

Wichelstowe Blog August 2017 – Looking for a new home?

The most significant thing we have been working on this month has been the submission of the planning application for the first parcel of housing in Canalside. We talked a bit about the houses in June's blog but we can now share some of the more detailed artists impressions and the full plans will shortly be available to view on the Council's planning portal.

The first housing parcels which sit either side of the canal to the north of Waitrose are some of the most attractive on the site with close links to Old Town, views over the canal and easy access to all the facilities which will be based around Waitrose. They are also some of the trickiest from a design perspective with several existing constraints (roads, canal, trees, level changes etc) as well as lots of opportunities such as the relationship with the canal which need to be considered. The design team have worked hard to pull together a well thought out layout and we are really looking forward to seeing the houses come out of the ground.



Subject to planning permission being achieved it is anticipated that housebuilding will start early in 2018 and we look forward to welcoming the first residents in the Autumn.

We are lucky to be working with a number of award winning firms who have delivered some amazing projects elsewhere in the country. I caught up with Nick Phillips from Metropolitan Workshop, who have been leading the design team and Matt Vaudin from Stonewood Design, who have in particular focussed on the feature terraces at either end of the site, to discuss the plans:

[Q. Why did you bid for the opportunity to design houses in Wichelstowe/Swindon?](#)

Nick: We have worked in Swindon for over two years and have forged an excellent working relationship with the Council. We are excited by the potential to set an exemplary standard, as the first phase of a new settlement with the potency to challenge the status quo of housebuilding and change the fortunes of Swindon.

Matt: Wichelstowe provides a great opportunity to design something special and different. The canalside location is unique for Swindon, and the brief allowed us to challenge the status quo for local housing.

Having been born and bred in the town, and now with a local architectural practice, the aspirations for the project are very close to my heart.

Q. What were the key influences behind your design approach?

Nick: Our design process for this scheme is informed by a contemporary reinterpretation of the terrace, which is aimed at a market of buyers generally discouraged by new build homes.

We feel that the canal is the defining feature of the site and fully integrating it into our residential layout is the best means of producing a truly place-specific response. Developing a meaningful relationship between the proposed development and the canal, and the relationship to the street and towpath was fundamental to our thinking.



Matt: The feature terraces have been inspired by the Victorian housing stock in Swindon, streets such as Goddard Avenue in Old Town. These homes are well-presented, robust, and allow future expansion for the modern family. Contemporary elevational references are taken from these houses including the shape decoration of the roof gables and the framing of bay windows at ground and first floor.

A chalky grey brickwork is proposed which takes its reference from the chalk limestone downland landscape of the region. You will also see references to railway heritage with window seats framed in a faceted white border, in direct reference to those you will see in Brunel's railway village.

Q. How will these houses be different to standard new build developments in Swindon?

Nick: These homes will offer generous space, flexible layouts and characterful features. When building we wanted to spend money on the things that matter to purchasers such as higher ceilings, good storage and so on, rather than whimsical design features.

Matt: We have developed the feature terraces to create homes which have a feeling of space, light and generosity. The houses will be 8% larger than normally required by the Nationally Described Space Standard and the architecture aims to be simple but beautiful, repetitive and not fussy.

Q. Why did you decide to include shared gardens? How will these work?

Nick: Our plan creates a layout that reinforces a sense of place by creating visual connections between the canal, the towpath, the communal gardens and from homes themselves. We envisage the towpath passing by communal gardens making them a convivial, well-used and passively surveyed.

This permeability offers opportunities to physically connect the gardens with the water, further reinforcing the objective of creating a walkable neighbourhood with easy access to the facilities within Wichelstowe, the wider town and the surrounding countryside. Each home will have its own private garden and terrace but will also have access to the shared communal gardens, places to gather socially and for children to play safely.





Q. What is your favourite element of the design?

Nick: The gardens and the large end of terrace 4-bed houses with their two corner bay windows looking up and down the canal

Matt: The bay windows in Goddard Avenue allow a view along the terraced street. We have developed this into the feature terraces by creating an oblique view in the form of a ground floor window seat.

Q. Can you describe the new houses in three words?

Nick: Communal, Spacious, Enduring

Matt: Contemporary Contextual Light

The first signs of activity on these housing parcels will actually start in September 2017 with the advanced works to the canal commencing. We have appointed Buckingham Group to undertake the works and they will be setting up the site during the week commencing 18th September. This section of canal requires improvement to the banks and we will have to drain down the canal to achieve this. This will result in water levels in other sections of the canal increasing as we try and keep as much water as possible within the network.

Finally, congratulations to all those who finished the New Swindon Half Marathon at the start of September. We had a great (if slightly damp!) time manning the aid station in Wichelstowe and were struck by how polite and friendly the runners were even with nine miles in their legs. It has inspired at least one member of our team to take part next year!