LANDSCAPE AND GREEN BELT STATEMENT

232-236 PALATINE ROAD

Second issued 28th November 2024

Prepared by
DEP Landscape Architecture Ltd
2 Commercial Street
Manchester
M15 4RQ

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report has been produced in support of a planning application for proposed residential development at 232-236 Palatine Road. The site is located on the urban edge of West Didsbury, Greater Manchester and is not within the Green Belt but adjacent to land within the Green Belt. During the pre application consultation process, concerns were raised by MCC on the initial pre-application design about the lack of buffer being retained to the Green Belt boundary and the overall impact the proposed development would have on the Green Belt.

The site is made up of three substantial 2-2.5 storey residential villas located on individual plots comprising 232, 234 and 236 Palatine Road. The villas are proposed for demolition and the sites would be collectively redeveloped to include an apartment complex fronting Palatine Road with semi-detached houses and town houses at the back set around a shared courtyard garden on a podium deck with basement car park underneath.

1.1 SITE CONTEXT

The site is located off Palatine Road and comprises three plots of land. Collectively these are fairly enclosed and sit between urban development which includes the Britannia Hotel complex to the north east and a residential apartment complex to the south. To the north west the site backs onto a car park and main vehicular access to the Britannia hotel complex. Palatine road defines the south eastern site boundary and comprises a traditional low stone wall with trees and vegetation. The streetscape is typical in character to the more established properties and developments found further along Palatine Road.

The site itself is of poor quality and provides little in the way of contributing to the wider visual amenity and landscape character other than the boundary vegetation and trees. The existing buildings are imposing and sat in large areas of hard standing which is devoid of any features or vegetation. The long gardens at the back are overgrown and unkempt. Please refer to the site photographs and birds eye view below.

Figure 1 - Site Photographs

Figure 2 - Birds Eye View of the Site - Image extracted from the Pre-application document

In the wider site context on the opposite side of Palatine Road (to the site) lies Withington Golf Club, there is a public footpath which runs through the golf course and connects to the river Mersey. There are no views from the golf course or the footpath to the site due to the surrounding trees and vegetation.

To the far west of the site on the other side of the Britannia Hotel car park lies the River Mersey and Mersey Valley and beyond that, Northenden Golf Club. There is a public footpath which follows the river Mersey but there are no views from the Mersey to the site due to the surrounding trees and vegetation.

Far south of the site, following Palatine Road lies the M60 motorway which separates Didsbury and Northenden. Palatine Road is very much suburban in character and context but the surrounding boundary trees and vegetation along the road and within the adjacent golf courses and river Mersey provide a verdant feel and sense of enclosure which helps to break up and screen views of the surrounding built form and townscape infrastructure.

Figure 3 - Wider Site Context to show the surrounding trees and vegetation

Figure 4 - Wider Site Context to show Public Rights of Way

Figure 5 - Looking down Palatine Road (site on the right hand side) - Image extracted from Google Maps

Figure 6 - Looking down the River Mersey Valley (site on the left hand side) - Image extracted from Google Maps

1.2 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The apartment complex at the front of the site is proposed to be five stories high and it set back behind the existing tree lined frontage to Palatine Road in line with the adjacent built form. The town houses and semi-detached dwellings would be set back behind this building and are 2.5 to 3 stories high. These dwellings back onto the north and south site boundaries and face into the central courtyard garden in the middle of the site. This central communal courtyard would provide shared amenity space for the residents and would also provide access to these properties. It would sit on a podium deck with a basement car park underneath. Vehicular access is provided from the far southeastern corner of the site off Palatine Road and accessible parking bays are also provided at the front of the apartment block.

Existing trees along the site boundaries are being retained or replaced. Trees which have been surveyed as dead, dying or dangerous are proposed for removal and replacement. The landscape is proposed to be reinforced with trees and vegetation to maintain a landscape buffer around the site to help contribute to the wider landscape character and visual amenity. The courtyard in the middle has been designed to provide more formalised grounds and will help create a high quality and visually pleasing environment for the residents. It will help provide opportunities for informal recreational and social interaction.

Figure 7 - Proposed Site Plan (Extract from the Landscape Plan)

2.0 GREEN BELT POLICY CONTEXT

The Green Belt boundary as illustrated on the Manchester City Council Local Development Framework Plan largely follows the extent of the River Mersey Valley which runs to the west of the site and also includes the two golf courses to the far west and east of the site, the M60 in parts and the adjacent vegetative highways embankments.

Green Belt looks to provide a protected landscape which remains open (of development) to check the unrestrictive sprawl of large built up areas. In this case the Green Belt is helping to provide a landscape buffer between the urban extents of Didsbury, West Didsbury and Chorlton to the north and the suburbs of Chorlton, Northenden and Sharston to the west. The purpose of Green Belt in preventing the merging of these areas is further reinforced by the River Mersey valley and the M60 motorway which provide both physical and visual buffers to the Green Belt boundaries and adjacent urban areas.

The Green Belt boundary is defined in the Manchester City Council Local Development Framework Plan. It largely follows the extent of the River Mersey Valley which runs to the west of the site and includes the two golf courses either side of the site, the adjacent Britannia hotel car park, the M60 in parts and the vegetative highways embankments. The site itself does not fall within the Green Belt Boundary as illustrated on Figure 8 below.

Chapter 13 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2023) relates to Protecting Green Belt land. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence. In this context the Green Belt is helping to contain the urban extents of Didsbury, West Didsbury and Chorlton to the north (in which the site is located) and the suburbs of Chorlton, Northenden and Sharston to the west.

Policy on proposals affecting the Green Belt (paragraphs 152-156) does not contain anything in relation to development on land adjacent to, but not within, the Green Belt either in terms of spatial or visual impacts. As such, there is no 'policy test' for development on such sites to meet in relation to impact on the Green Belt. Nevertheless, the remainder of this report looks to discuss the development proposals in the context of the surrounding adjacent Green Belt boundary and any perceived visual impacts the development may have on views from the Green Belt and the wider site context.

Figure 8 - Green Belt Boundary - Extracted from the Local Development Framework Plan

2.1 IMPACT ON GREEN BELT

The site itself sits outside of Green Belt as shown on figure 8, but the south east and the north western site boundaries sit adjacent to the Green Belt as defined on the Local Development Framework Plan. The boundaries to the Green Belt are important to help maintain its permanence and to provide a visual and physical buffer to help reinforce its fundamental aim to prevent urban sprawl and to keep land within the Green Belt permenantly open. Figure 8 also illustrates that a number of properties backing on to the green belt have developed up to the boundary.

The south eastern boundary of the site fronts onto Palatine road which is an established urban residential road. Its character is that of an enclosed road with established boundaries comprising in the main low stone walls and mature trees and vegetation which provide a verdant feel to the streetscape. Adjacent to the site there are open views to Britannia hotel which fronts Palatine Road. There are also views along Palatine Road of the adjacent residential villas and apartments.

The existing site boundary trees along Palatine road would look to be retained or replaced where appropriate, this boundary would also be reinforced with new trees and shrub planting in keeping with the character of the streetscape. These boundary features in addition to the existing mature trees and hedgerow vegetation along Withington golf course on the opposite side will continue to provide a strong landscape buffer to the adjacent Green Belt and restrict views into/ out of the site into the adjacent wider landscape and Green Belt.

Along the north western boundary of the site the development accommodates the existing trees and vegetation which are growing along the boundary to the adjacent Britannia hotel car park. This car park lies within Green Belt but is very much urban in character, it is lit by lighting columns and comprises large areas of hard standing with smaller pockets of formal grass and individual trees. It forms part of the wider infrastructure of the Britannia Hotel, the built extents of which fall directly to the green belt edge. Views from within this car park are urban in character and limited by the boundary trees and vegetation growing around the car park and to the site.

Within the development proposals there are two areas provided along the side elevations of the town houses and the semi-detached dwellings as illustrated on the proposed landscape plan. These areas will be planted with trees to help further reinforce the existing trees and vegetation along the Green Belt boundary. Scrub vegetation and small trees would be planted on top of the podium in the middle of the site to help break up views of built form within the site.

Trees and vegetation within and around the Britannia Hotel carpark and along the River corridor currently provide a substantial landscape buffer to the Green Belt boundary to the north west of the site, these also provide a substantial vegetative screen to views from the public footpath along the river looking back towards the site. In addition to the trees and vegetation within the adjacent golf course these help provide a visual buffer between the site and the wider areas of surrounding Green Belt. It is worth noting that there are no public footpaths within this part of Northernden Golf Course so publicly accessible vantage points looking back towards the site from this location are limited.

Physically the River Mersey which is formed by engineered grassy embankments and the adjacent M60 motorway with its vegetated highways embankments both provide permanent and physical buffers in the Green Belt and further reinforce its permanence and performance in preventing urban sprawl.

The proposed development does not contribute directly to UDP Policy E3.4 (River Valleys), however the boundary treatments do not detract from, or obstruct the objectives of the policy.

The site sits outside of but adjacent to the River Mersey Broad Urban Fringe Valley (LCA 45) which has been classified as moderate sensitivity. (Greater Manchester Landscape Character and Sensitivity Assessment.)

UDP Development Control Policy DC16.1 states 'New development will fit more easily into their surroundings if they incoporate existing landscapes, and there will be presumption to retain existing trees and planting with a high amenity and ecological value. If it is not possible to retain existing trees in situ, developers will be required to include appropriate replacement within the development site or the immediate area. The proposals have taken every opprtunity to comply with this guidance.

Figure 9 - Winter view looking towards the site frontage along Palatine Road from the edge of the Green Belt boundary.

Figure 10 - Winter view from inside the Britannia Hotel car park and Green Belt looking towards the site. The wireframe of the proposed development illustrates how the existing trees would significantly screen the building.

Figure 11 -Winter view from inside the Britannia Hotel car park and Green Belt looking towards the site.The wireframe of the proposed development illustrates how the existing trees would significantly screen the building.

Figure 12 -Location points for figures 10 and 11

2.2 CONCLUSION

The site does not sit within Green Belt but adjacent to the Green Belt boundary along Palatine Road to the south east and the Britannia hotel car park to the north west. It comprises a previously developed site of three large residential villas within the urban extents of West Didsbury. It is in an unkempt state and does little to contribute to the adjacent landscape character.

There is no local or national planning policy that sets a 'policy test' or requirements for development proposals adjacent to Green Belt. However concerns were raised by MCC on the overall impact that the development would have on the Green Belt and views into and out of the site.

The site is well screened from the Green Belt and wider surrounding landscape by the surrounding trees and vegetation growing alongside the site boundaries and within the adjacent Green Belt itself, therefore there are no significant views from the Green Belt into the site.

There are currently no visual or physical links through the site between the adjacent areas of Green Belt and the site does not play a role in the purpose of the adjacent Green Belt as its forms a previously developed site within the Urban extents of West Didsbury. The development proposals would continue to maintain this site as an urban residential development, it would continue to be screened from the wider Green Belt and would not impact on the openness of the adjacent Green Belt.