
Report of the Chief Planning Officer

CITY PLANS PANEL

23rd November 2017

Pre-application presentation of proposed student accommodation, junction of Portland Crescent and Woodhouse Lane, Leeds (PREAPP/17/00489)

Applicant – Vita Leeds 2

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 new proposals for the stalled hotel development located at the junction of Portland Crescent and Woodhouse Lane.
- 1.2 Work stopped on the site in March 2015 when the building contractor and its parent company went into administration. City Plans Panel received a briefing on the complex financial issues affecting the site in July 2016 since which time stakeholders have worked hard to find an appropriate solution to enable completion of the approved development.
- 1.3 Select Property Group has now acquired the site with the intention of using the completed building primarily as student accommodation as part of its Vita Student brand. Relatively minor changes to the originally approved scheme are proposed. The development would be their second in the city following the recent commencement of the development at St Alban's Place. It is intended to recommence work on site immediately following the grant of planning permission.

The crane which has remained on site for the last two years is presently being used to construct the building immediately to its rear at 67-83 Cookridge Street.

2.0 Site and surroundings

- 2.1 The broadly rectangular site is located on the eastern side of Portland Crescent at its junction with Woodhouse Lane and has a short return onto Cookridge Street. The incomplete concrete shell of an approved hotel has remained unfinished on the site since the developers went into administration 32 months ago. Whereas the southern limb of building is at its approved finished height the approved tower fronting Woodhouse Lane would be four storeys taller than its current height.
- 2.2 A part six, part eight storey building is presently being erected at 67-83 Cookridge Street directly to the rear (east) of the site. When complete the building will contain 96 student studio apartments and two commercial units at ground floor level.
- 2.3 The site has a sensitive heritage setting, abutting the northern edge of the City Centre Conservation Area whilst the Queen Square Conservation Area is situated across Woodhouse Lane to the north. There are a number of listed buildings close to the site including the O2 Academy (Grade II) which abuts the southern boundary of the site; the Civic Hall (Grade II*) to the south west beyond Portland Crescent; and Leeds City Museum and Art College (Grade II*) to the south.
- 2.4 Leeds Beckett University Rose Bowl and the associated surface and basement car park are situated on the west side of Portland Crescent opposite the site. To the east of the junction of Woodhouse Lane and Clay Pit Lane the extension to Merrion House is now nearing completion. In association with that development work has recently commenced on creating new areas of public realm on the northern and south-eastern corners of this junction including infilling the former subway, improving pedestrian links and the provision of new soft landscaping.

3.0 Proposals

- 3.1 It is proposed to add two additional storeys to the approved tower element of the building (14 storeys) such that the tower would be 16 storeys in height. The lower limb would remain at 6 storeys. The architectural treatment of the uppermost floor (previously intended as a “sky bar”) may be refined in response to the proposed use as student accommodation.
- 3.2 The completed building would primarily contain student accommodation. 312 student studios ranging in size from 20sqm to 56sqm would be provided within the building.
- 3.3 Dedicated amenity space for students would be provided at basement and ground floor level totalling 600sqm.. Other ground floor space would be occupied as retail accommodation (183sqm) and additional commercial office space would occupy basement and ground floor areas (637sqm).
- 3.4 The external space would be laid out to compliment the new public realm presently coming forward at the junction of Woodhouse Lane / Clay Pit Lane / Cookridge Street.

4.0 Relevant planning history

- 4.1 Planning permission (08/05664/FU) for a part 6 and part 14 storey hotel building with 246 bedrooms was approved in July 2009.
- 4.2 Planning permission (11/01979/EXT) extending the time limit for implementing planning permission 08/05664/FU was granted on 2nd August 2011.
- 4.3 Planning permission for amendments to the approved hotel scheme including a roof-top bar, feature glass lift and comprising 206 bedrooms (12/01191/FU) was approved on 26th July 2012. Development of this scheme by GB Building Solutions commenced towards the end of 2013 and stopped in March 2015 when the building contractor and its parent company went into administration.

5.0 Consultation responses

- 5.1 LCC Highways – the proposal is acceptable subject to the submission of a transport statement and a travel plan. Except for the fire doors onto Cookridge Street, all other doors abutting the highway should open inwards or slide. Cycle parking should meet SPD standards. Loading bay and taxi drop off is anticipated to be provided onto Portland Crescent subject to transport assessment and design check. Highway land dedication as footway is anticipated off Portland Crescent in accordance with the previous S278 agreement. Any other works should be complimentary to the City Council's Woodhouse Lane junction and associated public realm works.
- 5.2 LCC Contaminated Land Team - The proposed end use of the development is sensitive; as such a minimum of a Phase 1 Desk Study Report will be required in support of an application. Depending on the outcome of the Phase 1 Desk Study, a Phase 2 (Site Investigation) Report and Remediation Statement may also be required.

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).
- Aire Valley Leeds Area Action Plan (Adopted November 2017)
- 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.

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, delivering high quality innovative design and that development protects and enhance the district's historic assets in particular, historically and locally important buildings, skylines and views.

Policies T1 and T2 identify transport management and accessibility requirements to ensure new development is adequately served by highways and public transport, and with safe and secure access for pedestrians, cyclists and people with impaired mobility.

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

Policies EN1 and EN2 set targets for CO2 reduction and sustainable design and construction, and at least 10% low or zero carbon energy production on-site.

6.3 Saved Unitary Development Plan Review policies (UDPR)

6.3.1 Relevant Saved Policies include:

GP5 All relevant planning considerations to be resolved.

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

6.4 Site Allocations Plan Submission Draft (SAP)

The site is not specifically identified in the SAP.

6.5 National Planning Policy Framework

6.5.1 The NPPF recognises the presumption in favour of sustainable development. 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. 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;
- 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

Tall Buildings Design Guide SPD

Travel Plans SPD

Street Design Guide SPD

Building for Tomorrow Today: Sustainable Design and Construction SPD

Parking SPD

Neighbourhoods for Living SPG provides advice and principles for good residential design. It promotes local character, analysis of landmarks, views and focal points, and quality buildings.

6.7 Other material considerations

- 6.7.1 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

Despite extensive marketing it has not been possible to find a developer willing or able to complete the development as a hotel and the site has been purchased by a student housing provider. Consequently, the principal issues to consider relate to its proposed use as student accommodation and the extension of the approved tower.

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

7.1 Principle of the development

- 7.1.1 The site is located within the designated City Centre. 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. It has been established that there are 38,496 university students in the city presently without access to purpose-built student accommodation suggesting that additional provision is unlikely to result in an over-supply of purpose-built student accommodation in the near future. The proposal is therefore considered against the criteria set out within the adopted policy (identified below in italics):

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

The provision of 312 student 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 was previously a surface car park and is currently occupied by a part-built hotel building. The development would therefore avoid the loss of residential family accommodation.

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

The site is located towards the northern edge of the city centre and is very well-placed with regard to access to Leeds Beckett University, directly across Portland Crescent, and the University of Leeds via Calverley Street or Woodhouse Lane.

Criteria (iii) and (v) of the policy are considered in the amenity section, paragraph 7.2.

- 7.1.4 Areas within the basement and ground floor not required by the student development are proposed as commercial office and retail space. These areas, principally facing Portland Crescent, would help to animate the streetscene.
- 7.1.5 **Do Members consider that the proposed use of the building for student accommodation is acceptable in principle?**

7.2 Amenity considerations

- 7.2.1 Criteria (iii) of Core Strategy policy H6B aims *to avoid excessive concentrations of student accommodation which would undermine the balance and wellbeing of communities.*
- 7.2.2 The proposed student accommodation identifies 312 studios. The area principally comprises a mix of civic and educational uses, together with leisure and retail uses nearby. There is presently no student accommodation in the immediate area, albeit the completion of the adjacent 67-83 Cookridge Street development will deliver 96 new studios. There is significant student accommodation adjacent to the Leeds Beckett University campus approximately 200m to the west and some further to the

north off Clay Pit Lane. There is a small amount of private residential accommodation across Woodhouse Lane in Queen Square and also in the Brodrick Building adjacent to Millennium Square. However, it is not considered that existing local residents 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 that would undermine the wellbeing of the area within the context of a busy city centre environment.

- 7.2.3 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.*
- 7.2.4 The Leeds Standard sets a minimum target of 37sqm 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.
- 7.2.5 Members have visited several student housing schemes to review the level of amenity provided for occupiers. These include the Fresh Student Living at Darley Bank in Derby (April 2014) where the studio was 22sqm; Downing's Cityside, Calverley Street, Leeds (May 2016) where the student showflat was also 22sqm; and Vita Student's Telephone House, Sheffield (September 2016) where the average studio size was 20sqm, supported by a large area of dedicated, internal, amenity space. Planning permission for Vita's Leeds scheme at St Alban's Place in which the smallest 78% of studios would be just over 20sqm was granted April 2017 (16/07741/FU). In approving the scheme it was recognised that the size of the majority of the studios would be restricted, providing little or no opportunity for socialising, but that each studio would benefit from a good outlook, natural daylighting and suitable noise environment. Critically, the additional "hub" facilities providing dedicated amenity spaces within the building, together with opportunities to use the neighbouring public space would provide acceptable levels of amenity for the occupiers of the development. More recently, in September 2017, City Plans Panel received a pre-application presentation in relation to the proposed redevelopment of Symons House, Belgrave Street where the proposed studio size ranged from 21.3sqm to 44.2sqm, supported by areas of dedicated amenity space.
- 7.2.6 The format of the proposed scheme is very similar to the St Alban's Place development. The average studio size would be 27sqm. The smallest 2 studios would be marginally smaller than those at St Alban's Place but typically the proposed studios would be larger than most recently approved. Additionally, areas of dedicated amenity space would be provided across the basement and ground floor of the building providing 938sqm of space in total.
- 7.2.7 When approved, the rear elevations of the hotel would have faced the two-storey Walkabout bar at 67-83 Cookridge Street such that hotel bedrooms, starting at second floor level, would have benefitted from an open outlook. Since that time the Walkabout bar has been demolished and work commenced on the part 6, part 8 storey student development at 67-83 Cookridge Street. The footprint of that building was designed with two courtyards so as to provide students occupying studios in the rear part of the building with an adequate outlook and reasonable levels of

daylighting. Similarly, the position of the courtyards would have been such that occupiers of the hotel bedrooms would not have been unacceptably affected by the scale and location of the new student development.

7.2.8 The floor layout of the student accommodation now proposed at Portland Crescent would be very similar to the approved layout for the hotel. As such, student accommodation in the rear elevations of the building, facing 67-83 Woodhouse Lane, would benefit from reasonable, if not open, outlooks towards the courtyard areas up to level 5. Above that level the floorplate of 67-83 Woodhouse Lane reduces such that the living conditions of occupiers of student accommodation at Portland Crescent would improve further, enjoying a totally open outlook in the top 8 levels of accommodation.

7.2.9 **Do Members consider that the living conditions within the student accommodation would be acceptable?**

7.3 Public realm

7.3.1 The alignment of the northern end of the building was originally defined primarily so as to accommodate the intended NGT route as it joined Woodhouse Lane from Cookridge Street. In the interim the space between the building and Woodhouse Lane was to have been landscaped and a new footpath provided improving connectivity with pedestrian routes leading north.

7.3.2 Following on from environmental improvements to Clay Pit Lane brought forward as part of the arena development, work to improve the Clay Pit Lane / Woodhouse Lane / Cookridge Street junction has recently commenced. This work, on the northwest and south-eastern corners of the junction, will provide new areas of public realm including infilling the former subway, improving pedestrian links and the provision of new soft landscaping. It is intended that the space outside the building should be laid out as part of the development to complement the forthcoming landscaping and connectivity improvements being delivered on the northern side of Woodhouse Lane to the site.

7.4 Building scale and architecture

7.4.1 The building is located in a sensitive setting close to two conservation areas and a number of listed buildings. The tower element of the building was approved at 14 storeys, equivalent in height to Leeds City College (former Leeds College of Technology). It is proposed to add two additional storeys to this part of the building which, it is considered, would give the building more elegant proportions. Although taller than Leeds City College this disparity would not be readily evident other than in mid-longer distance views where such a difference in height would not be harmful. From Queen Square the additional height would provide greater variation when viewed in the context of the other background buildings, Leeds City College and Merrion House. From Millennium Square, largely due to the L-shaped footplate of the building and location further to the north the additional height would not appear significant and the Civic Hall towers would remain the dominant feature. Consequently, the setting of listed buildings and nearby conservation areas would not be harmed by the additional two storeys onto the tower of the building.

7.4.2 It was previously intended to provide a sky bar at the highest level of the hotel. Such a feature is not part of the current business model. Consequently, it is proposed to utilise this uppermost level as additional student accommodation. When this report was drafted the applicants were investigating architectural refinements to this level,

possibly involving the introduction of an external terrace, set back behind full height columns that would present a deep shadow line at the top of the building. The applicants will update Members of the emerging proposals as part of their presentation.

7.4.3 Do Members support the proposed changes to the height of the building and its architecture?

7.5 Other matters

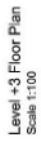
7.5.1 The incomplete appearance of the hotel development and the associated temporary arrangements for pedestrians, for the delivery of materials and the position of the site cabins have been a significant concern for many people for a considerable period of time. Consequently, expediting the completion of the building work and restoration of surrounding land and highways would be beneficial and highly desirable. To enable this, and to give the developers further confidence, determination of the forthcoming planning application on a delegated basis would be advantageous.

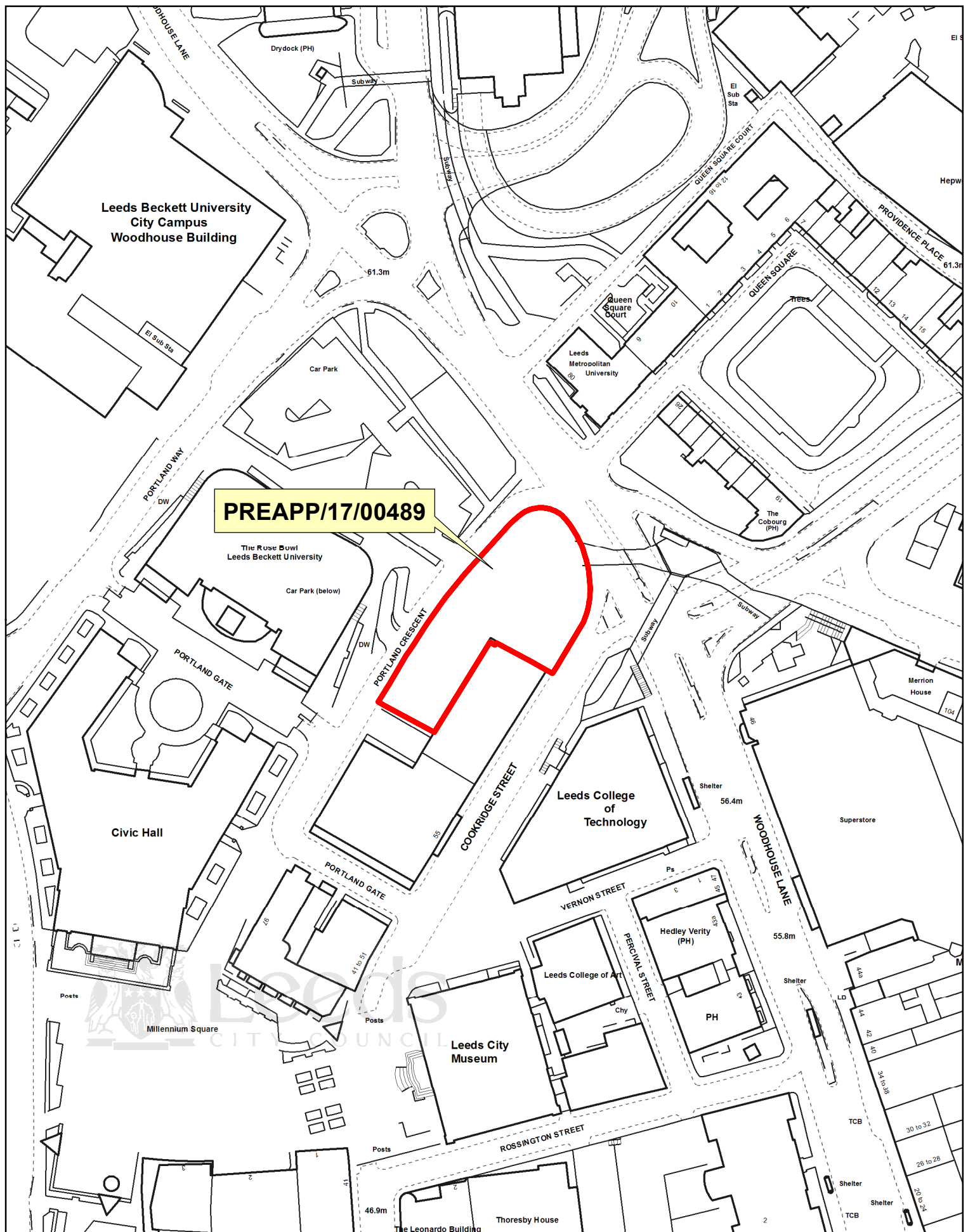
7.5.2 Subject to no other significant issues arising do Members agree that, when submitted, the planning application can be determined on a delegated basis?

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 use of the building for student accommodation is acceptable in principle? (7.1.5)**
- **Do Members consider that the living conditions within the student accommodation would be acceptable? (7.2.9)**
- **Do Members support the proposed changes to the height of the building and its architecture? (7.4.3)**
- **Subject to no other significant issues arising do Members agree that, when submitted, the planning application can be determined on a delegated basis? (7.5.2)**





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SCALE : 1/1500

