

## APPENDIX 3

Internal Consultation Response from ECC Urban Design and Landscape Officer:

**Project/Application – Police Station + Courts site, Heavitree Road, Exeter**

***An outline application ref: 21/1564/OUT***

- 1** ***The site falls within ‘East Gate - Site Reference 52’ as designated in The Exeter Plan (ECC, 2022) which is at draft stage. It is one of the 8 ‘Liveable Exeter’ allocations that are identified. A comprehensive re-development of the existing site is proposed and current buildings are to be replaced with two major components – a 646 bed Private Build Student Accommodation (PBSA) block with a 318 unit Co-living project***

***The project has been the subject of a series of design review meetings during the course of its evolution, these beginning in November 2020. The most recent review was in November of 2022 and the revised submission now explains how the proposals have responded to the published report.***

***That further review was arranged and revisions explored following concerns expressed by Members when the project was last considered by the planning committee.***

### Urban Design

#### **2** ***Bulk, Form and Massing in Relation to Context***

- 2.1 The very first proposals were suggesting a substantial bulk and massing that extended to a considerable height - indicating up to 10 storeys of accommodation for parts of the development. Gradually, the scale of the setting has been better-recognised and the project has responded more reasonably to the existing context whilst at the same time attempting to make optimum use of this brownfield site – the latter ambition being a key principle for Liveable Exeter sites.
- 2.2 The western end of the development now proposes a 3 / 3.5 storey response (above a basement level) compared to the 2 storeys of the adjacent Upper Summerlands, but with a full 4 storey condition at the front corner of the block here. The height of the development then rises in a series of steps relative to Heavitree Road (which itself is sloping) to reach the most prominent corner of the site. Turning along Gladstone Road the scale of the proposals then relates well to the building permitted and under

construction on the former ambulance station site, as its nearest neighbour.

- 2.3 The formal articulation of the mass thus creates an appropriate accent or focus at the corner of Heavitree Road and Gladstone Road. The gabled presentation at roof level marks this important corner and also simultaneously identifies the location of the main entrance to the PBSA block and communal facilities which activate the facades of the ground floor below.
- 2.4 A similar approach has been deployed at the eastern corner of the co-living block thereby providing a gateway condition to the landscape space and path that runs between the two blocks. This is 'answered' by a single gable on the opposite side of this gap. The idea of informally aligning the gap with College Road on the opposite side of Heavitree Road (see p.22 of the Addendum DAS) does not seem to have been carried through into the final version of the proposals, which is unfortunate, but results from the new balance in quantum between the two types of accommodation.
- 2.5 In addition to the form and bulk, the 'building line' relative to Heavitree Road has been a key subject of discussion and revision. The current proposals allow for a 'set back' from the pavement edge that (at a minimum of 14.5m) now allows street-side trees and planting to be included. The current landscape character of the street will certainly change but can be retained to a greater extent through the inclusion of 6 existing trees – although much of this frontage would again have to be re-worked if and when long-term ambitions for a dedicated bus lane along Heavitree Road are implemented.
- 2.6 The building line also now 'modulates' – with the facade stepping further back for portions of the Heavitree Road frontage in an attempt to further break up the mass and reduce the apparent scale here.

### **3 *Character and Identity***

- 3.1 The architectural language is based on brick, as a familiar material within the Exeter context, with metal clad dormer features set within a standing seam metal roof as an edge 'mansard' condition. The main roofs are otherwise generally flat (planted or 'green' with some PV solar collectors) and are relatively understated, except where these have been deliberately articulated as part of the gabled forms.
- 3.2 The two components of the development each provide variants within a generally consistent approach and this is welcomed since the scale and length of the Heavitree Road frontage may otherwise appear somewhat unrelenting and monotonous. Different brick specifications subtly adjust the colour/appearance and particular textural and constructional details are deployed specifically to provide a slightly different character to the

façades of each block. The result produces a satisfactory compositional balance - achieving an overall coherence and yet this is balanced with sufficient localised variety to provide visual interest along the street / within the townscape.

- 3.3 The project has been modelled and represented in a number of three-dimensional perspective views. The key image View 20 (see extract below) is considered to be generally satisfactory, although the area of vertical glazing between the two main gables of the Heavitree Road front at the corner of Gladstone Road seems to introduce an incongruous character and the substantial infill appears to weaken or conflict with the idea of presenting conventional gables here. A condition requesting detailed drawings of this element would be a useful request in order to allow further consideration of the appearance here.



## Landscape

### 4 *General Approach*

4.1 Whilst Landscape is a Reserved Matter, the particular spaces that have begun to be illustrated in more detail as part of the current submission are satisfactory in principle at this stage. This includes outline ideas for the courtyard gardens, the frontage spaces to both streets and the landscape route between the two blocks.

4.2 Greater clarity about the landscape character being attempted around the northern and western periphery of the site is needed and the design and placement of ancillary structures (sub-stations and stores) will need further

consideration as components of the landscape design at Reserved Matters stage. Further tree planting along the northern side of the site should be explored – possibly detailed here as more urban ‘street trees’?

- 4.3 The area that forms the rear service zone for deliveries/drop off; provides access to the cycle storage; and, links with the route between the blocks is an important (largely hard-landscaped) space that may benefit from having a distinct ‘sub-character’. External lighting design will be important across the whole site, but may be especially significant here.

## **Residential Amenity**

### **5 *Light, Space, Privacy and Facilities***

- 5.1 Each of the two components of the project rely on a ‘courtyard’ typology in achieving the intensities of development proposed. Earlier iterations of the designs included internal courts of unsuitable proportions. This gave rise to concerns about lack of natural light and privacy within the courts. In addition, and simply, the amount of external space that is private and available to residents was quite limited. The revised proposals have improved the situation in a number of ways:
- reduction in the height some parts of the accommodation enclosing the courts
  - removal of a set of rooms (as an additional wing) that sub-divided the space available within the PBSA block
- 5.2 The reduced heights now proposed for the enclosing wings of accommodation are expected to provide adequate daylight, but sunlight is not available to all rooms. North-facing single aspect accommodation is, of course, the least satisfactory, although reflected sunlight will be visible as it strikes the south, west and east facing internal facades at different times of the day, throughout the year. The material finish of the internal walls of the courts could be another useful condition attached to any approval requesting detailed drawings and specification for this walling - rather than deploy the same brickwork chosen for the exterior, a more reflective and lighter finish might be specified. Historic examples of this building typology have used a glazed brick in white or cream as a ‘tactic’, for instance.
- 5.3 The minimum face to face dimensions between units of accommodation (across the shorter width of the courts) is confirmed as:
- 16m for the PBSA block
  - 10.5m for the Co-living block (although here it is between a corridor and a residential unit)
  - 13m across the ‘green link’ between the PBSA and Co-living blocks.

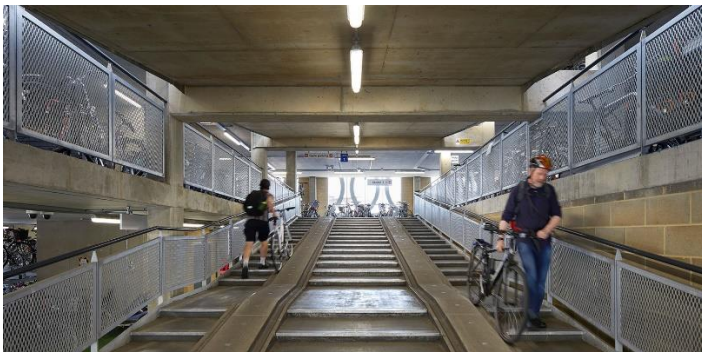
A special 'one way manifestation film/coating' is proposed to the glazing at ground and first floor levels in the co-living block where it relates directly to Upper Summerlands. The face to face dimension here is 18m at its narrowest. It is not clear why this idea is not proposed for the upper storeys. Further information/samples about this technique should be requested by a condition if this is to be pursued, however, a face to face dimension of 18m in this circumstance is not necessarily problematic. The ECC Residential Design SPD suggests that 23m is the minimum 'back to back' distance for conventional housing, but here we are in fact dealing with a 'front to front' relationship and with a line of intervening trees proposed between the building facades. The 23m standard originated more widely in planning guidance as a means for preserving the availability of daylight and sunlight to rear gardens (which do not exist here) and only later became a 'proxy' for ensuring privacy / preventing 'inter-visibility' between dwellings. The application demonstrates that the natural lighting criteria are otherwise met (using the '25 degree rule' in the BRE Site Layout and Planning for Daylight and Sunlight: A Guide to Good Practice (2011)) and inter-visibility between the front faces of buildings is not usually subject to a standard minimum dimension.

- 5.4 The line of tree planting ought to be achieved with semi-mature stock, so as to ensure an amount of visual filtering at the outset. The planting specification here will be confirmed in detail at Reserved Matters stage.
- 5.5 The amount of space available to residents as external amenity in the Co-living accommodation has increased slightly (from 0.93sqm to 1.0sqm per room) and is 0.9sqm per room in the PBSA student block. The landscape design strategy for the external 'Courtyard Garden' spaces, although only illustrative at this stage, does suggest a robust approach that would be appropriate for their role and use – which, in summertime 'heat wave' conditions (ever more-likely given climate change) could see them quite intensively occupied. Species of trees / planting that are tolerant to partial shade will need to be specified, but with careful specification and design, the green components of these spaces can provide a useful contribution to Biodiversity Net Gain.
- 5.6 The amount of internal amenity in terms of shared / common areas as part of the Co-living block has increase from 2.5sqm to 5.0sqm, which now compares with draft standards proposed by the GLA for this form of living accommodation, which states this as a minimum. The comparable figure for the PBSA block is 1.6sqm, but here residents will have access to the other facilities available to students - provided centrally by the University on their main campuses (including St Lukes on the opposite side of Heavitree Road).
- 5.7 Concern was raised in the report from the design review meeting about the long, unrelieved corridors that provide internal circulation as access to the individual rooms / units. This was perhaps most problematic in the large PBSA block. In the latest floor plans there are areas of subtle widening of the

corridor which seem to indicate 'nodes' at intervals that might with further detailed design serve to break up the internal route.

5.8 The suitability of providing bicycle storage / parking at basement level was discussed in the most-recent design review session.

5.8.1 New proposals have this now split between ground and basement in the Co-living block, with a lift providing access to the lower level, which is an adequate solution. Although improved, this still seems less than ideal as an arrangement and might still deter some residents from cycle use? A further improvement might have been to introduce a stepped ramp (see illustration of example below) that might be a stronger connection between levels and have the effect of combining them into a single volume - at least to some degree.



The cycle stores in the PBSA block are now entirely at Ground Floor level which is satisfactory.

5.8.2 Both blocks only seem to allow access to the cycle stores via external doors which are located at the rear of the blocks. The arrangement will do little to encourage their use and the possibility of direct links from the internal circulation of each block should have been considered.

## **Conclusion / Summary**

The project is ambitious in its scale, but the tactics now adopted for its form and massing satisfactorily relate it to its setting. Empirically, through the series of iterations and revisions, the project has evolved to represent what is probably the optimum density of development for this brownfield site and therefore makes best use of it. The landscape design is also well-resolved, given that further detail will be negotiated at Reserved Matters stage. The revised internal arrangements now confirm a stronger provision of shared amenity space and better availability of natural light to the accommodation arranged around the courtyard garden spaces.

Therefore, with the exceptions of the relatively minor points raised within the observations above (which might be addressed by imposing suitable conditions on any approval) the design aspects of the project are now satisfactorily resolved.

The recommended conditions are:

- Detailed design drawings at a suitable scale and specifications / samples to be submitted prior to commencement on site showing the construction materials and finishes of the glazed infill element between the roof gables at the south east corner of the site.
- Detailed design drawings at a suitable scale and specifications / samples to be submitted prior to commencement on site showing the construction materials and finishes of the internal walling enclosing the Courtyard Gardens.
- Detailed design drawings at a suitable scale and specifications / samples to be submitted prior to commencement on site showing the construction materials and finishes of the glazing system that provides the 'one way manifestation film/coating' that is proposed to parts of the western façade of the Co-living block.

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