

Land South of Watling Street, Dartford Planning Brief



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1. Introduction

1.1 The purposes of this planning brief are four fold:

- To provide planning guidance to the landowner about the scale, mix and layout which would be acceptable on this site, prior to the Dartford Borough Local Plan Review going on deposit shortly;
- To provide a clear statement about the design principles to be adopted in any development;
- To set out the requirements to be provided in respect of highway and access; and
- To set out the planning obligations which the landowner would be expected to agree.

2. Site Location

2.1 The site occupies a site area of 1.75 hectares on the eastern side of the town of Dartford (see attached plan). Watling Street is an important primary road into Dartford from the east and dates from Roman times. Over time, it has attracted uses, which either require good access to the highway network, or which depend to some extent upon passing trade. As a result, the principal uses in Watling Street have been commercial, including light industrial units, car dealerships and depots together with areas of private and public open space.

2.2 However, in recent year, two sites in Watling Street have come forward for residential development. Allotment land at Watling Street between the cemetery and the fire station has been developed as a private residential care home, while the former Dartford Football Club ground, opposite the site, has been developed as a high density residential scheme.

2.3 Land south of Watling Street currently comprises a former car dealership and petrol filling station, a dairy depot and a buildings material supplier including a two-storey building, together with areas of hardstanding previously used for the parking and storage of vehicles. The site has extensive green verges along the frontage of Watling Street. Levels rise by approximately 0.75 metres from Watling Street to the southern part of the site.

2.4 The rectangular site has its main frontage on Watling Street (B2200). The surrounding area contains a mix of uses. To the west lies Dartford Fire Station and Woodford House, a residential care home for the elderly. Immediately to the south there are a number of light industrial employment units which front Princes Road (A226). To the east there is

a building currently used as a fishing tackle shop, beyond which there are garages, a retail use and hot food take away uses.

2.5 There are no listed buildings on the site, it does not fall within a conservation area and there are no tree preservation orders within or close to the site.

2.6 The former car dealership building and the dairy depot are in the ownership of the Co-operative Wholesale Society (CWS). CWS also own that part of the site currently occupied by the builders' merchants.

3. Strategic Context

3.1 Since 1995, the Government has revised a number of planning policy guidance notes, including PPG1 (General Policy and Principles) PPG1 states that mixed-use development can help create vitality and diversity and reduce the need to travel. Single use developments are now actively discouraged. Local planning authorities are advised to include policies in their development plans to promote mixed uses including areas of major new development. More recently, in October 1998, the Government published "Planning for Sustainable Development: Towards Better Practice", a practical guide which seeks to demonstrate ways to plan new housing and other essential new development which better meets the Government's objectives for sustainable development.

3.2 The Government has recognised that neighbourhoods and their local facilities can serve an important role in achieving sustainable objectives. A thriving neighbourhood centre can encourage communities to interact. Although neighbourhood centres are largely underpinned by their retailing function, a centre also serves its local community in providing community facilities, such as a school, a surgery, a community hall, or a playing field. A network of neighbourhood centres within an urban area can help reduce the need to travel by car to major centres and encourage walking and cycling.

3.3 Kent Thames-side, the area of Dartford and Gravesham Boroughs north of the A2, is identified as a growth area of regional significance in the Thames Gateway Planning Framework (RPG9a), published by Government in 1995. The Framework makes clear that the focus for growth will be upon damaged land which can provide significant opportunities for new development.

3.4 The Framework estimates that Kent Thames-side has the potential for more than 30,000 new homes over the next 30 years, assuming a new station on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link is constructed. It sets out the fundamental principles for the future development of Thames Gateway These include:

- the need to create a pattern of vibrant and sustainable communities, both in terms of mixed-use developments on individual sites and in relationship to the needs of existing settlements;
- relating transport and land use opportunities in order to contribute to a sustainable pattern of development; and
- applying a new environmental standard, breaking away from the cycle of environmental blight.

3.5 The Kent Association of Local Authorities has published a revised Kent Design Guide, replacing the original Kent Design published in 1995. The Guide seeks to promote innovation, quality and sustainability within new development, and to raise awareness of design and environmental issues. It is intended that the Guide will be adopted by local authorities as supplementary planning guidance. Kent Design will, therefore, be expected to become a material consideration in the determination of planning applications throughout Kent. Copies of the Design Guide are available from Kent County Council.

4. Dartford Borough Local Plan

4.1 The Dartford Borough Local Plan was adopted in 1995 and runs until 2001. The draft content of a Review of the Local Plan was approved by the Councils Corporate Development Committee for deposit on 5 July 1999. Subject to final changes and printing, it is intended to place the draft on deposit in January 2000. In the meantime, in view of current interest about this site, it is considered prudent to prepare some planning guidance to assist the landowner and potential developers. This brief has been the subject of public consultation and was adopted by the Corporate Development Committee of Dartford Borough Council on 22 November 1999 as supplementary planning guidance. Consequently, the brief is a material consideration in determining any planning application on this site.

4.2 The adopted Local Plan has no site-specific proposals for this site. However, a number of general policies are relevant in determining any planning application that would come forward. Policy H7 states that proposals for housing development within the urban area will normally be permitted where the proposals would provide a good residential environment. Proposals should pay regard to the need to make appropriate provision for affordable housing. Policy H8 sets out the criteria in respect of density of residential development while policies H10 and B1 refer to design and layout. Policy CF3 encourages and supports the provision of social, community, educational and cultural facilities and infrastructure to meet future needs of the Borough and sets out the criteria against which proposals will be considered. Copies of the relevant policies are available from the Borough Council on request.

4.3 In addition to the relevant provisions of the adopted Local Plan, the Council has adopted a policy of seeking social housing provision at a level of 20%.

4.4 For the purposes of preparing the current draft Dartford Borough Local Plan Review, an analysis of the urban area has been undertaken to develop an urban structure which can form a basis for planning decisions. A number of neighbourhoods and neighbourhood centres have been identified within the urban area of Dartford Borough. The criteria which have been used to determine the existing neighbourhood structure area are:

- the definition of distinct 'neighbourhoods' with clearly identifiable boundaries;
- a range of facilities, including shops, post office, schools and other community facilities within a defined neighbourhood centre;
- the degree of accessibility to each centre on foot or bicycle from their respective neighbourhoods; and
- the provision of access to public transport.

4.5 The area bounded by Princes Road, St James Lane Pit, London Road and the A282 has been identified by the Borough Council as a residential area which currently lacks a range of neighbourhood facilities. Other than a small number of retail units along London Road in the northern part of this area, it lacks a local centre. This site is of a sufficient size and within one ownership to provide an opportunity for comprehensive development which could accommodate some neighbourhood facilities to serve the southern part of the area and complement those to the north.

4.6 The draft deposit Local Plan Review will safeguard land for the construction of a new public transport network through Kent Thames-side. Known as Fastrack, the network will link the towns of Dartford and Gravesend, a number of the major developments such as Bluewater and Crossways and existing communities. By building in segregation from, and priority over, other types of traffic, Fastrack will be able to offer faster journey times, greater regularity and reliability of service and a higher overall service quality compared to the current bus service within Kent Thames-side. Phase 1 of Fastrack will run along Princes Road, around 500 metres from the site. At present, there is a good public transport service on Watling Street, with the 490 service providing a 10 minute frequency between Dartford and Gravesend town centres. This should be the focus for public transport availability in the short term.

4.7 A local centre in this location would be well connected by the existing street network and the pedestrian bridge to the residential areas south of Princes Road.

5. Future Development Proposals

5.1 The Borough Council acknowledges that at present, the land at the rear of the site is currently leased by CWS to Stockgap Ltd, and that the lease has more than 10 years left to run. In addition, the Invicta Co-op Dairy Depot is still in operation and may continue to remain so for some time. Therefore, it is likely that in the short term, any redevelopment at this stage would be limited to that part of the site occupied by the former Cascade Motors. However, any proposals for this part of the site should not prejudice the long-term aspirations of both the landowner and the Borough Council to see the whole site redeveloped in a comprehensive way. In addition, development proposals should not adversely affect vehicular access to the backland site occupied by Stockgap. Access to Stockgap should, if possible, be separate from the new access arrangements serving any proposed redevelopment fronting Watling Street.

5.2 The guiding principles which the Council wish to see in considering any development proposals are as follows:

- A mixed-use, predominantly residential, development which incorporates a mix and type of other uses to create a new focus within the neighbourhood, including retail, community facilities and/or public open space.
- Proposals either based on a scheme for the site as a whole or for individual parts which are designed to integrate with an agreed framework for the whole site.
- A design which positively encourages pedestrian and cycle access to surrounding residential areas and to both existing and future public transport stops.
- Strong visual street frontage with high quality design to provide a quality streetscape, given the location of the site on a main route between Dartford Town Centre and Bluewater.

6. Retail use

6.1 The Council considers there may be scope for the provision of a local centre in this location which would serve the surrounding residential area. Proposals should be of a scale to meet the needs of local residents and employees and not adversely affect the vitality and viability of Dartford town centre and existing or proposed other local centres. Therefore, in addition to the guiding principles set out above, any retail proposals should:

- Provide no more than 500 sq m of gross retail floorspace in total, of which no more than 300 sq m of floorspace should be for food retailing.

- Relate to and form part of the Watling Street frontage within a landscaped and structured setting in order to create a focal meeting place, incorporating seating, trees and shrubs and public art.
- Be located to encourage pedestrian access from both Watling Street and from within the development. This could be achieved by providing a separate entrance and exit arrangement.
- Locate car parking predominantly to the side and/or rear of the development.
- Incorporate a high quality of design of unit(s) to ensure no blank elevations or dead frontages on visually prominent sides.
- Minimise disturbance to surrounding residential areas caused by servicing and traffic noise through careful design and siting of these areas.

6.2 The provision of retail units will relate to the completion of a specified number of residential units to be agreed with the applicant and set out within a legal agreement.

7. Residential Use

7.1 The surrounding mix of uses and the location of the site close to good public transport stops would allow for a high quality, high density residential scheme. In addition to the guiding principles set out in para 5.1, any residential element should include the following:

- pedestrian and cycle access from Watling Street to all parts of the site.
- A mix of design and type of housing such as 2-3 storey mews/town houses and an element of flatted development. Three-storey development should be sited away from the northern part of the site because of the gradient of the site.
- The provision of some street frontage development to both Watling Street and onto roads within the site, in order to minimise prominent flank elevations and fencing onto main street frontages.
- A layout which incorporates an element of functional playspace, in accordance with the Councils revised open space standards. This would require a local play area of up to 0.2 ha for a redevelopment of the whole site, incorporating play equipment for children up to 8 years old. Local play space to serve residential development on part of the site would be determined on a pro rata basis, unless otherwise agreed.
- Residential parking arrangements which minimise the intrusiveness of the car in the street scene while ensuring that provision is safe

and convenient. This may be achieved by rear access parking or enclosed communal parking areas within the development.

- A high residential density which achieves around between 60 and 90 dwellings per hectare across the residential element of the site. The entire site is potentially within 200 metres of a public transport stopping point.
- The provision of a buffer zone of landscaping to protect resident amenity from the commercial uses to the south.
- The provision of 20% of the residential units to be subsidised social housing: the requirement for social housing will be calculated on the residential capacity of the whole site. Any partial development will be expected to contribute on a pro rata or otherwise agreed basis. Construction of these units and their subsequent management will be the responsibility of a social landlord (housing association), registered with the Housing Corporation. The resulting housing will be made available to nominees of the Borough Council, secured by condition or planning obligation. Variations on this arrangement will only be considered in the most exceptional circumstances. The Councils Housing Department will provide a preferred dwelling size and mix, taking account of the 1996 Housing Needs Survey of the Borough and the profile of need as identified by the Councils Common Housing Register. At present, there is a strong demand for affordable rented accommodation, with a mixture of smaller and larger family housing units.
- In addition to the social housing requirement, the Council will seek the inclusion of an element of low cost market housing. The exact number of units and their specification shall be determined by negotiation, having reference to the prevailing housing need and the income levels amongst prospective purchasers. Developers will be expected to enter into a binding legal agreement to safeguard this element of affordable housing for subsequent occupiers.
- The provision of 10% of the open market housing and 20% of affordable housing to incorporate meet the "Lifetime Homes" criteria published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and incorporated within the forthcoming draft Dartford Borough Local Plan Review for deposit.
- Residential properties will be required to incorporate access arrangements suitable for people with disabilities. Entrance ramps and level thresholds should be provided to the principal property entrances. A stepped approach may be accepted to serve properties facing Watling Street because of the gradient.

7.2 At present there is sufficient capacity in existing schools to accommodate anticipated demand for both primary and secondary school places arising from the development of the site. If, however, in the future, there is insufficient capacity in local schools, an assessment will be carried out to determine the level of provision for educational contributions. Developer contributions will then be sought to cover the cost of additional provision arising directly from the development.

7.3 In line with Government Circular 1/97, the Borough Council will expect to enter into appropriate legal agreements with the developer to ensure the provision of community facilities which will arise as a direct result of the development.

8. Other Community Uses

8.1 There may be scope to accommodate a range of community uses on the site. Good accessibility both by car and by public transport and proximity to surrounding residential uses may support a number of different uses on the site. These could be small-scale leisure uses, health-care facilities such as a GP or dental practice, a church or other place of worship or a community hall. The Council's preference would be for one or more of these uses to be incorporated within a predominantly residential scheme. However, the Council would be willing to consider a development proposal which included primarily a community use which would help create a neighbourhood centre on this site. The Council would not expect the developer of residential development on this site to provide community uses, as the number of dwellings likely to be accommodated would not generate a need for community facilities, other than possibly a need for education contributions (see para 7.2). In addition to the guiding principles set out in para 5.1, any proposal would need to:

- Relate to and form part of the Watling Street frontage within a landscaped and structured setting in order to create a focal meeting point.
- Be located to encourage pedestrian access from both Watling Street and from within the development. This could be achieved by providing a separate entrance and exit arrangement.
- Locate car parking predominantly to the side and/or rear of the development.
- Incorporate a high quality of design of unit(s) to ensure no blank elevations or dead frontages on visually prominent sides.
- Minimise disturbance to surrounding residential areas caused by servicing and traffic noise through careful design and siting of these areas.

9. Highway and Access Issues

9.1 Development proposals would be expected to meet the following criteria:

- Limit the number of vehicular accesses onto Watling Street to two.
- Meet Kent County Council's vehicle parking standards, published in February 1999, and take into account the Borough Council's vehicle and cycle parking standards set out in the forthcoming draft Dartford Borough Local Plan Review for deposit to be published in January 2000.
- Access to any car park associated with non-residential uses should be via a road serving the residential part of the site.
- All highway design must be in accordance with the Kent Design Guide or as otherwise agreed.
- Pedestrian crossing measures and traffic calming measures shall be provided on Watling Street, by way of a legal agreement. This should be designed to take account of Watling Streets important role as a public transport link.
- No on-street parking along Watling Street.
- A footpath and cycle link to Princes Road to the south of the site shall be safeguarded within the development layout, the alignment to be agreed with the Borough Council.
- Current access to the builders' merchants to be either closed or changed to an adopted highway as development proceeds. The internal layout of any development proposal must be able to accommodate either option.
- All surface water needs to be disposed of on site. Surface water disposal will need to take account of the known poor sub-soil permeability in the area.

10. Cultural Heritage

10.1 The archaeological potential of the site, on the basis of present evidence, is not considered to be high. However, the site lies within the Area of Archaeological Potential associated with Watling Street, the probable alignment of the main Roman road from London to Canterbury. Roman and medieval artefacts have been discovered within 200 metres of the site in the past. In view of the size of the site and the fact that it lies in an area which has not been subject to a systematic archaeological survey, it is quite possible that further archaeological remains might have survived. Therefore, development proposals will be expected to take full account of both the relevant policies set out in the Built Environment

chapter of the forthcoming draft deposit Local Plan Review, as well as PPG16 (Archaeology and Development).

11. Other Environmental Considerations

11.1 The Borough Council will require evidence of a site investigation to determine if soil contamination is present owing to the former uses. If contamination is present, remedial action will be necessary.



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