
Stocktons - design options appraisal

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To Lucy Harrison [REDACTED]

; Dave Roscoe [REDACTED]

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Hi both,

I refer to my discussions with Dave regarding the design process and the consideration of alternative strategies for the arrangement of the site. The below summary is provided in the context of comments from residents of the Oxygen building on this matter, outlining how we have determined the appropriate approach and key inputs to this process.

Strategic approach to assessing alternatives

The proposal as presented is a product of an options appraisal which seeks to balance a range of (sometimes competing) considerations to arrive at the optimum form of development for the site. No single input has been set aside in this process but equally no one such input drives this process. Underpinning the approach is the need to ensure an acceptable development arrangement considered across all relevant metrics. Â Â

Key inputs to the design process in this regard are numerous. They include the development's relationship with buildings and uses *outwith* the site and the development's impacts, such as on residential amenity. They also include the need to achieve a scheme which responds positively to its wider urban context in order to maximise its regeneration impact.

Set against this context, we would draw attention to paragraph 1.6 of the Building Research Establishment (BRE) guidelines on "Site Layout Planning for Daylight and Sunlight which, with respect to the guidance, recognises the need to interpret the numerical standards 'flexibly' in recognition of natural lighting being only one of the many factors in site layout and design. Achieving the best quality development which, when considered in the round, responds positively to a multitude of constraints and opportunities is the objective. The BRE guidance notes that sunlight/daylight effects should be part of this process.

EIA, as a process, informs the design of the scheme in this spirit. It enables a consideration of the effects of the development in individual topic areas (and cumulatively) and helps achieve the balanced outcome sought in ensuring that all environmental matters are given consideration in the process. In the context of this scheme and location, limited residual significant effects are identified through the EIA, with none relating to the topic of daylight, sunlight and overshadowing, reflecting a positive outcome of the design process and options testing.

Options studies were conducted during both the development of the Strategic Regeneration Framework (SRF) for East Village Central and the detailed planning application for the site itself. These alternatives are summarised in *outline* both in Chapter 5 of the Environmental Statement Volume 1 and in Section 4 of the Design and Access Statement.

The list of options which could, theoretically, be considered is extensive. The EIA process has included a sufficient consideration of 'reasonable alternatives' as relevant which meets the requirements of the relevant regulations and guidance.

In considering this matter, we would note that this development has an important, and bespoke, regeneration role in delivering both the East Village Central SRF, contributing to the wider Piccadilly SRF and particularly in supporting the effective integration of this key regeneration location, which includes the Central Retail Park development, into the wider commercial core of the city centre and facilitating pedestrian and cycle movement via establishing a permeable street pattern in an area undergoing extensive change. We consider this to be an important strategic influence on the development and which the scheme should respond to, to the extent this is achievable in an acceptable manner.

A more expansive explanation of the logic and justification of the submitted arrangement needs to consider the different aspects that inform the overall design quality and respect practical viability of the development. These aspects are Masterplan/Plot Definition & Public Realm, Viability, Environment and Urban Design & Townscape.

Appraising design options

Masterplan, Plot Definition and Public Realm

The SRF determined two key requirements with respect to developing the wider site in the East Village Central area for both Stocktons and Presbar. These related to firstly, the proportion of 'Open Space' and secondly the appropriate level of, and distribution of, 'Building Height' on the site.

The need for open space meant that the site needed to be broken into separate plots to allow the buildings to breathe and the site to be opened up, increasing pedestrian permeability and offering the chance for new landscaped and useable spaces.

Within the development, it is deemed important to locate the plots to mark the two street corners with Great Ancoats Street, Ducie Street and Store Street, respectively. This is highly beneficial in urban design terms in order to re-activate and mark the existing street pattern and to positively embrace Great Ancoats Street as a key arterial route which marks the edge of the traditional core of the city centre.

This arrangement also offers the opportunity for the car-free public space to be in the centre of the new development. In this regard, the design team considered it important that the location and orientation of this space worked with the new open space being delivered as part of the Central Retail Park site redevelopment with a view to enabling a continuation of this green space and key active travel movement corridor through the site and, in the future, to be continued through the development of the Presbar site. This will emerge as a strategic area of linear public realm and open space running through this part of the city centre and facilitated by a combination of developments.

Viability

Whilst the SRF implied that two plots were appropriate on the site, this was questioned in some of the early design options considered by the design team where a single building composition of an office podium and a residential tower, the tower was located on the corner of Ducie Street and Great Ancoats Street and was lower in height than the Oxygen building. The arrangement was a different urban design typology of a single tower that stepped in height towards the Oxygen as single marker of the junction of Store Street and Great Ancoats Street.

The issue with the arrangement was that it was simply non-viable for the following reasons; the tower didn't provide a sufficient quantity of residential accommodation and the lack of a clear separation between the two functions was deemed to be unattractive to the funding market. Additionally the podium building occupied too much of the site and therefore couldn't meet the 'Open Space' criteria of the SRF nor open up the permeability of the wider urban block to Great Ancoats Street. It was clear to the development team and the design team that two individual buildings on separate plots had to be the basis of the arrangement of building on the site.

Environmental considerations

Shooters Brook: A culvert containing Shooters Brook runs under the site and this posed a further impediment to the location of the buildings. As explained above the location of the two plots were determined to distribute the open space at the centre of the site between two plots that could contain buildings which would mark the street corners and step in height to the more prominent corner of Store Street and Great Ancoats Street. This also corresponded to the location of the culvert meaning that the diversion of it could be minimised and that it would be possible to determine an arrangement where the culvert could run between buildings.

Wind: The prevailing wind direction is from the south west which was a factor in the location of the building massing, if the bulk of the building massing was orientated to be perpendicular to Store Street offering a narrow gable elevation to the street it would offer a broad façade to the prevailing wind which would result in unacceptable comfort conditions in the public realm at the centre of the site and the surrounding streets. The building arrangement would perform better if it offered a narrower elevation to the South West. It should be noted that the final arrangement for building B which is wider than building A has a wind mitigation screen at the base of the building which wouldn't be sufficient if the building was wider.

Daylight/Sunlight and Overlooking: The arrangement of the two plots in the two corners of the site meant that a good separation between buildings could be achieved; with distances ranging from 22m-25m between the buildings on the site – to enable the creation of useable open space / public realm – whilst achieving acceptable distances to existing residential properties (18 to 21m along the Store St boundary). Having established good distance between buildings, the alignment of Building A follows that of the Oxygen running parallel to the street on the NE-SW axis of the building offering therefore either NW or SE light to the apartments.

Urban Design & Townscape

In addition to establishing the requirement for a minimum quantum of development to be provided in two separate plots of development, that these plots could be logically located in the two corners of the site and thereby creating an open public realm between them and a preferred orientation of the buildings, the remaining issue to determine was the optimum building massing in order to reinforce the townscape and to support the on-going regeneration of the area.

As a design process it was clear to the design team that they were dealing with the arrangement of a 'cluster' of three towers, one of which was existing (Oxygen), and the best way to arrange these buildings was in a linear stepping arrangement. This cluster would reinforce the junction of Great Ancoats Street, Store Street and the start of New Mill Street and the onward route to Sports City to the east. The stepping in height from Building B up to Building A along Great Ancoats Street allows for a graduation in scale from the height point of the cross-roads down to lower-rise scale to the northwest of Ducie Street.

Around this principle the taller building was then broken into a series of elements the 'holding piece' (or 'up-turned tuning-fork') and the 'drawers' which not only articulated the side elevation offering a sense of movement (inherent to the site as a traffic intersection) and visual interest to Great Ancoats Street, but also enhanced the proportions of the building when seen from the distant axial views of the primary route the building sits on Store Street from the SW and its extension onto New Mill Street to the NE. The resulting composition of the varying heights of the 3 buildings is an elegant combination that can serve to reinforce the ambition for the continuing regeneration of the area. These townscape considerations are explained and illustrated further in section 5.4 of the DAS as well as in the Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment.

I hope this is of assistance in explaining the strategic design approach to the site, including the concentration of height in the southern part of the site.

Best wishes

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