

From: [Curley, Jane](#)
To: [Planning Comments \(SMDC\)](#)
Subject: FW: SMD/2021/0536 - Land at Barnfields Ind Est, Sunnyhills Road, Leek - further comments on amended plans
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Jane Curley (Mrs)
Senior Planning Officer (Majors & Commercial)

From: Steve Massey <>
Sent: 24 November 2022 14:11
To: Curley, Jane <>
Subject: SMD/2021/0536 - Land at Barnfields Ind Est, Sunnyhills Road, Leek - further comments on amended plans

Jane

Please find below further comments on this application following receipt of amended plans, and specifically with regard to the following revised plans:

21039/01 Rev G – proposed site layout
21039/03 Rev C – boundary treatment layout
21039/04 Rev B – boundary treatment details
21039/05 Rev B – illustrative street scenes
UG_1145_LAN_GA_DRW_01 P12 – landscaping general arrangement plan
UG_1145_LAN_HL_DRW_03 P10 – hard landscaping
UG_1145_LAN_SL_DRW_04 P08 – soft landscaping (1 of 3: western area)
UG_1145_LAN_SL_DRW_05 P08 – soft landscaping (2 of 3: central area)
UG_1145_LAN_SL_DRW_06 P07 – soft landscaping (3 of 3: eastern area)

1. It is noted that the scale bars for the Western, Central and Eastern Soft Landscaping Proposals plans are grossly inaccurate, and should not be used (for instance, the length of a detached single garage scales off at approx. 16m long if the scale bars as currently shown are used). Obviously just an accidental editing/draughting error, and I very much doubt that these scale bars have been actively used to design the landscaping layout or calculate planting areas and densities.
2. The cul-de-sac and parking bays fronting Plots 131 – 140 would comprise a hard urban environment heavily dominated by hard surfacing, walls, dwellings and parked vehicles, with little spatial opportunity (or proposed provision) for planting to soften and break up the streetscene. Three new trees (with ground cover underplanting) are shown in the soft landscape scheme within this long and otherwise continuous run of parking bays – these trees could succeed, but they would need to be put into properly specified and constructed planting pits suitable for hard-paved areas to stand a reasonable chance of successfully establishing and growing. I would suggest the proposed ACE GRI (*Acer*

griseum, Paperbark Maple) would be inappropriate for this location as it is typically of low-branching, multi-stemmed, spreading form unsuitable for a narrow space between parking bays, and fastigate-form species should be used instead. Could additional tree and shrub planting bays be created by changing the parking for Plots 131 and 140 to tandem spaces as opposed to side-by-side bays (as these plots have wider gardens which could perhaps stand some loss of garden area to accommodate intruding tandem parking?). Also, other positions for tree planting to contribute to streetscene greening along this cul-de-sac should be taken – eg SE corner of rear garden Plot 122; SW corner rear garden Plot 123; SE corner front garden Plot 123; SW corner front garden Plot 130.

3. Restaurant/café: proposed landscape treatment to both the parking area at the north and the paved outdoor seating/eating area to the south comprises ornamental evergreen hedging to most boundaries, with colourful mixed herbaceous perennial beds behind also including a good few trees; this would create a pleasant and attractive immediate surrounding for this element of the scheme. It will unfortunately still be adjacent to the turning circle (often used/occupied by commercial and HGV traffic) and opposite the scrapyards, and in relation to this it is not clear whether the proposed hedging is intended to continue along the south-west (turning circle) boundary of the café site – if not, it should, and I would also request that another couple of new trees are also added along this stretch of boundary, all to further filter/screen the visual intrusion of the scrapyards and turning circle vehicles on the café outdoor space.
4. Removal of on-plot frontage parking to Plots 62 – 68 and 80 – 87 is a definite improvement to the setting of the canal mooring basin, as is the revision to house types giving something of an “urban waterfront” character as opposed to standard suburban estate as previously. Spatial opportunity for landscaping is very limited, with short on-plot frontages having low evergreen hedging enclosing herbaceous planting and a few specimen shrubs, but this in itself need not be considered an issue if the architectural treatment is good enough to create a distinctive and high quality character which relates well to the canal basin.
5. To this end it remains disappointing that the canal basin is still shown to be fenced off, suggesting that it is not being viewed as public realm having any relationship with the development site, and this will serve as visual, functional and psychological barrier between the canal and the development – surely these elements should be designed to interact and enhance each other? I appreciate that design/layout of the canal basin does not form part of this application, but the indicative basin layout suggests very little spatial opportunity for public realm landscaping. Again this need not necessarily be reliant on substantial greenery and planting – good quality paving, bollards, some seating, and perhaps a few appropriate trees within the paved areas (and without the perimeter security fencing!) could be used to create an attractive waterfront public realm area which could work well with the dwellings opposite.
6. Eastern boundary adjacent to railway: rear (eastern) boundaries to Plots 127 – 130 and 152 - 154 would include a line of new trees inside their timber close boarded fences; these trees are proposed at the far end of the garden from the houses and so would have sufficient space to establish and grow, and would provide some additional filtering/screening of railway activity in conjunction with any retained within the railway

land beyond the garden fences. Residents could subsequently reinforce this with their own additional planting if/as they wish. Alongside Plot 131, the line of new trees continues with native shrub underplanting, within a landscape buffer strip a few metres wide which would be sufficient for this planting to establish.

7. The landscaping scheme for the development includes tree planting to a number of plot frontages to provide streetscene greening to the main route and side streets, along with enclosing ornamental evergreen low hedging and beds of mixed low shrubs. However, in many cases the frontages are so short that trees would be planted within 2 – 3 metres of the dwellings' front elevations; even for the fastigate (narrow upright form) species specified in some cases here, this would be inappropriately restricted, but quite a few of the trees specified in these locations are naturally tall, wide spreading, large trees at maturity (eg ALN GLU, Common Alder, and LIQ STY, Sweet Gum). This arrangement will not work, and any such trees planted are likely to be pulled out, cut down or heavily lopped within a few years of planting as they will very quickly outgrow the extremely small space available leading to shading, overbearing effect, direct crown encroachment onto buildings and fear of root damage to foundations. This layout generally does not provide sufficient space for meaningful streetscene tree planting.
8. There is a narrow strip of low evergreen shrub planting proposed along the top of the T-shaped turning head between Plots 126 and 127 which would soften/screen the lower part of the close boarded fence along this boundary (c. 1m wide planting bed shown on plan, in practice will be a bit narrower allowing for edge support/haunching for the carriageway. This could be improved by the addition of some climbers (with suitable climbing wires/trellis netting if required) or it may be possible to squeeze in a few smaller species fastigate trees against the fence. On the other side of this same fence, between Plots 151 and 154, there is no space allowed or available for any planting against the fence in the cul-de-sac/shared drive head.
9. Within the country park, to the south of Plots 8 – 24, is a wide (c.25 – 30m) wooded/scrubby planting belt, also incorporating a semi-silted up/overgrown pond. There is no formal access within this belt, and as far as I am aware also little or no informal access. The stone path through the country park meadow, from the car park to the canal terminus, is generally set back some 10m to 25m max away from the southern edge of this country park planting belt, and therefore some 35 – 55m away from the application site boundary. This path is generally the closest that most country park users will seek to get to the development site whilst they are in this meadow itself, and the intervening woodland/scrub belt would provide some quite effective existing screening of the proposed development (less so in winter, and less so in particular around the pond/marsh area where there relatively fewer trees/shrubs – this is also the length of the application site boundary where a retaining structure is indicated). Potentially, interlocking crib walls can accommodate planting (or become self-set by colonising vegetation) but typically this tends to be trailing groundcover/climbers/tall ruderal herbaceous plants rather than trees/large native shrubs – but even this would be more attractive/softer than the existing concrete circle-section boundary wall along this stretch. If the top of the crib wall is backfilled with soil rather than pure aggregate, and the railings and close boarded fences are set back into the site away from the top edge of the crib wall, there may be sufficient strip to accommodate some native shrub/hedge planting. An alternative may be for the

developer to fund additional planting within the country park planting belt along the base of the crib wall, although this would need to be discussed and agreed with the site management team of the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust who now maintains the country park on behalf of SMDC. The best means of planting/screening may well be more easily defined/agreed once we have detailed section drawings through this boundary and construction specification/plans for the crib wall. Further along, at the southern boundaries of plots 17 – 24, the planting plans show proposed new Beech hedging inside post and wire stockproof fencing (i.e. hedge planting within plot gardens); given the location immediately adjacent to the country park woodland/scrub belt, this would preferably be a mixed native species hedge. There are also pros and cons of planting the hedge inside a garden boundary fence: on the plus side it is more obvious who is responsible for each stretch of hedge (i.e. individual plot owners) and the hedge would be more accessible for maintenance; on the minus side some occupiers may be tempted to remove their stretch of hedge to avoid maintenance and gain extra garden area, and a planning condition requiring permanent retention of the hedge within individual private gardens may in practice be difficult to monitor and enforce. The hedge (if retained) inside the garden fence would grow through the wire netting and soon appear as simply a hedge from the country park side, but if residents chose to replace the post and wire fence with 2m close boarded, the hedge would provide no visual screening from external viewpoints and would then become more likely to be removed as “redundant”. A hedge outside the post and wire fence would be more likely to be simply trimmed back to the fenceline, and if a timber boarded fence was erected as replacement for the post and wire the hedge would remain outside to screen it – but ownership responsibility for the hedge would inevitably become ambiguous and access for its maintenance would be more difficult.

10. As far as I am aware permeable coloured asphalt is available.
11. The existing tree belt to Sunnyhills Road could cope with some new pedestrian links being created through it at a few locations to suit the development site layout and pedestrian permeability options, subject to specific details being submitted and approved for location and construction specification with particular regard to ground levels, in order to avoid excavation within rootzones of retained trees. The obvious locations are leading off one/two/three/all of the culs-de-sac terminating at the northern boundary of the site. The proposed landscape treatment to this existing tree belt is to underplant with a native shrub mix, which is appropriate, and this could be readily adapted locally to suit any new pedestrian access links created.
12. The layout still appears not to have taken the opportunity to create active pedestrian links into the country park. Possibilities are from the cul-de-sac end between Plots 8 and 12, and from the open space area surrounding the enclosed play area. It is acknowledged that there are some more notable ground level differences along this boundary between the application site and the country park (hence the proposed retaining structure) which would make pedestrian access links more complex to minimise damage/disruption within the country park whilst ideally providing appropriate full accessibility standards, but this should be looked at – again involving specific consultation with the site management team of the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust.
13. There appear to be no boundary treatment proposals for the length of the southern

boundary of the application site opposite Plots 80 – 87 and 104 – 109 (i.e. between the Barnfield Road turning circle and the canal basin); the presumption is that the existing industrial character steel palisade security fence would simply be retained. This seems a missed opportunity to remove this eyesore fence and re-think the landscape treatment along this boundary, both to enhance the development itself and to secure improvement of the environment quality/safety of the adjacent narrowly-enclosed, well used public footpath leading to the canal. I appreciate there is no doubt a design aim to maximise screening and division in order to reduce the visual (and sound) impact of the scrapyards, but there is nevertheless the chance to link the public footpath with the development, both visually and functionally, to improve pedestrian permeability between the development and its surroundings, and to make the footpath more attractive and less intimidating to users. This could even involve re-aligning the public footpath to within the development site and correspondingly relocating some screen planting to the existing line of the footpath, obviously subject to landowner consents and statutory public rights of way procedures.

14. In a similar vein, are there any proposals to remove the existing concrete post/chainlink fence along the northern (Sunnyhills Road) boundary of the application site, which is again of a rather dour and unattractive utilitarian industrial character. This proposal provides an opportune vehicle to consider removing the existing fence which, in conjunction with the proposed new underplanting to supplement the existing planting belt, would bring about site and setting enhancements and potentially increase the attractiveness of the locality and character of the development to prospective purchasers. Possibly a physical boundary enclosure/demarcation feature of any sort would not be required along this edge of the site; alternatively, a more attractive fence in keeping with the character of a quality residential development regeneration scheme could be provided eg 1.2m hoop-top railings, with suitable gaps and/or gates for any new pedestrian links created.

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