

# ENVIRONMENT CABINET MEMBER MEETING

## Agenda Item 113

Brighton & Hove City Council

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Planning Brief – Former Royal Alexandra Hospital Site</b>		
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>25 March 2010</b>		
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>Director of Environment</b>		
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Name:</b>	<b>Johanne Thompson</b>	<b>Tel:</b> 29-2500
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<b>Key Decision:</b>	<b>No</b>		
<b>Wards Affected:</b>	<b>Regency</b>		

### FOR GENERAL RELEASE

#### 1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 The report outlines the consultation process undertaken in relation to the development of a planning brief for the former Royal Alexandra Hospital site and seeks Member's approval of the draft Planning Brief (see Appendix 1).

#### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the draft Planning Brief for the former Royal Alexandra Hospital site be approved.

(The Brief will be used to provide up-to-date planning guidance to developers and will assist Development Control officers in the assessment of future pre-application proposals and/ or planning applications concerning the site. The Brief will be a material planning consideration in the determination of planning applications relating to the site.)

#### 3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION

##### Introduction

- 3.1 At a case review of the former Royal Alexandra Hospital site on 30 June 2009, Members of the Planning Committee agreed that there was a need to produce an up-to-date Planning Brief in the light of the Appeal Decision by the Planning Inspectorate, which upheld the council's decision to refuse planning permission to Taylor Wimpey UK Ltd (BH2008/02095) for the redevelopment of the site. Members were particularly keen for the Brief to:

- Emphasise the importance of promoting development that would seek to protect as much of the hospital building/s as possible;
- Encourage greater joint working between the landowner, the community and amenity societies about the future of the former hospital site.

The process for developing the Brief has been driven by these aspirations for this important and sensitive site.

## **Summary of recommendations in the Planning Brief**

### **3.2 The Planning Brief recommends:**

- The retention of the principal hospital building – it remains flexible on how this is to be achieved to enable proposals to come forward either as a conversion of the existing building or as a full restoration of the building back to the original Thomas Lainson design of 1881.
- The retention of the open space to the south of the principal building – the space contributes positively to the character of the area and provides the setting for views across the site from various vantage points both within the Montpelier and Clifton Hill Conservation Area and the adjoining West Hill Conservation Area.
- The height of future development must respond to the level changes across the site and must not exceed five storeys.
- The retention of all trees on site with Tree Preservation Orders.

There are many other aspects that the Brief provides guidance on but these are the key recommendations.

### **Consultation process**

### **3.3 A Scoping Report setting out the process and timetable for the development of a Planning Brief for the former Royal Alexandra Hospital (the Royal Alex) was approved by the Chairman of the Planning Committee and the Cabinet Member for Environment in August 2009. In accordance with Stage 2 of the Scoping Report, discussions were held with a number of stakeholders with an interest in the site (including amenity and residents' associations), to establish their priorities for any future development of the site. These stakeholders included:**

- Taylor Wimpey (the landowner)
- Montpelier and Clifton Hill Association
- Brighton Society
- Regency Society
- Clifton, Montpelier and Powis Community Association
- Homelees House Residents' Association
- Residents occupying 20 and 21 Clifton Hill
- Primary Care Trust (PCT)/ GPs

### **3.4 These discussions have contributed to an enhanced understanding of local aspirations for its future development. The results of this consultation were used to inform the development of draft land-use and design options for the site included as a background document to this report.**

Option 1 – Redevelop all of the site

Option 2 – Retain principal building, plus new build behind.

Option 3 – Retain principal with sensitive extension, plus new build behind

Option 4 – Retain cluster of existing buildings, plus new build behind

Option 5 – Retain all older buildings on site (minus existing extensions), plus new build in between

- 3.5 Members of the public, as well as residents' and amenity organisations, were invited to comment on these draft land-use and design options during a public exhibition staffed by officers in Hove Town Hall Foyer on Saturday 24 October (Stage 6 of the Scoping Report). The exhibition remained in the Foyer until Friday 30 October to encourage people who were unable to attend the public exhibition to comment on the options. The exhibition material was also made available on the council's website via a link from the council's Home page to a dedicated page containing latest information on the former Royal Alexandra Hospital site. Consultees were given a deadline of Friday 30 October for comments on the draft land-use and design options.
- 3.6 The draft land-use and design options were also presented to the city council's Conservation Advisory Group (CAG) at its meeting on 3 November 2009. CAG members requested more time to consider the options and suggested that the Royal Alexandra Planning Brief should be discussed again at a future meeting of CAG. The Montpelier and Clifton Hill Association (a member of CAG) recommended that the council should consider appointing a conservation consultant, to carry out an assessment of the draft options and to identify any additional options that would merit further consideration. This recommendation was duly acted upon and a consultant<sup>1</sup> was appointed to carry out a Conservation Assessment of the options.
- 3.7 At the meeting, CAG members also requested a site visit so that they could re-familiarise themselves with the state of repair of the buildings as well as the site's constraints and development opportunities. A visit to the former Royal Alexandra Hospital site was organised for CAG members on 28 January 2010 and was attended by officers of the city council and the landowner (Taylor Wimpey). This was followed up with a second meeting of CAG on 2 February 2010 where feedback on the consultation results from the public exhibition was given, as well as the consultant's Conservation Assessment of the options. A final version of the Planning Brief will be shared with CAG members at its next meeting on 16 March 2010. Any comments from CAG will be verbally reported at the Environment CMM meeting.
- 3.8 Regular briefings on the development and emerging content of the Brief have been undertaken with the Cabinet Member for the Environment and the Chairman of Planning Committee as well as the local ward Councillors.

### **Conservation Study**

- 3.9 The report containing the consultant's assessment of the development options is provided as a background document to this report. The Conservation Study identifies a preferred option which seeks to retain the main hospital building and the villa (Administration block) at the rear of the site. This is in recognition of the historic and architectural contribution both buildings make to the visual appearance and character of the Conservation Area. The consultant does, however, consider that retention of the cluster of buildings in the middle of the

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<sup>1</sup> Jack Warshaw, who provided evidence in chief on behalf of the city council at the Planning Appeal for the Taylor Wimpey scheme.

site (the Elizabeth Day Centre, the Laundry Building and the Nurses Home) would severely limit the development potential and would also compromise amenity. He states that “there would be no potential for green space in between buildings at the heart of the site. The layout, filled with cars and hard circulation, would be cramped, uninviting and commercially unattractive. Perhaps most importantly, any reference to recovering the original landscape quality and its contribution to the character of the conservation area would be lost”.

- 3.10 The report expresses a preference for the full restoration of the main building back to the original Thomas Lainson building of 1881 i.e. through the removal of the later balconies and the reconstruction of the façade. The consultant contends that the restoration of the original building would most likely result in the building becoming eligible for statutory listing. However, since a full restoration would undoubtedly require much more intervention on the part of specialist contractors, it is likely that this option would be less financially viable than some of the other options which involve straightforward conversion. The Planning Brief therefore recommends that a flexible approach is taken to the retention of the main building to enable proposals to come forward which are not unnecessarily restrictive. Similarly, while the retention of the Villa is desirable, the Planning Brief recognises that this is an aspiration which may or may not be achievable once viability is taken into account.

### **Viability assessment**

- 3.11 In accordance with Stage 4 of the Scoping Report, the District Valuer was invited to carry out an independent financial assessment of the draft land use and design options for the site. Based on the council’s initial assessment of the current economic market, the land-use most likely to attract the highest return on investment was residential, followed by B1 office development and finally hotel development. The draft design options were consequently developed assuming that the principal use of the site will be residential, although B1 office/ hotel development are also shown as potential more minor uses of the main hospital building in those options which assume the retention of the building/s.
- 3.12 The District Valuer’s report is provided as a background document to this report. The District Valuer states that in the present economic climate, even Option 1 (i.e. total redevelopment) which represents strongest financial return, is unlikely to yield any significant profit for developers of this site because of the reduction in land values since they purchased the site. However, it is important to recognise that viability assessments are conducted by applying certain assumptions at a specific point in time. If variables such as land values, build costs or the percentage of affordable housing were to change then the viability of each of the options will be directly affected. For example, using the information supplied by the District Valuer, officers have calculated that a rise in land values or a reduction in the percentage of affordable housing could result in Options 2 and 3 (the retention of the main building) becoming viable (assuming a 15-16% target profit level).
- 3.13 Recent discussions with the District Valuer service have revealed that since the options were tested in the Autumn of 2009, build costs have reduced and land values have slightly risen. Given that the site is located in a prime residential area, it is anticipated that it could be one the first areas in the city to benefit from

any future recovery from economic recession. This is likely to have a significant bearing on the viability of the site in the future.

- 3.14 The Planning Brief recognises the limitations of viability assessments but concludes that the assessment is still an important consideration in the deliverability of the future redevelopment of the site. The Brief therefore proposes a more flexible policy response to redevelopment proposals which retain the original building. It is possible that in order to facilitate conversion, the Local Planning Authority may exercise flexibility in relation to policies concerning affordable housing, housing mix/ size of units and Section 106 contributions. However, since this would mean a departure from Local Plan policy, a robust viability case would have to be included as part of any planning application.

### **Consultation results**

- 3.15 The public exhibition on the options generated 147 written responses from members of the public and 4 formal responses from residents' associations and amenity organisations. Feedback from the public exhibition revealed overwhelming support for the retention in some shape or form of the Royal Alexandra Hospital (93%). 65% of respondents were in favour of the retention of all buildings on site (Option 5) although it should be noted that the results of the District Valuer's report were not available in time for the public exhibition and thus members of the public were not aware that this option was the least viable in financial terms. 22% expressed support for Options 2 (retention of the principal building) and Option 3 (retention of the principal building plus sensitive extension). 6% were in favour of Option 4 (retain cluster of existing buildings), while 7% of respondents were in favour of demolition of the original buildings and the comprehensive redevelopment of the site.
- 3.16 The results of the consultation have been summarised within a background paper to the Planning Brief in order to apprise developers of the strength of public opinion concerning this important and sensitive site. The main themes arising from individuals' responses were as follows:

### **Individual's responses**

#### *In favour of retention*

- The existing building/s contribute significantly to the character of the area and should be conserved.
- Consider the Royal Alex building to be one of the most attractive landmark buildings in the city and of historic significance.
- Council should seek to maintain integrity of conservation areas.
- Demolition in a conservation area makes a mockery of having a conservation area
- Concern about height of any new development.
- Demolition of the existing building/s instead of re-using them is environmentally unsustainable and represents a gross waste of resources.
- Concern that demolition would lead to the establishment of a faceless modern building.
- Replacement buildings must be of high architectural value and sympathetic to surrounding area.

- Taylor Wimpey should sell the main building for sympathetic conversion and develop the rest of the site in consultation with local stakeholders.

*In favour of comprehensive redevelopment (including the developer)*

- Disappointed that the Taylor Wimpey scheme was rejected by the city council and Planning Inspector because the scheme was attractive in terms of design and the facilities it would provide.
- Retention of the existing low-rise buildings in the south or east of the site is likely to increase the pressure on the remainder of the site, resulting in compromised amenity for the 300 residents living to the north and west of the site.
- The relative lack of architectural merit of the buildings together with the impact retention would have on the provision of social housing, would suggest that comprehensive redevelopment of the site is the best way forward.
- The fabric of the existing building is too compromised and eroded by weather to make use of it in any redevelopment. The smaller buildings are too fragmented for viable development.
- The comprehensive redevelopment of the site should remain an option within the Planning Brief.
- Support the city council's decision to test the viability of the five options to be presented at the public exhibition.
- Keen to retain a medical use (i.e. GP surgery) as part of a mixed use scheme since this would aid viability.
- Support the application of policy HO2 of the Local Plan which requires 40% of units to be affordable because the provision of affordable housing on site secures Housing Corporation funding and therefore reduces financial risk.

**Amenity and residents' associations**

- 3.17 Comments were received from four amenity and residents' associations: The Brighton Society, Montpelier and Clifton Hill Association (MCHA), Prestonville Community Association and Homelees House Residents Association. Individual members of the Clifton, Montpelier and Powis Community Association (CMPCA), Regency Society and Silwood Area Residents' Association have also responded but not on behalf of their organisation and have therefore been included under the individuals' responses.

The key issues raised by the amenity/ residents' associations are summarised as follows:

- Retention of as many of the older buildings as possible;
- Concerned that one of the options presented involved the comprehensive redevelopment of the site;
- Do not agree with viability assessment of the options, such an assessment would require specialist knowledge of conversion costs;
- The options should have included use of the roof space in older buildings;
- The assumptions concerning internal circulation space for conversions are wrong;
- Dispute the number of units generated by each of the options;
- There needs to be a feasibility study to assess the full potential of conversion;

- The council should be flexible over standards for housing, car parking and the S106 agreement to help save the buildings;
- The quiet spacious quality of the Triangle is both a significant amenity for residents and a distinct element of the Conservation Area;
- The council options do not take account of the significant changes in levels across the site, height restrictions should apply;
- New buildings to the north or west of the site must not be too bulky, monolithic or have large unbroken flat surfaces.

### Neighbouring residents

3.18 A submission by 16 neighbouring residents from within the Alex “Triangle” (i.e. Clifton Hill, Clifton Road, Homelees House) commenting on the options was also received beyond the deadline and has been included in this report. The main issues raised were:

- **Steeply sloping land** – new buildings to the north-east of the site will be located on top of a hill. Their height has the potential to have a major impact on the amenity of residents who live to the immediate north and west of the site – casting shade, taking up the sky, obstructing sightlines and overlooking. The height of development should be restricted in these areas
- **Set back from the boundary** – because of the steep gradient the Alex site looms over adjacent properties. The brief should specify a minimum set back from the north and west boundaries of the site.
- **Roofs** – slate pitched roofs should be required on all main buildings.
- **Space** – the brief should preserve the distinct Victorian character, as a large open space with long open sightlines.
- **Textures** – the diverse range of textures in the Triangle (render, flint, dark red brick, slate and greenery) should be echoed in the palette of materials in new buildings.
- **Trees** – all mature trees should be preserved on site. A belt of trees and greenery at the northern and western boundaries of the site should be encouraged to ensure sufficient set back of new development from the boundary.

3.19 The Primary Care Trust and GPs from the Montpelier Surgery were consulted as part of the early stakeholder discussions as a party with an interest in the site. Their priorities for the future redevelopment of the site are summarised below:

- Keen that the provision of a new GP surgery is incorporated within each of the council’s design and land-use options for the site.
- Emphasised that an exhaustive site search has been conducted in the vicinity of the existing Montpelier GP Surgery and that no suitable premises had been identified.
- GP’s and PCT need premises which are fit-for-purpose and compliant with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act. Their preference is for a new build practice within the curtilage of the Royal Alex site.
- The surgery should ideally be highly visible and accessible.
- Dedicated parking should be incorporated within the overall development for GP’s, nurses and visitors (including blue badge holders).

- 3.20 The Planning Brief has addressed all of the issues identified from the consultation under sections 5, 6 and 7 of the Brief which incorporate guidance on Conservation, Development Principles and Deliverability.

#### **4. CONSULTATION**

- 4.1 Details of consultation are covered in the body of the report.

#### **5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:**

##### Financial Implications:

- 5.1 All direct costs for the production of the Planning Brief and consultation have been included within City Planning's budget allocation, there are no further costs.

*Finance Officer consulted: Derek Mansfield Date: 12/02/10*

##### Legal Implications:

- 5.2 Although the Planning Brief is a non-statutory document and therefore cannot be given full statutory weight, it has undergone wide ranging consultation, as outlined in the report, which itself gives weight to the document. The Planning Brief will be a material planning consideration in the determination of planning applications relating to the former Royal Alexandra Hospital site. No adverse human rights implications have been identified as arising from the report.

*Lawyer consulted: Hilary Woodward Date: 12/02/10*

##### Equalities Implications:

- 5.3 Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) issues relevant to this Planning Brief have been considered. Equalities principles have been an integral part of the development of the Brief and have particularly informed the consultation process, including the organisation of the early stakeholder discussions, the public exhibition and the dedicated Royal Alex page on the council's website.

##### Sustainability Implications:

- 5.4 Sustainability measures inform all of the principles for the future development of the site and are outlined within the Planning Brief.

##### Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 5.5 The Planning Brief has been developed to provide for a safer environment in the area through a range of measures including public and private realm improvements and the promotion of good urban design.

##### Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 5.6 None identified.



Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 5.7 The site is not allocated in the Local Plan, but it is part of the Montpelier and Clifton Hill Conservation Area. As such, the Planning Brief draws upon the history and the character of the conservation area enshrined within the Montpelier and Cliftonhill Area Character Statement. The former hospital is an important part of Brighton life and a well known local landmark. Thus the future development of the site needs to be sensitive to its previous history as a Children's Hospital for the city.

**6. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):**

- 6.1 Five draft land-use and design options were shared with members of the public at a public exhibition, amenity and residents' associations and the Conservation Advisory Group (CAG). Comments were invited on these draft options and are summarised in Sections 3.15-3.20 of this report.

**7. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 7.1 To ensure there is detailed, clear advice to developers on the type of development that is acceptable on this important and sensitive site.
- 7.2 To assist Development Control officers in the assessment of future development proposals and/or planning applications concerning the site.

## **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

### **Appendices:**

1. Planning Brief – former Royal Alexandra Hospital site

### **Documents In Members' Rooms**

1. Scoping Report – former Royal Alexandra Hospital site.
2. Land-use and design options.
3. Development Options Conservation Study – Jack Warshaw.
4. District Valuer's report.
5. Planning Brief – former Royal Alexandra Hospital site.

### **Background Documents**

1. Scoping Report – former Royal Alexandra Hospital site.
2. Land-use and design options.
3. Development Options Conservation Study – Jack Warshaw.
4. District Valuer's report.
5. Brighton & Hove Local Plan (adopted 2005).
6. Core Strategy Proposed Submission (February 2010).
7. Conservation Area Character Statements (2005).
8. City Planning Informal Planning Advice Note – Royal Alexandra Hospital for Sick Children (2006).