

Case Study – Riverside Sunderland Supplementary Planning Document Submission to the RTPI Awards for Planning Excellence 2021

Project Background

Riverside Sunderland is an exciting Council-led project seeking to regenerate the Urban Core of Sunderland and double the population of the city centre. The site lies to the north of the City Centre with the River Wear running through it. It comprises Sheepfolds and Bonnersfield to the north, Vaux, Farringdon Row, Galley's Gill, Riverside Park and High Street West to the south. What was once an area predominately of industry, has over the years become vacant redundant sites due to industrial closure. These brownfield sites have been challenging to bring forward due to viability issues and have remained undeveloped for some time, impacting negatively on the city centre.

However the proactive leadership of the Council and a positive vision for the city means the potential of Riverside Sunderland has been recognised and will be unlocked. Over the next 10-15 years, Sunderland City Council and partners will create a carbon neutral urban quarter at the heart of the city, providing high quality new homes and workspaces, attracting new investors, residents, skilled workers, students and visitors. Riverside Sunderland will drive economic growth, set new standards for sustainable development and promote wellbeing and inclusion.

This positive vision has over recent years seen the start of new investment and development within Riverside Sunderland with The Beam, an award-winning office building, which opened on the Vaux site in 2019 and is now home to global online grocery firm Ocado.

Sunderland's adopted Local Plan includes a policy focused around the Urban Core (SP2), with an aspiration to make it "a more attractive and vibrant place where people gather to socialise, work, live and play". To ensure a more comprehensive approach to delivery and ensure the vision for the area is realised, Riverside Sunderland is identified for allocation as a Strategic Site in the draft Allocations and Designations Plan (A&D Plan).

As development of the site is progressing at pace, it was recognised that a planning framework was required to provide further guidance and ensure the area was developed in a co-ordinated and comprehensive manner. Due to the scale, infrastructure requirements, and land ownership of Riverside Sunderland it was considered the best approach would be to prepare a Supplementary Planning Document as soon as practically possible. Work commenced on the SPD in April 2020 and it was adopted in December 2020.

Sunderland's new City Hall is under construction and is due for completion in November 2021. Legal & General is investing £100m in new office space on development sites close to The Beam and work is currently underway on the construction of a 120-bed 4-star hotel adjacent to Keel Square.

Complementary heritage-led regeneration activity, revitalising and re-using key listed buildings along the High Street, is also being delivered within the Riverside Sunderland area.

More recently planning permission has been granted for 132 residential units with cafes, retail and a community allotment on the Vaux site and a Future Living Expo will be held in 2023 to showcase the low carbon credentials of the site.

Outcomes for People and Communities

Having an adopted Supplementary Planning Document in place so quickly has enabled guidance and direction to be in place for landowners/developers. It has given confidence that investing in the city is supported. Developments which have already started have acted as a catalyst for other schemes within Riverside, contributing positively to the local economy and local workforce, with jobs created for local people. Supporting the economy of the city is Ocado and fellow Beam occupiers, employing approximately 300 people.

The new City Hall will act as a new employment hub bringing together a range of partners into one building. Riverside Sunderland will also house the replacement eye hospital, which is programmed to start in 2022, opening in 2024. Being relocated into such a central location will ensure this new Sunderland Eye Infirmary facility is accessible to all.

The SPD also sets out parameters and principles for creating important open spaces within the Riverside area. One of the centrepieces of Riverside Sunderland will be Riverside Park, which spans both sides of the River, creating a green lung through Riverside Sunderland, with a new pedestrian/cycle bridge across the Wear to significantly improve activity and accessibility.

A challenge for the SPD was ensuring that Riverside Park could be transformed into an area that is well-used, as the existing park, Galley's Gill, has never achieved its potential and has been subjected to vandalism and anti-social behavior. The demolition of Vaux Brewery and the construction of SSTC (Sunderland Strategic Transport Corridor) have left Galley's Gill isolated. The principles and parameters for Riverside Park had to be worked up closely with the consultants preparing the Riverside Masterplan to ensure the requirements were achievable and would make a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of users of the space. The SPD in conjunction with the Masterplan sets out realistic requirements to ensure the restored Riverside Park will be an invaluable resource for the community and a recreational asset for workers and visitors, whilst continuing to be a biodiverse open space and an important wildlife habitat.

The SPD carefully considered design elements to ensure safe and accessible public spaces can be created for all, with appropriate lighting and passive surveillance embedded throughout. Close working with the Masterplan team and their urban designers ensured the SPD set out criteria for developments to be accessible and easily navigable, allowing everyone to move from one place to another with a feeling of safety and security. Housing within Riverside Sunderland will be available for both sale and rent, allowing people of all income levels to reside there. This equality also applies to workspaces, with opportunities being available for smaller start-up businesses as well as larger, more established ones.

The SPD was supported by an Equalities Impact Assessment, which concluded that the SPD has the potential to offer benefits to all residents and service providers in Sunderland. As such the principles and parameters set out in the SPD ensure equality and gender mainstreaming are embedded within the document.

Planning Contribution

Having planners prepare the SPD for Riverside Sunderland has ensured a document is in place which reflects a wide range of disciplines. Planning officers preparing the SPD have Please outline how the project has benefitted from a planner or planners: providing strong and effective leadership and vision working in partnership with others managing implementation and delivery taken effective leadership and engaged positively with other stakeholders, at all levels, to ensure a concise document was produced, yet one that will ensure Riverside Sunderland can progress in a comprehensive manner.

The riverside area was well researched by the planners involved in the project to ensure an accurate picture was portrayed through the SPD, as well as having a very good understanding of the area and its

challenges and opportunities to ensure the principles and parameters would deliver what is required for this important regeneration site.

The organisational ability of the planners involved in the project ensured the SPD was undertaken in a very short time period, which involved not only the two statutory consultation periods and Council Committee approvals, but partnership working with the consultant team preparing the masterplan and the external urban designers to ensure the SPD was portraying a clear and effective message to all its readers. The SPD is a highly visual document which utilises a range of plans and imagery to portray the vision of the scheme.

Being able to engage and communicate with a wide range of people and organisations, has meant the vision of Riverside Sunderland has been extensively disseminated and the SPD amended as necessary by planning

Outcomes for climate action

In 2019, Sunderland City Council declared a Climate Emergency and committed to becoming carbon neutral as a city by 2040 and carbon neutral as a Council by 2030. The Riverside Sunderland SPD was prepared in consultation with the officers preparing the City's Low Carbon Framework and Action Plan to ensure a co-ordinated approach to climate action.

The SPD seeks to guide development on Riverside to achieve carbon neutrality and climate change resilience by:

- creating energy-efficient offices and public buildings;
- delivering energy-efficient homes built using modern methods of construction;
- encouraging active travel and use of public transport;
- reducing car dependency; • providing charging points for electric vehicles;
- promoting renewable energy and energy storage;
- introducing green roofs and green walls wherever practicable; and
- implementing sustainable urban drainage solutions.

The SPD recognises the importance of Carbon Neutrality and sets out a list of detailed criteria that developments within Riverside Sunderland need to incorporate. Recent planning approvals for developments within Riverside Sunderland have addressed the SPD requirements and incorporated low carbon solutions, for example a multi-storey car park featuring green walls.

The residential development on Vaux embeds sustainability throughout construction and operation. The scheme includes a number of features which contribute to carbon neutrality and are set out below:-

- Meeting 2025 Future Homes Standard;
- Potential to achieve Passivhaus standard for one of the residential blocks, subject to funding;
- Buildings likely to meet RIBA 2025 embodied carbon target;
- Achieving biodiversity net gain of more than 10%;
- Potential to achieve Home Quality Mark 4 Star rating;
- Public realm and landscape on track to achieve Building Nature 'Excellent' status;
- Homes designed to reduce energy demand and consumption, using air source heat pumps to provide low carbon heat and maximise use of renewable energy;
- Reduce whole life carbon impacts minimising embodied and operational carbon;
- Active travel solutions, provision for low carbon mobility;
- Minimise consumption of virgin materials, specify the use of low-carbon and renewable materials, prioritise locally sourced options;
- Design solutions and delivery strategies that reduce waste throughout the entire life cycle of the development;

- Water efficiency maximised, drainage design mitigating flooding risk and appropriate management of surface water and foul water;
- Designing in response to the local microclimate and climate change;
- Reduce carbon emission from construction to operation, delivering carbon savings through choice of materials, methods of construction and electricity led energy solutions;
- Reduce whole life carbon impacts by minimising embodied and operational carbon;
- A fabric first approach taken, of well insulated and airtight homes that require very little heating. Recovering heat from ventilation (Air Source Heat Pumps) and shower systems reducing demand for energy;
- Highly efficient lighting and equipment throughout to reduce energy consumption, photovoltaic panels are incorporated; • Windows taking advantage of natural daylight to reduce reliance on artificial lighting. City Hall has been designed for agile working, reducing the number of employees travelling. It includes Mobility Hub with electric fleet.

Outcome and sustainable development

Riverside Sunderland SPD contributes to a number of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals, which are a 'blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all'. The primary areas where it contributes are listed below, with a short indication of how this is taken forward within the SPD:

- (2) Zero Hunger – through enabling community growing projects
- (3) Good Health and Well-being – through the Galley's Gill / Riverside Park proposals and focus on active transport provision including walking and cycling
- (4) Quality Education – through opening up the proposed Housing Innovation Construction Skills Academy (HICSA)
- (7) Affordable and Clean Energy – through carbon neutral energy proposals integrated into the SPD (8) Decent Work and Economic Growth – through the creation of an environment to deliver significant numbers of new employment opportunities in the city centre, starting with The Beam
- (9) Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure – through the proposal to deliver Modern Methods of Construction at scale, and HICSA as referenced above
- (10) Reducing Inequality – through the Council's health in all policies approach and the proposed provision of a combination of housing both for rental and for sale
- (11) Sustainable Cities and Communities – through the embedded approach to sustainability which has been taken across the SPD
- (12) Responsible Consumption and Production – through the integration of Modern Methods of Construction into housing proposals and ambition for carbon neutral buildings
- (13) Climate Action – through the embedded carbon neutral approach which has been taken across the SPD reflecting the city's adopted Low Carbon Framework
- (15) Life On Land – through the biodiversity net gains approach highlighted in the recent residential planning application for the first 100 homes.

The contribution to the remaining UN Sustainable Development Goals (1,5 6, 14 , 16, 17) is less of a specific focus but forms part of the underpinning context for the City Council as a local authority, with equality including gender equality embedded. The SPD ensures that the principles and parameters it sets out for Riverside Sunderland will achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. As well as containing a section for Carbon Neutrality, it has a thread of sustainability running through it which is reflected in every aspect of developments that are being delivered on Riverside Sunderland, from the design and use of buildings and open spaces, to ensuring Riverside Sunderland is accessible and available to everyone, whether they will use the area to work, reside, or socialise. Sustainability is embedded into the proposals for Riverside Sunderland as it comprehensively utilises large areas of redundant and disused land within a prime urban core location. It reconnects the urban core with the riverside and seeks to increase city centre population and working population within this highly sustainable location, reducing the need to travel,

offering sustainable transport modes for those do travel, being in close proximity to transport hubs, with metro, train and bus access and secure cycle storage.

Community Engagement

Engagement with the community on Riverside Sunderland took place well in advance of the formal SPD consultation through work on the Masterplan. Pre-Covid, this involved a pop-up shop in the Bridges Shopping Centre for people to share ideas, workshops with over 130 people including residents and businesses to discuss ideas. The community engagement brought out a very clear appetite for change and real enthusiasm for a serious initiative to address the challenges. This is reflected in the strategic approach taken through development of the Riverside Sunderland SPD. There was a lot of interest from the consultees relating to sustainability and carbon neutrality, creating a better environment for walking and cycling as active transport - including creation of the new proposed footbridges - and greater accessibility to Galley's Gill / Riverside Park reflecting the range of benefits this will create. There was also evident demand for activity such as community growing projects. All of this has been enabled through the final SPD which was developed and adopted.

The community engagement generated a lot of support for Riverside Sunderland and resulted in 6 key messages which were taken forward by the SPD and incorporated into the principles and parameters.

- The relationship between Riverside Sunderland and the City Centre;
- Creating a community;
- Changing Galley's Gill;
- Providing opportunities for local people;
- Connecting the different neighbourhoods within Riverside Sunderland; and
- Being Carbon Neutral

Formal consultation on the SPD took place at both the first draft and the revised draft stage, with four-week consultation periods for each stage. Consultation on the first draft was undertaken in June/July 2020 and on the revised draft September/October 2020. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the engagement process was scaled back considerably in comparison to what would normally have taken place. The main engagement process was conducted via e-mail, using the City Council website, and through video calls for more focused discussions relating to particular elements of the SPD.

No fundamental issues were raised through the consultation process. Historic England did however raise a number of concerns during consultation on the revised draft of the SPD relating to a lack of guidance in the SPD for the historic environment. The issues raised were resolved through effective engagement between Planning Officers and Historic England. The result was the preparation of Heritage Impact Assessments to support and inform the SPD, the historic environment becoming more integrated within the document – including the incorporation of an additional section specifically setting out principles and parameters for the historic environment. These changes, specifically the requirement for Heritage Impact Assessments, were challenging due to the very tight timescales involved but have undoubtedly resulted in a stronger SPD.

Leading Practice

Riverside Sunderland SPD was a highly complex project to deliver given the ambitious vision for Riverside Sunderland and the need to ensure it could be successfully delivered. The SPD was developed to ensure the population of the City Centre could grow significantly, new employment opportunities could be enabled, and a mixed use community could be created across a number of site. The SBD needed to be delivered within very tight timescales whilst incorporating sufficient flexibility to enable delivery within the parameters of planning.

The complexities of the site - a collection of brownfield sites with an industrial heritage and a number of heritage features that need to be retained and developed – made this a challenging task.

The site's topography also introduced challenges. Having development sites at a high level, with cliff faces down to the river and the river acting as a barrier to the other riverside development sites, meant careful consideration had to be given to ensuring all aspects of Riverside Sunderland were integrated and designed as one, with no barriers to accessing the sites, the open spaces and the wider connecting neighbourhoods. This was achieved by working closely with urban designers of the Masterplan and having an understanding of how people will move around the area, opening up the riverside and forming a natural extension to the built environment. Ensuring the SPD recognised the importance of the green lung of Riverside Park to create the visual link between the northern and southern sites of Riverside Sunderland was also vital.

The provision of footbridges across the Wear, one at high level connecting Sheepfolds to Vaux and one at low level connecting the riverside, are solutions which have been put in place to create a more integrated and connected network and these are pivotal to the movement strategy for the site. These connections will also assist with the economy of both Riverside Sunderland and the wider City Centre as users of Stadium Village, including football fans and concert goers, will have very easy, direct access to a whole host of facilities and services.

Riverside Sunderland has suffered from failed attempts at regeneration, with previous masterplans unable to be progressed due to viability issues. Over recent years the area has again been brought to the forefront of the Council's plans, however this time it has been recognised that the right planning tools need to be in place to ensure development is coordinated in addition to securing private sector finance and investment to assist development. This considered and strategic approach has helped drive Riverside Sunderland forward at pace.

The planning officers leading on development of Riverside Sunderland SPD have worked incredibly closely with colleagues developing the vision for Riverside Sunderland, the consultant team developing the Masterplan, colleagues responsible for development of the footbridge proposals, and heritage colleagues. This detailed understanding of the vision and close working has enabled the Riverside Sunderland SPD to be developed to such a high standard.

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

The scheme is of importance to not only the City of Sunderland its neighbouring areas, but also to the region due to its unique location and connectivity with the riverside, City Centre and sea front. It is being developed as a special place that exploits the potential of its extraordinary location to the full. It will be a new community, a thriving business district and a focal point for civic, commercial and community life – framed in a beautiful landscape setting.

The aim is for Riverside Sunderland to be a place making initiative showcasing future living and the benefits it can bring to the people of Sunderland. Due to the lack of a high quality housing offer demand for city centre living within Sunderland has been low over recent years. By creating a new offer which is unique to Sunderland and new to the North East, the intention is to create communities where people want to live rather than need to live and help address some of the demographic challenges in Sunderland's City Plan – increasing the city centre population, retaining local talent, and attracting new residents and visitors into the area. Riverside Sunderland will be an excellent example of placemaking as part of a wider social and economic growth strategy and will create a high quality asset for the city and the wider region.

Riverside Sunderland is also inspiring young people and students in local schools, colleges and universities across the region and beyond through its proactive community engagement and education programmes. It will be a demonstrator site for research and innovation work being led by Sunderland College and

Northumbria University in the fields of modern methods of construction (MMC) and advanced manufacturing.

Whilst there are many pilot projects using MMC across the region and the wider UK, there are limited examples of it being undertaken at scale. Riverside Sunderland provides a unique opportunity to deliver MMC at scale; there are few opportunities to deliver 1,000 units, and none known to be within city centre environments. As a result, Riverside Sunderland supports growth of the regional supply chain in the MMC sector.

The scheme will also provide education and training opportunities through the proposed Housing Innovation Construction Skills Academy (HICSA), linking to Research & Development and ensuring the skills of the region meet the future needs of industry. Riverside Sunderland will lead the way in achieving carbon-neutral status and a Future Living Expo is to be held in the Vaux area of Riverside Sunderland in 2023, featuring events and experiences to engage visitors in new sustainable ways of living, set in-and-around new high-quality homes for the City Centre. This is expected to attract interest regionally, nationally and internationally, reflecting the particular importance of the project as highlighted above.

Riverside Sunderland will also be important in attracting inward investment in the region, encouraging high quality employers to relocate to the city, bringing with them career opportunities and increased expenditure in the regional economy.