

EAST BOLDON FORUM

Notes from a meeting with Lichfields Planning & Development Consultants and Avant Homes on 2 September 2021 re proposed construction of 230 homes at Cleadon Lane, East Boldon

In attendance:

Merv Butler, Joe Thompson, Howard Lawrence, Dave Hutchinson (EBF)
Chris Smith, Associate Director, Lichfields
Josh Woolard, Lichfields
James Johnson, Planning Manager, Avant Homes

Matters discussed:

1. Background

The meeting was brought about following the Forum's written response to the Leaflet issued to the residents living adjacent to the site (further information on the proposals is available at www.cleadonlane.com) and specifically in response to the Forum's complaint that they had not been made aware or consulted over the proposal.

For reference and context, the Neighbourhood Plan contains a number of general policies which will impact the development. However, EB10 specifically deals with the prospect of this brown field site coming forward for housing in the event that there was no demand for the existing employment related uses. EB10 reflects the community's feedback to our consultation in March 2019 and states:

"Proposals for the redevelopment of the site for a wider mix of uses, including housing, must be informed by a comprehensive masterplan to be prepared in consultation with the East Boldon Neighbourhood Forum, the local community and other key stakeholders. The applicant must also demonstrate that there is no need or demand for the existing employment related uses. Evidence should include details of the comprehensive marketing exercise undertaken."

At the outset of the meeting, Chris Smith explained that Lichfields were acting as planning consultants on behalf of Avant Homes to develop 230 new homes on the site of Cleadon Lane Industrial Estate, although all aspects relating to the design of the site are being dealt with by Avant's own in-house architectural team.

Avant Homes "have a contract with the landowner" to develop and market the site for housing on behalf of the landowner. JJ wasn't able to divulge the identity of the landowner but undertook to seek permission to do so.

It appeared that time was of essence in progressing the proposal. CS explained that time constraints had prevented Lichfield's from engaging with the Forum prior to the limited consultation being launched in July. They stated that they intend to submit a full planning application to the Council within the next month.

2. Lichfields consultation with the community

The Forum were informed that 650 leaflets had been delivered to houses in the immediate vicinity of the site. CS argued that this mirrored the approach the Council would take in notifying adjacent properties for a planning application. He quoted the following statistics about the consultation:

- 1,200 unique visits the website (1,500 in total)
- 180 responses to questions on the website
- 38 responses by post

Responses to consultation questions:

Q1 - Is East Boldon a sustainable location for new homes, with good transport links and access to local services?

- 34% agree or strongly agree
- 59% disagree or strongly disagree
- 7% neutral

Q2 - Is the site an appropriate location for new homes?

- 39% agree or strongly agree
- 53% disagree or strongly disagree
- 8% neutral

Q3 - Is it a well designed, attractive development?

- 31% agree or strongly agree
- 52% disagree or strongly disagree
- 17% neutral

Respondents to the consultation had raised the following concerns:

- Transport congestion
- Pressure on metro and the level crossing
- Impact on schools/GPs/dentists etc
- Overdevelopment of East Boldon
- Air pollution
- Loss of green land (?)
- Ecology/species loss

The Forum were informed by Lichfield that some respondents view the development as an opportunity to improve the appearance of the site and as an opportunity for affordable housing. JJ stated that he felt there was more support for this scheme than for most new housing developments and confirmed that full details of the consultation will be published as a 'Statement of Community Involvement', part of the formal planning application.

3. Development timescale and phasing

CS stated that over a year ago, a pre-application enquiry to South Tyneside Council (STC) had been submitted, and Highways England had been consulted about the outline proposals. The Forum confirmed that they were unaware of this. Lichfields suggested that STC will initiate any consultation in relation to highways issues.

CS acknowledged that although a planning application would be submitted in the next month, STC staff shortages and pressure of work may mean a delay in STC validating the application (the vetting required before the planning application is opened to consultation).

This will be followed in 2-3 months time with an open day/evening where the detailed plans for the scheme will be available for the public to view. Responses to the planning application will also be made available.

Lichfield offered to notify and meet with the Forum when the planning application is submitted so that the Forum has an opportunity to express an initial view.

Avant Homes confirmed they intend to start on site as soon as planning permission is granted. Initial work will be needed to prepare the site and remove any contamination. The intention is to then develop the whole site as soon as possible, starting with the northern part as this is immediately available. This is adjacent to green belt land and will be designed to present an attractive access point.

They intend to develop the rest of the site as soon as possible thereafter, probably within the next two to three years, subject to existing businesses vacating. They anticipate that the rate of sale of houses will be high.

4. Housing mix

Avant Homes stated that the majority of the dwellings will be 2 or 3 bedroom homes (each 45% of total) rather than 4 bedroom homes (10%). There will be no apartment type housing.

The Forum raised the issue of affordable homes. JJ couldn't confirm a figure but stated that this would be subject to discussion with STC.

5. Design principles and policies of the Neighbourhood Plan

The Forum emphasised how a number of policies in the Neighbourhood Plan would be applicable to the development and how these policies reflected the Government's direction of travel in terms of place making, design and the environment.

We also confirmed that if this scheme was to proceed, it would provide a benchmark against which other schemes, should they come forward, would be measured, and that the master plan set out in EB10 and which required community involvement, was a critical aspect.

Avant Homes and Lichfields did state that they were aware of the draft NP and would consider the policies contained therein, in particular the specific policy on Cleadon Lane

Industrial Estate (EB10), and they intended to pay particular attention to the design of the outward edges of the development in order to make it more attractive to passers-by. We highlighted the Forum's policy EB3 re design and the design code.

Subject to resolving contamination issues, they intend to open up the culvert which contains Tiled Burn. The Forum stated that this would be an opportunity to create an attractive area of landscape and habitat, as well as dealing with drainage more sustainably. An area where people could come together could form a key feature of any design. The Forum highlighted the issue of land contamination and raised concerns over the importance the site in relation to the wildlife corridor and Boldon Flats.

6. Impact on infrastructure – schools, transport etc

Concerns over these issues were set out in the Forum's response to Lichfields consultation and were highlighted at the meeting.

Avant Homes confirmed that they are aware of the concerns about such issues and stated that they will be addressed as part of the planning application. They are currently relying on historic data for traffic volumes on Cleadon Lane and Station Approach. A survey was done before the current school holidays and they are waiting for a report from transport consultants.

School places – they will liaise with STC Education regarding likely pupil numbers and forecast school capacity. They were aware of limits on school places and stated that a contribution will be made to STC to mitigate the impact of increased numbers in the future.

CS stated that the Environment Agency, Northumbrian Water and other agencies will be consulted as part of the planning application process.

7. Sustainable Travel/Safe routes for pedestrians and cyclists/Access to Metro and Shops

The Forum emphasised the importance of this and referred to Policy EB20 in the draft Neighbourhood Plan. We suggested that the development should have a direct link to the footpath/cycle path that runs next to the railway to enable direct pedestrian and cycle access, and that footpath networks should anticipate the possibility of a direct route to the metro, bus stops, shops etc., should the remaining businesses blocking this route cease to exist at some future date.

Avant Homes stated that intend to encourage residents to make use of walking/cycling routes and specific proposals will be included in the travel plan to accompany the planning application. They mentioned offering vouchers for the metro.

8. Way forward

We emphasised the need for transparency in dealing with the Forum and East Boldon community in general. Avant Homes stated that this would be their intention and committed to engaging with the Forum in a positive way as the development progresses.