



Weston Tower
West Bar Green, Sheffield

Preliminary Planning Brief

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Client: Citizen Living
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WESTON TOWER, WEST BAR GREEN, SHEFFIELD

Preliminary Planning Brief

1.0 Introduction

Purpose of Document

- 1.1 Since it was last in active use much of the area surrounding Weston Tower has changed significantly, but in spite of various periods of potential development the site itself has remained untouched. The site remains significant in its scale and development potential and as such there remains significant interest in bringing it forward for development; due to this, an initial process of investigation into its redevelopment is being commenced in order to inform its potential regeneration.
- 1.2 This report has therefore been prepared by Urbana Town Planning Ltd on behalf of Citizen Living in order to help inform this process, by setting out the general context with respect to planning and planning policy.
- 1.3 Alongside providing the crucial planning background and context, the key objective of this document is also to make an informed assessment of the site's development potential in order to inform and advise on how it might best be taken forward into the formal planning process.

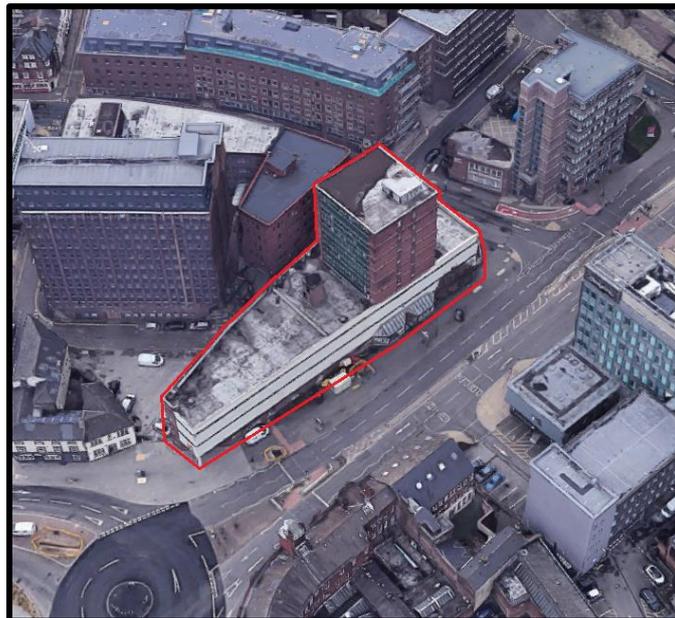
Site and Location



- 1.4 As highlighted above within the wider urban context, the site in question is positioned within the northern part of Sheffield City Centre. It is situated just outside the Furnace Hill Conservation Area, which begins at the adjacent 81-89 West Bar

(north-east of the site) and crosses West Bar Green extending to the north-west almost to Netherthorpe Rd, covering much of the area between that location, the site, Scotland St and the Inner Relief Road. Further to the west between Tenter St/Broad Ln and Netherthorpe Rd is the 'St Vincents Quarter', an area of the City Centre that has seen very significant redevelopment in the past 10-15 years, focused predominantly on Purpose-Built Student Accommodation. A large amount of construction and planning activity continues in this area with a notable shift away from PBSA and towards both traditional apartment schemes and 'Build to Rent' / 'PRS' proposals. This is also the case, though to a lesser degree, in the general area to the east and south of the site, which in recent years has seen a large number of office-to-residential permitted development schemes come forward to 'recycle' older office space beginning to come to the end of its viable lifespan in that use.

- 1.5 The centre of retail and commercial activity in the City Centre sits approximately 5 minutes' walk away to the south, while approximately equally to the north/north-west is the extremely popular Kelham Island district (an award-winning neighbourhood). The whole of the site in question covers an area of approximately 0.15 hectares as approximately indicated by the red line in the images above and below.



- 1.6 The current building on the site was constructed in the 1960s for office use, a use that it remained in before becoming vacant now over two decades ago. The existing building 'fills out' the site, which is of a slightly awkward shape, and the building itself is reflective of its time of construction in terms of architectural style and appearance, presenting a relatively imposing frontage to the street scene with very little activity even if it was occupied. It extends up to 9 storeys in height.

- 1.7 More generally the location is extremely sustainable in terms of its accessibility and public transport options, as evident from the number and variety of services and amenities that are within very close walking distance. The site is within Sheffield City Centre and is only approximately 450m away from the very centre of the city (measured to the junction of Leopold St, Barker's Pool, Fargate and Pinstone St). Public transport options include a range of high frequency bus routes as well as Sheffield's Supertram network.

Relevant Planning History

- 1.8 There is a relatively small amount of historic planning activity on the site but what is available for public viewing is of relevance to potential future development, as set out below.
- 1.9 *06/00908/OUT – Grant Conditionally – Erection of a mixed use development comprising office (Use Class B1) and residential (Use Class C3) with ground floor restaurant/cafe bar (Use Class A3/A4) with associated parking and open space comprising a 23 storey tower (max) at the apex of the site fronting West Bar/West Bar Green with an 8 storey (max) block fronting Tenter Street and 10 Storey (max) fronting Queen Street*
- 1.10 This proposal for outline planning permission was granted conditionally and crucially allowed for the development of a tower of 23 storeys in height, which would have been –and still would be– among the tallest buildings in the city. In taking cues from this historic permission the context of the time (nearing the height of that period of 'boom') should be given some consideration, as should the fact that we are now in a very different planning policy context. However, while that means that a degree of caution is advisable it does not mean that development of similar or even greater height wouldn't be achievable. Overall this permission shouldn't be seen as a precedent but it most definitely represents a very good benchmark for the site.
- 1.11 *14/00840/ORPN – Prior Approval Not Required – Prior Notification of change of use of offices to 18 residential units (Class C3 – dwellings)*
- 1.12 This submission was relatively straightforward in that it represented a prior notification to the Council of a change of use from office to residential under permitted development rights. The outcome was a confirmation that separate prior approval was not required and this confirmed the acceptability of the change of use. No external alterations were proposed. For these reasons this is not considered to provide any particularly useful details to inform potential future development but does at least further indicate that the principle of a change to residential use will be acceptable.

2.0 Primary Planning Policy Context

2.1 In order to establish the planning policy context of the site in a way that is useful to potential proposals a careful understanding of the key planning considerations is necessary. The most relevant planning policy documents include the following:

- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
- Sheffield Adopted Core Strategy
The Core Strategy sets out principles to guide development on both a strategic and in some cases more detailed level. Where compliant with the NPPF full weight will be given to the policies contained within this document.
- Sheffield Unitary Development Plan (Policies consistent with NPPF)
The Unitary Development Plan (UDP) was adopted in 1998 and despite its age, elements of it still partly form Sheffield's adopted development plan. However, the weight afforded to the policies and designated land uses is relative to their degree of consistency with the NPPF.
- Sheffield Pre-Submission Draft City Policies and Sites (Withdrawn)
This document can only be afforded very limited weight but remains of some relevance when considering general change in the city and the direction of development between the adoption of the UDP and the publication of this document.
- Furnace Hill Conservation Area Appraisal
- Emerging Draft Sheffield Local Plan
Due to its stage of preparation, little weight can be afforded to the Emerging Draft Sheffield Plan, although the 'direction of travel' and some of the documents produced in support of the emerging Plan can be of relevance in certain cases, for example the Citywide Options for Growth to 2034 document.

Sustainable Development

2.2 The NPPF states that at the heart of this key document is a presumption in favour of sustainable development which is a fundamental consideration in the process of both plan-making and decision-taking. Sustainable development is defined by 3 core dimensions: economic, social and environmental. It is established that: "For decision taking this means: approving development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay."

2.3 With regard to the site in question this key consideration is relevant insofar as any future proposals may contribute towards sustainable development goals and whether there are any potential issues within a hypothetical application that might need an 'on balance' decision to be made. For instance, the public and/or sustainability benefits associated with delivering 'X' number of dwellings may need to be argued to outweigh and override perceived 'harm' associated with the scale

or design of a hypothetical scheme. In such a scenario the importance of achieving sustainable development would be crucial and a full understanding of this fundamental element of policy will be very important.

- 2.4 As previously introduced the site location is inherently sustainable in terms of its position within the City Centre and the services and amenities located there. Proposals that increase the residential population and densities more generally will contribute towards the ongoing growth of the locality and the City Centre itself, supporting its sustainable growth as per Sheffield City Council's aspirations.
- 2.5 The NPPF also discusses the social sustainability of developments, setting out the general requirement for development to accommodate a sufficient number and range of homes and house types to help meet the needs of present and future generations. This is reflected more specifically in Sheffield's Core Strategy Policy CS41, which states that in larger developments (60 or more dwellings) no more than half of the units should consist of a single type (type in this case meaning size and tenure). It is possible to argue for a degree of flexibility in this but it will need to be kept in mind as and when potential schemes are being considered. In circumstances in which it is necessary for more than half of proposed dwellings to be of a single type then justification in the form of local market demand data and also reasoning related to unavoidable physical constraints can be used to mitigate any perceived 'harm' caused by lack of policy compliance arising from this particular issue.
- 2.6 In terms of the broader sustainability of the site, the presence of the existing building and its brownfield status makes it highly suitable for effective redevelopment, as per the core planning principles of the NPPF. This is echoed by Sheffield's adopted Core Strategy in policy CS24, whereby priority is given to the redevelopment of previously developed land. In this case any sort of reuse is likely to be supported, however a wholesale redevelopment of the site that results in a more positive contribution to the environmental, economic and social sustainability of the area would be viewed even more positively.
- 2.7 Beyond this, on a more practical level relating to the delivery and construction of any proposals, Core Strategy Policies CS64 (Climate Change, Resources and Sustainable Design of Developments) and CS65 (Renewable Energy and Carbon Reduction) must be complied with. Together these policies establish the general requirements for development to achieve high environmental standards relating to energy efficiency, resource consumption (water materials, space, etc.), waste, renewables, etc. Therefore, generally speaking the following will need to be considered when it comes to satisfying these policies:
- Measures taken to ensure low carbon footprint/energy use as measured by SAP calculations.

- Meeting or bettering minimum requirements of Building Regulations as they relate to U-Values.
- Local sourcing of materials where possible.
- Internal goods/finishes etc. to be specified to meet or better BR requirements.
- Low energy construction techniques to be considered at the appropriate stage of detailed design.
- Renewable energy technologies to be considered and deployed as far as reasonably possible.

Land Use / Principle of Development

- 2.8 As set out in the Proposals Maps accompanying the adopted Unitary Development Plan, the site falls within a 'Business Area' within which a range of uses are acceptable but use class B1 Business uses are preferred. In spite of this, owing to the age of the UDP, the substantially changed site context and more recent policies reflecting these changes (such as elements of the Core Strategy), Businesses uses are no longer considered to be the priority in this location, though that does not exclude the potential for e.g. an office-led development, or an element of B1 space within a larger residential-led mixed use scheme.
- 2.9 Beyond this, the Council is increasingly coming to rely on the maps that formed part of the (abandoned) City Policies and Sites documents. In these maps the proposal site still falls within a Business Area designation which is suggested to have slightly greater flexibility of use and so, as indicated in the previous paragraph, residential or residential-led redevelopment would also be acceptable.

Design and Heritage

- 2.10 As established the site falls immediately adjacent to the Furnace Hill Conservation Area, the closest boundary of which incorporates the adjacent buildings to the east of the site fronting West Bar/West Bar Green and extends across the road to the north and north-west. This Conservation Area encompasses a relatively small number of listed buildings (including the Grade II listed 'West Bar Fire Station Museum' and 117 + 119 West Bar, opposite the site) as well as other key older buildings in the area that represent evidence of its industrial and manufacturing heritage. That being said, in assessing the site for development it must be considered that due to the size and shape of the conservation area much of it has relatively little relation to the Weston Tower site.
- 2.11 Another heritage issue that is likely to be considered by the LPA is the significance of, and the relationship of the site with, some of the more prominent historic buildings in the City Centre Conservation Area to the south. In particular it is likely that in the hypothetical case of a 'tall building'/tower scheme being brought forward through planning its intervisibility with and impact on views of Sheffield Cathedral will be a potential concern from design and conservation officers. Any interruption of key views is likely to be considered to cause a degree of harm to the significance of the heritage assets in question and therefore any proposals brought

forward will need to give consideration to this factor. This is not to say that this will create a particular limit to the height of any proposals, but it will be necessary to present very clear and convincing public benefits that outweigh the perception of alleged harm (if any) caused to the significance of the heritage assets in question. Quantifying degrees of harm and/or benefit in a planning argument can be a complicated process but it is certainly achievable, especially with appropriate heritage advice taken on board.

2.12 More generally in terms of relevant policy, sections 12 and 16 of the NPPF set out a series of criteria concerning the achievement of well-designed places while enhancing the historic environment. Namely, developments should aim to be visually attractive in terms of their architecture and layout as well as being sympathetic to the local character and history of their surroundings. Any proposals should optimise the potential of the site in question, creating welcoming and distinctive places to live and work.

2.13 Locally, Core Strategy Policy CS74 is highly relevant in establishing the suitability of new developments with respect to the building form and urban grain associated with townscape generally, but also with Sheffield's 'distinctive heritage'. This includes specifically buildings and areas associated with the metal trades and therefore relates to the nearby Furnace Hill area, though not specifically the site itself. With this in mind it will be important for any sort of development or redevelopment of the site to:

- i. Contribute to place-making, be of a high quality, that contributes to a healthy, safe and sustainable environment, that promotes the city's transformation;
- ii. Help to transform the character of physical environments that have become run down and are lacking in distinctiveness;
- iii. Enable all people to gain access safely and conveniently, providing, in particular, for the needs of families and children, and of disabled people and older people; and
- iv. Contribute towards creating attractive, sustainable and successful neighbourhoods.

2.14 Overall while there are certain constraints to keep in mind with regard to the design and heritage matters relating to the site the fact remains that it is extremely sustainably located at a 'gateway' and/or 'landmark' location on West Bar roundabout. Local political and policy momentum (especially in terms of the emerging Local Plan) continues to encourage greater height and greater density of development in suitable locations such as this and therefore it is considered that a very tall building on this site is likely to be acceptable subject to achieving a corresponding level of design quality.

Affordable Housing + CIL Contributions

- 2.15 Sheffield City Council adopted the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) in July 2015 in response to changes in national planning policy. The site falls within CIL Charging Zone 4 (City Centre + South) and therefore any residential proposals will require a CIL contribution of £50 per square metre on the gross internal floorspace of the net additional liable residential (C3) development. Existing floorspace in a lawful use for a continuous period of 6 months in the previous 36 months prior to submission of any application can be counted in the usual way to offset the overall figure.
- 2.16 SCC's guidance relating to the provision of Affordable Housing establishes that within this area there is nil expected contribution towards affordable housing provision.

Other Matters

- 2.17 Beyond the above fundamental parameters that will primarily dictate the use, form and scale of any potential scheme on the site, there are various other issues that will also need to be dealt with should more detailed progress into the planning process be continued into. In order to deal with these more technical matters the following supporting reports are likely to be required as part of a planning application for redevelopment of the site:
- Design and Access Statement
 - Planning Statement
 - Ecological Survey (with specific relation to bats due to state of building)
 - Noise Impact Assessment
 - Drainage/SuDS Statement
 - Phase 1 SI/Contamination Risk Assessment (Desk Top Study)
 - Coal Mining Risk Assessment
 - Heritage Impact Assessment
 - Transport Statement/Assessment + Travel Plan
 - Wind Microclimate Assessment (subject to scale of proposals)
 - Daylight/Sunlight Assessment (subject to scale of proposals)
- 2.18 In setting out the above it is not considered that these issues will necessarily present significant difficulties, or that particular challenges will need to be overcome to ensure acceptability from these different perspectives, but nevertheless they will need to be addressed.
- 2.19 It should also be kept in mind that, depending on the scale of any proposal (in terms of height, floor area and number of dwellings) it may be necessary to also submit a preliminary application to the Council seeking an Environmental Impact Assessment screening opinion.

3.0 Conclusions

- 3.1 As introduced, the purpose of this document is to establish the planning policy context of the site in question in order to help guide the thinking that informs schemes for its potential redevelopment. As set out there are various key planning policy considerations presented by the context of the site and these are likely to influence the form of any potential development in a variety of ways, and to different extents, depending on the approach taken and final scale and form of any proposals.
- 3.2 In terms of use there is a reasonably strong degree of flexibility in this case, and furthermore it is considered that in spite of certain policy constraints the merits of the site and its location are such that it is still suitable for redevelopment of a very significant scale and height.
- 3.3 With that being the case, we would advise any party that may be exploring options for redevelopment to be ambitious with relation to this site and to positively engage Sheffield City Council in a constructive pre-application discussion in order to achieve its potential.