

PLANNING SUPPORTING STATEMENT

**PROPOSAL: ALTERATIONS AND PARTIAL DEMOLITION TO
CONVERT EXISTING BUILDINGS TO FORM 65 NO. RESIDENTIAL
UNITS, INSTALLATION OF MEZZANINE FLOORS, ASSOCIATED
LANDSCAPE WORKS (SOFT AND HARD LANDSCAPING) AND
PROVISION OF CAR PARKING**

**LOCATION: WHEELWRIGHT CENTRE, BIRKDALE ROAD, DEWSBURY
WF13 4GH**

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This Planning Supporting Statement (PSS) has been prepared in support of an application Ref No 2019/92587 for the change of use and alterations to former school buildings at the Wheelwright Centre, Dewsbury to form 65 residential units consisting of a mix of one, two and three bedroom accommodation.

The buildings lie within the main body of the town of Dewsbury and within the Northfields Conservation Area of the town on the north-west side of the junction of Birkdale Road to the south of the A638 Halifax Road to the east.

The former Wheelwright Grammar School is unlisted but is considered an important part of the heritage of the area. After a considerable time in mainstream education, the site was redeveloped as the Batley School of Art campus to Kirklees College.

Subsequently this use was also discontinued and the site commenced its current phase of vacancy, and prompted this application for the redevelopment of the site for residential purposes.

The application site is surrounded by what are predominantly residential uses within areas of traditional housing of differing designs, construction and aesthetic quality.

The application site is characterised by its current vacancy and represents in planning terms a redevelopment opportunity on what is previously developed land (pdl), or a (brownfield) site.

In this context the proposal to retain much of the built form of the site with selective demolition, and alterations to the building to create residential units, is seen as an indication of inward investment in the area and typify the objectives of sustainable development whilst securing the future of a heritage building.

2.0 DISCUSSION

The objectives of this section of the PSS is to consider the proposal in the context of current national and local planning policy and guidance with a view to reaching a balanced assessment of the planning merits of the scheme.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the Governments planning policies and how they should be applied.

Paragraph 2 of the NPPF is clear in advising that:-

“Planning law requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.”

It also advises that: -

“The NPPF must be taken into account in preparing the development plan and is a material consideration in planning decisions.”

An objective planning assessment must weigh all material considerations in reaching an outcome. Design and sustainability are key components of the decision making process, and in this case the location of the application site within the Northfields Conservation Area introduces additional design and heritage issues that must be considered.

In this regard this PSS must be read in the context of the following documents that form a part of the application bundle as follows:-

- (1) The Design and Access Statement prepared by Beckwith Design Associates Ltd, and
- (2) The Built Heritage Statement prepared by M B Heritage.

That the NPPF must be treated as a material consideration is outlined above.

The key objective of the modern planning system is to “*Achieve Sustainable Development*” which creates three overarching objectives for planning and which are interdependent.

These are equally applicable to this development and consist of:-

- (a) **Economic objective:** - to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy by ensuring land is available to support growth and innovation.
- (b) **Social objective:** - support strong, vibrant and healthy communities by ensuring the provision of homes and fostering a well-designed and safe built environment, and
- (c) **Environmental objective:** - by protecting and enhancing the natural, built and historic environment using natural resources prudently.

This proposal to redevelop the vacant former Wheelwright Grammar School has potential to link all these objectives. The site currently is an underused resource and as an area of vacant brownfield ‘pdl’ land it makes no economic or social contribution to the economy.

The reuse of such a resource is:

- Sustainable;
- Economically efficient, and;
- Fulfills a social objective

The proposal seeks to provide residential accommodation in the form of 65 no. high quality apartments. The proposed conversion will create a well-designed and safe environment for its future residents.

Finally the proposal will reuse a significant heritage building within a designated Conservation Area, which will bring the building back into use, making effective use of the building and land.

The evidence of inward investment and addressing the brownfield status of the site can also help to encourage and guide other developments towards sustainable solutions, protecting and enhancing the built and historic environment as a result.

Paragraph 11 of the NPPF provides guidance on decision making that we consider to be pertinent to this proposed development, it states that:-

“Plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development.”

For decision taking this means: -

- (c) *Approving development proposals that accord with up-to-date development plans without delays’.*

Section No. 04 of the NPPF deals with the process of decision-making, and provides pertinent advice to applicants.

Paragraph 38 advises Local Planning Authorities of their responsibilities:-

“Local Planning Authorities should approach decisions and proposed developments in a positive and creative way. By working proactively with applicants to secure developments that will improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area.”

It does however also place a responsibility on the applicants to engage with the planning system.

Paragraph 39 advises that:-

“Early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application process for all parties. Good quality pre-application discussion enables better coordination between public and private resources and improves outcomes.”

In this case the applicant submitted a formal pre-application enquiry to Kirklees Council. The pre-app has a reference number of 2019/20088 for ‘*the conversion of existing building to provide residential apartments.*’ The response was dated 28th May 2019.

The advice provided to the applicant as an outcome of the application was that:-

‘Policies throughout the Local Plan promote the reuse of existing buildings, and the use of brownfield land to meet development needs and support the regeneration of the area.

Therefore the proposed refurbishment of the Wheelwright Centre could be considered acceptable in principle, and that furthermore residential development at this stage is considered sustainable development given the site’s location in an already built up area.’

It is on the basis of this pre-application support that the applicants have progressed to a full application for the development.

Paragraph 2 of the NPPF quoted above has outlined the importance of both the NPPF and the Development Plan in decision making, in this case the development plan is considered to consist of the:- Kirklees Local Plan, Strategy and Policies (Adopted 27 February 2019).

Firstly we will review the guidance in the NPPF before balancing that against the policies of the Local Plan.

Section 5 of the NPPF deals with Housing.

Paragraph 59 advises:-

“To support the Governments objectives of significantly boosting the supply of homes, it is important that a sufficient amount and variety of land can come forward where it is needed, that the needs of groups with specific housing requirements are addressed, and that land with permission is developed without unnecessary delay”

Paragraph 68 provides advice on the contribution small to medium sized sites can offer to the housing stock, it advises that they make: -

‘An important contribution to meeting the housing requirements of an area and are often built on relatively quickly and should: -

Support, the development of windfall sites through their policies and decisions, giving great weight to the benefits of using suitable sites within existing settlements for homes.’

The application site is just such a windfall opportunity that has the ability to develop and support a sustainable community.

Making effective use of land is a cornerstone of sustainable development.

Paragraph 117 of the NPPF encourages that:-

“Planning policies and decisions should promote effective use of land in meeting the need for homes while safeguarding and improving the environment.”

Paragraph 118 advises that planning policies should support this objective by:-

- (c) *Giving substantial weight to the value of using suitable brownfield land within settlements for homes; and*
- (d) *Promotes and supports the development of under-utilised land and buildings, especially if this would help to meet identified needs, and support appropriate opportunities to remediate despoiled, degraded, derelict land.*

A key element of sustainable and efficient development is achieving well-designed places.

Paragraph 124 sums it up in 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.’

The project architects, Beckwith Design Associates Ltd, have set out their underlying design objectives in their Design and access Statement, (one of the two documents this statement is intended to support).

It recognises the importance of the key buildings on the site to the Conservation Area, and outlines an objective that focuses on the retention of these buildings preserving their scale and mass within the site.

The demolition of the 1960’s extensions is an integral part of the proposal that enables the retention and conversion of what we believe to be the most important in preserving the character and heritage of the site.

The resultant design and its layout are considered to accord with the advice in Paragraph 127 of the Design Guidance in the NPPF, which requires proposals to: -

- (a) *Function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but also 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, whilst not discouraging appropriate innovation or change.*

- (d) *Establish a strong sense of place; and*
- (e) *Optimizes the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development.*

The proposal is considered to meet these objectives, in doing so however it also has implications for conserving and enhancing the historic environment.

Paragraph 200 of the NPPF encourages local planning authorities: -

“To look for opportunities for new development within Conservation Areas that enhance or better reveal their significance.”

And advises that: -

“Proposals that preserve those elements of their setting that make a positive contribution to the asset should be treated favourably.”

Overall the proposal is considered on balance to perform well in terms of delivering these key objectives of the NPPF that are quoted above.

Having therefore reviewed the application in the context of the NPPF we also need to review the development plan in the form of the adopted Kirklees Local Plan and identify compliance and potential conflict.

The plan makes clear that a cornerstone of their ‘vision’ (Para. 4.2) is the regeneration of the town by providing high quality homes and quality development in sustainable locations and by retaining their heritage in the built environment.

The vision further refers in Para 4.3 to: -

‘(8) -Protection and enhancement of the characteristics of the built environment and historic environments’.

This proposal is entirely consistent with that vision.

We further note that in the ‘Statement of Place Shaping’ for Dewsbury that the plan encourages accommodation for a ‘growing young population’ a community that the proposed development is ideally placed to support.

It also highlights that there are opportunities for investment and that these must be encouraged if the vision is to be delivered.

The council has in the local plan identified a housing delivery target in the plan for Dewsbury that proposes a need for 4,650 units in the plan period, the delivery of 65 units on what is a sustainable, brownfield and windfall site is a useful contribution.

The recognition that brownfield sites can make is amplified in Para 6.4 of ‘delivering growth’ and this is reinforced in Policy LP3.

The plan encourages the ‘master-planning’ of sites and the need for integrated development, the proposal seeks to do so by providing facilities for residents and community buildings.

Policy LP7 is particularly pertinent in that it deals with the ‘*Efficient and effective use of land and buildings*’ it advises that to ensure the best use of buildings and land that: -

- *Proposals should encourage efficient use of pdl in sustainable locations and;*
- *Encourage the reuse or adaptation of vacant or underused properties;*
- *Achieve a net density of at least 35 d.p. h.*

All of which are features of the proposed re-development that support and assist the objectives of Para 8.6 and 8.19 of ‘*meeting and maintaining*’ the housing supply targets.

The proposed spread of accommodation types across the conversion is in conformity with the objectives of Policy LP11 which, consistent with national policy seeks to maintain a mix, catering for all types of need including hard to reach groups such as singles, aged and those with disabilities.

The applicant’s highway engineers have confirmed the sustainability of the proposed development in transport terms, with links to non-car based movement on public transport. With services, employment and recreation within walking/cycling distance of the site.

Provision has also been made for secure cycle storage within the development.

Policy LP24 provides advice on design and notes that proposals should promote high levels of sustainability through: -

- (i) ‘*The re-use and adaptation of existing buildings wherever practicable*’

A role into which the Wheelwright centre, is considered to ideally fit.

It is of a scale and massing that lends itself to conversion retains its existing presence in the street scene by employing a sound design approach.

We consider the principles of good design in policy LP24 and the NPPF are met by this development and the design agenda is articulated in more depth in the DAS submitted with the application by the project architects.

We also consider that the development meets its policy objectives with regard to climate change/flood risk and the natural environment, all of which are responded to by specific technical reporting submitted with the application.

Policy LP35 'Historic Environment' provides clarity for proposal affecting designated heritage assets, in this case the buildings are not listed but are recognized by the design team as having a 'place' in the Conservation Area.

The proposals have been developed (including the selective proposals for demolition) to retain and enhance the former school buildings retaining the key features and form of the existing buildings.

On balance therefore and when weighing the merits of the proposal through assessing the policy objectives and other material considerations set out in the local plan we are of the view that the proposal meets the criteria in which policy support can be afforded to the scheme as being in conformity to the development plan.

In the council's response to the pre application enquiry the applicant was advised as part of their planning statement to consider a number of matters as '**key issues**' that could be material to the determination of the application.

Firstly the council sought information consistent with the local plan policy on the loss of 'Community and Education uses'.

This, the council advise should take the form of an assessment of educational needs and how the site performs within that structure.

We would suggest that a full educational assessment is unnecessary given the abandonment of the premises by the education authority.

The Wheelwright School we understand was used within mainstream education for the town as a Grammar School and later as a Sixth Form College. This use is believed to have ceased as long ago as 1987 when its proposed closure by the local education authority was raised at the highest level in the House of Commons when it was deemed to be excess to requirements as part of a restructuring of education in the area.

Subsequently the premises were used in a quasi educational use as part of Kirklees College forming the 'Batley School of Art, that use ceased as part of a review of further education and the property has remained vacant ever since.

The college's decision to sell the site for redevelopment brought to a close the association with education uses of the site and the owners indicated the intention to redeploy the resulting revenue elsewhere in the education hierarchy of the area.

We also note that the demise of the site has been as a result of educational re-organization and that there is therefore clear evidence in accordance with local plan policy 49 that the site is ‘surplus to requirements’.

This is further supported by the consultation response from education in which they outlined the availability of other education establishments at St. John’s (Infants), Westmoor Junior School, Westborough High School and Springfield Sixth Form College that are first line providers.

The lack of need is supported by several of the consultation responses that acknowledge its abandonment as an educational establishment.

The **second** issue relates to the nature of the housing provision proposed within the application and the need to provide a cross section of house sizes and types.

The local authority has sought the inclusion of a range of house types including 3 bedrooms for which the Strategic Housing Team has identified a need in the area.

The proposed scheme has sought to be inclusive in its provision but the format of apartments are generally considered not to be ideal for family or extended family occupancy because of the design format and the lack of private amenity space.

The schedule of development does clearly prioritize the delivery of 1 and 2 bedroom accommodation with a limited number of 3 bed units incorporated within the development.

It is considered that the applicant has therefore sought to adhere to the housing departments requirements and the proposal will, we consider achieve a balanced community within the scheme and the area.

It must also be acknowledged by the housing provider that the provision of targeted accommodation of 1 and 2 bedrooms does inevitably free up some, 3 bedroom accommodation in the area that is often under utilized.

We consider that given the constraints of the building and its layout that the potential of the building is being achieved in a sustainable manner by delivery of residential units suited to conversion and/or redevelopment of heritage buildings.

3.0 SUMMARY

The development proposals submitted for this important Conservation Area site are considered consistent with the pre application enquiry 2019/2008 and the advice offered at that time by the local planning authority.

The council advised that: -

‘The proposed development has positive aspects, and the provision of residential accommodation in an established residential area is welcome in principle. Furthermore, it is welcomed by officers, that the owner is proposing to save the building’.

This was understandably the subject of a caveat based on the design proposals.

We consider that the applicants and their architects have addressed the design constraints of the site and the submitted scheme is consistent with the design objectives of both the NPPF and Local Plan.

Planning law requires that *‘planning decisions are in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise’*.

We consider that we have made an objective assessment of the development plan and its policies and taken account of all material considerations including the NPPF.

The proposal is considered to accord with this advice and as it is in conformity with the development plan and is sustainable should be supported accordingly.