

**SOVEREIGN HOUSE, SOVEREIGN WAY, TONBRIDGE**

**STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

**TONBRIDGE SOVEREIGN HOUSE LTD**

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## SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report identifies the public consultation that has taken place in relation to the proposed development for a mixed-use retail and residential scheme on the site of Sovereign House, Sovereign Way, Tonbridge and summarises the responses received and how these are addressed in the application proposal.
- 1.2 The proposals are for a mixed residential and retail development comprising 337 flats (including 111 affordable units) and 4 no. retail units (2,277 sq m total floorspace) together with the creation of new public spaces and pedestrian/cycle links, parking and environmental and ecological improvements to the Botany Stream.
- 1.3 The consultation process was designed to complement and supplement the statutory public consultation process undertaken by the local authority.
- 1.4 The Council's allocation of the Sovereign House site for mixed-use redevelopment forms part of the overall town centre regeneration proposals in the Tonbridge & Malling Local Development Framework. These proposals received wide support from local stakeholders and interest groups. No formal objections were raised to the proposed site allocation during consultation on the TCAAP and the Site Allocations Development Plan Document or at the subsequent Examination in Public.
- 1.5 Nevertheless the developer, Tonbridge Sovereign House Limited, recognised the importance of involving local people in having their say about the detailed development proposals for the site. Accordingly, a Public Exhibition was held at Sovereign House on Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> December 2007, details of which will be discussed in this report.

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## SECTION 2:      **METHODOLOGY**

- 2.1      As stated above, the developer Tonbridge Sovereign House Ltd are committed to ensuring that the local population are involved in the planning and design process of developments in their community. The developer employed Stiletto Property Marketing to organise a public consultation exercise with input from consultants on their development team; RPS, PDA and JSA.
- 2.2      Invitation letters for the Public Exhibition were sent to Tonbridge Civic Society, local Councillors, Sir John Stanley MP and local press. Advance notice of the Public Exhibition was also advertised in the Tonbridge Courier, published 29<sup>th</sup> November 2007.
- 2.3      A Public Exhibition was held at Sovereign House on Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> December 2007, between 10 am and 4 pm and enabled local residents and other interested parties to view the proposals by Tonbridge Sovereign House Limited Ltd to re-develop Sovereign House, Tonbridge and to question representatives of the project team. As a consultation exercise the aim was to receive feedback from residents and community representatives so that the developer could take into consideration local views and incorporate this feedback, wherever appropriate.
- 2.4      The Public Exhibition was attended by 55 people, including Councillors, members of Tonbridge Civic Society, Tonbridge & District Railway Travellers Association and local residents. Photographs of the exhibition are included at Appendix 1.

### **APPENDIX 1**

- 2.5      The exhibition consisted of A1 and B1 size boards, which displayed and discussed the constraints and opportunities presented by the site, design objectives and concepts of the scheme and the current proposals. Brochures were also prepared for attendees and distributed at the exhibition and a copy of the brochure can be found at Appendix 2.

### **APPENDIX 2**

- 2.6 The exhibition was staffed by representatives from the applicant, Tonbridge Sovereign House Ltd, RPS Planning, JSA and PDA who talked attendees through the displays, responded to questions and sought feedback.
- 2.7 A comments form was provided to all attendees and all were encouraged to complete these in order to record their views and provide the developer with valuable feedback on the proposals.

### **APPENDIX 3**

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## SECTION 3: CONSULTATION RESPONSES

3.1 A total of 19 comments forms were returned. This amounts to 35% of the total number of individuals who attended the exhibition. This is considered a healthy and indicative level of response for this style of feedback.

3.2 The responses received can be categorised as follows:

- a) General Comments
- b) Scheme Layout & Design
- c) Parking
- d) Affordable Housing
- e) Transport

a) **General Comments**

3.3 Numerous positive comments were received from various attendees of the exhibition in relation to the proposed scheme. The positive feedback received included comments such as:

- “Development like this is needed to inject new impetus into the life of the town”;
- The proposals demonstrate “an exciting move forward” for Tonbridge; and
- The scheme presented at the exhibition represent “a very well thought out project”.

3.4 One exhibition attendee welcomed the inclusion of a retail element in the proposals and acknowledged that Tonbridge town centre is in need of a “good shopping area”. The attendee further stated that the current shopping facilities are “dreadful”. It is therefore considered that the proposals put forward by the developer will be beneficial to the town centre as the town currently lacks a good retail offering.

3.5 One attendee questioned how the issue of flooding would be dealt with on site. This has been discussed with the Environmental Agency and a full Flood Risk Assessment, has been submitted as part of the application. This assessment concluded that the development is acceptable in flood risk terms, as relevant flood mitigation measures would be put in place.

**b) Scheme Layout & Design**

3.6 There were some concerns voiced by attendees relating to the height of the tower, stating that this would be out of keeping with the surrounding area. One resident also questioned the impact of this on views from the Castle.

3.7 Applicant Response: *The applicant considered these design comments following the exhibition. However, given that a 12-storey contemporary development had recently been consented to the northeast of the site, adjacent to the gasometers it was considered that the tower would not be out of character with surrounding area. In addition, views from the Castle were an important consideration in the detailed design of the proposals. The Design & Access Statement deals with this issue and concludes that the views from the Castle are of the urban setting of the town and the proposed development is screened by trees and 4-storey buildings fronting the High Street.*

3.8 A number of the attendees stated that the design was not sympathetic to the surrounding area.

3.9 Applicant Response: *As stated above, a contemporary 12-storey tower has recently been approved to the northeast of the site. The Design & Access Statement submitted with the application details the design rationale for the proposals. The statement highlights that the character of the surrounding area, and the richness of architecture within the town influenced the design of the scheme, and consideration was given to the elevational treatment and the need to articulate façades across the buildings. The proposed scheme provides a new landmark building for the Botany Quarter, whilst having regard to the character of the surrounding area.*

3.10 However, there were also positive responses received in relation to the design and layout of the scheme as presented at the public exhibition. This positive feedback included comments such as:

- The “general layout and features appear to refreshing forward thinking”;
- The heights and tower are “fine as suggested”;
- The “tower is striking and welcome”; and
- “The high degree of integration of landscaping with architecture” is “to be welcomed”.

**c) Parking**

- 3.11 A number of local people were concerned at the lack of adequate parking spaces proposed for the development.
- 3.12 However, various comments were also received from attendees suggesting that car-free covenants should be included in the decision notice in order to decrease car usage. One attendee also noted that provision should be made for cycle parking, in particular for the retail use.
- 3.13 Applicant Response: *The applicant reviewed the proposals in this respect. A full Transport Statement was prepared. The number of vehicle spaces provided in the development is 199 in total and this is considered to be appropriate and sustainable. In addition, a considerable provision of cycle parking is included in the proposals submitted, 172 covered and secure cycle stands are proposed within the development.*

**d) Affordable Housing**

- 3.14 There were no negative comments made with regard to the mix and number of affordable units proposed by the scheme at the public exhibition, although a verbal view was expressed about the appropriate mix and number of family units.
- 3.15 One attendee stated that the social/private mixed proposed by the applicant was “to be commended”.
- 3.16 Applicant Response: *The proposed mix is currently being discussed with the Housing Department of TMBC but, overall, it is considered that the mix is appropriate for this location and that family units would have appropriate amenity space provision.*

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e) **Transport**

- 3.17 Concerns were raised by attendees in relation to the extra traffic generation that was likely to arise as a result of the proposed development. Other attendees of the exhibition recommended that traffic mitigation measures be put in place in order to reduce the additional traffic.
- 3.18 Applicant Response: *The Transport Statement submitted with the application, prepared by PBA, addresses this issue and demonstrates that the current operational issues at Medway Wharf Road and Avenue du Puy that generate brief queuing during some peak periods are not significantly affected through the introduction of the development*

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## **SECTION 4: CONCLUSIONS**

- 4.1 The applicant has actively engaged with local residents of Tonbridge and provided the opportunity for the public to pass comment on the proposed development prior to submission of the application and the Council's formal consultation process..
- 4.2 Where appropriate, the applicant has responded to matters of detail raised during the consultation process through the submitted planning application.