

DESCRIPTION OF SITE/PROPOSAL

The application site (0.58 ha) is located on the junction of Bonhay Road and Frog Street and backs onto Tudor Street. The site is currently occupied by an office building, Renslade House which fronts onto Exe Bridges. The leisure use Fitness First is located immediately to the rear but outside the application site boundary. The existing Renslade House has a total of 10 floors within the main tower, a height of 28.5 metres. The main tower is flanked by two lower level podium buildings also within office use each with an overall height of between 7 and 9 metres due to the changes in levels within the site. These podium buildings contain 2 floors of office accommodation with undercroft parking also provided. The building is a concrete construction with aluminium windows and green solar reflective glass. The area behind and beneath these buildings have a total of 113 car parking spaces accessed from Tudor Street. The existing building has a dated appearance typical of its construction in the early 1970s. The building currently comprises of a total lettable area of 5,106 sq metres (54,962 sq feet) for office use.

The application proposes to demolish the existing eastern and western podiums and construct two buildings of a height comparable with the existing central tower. The buildings would provide a total of 387 student studio apartments with a shared common facilities on each floor creating a total floor area of 1,740 sq metres. The ground floor of each of the towers would include entrance foyer, common rooms, gyms, wcs, laundry, cycle storage, administrative offices, bin storage and plant rooms. The top floor for each building would comprise a sedum roof and a open terraced area. The western tower would comprise 10 floors, with a total height of 27.5 metres accommodating 211 student studio apartments. The eastern tower would comprise 11 floors, 29 metres in height and accommodating 176 student studio apartment.

The new buildings would be constructed on a brick plinth with a combination of zinc cladding/opaque insulated panels and reflective glazing with a sedum roof.

The car parking area would be reduced from its current capacity of 113 spaces to 50 spaces. A total of 200 cycle parking spaces would be provided within the building to serve the student use.

The application includes additional landscaped areas in the vicinity of the vehicular access onto Tudor Street, which remains the sole vehicular access point into the site.

The site lies adjacent to the Riverside Conservation Area which is located to the north and south. The Central Conservation Area lies further the north of the site. The Tudor House (Grade II*) and Eagle House (Grade II) are located on Tudor Street and located opposite the main vehicular access into the site.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION SUPPLIED BY THE APPLICANT

A Planning Statement, Design and Access Statement (including a Visual Impact Assessment), Heritage Statement, Air Quality Assessment, Noise Assessment, Lighting Assessment, Environment Assessment and Construction Environmental Management Plan have been submitted with the application.

REPRESENTATIONS

25 letters of objection including one from the Exeter Civic Society. Principal issues raised:-

1. Inappropriate height for site, out of keeping and insensitive within its historic context;
2. Inappropriate to add to an existing building described as unattractive/ugly/eyesore/ a

planning mistake/out of place;

3. New buildings will appear as a 'blot on the landscape and create a poor impression at a gateway City site;

4. Over-intensification of the site;

5. Damage key historic views including the Cathedral and the ancient Exe Bridge;

6. Loss of outlook from properties to the rear of the site including Tudor Street and Bartholomew Terrace;

7. New building would be visually detrimental and disproportionate to the area;

8. Loss of view from City Wall, supporting objection raised by Historic England;

9. Conclusion of Heritage Appraisal considered ill judged, inconsistent and inaccurate;

10. Inappropriate design philosophy resulting in an overall composition of '*a clumsy juxtaposition of three barely articulated towers*'

11. Disappointment that the existing building is not being reclad as part of this scheme;

12. Suggestion that enabling development needed to refurbish existing building disproportionate.

13. Potential for light pollution affecting existing residential properties;

14. Further traffic congestion in the area;

15. Insufficient parking spaces proposed;

16. Insufficient cycle parking provision;

17. Increase traffic noise;

18. Contribute to increased air pollution problems;

19. Increased risk to pedestrians/motorists due to poor/dangerous road crossing at Western Way;

19. Site too far from University, served by poor bus service;

20. Concentration of proposed student numbers has the potential to create a 'student ghetto';

21. No need for further student accommodation in the City;

22. Inappropriate location within the Flood Zone;

23. Loss of office accommodation within the side podiums and potential for existing tower being converted to residential accommodation under permitted development leading to a further loss of office accommodation;

24. Poor visual relationship with existing tower leading to significant harm to the Riverside Conservation area;

25. Bulk and mass of new building will cause significant harm to nearby historic assets including listed buildings (eg Eagle House Grade II, Tudor House Grade II*, Bartholomew Terrace Grade II, the medieval Exe Bridges) and a Scheduled Ancient Monument, the City Wall;

26. Proposed design creates a clumsy relationship with the existing tower and does not follow the existing layout;

27. Scheme should include affordable homes for local people;

28. Detrimental impact on the quality of life for nearby residents;

29. Rear elevation appears very utilitarian with little architectural merit;

30. Scheme would unacceptably alter the townscape from wider views ie the Green Circle;

31. Creation of student accommodation alongside offices is unlikely to attract future commercial tenants wishing to relocate into the existing building and potentially lead to pressure to change to further student use;

2 letters of comment raising no objection to student accommodation but questioning the need for more student accommodation rather than affordable homes for young people and/or people who work in the City; appropriateness of the heights of the proposed buildings; the relationship of student to existing office workers and raising doubts over the conclusions reached within the submitted Statement of Community Involvement.

1 letter of support from Exeter University who confirmed that they are supportive of all purpose built student residential schemes that are brought forward in accordance with the stated policy of Exeter City Council

CONSULTATIONS

The County Head of Planning Transportation and Environment comment that the key areas of consideration related to appropriate pedestrian and cycle access routes to the site, on site vehicular and cycle parking facilities and arrangements for student pick up and drop off. With just under 400 beds, the proposed development is expected to generate a considerable number of new pedestrian and cycle movements to and from the site. These movements are expected across four main routes, (1) Exe Bridge for St Thomas Local Centre/St Thomas Rail Station; (2) Riverside Cycle Route; (3) Bonhay Road for University/ St David's Rail Station and (4) Fore Street/New Bridge St for City Centre/route to University and bus stops

The latter of these, was highlighted in pre application discussions as a significant concern. The desire line for movements to New Bridge Street involves crossing Frog Street, a busy urban dual carriageway with peak hour traffic flows in excess of 1500 vehicles. Although there is an existing pedestrian crossing provision in the form of a subway, this is unattractive (in part due to increased distance and perceived security) and away from the desire line for a number of movements. On site observations confirm it is only sporadically used, and instead pedestrians cross Frog Street. Given the speed, volume and behaviour of traffic on Frog Street, the ad-hoc crossing that takes place is not considered safe and suitable, and this is further confirmed by the presence of a pedestrian injury collision on Frog Street in this location. The proposed development will significantly increase the demand for this movement.

To safely cater for this movement, the applicants have proposed two alternative solutions. The first is a signalised crossing of Frog Street, providing a route to steps on the south of Frog Street, and the second is a new set of steps to New Bridge Street on the north of Frog Street. Given the proximity of the site to Exe Bridges, the proposed signalised crossing could not be "on-demand" (for pedestrians) but is proposed as a pedestrian stage running simultaneously with the Bonhay Road stage at the adjacent Bonhay Road/Exe Bridge signals. However, this set up would give limited time to pedestrians, resulting in pedestrians crossing without a green man in an inappropriate location. Providing the facility, further encourages this as a place to cross which is a concern and was not considered a suitable solution.

By comparison, providing steps to New Bridge Street from the north of Frog Street would negate the need to cross Frog Street. This would provide a safe and appropriate route for the main movement from the site towards the city centre and university and therefore accepted. To ensure suitable access is provided the steps, as indicated on the New Bridge Street Stairs Concept Design Drawing SK003_Rev P1, should be provided prior to occupation of any part of the development. It has been indicated that these will be offered for adoption by the Highway Authority. The applicant is advised that this can be done through Section 38 of the Highways Act 1980 and a commuted sum towards these would be sought.

An additional pedestrian/cycle access point is also shown in the north west corner of the site. This is welcomed and to provide suitable access to the riverside cycle routes it should be complemented by dropped kerbs on Bonhay Road. The provision of these should be secured alongside the north/western block.

Vehicular access will be from the existing access point onto Tudor street, although this will be narrowed down to 6.0 metre access way and 15.0 metre bellmouth to create more of an urban landscape feel. This is befitting of the shift to a predominantly residential site and is welcomed. The applicant is advised that parts of the indicated area are HMPE and therefore

permission must be obtained prior to undertaking any work on the highway. In particular, the provisions of Sections 171 (Control of deposits of building material and the making of excavations in streets) of the Highways Act 1980 and 184 (Vehicles over footways and verges and New Road and Street Works Act 1991) will be of concern.

Parking for 200 cycles is provided in two blocks, one for each of the new buildings. The level of parking indicated in the application accords with the Exeter City Council Sustainable Transport Supplementary Planning Document and is acceptable.

Inspecting the ground floor site plans indicates that the cycle parking area is only likely to be sufficient for approximately 100 stands on a single level. Details on how 200 spaces are achieved is not explicitly clear and therefore the exact arrangements for this should be provided for approval in advance of commencement and in place prior to occupation. The provision of two tier racks to achieve the required spaces would be an acceptable solution

The submitted plans show a significant reduction in on site vehicular parking spaces, from 133 to 50. On site observation identified that the outside spaces are well used, although those under the existing buildings less so. The allocation of spaces is understood to be privately agreed between occupants and site owner and any changes to that presumably agreed through that process. Nevertheless, given the existing spaces are not fully utilised and the sustainable city centre location, the reduction in spaces is not sufficient to justify a refusal of the proposals.

Although the application will significantly reduce the existing on site parking numbers the spaces are rarely used on weekends when student pick up and drop off typically takes place. Provided that this process is carefully managed, as is typical for such developments, the on-site areas considered sufficient to cater for student pick up and drop off.

It is pleasing that a Travel Plan has been submitted with the application. Broadly, its contents are acceptable. However, information packs identified in the document should be provided for approval prior to their issue. This, along with implementation of the Travel Plan should be secured by condition.

Bonhay Road and Frog Street are A classified roads that serve an important local and strategic cross city purpose. To protect the efficiency of these and the safety of users of the public highway construction traffic will need to be appropriately managed and all vehicles and materials will need to be stored on site. A condition for a Construction Traffic Management Plan is therefore recommended and the applicant is strongly advised to meet with the highway authority to agree a suitable means of progress prior to undertaking any works.

In summary, the development will result in a significant number of new pedestrian and cycle trips. To cater for this additional demand, the development proposes new links and on site facilities and new steps to address deficiencies in the existing route to New Bridge Street. These facilities are considered acceptable and subject to conditions to secure these, the Travel Plan and construction management arrangements, the highway authority has no objection to the proposed development.

Historic England comment that Renslade House is a 1970s office complex of limited architectural or historic merit. It occupies a prominent position adjacent to a busy traffic gyratory, but backs onto a slightly fragmented area of historic townscape, which includes a Grade II* listed building that directly addresses the rear of the site. They therefore welcome proposals to develop the site, which they believe provides a great opportunity to mediate between Exeter's intrusive postwar highway engineering and its historic core.

However, the proposed development would adversely affect the setting of the City Walls and City Centre Conservation Area. They therefore suggest revisions to the proposals and at this stage, wish to register their objection to the application.

Historic England has been involved in pre-application discussions at this site. An earlier scheme rose higher than the current proposals and would have intruded in views of the Cathedral from Dunsford Road. At the height now proposed, the development would not affect the setting of the Cathedral.

However, their concerns remain in regards to impacts on view from the City walls. The City walls are Scheduled Ancient Monuments, and within the Central Conservation Area. The walls include Roman, Anglo Saxon and medieval parts which define the original extent of the city of Exeter. At Bartholomew Terrace, the original South-east corner of the city walls, historic fabric survives and the surrounding natural topography enables the viewer to understand their original defensive context. Standing on Bartholomew Terrace, views towards the rural hinterland of the City and distant Dartmoor contribute to the setting of the walls and thus their significance. The proposed new buildings flanking Renslade House would intrude into these views, diminishing the relationship between the scheduled walls and the wider landscape.

These views are very significant in allowing an understanding of the wall's historic purpose; marking the edge of the city and providing distant views from which travellers or hostile forces could be seen long before arrival. With long views available the purpose of the wall is easily understood by the casual observer; without them the course of the wall is just a line in the townscape.

Historic England also believe the design of the proposed development could be improved in the context of its relationship with Tudor Street and the Old Tudor House. While some improvements have been made here during pre-application discussions, the proposed development would not create an active frontage to Tudor Street. Mentioned is made earlier to this site's role as a mediator between the historic city centre and postwar gyratory, and Tudor Street is where the development needs to respond to the grain of the conservation area. The Tudor House, listed at Grade II*, is an outstanding 16th century survival which is compromised by the poor quality public realm ahead of it. They therefore regret that the proposed development does not take the opportunity to begin the re-establishment of some sense of streetscape on the west side of Tudor Street.

Of particular relevance to this case is NPPF paragraph 132, which notes that great weight should be given to the conservation of a heritage asset and *the more important the asset the greater the weight should be*. The City walls are scheduled Ancient Monuments, which are defined by NPPF paragraph 130 as *designated assets of the highest significance*.

NPPF paragraph 130 also notes that significance can be harmed by development in the setting of a heritage asset, and that any harm requires clear and convincing justification. In this context, they acknowledge that there is scope for significantly increasing the quantum of development on this site but do not consider that the current proposed arrangement of buildings is justified. Reducing the height of the proposed buildings flanking Renslade House but providing more development along Tudor Street might provide the same benefits but without harm to the historic environment.

The design policies of the NPPF are also relevant here. Paragraph 58 requires new developments to respond to local character and history and reflect the identity of local surroundings and materials. The proposals do not currently comply with this policy.

Historic England also remind the LPA of the need to preserve and enhance the character and appearance of a conservation area under the terms of the 1990 planning act. Views from the city walls are part of the character and appearance of the City Centre Conservation Area.

In summary, Historic England object to the proposed scheme and consider that amendments principally a reduction in height is necessary.

Environment Agency raise no objections to the proposal providing the development proceeds in accordance with the submitted Flood Risk Assessment.

Western Power comment on the siting of the existing sub station on the site which supplies Renslade House and the surrounding area. Any changes to the site will need to be reviewed before progressing.

Wales and West Utilities comment that it has pipes in the area. Their apparatus may be affected and at risk during construction works. Consequently if planning permission is granted the applicant is required to contact Wales and West Utilities directly to discuss their requirements in detail before any works commence on site.

South West Water raise no objection.

Environmental Health officer comments on the need for conditions in respect of contaminated land, the need for a Construction Environmental Management Plan and to comply with the submitted noise assessment report.

PLANNING POLICIES/POLICY GUIDANCE

Central Government Guidance - National Planning Policy Framework

- 4. Promoting sustainable transport
 - 7. Requiring good design
 - 8. Promoting healthy communities
 - 11. Conserving and enhancing the natural environment
 - 12. Conserving and enhancing the historic environment
- Plan making
Decision making

Exeter Local Development Framework Core Strategy

- CP2 - Retention of Employment Land or Premises
- CP5 - Student Accommodation
- CP15 - Sustainable Construction
- CP17 - Design and Local Distinctiveness

Exeter Local Plan First Review 1995-2011

- AP1 - Design and Location of Development
- AP2 - Sequential Approach
- H1 - Search Sequence
- H2 - Location Priorities

- H5 - Diversity of Housing

Relevant text- Student housing will be permitted provided that:

a) the scale and intensity of use will not harm the character of the building and locality and will not cause an unacceptable reduction in the amenity of neighbouring occupiers or result

in on-street parking problems;

b) the proposal will not create an overconcentration of the use in any one area of the city which would change the character or the neighbourhood or create an imbalance in the local community;

d) student accommodation is located so as to limit the need to travel to the campus by car

T1 - Hierarchy of Modes

T2 - Accessibility Criteria

T3 - Encouraging Use of Sustainable Modes

C5 - Archaeology

EN2 - Contaminated Land

EN5 - Noise

DG1 - Objectives of Urban Design

DG2 - Energy Conservation

DG7 - Crime Prevention and Safety

Development Delivery Development Plan Document (Publication Version) 2015

DD1 - Sustainable Development

DD7 - Allocated Housing Sites

DD12 - Purpose Built Student Accommodation

This policy seeks to protect residential amenity and to ensure that purpose built student accommodation is fit for purpose:

Purpose built student accommodation will be permitted provided the proposal:

a) respects, and contributes positively towards, the character and appearance of the area;

b) does not result in unacceptable harm to the amenity of neighbouring residents;

c) provides sufficient internal and external space for future occupiers;

d) makes appropriate provision for refuse storage, operational and disabled persons parking, servicing and cycle parking;

e) reduces the need to travel and would not cause unacceptable transport impacts; and,

f) is accompanied by a suitable Management Plan secured by planning obligation to demonstrate how the property will be managed in the long term.

DD13 - Residential Amenity

DD20 - Sustainable Movement

DD21 - Parking

DD25 - Design Principles

DD26 - Designing Out Crime

DD28 - Heritage Assets

DD34 - Pollution

Exeter City Council Supplementary Planning Documents:-

Sustainable Transport March 2013

Development Related to the University June 2007

Riverside Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan - September 2005

Central Conservation Area (West Quarter: Friernhay and Fore Street) Appraisal - August 2002.

OBSERVATIONS

The application seeks redevelopment alongside of one of the most recognisable buildings (Renslade House) and prominent sites (opposite Exe Bridges) in Exeter. The proposal is a

major development with the introduction of 387 student units within two buildings 11 and 10 storeys in height. Clearly such substantial buildings will have a significant impact on the character and appearance of the area, particularly within its historic setting. The report will assess the principle of the student use for this site; the proposed design principles; the building's impact on historic assets in the area; its appropriateness to neighbouring residential uses and acceptability in highway terms.

Student Use

The principle of student accommodation in a City Centre location is supported by the Core Strategy and the publicised version of the Development Delivery Development Plan Document subject to certain criteria. Policy CP5 of the Core Strategy states that purpose built student accommodation should be provided to meet housing need. In paragraph 6.28 it states that *'75% or more of additional student numbers should be accommodated in purpose built student housing. New purpose built student housing should be located on, or close to, the University campuses, at sustainable locations at or near to major transport routes, or in the City Centre'*.

Whilst the site is relatively divorced from the University campus, the applicant has submitted a Transport Assessment which provides details of available transport modes and in particular given its student use, the cycle and bus routes. However it is considered that the site does provide a suitable city centre location, which subject to highway issues relating to the provision of a new footbridge would represent an appropriate site which meets the relevant development plan policies.

Although some concern has been raised regarding the need for additional purpose built student accommodation in the city, the University's plans for growth means that significantly more additional bedrooms will still be needed by 2018/19 and therefore opportunities for new purpose built accommodation should be welcomed on appropriate sites. Indeed it could be argued that accommodating more students in this area would relieve the pressure for purpose built student accommodation within the residential areas closer to the University, such as St James. Consequently it is considered that, in principle, the site represents a suitable location for student accommodation use.

Design Principles

Whilst the scheme raises a number of issues the most fundamental one is the building's impact in terms of its height, scale and massing on the character and appearance of the area both within the general streetscene and within its historical context. It is evident from the information provided in support of the application and attendance at two Devon and Somerset Design Panel that the applicant has demonstrated a willingness to undertake the necessary design appraisal which a scheme of this scale requires. It is noted that the scheme has been amended to respond to the points raised by both the Design Panel and more recently Historic England. However the comments of the two Design Panel feedback responses did highlight differences of views and demonstrates the difficulty in designing a building of this magnitude for this site.

The applicant's intention to renovate the existing building for office use is to be welcomed, as it accepted that the 'tired' interior, as stated in the supporting statement, has a detrimental impact on attracting new tenants. The proposed works do not seek to change the external appearance of the existing building, which is disappointing given its existing appearance. Consequently as the works relate solely to internal refurbishment, this element of the scheme does not require planning permission. The supporting statement states that the demolition of the lower wings either side of the main tower block and replacement with student accommodation will help finance the refurbishment works, and whilst a planning condition or

obligation could be imposed to ensure this is carried out, this is not a significant factor for the planning assessment given the extensive additional floor space and size of building being proposed.

The applicant's design rationale is that the existing building would benefit from additional buildings to '*...enhance the composition of the existing Renslade House development ...that allows the proposed development to be read as a whole but offering an independence that will facilitate enhancements or development of the existing tower in the future*'. Whilst this rationale is understood, it is not accepted as the correct approach for this site. Given the objections raised and public perception generally it is clear that Renslade House is seen as an unattractive building which is out of character with its immediate setting characterised by low level buildings stepping up the slope. The introduction of two building essentially the same height as the existing Renslade House would create a significant change to the townscape for this area of the city and for visitors approaching the City from the south. The resultant appearance will, it is considered, further emphasise the incongruous appearance of the existing tower in this location when viewed against the characteristic stepped townscape typical of this part of the City. Indeed it is considered that rather than helping to visually integrate the existing building into the streetscape it will substantially add to the inappropriate built form that already exists. Whilst gaps are retained between the existing and proposed building these are considered minimal given the scale of the building and will lead to a significant expanse of the resultant built form, which will be viewed from many parts of the city. In addition, it is not considered that the applicant has demonstrated that the design and materials proposed adequately explains why this particular approach has been taken to meet the need for a locally distinctive development for this site. Given the prominent location of the site a very clear design approach is needed to create a acceptable scheme, which this scheme fails to achieve.

Historic Impact of the Development on Heritage Assets

The application needs to be assessed against its impact on the settings of designated Heritage Assets. For this scheme the heritage assets include the City Wall, the medieval Exe Bridge & St Edmund's Church (scheduled monuments); the Cathedral and the church of St Michael and All Angels on Mount Dinham (both Listed grade I); the Tudor House, Eagle House, Buildings along Bartholomew Terrace, Exe Bridge balustrades and arch at the lower end of New Bridge St (all Listed Grade II or II*); and the Riverside & Central Conservation Areas. The impact of the proposed development is principally on the ability to appreciate and understand the particular character and significance of those designated assets within whose settings the development can be considered to fall. In particular, on the ability to appreciate and understand both their immediate and broader settings and context and how they relate to the topography of the city and to each other. Several viewpoints have been used in order to assess the potential impact of the proposed development on the settings of these assets. Whilst the development will have an impact on all these heritage assets only the ones which would experience the most significant impact are highlighted. For example, the impact of the development on the Cathedral is minimal, and this has been accepted by Historic England. The impact on the Heritage assets are assessed in terms of their relative importance.

Whilst there will clearly be a physical impact on undesignated asset, principally buried archaeological remains, this is considered acceptable subject to a planning condition ensuring the completion of a programme of archaeological works.

Impact on the City Wall (Scheduled Monument)

The development lies within the broader setting of the section of city wall along Bartholomew Terrace. This section is one of the best examples of where the setting of the city wall, and through it's fundamental significance and role both as a defensive barrier and viewpoint, and

as a visible deterrence and statement, can be appreciated and understood. The retention of views out from the wall are crucial to the understanding and appreciation of its role as a defensive work, built to command the ground in front, and as a lookout point as part of that role. The retention of views in towards it are also crucial to the understanding and appreciation of its role and siting as a defensive work and as a visual deterrent.

It is considered that the setting of the scheduled city wall is already damaged by the presence of the current Renslade House block. This damage would be increased threefold by the addition of new blocks of similar height and mass to each side, and would amount to major additional harm to the setting of the city wall as it will have a major detrimental effect on the ability to appreciate and understand the significance of the wall and its location, both from views out from, and in towards, the wall. The attempted mitigation of this harm by retaining glimpsed views in between the three new buildings is not considered sufficient and the major harm caused to views in towards the city wall is not addressed.

View out from Bartholomew Terrace

This view is already compromised by the dominance of the existing tower block of Renslade House. At present this is mitigated to some extent by the ability to view the hills and horizon to each side of it. The addition of two more large and high blocks to each side of the present one will greatly increase the visual dominance of the Renslade House complex and will block off views to the west and south-west, although the view to the north west will still be available. The glimpses of horizon left between the buildings will be no more than incidental with the view dominated by the three tower blocks.

View in from the western bank of the river/Okehampton Street

Currently the view of the city wall from the Exe Bridges crossing is blocked off by Renslade House, except for a small glimpse of some of the buildings on Bartholomew Terrace just above the present, lower, northern block of it. However when viewed from along Okehampton Street, the view of the city wall becomes clearer, above the present northern wing of Renslade House, together with that of the houses along the terrace above, and the spire of the church on Mount Dinham. This view will be completely blocked by the proposed new northern block of Renslade House, and will only again be possible some distance to the north, level with the northern end of the new wing. Even here, the presence of the greater mass of the new Renslade House in the right foreground, and other roofscapes such as of Fitness First, will still act to dominate the view and obscure the line of the city wall behind.

Impact on Church of St Michaels and All Angels, Mount Dinham (Grade I)

Many churches were deliberately built to be seen from some distance away, hence the towers and spires that most have. Although some distance from the development site, the tower and spire of this church are clearly visible in views from the western bank of the river up from Exe Bridge, punctuating the horizon above Bartholomew Terrace and the city wall, although the view of it from Exe Bridge itself is blocked off by the present Renslade House. The construction of the new northern block will substantially block off these views, with the latter only becoming possible some way further to the north. The dominance of the spire on the skyline will be in turn dominated by the large mass and height of the new Renslade tower block in the right foreground. The development is therefore considered to add to the harm to the setting of the church that has already been caused by the present Renslade House.

Impact on Tudor House (Grade II) & Eagle House (Grade II)*

These buildings are located directly across the road from the development site. Currently the immediate setting of these buildings across the road consists of the wide rear entrance to the Renslade House site, with some soft landscaping on either side of it, the present south wing

of Renslade House set back from the street frontage, and the featureless expanse of the rear elevation of the Fitness First building.

The construction of a large and high new block on the footprint of the northern wing will by its size and massing visually dominate the views up and down Tudor Street, and will also dominate by its scale the historic buildings opposite. Although ameliorated to some extent by the proposed new landscaping and the glazed extension at the Tudor Street end, the latter still appears (at 4 – 5 storeys) to be higher than the historic buildings opposite. Whilst the reflection of images of the buildings opposite may add interest to the street scene, it is no replacement for the actual physical reconstruction or repair of the street frontage here, in a manner that respects the historic buildings opposite and enhances their settings by doing so. In conclusion, it is considered that the impact on the settings of these heritage assets could therefore be deemed as neutral.

Buildings along Bartholomew Terrace (Grade II)

Most of these are relatively high status 18th century that present their main elevations to the west, overlooking the city wall parapet and with extensive views to the west. The availability and attractiveness of the latter views clearly contribute to the presence of such buildings in this location, and in this regard their topographic location and the availability of views out from, and to some extent in towards them, contributes to the understanding and appreciation of why they are sited where they are. By blocking out views to the south west and west horizons, and by blocking out the views of the terrace from Exe Bridges and the western bank of the river, the new development will make it more difficult to fully appreciate the contribution their topographic location makes towards their significance and character, and the new blocks will therefore add to the harm to the broader setting of these buildings that has already been caused by the present Renslade House.

The Riverside Conservation Area

This lies on the floodplain, below the walled historic city on the hillside and spur above, and adjacent to the river. Its significance and remaining character derives from it historically being the port and industrial/service area of the city, from the late medieval period up until after World War II.

To the north of New Bridge Street some signs of this character survive along Tudor Street, in the form of the medieval Higher Leat, some former industrial buildings such as the Old Mill and Stables, and the buildings to the rear of Tudor House and Eagle House, but the prevalent character within this part of the conservation area is now residential. The boundary of the conservation area lies along Tudor Street. This is dominated on its south west boundary by the mass of Renslade House and of the Fitness First building, and there is no defined street frontage on the south west side of Tudor Street. The addition of a further large buildings to each side of Renslade House would inevitably due to their size and massing act to enhance this domineering effect. The proposed reflective finish (to mirror Tudor House/Eagle House opposite) and the landscaping may make this immediate area more visually attractive, but is no substitute for repairing or reinstating the street frontage. In conclusion, it is considered that the impact on the immediate setting of this heritage asset could therefore be deemed as neutral.

Currently it is possible to appreciate from views from across the river north of Exe Bridges the topographic location and character of the conservation area, and how it sits on the floodplain below the city wall and the Central Conservation Area above, and to catch glimpses of the converted industrial and new build residential buildings along Tudor Street. The construction of a much higher northern block, which extends further north than the present footprint, will block off the view of the Riverside Conservation Area (and its

relationship with the townscape above) from the river, and even where it is possible to glimpse the buildings behind from further north upriver, it will dominate that view. The effect will be of a wall, or barrier, completely blanking out the Riverside and Central Conservation Areas, and the city wall, behind, and dominating virtually any view of the city from the western side of the river.

As it will no longer be possible to as easily appreciate the significance of the Riverside Conservation Area as the city's old riverside port and industrial area, fundamental to which is its location sitting below the city wall and the historic city above, it is considered that the proposed development will substantially increase the harm to the broader setting of the conservation area already caused by the present Renslade House.

Central Conservation Area

This is defined by the city wall, and lies on the hill side above the development site. Its historic character, still capable of being discerned from various viewpoints from across the river, including from immediately north of Exe bridge, is one of a historic walled city on a spur rising above the flood plain, with a varied roofscape formed by the listed buildings along Bartholomew Terrace and the later residential development along Bartholomew Street to the south, with the roofs of other buildings behind. In several views the tower and spire of the Grade I listed Mount Dinham church (located within the St David's Conservation Area) dominates the skyline.

Currently, although partly obscured and visually dominated by the present Renslade House, particularly from the direction of Exe Bridges, it is still possible to view the Central Conservation Area, fronted by the city wall, on the hillside above the lower northern wing of Renslade House, and also above the southern wing. However, the height and massing of the new proposed blocks to each side will create a massive visual barrier that cuts off the view of the conservation area and this part of the walled city from the historic and current approach to the city from the west, including of the city wall and of the varied roofscape that characterises it, and of the view of the church on Mount Dinham, and will therefore act to divorce the conservation area from its riverside and waterfront context and from the western approaches to it. It is therefore considered that the much greater height and massing of the two new blocks would substantially increase the harm to the broader setting of the Central Conservation Area already caused by the present Renslade House.

Impact of residential amenities

The relationship of the site to the road network and the siting of the new accommodation away from residential properties in Frog Street would limit the perceived potential impact the student use would have on local residents. In addition, the plans indicate that an on-site management presence would be maintained at all time, which given the size of the proposed development is to be expected. A student management plan would be required as part of the Section 106 Agreement if planning permission is granted, to control such things as safety and security matters, arrivals/departments arrangements as well as providing local residents with contact details for potential student disturbance issue if they were to arise. It is considered that the site does provide a suitable location for student accommodation in terms of its impact on residential amenity.

Highway Issues

Whilst the site is close to the City Centre concern is raised regarding pedestrian access as this would be achieved via Fore Street and New Bridge Street and the stair which access/exits onto the southern side of Frog Street. Clearly this is the 'wrong' side of the road to directly serve Renslade House and the applicant had originally indicated a pedestrian

crossing over Frog Street However following discussion between the applicant's Highway Consultant and County Highway Officer an agreement has been reached to provides new steps from New Bridge Street, as part of the proposed scheme. This can be controlled by a planning condition and the pedestrian arrangement serving this site is therefore considered to be acceptable. In addition, the Highway Officer has assessed the proposal in terms of the reduction in the proposed on site parking spaces from 133 to 50 but considers that given the use and adoption of a suitable parking management plan this loss of parking spaces would be acceptable. In summary, the Highway Officer considers that the development will result in a significant number of new pedestrian and cycle trips. To cater for this additional demand, the development proposes new links and on site facilities and new steps to address deficiencies in the existing route to New Bridge Street. These facilities are considered acceptable and subject to conditions to secure these, the Travel Plan and construction management arrangements, the highway authority has no objection to the proposed development.

Summary

Whilst the principle of student use in this location is appropriate, the overall height, scale, massing and design approach is considered to be unacceptable. In particular it is consider that the proposed building will have a detrimental impact on the townscape and in particular on nearby heritage assets resulting in a dominant series of buildings which will accentuate the incongruous visual appearance already created by the Renslade House building. Consequently although it recognised that the scheme would provide a significant number of student units as required by Core Strategy CP5 it would fail to safeguard heritage assets in the area and meet the principles of good design as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework, Core Strategy CP17 and Local Plan Policy C1, C2 and DG1.

DELEGATION BRIEFING

8 December 2015 - Members were advised that since the pre-submission public consultation the scheme had been amended to provide increased gaps between the existing and proposed buildings and to include glazing to the inner ends of each tower to give the perception of greater separation between the buildings. These changes were made following discussion with Historic England who had commented on the importance of the maintaining viewpoints to and from the City Walls to reflect its historic significance. In addition, Historic England raised concern about the impact of the buildings on the Grade II * listed building on Tudor Street.

A key issue would be the visual appearance of the two new building alongside an existing building which was considered to be atypical of the cityscape. Members considered that an important consideration would be in respect of the views when approaching the City Centre from Exe Bridges and from that side of the river generally. Concern was raised that it might give the impression of an approach to the City that was over dominated by student accommodation. In addition regard would also need to be had to the impact on the Central Conservation Area and whether the scheme altered the setting of the historic City given the height, scale and massing of the new buildings.

It was commented that the redevelopment of this site would be beneficial to the lower end of the City Centre together with providing student accommodation in this area of the City which could reduce pressure of this use on other parts of the city.

It was noted that at important consideration would be the accessibility of the site from existing footpath and cycle path links to the University. However there was concern that existing linkage to the City Centre via Fore Street/Western Way which could result in pedestrian safety issues. The views of the Highway officer were therefore considered to be

essential on this issue.

9 February 2016 - Members were advised that the scheme had been amended with different elevational treatments, provision of increased gaps between the existing and proposed buildings and the inclusion of glazing to the inner ends of each tower to give the perception of greater separation between the buildings. The frontage on Tudor Street would be glazed and be lower in height to address the historic context of this street. The provision of a footbridge from Lower Bridge Street was technically feasible but would require the acquisition of land and this was not part of the proposed application. Members echoed the concerns of Historic England regarding the scale and massing and an important consideration would be in respect of the views when approaching the City Centre from Exe Bridges and from that side of the river generally and when viewed from the City Wall. Concern was raised that allied to the existing structure as well as the proposed student block on the Radmore and Tucker site the overall impact would be overwhelming.

RECOMMENDATION