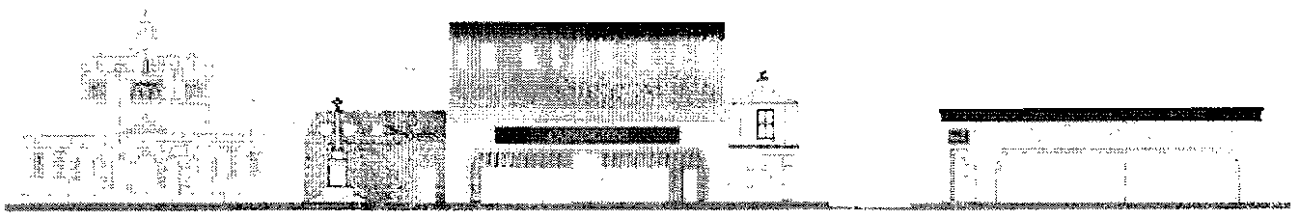
MBLA Architects+Urbanists

Design & Access Statement

Proposed Development at 684-690 Wilmslow Road Didsbury

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Introduction

The purpose of this statement is to describe the proposed partial demolition and reconstruction of the current premises at 684-690 Wilmslow Road, Didsbury. The current premises is 50% occupied by Carrington Wines whilst the adjacent unit at 686 Wilmslow Road is currently vacant.

The building is one of two identical constructions fronting Wilmslow Road, the other being at 678 to 680 Wilmslow Road to the north of Norgate Street. These two facades fronting Wilmslow Road defy architectural classification in that they are an eclectic mix of Art Nouveau and Neo Egyptian in nature. When commissioned to develop proposals for 684-690 Wilmslow Road, MBLA contemplated the demolition of this building but, felt that the site could be adequately developed without loss of potential accommodation, and that the retention of the primary façade would be architecturally sympathetic and appropriate given the somewhat unorthodox pairing of the two adjacent buildings.

MBLA are very conversant with the architecture and vernacular of both Didsbury and Withington and have recently been granted planning permission for two other proposals on Wilmslow Road, with sympathetic yet contemporary proposals. These two developments are the Pleasure Bar site in Withington village and the redevelopment of Binswood and its grounds near to Lapwing Lane. Both of these proposals were granted planning approval in the last 12 months.

The Site and Surroundings

The site is clearly a sensitive one in that it is on the eastern edge of Blackburn Park conservation area, adjacent to the Didsbury War Memorial, Public Library and Clock Tower.

Much development has taken place over the past 5 to 10 years with the construction of both a supermarket and restaurant / bar complex in its immediate vicinity. The current premises have been altered throughout its life and are at the moment made up of two distinct commercial units. These units are both serviced from a shared space to the rear of The Station Public House and the terraced dwellings fronting Norgate Street. It is intended that this shared access remains as the service point for the proposed commercial unit and associated apartments.

Design Policy and Guidance

- This section deals with the scheme and how it relates to Design Policy and Guidance. The relationship of the redevelopment scheme to national and local Planning policy is dealt with separately in the accompanying Planning Statement.

1.1 By Design (DETR/CABE)

It is now a requirement of PPS1 that regard should be given to good practice set out in 'By Design'.

'By Design' highlights the fact that good design is important everywhere and the creation of successful places depends on the skills of designers and commitment from those who employ them, as well as input from the planning system. The key aspect it focuses upon includes the design of buildings and spaces, landscapes, roads and movement systems. It also ties in with both the draft PPS3 and the Urban Task Force report by seeking to enhance the quality of urban development through a move from reliance on prescriptive development standards towards a more design led approach with a positive emphasis on place making.

'By Design' states that successful streets, spaces, villages, towns and cities tend to have characteristics in common. These factors have been analysed to produce principles or objectives of good urban design. They help to remind us what should be sought to create a successful place. 'By Design' lists the objectives of urban design as follows:

- ***Character – a place with its own identity***
  Planning should promote character in townscape and landscape by responding to and reinforcing locally distinctive patterns of development, landscape and culture.

- ***Continuity and enclosure – a place where public and private spaces are clearly distinguished***
  Planning should promote continuity of street frontages and enclosure of space by development which clearly defines private and public areas.

- ***Quality of the public realm – a place with attractive and successful outdoor areas***
  Planning should promote public spaces and routes that are attractive, safe, uncluttered and work effectively for all in society, including disabled and elderly people.

- ***Ease of movement – a place that is easy to get to and move through***
  Planning should promote accessibility and local permeability by making places that connect with each other and are easy to move through, putting people before traffic and integrating land uses and transport.

- ***Legibility – a place that has a clear image and is easy to understand***
  Planning should promote legibility through development that provides recognises routes, intersections and landmarks to help people find their way around.

- ***Adaptability – a place that can change easily***
  Planning should promote adaptability through development that can respond to changing social, technological and economic conditions.

- ***Diversity – a place with variety and choice***
  Planning should promote diversity and choice through a mix of compatible developments and uses that work together to create viable places that respond to local needs.

The design of the submitted development has been conceived to take into account all the design principles laid out within the above advice.

The relevant guidance contained within PPG3 is identified in detail in the accompanying Planning Statement. With specific regard to design the following key principles have been adhered to within the design concept of this scheme.

- The promotion of sustainable patterns of development; and the reuse of previously developed land with the focus of additional housing being in existing towns and cities;
- New housing and residential environments should be well designed and should make a significant contribution to promoting urban renaissance and improving the quality of life;
- A target of 60% is set for all new housing to be built of such sites by 2008, to which the application site would contribute;
- In adopting a sequential approach in identifying housing, urban areas are given first priority.

We believe this development accords with this advice.

1.2 PPG15 – Planning & the Historic Environment

The relevant guidance contained within PPG15 is identified in detail in the accompanying Planning Statement. With specific regard to design the following key principles have been adhered to within the design concept of this scheme.

Paragraph 2.14 of PPG15 states that the design of buildings which will sit alongside historic buildings needs very careful consideration. New buildings should be carefully designed to respect their setting, follow fundamental architectural principles of scale, height, massing and alignment, and use appropriate materials. PPG15 clearly states that new buildings do not have to copy their older neighbours in detail and that the most interesting streets in our towns and villages include a variety of building styles, materials and forms of construction, of many different periods.

We believe this development accords with this advice.

Consultations

Prior to the submission on a formal planning application, MBLA have had consultations with the Manchester City Council Planning Department, The Didsbury Civic Society and The Blackburn Park Conservation Group.

The Planning Officers at the City Council felt that the retention of the primary façade to the building and the redevelopment of the site to the rear of this façade was a sensitive approach and one that would prove most acceptable, as opposed to the demolition of the whole building and the sites total redevelopment.

When presented to a joint meeting of the DCS and the BPCG, the proposal was viewed as being a good design but, not appropriate for the given site. Comments were made to the potential over development of the site and the elevation to the rear of the War Memorial was felt to be too imposing. We are somewhat dismayed that having made the gesture to meaningful consultation with The Didsbury Civic Society, they then chose to speak to the local press prior to us making this application. A number of changes have been made to the proposals to increase the articulation of the primary façade in response to comments made at this meeting

The Proposal

The distinctive form of the primary façade presents an ideal opportunity to create an architectural conversation between old and new. It would be an insult to the existing building to simply propose a timber, zinc or glass box sitting on top of it, as the façade has a unique quality.

The proposal to create a homogenous façade that runs from the pavement to the rear of the retained façade, becoming a wall and roof at first and second floor level, adds a contemporary form to the retained elevation which itself is not a light element but, heavy in terms of its construction and dimension. The new façade is proposed to be constructed of a contrasting light element being composed of glass and thin copper sheeting. Though this material is not commonly used in adjacent buildings, it is a material that was consistently part of buildings vocabulary at the time that villages such as Didsbury were developed. It was commonly used as a roofing material in harmony with stone constructions such as the adjacent library. We believe it adds to the vocabulary of the building materials in the village which reflect its historic nature yet displays a contemporary form. The copper cladding is pre-patinated.

The swept back nature of the upper floors of the building lessen the overall bulk of the upper levels of the development and create a soft, sinuous form that is intentionally in direct contrast to the orthogonal and heavy nature of the retained façade.

Accommodation

The accommodation contained within the proposal is constituted by four apartments at the new upper levels and a studio apartment at ground and first floor to the rear of the commercial unit. We have considered a larger proposal for the site which could give a greater amount of residential accommodation but, believe this scale of development would be inappropriate. We do not consider that The Didsbury Civic Society's published view of the scheme (South Manchester Reporter dated 12th October 2007) that our proposal represents over development of the site is a correct analysis. For district centers such as Didsbury, we feel it is difficult to argue that a 3 storey building could possibly be considered to be over development, such centers are only truly sustainable with reasonable densities of building. It is our contention that single storey accommodation cannot be considered to be sustainable.

The orientation of this site presents the opportunity for the upper levels of accommodation to take advantage of a somewhat unique context to the south western elevation. The shared green space gives a secluded outlook in the centre of a busy village to the elevated residential accommodation. The lounge and bedroom windows to the proposed accommodation at the upper levels associated with the external deck provide a unique amenity to the accommodation. The residential accommodation at the lower level also has distinct qualities in that it is composed of a double height space lit by glazing to its roof.

Initially we were aware that due to the site's small footprint, it was not possible to provide any parking provision for the proposal. However since our original application discussions have ensued with the Aldi supermarket adjacent and an agreement is in place (documents enclosed) that assigns four car parking spaces within the Aldi car park that can be leased to the owners of the proposed dwellings on an annual basis.

We believe that our proposals offer a number of advantages for both the site and its immediate environs.

- The proposals offer a sensitive redevelopment of the site which is currently under utilised.
- The site offers the potential for a sustainable development.
- The proposal creates distinct living accommodation in the centre of the village.
- The redeveloped site adds to the variety of available commercial retail space in the village

In conclusion, we believe our proposals to be sensitive and appropriate and that they will add to the variety and quality of much of the architecture already existing from different periods of development that give Didsbury it's urban yet green quality.