

East Herts Council



Bishop's Stortford Mill Site

Site Development Brief

December 2010

Bishop's Stortford - Mill Site - Site Development Brief

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Introduction, Purpose and Scope

Lying on the edge of Bishop's Stortford Town Centre, the site forms an "island" bounded by Hockerill Street to the North, Dane Street to the East, Station Road to the South and the River Stort to the West. Currently utilised for commercial and industrial use, any future redevelopment would provide a unique opportunity to stimulate and encourage all aspects of town centre life. The site was one identified through the work of the Bishop's Stortford 20 20 Vision Group, sponsored by East Herts Council but made up of representatives of a broad cross section of organisations with a commitment to delivering best outcomes for the town.

In January 2010 the group published "A Vision for Bishop's Stortford" which captured many of the key objectives and outcomes the people of Bishop's Stortford feel are needed for their town.

This brief sets out what the Council will require to be submitted with a planning application/s as well as a number of section 106 planning obligations. It articulates the Council's objectives for the site which it shares with the partners of the Vision 20 20 Group. It establishes a number of key principles for prospective development and provides advice on preferred uses.

The site brief reflects the most current and up to date views for the site and is fully supported by the feedback from the consultation process. It is supported by and consistent with the Vision for Bishops Stortford 20 20.

Adopted as policy by the East Herts Council it will be able to feed into and inform the Local Development Framework and could subsequently be proposed and adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document in due course.

Vision and Development Objectives

Character and Vision

The character of Bishop's Stortford's riverfront in this location reflects its struggle for a new identity. The Mill Site offers a unique opportunity to bring an urban renaissance to this part of Bishop's Stortford through a river-related re-development of the Mill Site area.

Page 11 of 'A Vision for Bishop's Stortford' document states

'The Vision is of a river and waterfront attractively integrated into the town. A river and riverside that is well used and valued by people of the town and which adds to the overall feel of the town and contributes to its economy, its leisure and its sustainability'.

The site is in multiple ownership and the river frontage has 3 distinct elements from an ownership perspective. There are no indications that the larger occupant (flour mill) is intending to move from the site and the level of capital invested in the site by that operation would make the cost of moving significant. It would therefore seem unlikely that all elements of the site would be developed simultaneously.

Whilst the Council is not actively seeking to encourage the closure or relocation of any of the existing businesses on the site, it has been recognised that the site is considered to have the potential to contribute to the achievement of the Vision and delivery of the desired outcomes.

However, the site has significant potential for riverside regeneration which could provide a vibrant new facility and become a destination in its own right. This could be achieved without need to disturb the flour mill or the adjacent historic setting of Riverside House and Registry Office.

As part of this development option the Mill Site makes a good location for a mooring basin that could be fully integrated into a mixed use development including some residential, business and commercial uses that complements the emerging land use in and around the town centre and demonstrates the town's credentials.

Development Objectives for the Site

Consultation identifies a strong preference to a river-related development as a means of enhancing the town and its offer. The Council's objectives, informed by a Local Initiative Consultation ¹ exercise are that development of this site are;

1. Optimise the natural asset of the site, i.e. the river and its environs by the provision of a canal basin which can provide additional moorings and associated equipment and facilities. In particular, any design must demonstrate how it will avoid any canyon effect being produced.
2. Retail and commercial provision should be focused to complement the existing town centre shopping.
3. Development should maximise commercial frontages to the canal basin and encourage greater leisure use of the river and its environs.
4. Improve access to the waterway from the town centre and create a focus of activity for residents and visitors.

¹ A consultation exercise based on a short list of preferred options was undertaken by the vision 20 20 group as a local initiative. It was undertaken through the organisations represented on the 20 20 group. Details available at www.eastherts.gov.uk

5. The most significant historic buildings should be retained and where necessary renovated.
6. Densities, street layout and building forms should create a strong design concept which links the built form with open spaces, the river and contrasting visual elements. The development should be of varied scale and size and in keeping within an urban form whereby no single building repeats the dominance of the Flour Mill within the urban landscape.
7. In line with the Central Government's objectives the site should be designed to facilitate a low carbon lifestyle through a reduction in car dependence and designing new buildings to minimise energy requirements.

Planning and Policy Framework

The Development Plan

East Hertfordshire District Council is in the process of preparing its Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy. An Issues & Options discussion document has been subject to consultation during autumn 2010. The LDF will in due course form the new overarching planning document for the district which will replace the East Herts Local Plan.

The East Herts Local 2007 identifies three key sites in the town centre for redevelopment (Policy BIS 10). The Riverside/Alderley Road site has recently been completed. The other two sites, the Mill Site and Goods Yard Site, remain underdeveloped.

Policy BIS10 includes a number of specific requirements for these town centre sites, including:

- Channelling market demand to the town centre;
- Introducing a variety of new civic, commercial, retail, residential, and leisure buildings to stimulate and encourage all aspects of town centre life;
- Improving and completing open areas in townscape and strengthening and enhancing pedestrian and cycling movement in the town centre life;
- Respecting and taking into account both the recreational and leisure potential of the river frontage;
- Creation of new public spaces;
- Establishing civic quality in the town;
- Alleviating traffic pressures; and

- Accommodating car parking demand.

Policy BIS12 allocates the Mill Site for a mix of small scale office development and residential development. In reference to residential development the policy suggests around 100 dwellings, including up to 40% affordable housing. In the light of several large scale recent residential developments in the town centre together with the 2020 Group Local Initiative consultation exercise giving a strong preference to a river-related development option it is considered that the adopted development site brief should put greater emphasises on a reduced level of residential accommodation and instead encourage river-related development with greater dominance of employment and commercial uses. This emphasis should form the basis of incorporation in the East Herts Local Development Framework Development Plan Documents.

Information about the site

The Site and Surrounding Area

The area covered by this brief is shown **on Map 1**. The site is approximately 1.5 hectares (3.8 acres) in size and it has boundaries to the north, with the Registry Office; to east and south with Dane Street and Station Road; and to the west with the River Stort. The site is located within the Bishop's Stortford Conservation Area. On the eastern side of the site is no 8 Dane Street, a Grade II Listed building dating back to 17th century. In a wider context the Site Brief has clear relevance to the historic and emerging Land Use and Transportation pattern taking shape within the town centre. The town centre has grown and evolved over time with significant changes taking place in recent years. Many of the older sites including Jackson Square, Riverside, Anchor Street and the John Dyde site, have all undergone significant developments and land use changes. The existing and emerging patterns of land use as shown on the **attached Map 2** provides a valuable portrait of historic and emerging direction for the future of the town centre. It provides a baseline from which to consider the development potential for Mill Site. The baseline for the emerging town centre developments have been determined by recent large-scale developments and those anticipated under the East Herts Local Plan 2007.

Land Ownership

The site is currently occupied by Westmill Foods, Days and Sons Stone Masons, Sheppard's Garage and The Fountain bar and restaurant. Details are shown on

Access and Highways

The site is currently accessed via Dell Lane, a historic lane which runs between Dane Street and Station Road. Detailed investigations will need to be undertaken regarding the best means of access for new development which must operate satisfactorily in terms of capacity and safety.

Dane Street currently has a one way traffic flow between the junction with The Causeway and Station Road. Its narrow footway has to be relooked at in terms of future re-development implications whilst Station Road, a busy traffic route, crosses the River Stort over a narrow bridge.

The towpath along the River Stort is currently being improved by British Waterways.

Conservation Area

The whole of the Mill Site area falls within the Bishop's Stortford Conservation Area. It should also be noted that No. 8 Dane Street is a Grade II Listed Building and the Registry Office is building of local historic and architectural interest.

Services

Electricity, Gas Water Provision

Low pressure gas mains run along the Station Road, Dane Street and Dell Lane. Similarly energy electricity mains, water supply and main drains run along these roads.

Environmental Constraints

Flooding

The site lies adjacent to the River Stort Navigation, which is designated as a Main River watercourse at this location. Part of the site is within Flood Zone 2 as defined by the Environment Agency.

Archaeology

The site is in Area of Archaeological Significance No.114, as identified in Local Plan. This includes medieval and post-medieval town of Bishop's Stortford. The site lies south of medieval core of the town, within an area of intense later post industrial development of the town and in between the Stort Navigation and the railway station.

Development Principles

Appropriate Uses

The sites location and size gives potential for river-related uses which could include leisure, civic, employment and residential units of different sizes including some work place units.

Marina/Boating uses.

Bishop's Stortford Waterspace and Landscape Strategy consider this site as a key site for significant potential for riverside regeneration. A vibrant new facility including a mooring basin adjacent to the historic setting of Riverside House Registry Office could be fully integrated into a mixed-use development. It is anticipated that the development will provide an amenity block and servicing facilities for boat users.

Commercial employment uses

The riverside location and potential for a new mooring basin creates an attractive opportunity for a restaurant/cafe or pub to be incorporated into any scheme. This would provide a focus to those visiting by boat and pedestrians visiting the nearby Jackson Square for shopping. A pedestrian bridge linking the canal basin area with the town centre would be an important feature of the development. Retailing would be only considered acceptable as an ancillary use to the mooring basin within the mixed use scheme.

Employment Uses

The southern part of the site is already dominated by a Flour Mill which provides considerable local employment. Should this part of the site come forward for development in the future, there would be considerable scope for office development given its close proximity to both the railway and bus station; which would reduce the demand for on site parking.

Residential

There is limited scope for some residential apartments on upper floors of commercial employment uses. The potential for live-work units would also be considered to complement the surrounding employment use.

Accessibility and Connectivity

Access.

Dane Street is a route between the Causeway and Station Road. Bishop's Stortford Transport Strategy recommends that Dane Street becomes a 2-way street. This would have implications for turning into Dell Lane. Detailed investigations will need to be undertaken regarding the best means of access for the new development and continuation of the existing operations of the Flour Mill in terms of capacity and safety. The reversion to two-way traffic along Dane Street may include the provision of necessary land for footpath improvements, whilst any development proposals relating to the southern part of the site fronting Station Road would need to include the provision of necessary land to allow the widening of the Station Road Bridge.

The existing towpath along the River Stort, recently improved is to be maintained and should be incorporated as part of mooring basin proposals.

Sustainable measures should be incorporated into the redevelopment proposals to improve access to the site by modes of transport other than the private car, such as walking cycling and buses. A green travel plan will need to be prepared to minimise the use of private cars and promote the use of other sustainable modes of transport to and from the site.

Wider Town Centre Traffic Implications

The wider traffic implications of the development on this site need to be assessed in consultation with Hertfordshire County Highways. In terms of traffic management the Bishop's Stortford Transport Study recommends Town Centre Urban Traffic Control, including new signalised junctions and Scoot Cells.

Connectivity

It is important that the Mill Site is physically connected with the town centre via footbridge across the River Stort and good pedestrian link to the town centre. This would be an important feature of the redevelopment proposals.

The site is well positioned for public transport, being less than 880m from both the existing rail and bus stations. Safe and direct pedestrian links to these public transport facilities will need to be provided which should include crossing facilities.

Parking

Parking for all uses should be provided in accordance with the East Herts Local Plan 2007, Appendix II Vehicle Parking Standards. The Council recognises that the Mill Site's (in particular the southern part) proximity to the railway and bus station means that some flexibility should be adopted when assessing the appropriate parking provision.

Layout, Design and Landscaping

General Principles

Any proposal for this site should create an iconic and distinctive development, whilst respecting the historic character of the surroundings particularly when viewed from the river. It should have a high quality and inclusive design to create a well-mixed and integrated development. It should have well planned public spaces that bring the public together and provide opportunities for physical activity and recreation. The layout and design of the site should take advantage of the riverside location.

Buildings which front onto the river should ensure ease of access to/from the river/mooring basin and allow space for outdoor seating to be accommodated.

Careful consideration should be given to the scale, density, appearance and mix to ensure that the proposal enhances the local area whilst ensuring that there is not a detrimental impact upon the ecology.

Master Planning

The Council expects prospective developers to develop the site in accordance with a conceptual master plan which shall be submitted with a planning application. This will enshrine the principles set out in this brief within an overall design code that sets out parameters for overall design and layout. The master plan should also give an indicative plan of how the Flour Mill part of the site brief area might be developed to ensure that its future potential is not restricted.

Height, Massing and Variety

A mixture of heights and variety of architectural styles should aim to integrate with and respect the Registry Offices and the listed building at no 8 Dane Street. The redevelopment of this site gives an opportunity to improve the setting of the Registry Office, which although not listed, is an attractive building in the Bishop's Stortford Conservation Area, providing an important function for the town. Due attention should be given to the siting and height of any new buildings in the immediate vicinity of the Registry Office. Consideration should also be given to creating a meaningful public space to the rear of this building along the towpath.

Buildings fronting the river should not exceed 3/4storey high and should be sufficiently set back to avoid any 'Canyon' effect. Landmark buildings especially along the road junctions along Dane Street or Station Road could be included to give the site an iconic identity. The orientation of the buildings should make maximum benefit of the attractive views of the riverside. The layout should enable ease of access to/from and through the site.

Design Details

Attention to detail will be critical and it is important that a high quality of design and materials is used for all aspects of development including servicing areas, lighting and signage. There should be a strong design concept behind the development proposal which links the built form with open spaces and new and existing elements in the town. The development should be of varied scale and style, whilst retaining an urban form, with clearly defined boundaries and active ground floor frontages within the commercial part of the site. It should aim to promote safety and security through its design, by avoiding dead ends, darkness areas and blind corners and through use of CCTV.

Landscape and Open Space

A high standard of landscaping is expected throughout the development. This is to maximise the ecological potential of the site and to provide attractive and welcoming areas of open space for visitors and the local community. The mooring basin and the riverside frontage provide the opportunity to create areas of high quality public space which should be incorporated into any proposals for this site. Provision of seating for local residents should also be provided within the site. In determining the creation of

urban landscape form, consideration will need to be given to its relationship with River Stort, its urban context and the needs of future users of the site.

Views and Vistas

The size and topography of the site provides opportunities to open up views across the site and beyond. New views and vistas will provide additional interest within the site and encourage pedestrian routes through it, especially towards the railway station, town centre and river.

Amenity/Public Realm

A series of interconnected open spaces and areas of interest should be provided within the site. These spaces should respond to the variety of uses and make use of the river environment, Registry Office and adjacent listed building. Particular considerations should be given to extending the new public square found on the opposite side of the river and the provision of a pedestrian bridge across the river between the two sites.

Refuse Collection

New development proposals must enable adequate servicing and vehicle manoeuvring space for refuse vehicles and ensure that there is no adverse impact.

Waste Reduction and Recycling

Facilities to enable maximum recycling by residents/ visitors and proposals to maximise waste will need to be incorporated into the design and should be considered at an early stage.

Designing Out Crime

Developers will need to consider the connection between the design of the site and the preventions of crime, 'designing out' crime wherever possible. Buildings, landscaping, wall and fence layouts must allow for casual surveillance and car and cycle parking areas and access routes should be well lit, safe and conveniently placed. Consultation with the Police Crime Prevention Officer should be held at an early stage.

General Sustainability Principles

Efforts should be made to enhance sustainability by seeking to reduce carbon emissions, generate more energy from renewable sources, incorporate sustainable urban drainage systems, reduce waste generation, encourage more recycling and encourage more visitors by public transport, walking, cycling and boating. New development will be required to comply with Code for Sustainable Homes in accordance with requirements set out and implemented in Building Regulations.

The Council supports the advice provided in Building Futures. This is a series of practical guides produced on behalf of Hertfordshire local authorities to support sustainability measures in all new developments. Regard should be paid to this advice in terms of development proposals. The link to Building Futures is <http://www.hertslink.org/buildingfuture>.

Other Development Considerations

Environment Agency Requirements

The site lies adjacent to the River Sort Navigation, which is designated as a Main River watercourse at this location. Part of the site is within Flood Zone 2 as defined by Environment Agency. It will be necessary to undertake a Flood Risk Assessment

An 8 metre buffer zone will need to be left free from any permanent structures including fences and other obstructions. This buffer zone is required in order to improve access to the watercourse for riparian owner and/or Environment Agency to carry out flood defence functions and also provide an ecological buffer zone to protect the river environment.

The site drainage design should be made up of a range of Sustainable Drainage System (SuDS) techniques such as basins, ponds, filter strips, swales and living roofs which can be designated to meet the three SuDS criteria- reduce flood risk, improve water quality, and improve the environment.

If residential development is included within the proposals, the Environment Agency would wish to see that they meet the equivalent Code for Sustainable Homes level three for water efficiency. This equates to 105 litres per head per day.

Air Quality

The Council is seeking to improve the air quality in this area and consequently consideration will need to be given to the effect any proposal will have on existing air quality.

Land Contamination

The nature of the existing uses on the site would suggest that the land is contaminated. Any planning application will need to fully assess the implications of land contamination and ensure that a remediation strategy is in place prior to development.

Noise and Vibration

The planning application should consider the noise and vibration environment of the site and ensure that public spaces, as well as residential units are sympathetically

placed. The most notable sources of noise and vibration are from road traffic and the railway line.

Archaeology

The site area is in Area of Archaeological Significance No.114, as identified in Local Plan. This includes medieval and post-medieval town of Bishops Stortford. The site lies south of the medieval core of the town, within an area of intense later post industrial development of the town and in between the Sort Navigation and the railway station.

In accordance with PPS5 Planning for the Historic Environment, Policy HE 6.1, an archaeological desk –based assessment of the development, together with an historic building assessment of all standing structures should be provided. Once the results of initial investigations are made available, the County Archaeologist will be able to advise further on any additional work or mitigation which may be required. This work should be undertaken prior to a formal application being submitted.

Planning Obligations

In accordance with policy IMP1 of the Local Plan the Council will be seeking financial contributions towards the mitigation of the social, environmental and infrastructure impacts of the development. The Council's Planning Obligations SPD outlines the approach taken to seeking contributions from developers for the provision of appropriate infrastructure, services and community facilities.

Affordable Housing

With regards to affordable housing, a provision should be made for up to 40% affordable housing in accordance with policies HSG3 and HSG4 of the Local Plan. The Council's Affordable Housing & Lifetime Homes Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) provides further information. With regards to the size and tenure structure of the affordable housing provided the Council would seek a mix as set out in the current New Affordable Homes Commissioning Brief. This can be found on the Council's website.

Policy HSG6 of the Local Plan requires 15% of dwellings in new residential developments to be constructed to 'Lifetime Homes' standards. This requirement will need to be designed into any proposed scheme, especially as Lifetime Homes tend to require the provision of specific dimensions, including parking spaces. Further information regarding this matter can also be found in the Council's Affordable Housing & Lifetime Homes SPD.

Related and supporting documents / Bibliography

A Vision for Bishops Stortford - Bishops Stortford 20 20 Group

Mill Site Development Options - Bishops Stortford 20 20 Group

Mill site – Visual Character and History - Bishops Stortford 20 20 Group

Mill site - Land Use and Maps - Bishops Stortford 20 20 Group

Bishop’s Stortford Waterscape and Landscape Strategy – British Waterways

Consultation questionnaire - Bishops Stortford 20 20 Group

Summary of feedback from consultation - Bishops Stortford 20 20 Group

All documents listed are available at

www.eastherts.gov.uk/bishopsstortford2020

Map 1 – Site Location

Map 2 – Existing and Emerging Land use in Bishops’ Stortford town Centre