Cell Boundaries
In order to support the purposes of the Green Belt, the central development cell will not only contain buildings which affect openness less than the existing buildings, but will be defined by strategic landscaping which will, over time, conceal the new development effectively in the broader landscape. A combination of land modelling and strategic planting will be established in the areas which define the development cell to create a framework which, as it matures, will provide dense screening to the site all the year round. If space is created by the realignment of Altrincham Road, new planting there, when fully established, will allow the existing conifer hedgerow on the western boundary of the site to be removed.

Nature Conservation

6.6 An ecological assessment and ground condition assessment have been undertaken which identify the following issues which must be taken into account in any development proposals for the site:

(i) Styal Wood Site of Biological Importance (SBI) includes two woodland spurs that extend on to the site:

• There should be no direct or indirect impact on the SBI.
• Buffer woodland edges should be provided within the Brief site.
• Hydrological changes must not have an adverse impact on run off and river volumes.

(ii) There are badger setts in the vicinity of the site and parts of the site are used as foraging areas:

• Setts protection will be required.
• Foraging areas within the site must be protected.

(iii) Bats are evident on the site, within Stamford Lodge:

• Any reuse of Stamford Lodge must include protection of the known bat roost.
• Dispersal corridors to woodland must be maintained.
• Lighting of buildings and open areas must take into account the movement of bats.

(iv) Grass snakes are in evidence on the site:

• Protection must be afforded during construction.

Archaeology

6.7 A desk-based archaeological study of the site must be carried out as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment, and its findings reflected in any development proposals for the site.
6 CONSTRAINTS ON DEVELOPMENT cont.

Development Envelope

6.8 The visual assessment and testing of options for the site has enabled the definition of a development envelope, within which all new buildings and car parking must be located.

6.9 The development envelope is shown on Plan C. Proposals for development will have to demonstrate that they fit within the development envelope in terms of the siting of buildings and the height of buildings within each zone.

6.10 The visual assessment has demonstrated that proposals for redevelopment which fit within the development zone provide an opportunity to reduce the impact of the existing buildings and Building 17 on the openness of the Green Belt, and to achieve a development which has an acceptable level of visual impact from viewpoints on Altrincham Road and to the west, and would not be visible from the east.

Architectural Style

6.11 It is not appropriate for the Brief to dictate a particular architectural style. This will need to be considered at the planning application stage.

6.12 The overriding requirement is for a very high standard of building design, materials and landscape works, both hard and soft. An architectural style which integrates effectively with rather than dominating the site’s surroundings, and respects its ASCV status, will be encouraged.

6.13 The visual analysis identified the importance of on-site parking being visually contained and screened, and the advantages of semi underground car parking. The assessment that will be required to accompany any planning application should include an assessment of the visual impacts of car parking, and car park structures.
7 TRANSPORT

7.1 The main transport requirements of any redevelopment for the site are as follows:

(i) Access will be taken from Altrincham Road. The preferred form of access is a roundabout, which should meet appropriate safety and other design standards. Particular care will be required to limit the visual impact of the new access and to incorporate effective landscaping;

(ii) A footpath and cycleway will be required between the site and the built up area of Wilmslow, connecting to the existing pedestrian and cycle network;

(iii) Opportunities to realign Altrincham Road to improve safety will be encouraged;

(iv) Opportunities to extend footpaths and cycleways to the north west of the site, along Altrincham Road, towards the Airport will be encouraged;

(v) Car parking should be in accordance with the County Council’s standards, and in any event shall not exceed the guidelines in PPG13;

(vi) A Travel Plan shall be prepared in consultation with the County Council and Borough Council Highways Authorities. The Travel Plan shall be designed to provide a real alternative to single occupancy cars. It shall include proposals for public transport, car sharing, design for pedestrians and cyclists, the appointment of a Travel Plan co-ordinator, the creation of an occupier travel forum, and other measures reflecting best practice as set out in the County Council’s Travel Plan Best Practice Guide, and as updated to reflect developments in this field.

7.2 An application for planning permission must be accompanied by a full Transport Assessment of the travel implications of the proposed redevelopment. This must include a Travel Plan, and demonstration of the commitment and ability to fund and manage the implementation of the Plan during the life of the development.
8 THE SCALE OF NEW DEVELOPMENT

8.1 The single most important factor in determining the appropriate scale of new development on the Stamford Lodge site will be its Impact on the openness of the Green Belt.

8.2 Limiting new buildings to the Development Envelope in terms of location and building height, (see Section 6), and the creation of a robust and effective landscape framework, are key considerations in this respect.

8.3 No specific floorspace figure is set; that will be determined in the context of the proposed uses and the considerations set out above. In terms of building footprint, acceptable new development will broadly equate to that which exists currently on the site, together with the net increase in floorspace arising from the Building 17 planning permission (ie Building 17 - minus those buildings which were to be removed as part of the planning consent).

8.4 It is important to note that the proposed location of Building 17, at the north west corner of the site, is not considered to offer the best opportunities for limiting the visual impact of new development. The Development Envelope identified does not therefore include the whole of the Building 17 footprint. New development will be located more discreetly towards the centre of the site.

8.5 Overall it is a requirement of the Brief that new development should have less impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the character of the surrounding area, than that which exists on the site at present (together with Building 17).
9 REQUIREMENTS OF ANY PLANNING PERMISSION

9.1 Any planning applications submitted in respect of the Stamford Lodge site, must include the following:

(i) A comprehensive visual assessment of proposed buildings (and ancillary development) and the impact on the ZVI.

(ii) A Landscape Strategy for the whole site, including proposals for landscape management.

(iii) Proposals for maintaining the nature conservation value of the site during and beyond construction.

(iv) A Transport Assessment and proposals for implementation of a Travel Plan which will include off-site permission of facilities and/or appropriate contributions.