

Application 12/00474/FUL SCC City Design comments

Proposal

Full permission sought for Phase 3 of the Centenary Quay development with a mixed residential and employment use comprising 329 residential units (102 x one bedroom, 178 x two bedroom and 49 x three bedroom units), a food store (Class A1 - 5,500 square metres), commercial space (Classes A1/A2/A3/A4 or B1 - 1,685 sq. m) and a management suite (84 sq. m) in buildings ranging in height from four-storeys to twelve-storeys with associated basement car parking and cycle parking, landscaped public and private open spaces, servicing and other works including junction improvements and temporary access to the rivers edge. (Environmental Impact Assessment Development).

Relevant policies/guidance

Local Plan Review 2006 SDP 1, 6, 7, 8 and 9, Core Strategy 2010 CS 1, 5 and 13, Residential Design Guide 2006, CABE/EH's Tall Buildings Guidance 2007, Skyline Strategy (officer guidance) 2006 and draft Centenary Quay Design Code July 2008.

Summary

The proposed scheme is of high quality, with a distinctive architecture and public realm, that builds on the successful development of a new identity for Woolston in Phases 1 and 2. It will create a new and unique sense of place for the district centre, reinvigorate it, actively encouraging pedestrians to move through the high street and earlier phases towards future phases on the waterfront, whilst remaining true to the original concepts set out in the 2008 outline consented scheme Design Code for the Masterplan.

The developer, their planning consultants and their architects have worked hard with officers taking on board design advice in a number of areas, resulting in a well thought out scheme, where the scale and appearance of the proposals have been improved considerably; this includes continuing the simple restricted palette of materials, colours and details, evolved in Phases 1 and 2. The architectural identity of each block has been strengthening along with the identity of the residential entrances/vertical circulation through the use of different materials to the rest of the development.

Amount, use, access and layout

As raised in consideration of the reserved matters for phase 2 (11/01923/REM) a key issue from an urban design perspective is whether the relocation of the proposed food store and other uses proposed in the outline consent for Phase 2 to Phase 3 and vice versa is detrimental to the masterplan concept. The reserved matters application conditional approval for Phase 2 on 13 March 2012 accepted the relocation of the library and nursery closer to the high street. It was originally proposed in the 2008 outline consent that Phase 2 would provide and a food store of 4,320sqm GEA (Gross External Floorspace Area) as well as commercial uses of 1828 sq m, however the food store is now proposed at 5,500 sq m in Phase 3 along with commercial space of 1685 sq m. The provision of residential units in this phase has increased significantly (compared with those detailed in the revisions to the

Environmental Statement 25 July 2008) with an increase from 262 to 329 residential units, with increases in the numbers of 1 and 2 bed and a reduction in 3 bed units, all of which are flats. The density at 123 dwellings per hectare is very dense however the resultant design demonstrates that high quality architecture, public realm and amenity spaces can also be achieved, in this highly accessible location, where decent privacy distances are also achieved.

The relocation of the food store from Phase 2 to this phase fundamentally changes the use mix, the provision of private amenity space between and the access to the underground car park provided in Phase 3. This latter design issue is a considerable improvement as vehicles will now be directed into the car park before they meet the public space (the access route previously crossed the public space created between the Upper Square and the Lower Square by the waterfront), so conflict with pedestrians is reduced (and resolves a major concern held at outline stage).

The location of the food store also creates a much greater critical mass of retail/commercial uses further into the development site which will help increase footfall and therefore contributes to improving the vitality and viability of these uses as well as for future plans to include further commercial uses around the waterfront in future phases (block K1 - phase 3A and tower J1 - phase 4). However there is concern that this location might draw footfall away from the high street, but on balance it is thought that the relocation will help increase the attractiveness of the site to potential residents and in the long term help sustain the wider regeneration of Woolston.

The most significant change from the 2008 outline consented scheme to the public realm is the loss of ground level pedestrian access from the Upper Square to the semi-public courtyard linear green space between blocks J2/3 and J5/6. However as the entrance to the public/residential car park is now proposed below block K4, there is no longer a conflict between cars and pedestrians crossing from the Upper Square to the Lower one which on balance is much preferable. In the 2008 outline consented scheme the food store had a service yard entrance located next to the pub on Victoria Road; this is now located on John Thorneycroft Road is a location which will be visible to more household due to the increased density of development in this location and will be particularly visible to residents in the 5 storey apartment block C4 5 and 6.

The design principles of the masterplan that determined the form and layout of the elliptical Upper Square remain, being of a similar size and maintaining a view corridor from Weston Grove Road through the site to the River Itchen. The northern entrance to the square is slightly realigned to form a more direct relationship with the new John Thorneycroft Road and the view through to block J5/6 is maintained, albeit not a ground level). Focal points and landmark elements required to improve the legibility of the development as outlined in the Design Code are established at the north end of K5 and with the taller element of K2, whilst the provision of the food store shifts the emphasis of the 'landmark' from J3 towards J2, and these work well in this respect. The skyline profile of the proposed development is also in keeping with the general principles set out in the Design Code, with the views into the development being very similar to those anticipated in the early artists impressions and the provision of set backs to the upper most storeys of blocks J2, J3 and J5 in keeping with the wharfside architectural typology.

Entrances to apartments are made legible with the colour coded vertical circulation towers. Entrances to the retail stores activate the Upper Square with corner ones benefitting from triple aspects - **conditions should control the use of vinyl's etc to ensure that the active frontages are maintained where possible.** The entrance to the food store is also highly legible from inside the square as well as from the High Street and John Thorneycroft Road, and the location of the in store cafe activates the eastern entrance into the square.

Thought has gone into the planning of the layout with apartments on the north side of the blocks in blocks K3 and K4/5 designed with living spaces as dual aspect. Blocks J2 and J5 have one side facing north-east, however some dual aspect apartments have been introduced and end flats benefit from dual aspect living spaces. There are some good sized feature balconies to the 3 bed apartments on the west end of blocks J2 and J5, and corners of K2 and J3, **however the intermediate balconies look quite small given the potential occupancy of some of the 2 bed apartments. Is there a shared amenity terrace on level 6 of J3?** Level 8 of K2 also has a good sized shared amenity space.

The public realm itself remains true to the original concept for an Upper and Lower Square leading to continuous access to the waterfront with ample terraces from which to view the river. Both square provide ample opportunity for pedestrian movement, pavement cafes and other street activity to develop. The flight of steps linking the two spaces provides opportunity to linger and sit looking out onto the river whilst the lift access provides for those less able. **A cycle gutter should be provided to the steps to allow cycles to be easily moved between the two spaces.** The provision of a taxi rank to the west of K2 provides close access whilst not conflicting with pedestrian flow between the two spaces.

Inevitably tall buildings will shade the public realm at times through out the day, as demonstrated by the daylight and sunlight analysis diagrams. However the masterplan has given people a choice of open spaces to go to depending on the weather and time of the day. The Upper Square, in particular benefits from good sunlight penetration during the summer months from mid morning to the evening.

A wind tunnel testing microclimate study has been carried out for both the intermediary development (without the impact of future phases considered) and for the completed development (including future phases as currently proposed). In the latter case the scheme as proposed requires some mitigation to reduce wind speeds particularly around the entrances to K2, K4 and J3, the elevator entrance at Upper Square level, proposed outdoor dining areas on the western edge of the development, the eastern end of the raised podium private community amenity space and some of the public realm areas. Proposed mitigation includes trees and shrubs, porous screens and free standing canopies. **Clarification as to what mitigation measures have been included in the scheme is required.**

Scale

The height of the proposed development in overall terms is lower than the 2008 outline consented scheme, the scale of the elevations are similar but due to the overall lower heights the visual impact is slightly less. The only exception to this is block K5 which now is part 4 storeys high rising to 7 storeys where it abuts the 9 storeys of block K4. The blocks now have the following storey heights K2 - 12, K4 - 9,

K5 - 4-7, K3 - 5, J2/3 - 7-8, J5/6 - 7 (previously K2 -13, K4 -8, K5 - 4, K3 - 7, J2/3 - 9 and J5/6 - 8). Block K2 is over 14 m lower whilst other blocks are roughly 1 to 2 metres lower and storey heights also 1 to 2 storeys lower. Despite the slight decrease in height this does not appreciably affect the relationships between the proposed future phases of the development, such as block K1 - 9 -11storeys and tower J1 - 25 storeys.

Appearance

The development team have worked hard with officers to rationalise and simplify early designs at the pre-application stage, with meetings held on 1 November 2011, 30 of January, 6 and 20 February to discuss refinements to the design. The result is a high quality architecture with a strong rational, simple elevational treatment whilst giving each block its own identity through subtle changes in detailing, such as to the balcony design and use of 'hit and miss' fenestration patterns on block K3. Elevational treatment to the facades facing the Upper Square bring a human scale to street level, whilst the long elevations of J2 and J5 are articulated to break down their mass without becoming too fussy in their detailing, whilst creating a scale of wharf style architecture fitting of this waterside location. The common theme of colour clad vertical stair towers used in Phase 2 continues in Phase 3, adding interest and identity to each of these blocks. **However, although I think the striking vertical coloured elements of K2/4 work very well, I am not totally convinced by the use of colour to the end facades of J2 and J5 due to the conflict with the balcony structures.**

The food store plan and elevations have evolved with the store's own architects working with the developer's architects to ensure that the design fully integrates with the aspirations for the rest of the development. The deep brick facade that frames the curtain walled facade complete with a distinctive 'V' shaped steel framed support for a horizontal canopy gives a solidity to the design, making a visually distinct 'plinth' on which the residential block J2 sits, set back from the food stores main facade. The use of coloured glass panels brings a welcomed splash of vibrancy to the facade.

There is a substantial use of brickwork which gives the scheme a feeling of quality, solidity and longevity; **however the extensive use of white render is of concern with respect to its weathering characteristics in such an exposed location.**

I have a small number of concerns about the elevational design that should be addressed:

- the side elevation to block K3 is quite prominent when viewed when approaching from the High Street, yet is treated very simply and would benefit from more articulation of the fenestration;
- the change from brick to render on the east elevation of block K4/5 would benefit from a brick string course rather than an abrupt change from one material to another;
- the vertically linked balconies to the west face of block K3 look visually quite heavy; could these be further articulated?
- the delivery yard door and ventilation grille above at nearly 3 storeys high and the same wide is a significant and rather ugly feature on the street; could anything be done to improve this by reducing the size or through the use of public art?

There is some mention of public art provision on the west elevation of J5, though it is not clear what the proposed strategy is for this across the site and in the public spaces in particular. Provision must be fully integrated with the strategy that has been produced in draft. More discussions are necessary to ensure that this meets its full potential by keeping alive memories of the old ship building yards whilst looking forward to a new future for Woolston.