

Wolvercote Mill Site – Reserved Matters application - WNF Comments

The Steering Committee of the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Forum has taken note of the revised layout of buildings on the site and the plans for houses and apartments in the Reserved Matters application. It is accepted that this is a neglected brown-field site that should be developed. However, there are serious concerns about some aspects of the proposals and these are set out below.

Site Preparation

The removal of a large amount of contaminated material from the site and bringing in material to prepare the site for development and construct the buildings will involve a large number of vehicle movements in heavy lorries over about three months. This will be a potential cause of congestion, especially given the weight restriction and the traffic control system over the railway bridge. Representatives of CALA Homes have agreed that when the details of the contract for site preparation are available, there will be a local consultation. It is essential, given the potential for serious disturbance and safety risks to the local community, that this consultation and agreed consequent action should be a condition of approval.

There is also concern about ensuring that pollution consequent on the removal of contaminated material is effectively monitored, given the proximity of immediate neighbours to the site. CALA Homes have assured us that this will be done. It is important that appropriate safeguards are a condition of approval.

Absence of sections

The absence of sections for the whole site made the process of examining the application more difficult than it should have been. We had expected that there would be existing and proposed site sections for finished floor and site levels, as required in the Council's own List of National and Local Planning Application Requirements. We fail to understand why this was not required as part of the application.

Police Comments

We have seen the comments of the Police on safety by design and share some of their concerns.

Bus Company

There are also concerns about narrow roads, especially those expressed by the bus company, and there is still a local view that the access from the site to Godstow Road is problematic, especially when there are deliveries to the White Hart.

Flood Risk

There has always been concern about flood risk, both on the site and consequential flooding of neighbouring properties. The proposals from CALA Homes to manage surface-water drainage appear to be an improvement on the plans for flood control included in the approved outline application. The capacity of the foul sewer to cope with additional new homes is also a matter of concern to residents. As required in the outline planning approval, both these risks need to be carefully monitored.

Working hours

The Construction Traffic and Environmental Plan, paragraph 4.5 refers to the working hours - 7am to 8pm 6 days a week, with noisy work till 7pm. This is not in line with OCC's recommended hours of 7-30-5.30 on weekdays, and 7-30-1pm on Saturdays for noisy work. The proposed working hours would be very disruptive to the neighbours.

Layout generally

1. The provision that fifty percent of the units of accommodation on the site should be 'affordable' dwellings is welcomed, but these are concentrated in two areas of the site, which could lead to the development of ghettos, which is undesirable. Concerns about the plans of these dwellings are set out below.
2. The proposed removal of the central block of trees removes an existing wildlife corridor that will take many years to replace and will be opposed by local residents.
3. The buildings at the south-west of the site (Block B and Town House type 02) are too close to the mill stream, as pointed out by the Environment Agency and others.
4. There is no dedicated car-parking provision at the proposed Doctors' Surgery, nor for the workshops. Doctors and patients and those using, visiting or delivering to workshops (described on the plans as a 'B1 C Unit') will have to compete for what limited parking there is.
5. The road along the reservoir edge does not appear wide enough for normal through-use, especially given that there is little provision for visitor parking. The garages to Town Houses type 03 may end up being storage space or being converted to habitable space in the future, and if so there will be further demand on outside parking area.
6. The argument for flat roofs rather than pitched roofs to Town House type 3, as set out in the Design and Access Statement (page 50), is not convincing. Local people are generally averse to the town houses in nearby Rowland Close, and the flat roofs on houses and flats in nearby Webbs Close were replaced by pitched roofs some years ago.
7. The reasoning behind the steeper pitched roofs to Block C, compared for example with Block B, is also unconvincing. Steeper pitched roofs should only be provided where there is the possibility of conversion to usable space, such as living space.
8. The site layout has missed opportunities to use building form to protect a large part of the development from the noise transmitted by road traffic on the A34. We believe that the developer's strategy to solve the problem with double-glazing alone will not be enough.
9. The location of the west playground (for toddlers and young children) has, we understand, been approved by an inspector from ROSPA. However, we believe it will still be a concern to parents and carers because it is near water but is unfenced, and is largely out of sight of neighbouring houses..

Apartment blocks A, B, C and D

1. The internal design and layout of the apartment blocks (A, B, C and D) is very poor. The majority of these are affordable housing. There is no reason why affordable housing should be poorly designed. In particular, the public spaces are sparingly sized and planned. Access corridors are narrow, with (except in the case of Block A) no natural light or ventilation. There is no entrance lobby, and no space for greeting visitors or for letter-boxes. There is a single, minimally sized stairway and no lift. As a consequence, there is no disabled access to upper floors, which we consider essential
2. The flats are of minimal dimensions with very little storage space, and space to park a push chair. Double beds are illustrated in all bedrooms, being more economical of space, but this does not reflect the reality of family life, where children will need single beds. Generally bedrooms do not appear have sufficient space for desks and chests of drawers as well as wardrobes.
3. In Blocks A and B, cycle stores are badly planned. Access should be from the outside, not via corridors, which are likely to get damaged by bicycles.
4. Planning of the flats for the most part shows little regard for visual outlook or sunlight, especially in the case of single-aspect units.
5. In all dwellings, doors between kitchens and bedroom corridors have been omitted. These should be provided not only for fire safety, but also to limit smells and noise transmission.
6. The layout of windows in some cases does not fit with room layouts and the vertical 'portrait' configuration used for all windows will not provide satisfactory natural lighting.
7. We assume that the design of these apartment blocks is intended to reflect the industrial past of the site, as are the high chimneys on the individual houses, but we remain unconvinced that this is a necessary or successful feature of the development.

Community Centre

1. This building will need a small kitchen. The developer should at least provide services and drainage for this.
2. It is also desirable in a public building that all spaces are made accessible to all. Therefore a lift to the 1st floor mezzanine is essential.

Landscaping design and maintenance

1. It is noted that ground-floor levels of houses at the north of the site will be over 1 metre above existing ground levels. As shown on the Design and Access Statement (page 82), the ground level of the gardens to the houses on the east side of Meadow Lane will significantly fall towards the existing properties in Home Close. We are very concerned that water run-off from these gardens could flood these existing properties.

2. On the west side of Block B and at the entrances to the town houses type T02, there is an absence of soft landscaping (see drawing 6622.01.212); as a result, cars would be able to park right up to the building, which we consider to be undesirable. (See also comment 3 under Layout Generally above.)
3. The Landscape and Ecological Management Plan, para 3.62 refers to the frequency of mowing, but fails to mention the need to ensure that pollinators are taken into consideration.

In conclusion

WNF objects to this application without the resolution of the concerns expressed above.