

Harwell Street

Planning and Design Brief

September 2004

Harwell Street



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 brief has been subject to full and proper public consultation and subsequently, following amendment, formally adopted by Plymouth City Council.

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.



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 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 adjoins the Wyndham Square Conservation Area, and therefore any proposals will need to have regard for this.

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 figure 1)

The site is located in the Wyndham area, an established residential district, which lies directly to the northwest of the city centre. The site is set in a depression with significant retaining walls and rock faces, which enclose it on three sides to the east, west and north, with the backs of existing City Council residential properties to the south.

The site was used as an all weather pitch, however it is now showing signs of vandalism, misuse and neglect. This is perhaps due to the limited physical access to the site, and the lack of surveillance.

The current narrow vehicular maintenance access is through the existing housing development to the south. There is a separate poor quality and hostile pedestrian access from the west, and locked gated at the top of the former stepped access from Wyndham Street East. The existing boundaries on three sides are constructed of limestone rubble. There may be an opportunity to include the adjacent city council owned garages site to the west, within the site area.

Townscape & Historic Environment (refer to figures 2 & 3)

The area between Wyndham Square and the City Centre was originally fragmented by the arrival of the Millbay Branch of the Great Western Railway. The site was subsequently owned by The British Railway Board and used as an operational line and sidings, resulting in today's topography. The site was brought into its current use as all weather pitches in the early 1980's.

The area is characterised by Victorian terraces to the north, of 2- 3 storeys, predominantly of stucco render, with other buildings or walls utilising limestone. There have been some public realm improvements using slate paving in the area, and this has been carried through to the adjacent 1980s city council housing development, which also utilises limestone walls.

Local landmarks include an Arts and Crafts interpretation of a town house in the Old English tradition, with picturesque stair-turrets and brick chimneys, immediately adjacent to the site. St Peter's Church is situated west on Wyndham Street within Wyndham Square. The Cathedral of St. Mary's and St. Boniface is located at Cecil Street, west of the site. The Cathedral is of a gothic style with an extra slim spire.

The sites topography allows southern views from the elevated ground along Wyndham Street East to Millbay, the Citadel, the Hoe and the city centre. Both St. Peter's Church and St. Mary and St. Boniface Cathedral spire act as key reference points in this locality, with important views along Wyndham Street East to St. Peters Church.



Land Use

(refer to figure 4)

The area is predominantly residential, however there are a few local amenities and stores, with a local convenience stores, and two churches within a 300m radius of the site, and a local park directly adjacent to the site. The City Centre is a five to ten minutes walk.

There are several other schools within the catchment area, including St Peter's Community Centre adjacent to the site offers child day care and nursery facilities. St. Boniface Primary School, and also Pilgrim Primary School along Hastings Road to the east, all within 300m radius of the site. The University of Plymouth is only ten minutes walk away.

Transport

(refer to figure 5)

The train station is located within a ten-minute walk from the site and a bus route runs approximately three times every hour from a bus stop immediately adjacent to the site. There are several other bus stop points located within a 300m radius of the site that provide an effective public service.

Access to local amenities and the City Centre is a fifteen-minute walk. There is a need for an improvement in links with the main city centre shopping facilities, particularly across Western Approach.

There are parking facilities allocated at the north of the site that are to accommodate the visitors to the child's play area. Neighbouring housing layouts are designed with off-road parking facilities.

Building Typologies & Density

(refer to figures 6 & 7)

The surrounding area has a high density of housing, with a varied range of accommodation, including flats, family housing, and social housing. Housing directly adjacent to the site consists predominantly of Victorian terraced properties, with some more recent additions, including the 1980s City Council properties to the south.

The building heights around the site are mainly two to three storeys. Hastings Street is primarily comprised of three-storey student accommodation. The City Council development to the south is two storey, with an exception at lower Harwell Street where there are three storey housing with bridge-link entrance forms. The sheltered accommodation addressing Cecil Street is a recent four-storey building.



Guidelines for Redevelopment

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

Land Use Guidance

1. The site should be developed for residential use. This could include 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. 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 public spaces.
 - 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

One single vehicular access should be provided to the development off Wyndham Street East, to the northwestern corner of the site. This represents the easiest access to the site in gradient terms. This access could be further improved should the adjacent garages site to the west, currently in City Council ownership, becomes available.

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 housing. Proposals will need to demonstrate that car parking minimises the visual intrusion and maximize the quality of public space, wherever possible providing undercroft parking as the topography allows. Any parking associated with public space should be designed to the highest quality of materials. Secure cycle parking/ storage should be provided.

Pedestrian footpath links will be required to link with the city centre to the southeastern corner, the open space to the north, and local amenities to the west. The links to the southeast and west should include ramped access at 1 in 15 as well as steps.



Layout Design Guidelines

(refer to figure 8)

1. The proposed buildings should respond positively to the adjoining streets, park and the on-site public space. The new development should back onto the existing back garden boundaries to the south of the site. To the north and east, the building line should provide double frontages to face Harwell Street and Wyndham Street, and also to face the internal site public square.

2. The new buildings should create good overlooking of the existing adjoining streets and public spaces. This will establish spaces with good surveillance.

3. Car parking, cycle parking and other servicing or storage needs to be located and designed to minimise visual intrusion.

4. The terraces to the northern and eastern edge of the site should be designed to step down with the topography. A two storey frontage onto Wyndham Street East and Harwell Street should be created (possibly with basement level), which will create approximately a five storey elevation to the internal site elevations.

5. The internal square should be designed to provide a high quality amenity space. It should not be dominated by car parking, although the design should rely on a robust formal structure, and integrate with a high quality street design (with an emphasis on pedestrian environment) and the park to the north. The space should be carefully designed in such a way as to minimise use for any ball games and other activities, which cause social nuisance. The design should represent good quality contemporary landscape design.

6. The development should consider the following townscape opportunities.

- The creation of an architectural marker to the end of Archer Street, Hastings Terrace, and to the northeastern corner facing Harwell Street.
- Allow views from particular vantage points along Wyndham Street East and the existing public open space at Patna Place, across Plymouth.

- The blank side of the existing chapel along Wynham Street East is currently exposed and is very prominent from Harwell Street. Measures to visually conceal this through appropriate new development will improve this significantly. This could be facilitated should the adjacent garages site to the west, currently in City Council ownership, become available, allowing development directly adjacent to the chapel building. This may require the incorporation of replacement garages within the proposals.

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. Pedestrian links should be designed with good surveillance and illumination to deter use as escape route for potential criminals.

- The proposal should seek to remove the existing access behind the gymnasium, if possible.

Scale, Massing & Height Guidelines

The development should sit comfortably on the site, in scale with the surrounding townscape. The new buildings should relate positively to the existing buildings. A 2- storey height is recommended for the southern buildings, rising up to approximately 5 storeys height for the buildings on the northern and eastern boundaries, on their southern and western elevations. This would translate to a 2- storey elevation along Wyndham Street East and Harwell Street, because of the change in levels between these streets and the site itself.



Design Quality Guidelines

The new buildings should relate positively to the townscape fabric of the area. It should not attempt to replicate architectural attributes that give neighbouring historic buildings their special interest.

1. They should therefore be a sensitive, contemporary building (of its time) and not attempt to copy neighbouring buildings.
2. They should be intelligently composed and respond to the site and other opportunities.
3. They 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 may point to the use of large areas of glazing.
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 and streetscape finishes should complement the palette of materials used locally, which includes stucco render, Plymouth limestone, and slate flooring. Attention to detail and the use of quality finishes is characteristic of historic buildings in the area. Designers should demonstrate that a suitable quality is achieved. Proposed building designs should make a polite contribution to the wider townscape.
6. Enhancing the public realm should form an integral part of the proposals. Hard and soft landscape works in public areas and to the courtyard areas should represent good quality landscape design.
7. The existing boundary walls could be retained and reduced in height to provide front boundary walls, otherwise the materials could be considered for use as part of the public realm works, such as the steps and ramps.
8. Any requirement for utilities infrastructure e.g. electricity substations should be carefully designed into the scheme and not as an afterthought.



Contributions

1. The internal square, should this be proposed for adoption, will need a commuted sum to be secured to cover future maintenance.
2. An off site contribution will be required for improvements to the Patna Place open space.
3. An educational contribution may be required should the development include family housing.