

Notting Hill Housing Vision Event - Manor Place Depot, Walworth

3 June 2014

Elephant Amenity Network report

I went to the Notting Hill Housing exhibition for Manor Place. Despite being called a Vision event, the design team had already done feasibility studies and were proposing "approximately" 290 homes.

There was no information on the exhibition panels about the options they had looked at, but when pressed they said the direction they were given by Southwark was to maximise housing and retain heritage buildings.

NHH had considered the feasibility of providing up to 500 residential units, but to retain heritage buildings and be in keeping with local character they had rejected tall buildings on this site. The massing would be 3 - 8 storeys.

On affordable housing there is little or no information at the exhibition but in discussion, NHH say their aim is to be "policy compliant". At first they mentioned the 35% figure in the Core Strategy, but when I asked if this meant they would provide half as social rented, NHH said the policy they would comply with was the statement agreed by Southwark Cabinet on affordable rent. They agreed this was not a planning policy, but they were seeking to comply with the direction that Southwark had given.

Therefore, NHH acknowledged there would be no social rented housing. They said they have been directed by Southwark to provide some social rented on other sites in Southwark (eg Aylesbury) and to subsidise this they need to maximise the value from sites like Manor Place.

NHH claimed that "some of" the affordable rent housing would be "suitable" for council tenants, but when I went through the guideline affordable rent levels on the NHH website and how this was nearly 50% of average earnings, they agreed that affordable rent was not affordable to those on average or low incomes.

It is not clear what the precise affordable rent levels will be in Southwark. NHH claim they could be a lot less than the guidelines. When I asked what was the lowest affordable rent they had been able to negotiate in London, NHH cited a scheme in Brent where the Council had put them under a lot of pressure and they had agreed affordable rent for a 3 bed flat at £180.

The existing proposal does not include any affordable workspace and no community use. When asked why, NHH said they needed to maximise the value from other uses, such as new commercial units at the railway arches, in order to subsidise social rented housing in other schemes.

Of the communal green spaces, only 1 will be public and the others gated. NHH claim that maintenance costs of public space are higher and that it is unfair if residents service charges are paying for public use. The position of NHH is that public spaces should be adopted and maintained by the Council

The timetable is for a further public exhibition in September, a planning application in late autumn and to planning committee in early 2015.

When asked how the community can shape the proposals between now and September, NHH said they have arranged a workshop and walkabout with the Walworth Society. I asked how they would engage on non-heritage issues and NHH said they were open to suggestions.