



**Havering**  
LONDON BOROUGH

**Strategic Planning  
Committee  
7 October 2021**

<b>Pre-Application Reference:</b>	<b>PE/00661/21</b>
<b>Location:</b>	<b>Abercrombie House, Hilldene Avenue, RM3 7UA</b>
<b>Ward:</b>	<b>Gooshays</b>
<b>Description:</b>	<b>Demolition of all existing buildings and structures, site preparation works and the construction of a part 2/part3/part4-storey building comprising a hostel facility (approximately 74 residential units) and medical centre (approximately 1560 square metres), along with all associated infrastructure, plant, access arrangements, [car/cycle] parking, and hard and soft landscaping.</b>
<b>Case Officer:</b>	<b>John Kaimakamis</b>

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## **1 BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 This proposed development is being presented to enable Members of the Committee to view and comment upon it before a planning application is submitted. The development does not constitute an application for planning permission and any comments made upon it are provisional and subject to full consideration of any subsequent application, and the comments received as a result of consultation, publicity and notification.
- 1.2 Officers have been in pre-application discussions with regard to this site. The proposed scheme has been subject to review by the Havering Quality Review Panel (QRP), and it is now considered appropriate to seek Members' views before the proposal is developed any further.

## **2 PROPOSAL AND LOCATION DETAILS**

### **2.1 Proposal**

- The proposal relates to a council-led scheme for temporary/emergency sheltered housing for families, comprising around 74 units, alongside a separate medical centre. The applicant aims to replace the existing facility on site, to increase capacity and improve the existing accommodation. This scheme forms the first phase of a wider masterplan within the area, with the council exploring the potential to redevelop the Farnham Road shopping centre and Chippenham Road sites to the south in the longer term.
- Proposal includes the demolition of all existing buildings/structures (including Abercrombie House, former Library, and former Boxing Club).
- The approximately 74 dwelling family hostel would be provided in varying sizes of 1, 2 and 3-bed units including wheelchair accessible rooms, replacing the 40 rooms in the existing Abercrombie House hostel
- The medical centre would be approximately 1,560 sqm (GIA) in size.
- The building would consist of Part-2, Part-3 and Part-4 storey building elements, whilst the proposal also includes all associated infrastructure, plant, access arrangements, parking, central courtyard, public realm and hard/soft landscaping.

### **2.2 Site and Surroundings**

- The site is located within a district centre in Harold Hill, in the northeast of the borough.
- To the south of the site, Farnham Road is a post-war development with retail at ground floor level and housing above. To the north and west of the site, recently developed housing is of slightly higher density than the surrounding suburban context, and includes three storey apartments; located to the east is two storey suburban housing that is more typical of the wider area.
- Local Green Belt areas are accessible on foot, due to the relatively peripheral location.

- The site falls within Public Transport Accessibility Level Zone 2. There is no rail / tube station in the centre, and the nearest station is around 30 minutes' walk to Harold Wood. A regular bus service to Romford Town Centre is located directly in front of the site.

### 2.3 **Planning History**

There is no recent relevant planning history that relates to the current proposals at this site.

## 3 **CONSULTATION**

3.1 At this stage, it is intended that the following will be consulted regarding any subsequent planning application:

- London Fire Brigade
- TfL

## 4 **MATERIAL PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

4.1 The main planning issues raised by the application which the committee should consider are:

- Principal of Development
- Form and Massing
- Quality of Accommodation
- Transport
- Landscape
- Energy and Sustainability
- QRP Feedback

### 4.2 **Principal of Development**

- The principle of development is supported as it addresses the existing problems with Abercrombie House and the emergency family accommodation in the form of a family hostel. Potential to provide higher quality accommodation for families in need of emergency housing and make more efficient use of the site.
- Further information is required for the Medical Centre to clarify that the scale and layout of the proposals are suitable.
- Although this site is a standalone application, issues that are likely to impact later phases of the masterplan in the wider area should be considered. For

example, how parking is likely to be distributed, provision of play/amenity space, potential to improve key pedestrian/cycle routes. Information on these and any other relevant issues should be provided.

- If provision of the homeless family accommodation is to be relevant to overall affordable housing provision in later phases, this needs to be set out at this stage.
- Justification for loss of boxing club and availability of alternate community uses in the vicinity will be required to be provided.

#### **4.3 Form and Massing**

- The proposed form and massing generally appear to create an appropriate relationship with the surroundings. The proposal has been reduced to part 2/part 3/part 4-storeys and the relationship with the existing housing opposite on Bridgewater Road and any mitigation from level changes within the site needs careful consideration.
- Given the low-rise suburban nature of the surroundings any increase in height/massing beyond the current proposal should be avoided. The transition from the two storey housing to the east on Bridgewater Road and Hilldene Avenue to the site will be important. Currently, the three-storey element in the northeast corner of the site has the potential to impact negatively on neighbouring amenity.

#### **4.4 Provision Quality of Accommodation**

- The temporary nature of the housing and provision of communal facilities can help justify a reduction in the scale of units to below standard London Plan requirements for conventional housing. Concerns that the scale and layout of the smallest unit types offer limited quality/flexibility and recommend that these are replaced with the more larger unit types where possible.
- Need to demonstrate sufficient provision on on-site communal facilities within the building: lounge / washing facilities etc
- The mix of unit types, which would be 1, 2 & 3 bed units will be driven by the Housing Team and the identified need.

- Need to demonstrate that adequate light can be provided to all units and equally that the scale of the scheme does not adversely affect the light to any nearby residential properties.
- Need to demonstrate that there is satisfactory levels of communal amenity space/playspace for the future occupiers including details of quality of provision for all ages of children and parents, given level of occupation and likely stay length.

#### 4.5 **Parking and Servicing**

- Consideration of parking, access and servicing issues required and any proposed loss of street parking is likely to be of particular relevance.
- The number car parking spaces for the emergency housing should be justified, we would support a reduction in this quantum if the brief allows.
- A Transport Assessment including parking surveys of the surrounding area will be required.
- A cycle strategy should be provided.

#### 4.6 **Landscape**

- Landscape proposals should be developed from the outset to input at a strategic level and a landscape strategy for the perimeter parking/verge areas as well as the courtyard will be important.
- An Urban Green Factor calculation should be considered at outset.
- A SUDS strategy should be provided.
- Child yield/play requirements should be provided to demonstrate how London Plan standards can be adhered to.

#### 4.7 **Energy and Sustainability**

- An overheating strategy should be provided particularly with regard to single aspect south facing units. The lack of balconies means that alternative methods of solar shading are likely to be necessary.
- Indicative wall thicknesses and corresponding U-Values should be provided for discussion at pre-application stage.

- Further information on the renewable energy strategy required as the scheme develops including demonstration of sufficient plant space.

#### 4.6 Quality Review Panel (QRP) Comments

- The proposal was presented to the Havering Quality Review Panel on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2021. Members should note that the proposal being presented to them now may have changed to reflect the QRP's comments. The following comments were made by the QRP:
  - Panel feels that this is a promising scheme and the proposals represent a dramatic improvement on the existing hostel on the site. Massing and heights are appropriate, but panel feels that a more suburban form could be considered within this setting. Panel particularly supportive of the decision to arrange the building around a central communal courtyard, which it feels will be a significant asset, and urges the design team to consider carefully how it could be integrated more fully with how the rest of the building is used. Designing in movement through the space would help and panel suggest that a single storey building at the eastern end of the courtyard would help to achieve this and also provide much-needed additional space within what is a highly congested scheme: panel would like to be reassured that the site is capable of successfully accommodating so many families, albeit temporarily. More work therefore is needed on landscape and amenity space. The proposed approach to the environmental performance of the scheme, particularly with regard to energy, also requires further development.
  - Panel feels that the scheme's architecture and materiality are developing well. The massing and heights of the scheme work well, but the form could be broken up somewhat to give the scheme a more appropriate, suburban character.
  - Panel feels that the arrangement of the units is largely successful, and it welcomes the separation of the entrance from the bedrooms. They note that space within all of the units is necessarily tight, but that this is exacerbated within the larger, flexible units that can be adapted to increase the number of bed spaces without a corresponding increase in the amount of living space. The panel would like to see an assessment of the capacity of these units to accommodate activities, such as homework, and consideration given to increasing their size where possible.
  - Half of the units have no relationship with the courtyard, and there are a lot of single aspect units facing north, and some facing south. There is potential for providing dual aspect units and the panel would like to see this explored.

- The provision of glazing at the ends of corridors, to allow for natural lighting, is well-intentioned, but the panel feels that this limits the potential for larger, dual aspect units here. It suggests that on top floors, the corridor could instead be lit by sky lights, allowing for larger units on these floors.
- The panel feels that the internal corridors could feel institutional, and the panel would like to see the design team take every opportunity to introduce moments of delight, with inviting spaces for people to linger and seek respite. In particular, it feels that there is potential to reduce the number of cores, making them more generous and introducing courtyard views.
- While it recognises the constraints, the panel feels that there are potentially too many units on the site, without additional space being made available for retreat and respite, and for general amenity. Viewing the scheme within the context of the wider masterplan could offer potential solutions.
- Communal courtyard is a significant asset to the scheme, but panel feels that further thought should be given to ways in which this space could be better activated and integrated into the building, allowing for increased opportunities for residents to interact in informal settings. The landscape design should be developed to consider the differing needs of residents including spaces of calm as well as spaces for play and socialising -
- E.g., panel suggests opening up the gallery to the courtyard, and locating facilities and circulation routes that necessitate or encourage movement through the space, whilst a free standing, single storey building could be provided at the eastern end of the courtyard to house additional internal amenity, such as space where children could do their homework in relative peace, a communal kitchen and/or lounge.
- Panel notes that there will be a lot of children resident within the scheme, albeit on a temporary basis, with very limited play space available. Potential to create a degree of conflict over the use of the amenity space available, which will require careful design to accommodate the diverse demands placed up on it.
- Given pressures on amenity space, consideration be given to the potential for using some of the roof space for this purpose, where other uses (such as greening and energy generation) allow.
- Similarly, further consideration given to the potential for providing balconies to the units, in order to create additional amenity space for residents, where this is cost-effective.
- Pleased that early consideration has been given to the street landscape, which it feels will be critical to the success of the scheme and the wider masterplan.

- Proposed courtyard is a promising element of the scheme but, given the number of residents anticipated, it is likely to be heavily used. Would like to see the courtyard divided into different 'rooms' that can allow for quieter enjoyment as well as more active use.
- Proposed medical centre will have an awkward relationship with the courtyard and activating the ground floor elevation to Hilldene Avenue will be challenging; integrating the proposed car parking will also require careful treatment.
- Landscape architect should be appointed early on to help ensure the full potential of both courtyard and wider public realm is realised, particularly around the residential entrance.
- Early thought to issues around sustainable energy, water and drainage, and to move quickly to establish their ambitions for the scheme's environmental performance.
- Pleased proposal is already considering the whole-life carbon of scheme, and welcome intention to use modern methods of construction (MMC) to mitigate this.
- Recognises that it may not be feasible to reuse the existing buildings, consideration should be given to reuse of existing substructures, as well as the reuse of waste materials.
- Panel notes the early analysis of daylight and overshadowing, and welcomes intention to set back windows to provide some integrated solar shading. However, the south-facing, single aspect units will need particular attention in this regard and would also benefit from some noise buffering to mitigate the impact of Hilldene Avenue.
- Scheme should be considered in relation to the wider masterplan, both in terms of its character but also with regard to the capacity of the site. E.g., play and amenity space could be provided within Farnham Road, which could also be designed as a safe and attractive route to the park and wider area.
- Clarity needed on the connections beyond the site to public transport routes, cycle networks and existing green space, such as Harold Hill Central Park, which will provide important amenity and play space, particularly for older children.
- Operational and servicing requirements of building will likely result in extensive blank façades at ground floor, particularly along the northern elevation and around the health centre. Design needs to consider carefully how these are treated to activate the adjacent streets.



#### 4.7 **Other Planning Issues**

The proposal would attract Section 106 contributions to mitigate the impact of the development, covering the following:

- Improvements to public realm (particularly pedestrian spaces/highway in the vicinity of the site – including Liveable Neighbourhoods)
- Transport improvements including: cycling, public transport, CPZ
- Carbon Offset Contribution

The proposal would be subject to the Mayoral and Havering Community Infrastructure Levy contributions to mitigate the impact of the development but subject to relief based on existing and proposed uses.

Other considerations include:

- Sustainable design and construction measures;
- Secured by Design
- Preventing Anti-Social Behaviour
- Mitigation of noise from plant and servicing

#### **Summary of Issues**

4.8 Officers have discussed the following matters with the applicant team and Members may wish to comment in relation to these points in addition to any other comments/questions that they may wish to raise:

- Principal of Development
- Form and Massing
- Quality of Accommodation
- Transport
- Landscape
- Energy and Sustainability

#### **Conclusion**

4.9 The proposals are still at pre-application stage and input from Members would help to influence the final details of any development. There are some aspects that require further work as identified in this report and Members' guidance will be most helpful to incorporate as the various elements are brought together.