



Report of the Chief Planning Officer

CITY PLANS PANEL

Date: 21st November 2013

Subject: PRE-APPLICATION PRESENTATION – OFFICE SCHEME UP TO 11 STOREYS WITH ANCILLARY GROUND FLOOR ‘ACTIVE’ USES (PREAPP/13/00990) AT SITE BOUNDED BY WELLINGTON ST AND WHITHALL RD (FORMER LUMIERE SITE).

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 Panel for information. The Developer will be asked to present the emerging scheme to allow Members to consider and comment on the proposals.

1.0 INTRODUCTION:

1.1 This presentation is intended to inform Members of a new major office scheme proposed on the vacant former Lumiere development site between Wellington St and Whitehall Rd. This site benefits from permission for the Lumiere scheme, which is extant due to the fact that a significant amount of ground works were carried out before construction ceased. Members will be aware that there has been a recent application for an office and hotel scheme which received approval in principle at Panel in March this year. However, since this time the land has been sold and the new owner wishes to pursue this revised proposal. Members will be asked to comment on the emerging scheme.

2.0 SITE AND SURROUNDINGS:

2.1 The site is located on the southern side of Wellington St and to the north of Whitehall Rd, between the refurbished former Royal Mail building (West Central residential scheme) and the former Wellesley Hotel (City Central residential scheme). The site is the last significant piece of the jigsaw in the area between City Sq and Northern St. The surrounding area is characterised by a mix of new build

offices, a hotel and residential buildings to the south and the rigid grid-like street pattern of the office quarter to the north which is part of the City Centre Conservation Area and contains residential uses fronting Wellington St. When seen in the context of the surrounding street pattern, the site lies at the point where the east-west pattern of streets in the Conservation Area becomes adjusted through an approximately 30 degree angle to run off to the south-west along Whitehall Rd.

- 2.2 One of the major constraints here is the number of properties surrounding the site which contain residential units whose reasonable requirements for the protection of amenity have to be taken into account. The site is currently surrounded by 2.5m high metal hoardings and lies within the Prime Office Quarter as allocated in the UDP Review.

3.0 PROPOSAL

- 3.1 Whilst the previous application is no longer being pursued, some of the guiding principles which this employed have been rolled forward into this proposal. However, a major difference with this scheme is that the site is proposed to be developed with a single building rather than the previous proposal which was for 2 buildings, one in outline and one in full, with the phasing unknown. Consequently, there would be a greater degree of certainty over the development of this site under the current proposal.
- 3.2 The building follows the same general footprint as the previous scheme in that it has building lines which front Wellington St and Whitehall Rd. However, there is now a continuous link between the two along the eastern side of the site which is both parallel to, and the same height as, the neighbouring City Central residential scheme. The building fronting Wellington St is proposed to be of a height equivalent to the dominant eaves detail on the City Central building. Above this there would be a further floor set-back with a balcony/terrace facing out over Wellington Street and a glazed plant enclosure further set-back above that. It is still considered that the principle of using the neighbouring City Central building to set the height of this element remains the best way to strengthen the facade on the southern side of Wellington St and ensure that it complements the run of properties which lead to City Sq.
- 3.3 The Whitehall Rd elevation is proposed to be 11 storeys in height with a glazed plant room set back above this. The elevational treatment for this façade utilizes an exposed stone framework with double storey height module and strong vertical emphasis given by a vertical metal fin detail. This adds depth to the elevation and, through the subtle use of colouration, helps the building to respond to its neighbours. The architecture acknowledges the approach from the station to the east through the introduction of landscaped terraces, set behind the fin treatment. The details of this will be explained fully by the architect during the presentation. The ground floor on Whitehall Rd would be set back 3m beneath a double height colonnade which would reduce the impact of the scheme on pedestrians and provide a covered walkway around the base of the building.
- 3.4 Distances to the surrounding residential buildings are similar to those agreed as part of the previous scheme, which were carefully considered in order to protect residential amenity through overlooking and over dominance. The building is approximately 18m away from West Central, City Central and the properties to the north.

- 3.5 The resultant plan form is a basic U-shape, however, where the previous scheme proposed the central area as an open square, this proposal encloses the space with a 10 storey high, angled, glass wall. This creates a dramatic space which would be fully accessible to the public and is to be planted to create a winter garden. The exposed ends of the office floor plates above this will also receive a landscaped treatment so that the garden theme also runs vertically. The winter garden will also contain a dramatically designed mezzanine which will be the raised reception area to the offices above. This means that the entire ground floor space can be given over to general public use which, because of the controlled environment, can be used all year round.
- 3.6 The ground floor would contain bar/restaurant uses and a small amount of retail space which would open on to the street and also into the winter garden to provide lively frontages and activate the space through the introduction of seating areas. The winter garden provides additional public space to that which already exists on the site in the form of the main north/south route running from Wellington St to Whitehall Rd (ref. para 4.2). This scheme will also resurface that area as the original landscaping scheme was removed when the Lumiere works commenced. This provides the opportunity of creating a continuous landscape treatment from the outside space to the internal winter garden with the base of the angled glass wall creating the only partition. The opportunity has been taken to provide landscaping on other elevated parts of the building to provide colour, visual interest and a better environment for the future occupiers. There are also 2 roof top terrace areas for the occupiers of the buildings to utilize and a green roof to the top of the cover above the vehicular route along the eastern boundary.
- 3.7 In addition to being able to access the winter garden from the north/south route, 2 further access points would be taken through the ground floor in similar locations to those proposed by the previous scheme. One would be from Whitehall Rd and would manifest itself as a frameless double-height glazed wall set on the same alignment as Aire Street. This would be clearly visible when approaching from the station and offer clear views through the building to the winter garden. The detail of this entrance is being carefully considered as it is close to the vehicular access point. The elevations and surface treatment in this area need to provide a positive pedestrian environment as well as easy vehicular access. The other winter garden access point would be through the Wellington St building, which gives the opportunity to sub-divide this elevation into two distinct sections using large areas of glass set within a masonry framework. This would allow maximum visibility through to the space beyond and provide an inviting pedestrian route.
- 3.8 Servicing and vehicle access is again proposed to be along the eastern boundary of the site with a one-way route heading northwards entering the site from Whitehall Rd and exiting out on to Wellington St. This would provide a vehicle route, servicing lay-bys and ramped access to a double level of basement car parking for approximately 130 cars. The route is 8m wide which allows adequate dimensions for servicing to take place without hindering the flow of vehicles to the car parking area. A wall is proposed to run along the eastern boundary to provide an element of visual screening as well as some protection to the amenity of the residents in City Central. The details of this will be explained during the presentation.
- 3.9 The site would require measures to be provided as part of a Travel Plan as well as public transport contributions. There will also be requirements for improvements to local highway infrastructure, including carriageway widening at the Northern St/Whitehall Rd junction and the relocation of a pedestrian crossing facility on

Wellington St as well as relocated bus stops on Whitehall Rd. These will form part of a package of measures to be included in a Section 106/278 agreement.

- 3.10 Members will also recall that the findings of a wind study as part of the previous scheme informed the use of the kerbside space on Wellington St. A wind study has not yet been undertaken as part of this proposal. However, given that the problem areas on the public highway were identified as a result of the existing buildings to the west, rather than the proposal itself, it is likely these will reoccur here which would mean the need for protective guard railing and an avoidance of vehicle drop-offs on Wellington St. Any additional measures considered necessary as a result of the redesign of the building will clearly need to be taken in to account as part of the final submission.

4.0 HISTORY OF NEGOTIATIONS

- 4.1 Officers have had 4 meetings with the project architects which commenced in September. These have dealt principally with planning and design in order to develop the layout, scale, massing and general aspirations for the site.
- 4.2 This site was originally included as part of the development of the former post office building. As part of that scheme the application site had the benefit of permission for a 10 storey office block fronting Whitehall Rd attached to a 10 storey hotel fronting Wellington St, app. ref. 20/314/00/FU. This was separated from the refurbished former Post Office Head Quarters building (now West Central) by a public piazza. This piazza constituted the provision of all of the publicly accessible open space as part of the redevelopment of the entire site. Anything in addition to this would therefore be a positive gain. The piazza was laid out as part of the Royal Mail refurbishment but subsequently removed and blacktopped when the Lumiere construction works commenced.
- 4.3 Subsequent to this a further application was approved for a single office building on the site of 10 storeys in height, app. ref. 20/063/03/FU
- 4.4 The 35 and 53 storey Lumiere development was approved by application ref 06/01622/FU. This remains extant due to the extent of works that were undertaken to the basement.
- 4.5 The most recent development, Central Square app. Ref. 12/02788/FU, was approved by Members at panel in March this year. However the S106 was not signed due to the sale of the land and the application has now been withdrawn.

4.0 RELEVANT PLANNING POLICIES

4.1 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The NPPF advocates a presumption in favour of sustainable development, and a 'centres first' approach to main town centre uses such as offices. The location of prime office development within the City Centre, close to the railway station meets this requirement to locate such uses in sustainable locations. The NPPF also promotes economic growth in order to create jobs and prosperity. These new office buildings would help consolidate Leeds City Centre's role as the economic driver of the Yorkshire region, and the focus for investment in highly skilled and competitive businesses, as advocated by the emerging Core Strategy.

4.2 Development Plan

Leeds Unitary Development Plan Review 2006 (UDPR)

The site lies within the designated City Centre and is within the Prime Office Quarter. This allocates the area as principally for office use, with other uses bringing activity and variety.

Other relevant policies include:

GP5 all relevant planning considerations

GP7 planning obligations

GP11 sustainability

GP12 sustainability

BD2 new buildings

A1 improving access for all

A4 safety and security provision

N12 urban design

N13 design and new buildings

N25 boundary treatments

N29 archaeology

BD4 all mechanical plant

CC3 City Centre character

CC10 public space and level of provision

CC11 streets and pedestrian corridors

CC12 public space and connectivity

CC13 public spaces and design criteria

CC19 office development

CC27 Principal use quarters

E14 Office development

T2 Transport provision for development

T2C Travel plans

T2D public transport provision for development

T5 pedestrian and cycle provision

T6 provision for the disabled

T7A cycle parking

T7B motorcycle parking

T24 Car parking provision

LD1 landscaping

R5 employment and training for local residents associated with the construction and subsequent use of developments

N39A sustainable drainage systems

4.3 Leeds Natural Resources and Waste DPD 2013

The Natural Resources and Waste Local Plan was adopted by Leeds City Council on 16th January 2013. The Natural Resources and Waste Development Plan Document (Local Plan) is part of the Local Development Framework. The plan sets out where land is needed to enable the City to manage resources, like minerals, energy, waste and water over the next 15 years, and identifies specific actions which will help use natural resources in a more efficient way.

4.4 Relevant Supplementary Planning Guidance includes:

SPD Street Design Guide

SPD5 Public Transport Improvements and Developer Contributions

SPD Travel Plans

SPD Building for Tomorrow Today: Sustainable Design and Construction

4.5 Leeds Core Strategy Publication Draft 2012

- 4.5.1 The Core Strategy sets out strategic level policies and vision to guide the delivery of development investment decisions and the overall future of the district. On 26th April 2013 the Council submitted the Publication Draft Core Strategy to the Secretary of State for examination. The examination took place in October 2013. As the Council has submitted the Publication Draft Core Strategy for independent examination some weight can now be attached to the document and its contents recognising that the weight to be attached may be limited by outstanding representations which have been made.
- 4.5.2 Of particular relevance to this scheme proposal is Spatial Policy 3 Role of Leeds City Centre. This seeks to maintain and enhance the role of the City Centre as an economic driver for the District and City Region, by
- promoting the City Centre's role as the regional capital of major new office development,
 - making the City Centre the main focus for office development in the District including the West End within which this site is located.
 - comprehensively planning the redevelopment and re-use of vacant and under-used sites for mixed use development and areas of public space,
 - enhancing streets and creating a network of open and green spaces to make the City Centre more attractive
 - improving connections between the City Centre and adjoining neighbourhoods

Core Strategy Policy CC1 outlines the planned growth within the City Centre, including office growth.

5.0 ISSUES

The scheme proposes an internalized winter garden with a large sloping glazed elevation opposite West Central.

Do members consider that the internalization of the space within the winter garden is an acceptable response to the provision of publicly accessible space within the context of the design of the building?

The elevation to Wellington St conforms to constraints driven by the characteristics of the neighbouring City Central residential conversion. The use of brick is a response to the location opposite listed buildings within the City Centre Conservation Area.

Do Members consider that the proposed elevation to Wellington St is acceptable in this context?

The Whitehall Rd elevational treatment now consists of a glazed frame with expressed vertical fins. These are subtly detailed to respond to the height and colour of surrounding buildings. In addition, an element of layering and depth has been introduced on the eastern corner facing towards city station which has enabled elevated planting areas to be introduced.

Do Members consider that the exposed masonry frame and vertical fin elevational treatment to Whitehall Rd, wrapping around on to the eastern facing corner, is acceptable in this context?

One of the main pedestrian routes through the building is from Whitehall Rd which is close to the point where vehicles access the site servicing road. The elevations and surface treatments here must be carefully considered to ensure that the pedestrian environment is of high quality.

Do Members consider that the elevational treatment and pedestrian environment is acceptable in the area where the pedestrian entrance on Whitehall Rd crosses the vehicle entrance point?

The building runs along the common boundary with City Central where there is a wall which separates the servicing route of the proposal from the external car park of City Central. This will be clearly visible in the street scene from both Whitehall Rd and Wellington St, as well as from the lower floor residential units of City Central. This structure also has a green roof to present a better appearance to those who look down over it.

Do Members consider that the boundary treatment with City Central has an acceptable visual appearance in the street scene and from the City Central residential units?

The distances to the surrounding buildings are little altered from that of the previous proposal which was considered to be an acceptable relationship.

Do members consider that the impact on surrounding residential properties is acceptable?

A Section 106 agreement will be required to ensure a financial contribution to public transport infrastructure, the carrying out of off-site highways works (Northern St/Whitehall Rd junction, pedestrian guard-railing and crossing facility, bus stop relocations), travel plan items, hours of access to the winter garden, access to, and maintenance of, the open space area, jobs and skills priority for local people and any other obligations which arise as part of the application process.

Do members have any comments to make about this range of likely Section 106 obligations?

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Pre-application file: PREAPP/13/00990

Application file: Central Sq scheme: 12/03788/FU

Application Lumiere: 06/01622/FU

Application file for original total redevelopment of the Royal Mail site: 20/314/00/FU,

Application file for single building: 20/063/03/FU

