

Briefing

USDAW Scheme Design Review

May 2021

1. To ensure the proposed scheme is assessed against the most up to date local and national design guidance and policy we have undertaken a further review of all available guidance in respect of design matters and provided an assessment against any updates since the application was submitted in December 2020 and therefore the assessments presented in the submitted Planning Statement and Design and Access Statement.

Draft revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

2. A consultation period on the draft revisions to the NPPF closed on 27 March 2021¹. Many of the proposed changes relate to design and putting greater onus on beautiful places and sustainable buildings. The revisions are based on the outcomes of the Living with Beauty report by the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission (January 2020). Whilst these revisions remain in draft and therefore are to be afforded limited weight, they are responded to in the interests of completeness. The following draft additions are of significance to the USDAW scheme and are addressed in turn below:

Trees

3. Additional text has been added to the NPPF in respect of the importance of trees. The draft additional text seeks to ensure the right trees are provided in the right places and existing trees are retained wherever possible².
4. The scheme includes the protection of most of the mature trees on site and where loss is unavoidable replanting is proposed to mitigate the loss. The tree belt to the north and east of the site have been a key consideration in the scheme's design and their retention and the wider landscape proposals they influence and contribute to has become a unique point of difference from other PBSA schemes across the city.

Local design policies and government guidance on design

5. Proposed additional text refers to "significant weight" being given to "*development which reflects local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents which use visual tools such as design guides and codes*" (paragraph 133 of NPPF Draft Text for Consultation).

¹

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/961769/Draft_NPPF_for_consultation.pdf

² Proposed paragraph 130, National Planning Policy Framework, Draft text for consultation

6. The Planning Statement (paragraphs 7.118 – 7.121) and Design and Access Statement (page 27) submitted with the application reference and address the key design elements of relevant local design policies and guidance such as the Guide to Development in Manchester SPD (2007).
7. Further assessment of the scheme against national design guidance is provided below in respect of the National Design Guide.

Innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability

8. *Proposed additional text refers to “significant weight” being given to “outstanding or innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability, or help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, so long as they fit in with the overall form and layout of their surroundings” (paragraph 133 of NPPF Draft Text for Consultation).*
9. One Planet Living is an example Framework which lays out key themes for what a new build community should take into account to become truly sustainable. The below breaks down how we have reviewed this proposal against the One Planet Living Framework which focuses on 10 simple principles that provide goals and guidance to the substantiality approach to the project. Each principle is addressed in turn below:

Health and Happiness

- **Encourage healthy lifestyles** – Nearby parks and leisure centres encourage healthy lifestyles and engage local communities with the area. There is also a well-established cycle route along Wilmslow Road that can be accessed in front of the site.
- **Outdoor Space Provision** - A large proportion the site has been given over to outdoor spaces, with the landscape proposals being broken down into a series of squares, a courtyard, pathways and seating areas.
- **Natural Lighting** – The Daylight and Sunlight Report prepared by Consil and submitted with the application concludes that there is no significant impact on daylight or overshadowing as a result of the proposals. The PBSA scheme includes large full height windows to ensure each student room has suitable levels of natural daylight.
- **Air Quality** – The submitted Air Quality Assessment confirms that there site, when operational, will have very few emission impacts as a result of the relatively car free nature of the proposals.

Equity & Local Community

- **Positive Impact on Local Economy** - Fallowfield is already a well-established student area; existing amenities in the area will provide social benefits for the students and economic benefits for the wider community as they spend money in local pubs, bars, shops, restaurants etc.
- **Accessible Buildings and Spaces** - To create an inclusive scheme, all buildings are accessible at grade level and public realm spaces are inclusively designed.

Culture & Community

- **Public Open Spaces** - The site is immediately next to Platt Field Park, a large public open space. While the central courtyard is solely proposed for student resident's use, the landscape area in front of the villa is accessible.
- **Sense of Community** - A community room is proposed within the converted Oakley Villa; this will be accessed from a separate gated entrance off Langley Road. This space can be hired out for events, gatherings or used by the students to ensure the scheme contributes to placemaking and creating neighbourhoods of choice.

Land & Nature

- **Access to Recreational Green Space** – the site is adjacent to Platt Field Park and only 5 minutes from the Armitage Centre sports and recreational ground within the University of Manchester Fallowfield Campus. These facilities give unrivalled access to open space and recreation opportunity.
- **Rich Biodiversity** - Within the proposal, there are significant areas of soft landscaping which provide biodiversity opportunities in accordance with the recommendations within the submitted Ecological Assessment prepared by Bowland Ecology.

Sustainable Water

- **Sustainable Urban Drainage** - The central courtyard design incorporates rain gardens which form part of the sustainable urban drainage system.

Local & Sustainable Food

- **Sustainable Food** – The site is located within walking distance of many shops including a Sainsburys superstore so there is no need for a private vehicle when the students are buying groceries.

Travel & Transport

- **Walking and Cycling** – Fresh, the property management company, will restrict students from bringing private vehicles so there are only a handful of car parking spaces that are primarily for staff, guests or for disabled use. Two large indoor cycle stores have been provided at the ground floor of both buildings. This encourages cycling into University and the city centre.
- **Public Transport** - Adjoining the eastern site boundary is the largest bus stop outside of the city centre. The Wilmslow Road Bus stop provides the students with a sustainable public transport link to the University teaching Campuses and the city centre.

Material & Products

- **Construction Materials** - All of the proposed materials have been selected to ensure that they are durable have longevity to them and can be sourced locally.

Zero Waste

- **Waste Strategy** - The waste strategy has been considered holistically to enable a site-wide waste strategy that will be easy to manage by Fresh and use by students. The refuse areas will provide waste and recycling facilities in accordance with MCC requirements.

Low Carbon Energy

- **Efficient Buildings** - The proposal takes a fabric first approach to low carbon design to reduce the demand for heating. This strategy contributes to MCC's aspiration for high performing sustainable buildings.

National Design Guide

10. The National Design Guide establishes key components for good design in built development. Further assessment is provided below against the identified key elements of good design which are provided at paragraph 21 of the National Design Guide:

"A well-designed place is unlikely to be achieved by focusing only on the appearance, materials and detailing of buildings. It comes about through making the right choices at all levels, including:

- *the layout (or masterplan)*
- *the form and scale of buildings*
- *their appearance*
- *landscape*
- *materials*
- *their detailing"*

Layout

11. The key principle of the proposed layout is to reinstate the stripped back, refurbished villa to the heart of the development. Forming the linchpin to a new large, rectilinear central private courtyard to its rear. The other three sides of the courtyard are formed by an L-shaped, pitched roof building to the south (Building 1) and a linear taller building to the North (Building 2). Each of the blocks are broken in form to provide gaps and views to the sites surrounding context; the greenery of Platt Fields to the north and the familiar architectural typology of the brick terrace houses to Langley Road to the south.
12. Building 1 mirrors the grain and block pattern of adjacent terraced properties rather than mirroring the building line of the existing unattractive and dominating office building on the site. Building 2 is pulled south of the boundary to allow the existing mature trees to be retained whilst also allowing this block to be pulled away from the external wall of the existing villa; giving greater strength to the form of the rectilinear landscape courtyard.
13. The proposed scheme does not include built development in front of the Villa (to the east) so the Villa's attractive frontage and setting within the site is retained. This also ensures views to the Villa are preserved from Wilmslow Road and the building line and existing landscape continue to form a key part of the sites character.

Form and scale

14. The form and positioning of the proposed buildings has a great impact on how the students (and the wider community) will experience and travel through the site. The existing gated

entrance to Wilmslow Road and vehicle entrance on the corner of Langley road are to be retained. Once entering the site from the south you are met by a series of paths that lead towards the redeveloped and Oakley Villa with a contemporary glass extension to the west and south. The end gable of the villa and the adjacent eastern gable of building 2 create an informal entrance way to the central courtyard.

15. To the South West Corner of the courtyard there is an elevated path that leads through a break between building 1 and 2 to a quiet seating area that is nestled into the existing trees to this corner of the site.
16. The scale of building 1 has been considered against the villa and the terrace house on Langley Road. The pitched roof allows the eaves of the building to be lower than the eaves of the existing building in this part of the site. Ensuring that the massing sits more comfortably with its neighbouring buildings.
17. Building 2 is substantially set back from both Langley Road and Wilmslow Road and is therefore less visible from surrounding residential areas. Building 2 is taller than the existing buildings on site however is not of uncharacteristically tall form for its location. The University of Manchester tower accommodation and the Toast Rack are located in close proximity to the proposed development and are up to 19 storeys in height. Its northern most position on site means it will not cast shadow over the central courtyard. The mature tree belt to the north of Building 2 means the building is partially obscured when viewed from Platt Field Park. The submitted TVIA demonstrates the acceptability of the proposed scale and mass.

Appearance

18. The retention of Oakley Villa and improvements to its external appearance has been crucial to the design process throughout. The single storey contemporary extension to the south and west of the Villa retains key design features of the original building, such as the proposed slender reconstituted stone white piers that will complement the stone surrounds to the existing windows in the villa.
19. Building 1 forms the building line to the northern side of Langley Road which typically has a red brick Victorian Terrace typology. The proposal seeks to draw upon the character and appearance of the existing adjacent terraces. The proposals include a strip of landscaping to the south, regular window rhythm with stone lintel and cills and horizontal projecting brick detailing at the head of windows tie the terrace rows together. The building is broken below horizontally with recessed brickwork every two window bays. The proposed pitch and lowered eaves line on the courtyard facing façade means the perception of the buildings height is reduced from within the courtyard. Dormer windows are introduced to the fourth floor which are similar in nature to the ones found on the terrace houses on streets parallel to the site.
20. Building 2 is set back from both Langley Road and Wilmslow Road and is therefore less visible from surrounding context. Building 2 has similar horizontal reconstituted stone band and full height windows that are used on Building 1, floor to ceiling windows and yellow stone.

Landscape

21. The landscaping has been designed to create a variety of different spaces across the site with different qualities to them in terms of the sense of enclosure and ambiance. This is dictated by its position within the site, the buildings that front onto it and the quality of the hard and soft landscape.
22. A comprehensive landscape scheme proposed by Layer is submitted with the application. The landscape design has been influenced by the sites wider Platt Fields Park setting, existing landscaping and preservation and improvement to the Villa's setting.
23. There are two primary outdoor landscaped spaces within the site:
 - **Arrival Gardens** - A driveway and series of footpaths leading to 'The Villa' and residential blocks, dissect pockets of ornamental planting, framed by the tall, existing mature trees. Benches are dotted throughout the space providing seating opportunities to maximise the available amenity value of the site.
 - **Central Courtyard** - The sunken garden courtyard lies at the heart of the scheme, overlooked by the adjacent residential blocks and Oakley Villa. The space is richly planted to provide screening to ground floor bedrooms. Further opportunities are extracted within the small level change to accommodate seating and the integration of water attenuation during floods, acting as a natural SUDs space for heavy rain events. A combination of bollard lighting and tree uplighters create an atmospheric evening setting.

Materials and their detailing

24. The materials proposed on the site are reflective of the materials found in the immediate context. With the two main materials being red brick and white reconstituted stone. These are found on both the Victorian Terraces along Langley Road, nearby residential streets and on the retained elements of Oakley Villa. Both materials have longevity, durability and require minimal maintenance. Both elements can be easily maintained so any repair work is manageable during the building lifespan.
25. To complement the two dominant materials, the window frames are a warm coloured anodised aluminium with a fixed perforated panel in front of the full height opening light. The detailing to the perforated panel provides a contrasting texture to the smooth stone and rough faced brickwork.