

# Alma Road

Planning and Design Brief

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June 2004

Alma Road



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**PLYMOUTH**

CITY COUNCIL *DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENT*



## Background

Plymouth City Council has prepared this planning and design brief as a result of the proposed disposal of this site.

This document will be treated as a material consideration in the decision-making process. It is anticipated that it will be subject to full and proper public consultation, prior to being formally adopted by the City Council, thereby giving it greater weight.

The brief has been prepared within the context of the strategic design approach for the city. This is set out within the City of Plymouth Local Plan 1995-2011 (First Deposit 2001) and includes the key urban design principles that will govern the design of new development in the future. These will be reproduced in the emerging Local Development Framework that will eventually replace the Local Plan.



## Purpose of the Brief

The aim of the design brief is to identify and established the main planning, urban design and conservation issues related to the site, that need to be considered by developers, when preparing schemes for re-development of the site. It communicates guiding principles for the development, taking into account the wider context, and will set out key constraints, and specific requirements.

## Policy Background

‘The Governments aim is to create high quality towns and cities which people can be proud to live in. They must be attractive, clean, safe and well cared for, combining vitality and interest with practicality, sensitivity to the environment and continuity with the past. They must be well designed and planned, and to make the best use of previously developed land and buildings.’ The Urban White Paper- Our Towns and Cities of the future. 2000.

## Current Initiatives

There are a number of strategies and initiatives that should be taken into account as appropriate to the redevelopment of the site:

- The Plymouth City Strategy. Plymouth 2020 Partnership
- The Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy. Plymouth 2020 Partnership.
- A New Vision for Plymouth’s Built Environment. MBM Architectes.
- The Regional Economic Strategy for the Southwest of England. 2003-12
- The Economic Strategy for the Plymouth Sub-Region. 2001-4.

The site is important in lying along a strategic transport route, on a main approach to Plymouth.



## Relevant National Policies & Guidance

### Planning Policy Guidance Note 1: General Policies and Principles.

This guidance note sets out the Government's general approach in relation to planning. The note identifies among other key policy objectives that sustainable development; mixed use development and quality urban design are core values in the Government's approach to planning.

### Planning Policy Guidance Note 3: Housing.

This guidance note sets out the Government's planning policy approach to the development of housing. The guidance states that: 'new housing and residential environments should make a significant contribution to promoting urban renaissance and improving the quality of life'.

In order to achieve the objective this PPG states, among other objectives, that Local Planning Authorities should:

- Plan to meet the housing requirements of the whole community, including those in need of affordable and special needs housing;
- Provide wider housing opportunity and choice and a better mix in the size, type, and location of housing than is currently available, and seek to create mixed use communities;
- Place the needs of people before ease of traffic movement in designing the layout of residential developments;
- Seek to reduce car dependence by facilitating more walking and cycling, by improving linkages by public transport between housing, jobs, local services and local amenity and by planning for mixed use;
- Promote good design in new developments in order to create attractive, high-quality environments in which people will choose to live.

Sustainable Communities - Building for the Future. ODPM, 2003. This document provides an important benchmark for the redevelopment of the site and the wider area. The following summarises what the Government considers to be some of the key attributes for a sustainable community:

- A mix of well-integrated uses;
- Good public transport and other transport infrastructure both within the community and linking it to urban, rural and regional centers;
- Buildings –both individually and collectively- that can meet the needs over time, and that minimise the use of resources;
- A well integrated mix of decent homes of different types and tenures to support the range of household sizes, ages and incomes;
- A diverse vibrant and creative local culture, encouraging pride in the community and cohesion within it;
- A positive and distinctive sense of place;
- The right links with the regional, national and international community.

A wide range of guidance on urban design and related issues has been published over the last ten years. Some of this guidance has been referred to in the preparation of this brief. Developers and their architects are advised to refer to the documents in the bibliography attached to the brief.



## Relevant Local Policy & Guidance

Important planning policies affecting the site at the local level are contained within the following documents:

- City of Plymouth local Plan Adopted 1996;
- City of Plymouth local Plan First Deposit version (1995- 2011) 2001;

The following principles are particularly relevant to the site and illustrate how the City Council consider that new development should seek to shape the City of the future:

**UD Principle 1.** A City with individual identity. The characteristics of Plymouth that set it apart from other towns and cities need to be protected and built upon.

**UD Principle 2.** A City of communities. Communities need to be developed as attractive self-sustaining areas with distinct identities and excellent provision of local facilities, where opportunity exists for people to live work, go to school, shop, relax, play etc. within their own neighbourhood.

**UD Principle 3.** A City with quality streets and spaces. Safe, pedestrian friendly, accessible and visually stimulating streets and spaces should be created, which also encourage walking as a principle mode of transport.

**UD Principle 4.** A City with quality architecture. Architectural excellence should be encouraged.

**UD Principle 5.** A City that respects its historic environment. Plymouths unique historic buildings, historic landscape, and historic townscapes are preserved and enhanced.

**UD Principle 6.** A City with attractive gateways, transport corridors and an attractive waterfront. Development in these areas should add positively to the image of the city.

**UD Principle 8.** A legible City. The richness, quality, interest and variety of the environment should be safeguarded and improved, making it easy for people to orientate themselves within the city.

**UD Principle 9.** A sustainable City. Decisions taken about the development of the city today should aim to leave a positive legacy for its people of tomorrow.

The site is identified as Proposal 62 under the City of Plymouth local Plan First Deposit version. The site is identified as a residential opportunity, with an emphasis on a quality design and landscaping for a city approach.

Policies within the plan need to be considered by developers when preparing development schemes for the site. Policy 77: Development Setting is particularly relevant, which concerns the design and quality of new development in the city.



## Context Studies

This section of the brief illustrates the findings of an appraisal of the site and its surrounding context. The appraisal has been carried out to inform appropriate development responses for the site.

### Site Characteristics & Context (refer to figures 1 & 2)

The site is located in the Pennycomequick area, just north of the city centre. The site slopes significantly with a southerly aspect, being contained on two sides by backs of existing residential properties, facing Alma Road to the west and Central park to the north.

In 1977 the Devon County Council made provisions for a £10 million fly-over directly over the site to meet the increasing traffic flow predictions. A further 20 years of neglect led the 16 properties to eventually be demolished in 1998. The site has remained vacant ever since. The proposals for the flyover will now be considered to be dropped, however, a strip of land to the western side of the site (9m width), will be set aside to allow for future road widening associated with a revised junction to the south.

The site represents a very poor quality approach to the city centre in a high profile gateway location.

The site is well positioned for access to a range of services and facilities. Local shopping facilities are within a 300m radius of the site and the City Centre is only a short walk or bus journey away. Central Park directly adjoins the site and has a range of leisure facilities, including the Plymouth Argyll Home Park football ground and Victoria Park is only a five-minute walk away. Plymouth Station is only a five minute walk away to the south. The site lies within easy reach of Stoke Damerel Community College, and within the catchment for Stuart Road Primary School. The University of Plymouth and its main campus is also very close being a ten minute walk.


### Townscape & Historic Environment (refer to figure 3)

The site has a wide range of views, and sits prominently in the topography being positioned on a key gateway route to Plymouth. It is highly visible from a range of vantage points, including from the mainline railway and the strategic A386 traffic and bus corridor. Central Park offers extensive panoramic views across the city and to the site.

The existing terraced houses are predominantly render and two to three storey in height. Other materials are brick construction, with lime render and timber finish. The Devonport Prison Gatehouse on Russell Place is listed grade 2 and constructed of Plymouth Limestone rubble, and an important local landmark. It is visible along the back lane from Alma Road.

The demolished buildings on the site were originally of a high quality of detail and finish, expressing typical ornamentation of the later Georgian characteristics.

Many of the houses adjacent to Central Park have a poor visual connection and relationship with this important open space.



## Land Use (refer to figure 4)

The area is predominantly residential with a varied range of accommodation including family housing, flats, a small percentage of hotels, B&B accommodation and an increasing proportion of student accommodation.

Local shops are located along Stuart Road, with a small post office and general store, a local convenience store, two private members clubs, retail unit and a auto garage outlet. The Pennycomequick Public House lies directly to the south of the site.

Central Park lies on the doorstep of the site, and represents a major city wide leisure resource.

## Transport (refer to figure 5)

Alma Road site is located within a close proximity to the Strategic Recreational Footpath route (Proposal 124, Route N°: 5). This route begins to the north of Central Park, running southbound through the park to Central Park Avenue, and then continues through Victoria Park, terminating at Mount Wise.

There are minimal pedestrian crossings, which are essential to overcome the effect of the major roads as a barrier to movement. It may be beneficial to improve these, to facilitate pedestrian movement to local amenities and the city centre.

The Plymouth Station is located within a ten-minute walk from the site.

The bus route runs approximately three times every hour. The public bus stop point is immediately adjacent to the site and (in accordance with the Accessibility guidelines) that runs in both directions to the City Centre zones and Saltash areas. A further four stop points are located within 300m of the site located around the Pennycomequick roundabout that allows efficient use of public transport.

Access to local amenities and the City Centre is a fifteen-minute bus journey and approximately twenty minutes walk. The local shopping facilities are located within a 300m radius of the site.

Alma Road has a dual-lane flow in both directions. The route has a high density of traffic at peak times and at a constant throughout the remainder. This represents the main arterial route to the northern districts of the city, the A38 and beyond. There is no existing vehicular access to the site off Alma Road.

## Building Typologies & Density

(refer to figure 6)

The surrounding area has a fairly high density of housing. Housing at the north of Alma Road is a combination of terraced housing and semi-detached dwellings. The existing terraced houses are predominantly render and two to three storey in height. Due to the rising topography of the locality, the terraced properties step up the slope, and a large proportion are internally divided into flats on two-three storeys with a back-to-back traditional layout.



# Guidelines for Development

The appropriateness of development proposals for the site should be considered against these guidelines.

## Land-Use Guidelines

1. The site should be developed for residential use. This could include student accommodation, sheltered housing, or general housing.
2. The residential capacity should be compatible with the density characteristics for the locality.
3. Proposed residential densities should not compromise a quality living environment, and should be achieved within a building of suitable scale.
4. Affordable housing. On sites of more than 25 units 25% should be affordable, unless the site is developed for student housing, in which case there will be no requirement for affordable housing. Plymouth City Councils policy about affordable housing is currently under review; a draft Interim Planning Statement has been prepared.
5. Lifetime Homes. On sites of more than 10 units 20% should be Lifetime Homes, unless the site is developed for student housing.
6. Residential accommodation should be arranged so that there is a positive interaction between the function of the building and the street.
  - There should be direct access to the building for pedestrians from the street, ideally with multiple entrances, if individual dwellings, or apartments.
  - Balconies and roof terraces should be considered, to take advantage of the south facing aspect of the site.
  - Habitable rooms and windows should; be positioned to maximize surveillance of the street, and projecting windows, bays and corner windows might be considered.
  - These should be designed in such a way not to conflict with the privacy of the existing residential properties.

## Transport Guidelines

Initially a single access should be provided to the development off Alma Road, to the southern end of the development, to coincide with the existing back lane, with an arrangement of access from the southbound lanes only, and left exit only onto Alma Road, to agreed details. Additional access can also be provided along the rear lane, from Wake Street to the development. As part of these works kerb realignments will be required along a section of the eastern side of Alma Road, adjacent to the pedestrian crossing, to allow improvements to this crossing. Details of this access and changes are available from the City Council on request.

Car parking will be provided to the agreed levels, depending on the number of units. A ratio of 0.5 car parking spaces per unit will be permitted on site. For student accommodation, much lower levels of car parking will be expected. Car parking should be provided to the rear of the development, either as a courtyard arrangement or as undercroft, with communal space or facilities above. Secure cycle parking/storage should be provided for 50% of the units (higher for student accommodation).

The development will be required to make a contribution for the creation of a bus stop lay by in the current location of the southbound bus stop on Alma Road.

A pedestrian footpath will be required to link with Central Park on the northwestern corner, and a contribution may be required for the creation of an improved pedestrian crossing over Alma Road.

Back Lane to be repaired to an acceptable standard, where required, where damage has occurred through construction works or previous activities.



## Layout Design Guidelines

(refer to figure 7)

1. The proposed building should respond positively to the two main frontages of the site, Alma Road and Central Park (Jefferson Walk). The development should back onto the existing rear lane, and conceal the existing back gardens of the surrounding terraced housing to the east and south. This will establish a positive street frontage, with good surveillance, and enclose private space and car parking to the rear.

2. Building frontages should be located close to the 9m set back from the footpath to Alma Road, to allow for junction improvements. The frontage should be set back on the north-western corner to allow views and better access into Central Park. This would also allow for the creation of an improved future entrance space to Central Park. The reservation strip alongside Alma Road should be leveled and grassed, and street trees planted to establish a formal avenue approach to the street scene.

3. The siting of the building needs to consider the following townscape needs:

- The roofscape should be carefully designed to acknowledge the views from the elevated mainline railway, with a minimum of clutter (plant requirements designed into scheme) and positive south-facing roof terrace opportunities should be explored.
- The northwestern corner of the building offers the potential for an architectural marker, which acknowledges an entrance into Central Park.
- Vehicular access into the development should be designed to be as discrete as possible.

4. Car parking, cycle parking and other servicing or storage needs to be located to the rear of the development, and out of sight.

5. The new public space created to the northwestern corner of the site should relate to the character of Central Park, and provide a footpath link.

6. Introduce semi-mature avenue tree planting along Alma Road.

7. Development should be designed to Secure by Design standards, so that natural surveillance is maximised over public and communal areas of the site. Lighting is also an important part of the scheme, including to the back of the development.

8. Development to take account of amenity of existing properties backing onto development, and the outlook of the development itself in proposals for the communal space, and the boundary treatment. This should represent a high quality contemporary design.



## Scale, Massing & Height Guidelines

(refer to figure 8)

The development should sit comfortably on the site, in scale with the surrounding townscape. The building should relate positively with the sloping topography, and step down the slope. There is an opportunity to increase the scale on the northwestern corner, as a visual reference. The overall scale should be 3-4 storey.

## Design Quality Guidelines

The building should relate positively to the townscape fabric of the area and its context on the edge of Central Park. It should not attempt to replicate architectural attributes that give neighbouring historic buildings their special interest. As this site is prominent on an important approach to Plymouth, a high quality design solution must be achieved.

1. It should therefore be a sensitive, contemporary building (of its time) and not attempt to copy neighbouring buildings.
2. It should be intelligently composed and respond to the topography of the site and other opportunities.
3. It should seek to be sustainable, energy efficient, and should maximize the quality of living environment for residents- for example; making the best use of views, increasing natural daylight, ventilation and sunlight, creating good surveillance of the street.
4. Subtle references to the rhythm of existing terraces (as displayed in the frequency and proportion of the bays for example) can help to anchor the development in the local context.
5. Materials employed for building finishes should complement the palette of materials used locally. Generally the residential terraces use stucco render, although the use of local stone might be used sparingly (in plinth details for example).
6. Proposal to enhance the public realm about the building should form an integral part of the development. Hard and soft landscape works in public areas and to the communal courtyard areas should represent good quality landscape design.
7. Any requirement for utilities infrastructure eg electricity substations should be carefully designed into scheme.



## Contributions

1. A contribution will be required for some improvement works to Central Park. The contribution will depend on the nature of the final proposals.

2. An education contribution may be required subject to the proposals for the development and whether this includes family accomadation. The education contributions IPS4 provides guidance on the levels of contributions required.