

# Aida Bliss Development Update

## Background

When asked in a survey in 2012 about what should be built on the former Aida Bliss factory site Chester Green residents were of the overwhelming opinion in favour of family housing and/or small scale office-type buildings.

When in 2018 the Council purchased the site for residential development there was a sense of relief that at least there wouldn't be a battle between residents and a private developer about plans to build high rise apartment buildings. Council plans for the site have undergone several changes since then largely due to increasing awareness of the constraints arising from its location in a flood zone.

Despite the recent completion of flood defences in our area, the prospect of an extreme flooding event that overtops the defences determines what is required in any development. These include for example no residential living areas on the ground floor; this is remedied by undercroft parking beneath any residential building. Also required is quick and safe egress from the development in the case of a flood and places of safety within buildings above floodwaters from which residents can be rescued. Although the risk of extreme flooding events is very difficult to forecast we have seen the reality of the impact of these recently in Germany and Belgium - as well as many other parts of the world including the UK.

The issues above were one of the reasons why an extra care home accommodating elderly and vulnerable residents was ruled out.

## Constraints

There are several constraints or requirements on any development on the site:

- the relatively small size of the site
- the lack of residential living areas on the ground floor
- the costs of any development including the need to decontaminate the site
- the housing needs of people on the city's housing waiting list eg housing for large families and single people
- the need for the costs of any development to be met (via rents) over a 40 year period
- the need to retain the facade along City Road
- an agreed maximum height of any building on the site is 4 floors - approximately the maximum height of the current buildings.

Taken together these constraints will have an impact on the types and sizes of the housing units on the site. These include

- a development of exclusively family houses - around 40 - would not bring about a sufficient return on the costs of building them over a 40 year period
- the garden sizes of family houses will be significantly smaller than some public housing authorities recommend.
- there will need to be a mix of 3 and 4 bedroomed houses and double and single bedroomed apartments

## Development under consideration

The total number of housing units to be built on the site currently under consideration is 75. These numbers are very likely to change, but currently comprises:

- 4 x 4 bedroomed family houses
- 16 x 3 bedroomed family houses
- 2 x 2 bedroomed family houses

- 9 x 2 bedroomed flats
- 44 x 1 bedroomed flats
- Total of 75 Units

## Conclusions

The council has tried and is trying to creatively and constructively make the best responses to all of the above issues. Plans to retain the facade and build houses alongside and a short distance from it - rather than into it - are positive proposals.

The outstanding considerations are:

- because of the experiences of extreme flooding mentioned above and the views of some environmental economists, should a residential development be built on the site? The acquisition of the site was funded from the council's Housing Revenue budget, and this requires the council to build a residential development or forfeit the funding. Is it possible to return the funding and consider a non-residential development e.g. a university or Derby College Faculty? We were all enthusiastic about the Classic Car proposal.
- the number of dwellings and the number of adults and children living in them is quite high compared to other developments in the area. The limited garden space proposed and its impact particularly on the health of children remains a concern.
- Although a car parking space will be allocated for each unit there is a likelihood that there will be more cars than parking spaces. This will have an impact on car usage and parking and air quality.
- the Town House format proposed for the family houses which for flood risk mitigation has living areas at upper floor levels but garden amenity space at ground floor level can cause practical problems for parental supervision and child safety issues. Townhouses that have been built in Chester Green have not proved popular with families with young children with a number who could afford to move house to alternative accommodation.
- the experience of another single person accommodation development nearby has not been a positive one. Many of us are aware that a development of this type on the other side of the river had to be demolished owing to antisocial behaviour. How will the potential for this to happen again be prevented?
- The lettings policy and housing management approach need to be understood by local people if it is to have our confidence.

The Council Cabinet member with responsibility for Housing, Roy Webb, stated at the outset of the plan to develop the site that any development needed to be supported and welcomed by the local community. To achieve this more engagement and consultation with the local community is urgently needed. We all need to make sure we get this right.

Your comments are important so please let us know what you think about the current proposals for the Aida Factory redevelopment.

Please email your comments to [andrewmeehan75@gmail.com](mailto:andrewmeehan75@gmail.com)

or post to Andrew Meehan

Little Chester Residents Association

102 Chester Green Road Derby