



DESUIF

Disability Equality Service User Involvement Forum

Metro Green Area Action Plan Scoping Report Consultation

Response required by 17 November 2014

Response to Gateshead Council on behalf of the Gateshead DESUIF and Gateshead Access Panel.

Responses have been informed through meetings and discussions with Gateshead Council Officers and service user engagement, including the DESUIF Technical Meeting 21 October and DESUIF Focus Group 11 November 2014 at Gateshead Civic Centre.

Land Use, Infrastructure and Design

Explanatory Note: Whilst we recognise that the Area Action Plan itself may not be able to represent or secure any specific details of the development or control the detail design of developments including infrastructure, we believe it is important to raise the issues discussed in this response and request that these issues be considered and where possible addressed within the Area Action Plan and at each subsequent stage of planning and implementation. Our justification for raising issues of future detail development in this and other development proposals is to raise awareness of issues to all persons involved in such planning and implementation. Without such awareness of these issues and their implications for the end users of the land, facilities, and services, any development is likely to fall short of adequately meeting the basic needs of the many end users whom we aim and work to represent.

Local Context

The Metrocentre and associated facilities provide very inclusive environments for a large percentage of the population and have been extremely popular with disabled people due to its accessibility. The proposed Metro Green development area is also in many ways unique within the Gateshead Borough in regard to it providing:

- A plateau with no extensive or predominant level variations;
- Proximity to regularly serviced public transport routes;
- A high potential for easily accessible and inclusive pedestrian routes;
- A high potential connectivity via public transport routes and interchanges via road and rail for accessibility both within the area and to other parts of Gateshead and beyond;
- Proximity to accessible retail, leisure, healthcare and employment opportunities within the development area; and
- Additional opportunities for training and employment within adjacent areas.

Housing Development

Any housing developments are sure to be of great interest to disabled people and elderly persons as well as families with young children.

The location of homes for people who are less physically mobile, including disabled persons and elderly persons, in proximity to retail, leisure, and community facilities and services should be recognised as a priority for their accessibility as well as employment and social inclusion; for whom accessible pedestrian routes and access to local transport is a high priority.

Therefore when considering the evidence of need for housing for older people and disabled people, whose housing needs will require new dwellings built to Lifetime Homes or the proposed Building Regulations Part M Category 2 “accessible and adaptable dwellings ”and Wheelchair Housing or Category 3 “wheelchair user

Ref: Metro Green Area Action Plan Scoping Report Consultation	File No: GAPCon-MetroGreen-SH131114	Date: 14-11-2014	Page 2/6
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dwellings”, we believe an increased priority for such housing within the Metro Green development area should be recognised by employing higher ratios of provision above any generic percentages for the Borough; in recognition also that many areas of the Borough are likely to be less suitable for such (Category 2 and 3) dwellings. Such dwellings should be located as far as possible to ensure ease of access to the local infrastructure, facilities and services within the community. In the case of Metro green this would include the Metrocentre, the Metro Retail Park, Riverside Park areas and such future development in the local; as well as retaining / developing ease of access to pedestrian and transport routes and links to adjacent parts of Gateshead.

There will exist a need for Lifetime Homes/Category 2 and Wheelchair Housing / Category 3 dwellings across all tenure and all dwelling size, from single to 4 and 5 bedroom homes, which we believe should be recognised in the Area Action Plan. We also believe there to be a specific need for affordable housing and social housing, while a higher level of need for social housing will exist for elderly and disabled people, which should also be addressed by the Area Action Plan and any subsequent policies for development of the area.

We recognise that the Council’s policy of Social Housing, Lifetime Homes, and Wheelchair Housing are likely to be addressed in the form of generic ratios to be applied across the Borough and may be identified within “The Making Spaces for Growing Places” supplementary planning document. However, we believe there are considerable grounds to support an area specific approach to the application of such ratios in recognition of local issues, including such as those listed above, and their importance specifically to those persons who would likely most benefit from Social Housing and the increased accessibility of homes designed to the Lifetime Homes and Wheelchair Housing Standards; or as is currently expected, the proposed new National Homes Standards for Approved Document M Category 2 and Category 3 Dwellings.

Also for the above reasons, we believe this area would be very appropriate for the development of housing for older persons, including individual and communal dwellings for extra care housing and supported living.

Education and Training

There appears to be no specific mention currently in the Scoping Report of the inclusion of facilities for education and training within the prospective use of land. In consideration of the initial proposed development of 850 homes and potential of 2050 homes, we believe consideration of such provisions as education facilities for all age ranges and training facilities to support skills development are appropriate for inclusion in the Area Action Plan; and their suitable location and adjacencies to the proposed developments will be essential to minimise any need for travelling beyond the local area and adjoining neighbourhoods.

Ref: Metro Green Area Action Plan Scoping Report Consultation	File No: GAPCon-MetroGreen-SH131114	Date: 14-11-2014	Page 3/6
---	-------------------------------------	------------------	----------

Shared Routes and Shared Surfaces

We recognise the current attractiveness of the area for cyclist and expected development of shared routes for pedestrians and cyclists. However, there continues to be considerable concern among disabled people and their representative groups around the hazards for pedestrians from cyclists on unsegregated routes.

Shared surfaces (vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians) and shared routes (cyclists and pedestrians) are often problematic in regard to their detail design, and for users of such environments they are more often confusing, to all if not just some, and can create a high potential for hazards to pedestrian safety; especially for disabled and less mobile persons, the elderly and very young. Such areas and routes become most hazardous often when they are busy with any or all forms of movement, i.e. vehicle, cycles and/or pedestrians. The combination of any such movement without physical separation, i.e. a kerb edge, creates confusion, anxiety, and physical obstruction barriers to access and inclusion for many disabled people, as well as other vulnerable persons including young and elderly people, parents and carers; and for some can become “no-go areas” as a result.

We believe that with appropriate planning, control, and willingness on the part of developers, there will be opportunities within this specific area to provide segregated or separate routes for cyclists, some of which already exist: such separation of routes will also promote confidence and ease of access for both cyclists and pedestrians; especially for those most vulnerable.

Flood Risk and Drainage

We recognise the current requirements for sustainable drainage, which will be a high priority for this area, and such measures will need to be well publicised to engender confidence both for prospective developers, commerce, and residents.

Commercial and Mixed Use Development

We recognise that the Area Action Plan may only provide broad policy requirements or guidance on the desired development. We are concerned that the current development regulation system does not provide adequate control of development where decisions at Planning Application Stage are not required to consider the functionality or accessibility of the design other than in respect of the physical approach to a building. Consequently, by the time a scheme is submitted for Building Control Approval it is very often too late in the development process to address what can be major deficiencies affecting both accessibility and functionality; due largely to the currently recognised deficiencies nationally in awareness, knowledge, and training of construction professionals.¹

¹ Communities Minister Stephen Williams met with key professional bodies, challenging them to do more to make buildings, streets and public space more inclusive, 20 Oct 2014: www.gov.uk/government/news/ensuring-inclusive-design-in-our-public-space

We believe it is extremely important to recognise that we cannot afford to rely on the basic development control process and expect inclusive developments to be produced, without a strengthening of such controls locally. We further believe it is therefore imperative to have Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG), and for this local area in particular to recognise local needs and the uniqueness of the area as already discussed herein; and for consideration of similar separate SPG provision recognising local issues specific to other areas of the Borough.

Inclusive Design should also be recognised as an essential basis for sustainable development, but not expected to be automatically achieved by any new development. The City of London has recognised this as an issue and has recently published its Inclusive Design SPG.²

Viability and Remediation Strategy

The financial viability of projects including housing development will likely be at risk, if the Area Action Plan and related strategies do not foresee the consequences of not adequately investing in the remediation of the Metro Green area. The issue of viability is likely to have a high impact on the development of new homes in this area, and can be a critical factor that could prevent the implementation of any local plan requirement on a developer to provide the required level of social housing, or Category 2 and 3 dwellings. It is therefore extremely important that the remediation strategy is adequately resourced and funded, to avoid such development blight.

Delivery Plan and Phased Development

In regard to preparing a phased development plan, the connectivity of any new development and the existence of accessible pedestrian and vehicle routes need to be provided and maintained throughout the development phases, to provide ease of access to the existing primary routes, public transport, local facilities, and adjacent neighbourhoods. Such requirements of phased developments should be recognised as a critical factor, to avoid segregation and exclusion of any new or existing community, and to ensure accessibility and ease of access for all including elderly and disabled people are maintained.

Green Infrastructure and Open Space

We agree with the proposals for Green Infrastructure and the need for an assessment to identify requirements for Open Space. The consideration of both of these issues should also be correlated to the location of dwelling development to support the intentions of connectivity, recreation, health and well-being.

Support to Development of AAP

We agree with the proposed regeneration of land around the Metrocentre.

² Shaping Neighbourhoods: Accessible London: Achieving an Inclusive Environment, SPG October 2014

Ref: Metro Green Area Action Plan Scoping Report Consultation	File No: GAPCon-MetroGreen-SH131114	Date: 14-11-2014	Page 5/6
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We believe the themes and issues identified in the scoping report to be appropriate, subject to further inclusion of issues identified here n the above text, which we believe should include the referencing of the proposed supplementary design and planning guidance documentation.

We support the proposed development of the Area Action Plan and wish to be further involved in its development including any future reviews and consultations on its preparation and implementation.

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Ref: Metro Green Area Action Plan Scoping Report Consultation	File No: GAPCon-MetroGreen-SH131114	Date: 14-11-2014	Page 6/6
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