

ITEM 1

Application Reference	DC/068017
Location:	Former Sorting Office 1 Exchange Street Stockport SK1 1AA
PROPOSAL:	Full application for the conversion and external alterations to Stockport Sorting Office to accommodate 117 apartments over five storeys, 943 sqm of B1 office floorspace and 211 sqm of A3, A4 or A5 floorspace or a combination of such over lower ground and ground floors.
Type Of Application:	Full Application
Registration Date:	08.12.2017
Expiry Date:	14.02.2018
Case Officer:	Chris Smyton
Applicant:	Mr David Chilton, Rowlinsons Constructions Ltd / Housing Capital Trust
Agent:	Mr Leon Armstrong, Mosaic Town Planning

DELEGATION/COMMITTEE STATUS

The application is to be determined by the Planning and Highways Regulation Committee.

DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT

This application seeks full planning permission for the conversion and external alterations to the former Stockport Sorting Office to accommodate 117 apartments over five storeys, and 943 sqm of B1 office floorspace and 211 sqm of A3, A4 or A5 floorspace (or a combination of such) over lower ground and ground floors. One affordable unit is proposed.

The scheme involves various amendments and alterations to the building, including removal of two external stairwells, recladding, insertion of additional floors, creation of an atrium within the middle of the building and formation of a basement car park. The new proposal is based around the original framework of the building. As it stands the existing building had double height spaces (three floors) to the front part of the building which originally worked as the 'working' sorting office floor. Taking into account the basement and the double height spaces this part of the building is 6 storeys high. To the back of the building were the offices which consist of

seven floors, including the basement. This part of the building is seven storeys high. The main stairs cores and lift overruns are two storeys higher than this. There is also a plant room on top of the office block. To create the apartments, the office floors would be completed and run through the whole of the building, eliminating the double height spaces. The fourth floor is to be completed across the whole building and a fifth floor added (which is no higher than the existing plant room). The main stair core height has been retained. The stair cores to the Wellington Road Elevation and the main stair and lift core to Exchange Street are to be removed. The main stair and lift core to Station Road will be refurbished with an addition of a new lift. The secondary stair core to Exchange Street will be retained and refurbished. For comparison purposes, the existing building is shown super-imposed over the top of the proposed building with a dotted red line on the submitted elevation plans.

The basement remains as parking, with access to be taken from the existing road off Exchange Street. The scheme includes:

- 1) 17 parking spaces for disabled badge holders
- 2) 3 parking spaces with electric charging points
- 3) 11 standard parking spaces
- 4) 5 parking spaces for powered two-wheelers (motorcycles etc.)
- 5) Secure cycle parking for 120 cycles (within 3 storage areas)
- 6) 3 external cycle stands for visitor cycle parking.

Bin storage is proposed to be provided in the basement

The lower ground floor and ground floor both consist of 11 no. apartments, as well as retail and office space which fronts onto Station Road and Wellington Road South. Access to the apartments will be at ground floor level off Station Road. The lower ground floor retail access will be off Wellington Road South, and the ground floor office access off Station Road.

From first to fifth Floor each floor consists of 19 no. apartments.

The whole building consists of 117 no. apartments, 91 no. one bedroom apartments and 26 no. two bedroom apartments.

To the former administrative part of the building, which fronts the adjacent British Telecom building, an inset balcony has been introduced which increases distances from the apartments to the adjacent buildings and offers greater views out of the apartments and greater privacy.

At first floor an open atrium is introduced. This will be landscaped on each floor to create communal areas for the residents to use. The floor cuts at each level will be different to animate the space. As this is an open space the internal walkways leading to the apartments will be treated as external spaces.

The proposed building consists of different types of elevation treatments that are best appreciated by reference to the submitted plans and visuals. A key feature of

the elevations are 'Living Walls' (Green Walls) to be provided to the corner of Wellington Road and Exchange Street, the stairwell/ lift shaft fronting Station Road and wrapping around the north west corner of the building facing Exchange Street and the British Telecom building.

The site will be serviced via the existing servicing layby on Exchange Street (which will be slightly amended as part of the development). Swept-path analysis demonstrates that it will be able to accommodate a large refuse vehicle, as well as other large rigid HGVs. Bins will be transported from the bin store in the basement by the building manager on collection day. Deliveries to the commercial units will be via the footway. Given the size of the commercial units, it is considered that large deliveries will not be required.

The application includes the provision of a cycleway for the full length of Exchange Street. This has been agreed to by the applicant, and will be secured by planning condition.

SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

The 0.22ha site is located on Wellington Road South which is the main road running through Stockport Town Centre. The former Sorting Office occupies a prominent position along the A6 adjacent to Stockport mainline railway station, opposite Stockport Local Heritage Library and The Garrick Theatre and in close proximity to The Hat Works Museum. The site is situated near to Stockport Train Station, The Bus Station and local amenities within Stockport Town Centre. The former Sorting Office is not a heritage asset but is located within the setting of the Grade II Central Library building, the St Peters Conservation Area and 2 locally listed buildings (the former Unity and Cobdens/ Manchester Arms public houses).

The Sorting Office was closed in 2010 and has remained vacant ever since.

This site boundary is made up of three roads, Wellington Road South (A6) to the North East, Station Road leading to Stockport Railway Station to the South West and Exchange Street to the North West. There is an existing British Telecom building to the South West of the site.

The site has a level difference of approximately six metres with the highest point being the South corner of the building on Station Road. The site gently slopes down around the building. The level difference means that the part of the building is 'underground' on one elevation and above ground on the opposite elevation.

The building footprint is surrounded by a footpath with a lay-by for deliveries off Exchange Street.

The site is located in the TCG3.2 Area of Stockport Town Centre. It is also in a designated Air Quality Management Area.

POLICY BACKGROUND

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires applications/appeals to be determined in accordance with the Statutory Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The Statutory Development Plan includes:-

- Policies set out in the Stockport Unitary Development Plan Review (SUDP) adopted 31st May 2006 which have been saved by direction under paragraph 1(3) of Schedule 8 to the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004; &
- Policies set out in the Stockport Local Development Framework Core Strategy Development Plan Document (CS) adopted 17th March 2011.

N.B. Due weight should be given to relevant SUDP and CS policies according to their degree of consistency with the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) issued on 27th March 2012 (the closer the policies in the plan to the policies in the Framework, the greater the weight that may be given); and how the policies are expected to be applied is outlined within the Planning Practice Guidance ('PPG') launched on 6th March 2014.

Saved policies of the SUDP Review

TCG3.2: Cultural, Leisure and Heritage Quarter

LDF Core Strategy/Development Management policies

CS1: OVERARCHING PRINCIPLES: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT - ADDRESSING INEQUALITIES AND CLIMATE CHANGE

SD-1: Creating Sustainable Communities

SD-3: Delivering the Energy Opportunities Plans – New Development

SD-6: Adapting to the Impacts of Climate Change

CS2: HOUSING PROVISION

CS3: MIX OF HOUSING

CS4: DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSING

H-1: Design of Residential Development

H-2: Housing Phasing

H-3: Affordable Housing

CS5: ACCESS TO SERVICES

CS6: SAFEGUARDING AND STRENGTHENING THE SERVICE CENTRE HIERARCHY

AS-1: The Vitality and Viability of Stockport's Service Centres

CS7: ACCOMMODATING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

AED-6: Employment Sites Outside Protected Employment Areas

CS8: SAFEGUARDING AND IMPROVING THE ENVIRONMENT

SIE-1: Quality Places

SIE-2: Provision of Recreation and Amenity Open Space in New Developments

SIE-3: Protecting, Safeguarding and Enhancing the Environment
CS9: TRANSPORT AND DEVELOPMENT
CS10: AN EFFECTIVE AND SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT NETWORK
T-1: Transport and Development
T-2: Parking in Developments
T-3: Safety and Capacity on the Highway Network

Conformity with the Framework

The Planning Advisory Services' National Planning Policy Framework Compatibility Self-Assessment Checklist has been undertaken on Stockport's adopted Core Strategy. This document assesses the conformity of Stockport's adopted Core Strategy with the more recently published Framework and takes account of saved policies from the Unitary Development Plan where applicable. No significant differences were identified.

The Framework

Paragraph 6 states: *"The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development"*.

Paragraph 7 states: *"There are three dimensions to sustainable development: economic, social and environmental"*.

Paragraph 11 states: *"Planning law requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise"*.

Paragraph 13 states: *"The National Planning Policy Framework constitutes guidance for local planning authorities and decision-takers both in drawing up plans and as a material consideration in determining applications"*

Paragraph 14 states: *"At the heart of the National Planning Policy Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which should be seen as a golden thread running through both plan-making and decision-taking"*.

For decision-taking this means (unless material considerations indicate otherwise):

- *approving development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay; and*
- *where the development plan is absent, silent or relevant policies are out-of-date, granting permission unless:
i) any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole; or ii) specific policies in this Framework indicate development should be restricted"*.

Paragraph 17 states: *“Within the overarching roles that the planning system ought to play, a set of core land-use planning principles should underpin both plan-making and decision-taking. These 12 principles are that planning should:*

- *be genuinely plan-led, empowering local people to shape their surroundings, with succinct local and neighbourhood plans setting out a positive vision for the future of the area. Plans should be kept up-to-date, and be based on joint working and co-operation to address larger than local issues. They should provide a practical framework within which decisions on planning applications can be made with a high degree of predictability and efficiency;*
- *not simply be about scrutiny, but instead be a creative exercise in finding ways to enhance and improve the places in which people live their lives;*
- *proactively drive and support sustainable economic development to deliver the homes, business and industrial units, infrastructure and thriving local places that the country needs. Every effort should be made objectively to identify and then meet the housing, business and other development needs of an area, and respond positively to wider opportunities for growth. Plans should take account of market signals, such as land prices and housing affordability, and set out a clear strategy for allocating sufficient land which is suitable for development in their area, taking account of the needs of the residential and business communities;*
- *always seek to secure high quality design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings;*
- *take account of the different roles and character of different areas, promoting the vitality of our main urban areas, protecting the Green Belts around them, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving rural communities within it;*
- *support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate, taking full account of flood risk and coastal change, and encourage the reuse of existing resources, including conversion of existing buildings, and encourage the use of renewable resources (for example, by the development of renewable energy);*
- *contribute to conserving and enhancing the natural environment and reducing pollution. Allocations of land for development should prefer land of lesser environmental value, where consistent with other policies in this Framework;*
- *encourage the effective use of land by reusing land that has been previously developed (brownfield land), provided that it is not of high environmental value;*

- *promote mixed use developments, and encourage multiple benefits from the use of land in urban and rural areas, recognising that some open land can perform many functions (such as for wildlife, recreation, flood risk mitigation, carbon storage, or food production);*
- *conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of this and future generations;*
- *actively manage patterns of growth to make the fullest possible use of public transport, walking and cycling, and focus significant development in locations which are or can be made sustainable; and*
- *take account of and support local strategies to improve health, social and cultural wellbeing for all, and deliver sufficient community and cultural facilities and services to meet local needs”.*

Paragraph 49 states *“Housing applications should be considered in the context of the presumption in favour of sustainable development. Relevant policies for the supply of housing should not be considered up-to-date if the local planning authority cannot demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites”.*

Paragraph 187 states *“Local planning authorities should look for solutions rather than problems, and decision-takers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible. Local planning authorities should work proactively with applicants to secure developments that improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area”.*

Paragraph 196 states *“The planning system is plan-led. Planning law requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. This Framework is a material consideration in planning decisions”.*

Paragraph 197 states *“In assessing and determining development proposals, local planning authorities should apply the presumption in favour of sustainable development”.*

Paragraph 215 states *“.....due weight should be given to relevant policies in existing plans according to their degree of consistency with this framework (the closer the policies in the plan to the policies in the Framework, the greater the weight that may be given)”.*

Supplementary Planning Guidance

Supplementary Planning Guidance (Saved SPG's & SPD's) does not form part of the Statutory Development Plan; nevertheless it does provide non-statutory Council

approved guidance that is a material consideration when determining planning applications

'Recreational Open Space and Commuted Payments' SPG (adopted July 2006), 'Town Centre Housing' SPD (adopted May 2008), 'Sustainable Design and Construction' SPD (adopted April 2012), 'The Design of Residential Development' SPD (adopted December 2007), 'Transport & Highways in Residential Areas' (adopted September 2006), 'Sustainable Transport SPD' (adopted December 2007), Town Centre Masterplan SPD (adopted February 2005).

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

None.

NEIGHBOUR'S VIEWS

The owner/occupiers of 32 neighbouring properties have been notified by letter of the proposal. The application has also been advertised on site and in the press as a major development affecting the setting of a Listed Building and a Conservation Area. The consultation period has expired.

No representations have been received.

CONSULTEE RESPONSES

Conservation Officer – No objections. Whilst some modifications to the massing of the building are proposed, it will remain a relatively monolithic structure in the street scene and dominant in views along Wellington Road South, Exchange Street and Station Road. Providing care is taken in the selection of external cladding materials and fenestration, any harmful impact upon the setting of heritage assets should remain unchanged and could result in a minor improvement to the existing visual inter-relationships

Drainage Engineer – The drainage solution for this site is presently unresolved and discussions are continuing with the applicant. In the event this remains unresolved when the application is determined, conditions can be applied to the development.

Environmental Health Officer (Air Quality) – No objections. I have looked at this application and assessed the air quality report submitted. I can agree with the findings of the report and as such have no objections to the development. I would however recommend that a dust mitigation scheme is submitted for approval for the construction phase prior to the development commencing.

Environmental Health Officer (Contaminated Land) – No objections. I have reviewed the Phase 2 report which was submitted with the application, the report states that there may be a buried tank, if this is the case it will need removing and any impacted soils testing. As such could I request the CTM3 condition so they can provide evidence if required.

Environmental Health Officer (Pollution Prevention) – No objections. I have assessed the development for mixed use residential/commercial use and I do not object to it. The applicant has provided a noise report which assesses noise and vibration from a number of sources road, rail, fixed plant and new plant. The report advises that recommended Internal noise levels can be met, however each façade will need a different specification of windows to be able to meet the internal noise levels and a ventilation scheme.

The report also assesses the need for insulation between the residential and commercial element of the development and the applicant has provided a scheme to protect future residential from the commercial element of the development.

Highway Engineer – No objections.

Comments 02/05/18

I write with reference to the revised drawing (P4831_P02 Rev M 'Proposed Floor Plans – Sheet 1) submitted in response to my comments of the 11th April 2018. I note that the scheme has been amended, with the aim of addressing the issues I had raised with respect to parking. The scheme now includes:

1. 17 parking spaces for disabled badge holders
2. 3 parking spaces with electric charging points
3. 11 standard parking spaces
4. 5 parking spaces for powered two-wheelers (motorcycles etc.)
5. Secure cycle parking for 120 cycles (within 3 storage areas)
6. 3 external cycle stands for visitor cycle parking

This level of parking is in line with the adopted parking standards (accepting that the office and retail uses will share the disabled parking of the residential use as they are likely to generate demand at different times). The form of the parking is generally acceptable (there will be a need to agree full details of the parking, such as the design of the cycle stores, and I would recommend that the ground floor store is split into two smaller stores or have additional security measures, such as CCTV). As such, I can confirm that the revised parking arrangements are acceptable.

Consequently, and noting that my Consultation Response of the 11th April 2018 clarified that the Transport Technical Note had addressed the other issues I had outlined, no objections are raised subject to conditions.

Comments 11/04/18

Subject to exact details of how the site will be serviced being agreed, the site should be able to be serviced in a safe and practical manner (this can be dealt with by means of a servicing method statement secured by condition). I also note that the applicant has agreed to produce and implement a Travel Plan, provide shower / changing facilities and fund off-site improvements to improve the site's accessibility, as requested. There is however the need for a number of matters to be addressed, namely relating to servicing, parking and detailed design. I therefore recommend that that application is deferred, and the applicant is requested to review the scheme in light of the detailed comments made.

Nature Development Officer – No objections. The building appears to have been assessed using reasonable effort both internally & externally for the presence of bats (Habitat Regulations 2010) and the potential to support bats at other times.

No evidence of bats was found. The structures are considered to be of negligible value for roosting at other times.

I know of no reason to contradict these findings and conclude that the requirements of Stockport's Development Management Policy 3.369 have been met.

Given the structure of the building it is my opinion that additional survey work is not required now or in the future for roosting bats or other protected species. However, I would recommend that an informative is placed on any permission if granted to ensure that any future developer is aware of the protected status of bats and their roosts even when unoccupied. If bats are unexpectedly encountered or suspected all works should cease until advice is sought and implemented from a licenced bat consultant.

Planning Policy Officer (Employment) – No objections. The Sorting Office has been vacant since 2010. It is not clear what the level of existing vacant B1 office floorspace is, but the proposal includes for 943 sqm of B1 of modern replacement office floorspace over the lower ground and ground floors. In addition 40 new jobs are estimated in the planning application.

Under Core Strategy Policy AED-6 (Employment Sites Outside Protected Employment Areas) it needs to be demonstrated that the site is no longer viable as an employment use. This is usually but not exclusively demonstrated through the provision of marketing information over a minimum 18-24 month period. The agents state that as the sorting office is not wholly an office, warehouse or industrial building (sui generis?), this makes it difficult to market. Notwithstanding this, they provide evidence from GVA (letter dated 12 February 2018) confirming it has been marketed since 2011. GVA give details of the attempts to market it since 2011 including for offices, but with limited interest. They also make reference to a recent marketing campaign before the premises were put on the market in 2016, the details of which were shared with George Perrin in a letter dated 26 January 2017. Given this marketing evidence provided by GVA, I would consider the proposal complies with Policy AED 6.

Planning Policy Officer (Housing) and Strategic Housing – No objections. The policy position as set out in Core Strategy Policy H3 dictates that 5-15% affordable housing should be sought in town centre locations, with 5% sought until such time as viability in the town centre improves and a private market housing has been established. However, in addition to this, the Council should also apply Vacant Building Credit as indicated by paragraphs 21-23 of the government's Planning Practice Guidance relating to Planning Obligations. In so doing the effect is that the 5% requirement is then applied to the difference between the existing and proposed

floorspace, which in this case comes to 64sqm. Whilst there is an issue between the guidance, which focuses on floorspace, and the Council's policy, which relates to units, 64sqm can be said to be broadly equivalent to one flat.

In terms of the delivery of this unit, the preference of the Council would be for this to be delivered as a shared ownership property. The Strategic Housing team has contacted the Housing Partnership Registered Providers (RPs) in respect of the potential to take this unit under those terms. Of the four that responded, three were clear that it would not be of interest to them, citing issues such as disproportionate costs, and although the fourth indicated that they could look at it, they had concerns that the rental element necessary to support the costs associated with a single dwelling such as this would be likely to affect the affordability for the target households.

As such the Council has explored other options to deliver an affordable unit. Although the delivery of a discounted rental unit does not meet the description of affordable housing under the current Framework, it does so under the proposed revised Framework which is under consultation until May 10th and likely to be published in the summer. Consequently some weight can be given to that definition, although only because in this case the other options for delivering an affordable unit are not reasonably viable. The effect of delivering that unit would mean that whilst it does not meet the current definition, in terms of the level of income required by any potential occupant, it would in fact be no greater than that of someone who might be accessing a shared ownership unit: the proposal links the calculation of the level of discount back to the same income levels used for the policy compliant calculation for shared ownership. This element can be controlled through a legal agreement to ensure that the discounted rental unit is helping to meet the needs of those in need of affordable accommodation in the borough. Whilst this does not precisely meet the requirements of Policy H3, and noting that the reduction in requirement is as a result of having to apply vacant building credit, that Core Strategy policy does allow for viability which this approach seeks to address through the delivery of a unit for discounted rent.

Planning Policy Officer (Open Space)/ Play and Infrastructure Officer -The underlying thread to the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) is to help achieve sustainable development. It sets out that sustainable development is about positive growth – making economic, environmental and social progress for this and future generations.

The environmental and social progress is related to having access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation as it can make an important contribution to the health and wellbeing of communities, as set out under paragraph 73 of the Framework.

The policy requirements of Dev Man Policy SIE 2 'Provision of Recreational and Amenity Open Space in New Development' from the Core Strategy and the Recreational Open Space Provision SPG, indicates that new residential development schemes will be required to contribute towards the provision of open space for formal and casual recreation and children's play in locations which are accessible to future

occupants. Based on the number of bedrooms to be provided this would give a population capacity of 260.

The site is located in the TCG3.2 'Cultural, Leisure and Heritage Quarter' area of the Stockport Town Centre. The policy consideration from the Town Centre Housing supplementary planning document (SPD) applies a relaxation in planning requirements for children's play space, with the Council applying a 50% reduction in children's play requirements inside the town centre. The saved UDP Policy TCG 3.2 policy does however set out that a key priority for development in this location will be 'enhanced open space provision'. It should be noted that the contributions for formal play space remains unchanged because the units would still continue to place extra demand on the limited formal facilities in the borough. The calculations for children's provision is calculated below based on the 50% reduction in population capacity.

Children's play

Children's Provision $130 \times \text{£}167.31 = \text{£} 21,750.30$

Children's Maintenance $130 \times \text{£}11.86 \times 7 \text{ (sqm)} = \text{£} 10,792.60$

Total = $\text{£}32,542.90$

Formal Provision

As above the requirement of the Core Strategy policy is for as much as possible of the open space to be provided on-site, where this cannot be provided on site the commuted sum would be calculated as follows;

Commuted Sums

Formal Provision $260 \times \text{£}198.35 = \text{£}51,571.00$

Formal Maintenance $260 \times 17\text{sq.m.} \times \text{£}11.86 = \text{£} 52,421.20$

Total = $\text{£}103,992.20$

Overall total $\text{£}136,535.10$

It is suggested that the sum above is paid in order to accord with the policies surrounding open space provision. The proposal falls within the appropriate distances to Heaton Norris Neighbourhood Area of Play (NEAP) Hollywood Park (NEAP) and Covent Garden Local Area of Play (LEAP) for section 106 contributions to be taken.

Green Infrastructure

Green Infrastructure is defined as a 'network of multi-functional green space, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities'. The policy position for green infrastructure is set out below.

Paragraph 109 of the Framework sets out that the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by 'recognising the wider benefits of ecosystem services'.

Core Strategy Policy CS8 'Safeguarding and Improving the Environment' emphasises that development is designed and landscaped to a high standard which makes a positive contribution to the ...natural environment and that the council will work with developers to develop and enhance a network of multifunctional Green Infrastructure.

Dev Man Policy SIE 1 'Quality Places' sets out that development should be designed and landscaped to the highest contemporary standard paying high regard to the natural environment, within which it is cited. Incorporating GI into development schemes also contributes to addressing key issues such as climate change.

Dev Man Policy SD6 from the Core Strategy 'Adapting to the Impacts of Climate Change' sets out that positive consideration will be given to development that takes into account the 'urban heat island' effects, particular within the urban area of the borough . Such measures include:

- Provision of appropriate green cover (shaded green space and tree cover)
- Provision of green roofs, walls and boundaries
- Water features such as lakes, ponds, fountains and watercourses

The Town Centre Urban Green Infrastructure Enhancement Strategy encourages the use of vegetation in building design. It is therefore pleasing to see that the plans illustrate a green roof and wall being incorporated into the design. It is also recommended that the comments from the Nature Conservation Officer are fully taken on board in terms of creating net gain in biodiversity through development of the building into apartments and mixed high street uses.

Planning Policy Officer (Retail) – No objections. The site is located in the TCG3.2 Area of Stockport Town Centre. Saved UDP Review policy TCG3 indicates that the TCG3 Areas are all in-centre for the purpose of A3 use and A4 Use. Thus, it is considered that the A3 and A4 use element of the proposal complies with the Framework sequential test for main town centre uses and with Core Strategy policies CS5, CS6 and DMP AS-1 in principle. The proposed A5 Use element is consistent in principle with DMP AS-1 and does not conflict with saved UDP Review policy PSD2.2 because the site does not fall within a defined shopping frontage or within a defined business frontage and the proposal does not involve loss of retail use.

TfGM - TfGM HFAS have reviewed the Transport Statement (TS) prepared in support of the proposed development.

Trip Generation

HFAS agree with the trip generation exercise explained in the TS.

Road Safety

Road injury collisions for the most recent five years of data available in the vicinity of the site should be provided and analysed to determine if there are any underlying safety issues at the site.

Committed Developments

The TS does not mention any committed developments. SMBC should confirm if there are any committed developments in the vicinity of the development that they wish to be taken into consideration as part of the TS.

Site Accessibility

I. Public Transport

The TS explains that the development site is within close proximity of a number of bus stops with the closest ones being located approximately 120 metres from the centre of the site on the A6 Wellington Street. These bus stops consist of bus shelters which display bus service information. In addition to the bus stops on the A6 Wellington Street, Stockport bus station is located approximately 200 metres from the application site which provides access to wider range of local bus services.

II. Active Travel

The TS states that the proposed development site benefits from access to an extensive pedestrian footway network. Existing footways are located on all roads surrounding the site on the A6 Wellington Road, Exchange Street and Station Road. These provide pedestrian linkages to the nearby facilities in Stockport town centre as well as Stockport railway and bus stations.

Safe pedestrian movement across the A6 Wellington Street is provided for at several locations within the vicinity of the application site.

TfGM would suggest that info is provided explaining the condition of existing footways in the vicinity of the proposed development.

With regards to cycle access, the TS states that National Cycle Route 62 runs along Wood Street approximately 185 metres to the north of the application site. The TS does not provide details of other existing cycle facilities in the vicinity of the site, for example, there is no mention of whether there are on the road cycle facilities. TfGM would suggest that this detail is included in the TS.

In order to maximise the benefits of the site's location and to encourage walking and cycling, it should be ensured that the pedestrian and cycling environment, around the site, is designed to be as safe, attractive and convenient as possible, i.e. reinstate redundant vehicle access points/crossings, install tactile paving where appropriate, renewal of footway etc, including natural surveillance where possible. This should provide sufficient links to the surrounding pedestrian and cycle networks.

The TS states that pedestrians would be able to access the residential element of the site via a ground level entrance on Station Road whilst the office element will also be accessed off Station Road. The retail uses will be accessed off the A6 Wellington Road.

In terms of cycle access, the TS states that secure cycle parking will be provided within the basement for up to 30 cycles. TfGM would suggest that Stockport Council establish whether the proposed cycle parking is in accordance with their relevant cycle parking standards.

III. Travel Plan

It is important to influence people's travel patterns at the beginning of occupation. Therefore it is encouraging to note that the application is accompanied by a Framework Travel Plan. A full Travel Plan should feature a range of measures promoting a choice of transport mode, and a clear monitoring regime with agreed targets. If the Travel Plan is to be successful, it will be dependent on establishing a culture of sustainable travel behaviour at the outset, rather than on changing already established travel practices. The success of Travel Plan measures will depend on their effective delivery and commitment from the occupiers and therefore robust arrangements for the implementation and running of the Travel Plans need to be included in the Initial Travel Plan from the outset. These include:

- A travel plan budget and resources for the implementation and day to day management of travel plan measures;
- Appropriate management structures;
- Detailed time frames for the delivery;
- Handover arrangements for the travel plan or its components when the developer's responsibility ceases; and
- Targets and monitoring arrangements.

Ideally the full Travel Plan should include tailored measures to overcome specific barriers, or take advantage of opportunities, presented by the site.

United Utilities –

Drainage Conditions

United Utilities will have no objection to the proposed development provided that the following conditions are attached to any approval:

Foul Water

Condition 1

Foul and surface water shall be drained on separate systems.

Reason: To secure proper drainage and to manage the risk of flooding and pollution.

Surface Water

Condition 2

Prior to the commencement of any development, a surface water drainage scheme based on the hierarchy of drainage options in the National Planning Practice Guidance with evidence of an assessment if the site conditions shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

The surface water drainage scheme must be in accordance with the Non-Statutory Technical Standards for Sustainable Drainage Systems (March 2015) or any subsequent replacement national standards and unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority, no surface water shall discharge to the public combined sewerage system either directly or indirectly.

The development shall be completed in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To promote sustainable development, secure proper drainage and to manage the risk of flooding and pollution. This condition is imposed in light of policies within the NPPF and NPPG.

Management and Maintenance of Sustainable Drainage Systems

Without effective management and maintenance, sustainable drainage systems can fail or become ineffective. As a provider of wastewater services, we believe we have a duty to advise the Local Planning Authority of this potential risk to ensure the longevity of the surface water drainage system and the service it provides to people. We also wish to minimise the risk of a sustainable drainage system having a detrimental impact on the public sewer network should the two systems interact. We therefore recommend the Local Planning Authority include a condition in their Decision Notice regarding a management and maintenance regime for any sustainable drainage system that is included as part of the proposed development.

ANALYSIS

Principle of Development

The site is located in the TCG3.2 'Cultural, Leisure and Heritage Quarter' area of Stockport Town Centre. Residential, offices, restaurants and cafes are permitted by the Policy. Saved UDP Review policy TCG3 indicates that the TCG3 Areas are all in-centre for the purpose of A3 use and A4 Use.

Policy CS4 sets out the spatial priorities for the distribution of housing within the borough, and states that the priority for development is previously developed land within urban areas.

The principle of development is therefore acceptable.

Housing Supply

The Framework requires local planning authorities to identify and maintain at least a 5 year housing land supply against its housing requirements. Stockport is in a position of under-supply. In these circumstances paragraph 47 of the Framework notes that local planning authorities should boost significantly the supply of housing.

Affordable Housing

Note the comments of the Planning Policy Officer (Housing), in conjunction with Strategic Housing. No objections are raised. National policy provides an incentive for brownfield development on sites containing vacant buildings. Where a vacant building is brought back into any lawful use the developer should be offered a financial credit equivalent to the existing gross floorspace of relevant vacant buildings when the local planning authority calculates any affordable housing contribution which will be sought. Affordable housing contributions may be required for any increase in floorspace. Where there is an overall increase in floorspace in the proposed development, the local planning authority should calculate the amount of affordable housing contributions required from the development as set out in their Local Plan. A 'credit' should then be applied which is the equivalent of the gross floorspace of any relevant vacant buildings being brought back into use or demolished as part of the scheme and deducted from the overall affordable housing contribution calculation.

Taking into account the above credit, the affordable housing requirement for this development is one unit as proposed by the applicant. The requested affordable unit will be covered by a s106 Agreement.

Retail considerations

Note the comments of the Planning Policy Officer (Retail). No objections are raised. It is considered that the proposal would contribute to the vitality and viability of Stockport Town Centre.

Employment considerations

Note the comments of the Planning Policy Officer (Employment). No objections are raised. Under Core Strategy Policy AED-6 (Employment Sites Outside Protected Employment Areas) it needs to be demonstrated that the site is no longer viable as an employment use. In this case evidence has been provided confirming it has been marketed since 2011. Given this marketing evidence provided, it is accepted the proposal complies with Policy AED-6.

Highway Considerations

Note the comments of the Highway Engineer, who has also considered the representation from TfGM. No objections are raised. It is considered that the site is capable of being serviced in a safe and practical manner, and parking is proposed in accordance with the Council's adopted parking standards. The applicant has agreed to produce and implement a Travel Plan, provide shower/ changing facilities and fund the provision of a cycleway for the full length of Exchange Street. The requested conditions will be imposed.

Design, Character & Appearance

The existing building is of an unadorned aesthetic and in poor condition, having been vacant since 2010. Extensive discussions have taken place between the Local Planning Authority and the applicant, culminating in the current design and choice of materials. The proposed building layout, scale, appearance and quality are now

considered to be acceptable in this prominent location, and the development will improve the appearance of this site greatly. The building will sit comfortably within its surroundings, in accordance with policy SIE-1.

The Framework makes it clear that planning decisions should not attempt to impose architectural styles or particular tastes and they should not stifle innovation, originality or initiative through unsubstantiated requirements to conform to certain development forms or styles. The proposed building consists of different types of elevation treatments that are best appreciated by reference to the submitted plans and visuals. A key feature of the elevations are proposed 'Living Walls' to be introduced to the corner of Wellington Road and Exchange Street, the stairwell/ lift shaft fronting Station Road, and wrapping around the north west corner of the building facing Exchange Street and the British Telecom building. These Living Green Walls will create a prominent corner and interest in the approach from Wellington Road, as well as softening and adding visual interest to the long elevations of the building. They are complimented by the choice of green mid feature cladding panels, and a copper glazed tiled finish to the projecting stairwell fronting Exchange Street.

The application has been accompanied by a Crime Impact Statement, produced by Greater Manchester Police. The scheme responds constructively to the recommendations contained in that report.

Heritage Considerations

Note the comments of the Conservation Officer. No objections are raised. The former Sorting Office is not a heritage asset but is located within the setting of the Grade II Central Library building, the St Peters Conservation Area and 2 locally listed buildings (the former Unity and Cobdens/ Manchester Arms public houses). The Conservation Officer considers that whilst some modifications to the massing of the building are proposed, it will remain a relatively monolithic structure in the street scene and dominant in views along Wellington Road South, Exchange Street and Station Road. Providing care is taken in the selection of external cladding materials and fenestration, any harmful impact upon the setting of heritage assets should remain unchanged and could result in a minor improvement to the existing visual inter-relationships.

Living Conditions/ Impact on Residential Amenity

Note the comments of the Environmental Health Officer (Pollution Prevention). The development has been assessed for mixed residential/ commercial use and no objections are raised. Conditions will be imposed as recommended in the submitted noise report to ensure that appropriate living conditions are provided within the building, having regard to its proximity to existing commercial buildings and the A6.

There are no residential units immediately adjacent to this site that could be impacted upon by the development.

Habitable room windows from a number of apartments in the west elevation (north west corner of the development), on the lower ground to second floors, will look out

onto the British Telecom building with a separation distance of approximately 9.0m. This separation is achieved by the inclusion of outside balconies to each of these apartments, with the apartment windows set back behind these balconies, measuring approximately 12sqm. This is deficient when set against the advice contained in the Council's adopted SPD 'The Design of Residential Development' that recommends a separation distance of 15.0m.

Members must decide if this separation is acceptable and will ensure satisfactory living conditions for the occupiers of these apartments. In consideration of this issue, the SPD does acknowledge that rigid adherence to the standards can stifle creativity and result in uniformity of development. It also states that the Council will encourage imaginative design solutions, and in doing so may accept the need for a flexible approach to separation distances in the town centre. It must be recognised that in this instance the development proposes the imaginative conversion of an existing vacant and dilapidated building in an urban Town Centre environment, and future occupiers of these apartments will choose to live there for the central location and proximity to amenities. Simply put, to deliver adherence to the standard would require demolition of the building. In this context the separation distance with balconies is considered to be acceptable.

Amenity Space

Amenity space is provided for apartment occupiers in the form of approximately 12sqm balconies for those apartments facing the British Telecom building, the introduction of a first floor open atrium which will be landscaped on each floor to create communal areas for the residents to use, and a roof top terrace. The amenity space provided is deficient when set against the standards contained in the Council's adopted SPD 'The Design of Residential Development'. Making an allowance for the above balconies that will be provided for 28 x 1-bed apartments, it recommends a communal outside amenity space for the occupiers of a development of this size of 2,044sqm (18sqm/ 1-bed and 35sqm/ 2bed). As with the privacy standards, it does acknowledge that there may be some exceptional circumstances where it can be justified that careful innovative design rather than a blanket application of numerical space standards addresses the requirement for private amenity space.

In this instance, as stated above, it must be recognised that the proposal is not for a new build scheme. It is for the conversion of an existing vacant and dilapidated Town Centre building. The shortfall of amenity space does not weigh against the proposal in this context, and any future residents will be aware of the situation when choosing to occupy the building.

Air Quality

Note the comments of the Environmental Health Officer (Air Quality). No objections are raised. The application site is located in an Air Quality Management Area. As such, an Air Quality Assessment was required in order to determine baseline conditions, consider site suitability for the proposed end-use and assess potential impacts as a result of the scheme. The assessment has been independently assessed by the Officer. It is concluded that assuming good practice dust control measures are implemented, and these will be conditioned, the residual significance

of potential air quality impacts from dust generated by construction and other activities should be insignificant. In addition, road vehicle exhaust impacts are predicted to be negligible and exposure of future occupants to poor air quality is unlikely. Based on the assessment results, air quality issues are not considered to be a constraint to the proposed development.

Landscape

The site is constrained with limited outside space for soft landscaping. In recognition of this, substantial living walls are proposed to all elevations of the building. This is in conjunction with small pockets of planting, as indicated on the Proposed Site Plan. In the context of this site it is considered that the provision offered is acceptable.

Impact on Ecology/ Protected Species

Note the comments of the Nature Development Officer. No objections are raised. The requested informative will be imposed.

Recreational Open Space Provision and Maintenance

Note the comments of the Planning Policy Officer (Open Space) in conjunction with the Play and Infrastructure Officer. The committed sum to comply with the requirements of Core Strategy Policy SIE 2 'Provision of Recreational and Amenity Open Space in New Development', and the Recreational Open Space Provision SPG and the Town Centre Housing SPD, will be covered by a s106 Agreement.

The Play and Infrastructure Officer has recommended that the contributions are split between Hollywood Park and St Thomas Recreation Ground on the following basis:

Children's play

Children's Provision £ 21,750.30 – Contribution to Phase 1 play area improvements at Hollywood Park Play Area.

Children's Maintenance £ 10,792.60

Formal Sport Provision

Formal Sport is allocated as best fit against sport priorities agreed with Executive Councillor for Communities and Housing.

Formal Provision £51,571.00 – Creation of new community sports hub at St Thomas' Recreation Ground **Subject to Executive Approval**

Formal Maintenance £ 52,421.20

Overall total £136,535.10

A new play area will form part of the redevelopment of Covent Garden, so this would not be a priority for this contribution.

Heaton Norris Play Area has good junior provision and has commuted sum requests totalling £40k (from potential developments at Meadow Mill and Ash Hotel) to improve toddler play.

It is most likely Hollywood Park will require investment to improve and enhance play provision within the time frame required for the commuted sum spend (if it is received). Hollywood Park is an accessible play site from the Sorting Office, and would directly benefit the residents of this development. Currently there are no commuted sum allocations or pending requests for Hollywood Park.

St Thomas Recreation Ground is the priority strategic sport site for the Brinnington and Central Area. It is recommended that the sums are allocated to the provision of a new community sports facility at St Thomas Recreation Ground. It is anticipated this will cost £400k. There are 2 other pooling requests totalling £323k for this project (from developments at Blackberry Slopes and Meadow Mill).

The play element of the commuted sum has to be spent against the distance criteria set out in the SPG. Hollywood Park falls within the area that the commuted sum for play could be used.

The sport element of the commuted sum can be spent anywhere in the borough against strategic sports improvements. St Thomas is the best fit for this allocation from the priority list agreed with Executive.

As the development and the above sites are in the same Committee Area there is a link between the investment and benefit to residents of the development.

Contamination

Note the comments of the Environmental Health Officer (Contamination). No objections are raised. The requested condition will be imposed.

Drainage

Note the comments of the Drainage Engineer. In the event the drainage solution remains unresolved when the application is determined, conditions will be applied to the development to secure compliance (where achievable) with the aims of Policy SD-6. Such conditions will also encompass the recommendations of United Utilities.

Energy Statement

An Energy Statement has been submitted that is in accordance with the requirements of Policy SD-3.

Summary - 'Sustainable Development/ Planning Balance'

Paragraph 14 of the Framework sets out that at the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which should be seen as a golden thread running through decision-taking. This means, unless material considerations indicate otherwise, approving development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay; and where the development plan is absent, silent or relevant policies are out-of-date, granting permission unless (a) any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits,

when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole; or (b) specific policies in the Framework indicate that development should be restricted.

What sustainable development means in practice is contained within paragraphs 18 to 219 of the Framework, taken as a whole. Sustainability is multi-faceted. Paragraph 7 of the Framework establishes three dimensions to sustainable development – economic, social and environmental, and paragraph 8 indicates that these should be sought jointly and simultaneously through the planning system.

Paragraph 47 of the Framework notes that local planning authorities should boost significantly the supply of housing as the Council is currently unable to demonstrate a 5-year supply of deliverable housing sites. Paragraph 49 of the Framework requires that housing applications should be considered in the context of the presumption in favour of sustainable development.

The development involves the imaginative conversion of an existing vacant and dilapidated building in a prominent position, and it will boost the supply of housing and contribute to the vitality and viability of Stockport Town Centre. In considering the planning merits of the development against the Statutory Development Plan and the Framework as a whole, the proposal represents sustainable development and therefore Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that the application is granted. The application will need to be referred to the Planning & Highways Regulation Committee for a decision.

RECOMMENDATION

Grant