

FORMER ST GILES' & ST GEORGE'S PRIMARY SCHOOL, BARRACKS ROAD
STAFFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

16/00008/FUL

The Application is for full planning permission for the erection of a four storey building providing 4,914 square metres of floor space. The building is to accommodate the following:

- Office space for Newcastle Borough Council, the Police and Staffordshire County Council (including some of its commissioned services).
- Public reception, waiting area, customer services desks, self-service payment, interview rooms, open access PCs and multi-function rooms (usable for a variety of purposes including Council Chamber).
- Police facilities including private offices and secure interview rooms.
- Library space.
- Registrar space including a ceremony room.
- Other democratic space.

Vehicle and cycle access is proposed from Barracks Road. The proposed 30 space car park would accommodate police response vehicles and parking for disabled visitors and staff. 20 long stay cycle spaces are proposed within the building, with additional visitor spaces at entrances. The primary pedestrian access will be through the Queens Gardens.

The application site includes the Queens Gardens which will continue to function in its own right with some limited amendments, such as the widening of footpaths.

The site lies within the Newcastle Town Centre Conservation Area, the Urban area of Newcastle and the Primary Shopping Area as designated on the Local Development Framework Proposals Map. In addition it is within the Town Centre Historic Core as defined in the Newcastle Town Centre Supplementary Planning Document.

The 13 week period for this application expires on 25th April 2016.

RECOMMENDATION

PERMIT subject to conditions relating to the following:

- 1. Time limit**
- 2. Approved plans**
- 3. Approval of external facing materials and implementation of approved details.**
- 4. Approval of the full and precise details of the vertical 'breaks' on the Queen's Gardens elevation and implementation of approved details.**
- 5. Approval of full and precise details of the appearance of the windows and implementation of approved details.**
- 6. Approval of details to widen the pavement on Barracks Road through the removal of the layby and implementation of the approved details**
- 7. Approval of the hard and soft landscaping details, to include details of replacement trees, surfacing, seating and other street furniture and implementation of approved details.**
- 8. Approval of details of hostile vehicle mitigation measures, means to restrict access to the parking area and other appropriate security measures and implementation of approved details.**
- 9. Approval of details of any barrier to the car park and implementation of the approved details.**
- 10. Approval and implementation of a Green Travel Plan**
- 11. Contaminated land conditions.**
- 12. Approval of a detailed surface water drainage scheme**
- 13. Limitation on the hours of construction.**
- 14. Construction management plan, including protection of roads from mud and debris, and dust mitigation.**
- 15. Piling**
- 16. Implementation of the recommendations outlined in the submitted Noise Assessment.**
- 17. Waste storage and collection arrangements.**
- 18. Archaeological watching brief**

Reason for Recommendation

The site is located within the urban area of Newcastle with the town centre and is a sustainable location for office development. The benefits of the scheme include the economic benefits of retaining office floorspace and staff within the town centre and of bringing in jobs from existing premises in outlying areas. Both will contribute to and enhance the vitality and viability of the town centre. The development will also unlock the redevelopment of the wider Ryecroft site (which includes the Civic Offices and the site of the former Sainsbury's supermarket) which, as recently announced, would involve a significant element of retail floorspace and student accommodation. The economic benefits of that overall development would be significant to the town centre's economic vitality and viability.

Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 emphasises the need to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area. The development, although of a significant size and scale, would preserve the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and also the setting of nearby Listed Buildings including the Queen Victoria statue. Although the views of the Highway Authority are still awaited on the amended Transport Statement and they will need to be considered when received, it is not considered that the highway safety consequences arising from any additional on-street parking demands will be severe provided appropriate controls are in place and accordingly, as stated within the National Planning Policy Framework, the development should not be prevented or refused on transport grounds.

Subject to the imposition of suitable conditions it is not considered that there are any adverse impacts of the development that would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits and accordingly permission should be granted.

Statement as to how the Local Planning Authority has worked in a positive and proactive manner in dealing with the planning application

Officers have worked with the applicant to address all issues and the application is considered to be a sustainable form of development and so complies with the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Key Issues

Full planning permission is sought for the construction of a four storey public sector hub. The building will primarily provide offices for Newcastle Borough Council (NBC) and Staffordshire County Council (SCC) (including some of its commissioned services). A library and Registration Office for SCC will be included. Also to be included are facilities for Staffordshire Police including offices and secure interview rooms. Additionally, civic accommodation for NBC will be provided. A 30 space car park is to be provided with access from Barracks Road.

The County and Borough Council have property portfolios which are dispersed and do not fully support service priority outcomes. Some of the property such as the Seabridge Centre on Ash Way is some way outside of the town centre and therefore add little to its prosperity. Whilst other offices such as those of the Registrar, the former Orme Centre on Pool Dam and the former Connexions office on Hassell Street lie close to the periphery of the town centre. The co-location of partner organisations provides a continuation of Newcastle as a seat of local government and public service delivery which is important in terms of the town's status as a functional service centre (Newcastle being recognised in the Core Spatial Strategy as one of the two strategic centres in the conurbation) The proposals would enable the public to access public services in one central location rather than the current situation where there are five different access points all in different locations.

The development forms part of wider proposals to regenerate Newcastle Town Centre which has been under increasing economic pressure in recent years and which is likely to further decline unless significant corrective action is taken. A large site has been assembled at Ryecroft which is the site of the former Sainsbury's store and the site presently occupied by the Civic Offices. In order to release the existing Civic Offices site the Borough and County Council have reviewed their estate within the town centre with a view to bringing several functions together in one new building. Several sites were investigated in and around the town centre, and three town centre sites were explored in some detail before the site of the former St Giles' and George's school was identified as the preferred site.

The application site is within the urban area of Newcastle, as indicated on the Local Development Framework Proposals Map.

The proposal will result in the loss of the former St Giles's and St George's School building, the function of which was relocated to new purpose-built premises in 2005 (since which time this building has remained vacant). However as planning permission has already been given for its demolition (under reference 15/01077/FUL) it is not intended to consider this aspect of the proposal further within this report.

The main issues in the consideration of the application are:

- Is the principle of the proposed development on the site acceptable?
- Is the proposal acceptable in terms of its impact on the form and character of the Conservation Area and nearby Listed Buildings?
- Is the impact of the development on highway safety and on and off street parking availability acceptable?
- Do the adverse impacts of the development significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the NPPF taken as a whole?

Is the principle of the proposed development on the site acceptable?

As indicated above the proposal is for a new public sector hub consisting primarily of front-line public service functions and supporting back-office space. Local and national planning policy seeks to direct office development, a main town centre use, to town centre locations.

Policy ASP4 of the Core Spatial Strategy (CSS) – the most up-to-date and relevant part of the development plan – seeks to provide 60,000 square metres of additional gross office floorspace either within or on the edge of Newcastle town centre in order to accommodate new employment which is in keeping with the role of the town centre, thus reinforcing its role as a strategic centre where there is a relatively strong professional sector. It also seeks to provide 25,000 square metres of additional gross comparison floor space by the year 2021 with a further 10,000 square metres by the year 2026 as well as provide opportunities to maximise the potential for town centre living through high quality mixed use developments.

Policy SP1 of the CSS identifies Newcastle Town Centre as one of two Strategic Centres (the other being the City Centre of Stoke on Trent). It goes on to state that new development will be prioritised in favour of previously developed land where it can support sustainable patterns of development and provides access to services and service centres by foot, public transport and cycling.

The Newcastle Town Centre SPD places the application site within the Town Centre historic core which is described as the heart of the Town Centre and is rich with its heritage. The SPD indicates that any change must be of a positive benefit and create an asset for this core area of the Town Centre. It indicates that the whole of this zone lies within the Primary Shopping Area and thus retail activities must continue to predominate.

The site is located within Newcastle Town Centre and given the proposed use the relevant policies referred to above are supportive of the principle of this development. The proposed development would enable the existing Civic Offices to be demolished and as such will enable the redevelopment of the site known as Ryecroft which is planned to include retail floor space and student accommodation (a preferred developer has been identified and preliminary pre-application discussions have taken place in this regard).

It cannot be stated that the proposal will result in the provision of additional office floor space in the town centre. Indeed the expectation is that the Civic Hub will enable the partners to reduce their combined accommodation by 68% of current floorspace (albeit that a significant amount of it lies outside the town centre), and it is intended that the existing NBC Civic Offices will be demolished and it is not anticipated that the redevelopment of that site will include offices. The expectation is that the other facilities considered within the business case for the hub will in some cases almost certainly be redeveloped for other non-office purposes. However regardless of their location and the floorspace calculations the key point is that in terms of where staff are based and their numbers there is a centralisation of staff into the town centre. The concentration of staff and visitors within the town centre will increase footfall and therefore improve the conditions within which greater commercial activity can thrive. The development of the Ryecroft site, furthermore, would help to deliver CSS Strategic Aim 7, to help Newcastle Town Centre to continue to thrive as a strategic centre, and Strategic Aim 18, to promote mixed use development where it can support town centres. In addition the provision of retail floorspace within the Ryecroft site should improve customer choice and the diversity of the retail offer within the Town Centre which will accord with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) at paragraph 23 that promotes competitive town centre environments.

Indeed, given the overriding need for the partners in the hub project to generate long term financial efficiencies from their respective property estate, were proposals for a Civic Hub not able to be progressed in all likelihood there would be a general drift of a significant amount of the office functions away from the town centre into cheaper premises with all the associated footfall and expenditure implications for the town centre.

The development overall would provide economic benefits through the retention and relocation of office staff within the town centre. In addition it is anticipated that the retail development on the Ryecroft would generate £29.1 million per year in turnover, with an additional £530,000 per year in town centre expenditure from the student accommodation. Additional economic benefits arise from the Ryecroft scheme from the 351 full time equivalent jobs that would be created, and the additional 204 construction jobs over a two year period. Whilst the proposals that are the subject of this application have to be considered on their own merits the latter potential economic benefits referred to are a significant material consideration.

On the basis of all of the above, it is considered that the principle of the development in this location should be supported unless there are any adverse impacts which would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits.

Is the proposal acceptable in terms of its impact on the form and character of the Conservation Area both in relation to the loss of the existing building, and the proposed development itself?

Policy context in the assessment of the development's impact on the Conservation Area and setting of listed structures/buildings

Policy CSP1 of the Core Spatial Strategy (CSS) indicates that new development should be well designed to respect the character, identity and context of Newcastle and Stoke-on-Trent's unique townscape, and landscape and in particular, the built heritage, its historic environment, its rural setting and the settlement pattern created by the hierarchy of centres. Amongst other things new development should be based on an understanding and respect for Newcastle and Stoke-on-Trent's built, natural and social heritage and contribute positively to an area's identity and heritage.

Policy CSP2 of the CSS indicates that the Councils will seek to preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the historic heritage of the City and the Borough including buildings, monuments, sites and areas of special archaeological, architectural and historic interest.

Saved policy B5 of the Newcastle Local Plan (NLP) indicates that the Council will resist development proposals that would adversely affect the setting of a Listed Building. Saved NLP policy B10 indicates that planning permission will be granted only if the development will preserve or enhance the character or appearance of a Conservation Area.

Saved NLP policy B15 indicates that trees and landscape features which contribute to character and appearance and are part of the setting of a Conservation Area will be retained.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) at paragraph 131 states that in determining planning applications, the local planning authority should take account of:

- The desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- The positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and
- The desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

At paragraph 132 the NPPF states that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset (such as a Conservation Area or Listed Building), great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be. 'Significance' can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting. As heritage assets are irreplaceable, any harm or loss should require clear and convincing justification.

In paragraph 133 it is indicated that where a proposed development would lead to 'substantial harm' or total loss of significance of a designated heritage, local planning authorities should refuse consent, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss, or all of the following apply:-

- The nature of the heritage asset prevents all reasonable uses of the site
- No viable use of heritage asset itself can be found in the medium term through appropriate marketing that will enable its conservation; and
- Conservation by grant funding or some form of charitable or public ownership is demonstrably not possible; and
- The harm or loss is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the site back into use

Paragraph 134 of the NPPF states that where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.

The LPA has to have regard to the provisions of the development plan (as far as material to the application), local finance considerations (as far as material to the application) and any other material considerations (Section 70). Where regard is to be had to the provisions of the development plan, the determination should be made in accordance with the provisions of the development plan *unless* material considerations indicate otherwise (Section 54a). The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is a material consideration in the determination of applications. Paragraph 215 of the NPPF states that due weight should now be given to relevant policies in existing plans according to their degree of consistency with the Framework (the closer the policies in the plan to the policies in the Framework, the greater the weight that may be given to them).

With respect to the development plan policies referred to above the development proposals are considered to be broadly consistent with the Framework.

Other material consideration in the assessment of the development's impact on the Conservation Area and setting of listed structures/buildings

The Newcastle Town Centre Conservation Area Character Appraisal identifies seven Character Areas. The site falls within Character Area 4, 19th century expansion – Barracks Road and Well Street, and is directly adjacent to the Queen's Gardens which fall within Character Area 1, Town Centre – Ironmarket and High Street. Both Character Areas are assessed as being positive character areas. The School which is currently located within the site is listed as a key negative feature as it is vacant and its setting needs improving. It goes on to set out the most important issues based on the key negatives identified, one of which is that the future of the former School should be ensured. It highlights that the medieval burgage plots are still apparent on Ironmarket.

The Newcastle Town Centre Supplementary Planning Document (TCSPD) indicates that any development opportunities in the Historic Core would be likely to be infilling and intensification, with special attention to conservation. Any change must be of a positive benefit and create an asset for this core area of the Town Centre.

The TCSPD goes on to identify elements of good design in the town centre. It indicates the development should be designed to respect and where possible enhance its surroundings and contribute positively to the character of the Town Centre helping to improve its image and identity, having particular regard to the prevailing layout, urban grain, landscape, density and mix of uses, scale and height, massing, appearance and materials. New development should follow one of 3 design approaches; reflecting the best of the historical; contrasting with the traditional; or interpreting the traditional in terms of a contemporary design. Whichever approach is selected the key factor is the creation of well-mannered buildings that enhance their setting and that are well resolved in terms of their own architecture.

The TCSPD advises that innovation, and creativity may generate new buildings that look very different to those that have been developed within the Town Centre over its history but can still be supported, particularly where the design is driven by improved environmental performance and where such development will act as an exemplar of good architecture and design. But it is essential that the development respects its setting. Development must incorporate materials that are relevant and/or complementary to the surrounding area, are durable and appropriate for their purpose. Traditionally based brick, render and stone are recommended, with the addition of terracotta, tile and glazing used sensitively and in context.

The TCSPD indicates that it is important to create or maintain active frontages and that doors, and even windows, add to the interest of the streetscape. The TCSPD further advises that the historic core is sensitive and runs the risk of being undermined by buildings that are too high or too low. On the inner ring road, which includes Barracks Road, it is important to prevent the creation of a "canyon" effect by developing at maximum heights on both sides over any significant length.

The Urban Design Supplementary Planning Document (UDSPD) has a section that addresses Newcastle town centre. It identifies that the town centre has a distinctive pattern of relatively narrow plots throughout the historic streets. Buildings generally date from the Georgian period and more recent development, which follow a characteristic pattern of simple, regular and formal facades and

vertically proportioned openings. It refers to Queen's Gardens as a successful public space, which acts as a gateway space allowing views into the historic streets from the ring road approach.

The UDSPD sets out design guidance for the town centre which includes the need to diversify town centre activity by creating a network of streets and blocks of development similar in scale to the existing town centre and integrate the scale of car parking into the settlement form. The scale of development should be generally in the range of 3-4 storeys, to create an urban scale, with up to six storeys to address the ring road in landmark or gateway locations. It identifies the need to retain and enhance its distinctive character by using contemporary design to respond to the ordering principles of the historic townscape (e.g. of rhythm, symmetry, etc.,) rather than copying historic buildings.

In considering the historic environment more generally policy HE3 of the UDSPD indicates that new development in or adjoining Conservation Areas should demonstrate how it will contribute to the character or appearance with reference to the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan for each area.

Policy PR7 of the UDSPD states that new development must contribute to the quality and success of streets, public space and green space.

Assessment of the development's impact on the Conservation Area and on the setting of listed structures/buildings

As indicated above the application site lies within Newcastle Conservation Area. It is directly adjacent to Queen's Gardens which is an important public open green space for the town centre created in the 1920's. The Grade II Listed statue of Queen Victoria is sited within Queen's Garden and faces Ironmarket. Facing Queen's Gardens is No 31 Ironmarket, a Grade II Listed Building.

To the east of the site are the former Post Office, now Wetherspoons, and Ironmarket beyond which contains relatively tall buildings (typically three storeys) on relatively narrow plots. To south of the site, off Barracks Road, is the service yard to shops within Castle Walks.

West of the site is Barracks Road and the site of the former Jubilee baths which has been demolished and is to be redeveloped as a six storey (20-22m high) block of student accommodation. Cophall House, a 4/5 storey building faces the Nelson Place roundabout looking towards the site, as does the Georgian Listed terrace between King Street and Brampton Road. Directly opposite the site is the Exercise for Less building which is a lower two storey building.

The site therefore lies within the historic core of the Conservation Area but given its proximity to Barracks Road any building constructed will also have a relationship with the buildings adjoining the town centre beyond the ring road.

Consideration has been given, within the submitted Design and Access Statement, to the concerns expressed by Urban Vision to the scale and massing. Two options were assessed involving a three storey wing facing Queen's Gardens and either five storeys or three storeys with a tower arrangement on the corner on the Barracks Road wing. Both were discounted by the applicant due to concerns that it would result in a 'canyon' effect adjacent to the development on the former Jubilee Baths site.

The proposed scheme as submitted involves an 'L' shaped building that has a scale and massing that seeks to address the transition between the scale of the historic core of Ironmarket, Wetherspoons and the larger scale development beyond. Whilst four storeys (16.5m in height) over its total footprint the upper floor of the building is set back for the majority of its length where it fronts Queen's Gardens and will be fully glazed with clear and obscured 'look-a-like panels'. As such it will appear (when viewed from ground level from within the Queen's Gardens) as a substantially three storey building which when viewed from Ironmarket will be at a height which is comparable to many buildings on Ironmarket, although it will be taller than Wetherspoons. The glazed projecting 'pod' over the main entrance on the Queen's Gardens at first and second floor level will reduce the perception of the scale of this full four storey element whilst drawing attention to this section as the primary point of pedestrian access.

The Queen's Gardens elevation is shown to have vertical breaks which, if the projection is sufficient, will create shadows on the building to break up the elevation along the lines of the burgage plots on Ironmarket which together with the vertically proportioned windows would create greater vertical emphasis, provided a significant reveal or recess is secured by condition. It is considered that this respects the urban grain character of this part of the Conservation Area whilst acknowledging the integrity of the substantive building design.

A two storey glazed feature is proposed on the Barracks Road frontage which enables views into the building (particularly important to enable views of the public activity in this part of the building) and improves views into Queens Gardens through the removal of the boundary fence. This projects forward of the four storey building on the eastern side of the building and will also reduce the perception of scale of the proposed building when viewed from the ring road.

The approach that has been taken is a building which contrasts with the traditional and which provides active frontages to both these key elevations.

Currently the existing former school on the site doesn't address Barracks Road to the east and the site, as existing, has a boundary treatment directly abutting the narrow footpath approach to Queen's Gardens comprising a close boarded fence and sporadic trees. The proposed building will address Barracks Road as it has a wing along this boundary which is angled so that it moves further from the highway as it gets closer to Queen's Gardens. Notwithstanding that there will remain a pinch point at the point where the buildings is closest to the highway, the development will create a much improved pedestrian route along Barracks Road than currently exists for the majority of its length. In addition the applicant is seeking to address the pinch point and widen the pavement by extending the pavement into an existing layby which is understood to be no longer required for highway purposes. The widening of the pavement at this point will much improve the setting of the building and will also improve accessibility to the site from the bus station; a route that it is anticipated will be used more than at present.

The materials that have been selected are buff sandstone which is in contrast to the predominant materials of Ironmarket but has been chosen by the applicant to provide a sense of civic dignity and importance of this public service building. The remaining elevations will be clad in a more neutral masonry effect cladding.

The scheme presented to Urban Vision involved a contrasting cladding at ground floor of the Queen's Gardens elevation of the proposed building. The contrasting cladding has now been removed to simplify the material palette on this elevation and as such responds to that concern expressed by Urban Vision. The proposed material types are considered to be appropriate in this location, however it is important that the materials are approved through condition to ensure that they are of sufficiently high quality and will be durable for the life of the building. In addition it is considered, as has been suggested by the Conservation Officer and the Conservation Advisory Working Party, that sandstone with a redder hue would be more appropriate than the proposed buff. This can be secured through a planning condition.

Queen's Gardens lie within the application site however the siting of the proposed building will not extend into the Gardens although it will be closer than the existing former school building as its front elevation will be on the boundary line rather than the current building line which is 5m further back. This necessitates the removal of a line of Lime trees. The loss of the trees is considered acceptable in principle; however it is important that they are replaced in a suitable position.

The proximity and height of the building and its south eastern position relative to the Gardens will result in considerably more shade within them for much of the day particularly during the winter months.

The submission doesn't provide a detailed landscape scheme and as such the position of the replacement trees and the details as to how the public realm around the building will be treated to ensure that it is not harmful to Gardens is not fully resolved. This could be addressed through the imposition of a condition, however.

The impact of the proposed development will be confined to its immediate vicinity with the vast majority of the Conservation Area unaffected. There is no doubt, however, that there will be significant change in Queen's Gardens and the lower end of Ironmarket as a result of the replacement of the relatively visually discreet school building with a building of a much greater scale and overshadowing effect. Notwithstanding this, and contrary to the opinions expressed, it is considered that the development will, as indicated in the comments of the Conservation Officer, create a dynamic and lively piece of townscape that presents itself to the Queen's Gardens and will increase activity within it. Queen's Gardens, subject to careful handling of the hard and soft landscaping scheme, will continue to be an important, vibrant public space which is a significant asset to the town centre but needs to respond to the challenge of the new building's setting. It should be possible to retain its Victorian character and symmetry.

Taking all of the above into consideration your Officer agrees with the assessment set out in the submitted Heritage Statement that there will be no erosion of the heritage significance of the Conservation Area, and as such the impact is neutral and not harmful.

Similarly the proposed development will bring about change within the setting of the Grade II Listed statue of Queen Victoria, however Queen's Gardens itself will not fundamentally change in form and the introduction of a large building as a backdrop to the statue will not erode its significance and will not therefore be harmful.

Whilst 31 Ironmarket can be seen from the proposed building and vice versa, it is not considered that the proposed building lies within the setting of this listed building. As such the development will not harm its setting. Even if it is considered to be within the setting it is considered the setting will be preserved.

Overall it is considered that this is a development that complies with policy and guidance set out in the relevant Supplementary Planning Documents and as it is considered that there is no harm to heritage assets arising from this development and as such it is not necessary to undertake the planning balance as set out in the NPPF in paragraphs 132-134.

Is the impact of the development on highway safety and on and off street parking availability acceptable?

The access to the site would be via Barracks Road using the existing access to the School. The access arrangements are left in/left out. The supporting Transport Statement indicates that the development will generate 46 two way vehicle trips in the AM and PM peaks calculated on the basis of the parking provision at the proposed development. In this location it is considered that the number of trips is relatively small and the level of use of the access would not result in highway safety concerns.

Policy T16 of the Local Plan states that development which provides significantly less parking than the maximum specified levels will not be permitted if this would create or aggravate a local on-street parking or traffic problem, and furthermore that development may be permitted where local on-street problems can be overcome by measures to improve non-car modes of travel to the site and/or measures to control parking and waiting in nearby streets. Policy T17 of the Local Plan, however, indicates that development in Newcastle town centre within the ring road will not be permitted to provide new private parking, but will be required, where appropriate, to contribute to appropriate improvements to travel to the development. Such improvements are listed in the policy and include the upgrading or expanding of existing public parking, traffic management on approaches to the town centre, facilities for public transport, walking and cycling, and mitigating the impact of any (associated) on street parking by appropriate parking controls including resident parking schemes.

The NPPF, at paragraph 32, states that development should only be prevented or refused on transport grounds where the residual cumulative impacts of development are severe. In March 2015 the Secretary of State gave a statement on maximum parking standards indicating that the government is keen to ensure that there is adequate parking provision both in new residential developments and around town centres and high streets.

Based on the maximum parking standards in the Local Plan relating to office and library floor space (1

space per 30m²), the development should not be permitted to provide more than 164 spaces; although only 30 spaces are proposed. It is considered, however, that this is a private car park and as such the provision of a car park of any size is contrary to policy T17 as referred to above.

Notwithstanding policy T17 it is considered that there is clear justification for the provision of 13 police rapid response vehicles on site. The provision of disabled parking spaces for visitors (8 in number) and staff (2) is also considered to be appropriate. The remaining non-disabled spaces are primarily for visitors with just 2 additional spaces for staff. Therefore whilst not strictly in accordance with policy T17 it is not considered that an objection on this basis would be sustainable.

Whilst the level of parking is considered to be acceptable by your Officer, it is noted that the Highway Authority require further information on how the service yard will operate. The applicant has been advised of this and any further information received will be reported.

The site is in a highly sustainable location where there is a choice of modes of transport to the building and as such not all staff or visitors will be travelling by car. Those that choose to travel by car can park in any of a number of public car parks in and around the town centre, and for visitors there are also on street short stay parking spaces in the vicinity. It would be appropriate to impose a condition securing an up to date Green Travel Plan.

Many of the existing staff within the current Civic Offices building park in existing public car parks in and around the town centre. A number of staff (113), however, park on the Civic Offices' car park. In addition staff that currently work outside the town centre will be working within the Civic Hub. A factor to be taken into account is that, at least for NBC and SCC employees, there will be 6 workstations for every 10 members of staff. So whilst the total number of staff employed by the main partner organisations, with this building as their primary office base, the introduction of agile working practices will mean that there is unlikely to be any significant increase in demand for parking. As already reported, the proposed development does not seek to accommodate vehicles that would be displaced from the current Civic Offices car park. There will, therefore, be a number of staff working within the new Civic Hub building who will start to park in public car parks that haven't previously done so. Whether this, when the ratio of workstations to staff is taken into account equates to an increased use of parking facilities is difficult at this point to predict.

The Highway Authority have advised that the car park survey data provided in the initial submission is not clear and appears to be based on an average occupancy rather than availability at peak times. Since then further information has been received, in the form of an amended Transport Statement with additional survey information that suggests that there is sufficient capacity within certain existing car parks to accommodate any additional parking associated with this development with further capacity remaining. The level of parking that would be available to 'shoppers' should therefore remain at an acceptable level. As such it could not be concluded that the development would discourage visits to the town centre. The further views of the Highway Authority on this aspect of the development are however still awaited. Consideration is being given to the suggestion of the Highway Authority that contributions of £50,000 towards traffic management; this is for surveying of the surrounding streets before and after development and if necessary the implementation of traffic management schemes such as resident parking. It is anticipated that a supplementary report will be provided on this matter.

The submission does not specify the number of cycle parking spaces for visitors to the building and indicates that 20 spaces will be provided within the building. In addition the plans identify cycle storage for 100 cycles at the west side of the building. The Highway Authority has questioned whether the space allocated for the 100 cycle spaces is sufficient to accommodate that number and whether the level that can be provided is sufficient. It is considered that the level and location of cycle parking spaces for staff and visitors can be dealt with by condition, however if any further information is provided it will be reported.

In consideration of the above there is no basis upon which to conclude that the development will create or result in any highway issues as a result of on-street parking and overall it is considered that the development is acceptable in this regard.

Do the adverse impacts of the development significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the NPPF taken as a whole?

In conclusion, subject to the imposition of suitable conditions and obligations, it is not considered that there are any adverse impacts of the development that would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits and accordingly permission should be granted.

APPENDIX

Policies and proposals in the approved development plan relevant to this decision:-

Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent Core Spatial Strategy (CSS) 2006-2026

Policy SP1: Spatial Principles of Targeted Regeneration
Policy SP2: Spatial Principles of Economic Development
Policy SP3: Spatial principles of Movement and Access
Policy ASP4: Newcastle Town Centre Area Spatial Policy
Policy CSP1: Design Quality
Policy CSP2: Historic Environment
Policy CSP3: Sustainability and Climate Change Policy
Policy CSP4: Natural Assets
Policy CSP10: Planning Obligations

Newcastle-under-Lyme Local Plan (NLP) 2011

Policy T16: Development – General Parking Requirements
Policy T17: Parking in Town and District Centres
Policy B3: Other Archaeological Sites
Policy B5: Control of Development Affecting the Setting of a Listed Building
Policy B9: Prevention of Harm to Conservation Areas
Policy B10: The Requirement to Preserve or Enhance the Character or Appearance of a Conservation Area
Policy B13: Design and Development in Conservation Areas
Policy B14: Development in or Adjoining the Boundary of Conservation Areas
Policy B15: Trees and Landscaping in Conservation Areas

Other Material Considerations include:

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2012)
Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) (2014)

Supplementary Planning Guidance/Documents

Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent Urban Design Guidance SPD (2010)
Newcastle Town Centre SPD (2009)
Newcastle Town Centre Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan

Newcastle Extensive Urban Survey

Waste Management and Recycling Planning Practice Guidance Note (January 2011)

Relevant Planning History

15/01077/FUL. Demolition of former St Giles' and St George's School to facilitate the redevelopment of the site.- approved

Views of Consultees

The **Highway Authority (HA)** have no objection in principle to office in this location but require further information to enable them to provide a more informed response in support of the application.

The Travel Plan that has been submitted is only a draft of an out of date travel, a new updated draft travel plan is expected with relevant pieces of information that is applicable to this development.

There needs to be a robust car parking strategy based on surveyed data of the proposed staff car parks at peak times. The survey data that has been submitted is not clear and appears to be based on an average occupancy rather than availability at peak times, this is questioned as some of the

times used were outside of the times when demand is likely to be at its highest. This data can be collected during the planning application process but it must not be done during the school holidays. They reserve the right to amend their advice once this data has been collected. That said a quick look at surrounding car parks one Friday between 11am and 12 showed there to be spaces available. But the strategy should highlight where the staff car parking will be offered e.g. top floors of Midway rather than the car park as a whole.

The cycle parking is questioned as the plan appears to be labelled incorrectly and shows 100 spaces in a very small area. The Transport Statement states there will be 20 long stay spaces in the building, how will these be accessed and will there be any showering and changing facilities available? Ideally there should be 10% parking for the number of people in the offices. There also would be a need to consider visitor cycle parking; type and location to be agreed.

Information on how the barrier will work due to its location to the A34 is required as is further information on the service yard and how it will operate.

One other important issue is the securing of monies for traffic management around the site. Similar developments in the Town Centre with little or no car parking have been subject to S106 contributions of £50,000 towards traffic management; this is for surveying of the surrounding streets before and after development and if necessary the implementation of traffic management schemes such as resident parking. The County Council would need finance secured towards traffic management in line with other permissions.

The **Environmental Health Division** recommends the inclusion of conditions relating to the following:

- Contaminated land.
- Construction hours.
- Construction management plan, including protection of roads from mud and debris, and dust mitigation.
- Piling
- Implementation of the recommendations outlined in the submitted Noise Assessment.
- Waste storage and collection arrangements.

The **Environment Agency** has no comments.

The **Crime Prevention Design Advisor** wishes to register significant concerns with elements of the proposal and recommend that the development is not approved until identified issues have been adequately considered and measures incorporated to mitigate against perceived vulnerabilities within the current proposals. The concerns are expressed about the ability of vehicles to penetrate the building by accessing the building through Queen's Gardens. In addition access should be restricted to the rear to prevent unauthorised use of the car park. Other concerns raised relate to internal management/layout issues.

The **Landscape Development Section** has no objections in principle to the proposed development subject to the following:

- A comprehensive landscaping scheme is required.
- Replacement of the 'B' grade trees to be lost is required. An avenue of lime trees indicated in the design statement is supported provided they are not located within the bedding/grass areas.
- Cycling through Queens Gardens is not considered acceptable.
- The use of curved stone/timber seating is not acceptable.
- The bandstand should be retained and incorporated into the landscaping scheme, which needs to enhance the current character of the Gardens. Its proposed relocation adjacent to Barracks Road would not be considered as acceptable.

The Council's **Conservation Officer** advises that consideration has been given to the impact of the development on the Listed statue and the setting of the Conservation Area. Just because the Listed 31 Ironmarket can be seen in a distant view from the application site, does not mean that the site is part of that building's setting. The relationship is too distant and the development will not be harmful to the setting of that Listed Building.

Under Section 66 of the Planning Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act 1990, considerable weight should be given to preserving the setting of a Listed Building. Section 72 of the same Act applies so such weight should also be given to preserving the special character of the character of a Conservation Area.

The Conservation Area is established as a locally designated heritage asset and is considered to retain its special character and appearance, as set out in the appraisal and management plan (2008). The overall significance of the town centre is as a medieval town. The Civic Hub is proposed to sit at the back of Queen's Gardens, an important area of open space, on the site of the former school.

The Grade II Listed statue of Queen Victoria, now sits within the Gardens but has had 2 previous locations. Its public location is relevant and its relationship with the Gardens is a strong one and has great local significance (its history is set out in the Heritage Statement supporting the application). It is the Conservation Officer's opinion that the overall relationship of the monument and the Gardens will not be changed as a result of the development – it is not proposed to be moved or reoriented and the Gardens themselves are not proposed to be changed significantly (other than widening some of the paths). The hub will create an alternative backdrop but one must consider that the statue itself has had 3 different settings since it was erected in the early 20th century. Its current location is entirely appropriate but all locations have retained the listed status of the statue and therefore even though the setting changes as a result of the hub, it is not considered that there will be any harm to the statue caused.

This part of the Conservation Area will be altered and particularly views across the area which will change as one enters and leaves Ironmarket. Views will be more limited due to the height of the new proposal. It is not considered, however, that this will in itself be harmful to the character of the Conservation Area overall.

A new building on this site should create a dynamic and lively piece of townscape that should present itself to Queen's Gardens. The design of the new building is contemporary and this is entirely appropriate and the right approach. Pastiche would be the wrong approach as would keeping the façade of the old school. The new building could, if the quality is right, create an exciting space with active frontages out onto the Gardens and support this already popular public open space, creating a new relationship with the Gardens. The building is large but some attempt has been made to reduce the impact as it adjoins the buildings on Ironmarket. The modern glazing element intends to provide a transparent contemporary active building on the edge of the ring road and it is considered that again if executed well a new building would be created within the Conservation Area that would be a positive change.

In terms of materials, it has been suggested that Hollington stone in a buff colour may be used and this is proposed for the new building. The Conservation Officer's preference is not for buff and she has some concern over the impact of this given the scale of the building within a predominantly red brick town. The preference is for a Hollington mottled blend which has a redder hue and would provide more interest and adhere to the vernacular character of the town, in colour at least. The whole approach of this must be to strive for quality and not cut corners once the scheme marches forwards, materials must be high quality and well executed.

If it is considered that there is less than substantial harm (harm) to the listed buildings or their setting or to the setting of the Conservation Area, considerable weight and importance must be given to the desirability of preserving the character of such listed buildings, its setting or the setting of the Conservation Area in balancing the harm against other material considerations. This is in accordance with the legal implications of Sections 66 (1) and 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

The **Conservation Advisory Working Party (CAWP)** was divided on their views over the design. It was felt by some it was a missed opportunity for a better standard of design which would enhance the area. The detailing was poor and they wanted assurance that the quality would be a high priority by retention of the architects during the process. There was concern over whether the Queen's Gardens would be changed. All had concerns over the plant equipment being visible on the roof with no details of the size of parapet and a missed opportunity to provide a more interesting roof (garden?). The

Group want the bandstand to be retained. There was discussion over the tunnelling effect the building will create with the new student block opposite. Some members wanted the principal material to be brick, others favoured a redder Hollington stone, not buff as the design looked like there was a likelihood of poor weathering and staining of the building. The character of Queen's Gardens would change and loss of light and intimacy was unsympathetic to this part of the Conservation area. Some members fully supported the scheme as an exciting vibrant design which would be positive contribution to the town and to the Conservation Area.

The applicant has sought the views of the **Urban Vision Design Review Panel** on two occasions. They consider that the scheme is out of character of the Conservation Area. They remain concerned about the scale, massing and configuration of the building, and the proposed materials, as well as how the building sits within the landscape and the open spaces which it creates. The issues they raise are summarised as follows:

- Problems with pedestrian movement that exist around the site are not satisfactorily resolved in the scheme. These include the need to make the public realm more generous at the pinch point on Barracks Road and the lack of a surface pedestrian crossing over Barracks Road.
- Scale and massing of the building does not sit comfortably with the surrounding buildings. The effort to avoid a tall building on a constrained site has resulted in a bulky undistinguished building with a heavy massing that overpowers its surroundings. An alternative solution would be to introduce more variety in height with a maximum of 3 storeys over much of the footprint with a higher, elegantly proportioned tower or slab section nearer to the ring road.
- The palette of materials needs to be simplified. The glazed wing further complicates the design and may date rapidly.
- The proposed landscape master plan does not satisfactorily integrate the site with the formal layout of the Queen's Gardens.
- The sustainability of the building has not been addressed. The aim of achieving BREEAM Very Good standard is not sufficiently exemplary and would not lead other developers to aspire to high standards of sustainability and environmental performance. The Panel would like to see a commitment from the Council to sustainable modes of transport to the site through a green travel plan.
- There is a potential issue of conflicting uses with sensitive uses and general public use in the same building. In addition there could be situations where inter-visibility is not desirable such as where the Council Chamber and registrar's functions are on open view to the public from outside the building.

The Panel considered that the building to be occupied by April 2017 was too optimistic as this wasn't a sufficient time period to detail, construct, fit out, commission and occupy the development and in the circumstances more time should be allowed at the design and planning stage.

Historic England recommend refusal. They advise that they are extremely disappointed that the application for the demolition of the St Giles' and St George's Primary School has already been approved despite their recommendation. They acknowledge that considerable thought has been given to the design of the building, with care being taken to add interest and articulation to the elevations. However after some deliberation they are unconvinced that the proposal is appropriate in this particular location.

The scale of the proposed building is more characteristic of those properties on the opposite side of Barracks Road, rather than the more modest properties within the Conservation Area. Furthermore the proposed height, massing, materials and design combine to create a building which dominates this part of the Conservation Area, creating an uncomfortable juxtaposition with the adjacent Queen's Gardens. On this basis the scheme does not preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Conservation Area.

It is acknowledged in the Conservation Area character appraisal and management proposals for the area for the area, and the supporting Heritage Statement accompanying the previous application, that the former school contributes positively to the special character of the conservation area. It is therefore reasonable that any replacement scheme similarly achieves such high standards.

Whilst aware that consent has been granted for the demolition of the school, the incorporation of the existing building into the proposal is still encouraged.

The **Waste Management Section** has no comments.

The **Lead Local Flood Risk Authority** advises that the submission demonstrates that an acceptable drainage design could be achieved within the proposed development. A condition requiring the submission and approval of a detailed surface water drainage scheme is recommended.

The **County Archaeologist** advises that pre-determination archaeological works would not be warranted in this instance and that the scheme can be satisfactorily mitigated through an archaeological watching brief during groundworks.

The views of the **Newcastle South Locality Action Partnership** and the **Victorian Society** have been consulted but as they have not responded by the due date it is assumed they have no comments.

Representations

83 representations have been received, 2 from the **Thistleberry Residents Association** and 2 from the **Civic Society**, objecting to the application on the following grounds:

- Loss of another old building, on the local register, which is damaging to the heritage of the Town Centre and harmful to its character resulting in further loss of its identity.
- The existing building could be put to a use that would be beneficial to the town centre, such as providing units for self-employed craft people.
- It has not been demonstrated that alternative uses of the building cannot be found. There are many examples locally of historic buildings which have either been converted to new uses or part of their historic fabric incorporated into a new building.
- Investment will not be attracted into Newcastle if it becomes bland and soulless due to the loss of its heritage.
- The proposed building will be an eyesore and not in keeping with the character of the area. It is more aligned in height and architecture to development outside of the Town Centre.
- The use of cladding will result in another building that will look shabby in future. The building should be constructed of local brick.
- The proposed flat roof is inappropriate; all others in the vicinity are pitched.
- There are no details of the materials and as such this cannot be considered a full application.
- The height of the building will cast a shadow over the Queen's Gardens and create a canyon effect in Barracks Road.
- Urban Vision were involved too late in the process.
- The development will result in a reduction in size of the Queen's Gardens.
- The Queen's Gardens in its present form would be lost.
- The development will result in the loss of trees and the proposed replacement Lime trees are inappropriate as they are notorious for producing sticky sap that is unsightly and inconvenient.
- The bandstand should not be relocated
- It will not provide the facilities that are needed.
- It will result in a number of vacant buildings with uncertain futures.
- Parking is inadequate and the access unsafe. The level of journeys to and from the building appears to be underestimated and will result in chaos on the road.
- The police emergency response vehicles will not be able to get out of the site quickly enough.
- The lack of provision of employee parking will lead to additional pressures on spaces provided for shoppers and members of the public.
- The amount of cycle parking facilities is inadequate and inappropriately located.
- A more appropriate site for the development is the site of the Sainsbury's store, now demolished or the Lyme Valley.
- There has been inadequate pre-application consultation.
- It is uncertain whether the agencies that will be occupying the proposed building will be compatible. The desirability, feasibility and practicality of the proposal at this stage falls well

short of what might be expected, given the scale of the project, and the level of significance to the local government.

- The space for the proposed library is significantly smaller than the current one.
- The internal layout of the building does not facilitate the provision of important community facilities through the role of the Mayor.
- The building is not safe.
- There is no information given as to how CSS Strategic Aim 5 (to foster and diversify the employment base ... including new types of work and working lifestyles...) will be made to work efficiently.
- The proposal will result in a reduction in office space which is opposite to what the Council wishes.
- It should be possible to alter the existing Civic Offices building.
- The proposed retail floor space on the Ryecroft site will not result in the existing empty shops in the town centre filling up. The Council should concentrate on filling up the empty shops by reducing rents and parking charges.
- Footfall will be away from other important commercial areas.
- There has been inadequate public consultation and the proposal does not demonstrate a good use of public money.

A representation has also been received from **Mr Paul Farrelly MP**. Mr Farrelly considers that the application shouldn't be approved in its current form. The concerns expressed are summarised as follows:

- By virtue of its height, scale, massing, configuration and materials used it constitutes a design which is inappropriate and out of character for the Conservation Area.
- There has been insufficient public consultation and involvement for such an important project in order to proceed with the linked development at Ryecroft. The proposal should be considered on its own merits. Not to do so would be repeating noted failures of the past and would be materially harmful to the enduring character and appearance of the town centre.
- Following any demolition of the former school the Borough has a duty to redevelop the site with an enduring building, which will enhance the character of the Conservation Area. This development will not.
- To be effective Design Review should be commissioned at an early stage which did not happen in this case.
- The application has not addressed the fundamental concerns of the Design Review Panel. The observations and the conclusion of the Panel are supported. More time at design and planning stage to resolve the important issues are necessary to ensure that the building is right from the start. Not to do so would be to let Newcastle badly down.
- The minimum of publicity has been undertaken and the discretion within the Statement of Community Involvement to make the designs available at an advertised public exhibition has not been used which is disappointing.
- The pre-application consultation event was uninformative and disappointing, particularly due to the lack of any design perspectives, elevations or sections as to how the building would actually look, and in the surrounding context.
- Consideration of the application on 1st March is well ahead of the normal, statutory 13 weeks' for a major development and further limits the time for public involvement and comment.

An on-line petition titled 'Save St Giles' & St George's Historic School' has been submitted objecting to the application. At the time this report was prepared it had 1,097 signatures. This petition was reported to a recent meeting of the Council's Cabinet whereat it was resolved to reaffirm the previous decision to dispose of the building to enable the demolition of the former school building and the implementation of proposals for a new Public Sector hub.

It should be noted that the petition was started prior to the submission of this application, although the Civic Hub proposals were already at that stage in the public domain as a result of the applicants' pre-application consultation..

The petition states that St Giles' and St George's School is an integral part of the Queen's Gardens conservation area, the borough council want to demolish it and put a modern four storey building in its

place to create a 'hub' to contain council offices, face to face council services, library, registry office and police station. It is listed in the Council's own list of important historic buildings and the demolition has been strongly objected to by the national bodies Historic England and The Victorian Society, as well as the local Civic Society. The school provides an attractive backdrop to the Gardens and the listed Queen Victoria statue and is of local historic and aesthetic interest. The petitioners propose that the school is restored, or at least the Queen's Gardens facade and tower incorporated into a new building.

1 letter has been submitted in support indicating that there is no need to keep an old school that serves no purpose. There is a need for modern buildings with modern office space which leaves our architectural footprint of the 21st century in Newcastle for future generations to enjoy.

Applicant's/Agent's submission

The applicant has submitted the following

- Air quality assessment
- Coal mining risk assessment
- Phase 1 ground investigation
- Site waste management plan
- Heritage statement
- Archaeological assessment
- Design and access statement (incorporating Landscaping proposals)
- Landscape design statement
- Statement of community involvement
- Bat and bird survey
- Arboricultural impact assessment
- Flood risk assessment and drainage strategy
- Transport Statement
- Draft Green Travel Plan
- Urban Vision Design Review Panel response

These documents are available for inspection at the Guildhall and on the website that can be accessed by following this link <http://publicaccess.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/online-applications/PLAN/16/00008/FUL>

Background papers

Planning files referred to

Planning Documents referred to

Date report prepared

18th February 2016