



Report of the Chief Planning Officer

CITY PLANS PANEL

Date: 6 December 2018

Subject: PREAPP/18/00600 - Preapplication presentation for a 17 storey building comprising 13 floors of offices, 3 floors of co-working; ground floor and basement retail at 66 - 70 Merrion Centre, Merrion Way, Leeds, LS2 8NG.

Developer- TCS Holdings Limited

Electoral Wards Affected:

Little London & Woodhouse

Yes

Ward Members consulted
(referred to in report)

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 emerging 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 a 17 storey office tower with ground floor retail. The scheme is brought to City Plans Panel as the development involves investment in a brownfield site at the Merrion Centre which is a significant location within Leeds City Centre.

2.0 SITE AND SURROUNDINGS:

2.1 The site is part of the Merrion Shopping Centre, which is a 1960s group of structures housing a series of high and medium rise blocks set above a two storey plinth housing retail and leisure units.

2.2 To the north the Merrion Centre is bound by Merrion Way, to the east by Wade Lane, to the south by Merrion Street and to the west by Woodhouse Lane. The

centre sits close to but outside the boundary of the City Centre Conservation Area, which runs along the middle of Woodhouse Lane.

- 2.3 The site for the 17 storey block measures approximately 6.5 acres. Currently the ground floor has active retail uses whilst the remainder of the site has previously been in use as a D2 cinema, although this has not been in operation since the late 1970s and the space is largely stripped out internally,

3.0 PROPOSAL:

- 3.1 The emerging proposed development seeks to demolish the existing cinema and retail units that currently house Bonmarche and Home Bargains and to construct a 17 storey building. This would house a new ground floor retail unit of some 1,303 sq metres and a ground floor reception lobby leading to 2,622 sqm of co-working (flexible and shared) space at Levels 2-4 and 12,896 sq metres of office floorspace at floors 5-17. Ancillary accommodation and a plant area would be set out at basement level.

- 3.2 To the rear of the new building it is proposed to create a new publicly accessible courtyard with entrances from the lobby of the new building and from the current access points to this area from Wade Lane.

- 3.3 A loading and deliveries area is proposed from the access on Wade Lane which would sit between the rear of the multi-storey car park and the Ibis Styles hotel.

4.0 RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY:

- 4.1 None

5.0 HISTORY OF NEGOTIATIONS:

- 5.1 The proposals have been the subject of pre-application discussions between the Developer, their Architects, and Local Authority Officers since October 2018. These discussions have focused on the use of the building, scale, massing and design, parking and transport links, and public realm and connectivity. .

- 5.2 Ward Members were consulted on 19 November 2018.

6.0 RELEVANT PLANNING POLICIES:

- 6.1 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

- 6.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was revised and adopted in July 2018 and sets out Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied. It provides a framework within which locally-prepared plans for housing and other development can be produced.

- 6.3 Paragraph 39 of the NPPF states that early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties.

- 6.4 Paragraph 85 of the NPPF states that Planning policies and decisions should support the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities, by taking a positive approach to their growth, management and adaptation.

- 6.5 Paragraph 124 of the NPPF states that the creation of high quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities. Being clear about design expectations, and how these will be tested, is essential for achieving this. So too is effective engagement between applicants, communities, local planning authorities and other interests throughout the process
- 6.6 Paragraph 130 of the NPPF states that permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, taking into account any local design standards or style guides in plans or supplementary planning documents. Conversely, where the design of a development accords with clear expectations in plan policies, design should not be used by the decision-maker as a valid reason to object to development. Local planning authorities should also seek to ensure that the quality of approved development is not materially diminished between permission and completion, as a result of changes being made to the permitted scheme (for example through changes to approved details such as the materials used).
- 6.7 The Development Plan for Leeds currently comprises the following documents:
1. The Leeds Core Strategy (Adopted November 2014)
 2. Saved Leeds Unitary Development Plan Policies (Reviewed 2006), included as Appendix 1 of the Core Strategy
 3. The Natural Resources & Waste Local Plan (NRWLP, Adopted January 2013) including revised policies Minerals 13 and 14 (Adopted September 2015).
 4. Aire Valley Leeds Area Action Plan (Adopted November 2017)
 5. Any Neighbourhood Plan, once made.
- 6.8 Core Strategy
- 6.9 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.
- 6.10 Spatial Policy 1: Location of Development states that;
- (i) The majority of new development should be concentrated within urban areas taking advantage of existing services, high levels of accessibility and priorities for urban regeneration and an appropriate balance of brownfield and greenfield land
- 6.11 Policy CC1: City Centre Development:
The City Centre will be planned to accommodate at least the following:
- (i) 655,000 sqm of office floorspace.
- 6.12 Policy P10: Design states that:
New development for buildings and spaces, and alterations to existing, should be based on a thorough contextual analysis to provide good design appropriate to its scale and function.
New development will be expected to deliver high quality innovative design that has evolved, where appropriate, through community consultation and which respects and enhances the variety of existing landscapes, streets, spaces and buildings according to the particular local distinctiveness and wider setting of the place, contributing positively towards place making and quality of life and be accessible to all.

6.13 Policy T2: Accessibility Requirements and New Development states that new development should be located in accessible locations that are adequately served by existing or programmed highways, by public transport and with safe and secure access for pedestrians, cyclists and people with impaired mobility.

6.14 Leeds Unitary Development Plan Review Retained Policies

Policy BD6 (All alterations)

Policy BD5 (All new buildings and amenity)

Policy GP5 (All planning considerations)

6.15 Leeds Natural Resources and Waste DPD 2013

6.16 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 trees, 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.

6.17 Supplementary Planning Documents

6.18 Parking Supplementary Planning Document adopted January 2016.

6.19 Supplementary Planning Document 'Travel Plans' (February 2015)

6.20 Tall Buildings Design Guide (adopted April 2010)

7.0 KEY ISSUES

7.1 Principle of the proposed uses

7.2 The scheme is proposed to create flexible office and co-working space as well as creating a reconfigured A1 retail unit at ground floor level, facing in to the mall. The site is within the prime shopping area of the City Centre and as such the retention of A1 retail presence is acceptable for the host unit and the wider Merrion Centre. The office and co-working space would be served by a ground floor lobby but would have its work spaces laid out at levels from the first to the 17th floor. As such the proposed office space addition would not be detrimental to the retail functions of the Merrion Centre, the prime shopping area or to Leeds City Centre's role as a Regional Shopping Centre. The proposed office and co-working space would contribute to meeting the office growth target in Core Strategy Policy CC1.

7.3 **Do Members consider the uses proposed to be acceptable?**

7.4 The proposed scale, massing and design

7.5 The proposal is for a 17 storey office tower with a ground floor retail unit and lobby to sit on the site of two existing retail units and the former, long vacant, cinema within the Merrion Centre. The existing two ground floor retail units would be reconfigured with one unit given over for the creation of the new lobby and the other retail unit resized and retained. The new ground floor lobby would be a double height space that would have its principal entrance from the shopping mall within the Merrion Centre, with a second entrance from a new public realm space to the rear of

the proposed building, at the upper floors it is proposed to operate 3 floors of co-working office space and 13 floors of commercial office space.

7.6 The proposed 17 storey tower would be positioned at the heart of the Merrion Centre close to the existing 12 storey Wade House tower. The aim is that the proposal forms part of the wider strategy for the development of the Merrion Centre. This means that whilst the proposal is for a tall building it will be seen within the context of the other blocks of the Merrion Centre, which have a range of scales. The developer has also considered views from across the city and will present images showing that the proposal would sit comfortably within the skyline vistas across Leeds.

7.7 Like many of the structures within the Merrion Centre the form of the building would be a simply rectilinear block with its detailing coming forward in its modernist facades. The building proposes open plan flexible floor layouts to all levels to allow it to adapt to the needs of future occupiers and a feature atrium would be positioned to the mall end of the building. The retention of retail presence at ground floor will ensure that the proposal presents an active frontage to the Merrion Centre mall.

7.8 Whilst the design remains at an emerging stage it is considered that the tower would be of a design to complement the principles set out in the Merrion Centre's 10 year strategy masterplan in respect of position, scale, form and appearance. As such the palette would include anodised metal cladding and aluminium curtain walling and louvres. With the aim being to create an understated, refined contextually sensitive building.

7.9 **Do Members have any comments regarding the emerging scale, massing and design of the proposals?**

7.10 Transportation and Accessibility

7.11 The site does not involve the removal of any existing car parking. Due to the sites sustainable location, close to a high number of bus stops and within walking distance of the bus station, bus interchanges and the train station, as well as a high number of existing multi storey car parks (including one within the Merrion Centre) no new car parking is to be created for this scheme. Secure short and long stay cycling parking will be provided at ratios to accord with the requirements of local planning policy on cycle parking provision.

7.12 Public realm and Connectivity

7.13 The proposed would include the creation of a new area of public realm to the rear of the new tower in what is currently an underused back of house area. Ample servicing room will still be retained alongside the new tower to meet the needs of the existing proposed uses. The new public space would be accessed via the lobby of the tower and from Wade Lane. This would be a quiet, sheltered space which would be laid out with a mix of hard and soft landscape features.

7.14 **Do Members support the emerging public realm and approach to connectivity?**

9.0 CONCLUSION

9.1 The key questions asked in the report above are as follows:

7.3 Do Members consider the uses proposed to be acceptable?

7.9 Do Members have any comments regarding the emerging scale, massing and design of the proposals?

7.14 Do Members support the emerging public realm and approach to connectivity?

Background Papers: PREAPP/17/00353

