



Report of the Chief Planning Officer

CITY PLANS PANEL

6th June 2019

Pre-application presentation of proposed student residential accommodation development on the site of Commerce House, Wade Lane and St Alban's Place, Leeds LS2 8NJ (PREAPP/19/00037)

Applicant – Black Caviar Property Ltd.

Electoral Wards Affected:

Little London and Woodhouse

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 proposed development 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 the redevelopment of Commerce House, comprising the demolition of the existing office building and the construction of a multi-storey student residential accommodation development.

2.0 Site and surroundings

2.1 The existing building comprises a part 4, part 5-storey office building constructed in the late 1970's in conjunction with three similarly-designed office buildings (Warwick House, Belgrave House and Zicon House) built around a central courtyard used for parking and some servicing. Ground levels fall from Wade Lane located to the west towards the east down St Alban's Place which runs along the northern side of Commerce House, terminating at the retaining wall to the Inner Ring Road. A flight of steps runs down the southern flank of the building providing access from Wade Lane into the courtyard space. A vehicular access into the courtyard is situated

between Zicon House and Belgrave House. Two London Plane trees situated between the building and Wade Lane are protected by Tree Preservation Order (TPO 23 2018).

- 2.2 Zicon House was extended by two storeys at roof level and converted into residential apartments (Havana Residence) during 2017. Work has recently commenced at Belgrave House and Warwick House to convert and extend the buildings in a similar way.
- 2.3 A new, multi-storey, purpose-built, student accommodation building is close to completion on the eastern edge of the Council-owned greenspace to the east of Belgrave House. That development will bring forward improvements to the greenspace and also to St Alban's Place which runs along the north side of Commerce House. A second multi-storey, purpose-built, student accommodation building is also nearing completion on the southern side of Belgrave Street on the site of the former Symons House. Pedestrian facilities within Belgrave Street will be improved as part of that development which will also deliver a new pedestrian crossing across Wade Lane on the south side of the junction of Wade Lane and Merrion Way.
- 2.4 QOne, on the north side of St Alban's Place, was converted from offices to residential apartments around 4 years ago. Planning permission is also in place for a part 11, part 18 storey building for student accommodation on part of the car park immediately to the north of QOne.
- 2.5 To the west of Wade Lane further purpose built student accommodation buildings are currently being constructed on the north side of Merrion Way, including a 37 storey building on the former site of Hume House, 45 metres north of the site. Consequently, what was for many years an office-focused area to the north-east of the mixed-use Merrion Centre, is presently undergoing a rapid change to a predominantly residential area, comprising a mix of private rental and student apartments.

3.0 Proposals

- 3.1 It is intended to demolish the existing building and to construct a new building with a similar footprint in its place. The new building would be 6m shorter than that existing, reduced by 3m at each end. The building would comprise two stepped blocks, rising from 18 storeys adjacent to the greenspace to the east, to 28 storeys close to Wade Lane. The lower, eastern, shoulder would be slightly offset to help break down the building mass.
- 3.2 The building would contain 362 studios designed for students. A lower ground floor level would be formed in the eastern half of the building, primarily comprising bicycle and bin stores and space for a gym. The main, ground floor level, entrance into the building would be located towards the north-west corner of the building off St Alban's Place. The western end of the building at this level would be likely to include a double height reception/lobby area. There would also be a cinema room and general amenity space. Additional communal space would be provided at first floor level including study rooms. In total 638m² of communal space would be provided.
- 3.3 The proposed studios would be located from first floor level upwards. The studios would have a regular arrangement either side of the central corridor and would comprise 21m² of floorspace.

3.4 It is intended to service the building from the courtyard to the south of the building. The existing access drive from Belgrave Street would be improved to enable a refuse vehicle to enter the site and space would also be provided for delivery vehicles. These spaces could also be utilised for drop-off and pick-up at the start and end of the academic year. These facilities would be accommodated within a hard and soft landscape scheme which would include provision of lawned areas, new trees and also an external seating area on the southern side of the new building.

4.0 Relevant planning history

4.1 The office building was constructed following the grant of planning permission in 1976, along with similar neighbouring buildings at Belgrave House, Zicon House and Warwick House (H20/77/76/).

4.2 Zicon House was extended at roof level and converted to residential accommodation during 2017 (16/00767/DPD and 16/03396/FU). Belgrave House and Warwick House are currently being extended at roof level and converted to residential accommodation (18/06007/DPD, 18/06008/DPD, 18/06078/FU, 18/06079/FU and 18/06096/FU).

4.3 A part 7, part 11, part 18 storey building is being constructed across the greenspace St Alban's Place to the east comprising 376 student studios (16/07741/FU). The body of this building is now complete and glazed terracotta cladding is presently being added.

4.4 Planning permission for a part 9, part 23 storey, student accommodation building at Symons House on the southern side of Belgrave Street was granted on 22nd December 2017 (17/06605/FU). The body of this building is now complete and brick cladding is presently being applied.

4.5 Planning permission for a part 11, part 18 storey student accommodation building at QOne, Wade Lane on part of the car park north of QOne was granted on 12th December 2018 (18/02139/FU). This development has not commenced.

4.6 Planning permission for a 37 storey tower containing purpose built student accommodation at Hume House, Wade Lane 50 metres to the east of the site was granted on 7th August 2018 (18/01819/FU). Hume House has been demolished and initial groundworks are ongoing.

4.7 Planning permission for one 17 and one 27 storey student accommodation building, linked at first floor level, on the northern side of Merrion Way, was granted on 10th January 2019 (18/05738/FU). The lift cores of both buildings are now rapidly emerging.

4.8 An application to demolish the former Merrion Centre cinema and to construct a 17 storey office building 50m to the west of Wade Lane was deferred and delegated to officers for approval at City Plans Panel on 18th April 2019 (18/07799/FU).

5.0 Consultation responses

5.1 LCC Highways – A transport assessment, a travel plan and a management plan for refuse collection and servicing arrangements and another for the start/end of term pick up/drop off will be required with any planning application. Additional hard-standing is required within the courtyard in order to accommodate a layout that

would adequately serve the proposed development and the other existing buildings. The development would not be expected to provide dedicated parking facilities but should contribute towards pedestrian improvements to and from the site.

- 5.2 LCC Travelwise – A travel plan is required. The travel plan monitoring fee would be £4,710.
- 5.3 LCC Flood Risk Management – the proposed development is located in Flood Zone 1 with no known flooding incidents at the site. Nevertheless it is recommended that the finished floor level is raised above the adjacent road level to reduce the risk of internal flooding. A Flood Risk Assessment will be required to evaluate surface water drainage and the management of flood risk. The drainage will need to be designed in accordance with Minimum Development Control Standards for Flood Risk. A review of the BGS soils data identifies that the site is highly compatible for infiltration SuDS. Following the surface water drainage hierarchy, infiltration testing should be carried out. As the proposed development is classed as a Major, the surface water should revert back to the greenfield rate. However, if this is shown not to be practicable at least a 50% reduction from the existing rate should be achieved. The point of connection should be into the same drainage system the site currently drains to. A Pre Planning Sewer Enquiry will need to be submitted to Yorkshire Water.
- 5.4 LCC Contaminated Land Team - A minimum of a Phase 1 Desk Study Report will be required in support of the application. Depending on the outcome of the Phase 1 Desk Study, a Phase 2 Report and Remediation Statement may also be required.
- 5.5 LCC Environmental Studies (noise) - The site is close to the A64(M) Inner Ring Road and strategic noise maps indicate that noise levels without consideration of glazing and ventilation specification will result in an unsatisfactory internal noise environment. A possible solution may comprise acoustic glazing with a whole-building ventilation system. Such a system should ensure residents are protected from harmful effects of noise whilst maintaining satisfactory internal air quality. A Noise report should be provided detailing the current noise climate at the site (both daytime and night-time during a typical weekday during term-time), with the noise mitigation scheme designed with these levels as a basis for reducing internal noise levels to desirable ones as detailed within BS 8233).
- 5.6 LCC Environmental Studies (air quality) - Local air quality monitoring data indicate that air quality objective levels will not be exceeded at the development site, particularly if residential uses are confined to second floor level and above. As there appears to be no additional car parking associated with the development there should also be no adverse impact on air quality at other locations.
- 5.7 LCC Nature Team - There should be no significant nature conservation concerns - conditions should be used for removing vegetation to protect nesting birds, and incorporating integral bird nesting and bat features into the new build.
- 5.8 LCC Conservation - The proposed tower will affect the setting of St John's Church (Grade I) and the City Centre and Grand Quarter Conservation Areas in views north. The impact of the development needs to be assessed via verified views.
- 5.9 West Yorkshire Police - There is no objection in principle to the proposal. Security measures should be identified in the design and access statement that will help create a safe and secure environment for students who will live here. Reducing the number of access routes into the site, or including 1800mm high paladin or closed

welded mesh gates with access control measures would allow students or authorised person's entry, however visitor access should be directed through a main route which does have good surveillance and can be monitored by security / reception staff. Reception windows should overlook the public space and communal entrance areas in order to increase natural surveillance within these locations. The shared space / outdoor areas should have a good management plan and there should be good external lighting levels to illuminate the site. A monitored CCTV system would be beneficial.

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 for this proposal, 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).

6.2 Leeds Core Strategy (CS)

6.2.1 The Core Strategy sets out the strategic level policies and vision to guide the delivery of development and the overall future of the district. Relevant Core Strategy policies include:

- Spatial Policy 1 prioritises the redevelopment of previously developed land 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 8 supports training/skills and job creation initiatives via planning agreements.
- Spatial Policy 11 includes a priority related to improved facilities for pedestrians to promote safety and accessibility and provision for people with impaired mobility.
- Policy CC1 outlines the planned growth within the City Centre. 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 new development will need to provide and improve walking and cycling routes connecting the City Centre with adjoining neighbourhoods, and improve connections with 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.
- EC3 Safeguards existing employment land.
- 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.

- 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, including their historical and cultural significance, will be conserved and enhanced.
- 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:

- Policy GP5 states that all relevant planning considerations are to be resolved.
- Policy BD2 requires that new buildings complement and enhance existing skylines, vistas and landmarks.
- Policy 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 criteria for landscape schemes.

6.4 Natural Resources & Waste Local Plan

6.4.1 The Natural Resources and Waste Local Plan sets out where land is needed to enable the City to manage resources, like minerals, waste and water and identifies specific actions which will help use the natural resources in a more efficient way.

6.4.2 Relevant policies include:

WATER 1 requires development to include measures to improve their overall water efficiency. WATER 2 seeks protection of water quality in areas adjacent to sensitive water bodies. WATER 4 requires the consideration of flood risk issues and WATER 6 requires flood risk assessments. WATER 7 requires development not to increase surface water run-off. LAND 1 requires consideration of land contamination issues. LAND 2 seeks new tree planting as part of an enhanced public realm. 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 (NPPF) February 2019

6.5.1 Paragraph 108 states that appropriate opportunities to promote sustainable transport modes should be taken up; safe and suitable access provided for all users; and any significant impacts on the highway mitigated. Paragraph 110 states that priority should be given to pedestrian and cycle movements; the needs of people with disabilities and reduced mobility addressed; creation of safe, secure and attractive spaces; allow for the efficient delivery of goods; and be designed to enable use by sustainable vehicles.

6.5.2 Chapter 12 identifies the importance of well-designed places and the need for a consistent and high quality standard of design. Paragraph 127 states that decisions should ensure that developments:

- a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;
- b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;
- c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);
- d) establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;
- e) optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and
- f) create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.

6.5.3 Paragraph 170 states that new and existing development should not be put at unacceptable risk or be adversely affected by unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution.

6.5.4 Chapter 16 refers to the historic environment. Paragraph 192 states that local planning authorities should take account of:

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

Paragraph 193 states that “When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be).” Paragraph 196 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 including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.”

6.6 **Supplementary planning guidance**

- Accessible Leeds SPD
- Travel Plans SPD
- Tall Buildings SPD
- Building for Tomorrow Today: Sustainable Design and Construction SPD
- Neighbourhoods for Living SPG
- City Centre Urban Design Strategy SPD

Other material considerations

6.7 Core Strategy Selective Review (CSSR)

- 6.7.1 Paragraph 48 of the NPPF makes clear that the amount of weight given to relevant policies in emerging plans relates to a) how advanced the emerging plan is, b) the extent to which there are unresolved objections to relevant policies and c) the degree of consistency of those policies with the NPPF.
- 6.7.2 A selective review of the Leeds Core Strategy has been undertaken. Consultation on the CSSR has now finished and following the issuing of the Inspector's Main Modifications (MM) on 10th April 2019 the CSSR, taking the above factors into consideration, it is the case that the CSSR can be afforded significant weight. Those policies within it that are not subject to a MM can be afforded more weight, as it is implicit that the Inspector considers the policy sound without modification.
- 6.7.3 Although draft Policy H9 in the CSSR expressly excludes purpose built student accommodation from the space standard a footnote to the policy states such development should reflect the NDSS with appropriate adjustments to address the particular characteristics of these types of development. They should also meet reasonable standards of general amenity for occupiers to include adequate space, light and ventilation. Further guidance will be provided through a Supplementary Planning Document in due course.
- 6.7.4 Paragraph 5.2.46 of the supporting text to policy H9 states that "Provision of reasonable space standards is still important for student accommodation, and this will need to be judged on a case by case basis, and via the application of any national standards that might be created in the future".

6.8 Site Allocations Plan Submission Draft (SAP)

- 6.8.1 The SAP allocates land for housing and employment and retail centres and designates green space. The SAP is at a highly advanced stage as the Inspector has issued proposed MM's and these were the subject of consultation between 21st January and 4th March 2019. At the time of drafting this report, the Inspectors are having regard to the consultation responses made on MM's before reaching their conclusions on the soundness and legal compliance of the SAP in their final report. However, where no MM is proposed in relation to an allocation, the SAP can be afforded significant weight.
- 6.8.2 As this site is unallocated in the SAP it is considered to be a windfall site.

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 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. Policy H2 of the Core Strategy states that windfall sites will be acceptable in principle providing the number of dwellings does not exceed the capacity of transport, educational and health infrastructure, as existing or provided as a condition of development.

7.1.2 Policy H6B relates specifically to the provision of student housing. It has been established that there are approximately 38,000 university students in the city presently without access to purpose-built student accommodation suggesting that additional provision of such accommodation is unlikely to result in an over-supply of purpose-built student accommodation in the near future. Leeds Core Strategy paragraph 5.2.26 states that growth in new purpose built student accommodation is to be welcomed in order to meet need and to deflect pressure away from private rented houses in areas of over-concentration.

7.1.3 The proposal is considered against the criteria set out below within the adopted policy H6B (identified 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 approximately 362 student bedspaces would help to take reduce the need to use private housing for student accommodation.

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

The existing building on the site is currently used as office accommodation but would be used solely for the provision of purpose built student accommodation if developed. The development would therefore not involve any loss of existing housing and would avoid the loss of residential family accommodation.

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

The site is within the City Centre and is well-placed with regard to access to Leeds Beckett University, the Leeds University of Arts and the University of Leeds along Merrion Way and Woodhouse Lane. Forthcoming improvements to Merrion Way and the provision of new crossings across Wade Lane will help to improve accessibility to the universities further and would accord with Core Strategy policies SP11, CC3 and T2.

Criteria (iii) and (v) of policy H6B are considered in the amenity section, at paragraph 7.2 below.

7.1.4 The existing building, Commerce House, comprises B1 office space. Core Strategy Policy EC3 seeks to retain such a use unless the development (i) would not result in the loss of a deliverable employment site; or (ii) existing buildings are considered to be non-viable in terms of market attractiveness, business operations, age, condition and or compatibility with adjacent uses; or (iii) the proposal will deliver a mixed use development which continues to provide for a range of local employment opportunities and would not undermine the viability of the remaining employment site.

7.1.5 Although the property remains in active office use the site is not in an area of the city with a shortfall of employment land. New office development has recently taken place at Merrion House and approval in principle has recently been given for nearly 13,000m² of B1 office floorspace in a new 17 storey tower in the Merrion Centre. Additionally, there has been a shift in the focus of new office accommodation towards the west side of the city centre to areas such as Wellington Place. There remains a significant amount of committed or newly completed office floorspace elsewhere within the city centre, together with older office stock nearby. Further, the

development would provide employment opportunities for local people in both the construction and subsequent operation of the development. Consequently the development would accord with Core Strategy policies SP8, EC3 and CC1b.

7.1.7 Do Members consider that the proposed use of the site 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 Largely due to its proximity both to the universities and also the city centre the area is a focus for new purpose-built student accommodation, adding to that existing nearby at Arena Village, located to the north of the site; Sky Plaza, on the west side of Clay Pit Lane, and Havana Residence on Cookridge Street. The Vita St Alban's Place scheme across the greenspace from the site will deliver 376 studios in Autumn 2019; the Symons House development on Belgrave Street to the south will provide 349 student bedspaces in a mixture of clusters and studios early in 2020; the Unite development on the north side of Merrion Way will provide 976 student bed-spaces in summer 2020; the Olympian Homes Hume House development will provide 752 student bedspaces in summer 2021; and the Vita 2 Portland Crescent development will provide 312 studios during 2020. Planning permission is also in place for 98 student studios on land north of the QOne Residence, Wade Lane. The proposed student accommodation would provide approximately 362 bedspaces.

7.2.3 What was for many years an office-focused area, around the mixed-use Merrion Centre, is presently undergoing a rapid change to a largely residential one comprising a mix of private rental and student apartments. This includes former offices in adjacent buildings at Belgrave House, Warwick House, Zicon House and Brunswick Point which already have been, or are currently being, converted to private rental accommodation.

7.2.4 It is not considered that existing local residents would be adversely affected by student accommodation in the proposed location given the area's use, levels of student accommodation already present in the area, and the manner in which purpose-built student accommodation is managed. Similarly, 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 mixed use, city centre environment. It is more likely that the students would help to support existing businesses within the city centre. Further, the development's juxtaposition to both the main university campuses is such that more established, residential communities around Lovell Park would not be adversely affected by the development.

7.2.5 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.*

7.2.6 Although draft Policy H9 in the CSSR expressly excludes purpose built student accommodation from the space standard a footnote to the policy states such development should reflect the Nationally Described Space Standard with appropriate adjustments to address the particular characteristics of these types of development. They should also meet reasonable standards of general amenity for

occupiers to include adequate space, light and ventilation. Paragraph 5.2.46 of the supporting text to policy H9 states that “Provision of reasonable space standards is still important for student accommodation, and this will need to be judged on a case by case basis, and via the application of any national standards that might be created in the future”.

- 7.2.7 The Leeds Standard set a minimum target of 37sqm for a self-contained studio flat. This standard closely reflects the NDSS 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 and the reference to the national standards in the CSSR they have been used to help inform decisions on the acceptability of development proposals.
- 7.2.8 In addition, Core Strategy Policy P10 and Saved UDPR Policies BD5 and GP5 also provide more general requirements that development should contribute positively towards quality of life and provide a reasonable level of amenity and useable space. The assessment of amenity is also a wider consideration of qualitative factors including arrangement and separation of living functions (general living, sleeping, studying, eating, cooking, food preparation, storage and circulation), usable shape, outlook, privacy and external amenity space.
- 7.2.9 Officers and Members have visited several student housing schemes to review the level of amenity provided for occupiers. These include Fresh Student Living at Darley Bank in Derby (April 2014) where the studio was 22m²; Downing’s Cityside, Calverley Street, Leeds (May 2016) where the student showflat was also 22m²; Vita Student’s Telephone House, Sheffield (September 2016) where the average studio size was 20m²; and in March 2018 Unite’s development at Angel Lane, Stratford where Members viewed a 10 bedroom cluster flat where the cluster bedrooms of 11m² were supported by 23m² kitchen/living spaces, together with other internal and external amenity space located around the building.
- 7.2.10 City Plans Panel has previously approved the following student accommodation developments:
- Planning permission for Vita’s scheme at St Alban’s Place, in which the smallest studios would be just over 20m² (78% of the total provision), 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. However, each studio was found to benefit from a good outlook, natural daylighting and a suitable noise environment. In order to provide acceptable levels of amenity and communal living the studios are supplemented by managed areas of dedicated communal facilities at the two lowest levels of the building.
 - In December 2017, City Plans Panel approved the redevelopment of Symons House, Belgrave Street by LSSH where the proposed smallest studio would be 21.3m². 2 to 5 bedroom clusters in that development would have 14m² bedrooms with kitchen/living spaces increasing in size from 21-43m², all supported by areas of dedicated amenity space.
 - During Summer 2018 City Plans Panel approved the Unite and Hume House proposals on Merrion Way. The Unite scheme comprised 4, 5 and 7 bedroom clusters with 23-40m² kitchen/amenity space, and 30m² studios. Hume House

comprised a similar mixture of studios (22m²) and 4, 5 and 6 bedroom clusters with 21-35m² kitchen/amenity space, the area depending upon the size of the cluster.

In each of these purpose-built student schemes the dedicated additional amenity spaces within the building were considered critical in providing acceptable levels of amenity for the occupiers of the development.

- 7.2.11 The format of the proposed scheme is similar to the purpose-built student accommodation schemes referred to above. Excluding cycle storage and refuse areas a total of 638m² of dedicated amenity space for use by students would be provided over the lower ground, ground and upper ground floors of the building. The facilities would include a gym, cinema room, communal and study spaces equating to 1.76m² per student, an amount equivalent to that approved at the nearby Vita St Alban's Place scheme.
- 7.2.12 The studios would all be 21m². In combination with the dedicated amenity space the space available to students would be consistent with other purpose-built student schemes recently approved in the City Centre.
- 7.2.13 Student bedrooms would be located at first floor and above providing separation from activities at pedestrian level outside the building. Bedrooms would be positioned either side of a centrally-located corridor and would have southerly or northerly-facing windows. At the eastern end of the building bedroom windows would face QOne, 15 metres to the north, or Belgrave House 10 metres to the south. Those rooms at the eastern end of the corridor are also likely to benefit from windows on the gable end of the building such that the outlook from the rooms is considered acceptable. Similarly, due to the intervening distances and the arrangement of rooms in neighbouring buildings, the extent of overlooking is not considered unacceptable. Details of the dimensions of windows in the bedrooms was not available when this report was drafted such that at this stage it is not possible to confirm that each bedroom would have adequate levels of daylighting.
- 7.2.14 As the site is close to the A64(M) Inner Ring Road it is likely that internal noise levels could be unsatisfactory if glazing and ventilation are not designed to respond to the ambient noise levels. The use of acoustic glazing with a whole-building ventilation system should overcome these concerns. Local air quality monitoring data indicate that air quality objective levels will not be exceeded at the development site such that the occupiers of the development would experience acceptable air quality conditions..
- 7.2.15 **Subject to the confirmation of window dimensions do Members consider that the living conditions within the student accommodation would be acceptable?**

7.3 Townscape considerations

- 7.3.1 The existing part 4, part 5-storey, red brick office building dates from the late 1970's. It was constructed in conjunction with three similarly-designed office buildings (Warwick House, Belgrave House and Zicon House) around a central courtyard to the south and has a similar appearance to those buildings.
- 7.3.2 The new building would have a similar footprint to that existing, reducing the overall length by 6m, whilst maintaining the courtyard arrangement. The shorter footplate also enables protected trees located between the existing building and Wade Lane, and also trees within the greenspace to the east, to be retained.

- 7.3.3 The building would comprise two stepped blocks, rising from 18 storeys adjacent to the greenspace to the east, to 28 storeys closer to Wade Lane. The lower, eastern, end of the building would be slightly offset to help break down the building mass.
- 7.3.4 In accordance with paragraph 193 of the NPPF great weight should be given to the conservation of nearby heritage assets. Any new development must also provide good design that is appropriate to its location, scale and function (Core Strategy Policy P10). Part (i) of the policy states that the size, scale, design and layout should be appropriate to its context and the development should protect and enhance skylines and views (ii). These policies accord with guidance in the NPPF which requires that development establishes a strong sense of place, using streetscapes and buildings to create attractive and comfortable places to live, work and visit; to respond to local character and history; and to reflect the identity of local surroundings.
- 7.3.5 Although one of a group, the existing building form is not of such high quality that its loss would not be harmful to the existing townscape character and due to its scale it would not have an impact upon any heritage assets. Therefore, the demolition and redevelopment of the site is acceptable in principle. Demolition also provides the opportunity to bring forward a more efficient use of the land responding to the existing and emerging context around the site.
- 7.3.6 The scale of the proposed building is such that it would be visible from a number of vantage points around the city including from the City Centre and Grand Quarter conservation areas and in the setting of listed buildings, such as St John's Church to the south. Views of the building from a variety of key viewpoints around the city will be presented to Panel.
- 7.3.7 The area is characterised by a number of large, modern, buildings such as the Merrion Centre, Wade House, Arena Point (Tower House) and CLV Arena Village. Partly in recognition of this context the Tall Buildings Design Guide identified that there could be the opportunity for a cluster of tall buildings in the area to the north east of the Merrion Centre which includes the site. In the near future new multi-storey buildings will be completed nearby at St Alban's Place, a part 7, part 11, part 18 storey building across the greenspace to the east of the site and at Symons House, a part 9, part 23 storey, building on the southern side of Belgrave Street. Tall buildings on Merrion Way comprising a 17 storey and 27 storey towers for Unite; and a 37 storey tower at Hume House will also be completed within the next two years. There are also proposals for a 17 storey office building within the Merrion Centre to the west and a part 11, part 18 storey building immediately north of QOne.
- 7.3.8 Whereas there is some variation in scale, following the completion of the new buildings referred to above, building heights will as a rule ascend from the west along Merrion Way to a high point at Hume House and then generally descend from that point towards the north, east and south. The new building at Commerce House, lower than Hume House but taller than Symons House, would fit comfortably within this emerging pattern of tall buildings and in doing so would reinforce the cluster in longer range views of the cityscape.
- 7.3.9 The architectural form and approach to materiality has evolved through an iterative pre-application process. The principal move has been the introduction of a stepped and split form which assists in breaking up the building's mass. At the same time the two elements of the proposed building harmonise with the scale of other nearby buildings. At the eastern end, the 18 storey element would be comparable with the

17 storey central core of the St Alban's Place scheme across the greenspace to the east. The building would then step up to the 28 storey section, a similar height to the taller Unite tower on Merrion Way, creating an counterpoint to the 37 storey Hume House development across Wade Lane.

7.3.10 The emerging architectural expression utilises a simple and regular lattice of glazing and masonry, intended to present an elegant appearance with a pronounced emphasis on the verticality of the building. Above the lowest levels of the building floors are likely to be expressed externally in pairs and proportions at the top of the building may be extruded to create a clear crown to the building. The regular pattern to the façade ensures some commonality with the neighbouring brick buildings around the courtyard whilst the architectural form will create an interesting dialogue with Hume House across Wade Lane.

7.3.11 **Do Members consider that the proposed mass and form of the development and its relationship with the surrounding context is acceptable?**

7.4 Transportation and accessibility

7.4.1 The site is located in a highly sustainable location close to the many amenities offered by the City Centre and is readily accessible by a range of modes of transport. The development itself would be car-free, potentially with three spaces provided within the courtyard to be utilised for servicing the development and its neighbours. The spaces would also be available for student drop off and pick up at start and end of term time, their provision and use controlled by a management plan. Bins for each of the buildings abutting the courtyard would be stored within the buildings and could be collected from within the courtyard thereby reducing the pressure on the layby on Belgrave Street. A detailed servicing strategy needs to be developed and agreed.

7.4.2 Bike store areas for the development are proposed at the lowest level of the building fronting the courtyard. The cycling facilities would form a key element of the Travel Plan which will be submitted with the planning application. The travel plan monitoring fee would be £4,710.

7.4.3 Levels drop approximately 3 metres from Wade Lane to the courtyard space to the south of the building. Level access would be provided into the main entrance towards the north-west corner of the building close to Wade Lane. Lifts running throughout the building would provide access to all floors including the lower ground floor level that would have direct access to the courtyard space.

7.4.4 It is intended that the courtyard is landscaped with trees, lawned areas and spill-out areas to provide sheltered external amenity space solely for residents of neighbouring buildings. In common with the existing arrangement gates would be installed between each of the buildings. However, given its city centre location and relationship with other areas of green infrastructure the space could be used for passive recreation by the public without introducing unacceptable security or privacy issues. Due to the change in levels between the courtyard and Wade Lane there are more convenient pedestrian routes around the site itself. However, open access would also enable historic routes to be re-established, improving the permeability of the area.

7.4.5 **Do Members consider that the courtyard space should be publicly accessible?**

7.4.6 The development, accommodating 362 students, will result in additional pedestrian and cycling movements to and from the universities, placing greater demands on existing and proposed highway crossings and footways along the route. As a consequence, and in common with the recent Unite (Merrion Way) and Hume House (Wade Lane) proposals which are providing a combined contribution of £608,793 towards the improvement of Merrion Way, it is considered that these impacts should be mitigated by a developer contribution towards the improvement of the pedestrian environment in the area beyond the site boundary to accord with Core Strategy policies P10, T2 and CC3.

7.4.7 **Do Members consider that the development should deliver improvements to the pedestrian environment in the area beyond the immediate periphery of the site?**

7.5 Wind

7.5.1 Due to the height of the building the applicant is mindful of the potential impact of the development on the local wind environment and will appoint a wind consultant to fully test the wind impact as the next stage of the design process. The findings of the assessment will be contained within a wind impact assessment which will be submitted with the planning application. Upon receipt of a wind study the Council will appoint their own experts to peer review the report's findings.

7.6 Sustainability

7.6.1 The Core Strategy climate change policies are designed so that new development contributes to carbon reduction targets. Policy EN1 is flexible, allowing developers to choose the most appropriate and cost effective carbon reduction solution for their site. Major developments also need to meet the BREEAM Excellent standard if feasible (EN2). Where technically viable, appropriate for the development, and in areas with sufficient existing or potential heat density, major developments should propose heating systems, potentially connecting to the emerging district heating network (EN4(i)). At this stage of the design process detailed information regarding sustainability measures is not available but, as the scheme progresses, will be integrated into the detailed design.

7.7 Conclusion

7.7.1 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:

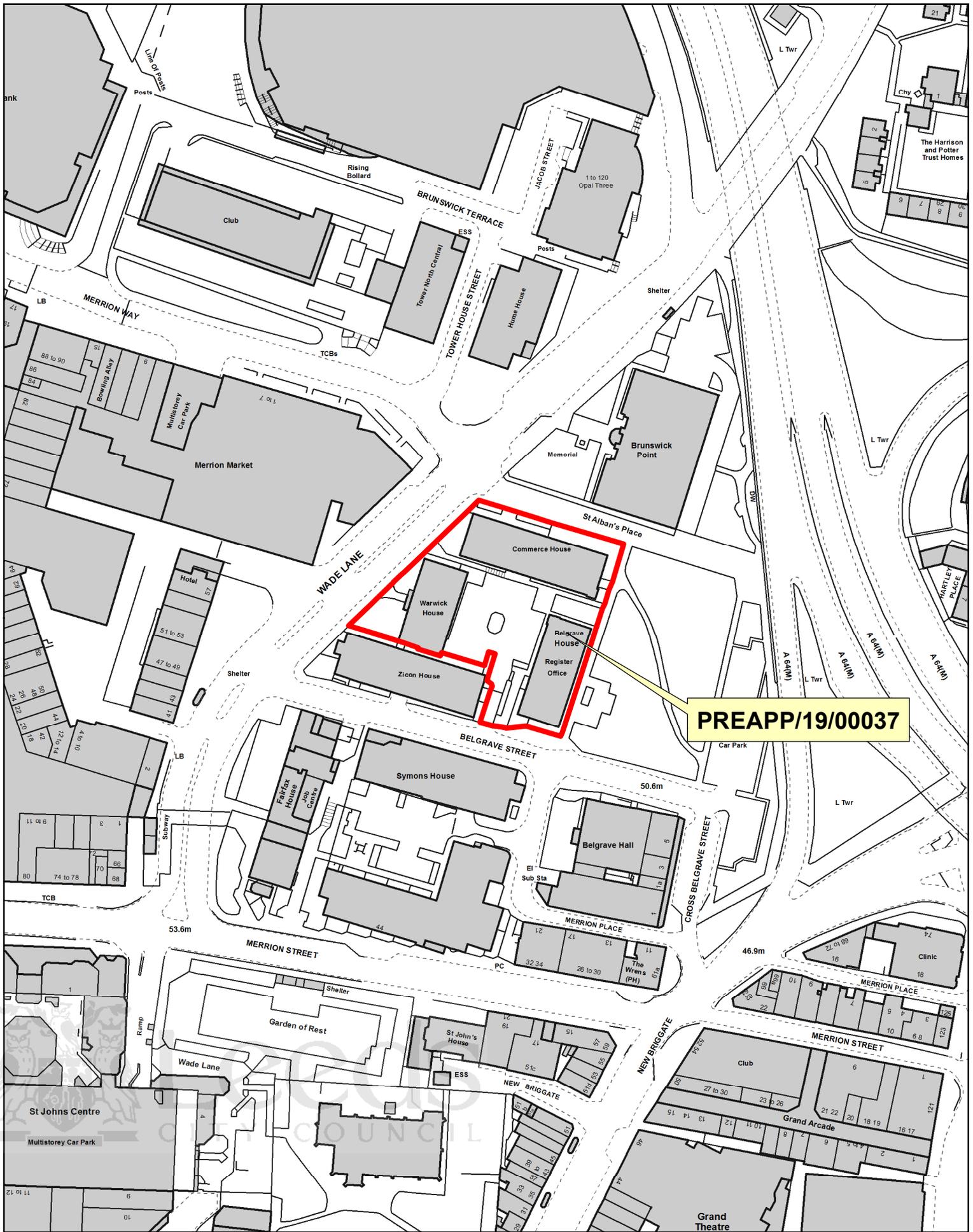
Do Members consider that the proposed use of the site for student accommodation is acceptable in principle? (7.1.7)

Subject to the confirmation of window dimensions do Members consider that the living conditions within the student accommodation would be acceptable? (7.2.15)

Do Members consider that the proposed mass and form of the development and its relationship with the surrounding context is acceptable? (7.3.11)

Do Members consider that the courtyard space should be publicly accessible? (7.4.5)

Do Members consider that the development should deliver improvements to the pedestrian environment in the area beyond the immediate periphery of the site? (7.4.7)



CITY PLANS PANEL

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SCALE : 1/1500



5.0 Landscape

Concept Plan

1. Vehicle + pedestrian access (pedestrian priority)
2. Ramp
3. Drop off / pick up / deliveries
4. Existing trees to be retained
5. Proposed trees
6. Proposed ornamental multistem trees
7. Shrub planting
8. Railing
9. Seating
10. Existing cycle parking
11. Existing stepped access to Belgrave House retained
12. Raised planters
13. Timber seating platform
14. Spill out area
15. Existing steps retained
16. Lawn
17. Proposed wall
18. Existing trees to be removed
19. Service vehicle route
20. Landscape enhancements to interface with St Alban's Place to complement VITA scheme

