

Cllr Theobald's response to the Alex Triangle deputation

1. An amenity issue – new development on the crown of Clifton Hill

How the planning brief addresses this issue?

- Sections 6.7 and 7.4 draw attention to the changes in levels across the site. The Brief suggests that the height of development should be restricted at higher points of the site (i.e. North and West) to 2-3 storeys and should not exceed 5 storeys on the remainder of the site.
- Section 7.4 establishes the principals for the design of new infilling or replacement buildings. It states that any new development should take account of the principal building, the character of the conservation area and the surrounding historic context. The Brief is not prescriptive on the exact form the roofs should take of new development, the emphasis instead, is on the quality of design and a sympathetic approach to surrounding development.
- Set backs of new buildings are not specified in the Brief principally because issues of amenity are already covered by the council's Local Plan policy QD27 "Protection of Amenity". This policy covers aspects such as overlooking, privacy, daylight, sunlight, disturbance and outlook. Schemes which are not compliant with Policy QD27 will be refused planning permission.

2. A commercial viability issue – densities in the north-west sector of the site

How the planning brief addresses this issue?

- Chapter 6 focuses specifically on deliverability and the need for a viable scheme on the Royal Alex site to prevent the physical deterioration and ongoing underutilisation of land and buildings. The preferred development approach i.e. the retention of the principal building, has been tested in terms of viability and is considered deliverable.
- In the case of the preferred development, the height of development is restricted to 2-3 storeys in the north and west of the site but still generates 102 residential units with 20% affordable housing provision. If other planning policies are interpreted flexibly i.e. housing mix, size of housing units and S106 contributions, then the viability may be further improved. In a full economic recovery, the LPA will also expect the retention of the existing Victorian Villa which will further restrict development in the north of the site but the Brief is clear that infill development will not be allowed to exceed 2-3 storeys at the highest points of the site.

3. A conservation issue – the character of this part of the Conservation Area as an open space.

How the planning brief addresses this issue?

- Section 5.1 of the Brief signposts developers to the Character Statements for the Montpelier and Clifton Hill and West Hill Conservation Area. The Brief acknowledges that conservation is not just a matter of retaining historic buildings, it is also a matter of respecting those qualities of space, rhythm and texture which are indicative of the area. It does, however, point out that the rear of the Royal Alex site is somewhat compromised by second-rate and short-life buildings. There is consequently an opportunity for developers to design a scheme which responds more positively to the rhythms and textures of the surrounding area.
- Section 7.9 of the Brief stipulates that the landscape associated with the proposed redevelopment of the site should be an intrinsic part of the overall design concept. Any new landscaping should have regard to existing wildlife habitats and the ecology of the area in accordance with CP5 Biodiversity in the emerging Core Strategy. Section 7.10 also states that all trees with a TPO must be retained in future proposals for the site.
- The setting of all TPO trees should be preserved and enhanced, enabling them to continue to make a positive contribution to the character of the area. The Brief requires that proposals incorporate a planting/ landscaping strategy which optimises the environmental benefits, as well as provides privacy and frames views. The LPA considers that the Brief has sufficient mechanisms in place to protect the amenity value of the existing environment in the north and west of the site.

4. A second conservation issue – the architectural qualities of structures in different sectors of the redeveloped Alex site

How the planning brief addresses this issue?

- In addition to the requirements set out in Sections 7.9 and 7.10, the LPA has also included a further section in the Brief (Section 7.5) dealing specifically with architectural features. This section refers directly to the important role of the flint wall boundary in defining and linking the grounds and gardens of properties, providing cohesion to the area and complimenting the buildings it encloses. Any proposals which would have a detrimental impact on the flint wall and its setting would be at risk of being refused planning permission.

What force the Brief has, to guarantee outcomes on these issues, not only at the present time but also with regard to the development of the site in future years?

The response to this question is the same for each of the issues raised by members of the Alex Triangle. The consultation in support of the development of the Planning Brief has been extensive entailing:

- Early stakeholder consultation with amenity groups, residents' associations, councillors and the landowner – designed to establish their priorities for the future redevelopment of the site;
- Public exhibition – testing public opinion on the council's draft land-use and design options for the site; and
- Conservation Advisory Group (CAG) – testing the council's draft land-use and design options for the site and feeding back the results of the Conservation Assessment.

This has contributed to an enhanced understanding of local aspirations for the site and has helped to inform the development of the Brief. The Brief will be a material planning consideration in the determination of planning applications relating to the site. It remains to be seen how much weight will be given to the Brief by a Planning Inspector if there is an appeal/ inquiry in the future. However, it is likely that an Inspector in deciding what weight to attach to the Brief will give consideration to the extensive consultation process which has gone far beyond that which is normally undertaken in support of Planning Briefs.

Given the current economic situation, deliverability and viability are key themes which are explored within the Planning Brief. The Brief will therefore need to be reviewed at regular intervals to ensure that it adequately reflects local market conditions. It is suggested that the first review will take place in two years time. This will ensure that the Brief remains up-to-date and pragmatic in its approach towards the site. This proactive approach is necessary to ensure that the site does not remain vacant for the foreseeable future.