DEVELOPMENT SITE AT FORMER POST OFFICE ASHDOWN ROAD KINGSTON UPON THAMES

Presentation to Development Control Committee - 2nd June 2015

Non-Compliance of St George Scheme with RBK's Eden Quarter Development Brief SPD, March 2015

- What is the **existing character** of Kingston centre?
- What **objectives** were defined in the SPD?
- How can Kingston town centre effectively be announced with a "**gateway building**"?
- What is the SPD's guidance on **Building Heights**?
- How can the TOPO site be **enhanced**?
- How does the scheme **impact on the site and its environs**?

Non-Compliance of Scheme with RBK's SPD

- What is the existing character of Kingston centre?

- Images taken from RBK's SPD;
- A historic, riverside market town;
- A range of new and old buildings;
- Generally low-rise and architecturally diverse;
- A vibrant and attractive place to live, to work and to visit.

Non-Compliance of Scheme with RBK's SPD

- What Objectives were defined in the SPD (ref. page 48)?

Objectives

1. To refurbish and provide appropriate new uses within the former Post Office (Grade II listed) and improve its setting within an area of high quality public realm, linked to Eden Square.
2. To refurbish and provide appropriate new uses within the former telephone exchange (Grade II listed), using the building as an attractive corner at this side of any new development.
3. To create a new restaurant, retail and leisure destination using the historic buildings and high quality new public realm to establish an attractive and distinctive sense of place.
4. To form a new urban block with active frontage on all sides, knitting the urban fabric back together.
5. To improve the view of the town centre when arriving from the south from College Roundabout.

- We support all the Objectives defined in the SPD;
- We would like to see the existing character of the town centre maintained and improved;
- Where poorer quality buildings and re-development sites exist, we would like to see schemes that fulfil this.

Non-Compliance of Scheme with RBK's SPD

- How can Kingston town centre effectively be announced with a "gateway building"(ref. pages 33 & 48)?

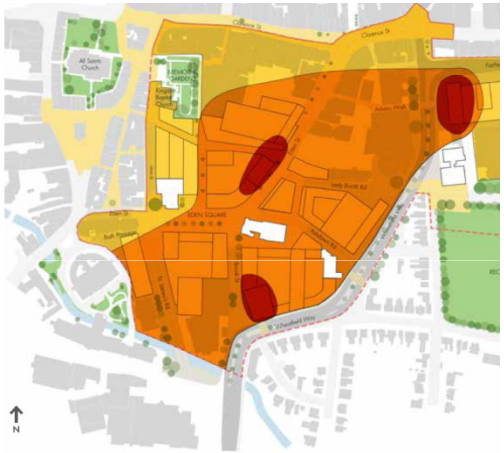

Figure 8: Guidance on building heights within the Ec

The south west corner could be an appropriate location for a residential tower. This tower would form a strong landmark when arriving in Kingston from the south (Penrhyn Road) and especially high quality design is therefore expected.

- We support the idea of a "gateway building" that draws visitors into the centre of the town.
- A suitable gateway for Kingston would be one that reflects the existing character shown in the slide above;
- A modern tower-block bears no relation to the town's scale and character and would be incongruous;
- Many of the residents opposed this aspect during the consultation for the SPD;
- We therefore disagree with the one of the Development Parameters set in the SPD, and its proposed implementation in St George's scheme;
- We nevertheless note that the SPD suggested 9+ storeys, not 19 storeys.

Non-Compliance of Scheme with RBK's SPD

- What is the SPD's guidance on Building Heights (ref. page 90)?

Building heights

Kingston Town Centre has a variety of building heights. The historic core of the town centre is low rise and buildings around the lanes and Market Place are predominantly two to three storeys. Newer developments along the riverside are taller, with some buildings reaching eight storeys. Any new buildings must take the sensitivity of the historic core of the town centre into account.

To the north of the study area is Clarence Street which is slightly bulkier in scale with most buildings rising to three or four storeys. The Bentalls Centre is the largest building in this area at approximately six storeys. Eden Street also has a similar grain and height to Clarence Street, particularly towards its northern end.

The Eden Walk Shopping Centre is formed of two distinct building elements. Most of the centre is relatively low in scale, typically two storeys with parking at the rear, although the shopping centre has a large and bulky floor plate. However, above this is located a large multi-storey car park and offices. The lack of detail to the building's facade towards the southern end of Eden Street increases the sense of the building's bulk.

A number of taller buildings currently sit in the southern part of the site including the Unilever offices and Kingston College buildings. Combined House, on Wheatfield Way is one of the tallest buildings in the study area, reaching ten storeys. The two listed buildings on Ashdown Road are relatively modest in scale but have a robust character.

- We agree that "any new buildings must take the sensitivity of the historic core of the town centre into account". The St George scheme does not fulfil this.
- The KCFE tower has been cited by St George (ref. public meeting, All Saints Church, May 2015) as a precedent for additional tower blocks; it is a hideous building, conspicuous from some distance (Richmond Park; Hampton Court Home Park; etc.); it shows the adverse impact of any new tower block nearby; it should not be taken as a precedent for a new tower block on the TOPO site, or anywhere else in Kingston.

Non-Compliance of Scheme with RBK's SPD

- How can the TOPO site be enhanced (ref. pages 48-49)?

Development parameters

This site has significant potential to help transform the Eden Quarter and form a mixed use block that helps to meet retail, leisure and housing need. The two listed buildings, the former Post Office and telephone exchange should be refurbished to a high standard. The Post Office building should stand alone from the block as a 'gem' sitting within high quality public realm. The building should form the heart of a new restaurant and retail area, with cafes and outdoor seating occupying the pedestrianised space. This space will be modelled on the Apple Market which is an attractive public space due its scale and the quality and variety of surrounding buildings.

The Apple Market in Kingston provides a good example of an attractive and intimate public space with high levels of activity

At ground floor, the block should have fine grain active retail, restaurant and leisure uses on its north and western edges. The east and southern edges of the block will be office or residential at ground floor with a service and car parking entrance. Car parking will be accommodated in the basement and in the interior of the block wherever possible. Any car park edge that does face the street must be attractively screened.

- We support other aspects of the Development Parameters set in the SPD;
- The reference to the Apple Market is appropriate;
- The proposed St George scheme bears no resemblance to the Apple Market and is therefore inappropriate.

Non-Compliance of Scheme with RBK's SPD

- How does the scheme impact on the site and its environs?

- The proposed development comprises several tall buildings, all of which dwarf the existing surrounding buildings;
- This overly-dense, high-rise scheme would create an impermeable block, through which there would be no public access;
- The residents would be looking out of their windows directly into someone else's windows – a most intrusive and un-homely sensation;
- The nearby houses in Wheatfield Way and Grange Road would be overwhelmed.

Non-Compliance of Scheme with RBK's SPD

- How does the scheme impact on the site and its environs (cont'd)?

- The wind would be funnelled along Brooke Street and Ashdown Road, making the street-level walkways cold and unattractive;
- The buildings would prevent the sun penetrating the communal residents' gardens and the public areas, depriving the area of warmth and brightness (ref. shading analysis);
- The new public open space would be cold, windy and shady due to its aspect and the surrounding blocks; in all seasons it would be an un-attractive place to linger and wholly unsuitable for outdoor restaurants.

Non-Compliance of Scheme with RBK's SPD

- Conclusion - The scheme proposed by St George is unsuitable for the TOPO site and does not comply with the SPD:

- We therefore request that the Councillors reject St George's application.

- It is wholly out-of-character with Kingston.
- It will not provide an effective gateway to Kingston town centre.
- It will not enhance the site from its present condition.
- There is no meaningful precedent for its proposed tower blocks.
- It will significantly detract from the area by creating a cold, dark and windy environment.
- It does not satisfy the SPD requirement to create an attractive new public space.
- It is a gross over-development of the site.