



Awards for Planning Excellence Case Study

Treetops

Entered by Terence O'Rourke and The Bournemouth Development Company

Sponsored by

STRIDE TREGLOWN

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TETRA TECH
Planning

1. Project background

The development scheme is considered to have had a positive outcome for the local economy, people and communities through:

- BDC invested circa £10 million into the local economy by using predominately a Bournemouth & Poole based project consultant team and building contractor, to support local jobs, the local economy and local supply chain;
- Supporting the town centre economy through increased critical mass of population living within and utilising the town centre; this is considered to be even more important in a post-covid society;
- Providing much needed housing against a backdrop of a housing undersupply and major issues affecting housing delivery going forward in the locality;
- Providing new sustainable town centre housing for BCP residents who would have otherwise not been unable to live in Bournemouth town centre;
- Providing high quality housing within easy access of high quality public open spaces; principally the listed pleasure gardens and Bournemouth beach;
- Providing housing within a highly sustainable location, to reduce the dependence on the car, and encourage walking and cycling and healthier lifestyles.
- During the construction phase 90% of the workforce came from local areas, with 10% of the workforce comprising apprenticeships.

The development is complete, with all apartments let and occupied within 12 weeks of completion. The development is providing much needed sustainable housing for the conurbation. The property has been retained by BCP Council and let through its subsidiary company Seascope Homes and Property Limited

2. Outcomes for People and Communities

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3. Planning Contribution

As the appointed planning consultants were responsible for successfully leading the project team from the project inception and pre-application to determination at planning committee.

The project planner was therefore responsible for:

- acting as the main point of contact between the LPA Officers and project consultant team;
- liaising with and leading pre-application discussions with the LPA, Council Members, Historic England, wider stakeholders and the local community;
- receiving comments, recommendations and requests that would shape the development of concept proposals;
- advising the client as to the appropriate courses of action to achieve successful project outcomes;
- working closely with the principal designers, considering all the challenges and technical constraints, and agreeing appropriate concept proposals that would be acceptable in planning terms;
- working with the full design team and contractor, developing these concept proposals into a design that was worked up into a planning application, including reviewing the heritage setting and Town Centre development Design Guide (2015) to advise on the design and materials palette;
- developing a planning strategy that clearly set out the site constraints, highlighted how public and stakeholder engagement shaped the scheme which ultimately responded positively to the issues raised;
- ultimately, successfully securing a planning permission that was viable and deliverable;
- leading on s.106 discussions surrounding transport contributions to enhance the surrounding public highway;
- negotiating the determination of the application with the LPA and identifying ways forward to overcome issues.

The project was also supported by the LPA's planning officers, who provided advice and input into the pre-application process, specifically in relation to the design evolution and balance of benefits against harm. The LPA planning input through pre-application discussions highlighted the value of the pre-application process, and was instrumental in the final successful outcome being achieved.

The original proposal was to have two flat blocks at the southern and northern ends of the site, with a terrace of 8 town houses in the central area. The pre-application discussions identified the presence of a veteran tree along the eastern bank, as well as outlining their concern regarding the height of the northern tower block and its relationship with the Grade I listed church. The submitted development proposal comprised of 49 apartments split across two apartment blocks. The first apartment building consisted of 5 residential floors over 2 levels of basement parking and the second consisted of 6 floors over 1 level of undercroft parking. Both apartments were sited on the existing surface car park area to minimise the level of tree removal required and impact upon the structurally unstable slopes.

Officers outlined concern at the height of the second block, as this was sitting on a higher plateau and it was considered that the relationship to the church, visible above the tree line, would be harmful. Accordingly, the second block was reconfigured to sit further away from the site boundary as well having being one storey shorter.

This demonstrates clearly how the input of planners within the project benefitted the overall development scheme

4. Outcomes for climate action

The development delivers enhanced U-values as part of the fabric first approach that was adopted for the construction in order to exceed sustainability targets. Through increasing the thermal efficiency of the walls, floors and roofs, the project was able to remove the need for further renewable energy sources, thereby reducing ongoing maintenance requirements.

The development exceeded the sound and air permeability tests, with results of 0.71 – 0.98m³/h-1/m²@50Pa (the test threshold is 5m³/h-1/m²@50Pa).

A Mechanical Ventilation and Heat Recovery (MVHR) system was employed with provides the main

source of heating within the development. This system captures waste heat generated within the development and recycles it back in to the apartments.

All integrated appliances installed at A+ rated. LED lighting is used throughout the development, and all apartments are fitted with switches that automatically turn off if left on and the room is not in use.

Low flow appliances have been specified throughout the development which, paired with sustainable drainage systems, minimises the level of water consumption on site. The specification of the taps chosen do not enable resident to accidentally leave them turned on. All toilets are also fitted with a dual flush system.

With respect to the construction phase, 97% of trades employed came from within a 25-mile radius of the site, with 89% within a 15-mile radius. This fundamentally reduced the travel miles required to access the site and supported reduced vehicular-related carbon emissions as a result.

Sustainable transport modes were encouraged, with staff on site car sharing, cycling, walking and using public transport.

Measures were put in place to limit electric and water consumption onsite, which was metered and monitored. Waste was minimised through re-using materials where possible and recycling. The waste contractor provided monthly reports to the development contractor, with in excess of 78% of the waste generated being recycled.

The main contractor also utilised the new buildings, specifically the space in the basement areas, for the provision of site accommodation and materials store. Utilisation of these spaces, reduced the need for portacabins, which are inefficient to heat and light. Less energy was therefore expended as a result.

The final materials palette was informed by the surrounding local vernacular, following consideration of the adjacent church, surrounding Conservation Areas and the Bournemouth Town Centre Design Guide SPD (2015). Buff bricks were used within the scheme as they are a robust materials that are easy to maintain and have a long life.

The sustainable location of the development means people are able to live and work within a town centre location, reducing the dependency on non-sustainable transport modes.

5. Outcomes for sustainable development

Good health and well-being:

The site is sustainably located within Bournemouth town centre, and encourages healthy lifestyles through reducing the need to travel by car and supporting walking and cycling. The development is also positioned within close proximity to high quality public open space in terms of the listed Bournemouth pleasure gardens and Bournemouth beach. This access to high quality public open space supports good health and wellbeing through encouraging more active lifestyles and providing space for relaxation, supporting mental health.

Quality education:

See also question 1. The use of a local project consultant team and development team enabled local skills development within the local workforce during the course of the project.

Affordable and clean energy:

As per question 3, the development employs a range of design approaches that reduces the energy demand of the building, and makes the apartments cheaper to heat through the use of the MVHR

system.

Decent work and economic growth:

The provision of new housing within the town centre will support the local town centre economy through increased population.

The client also appointed local consultant and contractor teams which supported local jobs and benefited the local and regional economy as a whole. This also supported local skills development.

Reduced inequalities:

The provision of housing to rent provides the ability for members of the community to live in the town centre who would otherwise not have been able to. The development has provided high-quality and sustainable housing, which in turn has increased the demographic profile of town centre residents, boosting the diversity and strength of the town centre population as a whole.

Sustainable cities and communities:

As per questions 1 and 3. The sustainable development will minimise car dependency, reduce the energy and water demands of the development. The construction phase also sought to reduce the energy needs of the construction site and recycle materials.

Responsible consumption and production:

As per question 3, the fabric first approach to the development, and installation of appropriate appliances means that energy and water consumption will be significantly reduced.

Efforts were also made during the construction phase to reuse and recycle materials, reduce the energy consumption and encourage sustainable commuting patterns.

Recycling of materials:

The main contractor sought to re-use as many construction materials onsite as possible. The main waste contractor provided monthly reports as to the level of recycling of materials removed from site, with in excess of 78% recycling achieved.

Climate action:

As per question 3.

Life on land:

The development incorporates a comprehensive landscape scheme that resulted in a net increase in planting. The new planting will ensure the long-term presence of substantial trees and planting on site, and therefore positively support biodiversity.

In addition to this the applicant committed to a 10-year management and maintenance condition for the soft landscaping (double the standard length applied to planning permissions) to ensure that the landscaping and new tree planting fully take hold and establish and mature within the site and deliver on all of the projected benefits.

6. Community Engagement

The robust pre-application consultation undertaken was as follows:

- Site visit with LPA tree and conservation officers: July 2015;
- Pre-application meetings with the LPA: August 2015 / November 2015 / March 2016;
- Bournemouth Design Review Panel: September 2015;
- Assessment and site visit with Historic England: October 2015;
- Liaison with the local parish rector – Autumn 2015;
- Liaison with Ward Members, Planning Committee Members and key stakeholders: November 2015;
- Public exhibition: November 2015;
- Site visit and presentation to the council's planning board: January 2016;
- Further engagement with Historic England: April 2016.

The engagement undertaken was essential to the emergence of the final scheme, which carefully balanced the considerable constraints and challenges whilst delivering a high quality housing development that makes a strong contribution to the council's town centre housing delivery aspirations.

Engagement with the LPA's tree officer identified the presence of the veteran tree, which fundamentally changed the nature of the scheme. Previously this tree was proposed to be lost to enable provision of a terrace of town houses that would also act to stabilise the eastern slope.

Early engagement with Historic England identified the key issues that needed to be considered in respect to the setting of the Grade I listed church. Key views were identified that needed to be tested to demonstrate that the development proposal would act as a background development rather than competing with the church.

The initial pre-application discussions with the LPA proved useful in terms of further informing the emergence of the development proposals. The process was also important in identifying the LPA's key issues and concerns. Most notably these related to heritage and trees, and through engaging in pre-application discussions, we were able to test different development scenarios to establish the development's positioning, scale, bulk and mass.

The public and stakeholder exhibition feedback highlighted general support for the provision of residential development within the site. The exhibition allowed for a number of questions and concerns to be raised by local residents and members of the public, which have been incorporated into the design of the proposals and addressed within the planning application submission documents.

The various engagement exercises highlighted that a key challenge for the project is in meeting conservation / tree retention objectives but also to optimise the potential of the site to deliver a range of residential accommodation types. Following extensive investigation of this issue a firm steer was provided by the planning authority that the footprint of development on the site be contained in order to retain a well treed setting for the site and local heritage interests.

7. Leading Practice

Given the site's complexity, early engagement with LPA officers and stakeholders helped identify the key constraints and reach agreement on the acceptable development principles. As a result, a

constructive working relationship developed which was key to developing a proposal that maximised the development potential of the site whilst ensuring the development did not generate significant detrimental impacts.

One of the key planning tools used was the robustness of the landscape scheme. We identified in other developments that there was scope to extend the landscape management and maintenance period to ensure delivery of robust solutions. There was a nervousness from the LPA that the level of planting re-provision would sufficiently screen the site and become sufficiently established to replace the mature trees to be lost. We identified that the only way to offer greater certainty was to propose the imposition of a 10-year soft landscape management and maintenance condition, doubling the standard requirement. This approach was fundamental to the LPA's satisfaction that the development impacts would be appropriately mitigated.

The use of appropriate tools, including visuals and 3D models, enabled key ideas to be explained and tested at all stages. This was particularly important when considering the relationship of the development proposal with the Grade I listed church and wider Bournemouth skyline and townscape. The use of the impartial Bournemouth Design Review Panel was essential in testing the design rationale for the site and debating the key issues and appropriate solutions.

The LPA allowed applicants to present proposals to the Planning Committee ahead of determination. We utilised this tool to its full potential and presented to the committee multiple times, as well as organised a site visit so that we could fully explain the site, its context and challenges and explain how these were proposed to be responded to. It gave committee members the opportunity to ask questions and share their thoughts on the scheme. This ensured that at the determination stage, members of the committee had a much greater understanding, as well as seeing how their comments had been positively responded to.

Given the complex relationship between the development proposals, planning policy context and design response, it was considered that it would be beneficial for the planners and architects to produce a combined Planning and Design and Access Statement that allowed for the whole story of the development proposal to be explained. This process brought together the site challenges and constraints, the design rationale and the planning justification into a single easy to read document, that supported both the LPA and the local community and stakeholders in considering the scheme.

The planning approaches outlined led to planning permission being granted, that is now providing 46 high quality residential dwellings for Bournemouth residents who would otherwise not have had the opportunity to live in a sustainable town centre location.

Planning permission was not achieved in line with the client's programme on account of the complexities involved and the need for all parties to take appropriate time to consider all the implications.

8. Does the scheme or project have particular significance to the region?

Treetops at St Stephens Road (planning reference: 7-2016-7044-H) is the latest scheme to be delivered by the Bournemouth Development Company (BDC), a Joint Venture between Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole Council (BCP) and Muse Developments. BDC was established to help the deliver the Town Centre Vision for Bournemouth, whose objectives included boosting the economy, creating attractive spaces, and increasing vibrancy through creating opportunities for tourism, education, culture, retail and new homes. A specific objective of the BDC is to "deliver development that is innovative in design and quality, and which is in itself exemplar in

terms of all aspects of sustainability”.

The local geography of the BCP sub-region is characterised by its coastal location, the adjacent and surrounding protected landscape, including an AONB, national park and protected heathland. This presents significant constraints to the delivery of new housing on green field land, placing more pressure on the successful redevelopment of brownfield land within the conurbation.

The Treetops scheme at St Stephens Road demonstrates how a public / private partnership can successfully address the challenges of town centre development on an under-utilised brownfield site, by taking a longer term and more strategic approach to delivery. The scheme has also demonstrated the value of working with a carefully selected and local design and delivery team who have a good understanding of the local area to unlock a challenging site.

This is the fourth residential scheme delivered by BDC in the town centre, now fully occupied and highlighting the appeal and benefits of living close to local amenities to residents, and the positive impact upon the local economy by having more people living in the town centre. The scheme has therefore made a significant contribution to delivering the Town Centre Vision for Bournemouth, meeting the key objectives and requirements of boosting the town centre’s economy, creating attractive spaces, increasing vibrancy and providing high-quality and sustainable new homes.

The use of a predominantly local project and construction team has supported the local and regional economy including the local and regional supply chains. 90% of the construction work force was local.