

MADDOX PLANNING

**STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY
INVOLVEMENT**

FRANCIS ROAD, WITHINGTON

MADDOX PLANNING

LONDON & MANCHESTER
0345 121 1706

STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

FRANCIS ROAD
29/07/2021

Description of development

Demolition of existing buildings and residential redevelopment including creation of a new vehicular access from Francis Road, parking provision, landscaping and associated works.

Type of application

Full planning application

Applicant

Southway Housing Trust (Southway Housing Trust (Manchester) Limited)

Southway Housing Trust is a committed and forward thinking, not-for-profit, local housing company based in South Manchester. Southway is passionate about providing excellent homes and outstanding customer care. It was established in 2007 in South Manchester where it owns 5,880 properties. All Southway homes exceed Decent Homes Standard, and its core landlord services excel in performance and tenant satisfaction ratings. Southway annually spends up to £25m to invest in its local communities.

Southway has an experienced Development Team with a track record in delivering new social investment, including employment and training initiatives. It also has a dedicated Age Friendly team to meet the diverse needs of its local communities. Southway has a strong financial standing, with an excellent governance and viability rating, with new loan facilities secured for the future. Southway plays a key role in its communities and already reaches out to local groups working with local stakeholders and community groups. Southway is proud of all the work it does in its neighbourhoods.

Contents of this statement

1. Introduction
2. The value of pre-application engagement
3. Planning policy and guidance
4. Pre-application engagement with the local planning authority
5. Pre-application engagement with local people
6. Conclusions

Introduction

- 1.1 Maddox Planning has prepared this Statement of Community Involvement on behalf of Southway Housing Trust. This document accompanies a submission application which seeks full planning permission. The proposed development is:

Demolition of existing buildings and residential redevelopment including creation of a new vehicular access from Francis Road, parking provision, landscaping and associated works.

- 1.2 Southway Housing Trust, Step Places (the developer project managing the scheme) and its project team engaged with Manchester City Council through a formal pre-application process which involved a meeting and follow up correspondence. There was also engagement with elected ward members.
- 1.3 Due to COVID-19, it was decided in the interest of public safety not to hold an in-person public consultation event. The launch of an online public consultation portal followed a letter drop making the local community aware of the proposed development, how to access the full details and how to comment. The consultation portal gave local residents and businesses an opportunity to comment on the proposed development and was live in December and January 2021. The original 29 December 2021 deadline for responses to the on-line consultation was extended, to ensure that local residents wishing to comment had the opportunity to do so.

Purpose of this report

- 1.4 This document sets out a summary of the consultation process undertaken by Step Places and Southway Housing Trust, together with a summary of the responses received as a result of these consultations. It should be read in conjunction with the other reports and documentation that accompany the planning application submission.

The value of pre-application engagement

- 2.1 Pre-application engagement by prospective applicants offers significant potential to improve both the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning system and improve the quality of planning applications. This can be achieved by:
1. providing an understanding of the relevant planning policies and other material considerations associated with a proposed development (see Planning Statement);
 2. working collaboratively and openly with interested parties at an early stage to identify, understand and seek to resolve issues associated with a proposed development (as set out in this Statement);
 3. discussing possible mitigation of the impact of a proposed development, including any planning conditions (as set out in this Statement);
 4. identifying the information required to accompany a formal planning application, thus reducing the likelihood of delays at the validation stage (see Planning Statement).

Planning policy and guidance

National Planning Policy

- 3.1 Early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties. Good quality pre- application discussion enables better coordination between public and private resources and improved outcomes for the community (Paragraph 39).
- 3.2 The Framework (paragraph 126) states the creation of high-quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities. Effective engagement is essential for achieving this.
- 3.3 The Framework at Paragraph 126 states applications that can demonstrate effective engagement with the community should be looked on more favourably.
- 3.4 National Planning Practice Guidance states that pre-application engagement with a local community is encouraged where it will add value to the process and the outcome (Paragraph: 010 Reference ID: 20-010-20150326).

Manchester City Council

- 3.5 Manchester City Council (MCC) adopted in June 2018 a Statement of Community involvement, which sets out how residents and businesses can get involved in planning activity. MCC encourages developers to consult with the community before submitting a planning application. The document sets out that a decision on whether a proposal needs more in-depth consultation is based on its nature or scale of the proposal. The level of consultation undertaken is considered to commensurate the proposed development.
- 3.6 The MCC document set out methods of consultation which are likely to be suitable for significant development proposals:
 - **Letters sent to residents and businesses in nearby streets** telling them what is proposed, how they can get more information and how they can give the developer their views
 - **Public exhibition** in an accessible location close to the development (e.g. library or supermarket) which tells the public about what is happening and gives them an opportunity to make comments
 - **A website** set up by the developer
 - **Leaflets distributed to nearby streets and placed in facilities** near the proposed developments which have a tear off slip for comments
 - **Social media** used by the developer to advertise the development and associated consultation events
- 3.7 These recommended methods were reviewed and considered ahead of the consultation exercise approaches selected and undertaken.

Pre-application engagement with officers and local elected members

- 4.1 The applicant entered into formal pre-application engagement with the local planning authority (the LPA) in May 2021. The applicant submitted a draft proposal to the LPA for consideration; this included a pre-application planning design document which presented the proposal and its design evolution. Meeting minutes were subsequently agreed, and it was advised by the case officer, Jennifer Conner, that these minutes should be used as the formal pre-application response. The scope of validation requirements was also agreed at this stage.
- 4.2 In summary, the principal points made by the case officer in the pre-application meeting are:
- Residential redevelopment would be more suitable in the predominately residential suburban setting.
 - A significant improvement over existing site conditions.
 - Proposed separation distances were a betterment than what is currently there onsite.
 - Supportive of the industrial aesthetic in the design.
 - Appropriate landscaping measures should be implemented to ensure of appropriate boundary green buffers and encouragement of biodiversity habitats.
 - Highways need to be fully considered and assessed to ensure a safe access, movability through the site and minimal impact to existing on-street parking.

Local Ward Councillor engagement

- 4.3 The three elected local ward councillors for Withington, Councillor Chambers, Moore and Wills, were notified of the consultation through a bespoke letter, emailed directly. The bespoke letter invited them to review the proposal online. This was intended to provide the local members with an opportunity to engage with the applicant and give feedback, and to make the local members aware of an approach having been made to local residents and business seeking views on the proposed development.
- 4.4 Councillor Wills responded by stating that these plans looked positive, and the fact that these flats were proposed to be 100% affordable rent was particularly good news, given the heavy demand in Withington and in South Manchester as a whole.
- 4.5 Councillor Wills asked six questions and the applicant responded accordingly through Maddox Planning. The questions and responses are outlined below:

- 1) In terms of affordability, what will the likely starting rate be for rent?

The primary objective of Southway Housing Trust is to deliver affordable homes within its core area. Its policy is to apply the lower of 80% of market rent or Local Housing Allowance (Housing Benefit) cap within the core area. This will be applied to the homes being proposed at Francis Road.

- 2) Will the development necessitate the removal of any existing trees?

The proposed development does not require the removal of any trees.

- 3) If so, how many trees, will these be replaced, and at what ratio?

In addition to retention of existing trees, there will be new trees and shrubs planted to the Francis Road frontage, and also in a landscaped area of the rear car park. A wooden bench seating area is proposed

adjacent to the new building, and there will be a feature tree and other planting in this area. Some 145 trees and shrubs are proposed to be planted as part of the proposed development.

- 4) How many parking spaces will be provided for the 26 flats? This is likely to be the biggest concern raised by residents on Francis Road and surrounding streets, as parking, in particular parking by staff at the Christie, is a major issue in this area.

The proposed development includes provision for 17 car parking spaces (two accessible). The project transport consultant has advised that a development of this scale and nature typically requires 10 to 13 parking spaces, hence 17 is considered generous provision. There is also a scooter store, proposed to be located within the building.

- 5) Will there be any on-site provision for electric car charging?

Out of 17 parking spaces, four spaces will have EV charging points.

- 6) How much bike storage will be provided? As the development is not near a bus stop, it is important that sustainable travel is encouraged.

A travel plan will be submitted as part of the application and this sets out a strategy to promote sustainable travel modes amongst future residents. The bike store located near to the proposed seating area is designed to accommodate eight bicycles.

- 4.6 The exchange concluded positively by the Councillor Wills expressing enthusiasm for the forthcoming submission of the planning application. The applicant made Councillor Wills aware of changes to the scheme, again through Maddox Planning.

Further engagement with Local Ward Councillors

- 4.7 Following the formal pre-application consultation, design changes were made to the scheme in response to comments from local residents. Prior to submission of the planning application, the local ward members were notified of the revised proposals and advised that the applicant was due to submit shortly and if there were any questions, to contact Maddox Planning. Maddox Planning advised there would be an opportunity for local residents to formally comment on the proposal once the planning application was validated.

Pre-application engagement with the local community

Engagement process

- 5.1 As part of the pre-application process, Southway Housing Trust and developer Step Places sought to consult with the local community to gain an understanding of views over its proposed development.
- 5.2 Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was decided that most appropriate form given the circumstances was an online consultation which provided accessibly to information as well as the opportunity of leaving feedback. It was acknowledged that some people may not have internet access and the letter advised that information details can be forwarded on and that the comment box can be used to record the views of others.

The letter drop

- 5.3 A letter drop commenced in mid-December 2021 and included direction to a Maddox hosted consultation webpage, which gave details of the applicant and the proposal, and provided an opportunity to submit feedback.
- 5.4 An appropriate area for the letter drop was defined, which generated 117 home and business addresses. The applicant and Maddox Planning defined the extent of the letter drop area having regard to properties proximate to the proposed development. The letter that was provided for the drop was a one doubled sided A4 page that gave details of the site, the proposal including a proposed site plan, a CGI of the proposal and details of the consultation website.

Online consultation

- 5.5 The consultation website went live on 20 December with an initial deadline of 29 December. This was extended into early January, to ensure that local residents wishing to comment had the opportunity to do so.
- 5.6 The consultation webpage hosted by Maddox Planning presented the scheme in summary form, in a simplified written style in an attempt to ensure legibility for all audiences. The webpage gave visitors to the site the opportunity to respond through the submission of comments via the platform. For reference the website URL is: <https://www.maddoxassociates.co.uk/withington>. The web page content included details on:
- the site;
 - who Step Places and Southway Housing Trust are;
 - what has happened so far;
 - the proposal; and
 - how to comment.
- 5.7 Drawings for the proposed development were available online. These included a location plan, existing site plan, proposed site plan and numerous CGI illustrations of the proposed development.

Consultation outcomes

- 5.8 Out of the 117 homes and businesses that were consulted, only three responses were received (a <3% response rate) with only one objection. The objection did not give any reasons beyond stating being against the proposed development. The applicant did contact the respondent through Maddox Planning, in seeking to understand what the objection was specifically related to, but no further response was received.

- 5.9 A second response raised concerns about on-street parking on Francis Road including the impact of Kingslea House, asked about parking within the development including for visitors and queried the likely construction programme.
- 5.10 One response asked that the consultation period be extended, which it was.
- 5.11 An advantage of letter drop and on-line consultation over in-person consultation is the greater certainty that a high proportion of local residents are made personally aware of a forthcoming development proposal. The low proportion of responses to a consultation of this nature can be taken as indicative of the local community overall not having any particularly strong opinion over the proposal.

Response themes and other matters

- 5.12 From the limited responses received, the response themes and other matters were as follows:
- support of the delivery of affordable housing
 - support of the use of a brownfield site
 - existing on-street parking conditions including the impact of Kingslea House
 - Appropriate parking provision for the proposed development
 - construction programme
 - a request for more time to respond to the consultation
 - a single general objection without elaboration
- 5.13 The applicant through Maddox Planning tailored replies to each consultation response to provide clarifications as appropriated. All comments received were duly taken into consideration prior to submission of the planning application.
- 5.14 In terms parking, the current proposal will not reduce the parking spaces available to Kingslea House. Kingslea House will continue to be served by the existing access.
- 5.15 Southway Housing Trust has many similar developments in the Manchester area, and so has a good idea on likely car ownership. Southway expects that about half of the 24 apartments will be occupied by a car owner. 15 parking spaces are provided, which suggests that about 25% will be available for visitors.
- 5.16 Subject to planning permission being granted, the principal construction period will be approximately 12 months. Ahead of this there would be demolition of the existing buildings and some preparatory works.
- 5.17 Some of the design amendments were in response to detailed discussions had with neighbours. Through these discussions, design amendments now propose new vehicular access off Francis Road is proposed. The private lane off Cotton Lane will remain as existing.

Conclusions

- 6.1 Maddox Planning has prepared this Statement of Community Involvement on behalf of Southway Housing Trust. This document accompanies an application which seeks full planning permission for:

Demolition of existing buildings and residential redevelopment including creation of a new vehicular access from Francis Road, parking provision, landscaping and associated works.

- 6.2 Pre-application engagement was undertaken with Manchester City Council through a formal pre-application process.
- 6.3 An online consultation webpage ran from mid-December 2021 to early-January 2022 and provided opportunity for the local community to comment on the proposed development. Some 117 homes and businesses local to the development received notification of the consultation. The consultation event generated a response from <3% of those addresses that received a consultation letter. The only objection did not give any reasons beyond stating being against the proposed development. The low proportion of responses to a consultation of this nature can be taken as indicative of the local community overall not having any particularly strong opinion over the proposal.

Outcomes of pre-application engagement

- 6.4 The key outcomes of the pre-application engagement and consultation exercises, and changes made to the proposed development are:
- positive engagement with Cllr Wills, including support for the provision of affordable housing
 - a <3% response rate from local residents and businesses despite an extended period of time for receipt of consultation responses, with only one objection received and this being without any elaboration over reasons for objection
 - confirmation of on-site parking provision and measures intended to not exacerbate and potentially help reduce existing on-street parking
 - clarification provided with regard to likely construction programme
 - improvement and increase of onsite landscaping and opportunity for biodiversity, to off-set the necessary removal of 5 no. trees
 - officer views including providing broad encouragement for:
 1. *industrial aesthetic design*
 2. *residential development that would introduce a more suitable land use in a predominantly residential setting*
 3. *a development constituting significant improvement over existing site conditions*
 4. *proposed separation distances considered a betterment over current on-site conditions*
 - New access off Francis Road
 - New site layout to accommodate the new access off Francis Road
 - Reduction in unit numbers from 26 to 24
 - A reduction in parking numbers but broadly proportionate to the reduction in unit numbers