

DESIGN SUPPORTING STATEMENT

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Design

**‘Jessiefield’, Spath Road, Didsbury,
Manchester, M20 2TZ**

McCarthy Stone Design Revisions

**Local Planning Authority Reference:
I34946/FO/2022**

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I. INTRODUCTION

Role and Purpose

- I.1 I am Kenneth Brown, Managing Director of Townscape Solutions Ltd and I have been asked to provide this townscape and urban design supporting statement to accompany the latest design revisions provided by MCK Associates Limited.
- I.2 I have been involved with the site since before the previous application which was refused and subsequently dismissed on appeal (Appeal Ref: APP/B4215/W/21/3274312). Since then, I have been advising on a new design approach which seeks to address the Appeal Inspector's decision, whilst still being commercially viable to ensure it can be built.
- I.3 Most recently I attended a (virtual) meeting between McCarthy Stone and Officers of Manchester City Council on 15th November 2022. Below I set out my notes of the meeting and the main points arising. This Statement outlines the Council's concerns and my opinion on the success of the revisions in addressing them.
- I.4 This statement is brief in nature and will focus primarily on the main issues between the Applicant and the Council and should be read in conjunction with an examination of the latest drawings as well as the McCarthy Stone covering letter.

Summary of Experience

- I.5 I have over 25 years urban design experience involving masterplanning and advising on development proposals throughout the country, including similar types of development to the application.
- I.6 I am a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute and hold a BSc (Hons) in Town and Regional Planning and an MA in Urban Design.

2. THE SITE AND CONTEXT

- 2.1 The proposed development is located at 'Jessiefield' on the corner of Spath Road and Lancaster Road in Didsbury, Manchester. Currently on the site is a large detached house which is proposed for redevelopment.
- 2.2 The Design and Access Statement includes a full analysis of the site and context. In summary the following points should be made:
1. The appeal site is in a sustainable and accessible location close to local facilities and public transport.
 2. The principle of its redevelopment is agreed.
 3. Apart from the protected trees at the southern end which are to be retained, the site has no special townscape protection or designation and no heritage impact is alleged.
 4. The site is on a corner and will require a positive approach to address both roads.
 5. The context typically consists of large properties with generous frontages along tree-lined streets. The built form varies and includes large detached villas, purpose built apartments and smaller detached and semi-detached houses, all of varying ages and styles.
 6. The scale in the area ranges from single storey bungalows to three and four storey apartments.
 7. Red brick and render are commonly used in that area for facing materials. Roofs are generally pitched, although flat roofs are also found. Roof coverings commonly include slate or tile.

3. THE CURRENT APPLICATION

- 3.1 The current application, which was validated on 21st September 2022, was drawn up in response to the Inspector's decision following the dismissal of the appeal on 16th March 2022.

- 3.2 The Design and Access Statement which accompanies the current application summarises the main points in the decision and how the design sought to respond. The general concern was the overall scale of the appeal scheme with the 4-storey frontage being the main concern.
- 3.3 The current application scheme reduced the scale removing the 4-storey frontage and is now no more than 3 storeys. Furthermore, the overall amount / form of development on the Spath Road frontage is reduced in all dimensions with a reduction in the width and depth of the building. The massing also includes greater articulation with varied ridge lines together with steps and projections in the building faces as well as features including gables of varying sizes and dormers.
- 3.4 Following the submission, the Council subsequently provided an email response on 8th November 2022. In summary, the response did not consider the revised proposal overcame the Council's previous concerns surrounding scale and massing and the impact upon the character and appearance of the area. As such, the application was to be recommended for refusal.
- 3.5 McCarthy Stone responded with a request that before the preparation of the report recommending refusal, a meeting be arranged to obtain feedback to discuss the issues in detail with a view to making further amendments to address the Council's concerns.
- 3.6 A meeting was helpfully set up at short notice on 15th November 2022. Set out below are my notes of the meeting and the main points arising.

The Council's Concerns

1. Although recognising the reduction in scale from 4 to 3 storeys as well as the reduction in unit numbers, the Council believed there was still too much development and excessive height/massing and footprint.
2. The frontage area of hardstanding was also considered excessive and overly visible.
3. The building also needed a more spacious setting.
4. The frontage (Spath Road to Lancaster Road) was considered too continuous.
5. Ideally more than one building would be proposed but recognised that is not possible regarding the type of accommodation being provided.

6. Acknowledged that amenity is no longer a concern.

3.7 Following some back-and-forth discussion, a range of potential design solutions were agreed as follows.

Potential Design Solutions

1. The Spath Road frontage should not be as wide and should not extend as close to the corner. If it was narrowed, it would be more likely to get support.
2. There should be more breaks in the building with the impression of separation between Spath Road and Lancaster Road.
3. The ridge should be dropped to vary the height on Lancaster Road.
4. The Lancaster Road frontage should be set back further from the road.
5. The access from Spath Road should be narrowed and potentially include gate piers. Possibly consider refuse collection from the road rather than accessing the site.
6. If Highways will not agree to the gap being narrowed, then at least provide more landscaping to soften the view through the gap.

3.8 Other issues were also discussed as follows.

Other Points

1. It was confirmed that no affordable housing would be required.
2. An extension of time was agreed initially to mid-January where the progress can then be reviewed.
3. The Council was happy for draft plans to be submitted for their opinion before going out to consultation

4. AMENDED SCHEME DESIGN

4.1 Following the agreement that amendments could be provided for review, further internal discussions took place and MCK Associates was asked to draw up a revised scheme that addressed the Council's concerns. At the same time, it was important to design a viable scheme that can be built. In my view the architects have done well to achieve both aims as explained below.

- 4.2 The scheme is still similar in its general design approach to the application scheme. This approach is described in detail within the Design and Access Statement. In essence it maintains a similar staggered layout to the current house which relates to 'Cairncroft' adjacent whilst setting it back 6-8m further than the house.
- 4.3 The scale, massing and appearance have also been informed by 'Cairncroft' as well other existing buildings within the wider surrounding area. The appearance shows a contemporary appearance but with traditional elements referencing the larger 19th century houses in the area including gable features, dormers, vertical proportions and traditional materials including red brick and dark grey roof tiles.
- 4.4 The principle of this design approach was not questioned by the Inspector who also accepted that the front facing gables, recesses and balconies would provide visual relief. The revised scheme has however proposed significant amendments to scale and massing, the extent of which can be seen marked on the revised drawings with dashed lines showing the comparative scale to the current application scheme and the appeal scheme.
- 4.5 Amended 'verified visual montages' (VVMs) have also been produced to illustrate the revised scheme in the street scene. These demonstrate the latest proposals relate positively to the context and are in no way dominant or incongruous.
- 4.6 Each of the Council's comments (in italics) are assessed first followed by an evaluation of the design response, being mindful also of the Inspector's decision which is addressed at the end.

I. Frontage Width

- 4.7 *The Spath Road frontage should not be as wide and should not extend as close to the corner. If it was narrowed, it would be more likely to get support.*
- 4.8 The revised scheme has responded to the suggestion and narrowed the building frontage by approximately 1 metre which gives a narrower appearance to the frontage as well as increasing the distance to Lancaster Road from the corner of the building.

- 4.9 In comparison to the appeal scheme the frontage width is approximately 4.5 metres narrower.

2. Impression of Separation

- 4.10 *There should be more breaks in the building with the impression of separation between Spath Road and Lancaster Road.*
- 4.11 For the single building required for the type of development it is not possible to give the impression of complete separation. The scheme does however show a drop in height behind the frontage to what appears to be 2 storeys from the street, similar to a rear wing seen on many Victorian/Edwardian houses. This provides visual separation in the roof line and helps to further break up the massing.

3. Ridge Reduction

- 4.12 *Drop the ridge to vary the height on Lancaster Road.*
- 4.13 As well as the drop in ridge height behind the frontage, the ridge line also drops on the entire Lancaster Road elevation by approximately 1 metre and a 4.5 metre drop where it drops to 2 storeys behind the frontage described above. It also drops to 2 storeys at the southern end. The current relatively uniform ridge line is now far more varied and articulated.
- 4.14 Regarding the appeal scheme, the latest scheme varies from approximately 0.67 metres higher to approximately 5 metres lower. The scale impression overall is much reduced.

4. Lancaster Road Frontage

- 4.15 *The Lancaster Road frontage should be set back further from the road.*
- 4.16 This has also been achieved with the proposed building now set further back along the entire frontage by just under 1 metre and up to 2.7m further back at its greatest. The dashed lines on the site plan make this clear. Combined with the lowered height and greater articulation, the overall impact on Lancaster Road is plainly reduced.

5. Access Width

- 4.17 *The access from Spath Road should be narrowed and potentially include gate piers. Possibly consider refuse collection from the road rather than accessing the site.*
- 4.18 Highways responded to the access width query following the meeting and confirmed that the site can be serviced from the road. This has allowed a narrower access which can be seen in detail on the submitted 'Access Treatments' drawing and the revised VVMs.

5. Landscaping

- 4.19 *If Highways will not agree to the gap being narrowed, then at least provide more landscaping to soften the view through the gap.*
- 4.20 As well as narrowing the access, the revised site layout has also removed the row of parking spaces in view from the access and relocated them away from any sightlines from the Spath Road.

The Inspector's Decision

- 4.21 Regarding the appeal decision, there has already been a significant reduction in height on the frontage from 4 to 3 storeys which was the main issue raised by the Inspector (Para 6). The latest amendments further reduce the scale in all dimensions as well as adding more variation and articulation in massing. In addition, there has also been a reduction in dominance of parked cars, with both a reduction in the number of spaces as well as the removal of any spaces visible from the street through the access. These changes address additional comments made by the Inspector (Para 7).
- 4.22 The site plan and elevations with dashed lines illustrating the comparative extents of the scheme demonstrate the significant reductions that have taken place since the appeal. In my view the scheme has clearly addressed the Inspector's decision.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 On a site close to public transport routes and facilities, it is important to optimise the potential of the site in line with the NPPF. The latest scheme does this whilst still being sensitive to its context.
- 5.2 Whilst arguably the current application addresses the Inspector's decision, the Council did not believe it went far enough. The latest scheme has therefore further reduced the scale and massing, set it back more from the corner and from Lancaster Road and overall is now 2-3 storeys in height rather than the 3-4 storeys on the appeal scheme. Combined with greater articulation, a more varied roofline, narrower access and removal of parking spaces visible from the entrance, the amended scheme clearly addresses the issues within the appeal decision. The design has also in my view addressed the Council's concerns raised at the meeting.
- 5.3 The revised scheme is an appropriate and high-quality townscape response and is in no way dominant or incongruous in the street scene or detrimental to the character of the area. For the reasons explained above it is my professional opinion that the design of the proposed development has made significant amendments to address both the appeal decision and the Councils' comments and should now be approved.