

16 February 2023

Mr H Smith
Principal Project Manager (Development)
City Development
Exeter City Council
Civic Centre
Paris Street
Exeter, EX1 1JN

Dear Howard

APPLICATION REFERENCE 22/1145/FUL- SCHEME AMENDMENTS

HAVEN BANKS RETAIL PARK, HAVEN ROAD, EXETER

Many thanks for yours and Mark Pearson's (hereafter referred to as the 'urban design officer') time over the past few months. The face to face and virtual sessions/design workshops have been extremely useful and together with comments from residents and local groups, have helped refine and evolve the scheme from that originally submitted last year.

Through this process of discussion and engagement with ECC, the site constraints and opportunities have been firmly established and these have informed the scheme changes now submitted.

The proposals, as set out in the updated plans and supporting documents hereby submitted, now incorporate your/the urban design officer's suggestions and further to agreement reached at our final design workshop on the 16th January, we trust the scheme can now be fully supported and progressed to the 27th March planning committee.

Comprehensive details of the scheme amendments are set out in the supporting plans and design and access statement, but an overview of the key changes is set out below.

Building A

Following a review of the built form, neighbouring resident's comments and taking advice from the urban design officer, the form and shape of building A has been changed significantly, now proposing a slightly taller building, but with a much reduced footprint, emphasising this key entrance point into the site, better addressing Haven Road and views from the river, whilst retaining additional trees and providing a new area of communal open space to the west.

As per the previous iteration, the SE frontage onto the new public square steps down towards the rear of the properties fronting Diamond Road to further reduce any potential impacts of overlooking or a sense of enclosure to these residential neighbours, with the closest part of the building taking the form of a single storey gable end.

Primary outlook from the new homes in this building will be to the northwest, northeast and southeast, away from Diamond Road. Windows in the rear (southwest) elevation, facing Diamond Road, are secondary and set well away from the rear windows of neighbouring houses. Whilst it is not considered that these windows

are in close enough proximity to Diamond Road to cause an overlooking issue, they predominantly serve circulation corridors and bathrooms, and therefore these secondary windows can be obscure glazed as necessary.

The building layout retains the ground floor commercial units onto the square, with a return frontage onto Haven Road, with 4 storeys of residential accommodation above, providing 21 predominantly 1-bedroom homes.

These scheme changes address the urban design officer's previous concerns that the original form of building A constituted overdevelopment and resulted in some awkward relationships with properties on Diamond Road and Haven Road. These matters have now been resolved, separation distances comply with required standards and a greater sense of arrival has been created through the provision of a stronger corner building, drawing pedestrians through from the Piazza opposite.

The building also better addresses views to the northwest, towards the river, proposing a slender, predominantly glazed flank elevation, providing high quality outlook for new residents in these end units.

The changes to building A have also lightened its appearance, removing the deep metal fascia and amending the entrance which had previously been a concern of the urban design officer.

Building B

The main feedback received in relation to building B was to simplify the elevations and also that there was no requirement to look to replicate built form found outside of the site, as this building would only really be viewed from within the development. Previous design comments felt the original submission displayed a 'confused and over-complicated architectural language' and the focus of discussions with yourself and the urban design officer was to simplify and rectify this matter.

The amended plans have achieved this simplification and improved the relationship with the site, removing the central gable on the frontage elevation. The floors above ground level are now set back so that there is no longer a proximity issue with building C, removing the need for the projecting public art panels and allowing their removal.

The side elevations now feature a gable to better address the site and building to the rear, removing a hipped roof feature that the urban design officer had raised concerns about.

The flank windows at the eastern end, nearest The Coolings, are set back within a projecting frame, which acts as a design feature and also prohibits all but oblique views of the rear windows of the neighbouring residential building.

At ground level, the commercial unit window is extended around the north-western elevation of building B, providing greater activation onto the public square and a direct point of entrance to the unit.

The materiality of the building has also been simplified to present a uniform architectural language and also giving the building a character of its own, when viewed alongside the other 3 proposed buildings.

Building C

Building C has been significantly updated to incorporate comments made with regard to the previous iteration, both internally and externally.

The addition of a central core has allowed the building to be divided into a number of separate elements, internally, reducing corridor lengths and the number of units accessed from each core and via each corridor. This improves the residential experience and adds to the sense of safety, security and homeliness. The internal subdivision of the building into 4 elements has also allowed for an increase in dual aspect units, with additional 3 bed apartments spanning from the front to the rear of the building.

At ground level, where corridors need to be longer for fire safety reasons, and as a result will be more heavily trafficked, lobbies are provided to each unit for privacy and security purposes. Above ground floor, where individual sections of corridor will be lightly trafficked, lobbies are removed and units are designed to be more open plan with increased usable internal space.

The new central core also provides direct access to the centre of the roof terrace, removing the potentially convoluted route previously proposed.

At ground level, as requested by the urban design officer, the cycle stores have been moved to the front of the building, now located either side of the main pedestrian entrance. This greatly improves their accessibility via the main thoroughfare and encourages cycling by making it an easier and swifter process to collect or deposit bicycles on the way out of/in to the building.

The relocation of the cycle stores also improves security, with access provided off a well-trafficked route with significant surveillance from both buildings C and D (and to a degree, B). This relocation also has the effect of breaking up the frontage elevation and clearly defining the central residential access point to building C. This positively responds to the comment of the urban design officer, that the cycle stores, as previously proposed, seemed difficult, rather than convenient to access.

The roof form allows for the provision of a number of penthouse units at this upper level, helping diversify the type and mix of units within the scheme, delivering the more 'aspirational' units as requested by the urban design officer.

In addition to these penthouse units, a duplex 4 bedroom unit is added at the end of the eastern wing of building C. This has the benefit of adding a different unit type to the residential mix, infilling an area of space at the periphery of the site which had been queried by the design officer given its potential lack of overlooking and better addressing the cycle path as users travel north.

The addition of improved ground floor terraces adjacent the cycle path opens up this area and softens the boundary between the path and new building, also increasing surveillance and a clearly defined legibility. The facade treatment also better addresses the cycle path, improving the sense of safety and security.

Above this, triangular balconies are added to the elevation onto the cycle path, providing amenity space for the units above, adding interest and breaking up the bulk of this frontage and also tying in with the form and orientation of residential development in the vicinity, at Chandlers Walk and Maritime Court. This resolves the urban design officers previous comments regarding the potential for an awkward or unresolved arrangement.

To the south, the Water Lane frontage has been updated to better address this road, following the suggestions of the urban design officer. The vehicle access point to the servicing area and car park has been narrowed, reducing this gap in the street scene. The step down of this wing to the southeast, towards neighbouring properties on Water Lane, has also been predominantly removed, creating a full height frontage element onto this main road.

This change has been incorporated in response to the urban design officer's concerns about this elevation appearing as a flank elevation, rather than a frontage, which stated:

"The massing of the development in response to Water Lane needs to be a more confident proposition in terms of height and how this edge of the site relates to the general height of the 'body' of the development".

This review of massing sought a more consistent approach and uniform height of development along Water Lane, rising to additional height at the cores.

To the rear of building C, relocation of the cycle stores and improved landscaping better addresses this area and the relationship with Chandlers Walk, making it a more usable, attractive area.

The materiality of building C has also been simplified, removing the stone from the elevations and bringing the brick down to ground level. The window head at top floor level has been pushed up, reducing the area of brickwork above the windows.

Building D

Internal and external remodelling of building D has addressed the initial comments made by the urban design officer and the scheme has evolved in conversation with ECC, to one which now reflects a position of agreement.

Internally, generous communal lounges have been added to the 2 curved corners of the building at ground, first, second and third floor level. These are in addition to the lounge/kitchen areas already proposed, so result in a significant increase in overall communal floorspace.

The additional communal space at ground floor includes a kitchen area, positively responding to the urban design officer's concerns that no kitchen was provided at ground floor previously.

These additional kitchen and lounge areas increase internal amenity space and also subdivide the building into a number of smaller co-living groups, as requested by the urban design officer. These internal changes also allow for an updated external treatment of these corners, providing stronger frontages onto these key junction/entry point locations and greater activity/animation onto the street.

Refuse store provision has been reallocated across the 2 sides of the building to reduce the potential disparities and inconvenience for residents from one half of the building having to access stores in the other half. Whilst the majority of cycles will be stored behind the northern half of the building, (as the southern half needs to include facilities accessible to the service road), bin stores have been allocated more equitably and storage for larger bikes is added to the southern portion. Notwithstanding this, the 'northern' bike store is a very short distance from the southern part of the building, via a secure external pathway to the rear of the building.

Where units are lost at the corners of the building, through conversion to amenity lounges, these are re-provided at the rear of the building, in areas previously identified for plant, but following further analysis, surplus to requirement. This reduces the overall loss of units across the scheme and also provides for a more active and interesting rear elevation, towards Stream Court. This positively responds to the urban design officer's request for a 'secondary frontage' at higher level on the rear elevation, better addressing Stream Court and the river.

At the northern end, the urban design officer had raised concerns about the 'stop vista' at the end of Diamond Road, feeling that the previous iteration somewhat turned its back on this area. The emergency escape route has now been removed and a projecting bay and oriel window has now been aligned centrally to terminate the view in a more symmetrical and aesthetically pleasing manner. Fenestration in this part of the rear elevation and a pergola set back behind a parapet on a roof terrace add interest and activity to this elevation.

These changes ensure that the building now fully addresses Diamond Road and are supported by the urban design officer.

Given the building's location to the western side of the site and potential views from the river of its roofline, additional canopy features have been added to the top floor to add interest and break up the roof, as viewed from both the front and rear. This has the effect of breaking up the top floor, reducing the buildings appearance as a single mass, particularly in long range views. These angled canopies also perform the function of providing a degree of shelter for the top floor private amenity areas.

Public Space

Further to comments in relation to the public areas of the site, a review of proposed landscaping and play space has been undertaken, resulting in a number of improvements across the site.

At the northernmost public square area, forming the site entrance from Haven Road, concerns had been raised by the urban design officer about privacy to the rear of properties fronting Diamond Road and also the environment within this square, particularly to the rear of the electricity building and side of the climbing centre.

The screening around the new substation has been strengthened so that 3 sides are now fully enclosed, whilst creating the access point along the northern side. This will visually improve the square area and create a greener setting, improving views from residential properties and the commercial units in buildings A, B and D.

Above the substation, the walls of the climbing centre and electricity building are designated as a zone for art and the applicant will look to engage with a local artist to devise a scheme to enliven these currently blank elevations. This can be secured by condition as necessary and will become a key design feature of the scheme.

At the southern end of the square, increased planting is proposed to screen the rear elevations of the properties fronting Diamond Road, providing a green backdrop as you enter from Haven Road. The boundary treatment in this area will comprise 2.4m timber fencing, behind the proposed vegetation and planter screening. As such, privacy to these neighbouring properties will be protected and strengthened.

Views

As part of the submission, the scheme architects have also commissioned a set of 12 verified views, as requested by the urban design officer, covering the various views agreed between the officer and Alan Mansbridge of Piper Whitlock during their site walkaround on 5th January. All 12 views were taken in January and as such, given the lack of vegetation, represent the 'worst case' in terms of visibility of the proposed buildings.

It is considered that despite the time of year and lack of screening, the buildings fit in well with the surrounding townscape in both long and short-range views and this situation will only improve as materials soften and landscaping strengthens.

We are aware of some entirely inaccurate '3D visualisations' which were published in local papers, so agree that the preparation of genuine verified views was an important exercise in demonstrating that the proposals will not have an unacceptable impact on neighbouring properties or townscape and will in fact sit harmoniously within the context of the area.

In line with the amendments to the application plans, a number of the original supporting environmental reports have been updated as necessary and accompany this submission. These comprise:

- Ecology
- Biodiversity Net Gain
- Transport Assessment
- Daylight/Sunlight
- Landscaping
- Arboriculture
- Energy and Sustainability
- Heritage
- Air Quality

We look forward to any comments you may have and would be grateful if you could provide us with any consultee responses which might require our response, as they come in.

As discussed, we are both very much targeting the March planning committee so please do not hesitate to contact me if there is anything additional you require to ensure the application gets on to the March agenda.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jonathan Rowlett', written in a cursive style.

Jonathan Rowlett
Director