

Appendix 4 - Newberries Mini-Review – ATW v1.1

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a small scale review of the development potential of the Newberries Car Park site, drawing on previous documents and having regard to relevant planning documents and priorities.

2.0 Site Information

Site Address	Newberries Car Park, rear of 333-407 Watling Street, Radlett
Site Area	0.9ha (approx.)
Description	Public car park including recycling point and underground surface water storage tanks
Current use	Public car park
Site ownership	Hertsmere Borough council

3.0 Planning Designations and constraints

District Centre

- 3.1 The site is within the Radlett District Centre, as set out in the Hertsmere Local Plan 2012 – 2027.
- 3.2 As a site within a Town Centre appropriate uses in principle include retail, leisure (including cinemas, restaurants, drive-through restaurants, bars and pubs, nightclubs, casinos, health and fitness centres, indoor bowling centres and bingo halls); offices; and arts, culture and tourism development (including theatres, museums, galleries and concert halls, hotels and conference facilities). Community facilities such as GP surgeries, dentists etc. would also be appropriate and it should be recognised that residential development should be encouraged on appropriate sites where it contributes to vitality.
- 3.3 The site is mentioned in the Draft Radlett District Centre Brief SPD 2016 which has limited weight, however the commentary in this note is more up to date.

Flood Risk

- 3.4 The majority of the site is located within Flood Zone 3a with a proportion also being designated as within Flood Zone 3b.
- 3.5 Flood zone 3b is the active flood plain and should be safeguarded from any development, although opportunities for any development to further mitigate the risk of flooding elsewhere or increase the capacity of the area should be explored.
- 3.6 Flood Zone 3a is an area where less vulnerable development is acceptable in principle and more vulnerable development can be allowed if it passes the exception test. The exception test essentially requires it to be demonstrated that a) the development must provide wider sustainability benefits to outweigh flood risk and b) it is demonstrated that the development will be safe for its lifetime taking account the vulnerability of its users, without increasing flood risk elsewhere and where possible reducing flood risk overall.

Access/Traffic and Parking

- 3.7 Vehicular and pedestrian access is from a mini roundabout to the south of Newberries Parade. An additional pedestrian access leads from Watling Street to the northern end of the site via a timber walkway.
- 3.8 It is noted that at peak hours traffic can accumulate along Watling Street and care should be taken to ensure any development does not have a severe detrimental impact on the operation of the highway network which may worsen, traffic, air quality and the quality of place.
- 3.9 The car park provides 216 useable spaces and serves to support the centre. It is important that any development retains an adequate public car park to support this role, while at the same time does not increase vehicular trips to an extent which would have unacceptable detriment to the operation of the highway network. Any decisions about the extent to public car parking should be reduced, retained or increased should be based on an objective assessment of data relating to its current and potential future use.
- 3.10 In terms of parking the area is currently a public car park. It is noted that parking was set aside for 100 spaces under a previous legal agreement to secure 100 spaces for users of the Radlett Centre. It appears the spaces may have been delineated. It does not appear they have ever been set aside for priority use and are used just as part of the wider car park, this does not appear to have caused any planning issued over the years. Legal advice would be required to establish if this agreement is enforceable in any way, but there appears to be no planning reason that such an arrangement would be required.

Aerodrome Safeguarding

- 3.11 The site lies within the area on which we need to consult Elstree aerodrome for development over 15m high. This does not mean that developments over this height are necessarily unacceptable.

4 Context

- 4.1 The site is located behind a three-storey parade of shops with flats above, between Tykes Water and the Thameslink railway line. A small part of the site is visible from Watling Street at the access point, but the majority is not visible from the town Centre or wider public realm.
- 4.2 The site currently houses a large council car park with vehicular access from Watling Street at the southern end and an elevated pedestrian access at its northern end. There is a substantial change in level between Watling Street and the site, which sits much lower.
- 4.3 The car park has 202 useable spaces and provides one hour free car parking for those visiting Radlett District Centre (with longer periods charged). The car park serves to support the Centre.
- 4.4 The neighbouring buildings at Newberries Parade and Watling Mansions are 3-4 storeys high when viewed from Watling Street. The rear of the buildings and car parking are set at a lower level Newberries Parade is 4-5 stories when viewed from the site.
- 4.5 The site is bounded by trees on all sides.

5 Development Response

Appropriate uses

- 5.1 The town centre location gives rise to quite a number of uses which are appropriate in planning terms and would have the potential to support the vitality and viability of the centre and it would be most beneficial to explore mixed use development with complimentary uses. However, it is important that these uses also be considered in relation to other key planning constraints such as flood risk and traffic generation. Aside from planning it must represent a viable development.

Residential Uses

- 5.2 Residential development would be appropriate in terms of the town centre, but the profile of traffic generation would likely coincide with periods of existing congestion on the highway network. Further the flood risk status of the site would mean that the vulnerability of future occupiers and the ease and practicality of evacuation in a flood event would be key consideration. In respect of the latter a building operated by a single institution would be easier to manage than buildings or units in separate ownership.
- 5.3 Combined these factors would rule out certain types of housing which would have a higher proportion of vulnerable people (for example elderly or young people) or which would give rise to traffic generation at peak times. Provision of Elderly Care Homes, or residential units which might serve families or be reliant on cars would therefore be inappropriate.
- 5.4 In terms of residential uses a hotel would appear to be one of the most appropriate uses. Such a use would likely generate a greater degree of additional activity and spend in the Town Centre than traditional residential use, it would also have a low requirement for parking (and could potentially rely on the public car park) and travel patterns would differ from peak highway impacts.
- 5.5 Another option would potentially be smaller residential units to be marketed under a Private Rented Scheme (PRS), for example studio flats, with low/no car parking provision aimed at providing for professional occupiers commuting to London. Such a use would likely have appropriate characteristics to address the flooding and traffic issues, but would likely have a less beneficial impact on the vitality of the centre than a hotel.

Non-Residential Uses

- 5.6 Retail uses would clearly be appropriate for the town centre location and the provision of additional retail space has the potential to attract additional users to the centre increasing its vitality and viability. In terms of flood risk the store could have an evacuation plan and users of the store at peak period of traffic are likely to be linked trips whereby the vehicle was on the road and passing the location in any event. A larger retail unit, which could act as an anchor for the centre, and have the potential to generate linked trips which might benefit the wider town centre is likely to be the most successful given the degree to which the site is set back from the main route and separated from the high street.
- 5.7 Office use would be another potential option which would be compatible with the town centre location and would have the potential to ensure an appropriate flood evacuation plan. However, in this location an office use would likely be reliant on some degree of trips by car and these trips would likely occur on the highway

network at current periods of congestion. Based on an initial consideration the impact of an office use is likely to be greater than that of a retail use.

5.8 Other community uses would also be appropriate, however each use would have to be considered on its own merits and consideration of the likely users of such facilities would be required in relation to flood risk and escape routes.

5.9 It is noted that the Focus Groups established by Cllr Morris OBE captured the views of approximately 40 individuals from Radlett and included the following potential additional uses:

- Pop up shops
- A Street Market
- Restaurants
- Public Space

5.10 While in principle compatible with the town centre location it is difficult to envisage them being successful in this location, particularly as the main uses for the site. The main constraint being the degree to which the site is separate from the main high street and other traders. Street Markets or pop up food shops tend to be most successful when located in existing areas of high footfall or when they are a feature in their own right with very good public transport access. There are already a reasonable number of restaurants in Radlett and it may be that adding substantive further provision served to reduce the use of the existing town rather than attract extra footfall and it is difficult to imagine a public space in this location being successful. It may be worth considering is some aspects of these suggestions could be incorporated as ancillary features to the main development, but this may ultimately prove unsuccessful.

5.11 In planning terms it would appear that a mix of a hotel and retail uses would be the most appropriate for the site. Not only would these be the uses most likely to support and improve the economy within the District Centre, but they are also uses which have the greatest potential to overcome potential issues relating to flooding and congestion.

5.12 At the time of undertaking this review it is not clear to what extent and how recently advice may have been sought from the Environment Agency on the site or proposals and it should be noted that their input would be key.

Access

5.13 Due to the existing site constraints there are no feasible options other than relying on the existing locations for pedestrian and vehicular access.

5.14 The appropriate levels of access and connection to Watling Street would depend on the proposed uses, however the design and layout should indicate how people will access the site and buildings and move between these and the wider centre. Any proposal should seek to improve the access, particularly for pedestrians to the southern end of the site.

Height and Massing

5.15 Any redevelopment proposals should take their cue from the visual character of the immediate surroundings and the wider local area.

5.16 As the site is set back from the main parade and there is a sloping topography, it should be noted that it would be appropriate for the site to house a taller structure

than those predominant in the area. However, the overall height of the building would depend on the quality of the design as a whole.

Design

- 5.17 Any proposal should be well designed in its own right and have regard to modern construction and building styles. It would be appropriate to consider the context and features of the area for inspiration, however the key objective should be that the development sit comfortably within the existing area rather than seeking to be a pastiche of existing building styles.
- 5.18 The main view of the site from the wider public realm would be from the southern access point and the design should make the most of this area to ensure the development and its connections to the wider town are legible.

Trees

- 5.19 There are substantial trees on all boundaries of the site and all healthy, high quality trees within the site should be retained. The trees contribute to the character of the area and perform a variety of important functions including providing screening between existing uses and providing potential habitat for wildlife along the railway corridor and Tykes Water.

Other Issues

- 5.20 It is worth considering if the site is the correct one for development and whether development of a wider site would be practicable or beneficial. It is also worth considering the extent to which development of this site could enhance other aspects of the Town Centre.
- 5.21 Tykes Water and a significant belt of trees separate the development site from the rear service yards of Newberries Parade and Watling Mansions. Planning considerations would seek to ensure this area was not subject to development for a variety of reasons and indicate that the correct approach is to develop the site in isolation.
- 5.22 Notwithstanding the planning considerations, building over this area would give rise to a host of practical construction issues and land ownership issues which would also have to be considered in reaching a decision.
- 5.23 The main contribution this site could make to the wider centre would be to provide a high quality development which adds to the quality of the place and provides complimentary uses which might encourage improved footfall and trade within the wider centre. In planning terms wider improvements to the Town Centre (other than any directly required to mitigate traffic impacts) could not be justified, however if such enhancements were put forward they could be looked on positively.
- 5.24 There is a foul water storage tank under the car park which represents a constraint on any development which should be factored in. Any proposals either need to work around the retention of the tank or factor in the cost of mitigating for any removal, loss or reduction in size. This is a significant constraint on both development options and viability of any scheme.