

Urban Design Comments

F/23/94668 – Land East of Knowle Lane

From: Urban & Landscape Design Team to Development Management

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Proposal: Construction of 4no. general industrial buildings (Use Class B2) containing 15 separate units, including landscaping, parking and associated works

Summary:

- The large footprint proposed along the southern boundary – Block D - seems incongruous and would create an unattractive and undesirable clash of scales with the surrounding area.
 - Elevations are of poor design and more consideration is needed on this matter.
 - Lack of pedestrian priority. Need to segregate vehicles and pedestrians.
 - Opportunity to enhance the setting of development with soft landscape has been missed.
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These comments are made in relation to the plans and supporting information dated 3 February and 26 April 2023 and should be read in conjunction with comments from the Landscape, Tree and Ecology Officers.

1. Site Context

Landscape

The site lies within the settlement boundary of Fair Oak and it is surrounded by countryside on three sides. Directly to the north are fields, to the south is a former landfill site. In addition, a SINC designation covers the eastern sector of the site, including a large pond. The site is therefore considered to be in a sensitive location where there is an increased potential for adverse landscape and visual impacts.

The following comments are made on the assumption that any impact on the SINC and wider countryside setting can be suitably mitigated to the satisfaction of the Ecology and Landscape Officers.

Built Form

There is an existing, occupied three-storey office block along the access road to the site, with a parking area to the front. This is 'Block A' that was approved under Decision Notice F/17/80640. This building is constructed of orange/red brick with grey cement boarding under a dark slate tiled roof, with grey fenestration (DC/18/82772 refers).

Dwellings to the north of this are primarily two-storey red brick properties under clay tile roofs.

Sustainability

There is no bus service on Knowle Lane and pavements are provided on only one side before disappearing completely south of the Recycling Centre – making walking to nearby Knowle Park potentially unpleasant and intimidating for some pedestrians. Bus services operate on Mortimers Lane to Winchester and Fareham, but services are infrequent. This is therefore a car-dependent location.

2. Streets, Spaces and External Layout

Site Access

Access to the site is via the existing access onto Knowle Lane and no alterations are proposed.

External Layout & Public Realm

As previously noted by the Landscape Officer and due to the sensitive location of the site, it is imperative that any full application be accompanied by a constraints/opportunities drawing and a comprehensive landscape strategy plan. It is crucial that landscape principles are foundational to the final site layout, with priority given to creating connected Green Infrastructure.

Also, sections and street scenes to show how the proposal works.

The scale of the proposed built form should refer contextually to the size of the buildings in the local area. It is recommended to analyse the scale of existing building in the immediate and wider surrounding area to ensure that new large footprint building, such as Block D, is in-keeping with and not larger in scale than neighbouring buildings which could, seem incongruous and would create an unattractive and undesirable clash of scales.

The proposed built form of Block D should be refined in order to break up the mass into at least two buildings to reflect the prevalent pattern of the surrounding area.

The public realm provides a setting for all buildings and includes all parts of the urban environment that the public can experience or access, such as public spaces and in some cases, semi-public spaces. A high-quality public realm space can provide many benefits to a development, including enhancing the building's setting, encouraging active use of space to support personal safety within the built environment, and creating a space for socialising and enjoyment.

In terms of public spaces, these could be communal areas for site workers and visitors to socialise and relax within a safe, relaxed environment. Sitting areas should be considered, potentially near the pond.

Consideration needs to be given to how the space is activated across the day, how it is maintained and whether it delineates sufficiently areas for pedestrian and vehicles.

Segregation between vehicles and pedestrians is common on many large industrial/commercial sites which often brings with it the risk of conflict between users and is poorly thought out at the early layout design stage. To avoid inappropriate mixing of pedestrians and vehicles, accessibility and routes for all modes need to be carefully considered from the outset and certain elements will need to be introduced to help mitigate potential conflict. Examples of this include the provision of bus stops, cycle stores, smart

car/electric car charging facilities and priority parking spaces in accessible locations, combined with easily accessible, direct pedestrian, cycle routes/access with extra provision for wheelchair users.

Careful and creative combination of these elements within the layout of the scheme will help to create a more inclusive landscape for all users, enhancing the internal and external connectivity of the site, whilst also maintaining safe separation between potential conflicting modes.

The layout needs to be evolved as part of an iterative and multidisciplinary design process, which is fundamental to high quality placemaking. Landscape will be critical to provide screening of existing neighbouring industrial uses and also provide suitable buffers to the former landfill site to the south.

The contextual analysis of the local landscape should help to establish the correct boundary treatment on site, suggesting where existing hedgerows and lines of trees may be used to define boundaries and edges.

Appropriate lighting should also be considered to allow the signage, and building, to act as a feature during day and night.

3. Height, Scale

There are no objections *in principle* to this aspect of the scheme.

4. External Appearance & Materials

The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) should be a helpful tool to inform design choices, for what is suitable and appropriate, when considering materials, character and style of the development. A robust assessment of landscape will ensure context-led design does not focus solely on the architectural design elements of the scheme but will help ensure the development is in keeping with the landscape character of its surroundings.

In terms of external appearance, it is essential that all new buildings appear as high-quality buildings in their own right and do not stand out as unattractive monolithic blocks. Due to the bulk and expansive elevations of larger buildings, it is often necessary break-up elevations wherever possible, to create more architectural interest and style and prevent prolonged street scenes (and wider views) dominated by a continuous blank and uninteresting elevation.

As it stands, all four buildings are similar in appearance and the palette of materials follows the implemented office development - Block A - at the site entrance. This approach is acceptable in principle; however, it is felt that the external appearance of the proposed buildings does not appear to go far enough in terms of design. It would be encouraged to explore different detailing treatments to create visual interest to the elevations, explore other proportions and design of windows and/ or introduce colour in the architecture, in a simple and bold way, to enliven the environment and announce the new use of the site.

The elevations present three different tones of grey with diverse widths of cladding randomly applied on the elevation. It is unclear what type of claddings are being proposed as the applicant's DAS only mention anthracite cladding which it is anticipated to be a similar material to the one applied on Block A. More information would be needed to clarify this subject.

Furthermore, it is proposed timber cladding above the entrances to help define them and make them more legible. However, other options could be considered to help 'break up' elevations, either vertically or horizontally depending upon the height/width of the building. This could include introducing measures such as slight recesses or fissures within the elevation to help create the perception of depth, changes in materiality or the way it is applied, or changes in tone.

Also, introducing openings at the mezzanine level can not only break down a monotonous elevation but can assist in providing natural light to the interior spaces. Utilising breaks in the elevation to pronounce the main entrance point to the building would be another way of creating visual interest to the proposed elevations.

It is important that all buildings, regardless of internal use, are designed to be features in themselves, and therefore there should not be an overt reliance on screening large buildings as the default approach to managing their impact.

Every effort should be made to create a building which is positively designed, and even functional and utilitarian elements such as ventilation stacks, shading screens / louvres etc can be integrated into a design to create features which enhance, as opposed to detract, from the overall aesthetic.

The primary frontage of the proposed buildings, which is facing on to the central courtyard, should be of high in quality and distinction through the use of its materials and building design (fenestration, style, etc.)

Signage is a crucial element of any larger building; not only does it provides passive advertising to passing pedestrian and vehicular traffic, but it defines the buildings' location within the built environment and, when done correctly, can contribute positively to sense of place and placemaking. Whilst signage is often dealt with by way of a separate application, there are some key principles which should be adhered to when dealing with signage on large buildings.

The roof design has a significant impact on the appearance and character of buildings, as well as how they relate to the context in general. It is recommended to explore other roof shapes such as gables to help break up the mass or saw-tooth roofs to allow for natural light into a deep plan building.

5. Sustainability

To support the Council's commitment to mitigate climate change:

- Significantly reduce vehicular dominance and prioritise pedestrian and cycle provision and links to public transport
- Provide minimum parking provision
- Consider creating provision for shared car club vehicles to reduce the number of parking spaces required
- Provide charging points for electric vehicles, Ebikes and other forms of micro-mobility in locations that support the streetscene and do not hinder pedestrian movement
- Consider installation of photovoltaics
- Introduce *Passivhaus* and *Lifetime Homes* approaches to building design and construction

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- Consider introducing additional green and blue roofs and walls to reduce hard surfaces and control water at source
- Include additional trees and soft landscape within streetscenes to reduce hard surfaces, slow surface water run-off, provide shade and create habitats / corridors for biodiversity
- Orient buildings to maximise solar gain and provide natural surveillance of surrounding streets and spaces to encourage active travel and sociability