



Report of the Chief Planning Officer

CITY PLANS PANEL

6th OCTOBER 2016

Pre-application presentation of a proposed new student accommodation building on land between St Alban's Place and Belgrave Street, Leeds (PREAPP/16/00093)

Applicant – Select Property Group

Electoral Wards Affected:

City and Hunslet

Yes Ward Members consulted

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

RECOMMENDATION: This report is brought to Plans Panel for information. The Developer will present the details of the scheme to allow Members to consider and comment on the proposals at this stage.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This presentation is intended to inform Members of the emerging proposals for new multi-storey student accommodation and reconfigured external space on land between St Alban's Place and Belgrave Street to the north of New Briggate.
- 1.2 The proposed development, by Select Property Group, would be part of their Vita Student brand. Vita Student currently manage student accommodation in 10 UK cities but do not currently have a presence in Leeds. Members of City Plans Panel recently visited the developer's Vita Student scheme at Charter Square in Sheffield primarily to view the size of the studios and associated communal spaces.

2.0 Site and surroundings

- 2.1 The site comprises a public pay and display parking area and soft landscaped open space. The parking area accommodates 37 spaces and is accessed from Cross Belgrave Street, off New Briggate, to the front of the Sandanista bar. Pedestrian routes traverse and run along the periphery of the open space which rises 4m from

Cross Belgrave Street towards the north and west (St Alban's Place). The area accommodates 67 primarily semi-mature trees which make a significant contribution to the local treescape and positively contribute to the amenity of the area, including to views from New Briggate and from York Road to the east. At the same time the close proximity of some of the trees, along with the mounded nature of the ground, reduce the usability and quality of the space. There is a footpath on the eastern edge of the site abutting the Inner Ring Road retaining wall which connects New Briggate with Wade Lane and thereafter the pedestrian route on the north side of the arena. The site provides panoramic views towards East Leeds and conversely the site is visible on approaches along York Road.

- 2.2 The surrounding area contains a mix of uses comprising offices; leisure uses including bars, restaurants and the Grand Theatre; and more recently, residential accommodation, such as Q One in the converted Yorkshire Bank offices on the northern edge of the site. Nearby buildings to the west and south of the site are typically 3-4 storeys in height. These include Belgrave House, one of four similar office buildings forming a courtyard constructed on the west edge of the public space, and more historic buildings such as Belgrave Hall, The Wrens and buildings on New Briggate. Taller buildings are situated at higher levels to the north and north-west. These include Q One (8 storeys); and buildings to the west of Wade Lane including existing student accommodation in the 25 storey Opal 3 (CLV) tower and Hume House (Arena Point), a 20 storey office building fronting Merrion Way.

3.0 Proposals

- 3.1 It is proposed to construct a single building running parallel to the eastern boundary of the site (the retaining wall to the Inner Ring Road). The building would have a rectangular footprint and be approximately 67m in length and 14 metres in width. The building would have a stepped profile. The southern element of the building, 14m from Belgrave Hall, would be 7 storeys (19.6m) in height. The central element, approximately half the length of the building, would be 18 storeys (56m) tall whilst the northern portion, 17m from Q One, would be 11 storeys (33.6m) high.
- 3.2 The building would accommodate 376 student studios. 292 of the studios would be 20sqm.. There would be 76 studios 26sqm., which the applicant refers to as double occupancy, and 8 twin rooms which would be 31sqm..
- 3.3 The southern end of the building, facing the city centre, would house a retail or A3/A4 unit potentially 2 storeys in height and circa 350sqm.. Communal space for students would be located in the "hub", comprising approximately half of the ground floor and half of the first floor totalling approximately 820sqm. The hub would be likely to contain lounge and tv areas, quiet study areas, breakfast facilities, and leisure facilities such as a gym and pool tables.
- 3.4 The appearance of the building involves a highly textured and intricate façade. A 'woven' pattern of glazed ceramic tiles is proposed to articulate the facades into smaller proportions..
- 3.5 Initial design concepts for the public realm have been provided. It is suggested that the area of green space will increase from 2,390sqm to 3,697sqm.. It is intended to enhance the approach from the city, in part by reducing vehicle dominance, reinforcing the idea of the street through the introduction of active building frontages and opportunities for uses to spill out into the street.

- 3.6 The central area is intended to be a new, high quality, green space which utilises levels to create a more dynamic and welcoming space. The space could use terraced lawns, planted steps and groups of trees with lighter foliage to reduce heavy shading. A total of 31 existing trees would be removed.
- 3.7 Along the eastern and northern peripheries of the site the applicant notes the opportunity for a new linear green space improving the linkages between Belgrave Street and Wade Lane whilst setting the new building in a park-like setting. This would include the replacement of the southern end of the car park opposite Belgrave Music Hall with a new green space.
- 3.8 There is an aim to create a lower vehicle speed environment and high quality pedestrian area on Belgrave Street. The junction of Cross Belgrave Street and Belgrave Street would be altered with the intent to take on the characteristics of a shared surface. No car parking is proposed as part of the scheme.

4.0 Relevant planning history

- 4.1 Pre-application discussions regarding the current scheme commenced earlier this year although pre-application enquiries regarding the development of this area go back to 2008. Members most-recently considered pre-application proposals for new student accommodation buildings on the site ranging in height from 5 to 12 storeys at City Plans Panel on 9th May 2013.

5.0 Consultation responses

- 5.1 City and Hunslet ward member Councillor Nash is content that any new building would be on the not very attractive car park and it would certainly attenuate noise from the Inner Ring Road. There is a dire shortage of open green space in the city centre such that the “gardens” on Belgrave Street should not be compromised.

However, Councillor Nash states that 17 storeys high is far too high at this location and, as it would be too dominant for nearby listed buildings, she objects to the proposal.

- 5.2 LCC Highways - The site's location is such that development needs to be a low traffic generator and, as such, student residential accommodation is a suitable use of the site. There is no in principle objection to the proposed development providing access requirements are met and a safe environment is created on Cross Belgrave Street. Vehicular access requirements can only be taken from Belgrave Street. St Albans place is only suitable for emergency access.

The operational requirements of the site must be accommodated, including start and end of term drop off / pick up and ad hoc activities such as deliveries and taxi drop off without causing disruption to the highway network. Whilst Belgrave Street generally has low volumes of traffic, it is narrow and the 90 degree bend adjacent to the site can easily be obstructed. Therefore, space needs to be provided to allow vehicles to pass the largest vehicles stopped at the development, likely to be a refuse vehicle. Whilst the building is shown to cover much of the existing car park, the remainder should be retained for operational activities.

Secure cycle parking should be provided within the building for residents and short stay parking outside for visitors. A Travel Plan will be required.

The landscape design concept identifies the important approach to the site along Cross Belgrave Street. In order to create a successful public realm area, the streetscape needs to provide a change in environment to drivers entering from the Loop to encourage caution and low speeds; also the established leisure uses need to be able to integrate with the new public realm, and some interventions will be required on Cross Belgrave Street to achieve this.

- 5.3 LCC Flood Risk Management (FRM) – There are no records of flooding problems in the vicinity of this site. Surface water discharge rates should revert back to the greenfield situation and sustainable drainage solutions should be utilised if practicable
- 5.4 LCC Contaminated Land Team – the end use is a vulnerable one and therefore a Phase I Desk Study Report is needed before the determination of any application. Depending on the outcome of the Phase I Desk Study, a Phase II (Site Investigation) Report and Remediation Statement may also be required.
- 5.5 LCC Landscape – An up to date tree survey should be provided to establish the merits of retaining existing established trees. The landscape concept proposed recognises the importance of the park area and its context in the wider area, which is good. It's not just a space in its own right but an interim destination within a wider public network of links and spaces. Not least as part of a potential route linking through from Briggate via New Briggate to the Arena.

Proposals to extend the public domain beyond the established park boundary is good, along with seeking to reduce vehicle dominance in favour of pedestrians. Addressing the sloping nature of the site is important, particularly in ensuring disabled access compliance. The intention to make use of levels within the overall landscape concept is welcomed and the 'simple' planting approach in conjunction with varied grassed areas will help to maximise a sense of space between existing and proposed built forms.

The overall space needs to be developed to allow other existing buildings to be remodelled in the future, to develop more connections and active ground floor uses. The design should encourage the development of an equitable shared open space, rather than one which is primarily an extension for the proposed built development.

The promotion of active uses at ground floor level will assist in the setting of the new building and encourage use of the space beyond. Evening/night-time use should also be considered to extend the usability of the space and provided a sense of overall security to the area.

6.0 Policy

6.1 Development Plan

- 6.1.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires the application to be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. For the purposes of decision making, the Development Plan for Leeds currently comprises the following documents:

- The Leeds Core Strategy (Adopted November 2014)
- Saved UDP Policies (2006), included as Appendix 1 of the Core Strategy
- The Natural Resources & Waste Local Plan (NRWLP, Adopted January 2013) including revised policies Minerals 13 and 14 (Adopted September 2015).

- Any Neighbourhood Plan, once Adopted

6.2 **Core Strategy (CS)**

6.2.1 Relevant Core Strategy policies include:

Spatial Policy 1 prioritises the redevelopment of previously developed land within Main Urban Area, in a way that respects and enhances the local character and identity of places and neighbourhoods.

Spatial Policy 3 seeks to maintain and enhance the role of the City Centre as an economic driver for the District and City Region.

Spatial Policy 11 includes a priority related to improved facilities for pedestrians to promote safety and accessibility

Policy CC1 outlines the planned growth within the City Centre for 10,200 new dwellings, supporting services and open spaces. Part (b) encourages residential development, providing that it does not prejudice town centre functions and provides a reasonable level of amenity for occupiers.

Policy CC3 states that development in appropriate locations is required to help and improve routes connecting the City Centre with adjoining neighbourhoods, and improve connections within the City Centre.

Policy H6B refers to proposals for purpose built student accommodation. Development will be controlled to take the pressure off the need to use private housing; to avoid the loss of existing housing suitable for families; to avoid excessive concentrations of student accommodation; to avoid locations that would lead to detrimental impacts on residential amenity; and to provide satisfactory living accommodation for the students.

Policy P10 requires new development to be based on a thorough contextual analysis to provide good design appropriate to its scale and function. Developments should respect and enhance existing landscapes and spaces with the intention of contributing positively to place making, quality of life and wellbeing.

Policy P11 states that the historic environment and its settings will be conserved, particularly those elements which help to give Leeds its distinct identity.

Policy P12 states that landscapes should be conserved and enhanced.

Policy T2 states new development should be located in accessible locations.

Policy G1 states development adjoining areas of Green Infrastructure should retain and improve these.

Policy G6 states that green space, including open space in the City Centre, will be protected from development unless (iii) redevelopment proposals, in the delivery of wider planning benefits, demonstrate a clear relationship to improvements of existing green space quality in the same locality.

Policy G9 states that development will need to demonstrate biodiversity improvements.

6.3 **Saved Unitary Development Plan Review policies (UDPR)**

6.3.1 Relevant Saved Policies include

GP5 All relevant planning considerations to be resolved.

BD2 New buildings should complement and enhance existing skylines, vistas and landmarks.

BD5 Requires new buildings to consider both their own amenity and that of their surroundings including usable space, privacy and satisfactory daylight and sunlight.

LD1 Sets out the criteria for landscape schemes.

6.4 **Natural Resources and Waste Local Plan 2013 (NRWLP)**

6.4.1 Policy Land 2 states that trees should be conserved wherever possible and new planting should be introduced to create high quality environments for development. Where removal of existing trees is agreed in order to facilitate development tree replacement should be provided on a minimum three for one replacement to loss.

AIR1 states that all applications for major development will be required to incorporate low emission measures to ensure that the overall impact of proposals on air quality is mitigated.

6.5 **National Planning Policy Framework**

6.5.1 Planning should proactively drive and support sustainable economic development; and seek to secure high quality design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings (para. 17). Local Planning Authorities (LPA's) should recognise town centres as the heart of their communities and support their vitality and viability; and recognise that residential development can play an important role in ensuring the vitality of centres (para. 23). Housing applications should be considered in the context of the presumption in favour of sustainable development (para. 49).

Section 7 states that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, is indivisible from good planning, and should contribute positively to making places better for people. It is important that design is inclusive and of high quality. Key principles include:

- Establishing a strong sense of place, using streetscapes and buildings to create attractive and comfortable places to live, work and visit;
- Optimising the potential of the site to accommodate development;
- Respond to local character and history;
- Reflect the identity of local surroundings and materials, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation;
- Create safe and accessible environments; and
- Development to be visually attractive as a result of good architecture and appropriate landscaping.

6.6 **Supplementary guidance**

Travel Plans SPD

Building for Tomorrow Today: Sustainable Design and Construction SPD

6.7 Other material considerations

The Leeds Standard was adopted by the Council's Executive Board on 17th September 2014 to ensure excellent quality in the delivery of new council homes. Through its actions the Council can also seek to influence quality in the private sector. Those aspects of the Standard concerned with design quality will be addressed through better and more consistent application of the Council's Neighbourhoods for Living guidance. The standard closely reflects the Government's Technical Housing Standards – Nationally Described Space Standard which seek to promote a good standard of internal amenity for all housing types and tenures. Whilst neither of these documents has been adopted as formal planning policy and only limited weight can be attached to them, given their evidence base in determining the minimum space requirements, they are currently used to help inform decisions on the acceptability of development proposals.

7.0 Issues

Members are asked to comment on the proposals and to consider the following matters:

7.1 Principle of the development

7.1.1 Core Strategy Policy CC1(b) encourages residential development in city centre locations providing that the development does not prejudice the functions of the City Centre and that it provides a reasonable level of amenity for occupiers.

7.1.2 Policy H6B relates specifically to the provision of student housing. The policy was adopted following the Core Strategy Inspector's rejection of the Council's position that the policy should include a test for need when considering applications for new student housing. The proposal is therefore considered against the criteria set out within policy H6B within the adopted Core Strategy:

(i) *To help extend the supply of student accommodation taking pressure off the need for private housing to be used.*

The development of 376 studios would help to take pressure off the need to use private housing for student accommodation.

(ii) *To avoid the loss of existing housing suitable for family accommodation.*

The site does not currently accommodate any buildings. The development would therefore meet the objective.

(iii) *To avoid excessive concentrations of student accommodation which would undermine the balance and wellbeing of communities.*

The proposed development involves 376 student studios. There is no student accommodation in the immediate area, albeit the CLV (former Opal 3) student building is located on the west side of Wade Lane approximately 100m to the north. The area supports a mix of uses, including residential accommodation directly to the north in the Q One building. However, it is not considered that these and other

existing residents in the city centre would be adversely affected by student accommodation in the proposed location given the way in which the area is currently used. Further, it is not considered that the number of students proposed would result in an excessive concentration of students within the context of a busy, mixed use, city centre environment.

(iv) *To avoid locations which are not easily accessible to the universities.*

The site is located towards the north-eastern edge of the city centre and is well-placed with regard to access to both the University of Leeds and Leeds Beckett University. Intended improvements to the public realm including across the space and along St Alban's Place should improve accessibility further.

7.1.2 **Do Members consider that the proposed development is acceptable in principle?**

7.2 Living conditions

7.2.1 Criteria (v) of Policy H6B requires that the proposed accommodation provides satisfactory internal living accommodation in terms of daylight, outlook and juxtaposition of living rooms and bedrooms.

7.2.2 The Leeds Standard sets a minimum target of 37m² for a self-contained studio flat. This standard closely reflects the Government's Technical Housing Standards – Nationally Described Space Standard which seeks to promote a good standard of internal amenity for all housing types and tenures. No distinction is drawn within these documents between open market and student accommodation. Whilst neither of these documents has been adopted as formal planning policy in Leeds given their evidence base in determining the minimum space requirements they are currently used to help inform decisions on the acceptability of development proposals.

7.2.3 Members recently visited one of the developer's student schemes in Sheffield where a typical studio measuring 20sqm was viewed. The room had a full height window and a slightly greater floor to ceiling height than would be present in a new build premises. For comparison, in April 2014 Members visited a student scheme at Darley Bank in Derby where the student studio was 22sqm and City Campus, Leeds in May 2016 where the student showflat was also 22sqm.. Further, planning permission has been refused and appeals dismissed at 46 Burley Street (where the studio size was primarily 20.9sqm) and Kirkstall Design Centre (primarily 16-25sqm) as the proposals would fail to provide a satisfactory standard of comfortable living conditions for the students. More recently, Members have approved student accommodation on Cookridge Street where the smallest studio will be 31sqm.. Each of these proposals benefitted from additional dedicated student amenity space albeit that at Kirkstall Design Centre was limited in extent.

7.2.4 All of the student accommodation is proposed as studios. The majority of studios would be 20sqm although 76 double occupancy studios at 26sqm and 8 twin rooms measuring 31sqm are also identified. The studios would have an uninterrupted outlook towards the area of green space or towards the east such that they should benefit from good outlooks and daylighting.

7.2.5 Communal amenity space for the students would be located in the "hub" which would be split over two floors. The applicant states that the amount and quality of shared amenity space is market leading and Members noted the quality of provision during the visit to Sheffield. The hub, extending to 820sqm, would be likely to

contain lounge and tv areas, quiet study areas, breakfast facilities, and leisure facilities such as a gym and pool tables.

7.2.6 Do Members consider that the living conditions within the student accommodation would be acceptable for future occupiers?

7.3 Townscape considerations

7.3.1 Local and national policies seek high quality design both with regard to buildings and spaces. The site forms part of the New Briggate character area where Victorian buildings are typically 3-5 storeys in height. At the same time the site is also in a transitional location. The building directly to the north is 8 storeys in height and beyond Wade Lane further to the west there are existing 20 and 25 storey high buildings. The site is also prominent in views along the A64 from the east. In longer-distance views the existing trees within the greenspace act as a foil to the taller buildings behind whereas in more local views the site is seen in the context of listed buildings such as Centenary House and Crispin House. Consequently, any development of the site needs to successfully mediate these varying contexts.

7.3.2 The proposed building has a stepped form intended to respond to the immediate context, to key views and to promote slender building proportions. The southern quarter would be 7 storeys (8m taller than the eaves to Belgrave Hall); the central body of the building would be 18 storeys and the final, northern, quarter 11 storeys (2m higher than the eaves to the Q One building).

7.3.3 Do Members have any comments regarding the scale and massing of the proposed new building and its relationship with the surrounding context?

7.3.4 The urban grain north of Merrion Way and to the east of Wade Lane has a rectilinear layout. The proposed building footprint diverts from the existing grain by following the alignment of the Inner Ring Road to the east. This arrangement has a number of advantages in that it enables greater separation to be achieved between the new and existing buildings; it maximises the potential size of the greenspace and it enables the greatest potential for improving connections through the space. At the same time it is important that the route to the east of the building is designed to be of a high quality.

7.3.5 Surrounding buildings are predominantly red brick with slate or flat roofs. Of these Belgrave Hall is the most positive feature towards the northern edge of the New Briggate character area and abuts the southern edge of the site. Buildings to the north and west of Belgrave Street are of a more contemporary appearance.

7.3.6 The proposed building identifies a highly textured and intricate façade. A 'woven' pattern of glazed ceramic tiles has been developed to articulate the facades into smaller proportions whilst providing depth and texture to the elevations. The external expression of the centrally located core is intended to help break up the scale of the building. It is intended that the building reads as three slender elements.

7.3.7 Do Members have any comments on the emerging appearance of the proposed building?

7.4 Public realm

7.4.1 Although the existing public space would benefit from improvement it provides a valuable amenity for local office workers and a wider visual amenity particularly on

eastern approaches to the city centre. Development of these areas is not normally supported unless there is appropriate mitigation (Core Strategy policy G6). The NRWLP states that trees should be conserved wherever possible and new planting should be introduced to create high quality environments for development. Where removal of existing trees is agreed in order to facilitate development tree replacement should be provided on a minimum three for one replacement to loss or where this cannot be achieved on site, off-site planting will be sought.

7.4.2 The conceptual proposals identify the formation of a new soft landscaped public space, bounded by a new building on its eastern edge. The position of the building would help to protect the space from Inner Ring Road traffic noise. By virtue of the location of the new building predominantly upon the existing car park and the incorporation of peripheral areas it is suggested that the extent of existing green space (2,390 sqm) would increase to 3697sqm. However, full details of the landscape scheme have yet to be developed.

7.5 Transportation and connectivity

7.5.1 Existing footpaths across the centre and eastern edge of the site act as a route between eastern and northern areas of the city centre. The routes have become more significant with the development of the arena and will be increasingly important as the area develops further. Core Strategy policy CC3 notes the need to improve pedestrian linkages, connectivity and to ensure accessibility for all.

7.5.2 The site is located in the city centre in an area where it is hoped and intended that pedestrian flows will increase. Consequently, it is particularly important to avoid creating dead frontages at ground level that would be detrimental to pedestrian use, public safety and to visual amenity. A range of uses have been introduced facing into the proposed public space that will help to activate it. The peripheral route alongside the Inner Ring Road and along St Alban's Place has fewer such uses but includes a number of windows to ensure that it would be overlooked.

7.5.3 The development necessitates the loss of the existing off-street pay and display spaces. There would be no parking provision for the development. Suitable measures for the servicing of the proposed buildings, together with management of vehicles expected at the start and end of terms will need to be developed.

7.5.4 **Do Members agree to there being no car parking provision for the proposed development?**

7.6 Conclusion

7.6.1 Members are asked to note the contents of the report and the presentation, and are invited to provide feedback, in particular, on the issues outlined below:

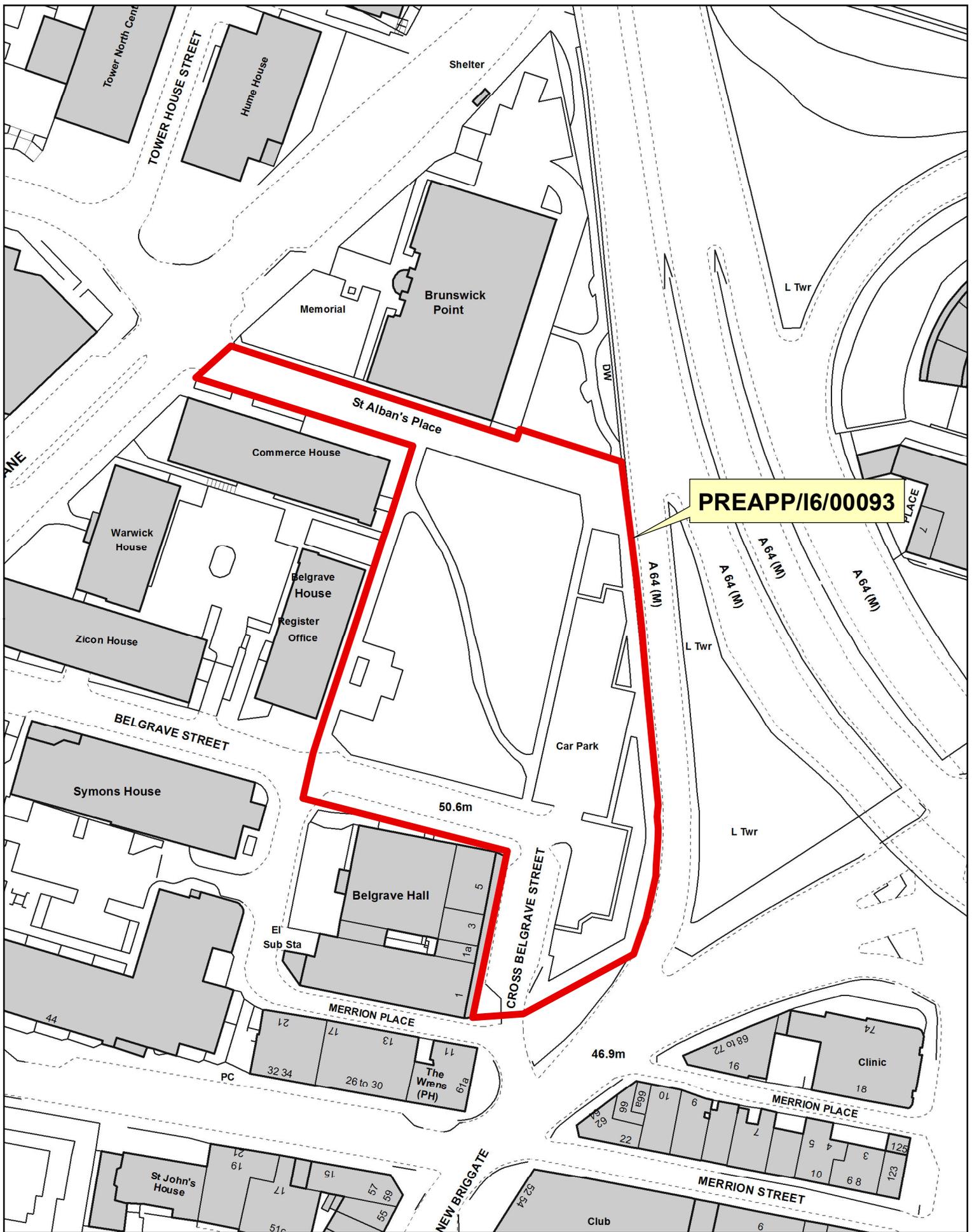
Do Members consider that the proposed development is acceptable in principle (7.1.2)?

Do Members consider that the living conditions within the student accommodation would be acceptable for future occupiers (7.2.6)?

Do Members have any comments regarding the scale and massing of the proposed new building and its relationship with the surrounding context (7.3.3)?

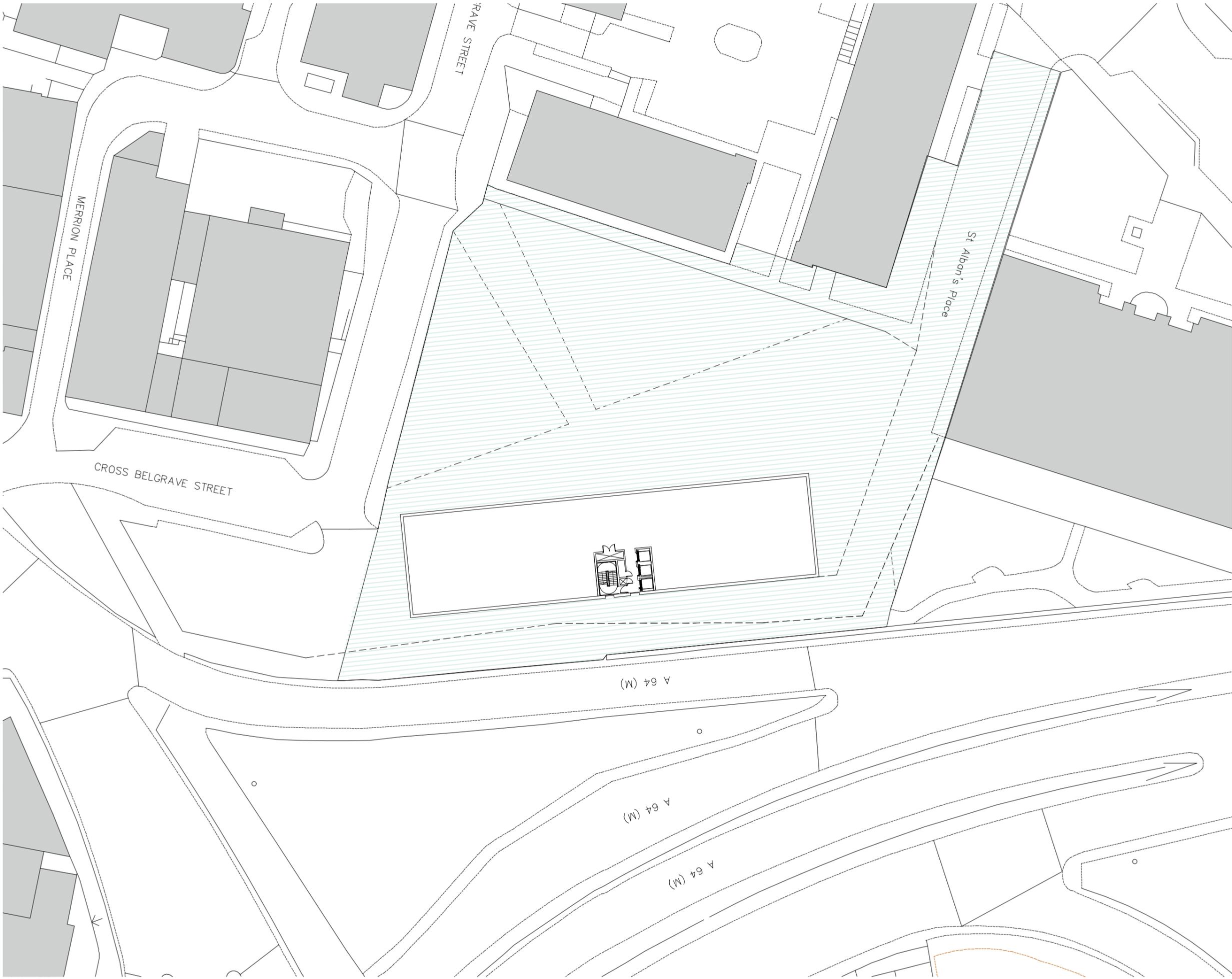
Do Members have any comments on the emerging appearance of the proposed building (7.3.7)?

Do Members agree to there being no car parking provision for the proposed development? (7.5.4)?



CITY PLANS PANEL





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PROJECT
**St Albans Place
 Leeds**

TITLE
Proposed Siteplan

DRAWING STATUS
PRELIMINARY

DRAWN MB CHECKED

SCALE 1-500@A3

DATE Feb 2016

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