BEDFORD ROAD DEVELOPMENT BRIEF

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Guildford Borough Council
Environmental Planning Group
Millmead House
Millmead
Guildford
GU2 4BB
01483 444664
BEDFORD ROAD DEVELOPMENT BRIEF

1. Introduction

1.1. This brief sets the parameters for the development of the Bedford Road site in central Guildford. The planning policy background to the site is explained and the appropriate uses considered. It highlights the constraints affecting the site and the objectives to be achieved by any development. The brief recommends a use and form of development for the site which would form the basis for any detailed proposals.

2.0 The Site and Surroundings

2.1. The site lies on the western edge of Guildford Town Centre and comprises 0.41 hectares (1.0 acres). Plan no.1 shows its location. The site is flat with no significant trees or landscaping. To the north, the site is bounded by the Odeon cinema and adjacent restaurant with a large area of public open space. Fay's Passage, a narrow service road, is to the east and south with the backs of development in Bedford Road. Much of this is devoted to social and leisure use. The River Wey is to the west with a number of substantial buildings in office use. The River Wey Navigation is owned by the National Trust who have a detailed Environmental Strategy for the river. The waterway, the tow path and a one metre wide strip on the east side of the river (the development site) are designated as conservation area. Any development of the site would have to respect the setting of this area. The railway station and bus station are within easy walking distance to the west and east respectively.

2.2. The site is currently occupied by 50 temporary car parking spaces, 20 garages, a brick Victorian riverside building and corrugated iron extension and the remainder of the former terrace of houses fronting Bedford Road.

2.3. There are no outstanding planning permissions affecting the site.

2.4. A footbridge across the river links the site with Walnut Tree Close and the Railway Station and University to the west. This is a major pedestrian route that needs enhancement.

3.0 Planning Policies

(i) National Planning Guidance

3.1. Key themes run through national planning guidance which are relevant.

3.2. Ensuring a good quality design that reinforces local character (PPG1 General Policy and Principles)

3.3. Ensuring the best and most efficient use of redundant and brownfield land to relieve pressure on greenfield sites (PPG1, PPG12 Development Plans and Regional Planning Guidance, PPG13 Transport)
3.4 Promoting sustainable development, with particular emphasis on reducing the need to travel by private car. Promoting energy efficient design (PPG1, PPG5 Housing, PPG4 Industrial and Commercial Development and Small Firms, PPG12, PPG13 and PPG22 Renewable Energy)

3.5 Promoting mixed use schemes, particularly in the town centre, which help create vitality and diversity and reduce the need to travel (PPG1, PPG6 and PPG13).

(i) Detailed Policy Considerations

3.6 The Surrey Structure Plan 1994 and the Guildford Borough Local Plan 1993 comprise the development plan for the area. Both of these plans are currently under review. The Local Plan Review has reached an advanced stage with a Deposit Plan produced in 1999. This Plan identifies the Bedford Road as a Town Centre Proposals Site (Policy 99GT1) and reflects the Borough Council’s current approach to planning policy. For ease of reference only policies in the Deposit Local Plan 1999 are referred to below.

3.7 Proposal 99GT1 – Land at Bedford Road Opposite the Odeon Cinema, refers to planning permission being granted for a mixture of one of the following uses: residential; hotel preferably with conference facilities; offices. Planning Committee recently agreed (Minute 572) to add uses to the list as part of Proposed Changes to the Deposit Plan, these are: retail; cultural; leisure; entertainment.

3.8 The general policies covered by Policy 99G1 are of relevance to the redevelopment of this site. Of particular relevance are:

- Policy 99G1 (6) Flood Protection. The site lies within the River Wey Flood Plain. Areas of floodplain should be safeguarded from development that would increase the risk to people or property from risk of flooding.

- Policy 99G1 (11) – Mixed Use. The Borough Council will promote a mixture of land uses on this site to add to the vitality and viability of the town centre.

3.9 Policy 99G2 Design Code relates to all development proposals which will be expected to comply with the design requirements set out in the Policy.

3.10 Policy 99G4 refers to the Borough Council’s Percent for Art scheme, which encourages the incorporation of art in major development proposals. The developer of the site will be encouraged to make provision for art, which introduces character and visual interest into the environment.

3.11 Policy G11 – The Corridor of the River Wey and the Guildford and Godalming Navigations. The site lies within this Corridor and will be expected to comply with the requirements of the Policy.

3.12 Policy 99H11 – Affordable Housing. This Policy refers to negotiations with developers on all housing developments of 15 or more dwellings, or residential sites of 0.5 hectares or more irrespective of the number of dwellings. The total site area is 0.51 hectares.

3.13 Policy 99M4 – Parking Provision in Guildford Town Centre (see para 4.4 below).
3.14 Policy 99HE12 – Development Which Affects the Setting of a Conservation Area. The Borough Council will not grant planning permission for development which would harm the setting of the Conservation Area, or views into or out of that area.

3.15 Policy 99HE14 – Areas of High Archaeological Potential. The site lies within an area of high archaeological potential. Any development will have to be accompanied by an assessment of the archaeological value of the site.

3.16 Policy 99T4 – New Hotels, Guest Houses and Other Overnight Accommodation in Urban Areas. This Policy is supportive of new hotel accommodation in urban areas subject to meeting the 4 identified criteria.

4.0 Development Factors

4.1 An analysis of the urban design character of this part of the town centre has been carried out and a more detailed analysis of the constraints and opportunities that affect the site.

Area Character

4.2 The character of this part of the town is strongly influenced by the recent growth of leisure and social facilities. These include the Electric Theatre, the bars in Bridge Street, the Bar Mambo and Drink nightclubs, the Old Orleans restaurant and bar and the Odeon cinema. A use that would be compatible with these night time leisure users would be preferable for the site. These uses have increased the night time use of the area considerably and there are considerable flows of pedestrians well into the evening. The analysis also reveals that there are distinct barriers to pedestrian movement with the river, Bridge Street and Onslow Street. In particular there is an important link between the town centre and the railway station, university and the west part of the town that passes through the site. Consideration should be given to improving these pedestrian routes as part of any development. The site also has a poor relationship with the river and there is scope to exploit this potential more fully.

Site Constraints

4.3 River Wey Flood Plain - the site lies within the flood plain and development must not exacerbate flooding or put additional people or property at risk. Any redevelopment proposals will need to demonstrate that the existing flood water storage and flow capacity across the site are at least maintained to the equivalent 1968 flood flow level. Development could be raised above the flood water level of 32.46 AOD (N), which means that the level of usable floorspace would be approximately 1 metre above existing ground level. The Environment Agency would not normally support residential development within the flood plain, even though the site has been in residential use previously. Any proposals for residential use would need to satisfy the Environment Agency’s detailed requirements.

4.4 The Environment Agency requires a maintenance buffer zone of at least 8 metres adjacent to the river, which should be kept clear of new buildings but could be landscaped and planted.
4.5 Parking - the immediate proximity of the Bedford Road multi-storey car park, together with the railway and bus stations, provides a substantial amount of car parking and access to alternative modes of transport. Parking will be limited to disabled and operational parking and for servicing facilities clear of the highway for non-residential uses. Any such provision should be located away from the River Wey frontage. For residential development a maximum of one space per unit would be allowed. All servicing should be from Fay’s Passage.

4.6 Existing Buildings - there are no significant buildings on the site with the exception of the Victorian brick building, currently in use as a Auction Room. While it has little inherent architectural value, it has an important urban design function in the context of the site and it should be retained within any overall development. The corrugated metal side extension is of no architectural interest and could be removed from the site. There may be scope to replace it with a more sympathetic glazed structure.

4.7 Archaeology - The site lies within an area of high archaeological potential. Any development will have to be accompanied by an assessment of the archaeological value of the site. The National Trust have undertaken an archaeological survey of the Wey Navigation and this should be consulted as part of any assessment.

Site Opportunities

4.3 The site has the potential to form an important part of the leisure and cultural quarter that has grown up in this part of the town. As such, a hotel use would be particularly appropriate for the site and would co-exist happily with many of the surrounding uses. In urban design terms the site has the potential to complete the large public space to the front of the Odeon and to create a much more satisfactory experience for people using this space. It is important that any development addresses this issue and the elevation of any building that fronts onto this space needs to be of an appropriate scale and suitably animated and detailed to contribute positively. The urban design analysis has indicated that a 3 or 4 storey hotel on a raised undercroft may be an appropriate scale for a hotel. It may be appropriate for any 4 storey building to step down to 3 storeys by the river frontage so as to reflect the scale of other buildings along the river. Further analysis will be required at the detailed design stage to determine the acceptable height of any proposal. There may also be scope to remodel the square to the front of the Odeon so as to provide a more satisfactory space for people using these major leisure uses. In particular, the opportunity needs to be taken to try to open the space up to the riverside landscaping, so as to integrate the space with the river in a more satisfactory way. A review of lighting in the square and the river’s edge may help to provide a better night time ambience and increase safety and security at the same time.

4.9 Any building should address the river and provide an attractive backdrop to river views, particularly from the busy Onslow Bridge to the south and the towpath to the west. A landscaped area, which should have full public access, should be provided between any building and the river. Detailed design of any building should allow for informal surveillance of the riverside open space. Servicing and vehicle access should be provided from Faya’s Passage which currently acts as a service road to the existing properties on Bridge Street.
4.10 The existing brick building, currently occupied by Clarke Gammon Auctioneers, is an attractive Victorian building that has an important urban design function in terminating the view down Bedford Road. It also provides a landmark on the river edge and helps to “announce” the site to river users. The building has potential for conversion and re-use, possibly as a restaurant or bar linked to any hotel use. As the building lies partly within the river exclusion zone, no other building would be likely to be permitted on this part of the site. As such, the building provides a unique opportunity to achieve a built form right on the edge of the river. It may be possible to extend it with some form of glazed “conservatory” to maximize the opportunity for river views. The corrugated iron extension that currently exists has no character and could be considered an eyesore - it should be removed as part of any development.

4.11 There is scope to maximize the site’s frontage to the river by adjusting the site boundary via a land swap with the adjoining owner to the south. This may well be to the mutual advantage of both parties as it would provide the adjacent landowner with a more satisfactory car park layout.

4.12 A number of key pedestrian routes cross the site. In particular, there is the opportunity to extend the riverside walk along the front of the site and beyond to link up with Bridge Street by Onslow Bridge. This will require negotiation with the adjacent landowners to the south, but in physical terms there would appear to be no insurmountable problem in achieving this important link.

4.13 There is an important east-west pedestrian route that crosses in front of the site and links the town centre to the railway station, the University and the other development on the west side of the river. There is scope to improve the attractiveness of this route by reconfiguring the public square and, in particular, by exploring the possibility of replacing the current footbridge over the river. This is of a utilitarian design and does little to enhance the river or its setting. More importantly, however, the alignment of the bridge ramp on the east side of the river cuts the urban square outside the Odeon off from the riverside walkway to the detriment of both spaces. A redesign of the bridge and, in particular, the ramped access would greatly help to create a proper integrated urban space around these key town centre uses. There is also scope for improving access to the site from Bridge Street via The Quadrant and this should be explored as an option for any development of the site.

4.14 In summary, the key opportunities to be exploited on the site are:

- to create a positive riverside open space and pedestrian route
- to link the riverside walk into Bridge Street
- to create a built form of a scale and height that is capable of enclosing the square
- to ensure that ground floor design and uses animate and positively contribute to the square
- to create a focus of activity in the area and to help integrate the Odeon into the Bridge Street leisure and culture zone.
- to create a positive and usable open space and built edge to the river frontage.
to provide servicing and operational parking accessed from Fay's Passage

- to consider redesigning the square to make a more positive contribution to the area

- to consider redesigning the pedestrian footbridge to allow for better integration of the square with the riverside, to improve pedestrian links and provide a more attractive structure

- to consider adjustment of the site boundary to improve the river frontage.

5.0 Site Uses

5.1 All of the uses included in Policy 99GT1 of the Deposit Local Plan are considered acceptable. These include: residential; hotel preferably with conference facilities; offices; retail; cultural; leisure; entertainment.

6.0 Townscape and Design

6.1 A number of options have been looked at for the form of building that may be appropriate to the development of this site. It is considered that the most likely form of development would be for a 3 or 4 storey building fronting onto the main square and involving the re-landscaping and re-modelling of that square. The pedestrian footbridge and its landing ramp should also be re-designed to fully exploit the urban design opportunities of the riverside setting. The building would also have to relate well to the riverside setting and there would need to be an area of public open space to the river's edge. The building and site development would need to address the site opportunities listed above.

6.2 It is not considered necessary or desirable to dictate any particular architectural style for the new buildings. Any building will be required to be of a high design standard, utilizing high quality and durable materials and respecting the form, scale and architectural character of the area. The building will be expected to have a quality which will contribute positively to the regeneration of this major town centre site.
BEDFORD ROAD - DEVELOPMENT OPTION

A - 3 - 4 Storey Building to Front onto new Square and River
B - Retain Existing Victorian Building
C - Remodel Pedestrian Square
D - Extend Riverside Walk to Bridge Street
E - Servicing from Fay's Passage
F - Possible Link Through to Bridge Street
G - Reconfigure or Replace Footbridge to ease Pedestrian flow across the site