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Ref: Urban Design assessment of development opportunity sites

Title: Fire Station & Laundry Site, Saffron Walden, Essex

Client: Uttlesford District Council

Date: December 2012

Place Services at Essex County Council working in partnership with Uttlesford District Council

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Executive Summary

Following consultation on the proposals for a draft Local Plan in June/July 2012 an area of Saffron Walden Town Centre which included the Fire Station and Laundry site including the Fire Station and Laundry in Saffron Walden was identified as a development opportunity site. Through a process of viability testing, context analysis and urban design appraisal, the future development potential of the site has been explored and development principles established.

This document sets out the principles for the future development of the site, ensuring that any development fits into the surrounding context, while providing the town with a suitable mix of uses which meets the needs and requirements for the future growth of Saffron Walden.

The follow summary sets out the key development principles future development proposals will need to address:

- Any development proposal should be of a high quality and should respect and enhance the historic and conservation values of the site immediate surroundings
- Principal pedestrian access from Hill Street
- Principally commercial/retail uses fronting Hill Street; an element of residential would be acceptable above ground floor
- Site topography should be utilised in achieving the on site car parking requirements by creating under deck parking for the residential units towards the southern boundary of the site
- Pedestrian links through the site from the Jubilee Gardens and Waitrose store and carpark to Gold Street should be encouraged
- Residential infill fronting Gold Street will be encouraged to improve the street scene while removing low conservation value buildings
- Development proposals need to consider the adjacent residential properties on Gold Street and the link to the surgery

Purpose of this report

Uttlesford District Council is assessing the viability of a number of development opportunity sites in Saffron Walden, Great Dunmow and Stansted Mountfitchet. This report follows on from another commissioned report undertaken by Carter Jonas titled; 'Assessment of Development Opportunity Sites' November 2012. The Carter Jonas report sets out the future viability of development options for each of the identified sites.

This report takes the findings of the Carter Jonas document and begins to establish urban design development principles and options for each site including future uses.

1. Local Context

Saffron Walden is an attractive market town with an interesting variety of small traders and is probably underrepresented in terms of national retailers as compared to similar towns. To some this is part of its attractiveness. There is generally a fairly low level of vacant retail units and when a unit becomes available it is usually taken up fairly quickly. There is perhaps a shortage of larger units which might attract more national retailers to the town.

The town is close to Stansted airport and has excellent links to Cambridge, just 15 miles away. The prime area for retailers is King Street and while rental levels for retail units have reduced since their peak they are still high enough to justify development in appropriate locations.

The site is within the town centre and has good transport links nearby in terms of public transport which would promote accessibility, social inclusion and the use of sustainable travel modes. The site is already in employment use but the development will offer additional retail floorspace which would support the local economy and local employment.

The site is located within the Conservation Area of Saffron Walden and in close proximity to a large number of listed buildings including several grade II* designated.



2. Policy and Viability Context

Emerging Site Allocation Policies (LDF Working Group Oct 2012)

Saffron Walden Policy - Development Opportunity Sites

The Council will support development and redevelopment opportunities for town centre uses in the following town centre locations.

- The Fire Station/ Saffron Walden Laundry
- Emson Close/ Rose and Crown Walk and car parks to rear of Boots and Saffron Building Society

Development should form part of a comprehensive development or not prevent the development of any other part of the site. Development will need to be implemented in accordance with design guidance approved by the Council and other Development Management policies. Implementation of the proposals will be regulated by legal obligation in association with the grant of planning permissions.

Assessment of Development Opportunity Sites report (Carter Jonas Nov 2012)

The site could provide one large or two smaller retail units fronting Hill Street serviced from Gold Street with other town centre uses, possibly within a D1 Use Class, on the rear. Residential accommodation on the upper floors might help provide additional value to increase the site value which could encourage both occupiers to move. Such a development could provide a contribution of 500 m² (5,400 sq ft) or more to the floor space requirements and with a vacant site would be economically viable. Such units could be attractive to major retailers unable to find suitable sized premises in Gold Street despite being slightly 'off pitch'.

Alternatively the whole site is capable of accommodating as much as 1,875 m² (20,000 sq ft) of ground floor retail space through provision of a small 'mall' but this would produce a larger number of small units and while it could have an exit onto Gold Street there would be no draw to create through pedestrian traffic. Such a scheme would do little to meet the needs of major retailers and the nature of the units provided would make attracting tenants difficult so that achieving a viable scheme is unlikely to be achieved.

Waitrose have consent to extend their store and a small mall might become viable if linked to an extended Waitrose store. Any link would need to avoid damaging Jubilee Gardens.

The site might attract a discount retailer but is smaller than their preferred site size and their use is unlikely to generate sufficient value to interest the existing users in moving.

Viability

A mixed use development providing ground floor retail with an alternative town centre use at the rear with upper floor residential accommodation will be viable, though would require careful design to protect the amenity of any residential units. No scheme is likely to come forward until such time as the Fire Service and/or laundry have a need to relocate to new premises.

Summary

- One large or two smaller retail units (500m² or 5400sq ft)
- Fronting Hill Street, serviced from Gold Street
- A mixed use development
- Ground floor retail
- Alternative town centre use at the rear (possibly D1 use)
- Upper floor residential accommodation
- Careful design to protect amenity of any residential uses

3. Historical Context

Summary of Saffron Walden Conservation Area Appraisal and Draft Management Proposals (Approved April 2012)

The site lies within the Saffron Walden Conservation Area. It does not contain any listed buildings, though 9 are identified as of relevance given they adjoin or face on the opposite side of the street. These are on Hill Street, Gold Street and the corner of Market Row. The only Grade II* listed property is Jubilee House, which is a 18th century L shaped office building (converted from house), with major rear and side 19th and 20th century extensions helping enclose and closely associated with Jubilee Gardens.

The Saffron Walden Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy also identifies:

- The important architectural/historic value of 8-12 Gold Street, a terrace of 19th/20th century cottages on the opposite side of the street to the site. These would be protected from demolition without prior consent unless otherwise stated.
- The open space importance of Jubilee Gardens. It notes that the laundry and multi-storey car park detract from its visual setting, and suggests these are screened by providing additional low canopy planting.
- The importance of the Gold Street view, with most buildings being either listed or identified as making a positive contribution to the conservation area and the view south distinctively centred on the spire of St Marys Church.

Adjoining the site to the south east are three trees protected by TPOs lining a footpath to Jubilee Gardens The conservation area identifies no other trees of importance with relevance to the site.

Archaeology report

The site lies within the medieval town area of Saffron Walden. There is known to have been prehistoric, Roman and Saxon occupation on the ridge top before the construction of the town. After the Norman Conquest Saffron Walden was granted to the de Mandevilles, becoming the centre of their Essex and Suffolk estates. They built a castle on the chalk peninsula between the two streams of the Slade (King's Ditch and Madgate Slade). The castle was built to dominate the area and its plan determined the subsequent street layout. The inner bailey was oval in plan and contained the domestic and defensive buildings of the de Mandevilles, of which only the flint rubble keep survives. The outer bailey was also ovoid in plan, fully enclosing the inner bailey and the original town. The church was built and two streets, Church Street and Castle Street, laid out within the outer bailey. In 1141 the de Mandevilles acquired the right to hold a market. By the 13th century the town had passed from the de Mandevilles to the de Bohuns. In the early to mid 13th century a large town enclosure was laid out to the south and west of the outer bailey and the outer bailey ditch back-filled. The date of this work may correspond to the granting of a new charter in 1236. The town enclosure ditches, known as the Battle or Repell Ditches enclosed a total area of 20 hectares. Within this were laid out new streets, principally High Street and its back lane Gold Street, and a new market-place.

The study area is located on the southern side of the mid-13th century market-place. It is not certain when the southern side of Hill Street was first developed, although a medieval date is presumed. Gold Street has been built-up possibly by the 15th century and definitely by the 16th. The Slade stream, which ran along the northern side of Hill Street was culverted c. 1700 and its valley infilled.

There has been no excavation within the study area. However fieldwork immediately to the north at Market Row/Hill Street revealed a complex stratigraphy of deposits dating from the 12th century onwards.

The archaeological requirements if development proceeds will comprise an initial phase of trial trenching followed by open area excavation of significant deposits identified. The trenches will be positioned to identify depth of the archaeological deposits across the area so that preservation in situ can be achieved where possible.

4. Site Analysis

The plan below highlights the principle context surrounding the Fire Station/laundry site. The interconnecting Fire Station and Laundry sites follow the sloping topography of the area, rising gradually from Hill Street. The Fire Station entrance provides opportunity for infill development, facing onto primary street retail frontage. Gold Street is a narrow historic street with on street parking on each side of the street. Residential uses dominated the top end of Gold Street, many of which are listed buildings. Jubilee Gardens, Waitrose and the Surgery provide key destinations for pedestrian movement.



Key

- Site boundary
- Primary street frontage
- Secondary street frontage
- Town centre boundary
- Important open spaces
- Listed buildings
- Building that make important architectural contribution to the conservation area
- Significant trees

Photographic survey



Top: The Fire Station site from Hill Street could potentially be the frontage for a new retail unit. The site as viewed from the Jubilee gardens; the levels gradually slope up the site away from the town centre.

Middle: Access point to the site via Gold Street is narrow; the private pedestrian link to Jubilee Gardens via the surgery.

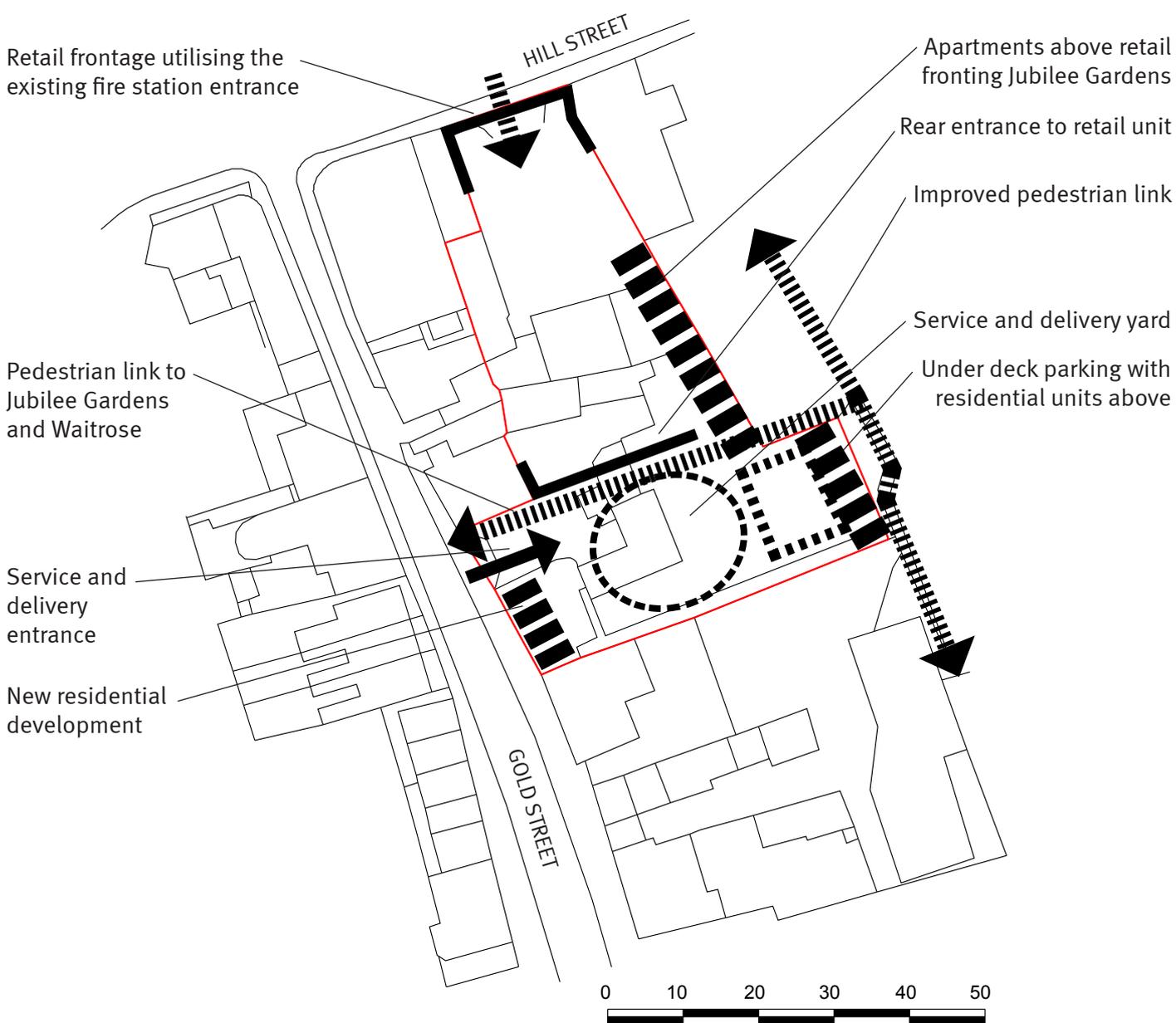
Bottom: Access the site from Gold Street; many of the buildings on site are poor quality but the entrance is adjacent to listed buildings.

Key Principles

The development principles plan below highlights the key criteria for the future development of the site to follow. This plan represents the main development opportunities of the site while indicating the constraints of the site and the neighbouring properties.

Development principles:

- Infill commercial/retail unit in keeping with the surrounding context fronting Hill Street with servicing from the rear of Gold Street
- High quality residential apartments overlooking Jubilee Gardens
- High quality residential units fronting Gold Street
- Service yard and parking to the bottom of the site adjacent to the surgery parking
- Improved pedestrian links to Jubilee Gardens, Waitrose and Gold Street



Indicative Outline Proposal

The site would be suitable for a food store and/or other medium to large national anchor stores sized between superstores and smaller convenience stores. The location provides primary street frontage with suitable town centre levels of footfall.

Development breakdown

storey	units	type	car parking	garden/terrace
1	1no.	Retail unit (1000sqm)	3no. + off street delivery bay	na
2*	4no.	3bed duplex apartments (200sqm)	200% underdeck	30sqm terrace/balcony
1**	6no.	2bed apartments (90sqm)	100% underdeck	20sqm terrace/balcony
2	2no.	2bed semi-detached (90sqm)	200% garage parking	25sqm garden

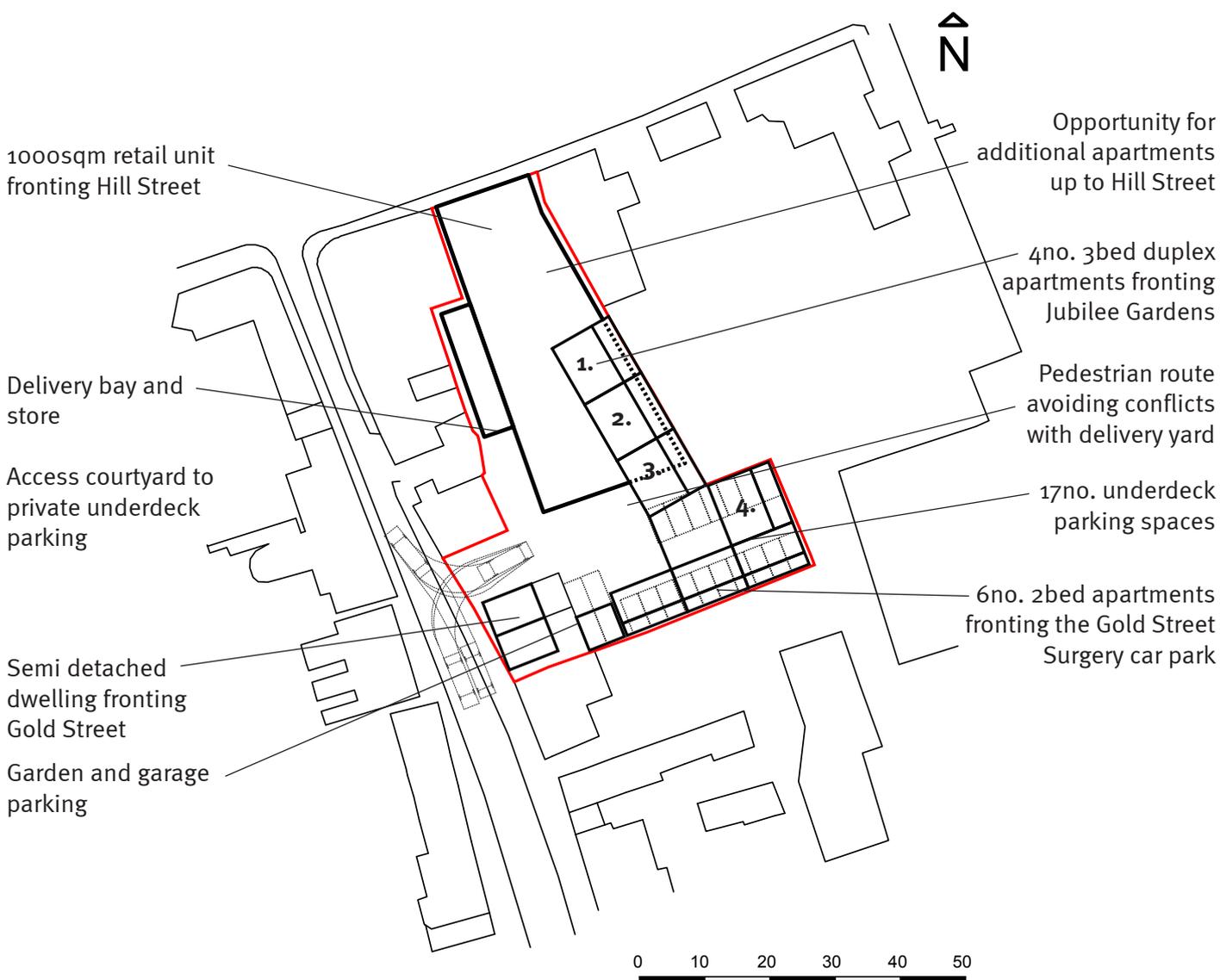
*2 storey above retail unit

**2 storeys of apartments above the ground floor parking deck

Pedestrian access from Hill Street.

Vehicle access onto the site is via Gold Street.

Options for various sized apartments may increase or decrease depending on market demand, viability and parking space provision, the apartments will have to be of high quality and suit the conservation nature of the town.



Consultation

As part of the preparation of this report the following groups were consulted on in regard to the future development of the site;

- Strategic Development Management, Essex County Council Highways
- Conservation Officer, Uttlesford District Council
- Tree Officer, Uttlesford District Council
- District, town and parish councillors
- Historic Environment Specialist, Place Services

Relevant district, town and parish councillors were invited to a 'walk and talk' meeting on site to walk around the site and discuss key issues including setting out their aims objectives for the site. The 'walk and talk' day was held on Tuesday 11th December 2012. A summary of the comments are included below as well as any additional thoughts the councillors provided.

Strategic development highways comments

- Waitrose has consent to extend parking
- Frontage on Hill Street and access/delivery from Gold Street
- On site parking provision will be essential

Walk and Talk summary

- Retail fronting Hill Street, servicing and deliveries from Gold Street
- There is an opportunity for high quality residential apartments above retail fronting Jubilee Gardens
- Increase and improve pedestrian links and access from Waitrose and Jubilee Gardens to Gold Street
- Opportunity for infill residential fronting Gold Street to replace poor quality Laundry building
- Under deck parking on site for residential could be accommodated utilising the sloping sites levels
- Any proposal need to be of the highest quality in both detail and design
- The proposal needs to respect the historic nature of Saffron Walden and its conservation area

Councillor's invited to contribute:

Simon Lloyd Town Clerk, Cllr Watson, Cllr Perry, Cllr Walters, Cllr Eastham, Cllr Asker, Cllr Sadler, Cllr Rolfe, Cllr Eden, Cllr Ketteridge

Town councillors

Ben Balliger, Beryl Wardley, Cliff Treadwell, David Britton, Mike Hibbs, Milon Ahmed, Nick Osborne, Richard Harrington, Sandra Eden, Sarfraz Anjum

Contacts

This document has been prepared on the request of Uttlesford District Council and has been produced by Place Services, a trading company of Essex County Council.

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Reference Documents

Uttlesford District Council Local Plan (2005)
Uttlesford District Council
2005

Parking Standards: Design and good practice
Essex County Council
2009

Assessment of Development Opportunity Sites
Carter Jonas
November 2012

Saffron Walden Conservation Area Appraisal and Draft Management Proposals
Uttlesford District Council
Approved April 2012

Retail Site allocation policies
LDF Working Group
October 2012