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## Macclesfield town centre redevelopment

### Macclesfield

Comprehensive redevelopment of Macclesfield town centre. Designed by Engle.

26 January 2009

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We offer a warm welcome to the general approach and principles outlined in this project. This is a highly significant scheme for Macclesfield, however, and therefore we feel that a number of issues need to be dealt with particularly carefully. We recommend that the following points are addressed before a decision is made on the planning application.

### Scale of development

We have considerable concern for the scale of the development proposed. While we think the decision to locate the larger buildings at the southern end of the town, where the land is lower, is a logical one, we think the maximum building envelopes proposed are inappropriate. The maximum building envelopes for Blocks C1, D1 and D2 in particular are overbearing on the surrounding buildings, as shown in sections 4, 5, 6 and 7. Development of this scale also creates retail streets between the blocks that will be considerably overshadowed and because of the height of the buildings on either side, will create an overwhelming environment for the pedestrian. Sections 8, 9 and 10 for example show Exchange Street dominated by high walls on both sides. We understand the rationale to replicate the narrow streets within Macclesfield town centre, but this should be coupled with an appropriate scale of development on either side of the street. We also understand that a building that has to accommodate large retail stores cannot take its cue from the historic buildings within Macclesfield. Nevertheless, it is important that the scale and form of the development is sympathetic to the town. We urge the design team to reconsider the scale of the development and revise the maximum building envelopes to a scale that is more in-keeping with the existing buildings.

### Churchill Way

The successful edge treatment of the site boundary along Churchill Way, particularly at the south-west end of the site, will be a critical issue. Firstly, the presence of the wall creates what could be a hindrance to permeability into any future development on the opposite side of Churchill Way. We recommend that the impact of the scheme beyond the site boundaries is considered and ways to minimise strong barriers here are found on the basis that the road may well change character at some point.

### Permeability

While we find the overall pattern of urban grain convincing, we would like to reiterate our point above regarding the consideration of the scheme beyond the boundary of the red line in relation to the routes into and out of the scheme. In particular, the conditions at the northern end of the Arcade are quite different to those at the southern end within the heart of the scheme. Visitors and shoppers entering the Arcade from Exchange Street will experience a very different environment as they emerge into Castle Street. As the scheme stands at the moment, the way in

which visitors move through the scheme particularly in a northerly direction through Mill Street and the Arcade feel unresolved, and we would urge the team to create a more coherent joining of the scheme with the existing urban fabric at this location

## Architecture

We appreciate that the current application is an outline one and that therefore much of the architectural detailing will be reserved for later stages of the planning application process. The focus of the design analysis at the scale of the masterplan therefore should focus on principles such as materials, scale and context. Once the underlying principles of successful place-making are established, the architecture will follow. We urge the design team to reconsider the principles of scale, after which the architectural strategy can be considered.

It is our common practice to recommend that schemes of this type are designed by more than one hand, mirroring the development and design of town centres themselves. It is difficult to create difference and distinctiveness across this scale within a single practice, even if the design of individual buildings is given over to various teams within the office. Irrespective of the discussions regarding the type of architecture or the number of practices, it is imperative that all the architects that are offered an opportunity to work on this project do so through merit, and we recommend that the client establishes a process for competitively selecting the teams.

The town square is an important focal point within the scheme and has the potential to be a lively part of the town. While we welcome the informal design for the square, we are concerned that relocating the community centre to the edge of the site and reducing the number of residential units around the square will create a vacant area after the shops close. This does not correspond with the vision to create a lively town centre that has adequate levels of self-supervision out of hours when the shops close and could.

## Roofscapes

As a minor observation, we note that the 15 metre incline across the site suggests that roofscapes should be considered very carefully given the visual impact they will have. This is particularly relevant for the department store block.

## Future-proofing

Building regulations and sustainability are two issues for which legislative requirements will change dramatically in the coming years. Our strong recommendation is that the scheme actively takes into account anticipated developments in these areas in order that, for example, structural works that will be required in five years time would be better undertaken as a core part of the scheme.

We welcome the low-key approach to servicing, which we consider to be appropriate for a scheme of this nature and size. This is another issue that should be tested for future proofing.

## Conclusion

We welcome the overall strategy for redeveloping the centre of Macclesfield, however we are concerned that the parameter drawings for scale and use in particular could result in a large retail development that is incongruous within the town. We recommend, therefore, that our concerns are addressed before the planning application is decided.