

## **ITEM 2**

<b>Application Reference</b>	<b>DC/079226</b>
<b>Location:</b>	Weir Mill King Street West Stockport SK3 0DT
<b>PROPOSAL:</b>	Redevelopment comprising the repurposing of existing buildings and erection of new buildings for a mix of uses comprising 253no, residential homes alongside flexible commercial space (Use Class E), drinking establishments (Sui Generis Use), and hot food takeaways (Sui Generis Use); partial demolition, new public realm, vehicular access, car parking and cycle parking, and associated works.
<b>Type Of Application:</b>	Listed Building Consent
<b>Registration Date:</b>	23.12.2020
<b>Expiry Date:</b>	20210217
<b>Case Officer:</b>	Emma Curle
<b>Applicant:</b>	Capital And Centric (ROSE) Limited
<b>Agent:</b>	Avison Young

### **DELEGATION/COMMITTEE STATUS**

Under the Council's adopted scheme of delegation this listed building consent application can only be determined by the Planning and Highways Regulation Committee due to the number of objections received and the strategic nature of the application. In addition, due to the proximity of the application to the ward boundary and the impact the development would have on the Grade II\* listed viaduct the application must first be referred to the Central Stockport and Heaton and Reddish Area Committees for comment and/or a recommendation.

Importantly, given the formal objections received from The Victorian Society and Ancient Monuments Society, should members be minded to grant listed building consent for the proposed works then the listed building consent application must be referred to the Secretary of State to give him the opportunity to call-in the application for his own determination should he choose to do so.

### **DESCRIPTION OF WORKS**

The application seeks listed building consent for a residential-led mixed-use development that includes the conversion of Weir Mill to residential apartments. The proposed works include:

- Refurbishment and restoration of key heritage assets including the 2 main mill buildings, wheelhouse and some ancillary buildings
- Erection of two new buildings;
- 253 residential dwellings (Use Class C3);
- 2,312sqm mixed retail and commercial uses (including Use Class E and Sui Generis Uses);
- 11 car parking spaces;

- Over 360 cycle spaces;
- Public realm;
- Landscaping;
- Associated infrastructure; and
- Demolition of selected buildings on site.

The proposed residential development comprises:

- 144 x 1bed apartments
- 106 x 2bed apartments
- 3 x 3bed apartments

The development has been designed to create new connections into the site engaging it with the wider area, significant regeneration already underway in the Town Centre as well as the wider transformational regeneration planned for Town Centre West over the next 15-20 years. The key aspects to this include:

- Opening up the River Mersey frontage to the site.
- Creating a new connection and piece of public space to the new bus Interchange main entrance and new interchange park, including the creation of new Weavers Square and the resident-focussed Central Courtyard within this site.
- Creating an arrival space from King Street West to landmark the site and drive routes into the heart of the site.

The application comprises the retention/refurbishment of existing buildings, demolition of selected existing buildings and erection of new buildings on site, including:

- Retained and Refurbished Existing Buildings:
  - East Mill and West Mill (Buildings 1,2 and 3)
  - Wheelhouse Building (Building 4)
  - West Shed (Building 8)
  - Structural elements of the Weaving Shed (Building 11)
- New Buildings:
  - East New Building
  - West New Building
- Demolition
  - The Chestergate building (Building 5)
  - 1920's and 1960 courtyard buildings (Buildings 6,7 and 9)
  - The Weaving Shed (Buildings 10, 11 and 12) The existing building currently blocks access to the river frontage in a key location. The proposal would maintain the structure and format of the key building in a new public space 'Weavers Square'

### Retained and Refurbished Mill Buildings

#### *East and West Mill*

The existing East and West Mill buildings are proposed to be converted to residential accommodation offering modern, open-plan living spaces that take advantage of the period features the mill affords.

The East Mill would create 50 spacious new apartments above 500sqm of new commercial space at ground floor. The commercial space would open to both the courtyard and River Mersey frontage.

The West Mill proposes 37 new apartments including 5 duplex units and two top floor 3 beds units looking out over the River Mersey. The southern end of the West Mill, at ground floor would provide for a commercial space offering potential links to the West Shed. The West Mill also serves as the main entrance lobby for both of the Mill buildings, with post boxes, communal bike store and access to the new shared core.

Internal alterations are proposed to accommodate the residential development, together with a new central core to provide new vertical circulation between the East and West Mill buildings. A new feature escape stair to the eastern gable of the East Mill is also proposed to provide safe egress from the building.

It is proposed that all windows in the existing retained buildings would be replaced with powder coated metal window frames.

#### *West Shed*

The West Shed would provide 550 sqm of new commercial space set within a single storey, brick jack vault arched top-lit factory space. Access to the building is proposed via a new entrance Piazza on Chestergate and King Street West and a new access from King Street West Bridge.

It is proposed that this building would create a place to eat and drink, work, meet and socialise. With the exception of a small area of existing WC's and a bay of the roof being removed, the building would be retained. The demolition of these two small areas is required to facilitate the proposed connection. New window openings are proposed.

#### *The Wheelhouse*

The Wheelhouse is proposed to be retained as commercial space of 320sqm. The location of the unit would provide for views onto the Weirside terrace, River Mersey and Viaduct.

### New Buildings

#### *East New Building*

A new building is proposed to provide for 78 new homes and 160sqm of new commercial space. The building would be 14 storeys tall and located on the corner of Chestergate and Astley Street, partly on Council owned land. The new commercial space is at ground floor.

The building is shaped by the viaduct arches, is located adjacent to the viaduct and has a compact floor plate and a central vertical circulation core. The building has views out over River Mersey, central Stockport and the viaduct. The main entrance to the building is accessed off Weavers Square.

The building has large projecting balconies which animate the facades and provide unique characteristics to each facade.

#### *West New Building*

The new West building ranges between 5 and 7 storeys tall, and would deliver 88 new homes and circa 702 sqm of new commercial space. It is located to the junction of

Chestergate and King Street West and is shaped in plan to both frame and create views into the new courtyard space.

The building incorporates a roof top terrace and residents lounge on the fifth floor level. The spaces combine to create an amenity offer which looks onto the viaduct, down into the courtyard, and out into the wider area to the South.

The layout of the building creates a cut through from Chestergate into the courtyard forming a covered entrance into both the West New Building and into the commercial unit(s). The commercial unit(s) are at ground level and front both Chestergate and the public realm within the site..

One full red projecting balcony is included on the elevation to the New West Building providing views to the heart of Stockport through the arch of the viaduct and to the St Mary's Church Spire.

The principal management suite is located within the new West New Building, and is located to enable an active and passive surveillance of the delivery drop off area, carpark, bike store and provide more engagement with the street. This space would connect through to the courtyard and acts as a hub for residents.

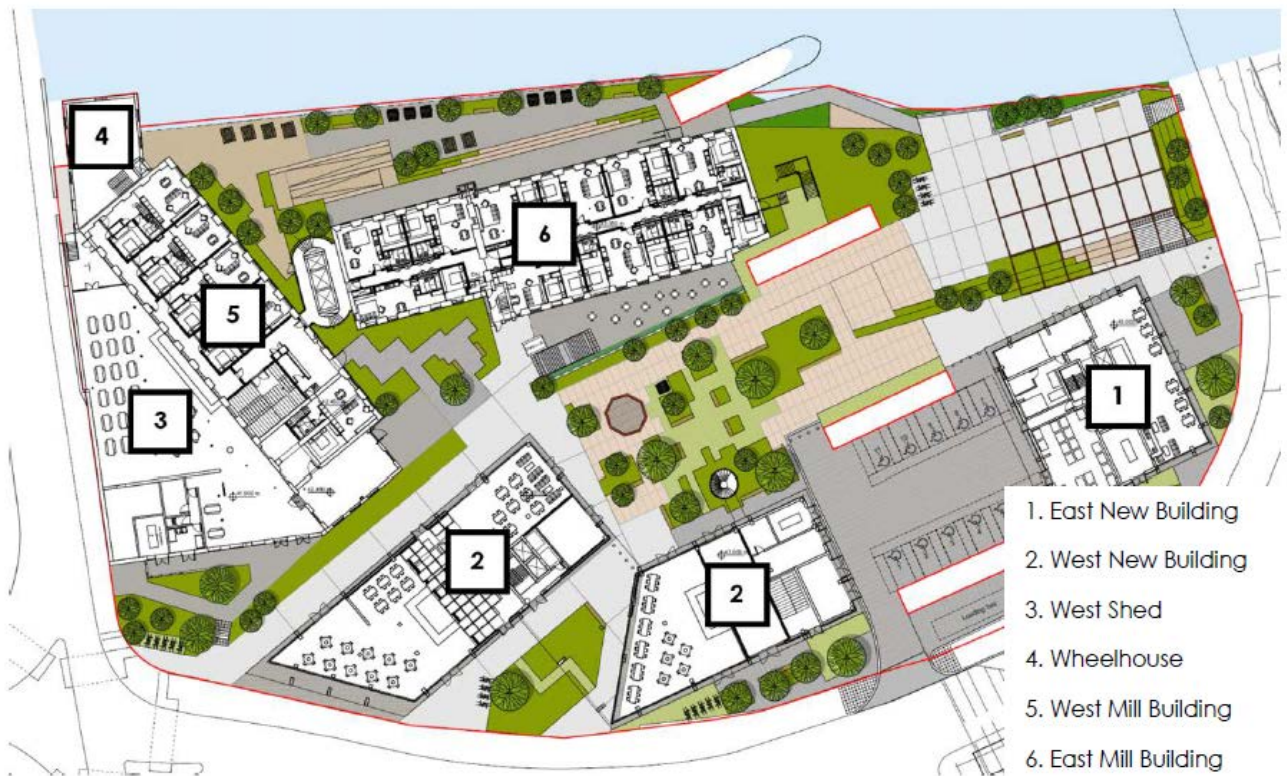
### Proposed Demolition

As part of the proposal several buildings have been identified for demolition:

- The Chestergate building. The proposed removal is promoted due to the inability to bring forward a viable reuse and the building condition. The Chestergate Building forms part of the same phase of building as the West Shed.
- 1920's and 1960 courtyard buildings. Removal of these buildings is proposed to create development opportunities within the site.
- The Weaving Shed. The location of the Weaving Shed currently blocks access to the river frontage. The proposal would maintain the structure and format of the key building in a new public space 'Weavers Square'

The location of buildings and proposed development is best appreciated through the submitted plans.

The following plan will assist as an indication:



The site is proposed to be a car-free scheme due to its highly accessible location via alternative, sustainable modes of transport. Nonetheless, vehicular access for maintenance and servicing vehicles as well a small provision of disabled parking (11) spaces is provided via the existing access off Chestergate Road to the south.

Emergency vehicular access is proposed from the Chestergate junction to the southwest corner of the site and pedestrian access is created throughout the development, with new routes proposed from Chestergate. All routes are inclusive and accessible.

In addition to the built form, the scheme proposes significant external landscape improvements and creation of new public spaces, creating activity where there is currently none.

Four core spaces are proposed within the site:

- The Riverside - proposed to be opened up providing a location for residents' outdoor dining space and an area for the commercial units in the lower mill level.
- The Courtyard – a central area at the core of the site offering an industrial and practical space where key movement through the site is to be expected. Offering intimate dwell space, soft planting, trees and features highlighting the historic elements including the location of the former chimney.
- Weaver's Square - The Square is proposed as an event space for the development and open space for the immediate commercial units to spill out onto as an al fresco option. Aspirations for the square include treating the ground plane with large-scale mural paintwork that will help identify and advertise the space to users entering Stockport on the railway line overhead.
- The Street – to act as the connecting link between the highly greened courtyard and the future Stockport Interchange. The aim of the lower level

commercial units is to animate Chestergate and create a street scape, but without impeding on the key movement routes.

### Submission Summary

The parallel planning application combined is accompanied by an Environmental Statement (ES), which includes chapters on the following environmental effects:

- Socio-economics
- Heritage
- Ecology and Nature Conservation
- Ground Conditions
- Cumulative Impacts

The following documents have also been submitted in support of both the planning and listed building consent applications:

- Crime Impact Statement
- Planning Statement
- Design and Access Statement
- Solar Glare Report
- Tall Building Statement
- Transport Assessment and Travel Plan
- Tree Survey
- Energy Statement Report
- Utilities Service Report
- Wind Assessment
- Daylight and Sunlight Assessment
- Ecological Assessment
- Air Quality Assessment
- Archaeological Assessment
- Floor Risk Assessment
- Development Options Appraisal
- Public Consultation Report
- Daylight Sunlight Report
- Viability Report
- Geotechnical Assessment
- Indicative External Lighting Layout
- Landscape Design and Access Statement
- Structural Report
- New Build – Structural Report
- Noise and Vibration Assessment

### **SITE AND SURROUNDINGS**

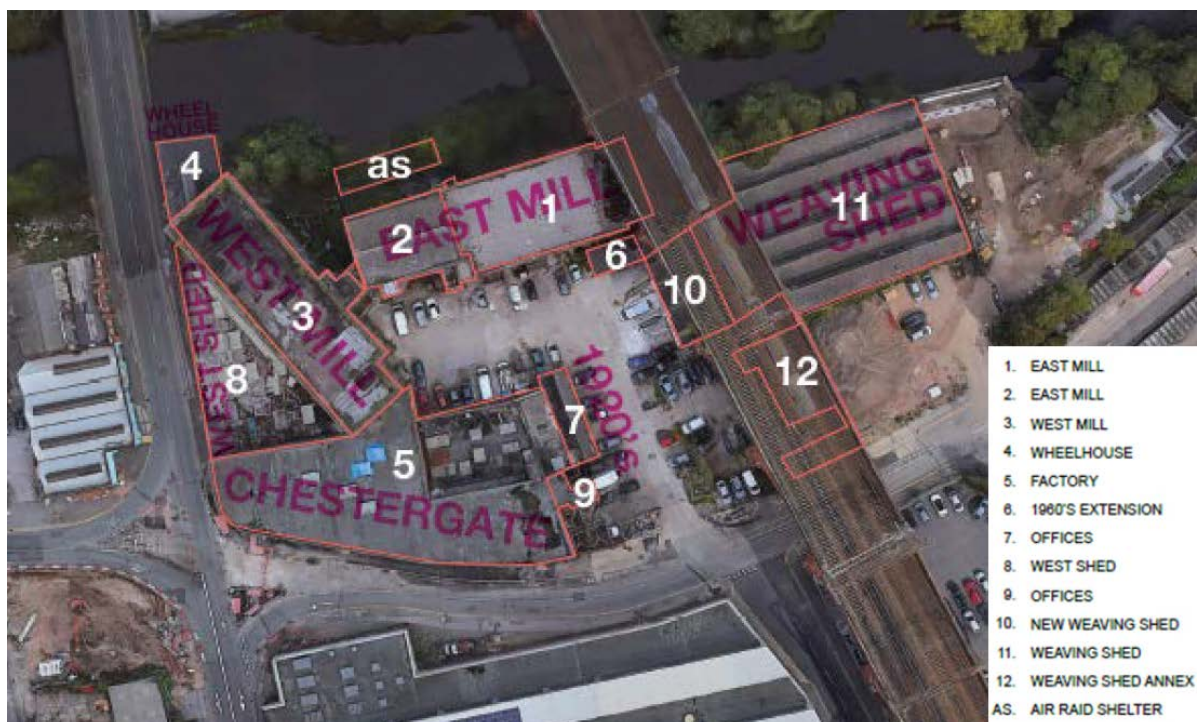
The site extends to approximately 0.97 hectares, is broadly rectangular in shape and currently comprises the Grade II listed Weir Mill complex. The site is bisected by the Grade II\* Railway Viaduct, which oversails the site, including four of its supporting piers located within the site boundary. The site is contained by Astley Street to the east, King Street West to the west, Chestergate to the south and the steep sided banks of the River Mersey to the north.



The site occupies a prominent position within the Town Centre and is located within the Weirside Neighbourhood in the adopted Stockport Town Centre West Strategic Regeneration Framework (SRF). It fronts both Chestergate and King Street West and is adjacent to the former bus station and new Transport Interchange development currently under construction. The site is located in a highly sustainable location near to public transport hubs, is on a vehicular route providing access to the M60 motorway from the south and east of the Town Centre and is easily accessible by foot and cycle. The site is highly visible from passengers of the railway line.

The site currently comprises a number of existing buildings ranging in height from single storey, to between 5 and 6 storeys for the main mill buildings, each of varying quality. The collection of buildings on site has developed over time and are positioned around the central area which is currently used for parking. The buildings were previously occupied by a variety of established uses including industrial, warehousing and leisure uses. A number of the buildings on the site have however been vacant for some time.

The site is best appreciated in its context, however, the following annotated aerial photograph should assist with an understanding of the existing complex and location of buildings. There are currently 12 individual buildings on site, which together form the Grade II listed Weir Mill complex, that was first developed in the late 1700s. The viaduct can easily be seen running through the following photo.



As existing, the site includes:

- The former spinning mill (East Mill - buildings 1 and 2) is 6 storeys in height.
- A 5-storey block (West Mill – building 3) in the western area of the site, adjoining King Street West that once included the former engine house in the basement.
- A 3 storey building (Wheelhouse – building 4) attached to the West Mill incorporating part of the late C18 wheelhouse in its basement.

- A 2-storey brick range (Factory – building 5) following the curve of Chestergate.
- A late C19 2-storey square block (Offices - buildings 7 and 9) that faces onto the yard.
- A late C19 warehouse (West Shed – building 8). This building has been reduced to single storey with a flat roof
- A single storey former weaving shed (Weaving shed – buildings 10 and 11). These are located immediately beneath and extending east of the viaduct
- A single storey building (Weaving Shed Annexe – building 12)

Given the age of existing buildings on site, many of which have been neglected over many years, a number of the buildings and structures are in poor condition and are subject to significant structural issues which include cracks in the brickwork and corrosion of metals previously used for reinforcement. The existing buildings are under-utilised and are consequently deteriorating in both appearance and structure. The application has been supported by a structural survey demonstrating this in detail.

The site as existing is almost fully developed with little existing soft landscaping within the main area of the application site. There is however vegetation including a number of mature self-seeded trees along the northern boundary of the site adjacent to the River Mersey.

The areas surrounding the site are largely characterised by industrial and employment uses, with commercial buildings and the M60 motorway beyond the River Mersey to the north, to the east of the site sits Stockport Bus Station and the Town Centre retail area, the south is predominantly industrial buildings and the Stagecoach Stockport Depot and to the west is occupied by commercial and industrial buildings.

The site is located within close proximity to a number of heritage assets of special architectural and historic interest. Most notably they include:

- Wellington Mill and chimney (Grade II)
- Wellington Bridge (Grade II)
- Former Wellington Bridge Inn (locally listed)
- St Peters Conservation Area to the east
- King Street West bridge (locally listed) to the north
- King Street House Hatworks (locally listed)
- Kingston Mill (locally listed) to the west.

Historic asset descriptions for statutory and locally listed buildings and conservation areas can be accessed via the Council's interactive mapping system at the following link: <https://www.stockport.gov.uk/find-conservation-and-heritage-assets>



The list description for Weir Mill is as follows:

SJ99SE CHESTERGATE 701-0/3/10010 (North side)

Wear Mill - Grade II

Cotton spinning and weaving mill. Mid C19 with incorporating C18 remains and rebuilding of 1884. Brick, slate roofs. Corner site bounded by King Street West and river Mersey on north, the earliest mills built on the river bank; railway viaduct breaks into the site on the east. Site comprises: 2 spinning mills, weaving shed, warehouse, offices and chimney. EXTERIOR: the earlier, c1830-40, spinning mill is of 6 storeys and 3 building phases, 4x6, 10x6 and 6x6 bays, small windows with stone sills and lintels, stone eaves cornice; no power features, fireproof construction of cast-iron columns and segmental brick arches. The later spinning mill is of 6 storeys, 15x6 bays, large brick-arched windows with stone sills, brick eaves cornice, squat Italianate tower, internal engine house. 5-storey block built against King Street West has engine house in basement, east face (to yard) and single storey range behind road-side wall which follows line of river bridge parapet wall. A 3-bay block attached to the 1884 mill incorporates part of the late C18 wheelhouse in its basement, the archway standing over the river. Weaving shed of brick, mid C19, 5 roof ridges, below railway viaduct. Chimney is octagonal and tapers, an incised stone plaque on the west side, approx. 2.5m from ground: '?6/ GAP/ 1868'. Late C19 warehouse has been reduced to single storey, flat roof, and 2-storey brick range follows the curve of Chestergate, late C19 2-storey square block faces onto the yard. Some demolition on west side of site.

HISTORY: a drawing of the mill late C19 indicates that it was then owned by Samuel Moorhouse Ltd. A short chimney stood on the river edge, close to the road bridge, and there were long low rooms against the river edge, probably used for carding. A multi-phase integrated mill; a good example of the typical pattern of development by extension and successive rebuilding. Wear Mill displays the greatest number of phases of development represented on any mill site in Greater Manchester, including two different types of fire proof construction. It remains substantially intact, with its ancillary buildings. The confined site and the proximity of the railway viaduct adds to the architectural interest of the group. (Greater Manchester Archaeology Unit: Record No.2505) .

Listing NGR: SJ8904090236

The list description for Stockport Viaduct is as follows:

SJ 8990 SW 3/32

VIADUCT STREET Stockport Railway Viaduct (Formerly listed as Railway Viaduct, Stockport) - Grade: II\*

Railway viaduct opened 1840 by GW Buck for Manchester and Birmingham Railway in brick and stone. 28 arches (three spans at either end of 18ft, 22 spans between of 63ft), more than a mile long (1791 yards), and 111ft high above the river. Said to contain 11 million bricks, viaduct in brick with stone capping and dentil cornice. Stone moulded impost bands and rusticated faces to piers. Took 21 months to build, at a cost of £72,700. Widened to the west 1888 to 1889.

Listing NGR: SJ8910590246

## **POLICY BACKGROUND**

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 ("PCPA 2004") requires that planning applications be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

### **The Development Plan includes-**

- Policies set out in the Stockport Unitary Development Plan Review adopted 31<sup>st</sup> 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 adopted 17<sup>th</sup> March 2011.

### **Saved policies of the SUDP Review**

TCG3.1	Riverside
TCG1	Town Centre and M60 Gateway
TCG1.2	Town Centre/M60 Gateway Transport Hub
TCG1.3	Parking in the Town Centre
TCG1.4	Sustainable Access in the Town Centre/M60 Gateway
TCG3	Town Centre Mixed Use Areas
EP1.7	Development and Flood Risk
EP1.10	Aircraft Noise
L1.8	Strategic Recreation Routes
L1.11	Development Related to Recreation Routes
MW1.5	Control of Waste from Development

### **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-4 'District Heating (Network development Areas)'

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'

AS-3 'Main Town Centre Uses, Hot Food Take Aways and Prison Development Outside Existing Centres'

CS7 'ACCOMMODATING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT'

AED-1 'Employment Development in the Town Centre and M60 Gateway'

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  
CS11 STOCKPORT TOWN CENTRE

## **Supplementary Planning Guidance**

Supplementary Planning Guidance 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.

- Shopfronts and Advertisement SPG
- Design of Residential Development SPD
- Town Centre Housing SPD
- Sustainable Transport SPD
- Sustainable Design and Construction SPD
- Future Stockport SPD – Town centre Masterplan (2005)

## **National Planning Policy Framework**

A revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) issued by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) on 20th July 2021 replaced the previous NPPF (originally issued 2012, revised 2018 and updated in 2019). The NPPF has not altered the fundamental legal requirement under Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 that decisions must be made in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations (such as the NPPF) indicate otherwise.

The NPPF is national planning policy that should be taken into account in dealing with applications. It focuses on achieving a lasting housing reform, facilitating the delivery of a greater number of homes, ensuring that we get planning for the right homes built in the right places of the right quality at the same time as protecting our environment. If decision takers choose not to follow the NPPF, then clear and convincing reasons for doing so are needed.

N.B. In respect of decision-taking the revised NPPF constitutes a “material consideration”.

*Para.1 “The National Planning Policy Framework sets out the Government’s planning policies for England and how these should be applied”.*

*Para.2 “Planning law requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise”.*

*Para.7 “The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development”.*

*Para.8 “Achieving sustainable development means that the planning system has three overarching objectives, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways (so that opportunities can be taken to secure net gains across each of the different objectives):*

- a) an economic objective
- b) a social objective
- c) an environmental objective”

Para.11 “Plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

For decision-taking this means:

c) approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or

d) where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, granting permission unless:

i. the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance [including statutory listed buildings] provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or

ii. 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”.

Para.12 “The presumption in favour of sustainable development does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision-making. Where a planning application conflicts with an up-to-date development plan (including any neighbourhood plans that form part of the development plan), permission should not usually be granted. Local planning authorities may take decisions that depart from an up-to-date development plan, but only if material considerations in a particular case indicate that the plan should not be followed”.

Para 34. “Plans should set out the contributions expected from development. This should include setting out the levels and types of affordable housing provision required, along with other infrastructure (such as that needed for education, health, transport, flood and water management, green and digital infrastructure). Such policies should not undermine the deliverability of the plan.”

Para.38 “Local planning authorities should approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way..... Decision-makers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible”.

Para.47 “Planning law requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Decisions on applications should be made as quickly as possible, and within statutory timescales unless a longer period has been agreed by the applicant in writing”.

Para.55 “Local planning authorities should consider whether otherwise unacceptable development could be made acceptable through the use of conditions or planning obligations. Planning obligations should only be used where it is not possible to address unacceptable impacts through a planning condition.”

Para.58 *“Where up-to-date policies have set out the contributions expected from development, planning applications that comply with them should be assumed to be viable. It is up to the applicant to demonstrate whether particular circumstances justify the need for a viability assessment at the application stage. The weight to be given to a viability assessment is a matter for the decision maker, having regard to all the circumstances in the case, including whether the plan and the viability evidence underpinning it is up to date, and any change in site circumstances since the plan was brought into force. All viability assessments, including any undertaken at the plan-making stage, should reflect the recommended approach in national planning guidance, including standardised inputs, and should be made publicly available.”*

Para.60 *“To support the Government’s objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes, it is important that a sufficient amount and variety of land can come forward where it is needed, that the needs of groups with specific housing requirements are addressed and that land with permission is developed without unnecessary delay.”*

Para.92 *“Planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which:*

*a) promote social interaction, including opportunities for meetings between people who might not otherwise come into contact with each other – for example through mixed-use developments, strong neighbourhood centres, street layouts that allow for easy pedestrian and cycle connections within and between neighbourhoods, and active street frontages;*

*b) are safe and accessible, so that crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion – for example through the use of attractive, well-designed, clear and legible pedestrian and cycle routes, and high quality public space, which encourage the active and continual use of public areas; and*

*c) enable and support healthy lifestyles, especially where this would address identified local health and well-being needs – for example through the provision of safe and accessible green infrastructure, sports facilities, local shops, access to healthier food, allotments and layouts that encourage walking and cycling”*

Para. 98 *“Access to a network of high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity is important for the health and well-being of communities, and can deliver wider benefits for nature and support efforts to address climate change. Planning policies should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the need for open space, sport and recreation facilities (including quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses) and opportunities for new provision. Information gained from the assessments should be used to determine what open space, sport and recreational provision is needed, which plans should then seek to accommodate.”*

Para. 100 *“Planning policies and decisions should protect and enhance public rights of way and access, including taking opportunities to provide better facilities for users, for example by adding links to existing rights of way networks including National Trails.”*

Para.111 *“Development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe.”*

Para.119 *“Planning policies and decisions should promote an effective use of land in meeting the need for homes and other uses, while safeguarding and improving the environment and ensuring safe and healthy living conditions. Strategic policies should set out a clear strategy for accommodating objectively assessed needs, in a way that makes as much use as possible of previously-developed or ‘brownfield’ land.”*

Para.120 *“Planning policies and decisions should:*

*... c) give substantial weight to the value of using suitable brownfield land within settlements for homes and other identified needs, and support appropriate opportunities to remediate despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated or unstable land;*

*d) promote and support the development of under-utilised land and buildings, especially if this would help to meet identified needs for housing where land supply is constrained and available sites could be used more effectively (for example converting space above shops, and building on or above service yards, car parks, lock-ups and railway infrastructure);...*”

Para. 121 *“Local planning authorities, and other plan-making bodies, should take a proactive role in identifying and helping to bring forward land that may be suitable for meeting development needs, including suitable sites on brownfield registers or held in public ownership, using the full range of powers available to them. This should include identifying opportunities to facilitate land assembly, supported where necessary by compulsory purchase powers, where this can help to bring more land forward for meeting development needs and/or secure better development outcomes.”*

Para. 125 *“...Where there is an existing or anticipated shortage of land for meeting identified housing needs, it is especially important that planning policies and decisions avoid homes being built at low densities, and ensure that developments make optimal use of the potential of each site. In these circumstances:*

*a) plans should contain policies to optimise the use of land in their area and meet as much of the identified need for housing as possible. This will be tested robustly at examination, and should include the use of minimum density standards for city and town centres and other locations that are well served by public transport. These standards should seek a significant uplift in the average density of residential development within these areas, unless it can be shown that there are strong reasons why this would be inappropriate;*

*b) the use of minimum density standards should also be considered for other parts of the plan area. It may be appropriate to set out a range of densities that reflect the accessibility and potential of different areas, rather than one broad density range; and*

*c) local planning authorities should refuse applications which they consider fail to make efficient use of land, taking into account the policies in this Framework. In this context, when considering applications for housing,*



*authorities should take a flexible approach in applying policies or guidance relating to daylight and sunlight, where they would otherwise inhibit making efficient use of a site (as long as the resulting scheme would provide acceptable living standards)."*

*Para.126 "The creation of high quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities".*

*Para. 130 "Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:*

*a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;*

*b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;*

*c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);*

*d) establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;*

*e) optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and*

*f) create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience."*

*Para. 131 "Trees make an important contribution to the character and quality of urban environments, and can also help mitigate and adapt to climate change. Planning policies and decisions should ensure that new streets are tree-lined, that opportunities are taken to incorporate trees elsewhere in developments (such as parks and community orchards), that appropriate measures are in place to secure the long-term maintenance of newly-planted trees, and that existing trees are retained wherever possible. Applicants and local planning authorities should work with highways officers and tree officers to ensure that the right trees are planted in the right places, and solutions are found that are compatible with highways standards and the needs of different users."*

*Para. 132 "Design quality should be considered throughout the evolution and assessment of individual proposals. Early discussion between applicants, the local planning authority and local community about the design and style of emerging schemes is important for clarifying expectations and reconciling local and commercial interests. Applicants should work closely with those affected by their proposals to evolve designs that take account of the views of the community. Applications that can demonstrate early, proactive and effective engagement with the community should be looked on more favourably than those that cannot."*

Para. 133 *“Local planning authorities should ensure that they have access to, and make appropriate use of, tools and processes for assessing and improving the design of development. These include workshops to engage the local community, design advice and review arrangements, and assessment frameworks such as Building for a Healthy Life. These are of most benefit if used as early as possible in the evolution of schemes, and are particularly important for significant projects such as large scale housing and mixed use developments. In assessing applications, local planning authorities should have regard to the outcome from these processes, including any recommendations made by design review panels.”*

Para.134 *“Development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes. Conversely, significant weight should be given to:*

- a) development which reflects local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes; and/or*
- b) outstanding or innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability, or help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, so long as they fit in with the overall form and layout of their surroundings.”.*

Para.157 *“In determining planning applications, local planning authorities should expect new development to:*

- a) comply with any development plan policies on local requirements for decentralised energy supply unless it can be demonstrated by the applicant, having regard to the type of development involved and its design, that this is not feasible or viable; and*
- b) take account of landform, layout, building orientation, massing and landscaping to minimise energy consumption”.*

Para.167 *“When determining any planning applications, local planning authorities should ensure that flood risk is not increased elsewhere. Where appropriate, applications should be supported by a site-specific flood-risk assessment. Development should only be allowed in areas at risk of flooding where, in the light of this assessment (and the sequential and exception tests, as applicable) it can be demonstrated that:*

- a) within the site, the most vulnerable development is located in areas of lowest flood risk, unless there are overriding reasons to prefer a different location;*
- b) the development is appropriately flood resistant and resilient such that, in the event of a flood, it could be quickly brought back into use without significant refurbishment;*
- c) it incorporates sustainable drainage systems, unless there is clear evidence that this would be inappropriate;*
- d) any residual risk can be safely managed; and*
- e) safe access and escape routes are included where appropriate, as part of an agreed emergency plan.”*

Para.180 *"When determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply the following principles:*

*a) if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused;*

*...*

*and d) ...opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around developments should be integrated as part of their design, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity or enhance public access to nature where this is appropriate."*

Para.183 *"Planning policies and decisions should ensure that:*

*a) a site is suitable for its proposed use taking account of ground conditions and any risks arising from land instability and contamination. This includes risks arising from natural hazards or former activities such as mining, and any proposals for mitigation including land remediation (as well as potential impacts on the natural environment arising from that remediation);*

*b) after remediation, as a minimum, land should not be capable of being determined as contaminated land under Part IIA of the Environmental Protection Act 1990; and*

*c) adequate site investigation information, prepared by a competent person, is available to inform these assessments."*

Para. 185 *"Planning policies and decisions should also ensure that new development is appropriate for its location taking into account the likely effects (including cumulative effects) of pollution on health, living conditions and the natural environment, as well as the potential sensitivity of the site or the wider area to impacts that could arise from the development. In doing so they should:*

*a) mitigate and reduce to a minimum potential adverse impacts resulting from noise from new development – and avoid noise giving rise to significant adverse impacts on health and the quality of life;*

*...*

*and c) limit the impact of light pollution from artificial light on local amenity, intrinsically dark landscapes and nature conservation."*

Para.186 *" Planning policies and decisions should sustain and contribute towards compliance with relevant limit values or national objectives for pollutants, taking into account the presence of Air Quality Management Areas and Clean Air Zones, and the cumulative impacts from individual sites in local areas. Opportunities to improve air quality or mitigate impacts should be identified, such as through traffic and travel management, and green infrastructure provision and enhancement."*

Para. 189 *"Heritage assets range from sites and buildings of local historic value to those of the highest significance, such as World Heritage Sites which are internationally recognised to be of Outstanding Universal Value. These assets are an irreplaceable resource, and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations."*

Para.195 *“Local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise any conflict between the heritage asset’s conservation and any aspect of the proposal.”*

Para.199 *“When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.”*

Para.200 *“Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification. Substantial harm to or loss of:*

- a) grade II listed buildings, or grade II registered parks or gardens, should be exceptional;*
- b) assets of the highest significance, notably scheduled monuments, protected wreck sites, registered battlefields, grade I and II\* listed buildings, grade I and II\* registered parks and gardens, and World Heritage Sites, should be wholly exceptional.”*

Para.201 *“Where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to (or total loss of significance of) a designated heritage asset, local planning authorities should refuse consent, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or total loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss, or all of the following apply:*

- a) the nature of the heritage asset prevents all reasonable uses of the site; and*
- b) no viable use of the heritage asset itself can be found in the medium term through appropriate marketing that will enable its conservation; and*
- c) conservation by grant-funding or some form of not for profit, charitable or public ownership is demonstrably not possible; and*
- d) the harm or loss is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the site back into use.”*

Para. 202. *“Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.”*

Para. 203 *“Non-designated heritage assets of archaeological interest, which are demonstrably of equivalent significance to scheduled monuments, should be considered subject to the policies for designated heritage assets. The effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.”*

Para.204 *“Local planning authorities should not permit the loss of the whole or part of a heritage asset without taking all reasonable steps to ensure the new development will proceed after the loss has occurred.”*

Para.205 *“Local planning authorities should require developers to record and advance understanding of the significance of any heritage assets to be lost (wholly or in part) in a manner proportionate to their importance and the impact, and to make*

*this evidence (and any archive generated) publicly accessible<sup>69</sup>. However, the ability to record evidence of our past should not be a factor in deciding whether such loss should be permitted.”*

*Para.206 “Local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development within Conservation Areas and World Heritage Sites, and within the setting of heritage assets, to enhance or better reveal their significance. Proposals that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to the asset (or which better reveal its significance) should be treated favourably.”*

*Para.208 “Local planning authorities should assess whether the benefits of a proposal for enabling development, which would otherwise conflict with planning policies but which would secure the future conservation of a heritage asset, outweigh the disbenefits of departing from those policies.”*

*Para.219 “existing policies should not be considered out-of-date simply because they were adopted or made prior to the publication of this Framework. Due weight should be given to them, 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)”.*

## **Planning Practice Guidance**

Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) is a web-based resource which brings together planning guidance on various topics into one place (launched in March 2014) and coincided with the cancelling of the majority of Government Circulars which had previously given guidance on many aspects of planning.

The following paragraph may be particularly helpful to members in determining this application:

### **How can the possibility of harm to a heritage asset be assessed?**

What matters in assessing whether a proposal might cause harm is the impact on the significance of the heritage asset. As the National Planning Policy Framework makes clear, significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting.

Proposed development affecting a heritage asset may have no impact on its significance or may enhance its significance and therefore cause no harm to the heritage asset. Where potential harm to designated heritage assets is identified, it needs to be categorised as either less than substantial harm or substantial harm (which includes total loss) in order to identify which policies in the National Planning Policy Framework ... apply.

Within each category of harm (which category applies should be explicitly identified), the extent of the harm may vary and should be clearly articulated. Whether a proposal causes substantial harm will be a judgment for the decision-maker, having regard to the circumstances of the case and the policy in the National Planning Policy Framework. In general terms, substantial harm is a high test, so it may not arise in many cases. For example, in determining whether works to a listed building constitute substantial harm, an important consideration would be whether the adverse impact seriously affects a key element of its special architectural or historic interest. It is the degree of harm to the asset's significance rather than the

scale of the development that is to be assessed. The harm may arise from works to the asset or from development within its setting.

While the impact of total destruction is obvious, partial destruction is likely to have a considerable impact but, depending on the circumstances, it may still be less than substantial harm or conceivably not harmful at all, for example, when removing later additions to historic buildings where those additions are inappropriate and harm the buildings' significance. Similarly, works that are moderate or minor in scale are likely to cause less than substantial harm or no harm at all. However, even minor works have the potential to cause substantial harm, depending on the nature of their impact on the asset and its setting.

The National Planning Policy Framework confirms that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). It also makes clear that any harm to a designated heritage asset requires clear and convincing justification and sets out certain assets in respect of which harm should be exceptional/wholly exceptional (see National Planning Policy Framework, paragraph 194).

Paragraph: 018 Reference ID: 18a-018-20190723  
Revision date: 23 07 2019

## **Stockport Town Centre West Regeneration Framework**

This document was formally adopted by the Council on 12 November 2019 and sets out the strategic vision, masterplan and delivery strategy for the Stockport Town Centre West area, now being delivered by the Mayoral Development Corporation. It proposes transformational change over the next 15-20 years through the delivery of approximately 3,500 high quality new homes, up to 100,000m<sup>2</sup> of employment floorspace together with associated green space, social infrastructure etc. to create *"Greater Manchester's newest, greenest and coolest affordable urban neighbourhood"*. Though not a planning policy document, it is a material consideration in the determination of this application.

The application site is located in the SRF's 'Weirside' neighbourhood that the SRF states will become *"a distinctive new town gateway, showcasing its heritage, rediscovering the waterfront and connecting to open countryside"*.

For Weirside, amongst other things, the SRF proposes:

- *"New infill buildings of an appropriate scale, working with retained and refurbished historic buildings;"*
- *New structures could offer modern detailing and materials, providing a sharp contrast with the predominantly red brick Victorian buildings in the area;*
- *Building forms will range from own front door office spaces through small scale apartment blocks through to the larger floorplates and office buildings facing the A6;*
- *Although relatively low rise the area will have an intensity generated through close spacing of buildings, creating an active but intimate feel to the urban environment.*
- *Responding to the River Mersey by improving accessibility to its banks through new pedestrian links and introducing a kayak slipway;*
- *Weirside will be largely car-free with pedestrianised zones to support cafe and small and medium sized business culture with independent breweries, food*



*and drink and local makers. Spaces will allow servicing but prioritise pedestrians, cyclists and buses using best practice design guidance to ensure these modes complement each other”*

## **RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY**

### **Application ref: DC/079225**

Application type: Full planning application

Description: Redevelopment comprising the repurposing of existing buildings and erection of new buildings for a mix of uses comprising 253no, residential homes alongside flexible commercial space (Use Class E), drinking establishments (Sui Generis Use), and hot food takeaways (Sui Generis Use); partial demolition, new public realm, vehicular access, car parking and cycle parking, and associated works.

Applicant: Capital and Centric (ROSE) Limited

Decision: being considered in parallel with this application.

### **Application ref: DC/082004**

Application type: Advertisement consent

Description: Roof mounted signage which comprise 15 individual, internally illuminated characters CAPITAL & CENTRIC on roof of Weir Mill facing King Street West

Applicant: Capital and Centric (ROSE) Limited

Decision: pending consideration

### **Application ref: DC/081972**

Application type: Listed building consent

Description: Installation of rooftop mounted signage.

Applicant: Capital and Centric (ROSE) Limited

Decision: pending consideration

### **Application ref: DC/072907**

Application type: Full planning permission

Description: REVISED PROPOSAL: Redevelopment comprising demolition of buildings, repurposing of existing buildings, and erection of new buildings for a mix of uses comprising 293no. residential apartments and 915sqm flexible commercial space (Use Class A1, A2, A3, B1 or D2 use); ancillary hard and soft landscaping , formation of a new vehicular access onto King Street West, vehicular and cycle parking, and associated works and infrastructure.

EIA DEVELOPMENT - ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT SUBMITTED 28.08.19  
ADDENDUM SUBMITTED 25.10.19

Applicant: Maryland Securities Group

Decision: Withdrawn 20 May 2020

**Application ref: DC/072908**

Application type: Listed building consent

Description: REVISED PROPOSAL: Redevelopment comprising demolition of buildings, repurposing of existing buildings, and erection of new buildings for a mix of uses comprising 293no. residential apartments and 915sqm flexible commercial space (Use Class A1, A2, A3, B1 or D2 use); ancillary hard and soft landscaping, formation of a new vehicular access onto King Street West, vehicular and cycle parking, and associated works and infrastructure.

EIA DEVELOPMENT - ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT SUBMITTED 28.08.19  
ADDENDUM SUBMITTED 25.10.19

Applicant: Maryland Securities Group

Decision: Withdrawn 20 May 2020

**PUBLIC REPRESENTATIONS**

The Council has received three supportive representations to the application from individual members of the public as follows:

I understand that you are currently considering an application for the redevelopment of Weir Mill.

As a Stockport resident I have taken a keen interest in this project and wanted to add my support for it. Weir Mill is an iconic building & part of Stockports rich industrial heritage & to see it standing mostly empty & neglected is a shame.

The plans as I understand them would not only provide additional homes but also redevelop the riverside in that area. This is something that Stockport is crying out for. A river running though our town should be an asset but as it stands it is put to very little use.

I hope you see fit to approve the Capital Centric proposals & I look forward to watching this neglected area of our town become transformed.

I would like my support of the proposal for re generation of Weir Mill to be noted. From what I understand the proposal includes affordable housing, commercial and recreational areas. Prior to my retirement, I worked in Manchester and there are several areas there that have this style of development and they appear to be very popular.

I would just like to add my support in the application of Weir Mill.

It is a key part of the Town Centre West regeneration plan. When it is built it will bring more people to an area that is currently just crumbling away and an eye sore. When it is built it will attract more companies to the area therefore increasing footfall and boosting the local economy. Stockport needs people coming into its centre and spending money.

Yes, the bridge will be partly blocked, but what good is a bridge when the area around looks awful? Plus the bridge is already partially blocked by the Travelodge.

Weir Mill will provide modern high quality housing to an area that currently has none. The Weir Mill could be the catalyst to create an area akin to Manchester's Northern

Quarter, Birmingham's Digbeth, London's Shoreditch. Stockport needs to progress, otherwise we're all living in the same lifeless area staring at a bridge that's covered in weeds and limescale.

Please pass the planning application

An online petition objecting to the applications contains in excess of 3,652 signatures (as of 31 August 2021). The petition is addressed to the applicant, Stockport MBC and the Stockport Mayoral Development Corporation and is entitled 'Don't Hide Our Viaduct: Save Weir Mill'. It remains active and is available to view here:

<https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/don-t-hide-our-viaduct>

The headline text of the petition is as follows:

"Save Stockport's iconic Grade II\* listed Railway Viaduct from more concealment by cumulative impact of high-rise apartments as part of the Weir Mill redevelopment. The mill can be reused and saved by enabling development, and the rest of C&C's proposals have merit. But not at the expense of the iconic viaduct's concealment. We want the developers to devise a revised scheme without a tower; and the council and corporation to provide compensatory development land to the west.

*Why is this important?*

Famous views of the town's largest historic feature, enshrined in Lowry paintings, are being eroded by willful siting of tall tower blocks along its eastern side, concealing the structure from most of the town centre.

The Council's own self-permitted 19-storey Interchange tower will block views of the viaduct on the south side of the valley, while a previous grouping at Regent House (14 storeys) blocks views to the north. Capital and Centric's 14-storey tower takes out both central and oblique views.

*How it will be delivered*

Various means of petition submission to Capital and Centric PLC., Stockport Council, the Mayoral Development Corporation; Historic England and, if necessary, to central Government and its Planning Inspectorate."

A series of written updates to the petition are also on the website and should be read by committee members to fully understand signatories objections. It should however be noted that the online petition has been active for well over a year and was started in response to the previous applications submitted by Maryland Securities Ltd that were withdrawn in May 2020. It is therefore possible that some of the signatories may have objected to the previous applications but not the current proposals. This cannot however be assumed so the petition should be taken on face value.

The Council has also received eight objections to the application from individual members of the public as follows:

The tower block of flats would be a massive blot on the landscape, blocking arguably the most famous view in Stockport; our fabulous Grade II\* Viaduct. [I fear that Stockport might win another Carbuncle Award should this be passed]. Lowry would be turning in his grave!

**Core Policy CS8**

**SAFEGUARDING AND IMPROVING THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Quality Places**

*3.285 Development that is designed and landscaped to a high standard and which makes a positive contribution to a sustainable, attractive, safe and accessible built and natural environment will be given positive consideration. High quality design which promotes a sense of place is of importance throughout the borough and should be an integral part of all development proposals, paying high regard to important local natural and built environment features, including the historic environment,*

How does the new tower help to achieve any of these objectives? The tower will dominate the principle view from the A6 and that will establish a new sense of place. The Applicant has failed to include the impact that the tower will have on the view probably because a photo montage of the view with the tower within it would reveal the true impact of the proposals and the harm it will do to the view.

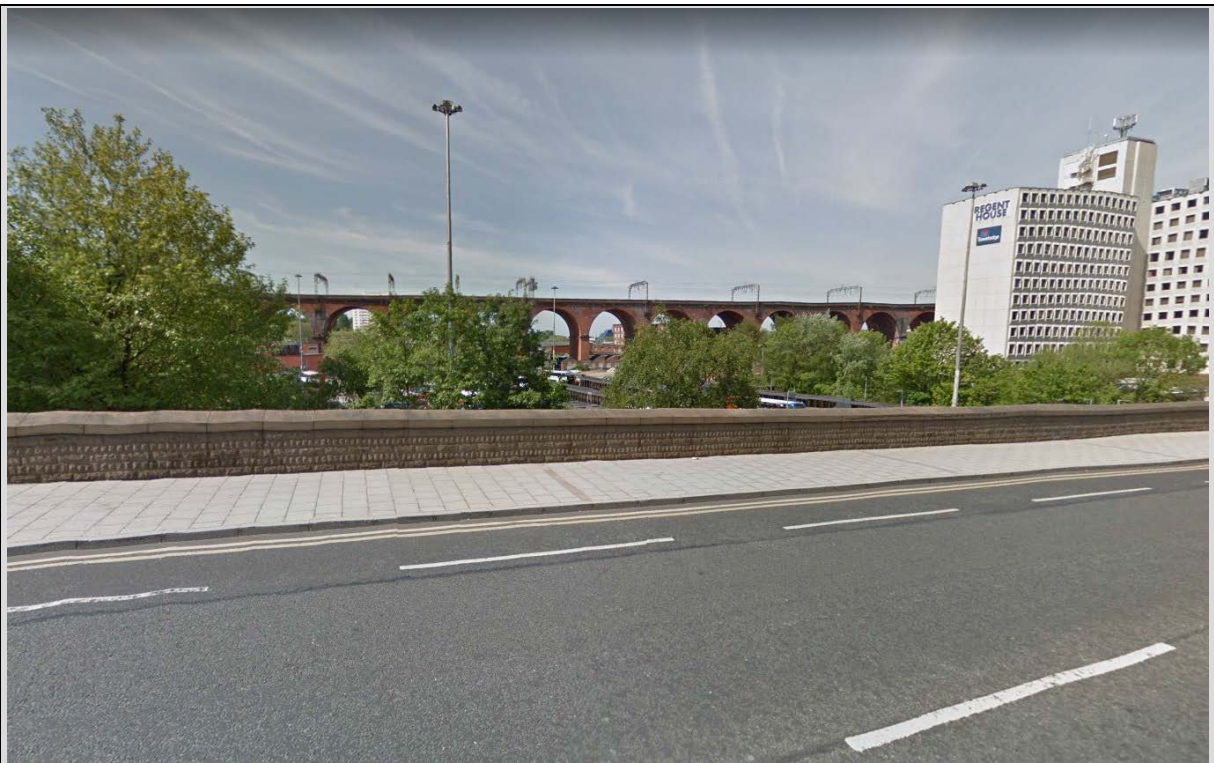
### ***Heritage Conservation***

**3.300** *The Council recognises the unique place the historic environment holds in Stockport's cultural heritage and the multiple ways in which it supports and contributes to the economy, society and daily life. The historic environment is a non-renewable resource and its fragile and finite nature will be a particularly important consideration in the allocation of sites in the Allocations DPD and in Development Management decision-making. Conserving and managing this resource for future generations is a key component of the wider principle of sustainable development which forms an overarching principle of the LDF.*

The viaduct is unique (in Stockport - there are no others here as far as I know).

Much still remains of the historic environment especially in the context of the Stockport town centre where so much has been lost over the previous 50 years and more. This includes existing views. Possibly the most important view of this site is from the A6 as this is where most people will get a first glimpse of the site as they pass by in car and bus. The view is also from the viaduct as people pass by in trains.

Here is the currently uninterrupted long view of the viaduct from the A6 without the tower and below it the same view but with the approximate placement of the proposed new tower.



Note how this completely changes the dynamic of this view. It is not longer a wide open vista of the whole length of the viaduct presently in view.

It is quite evident from the height and position of the tower that it will interrupt the view from the A6 and that this will harm the setting of the grade 2\* listed viaduct. I would argue that it would be substantial harm. Regent House built in the 1960s in less enlightened times when it comes to protection of our heritage, will further separate the viaduct from the principle view point and this just adds to the harm caused to it by the proposals.

We cannot change the past. We cannot turn the clock back to 19th century mills, smoke and deprivation of the people who worked in the mills and lived near them and neither would we want to. However it is to be applauded that the proposals do



save the existing buildings on the site but this should not be at the cost of losing crucial views within the townscape.

The Viaduct is special because in its history it was never usurped by a building which contrasted to it in terms of style, mass and height.

In this photo the massing of the existing mill buildings can be seen relative to the viaduct and beneath this more or less the same view now showing the tower projecting above the viaduct. This gives some idea of how much higher the tower must be to be able to be seen from this viewpoint.





**3.30 1** *Development will be expected to make a positive contribution to the protection and/or enhancement of the borough's heritage assets. Buildings, sites, monuments, places and areas positively identified as having a degree of historic, architectural, artistic or archaeological significance (including canals and other transport infrastructure of historic value) will be safeguarded for the future.*

It is difficult to see how the new Tower contributes to the protection of and/or enhancement of the Viaduct as it seems to do quite the opposite. It will detract from the heritage asset that is the viaduct and it will detract from the views from within a conservation area.

The Viaduct is a 'Heritage Asset', it has been identified as having a degree, which in my opinion would be a significant degree, of historic and architectural significance and it should be safeguarded. In my opinion this includes its setting and these proposals would substantially harm both the setting of the heritage asset and also the views from within a conservation area.

***National Government Guidance is set out in The National Planning Policy Framework as follows:-***

*194. Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification. Substantial harm to or loss of:*

- a) grade II listed buildings, or grade II registered parks or gardens, should be exceptional;*
- b) assets of the highest significance, notably scheduled monuments, protected wreck sites, registered battlefields, grade I and II\* listed buildings, grade I and II\* registered parks and gardens, and World Heritage Sites, should be wholly exceptional.*

The setting of a heritage asset WILL BE harmed by these proposals by virtue of the tall building being proposed. Therefore there should be clear and convincing justification for it. If the harm is considered to be substantial, and I and others argue that it will be, the substantial harm should be wholly exceptional.

In this case, the tower is both close to the viaduct and also clearly within the field of view of one of the principle points of view. This has not been addressed by the Applicant.



The two views above demonstrate the impact and substantial harm that the new tower will have on the setting of the heritage asset.

*195. Where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to (or total loss of significance of) a designated heritage asset, local planning authorities should refuse consent, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or total loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss, or all of the following apply:*

Loss of significance will result to the Viaduct and views of it and also to views from within the conservation area by virtue of the proposed the Tower hindering and interrupting vies across the space between the A6 and the viaduct and from other points of view in a way that has never been in the past.

Consent should be refused unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm.

Has the developer provided clear evidence that the benefits cannot be achieved in another location? It is not enough to say that they do not own any land anywhere else. It is enough to show that land exists elsewhere in a more suitable location that will not result in harm to the heritage asset. justification . If other sites within the area being considered for public benefit exist then these should be taken into consideration. Has this review proves been carried through by the Applicant and by the Council (who cannot determine this application without such knowledge).

a) the nature of the heritage asset prevents all reasonable uses of the site; and  
This does not apply - development that respect the viaduct can still be achieved

b) no viable use of the heritage asset itself can be found in the medium term through appropriate marketing that will enable its conservation; and  
This is not applicable

*c) conservation by grant-funding or some form of not for profit, charitable or public ownership is demonstrably not possible; and*

This is not applicable

*d) the harm or loss is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the site back into use.*

The applicant must show that the development cannot be achieved without the proposals that would result in harm to the heritage asset.

*196. Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.*

This is a matter of subjective judgment but it seems to me that the tower will cause substantial harm to the viaduct by virtue of the domination of the views of the viaduct from the Conservation Area and elsewhere. What would it need to be less than substantial. In my opinion that would be perhaps where a proposal involved a building in a similar location but which is say as high as the viaduct as opposed to being higher than it.

It could still be argued that there is harm because there would be a building higher than anything that was historically present on the site and which obscures part of the viaduct but it doesn't actually project above the parapet and completely dissect the horizontality of the top of the structure.

The Design and Access Statement has commented that "We have met with Historic England three times during the course of the design development, and they have commented that the proposals result in less than substantial harm."

Nevertheless, in my opinion the proposals would result in substantial harm to the heritage asset.

Notwithstanding the comments from Historic England (and also it is suggested in the Design and Access Statement The Victorian Society), proposals that cause less than substantial harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. The public benefits are additional residential accommodation and employment during the construction. The harm will be obstruction of the open view of the viaduct from the A6 and other places.

There is already a large building partly obscuring the view of the viaduct from the A6 that being the 1960s white multi storey building on ??? Street. Further buildings in the open view is a serious detraction from the present views.

The Design and Access Statement also comments on the design of the new tower as follows "The building is shaped by the viaduct arches which the building aligns with and results in a compact floor plate approach with a central vertical circulation core."

Far more appropriate is the blocking of views which the Design and Access Statement hardly looks at.

To the lay person reading this it would not be unreasonable for them to be left with a puzzled expression. There would appear to most reasonable people that just

because the block is 'aligned' with the viaduct is not a reason for considering it to be appropriate.

I've just read of the proposal to construct of a 14-storey block of flats adjacent to the railway viaduct and would urge you and your council to oppose this idiocy. Stockport has much going for it but surely a reputation for barbarianism isn't an attribute you wish to add, is it?

So the Council you lead wants to erect a 14-story tower block next to Stockport Viaduct. Isn't one accident involving Stockport Viaduct enough? Hopefully the Council will do the decent thing and refuse the application. Or be assured it will go down in history as an act of vandalism akin to the demolition of the Euston Arch.

Stockport is my town , born and educated in the area which means very much to me , Stockport is a town with a very good history and good focal points , the indoor market and surrounding area with a fine parish church St Mary"s ,also the lower area of the town which has the fine Plaza Theatre, the river mersey and mersey square with central shopping all with an historical view.

The view has a focus on the construction of the age built in 1840 The tockport Railway Viaduct Grade 2 listed and renowned for its superb construction which is a fine sight also when floodlit at night ,therefore to propose a Tower Block to block out this long lived mersey view in my opinion should be a non starter and i am fully against the proposal and therefore wish to register my protest against it.

I have to say that with 87 documents on the planning website it is hard to ascertain exactly what is being planned.

Whilst I am fully supportive of developing the Weir Mill site, and providing more housing I have to object to the height of the East New Building.

There is a document on the planning website 'Option 8b' which suggests reducing the height of East New Building to the height of the Viaduct, but this ends with stating that it is 'unviable'. So, am I to assume that the planning decision is to be made with a 14 storey building adjacent to the Viaduct?

One of the diagrams in the Tall Buildings document refers to 'revealing the Viaduct' – exactly how do you reveal something by putting a large building in front of it?

The implication being that the Viaduct is only viewed from Chestergate, whereas most people probably see it from Mersey Square. It does not 'safeguard key views of the viaduct' as the developers think, it hides the Viaduct.

East New Building is supposed to be a 'landmark' building – no, it just looks like an office block placed in front of a Grade II listed Viaduct. A landmark building is something like the Town Hall or Central Library: something with architectural merit.

Why would anyone want an apartment next to a railway line? All that glass and a train full of people staring in!

I have not yet worked out whether these apartments will be for rent or sale, it would be better if they were for sale, given the large number of buildings either recently built or planned in Stockport that are just rental. People have a more vested interest in their surroundings when they own a property.

I'm afraid I can't tell from the website whether comments on this planning application are still being accepted. I am writing following a prompt from Capital & Centric as I commented on their original plans. In summary the idea to rejuvenate the Weir Mill site is a good one, but not with a 14 storey building next to the Viaduct.

I am very concerned that the proposal of a 14 storey build at Weir Mill would be an unsuitable siting. I would hope that there might be a compromise for this? Extra much needed housing must be built but with conservation in mind. Stockport's viaduct is one of its 'jewels' and deserves due consideration.

## **Stockport Heritage Trust**

The Stockport Heritage Trust (SHT, the Trust) hereby objects to the current proposals affecting the Grade II listed Weir Mill complex and Grade II\* Viaducts, and recommends that planning permission and listed building consent be refused.

### **SUMMARY**

A. The Trust's principle objection concerns the 14-storey tower proposed for the eastern part of the site. It would sit in front of and obstruct iconic views of the Grade II\* listed viaducts. This is especially true when considered in the wider context of the cumulative effect of tall buildings in the vicinity i.e., including both the existing Regent House, the imminent construction of the Council's own Interchange Tower and bus station, and future plans for development towards the south, along the hillside towards the railway station. The Interchange scheme is noticeably absent from the applicant's environmental impact assessment, and most of Capital and Centric's own representations of the Weir Mill tower are from close range, or bird's eye views taken from the west – not from the town centre.

B. Equally important, and totally ignored by the developers, are the views of Stockport's historic town centre and its key landmarks from commuter and inter-city trains passing over the viaducts. These important views potentially attract visitors to the town, are seen by at least 4 million passengers per year (i.e., 650 train movements per day), and would be concealed by the towers at Weir Mill and the adjacent Interchange site. Views of the listed St. Mary's and St. Peter's churches and of the town hall would all be gone or drastically reduced.

C. Iconic town centre views of both the Viaducts and Weir Mill have been documented since the first railway structure's erection in 1840. The views include popular mid-nineteenth century engravings and lithographs (including Tait's famous 1848 depiction); numerous artistic works by L.S. Lowry RA (1887-1976) and other painters, photographers and now film-makers.

D. The viaducts are beloved of townsfolk, by tourists and other visitors, and are revered in fond memory by the Stockport diaspora. Local councillors and members of parliament campaign for their welfare. The broad span and soaring height of the structures are represented in popular culture in business and social club logos, and in posters and postcards sold around the world. The historic structures have enormous aesthetic, technical-scientific, and social / community values. The viaducts create Stockport's sense of place.

E. While the Trust accepts the need for enabling development to help fund the repair and rehabilitation of the Grade II listed Weir Mill, it objects to the 14-story eastern tower proposed in the development. There are ample vacant sites in and around the Council's Town Centre West development zone, including some to the immediately

west of the Weir Mill complex (partially owned by the Council), that could be provided by the Council and/or the Mayoral Development Commission to facilitate a more benign Weir Mill development. Considering the already heavy public subsidy being arranged through Homes England for the Capital and Centric scheme, the cost-benefit of marginal land transfer would be considerable. Especially so, if the development plans became protracted through fundamental objections being raised by the Trust, the Victorian Society and Historic England leading to a Ministerial call-in and public inquiry fought on the issue of the offending tower.

Detailed comments on the applications and reasons for objection are given below.

## 1. HERITAGE ASSETS IMPACTED BY THE PROPOSALS

### The Mill Complex

1.1 SHT stresses to your Council the special architectural and historic significance of the Grade II mill complex because of its completeness, revealing the continuing development of the site through time. This is emphasized in the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments for England's seminal study, original description and analysis of the site that underpins the current explanation in the Statutory List. Historic England have called this site a "highly significant example of a multi-phase cotton mill."

1.2 The Trust agrees with developer's assessment that the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century structures on the site (excluding the second matching viaduct of 1889) have low or negligible heritage or other values. The mid- and earlier-nineteenth century and eighteenth century buildings, however, SHT deems to have high or considerable value, and therefore agrees with Capital and Centric's plans for them to be saved, repaired and reused.

### The Viaducts and the Mill

1.3 The Trust's understanding is that at least one pier of the Grade II\* viaducts lies within the curtilage of the Mill. The Mill's form and development in relation to the construction of the viaduct overhead is an integral part of the history of both statutorily protected structures. And the views of the Mill through the arch of the viaduct form part of the cherished local appearance of the site as a whole, as illustrated in many engravings, paintings, and photographs of the area.

1.4 The developer makes a poor case for the non-economic arguments in support of the eastern tower where it affects the viaducts. The potential harm caused by the development to the appearance of the Viaduct is underplayed and takes no account of the cumulative visual impacts caused by other nearby planned or existing developments i.e., the Council's own 17-storey Interchange residential tower and bus station, and the extant Regent House. Certainly, both short- and long- range views to the combined sites will be detrimentally affected by the planned 14-storey residential block on the east side of the Weir Mill site. Indeed, the view-shed images presented in Capital and Centric's reports are misleading and fail to account for the intended Interchange tower, where the cumulative stacking of tall buildings against the east side of the viaduct will badly block public views from much of the town. The viaduct's iconic dominance over the town would be vastly reduced and spoilt by the unnecessary height of the new tower.

### The Viaducts



1.5 The Grade II\* Viaducts (built 1840 and 1889) span the Mersey valley and gorge in 22 arches more than 0.5 km long at a height of 33.9 m. They remain a crowning achievement of the Victorian Age and are the largest, most prominent and iconic heritage asset in the town. The presence of the viaducts can be seen from many long-distance viewpoints in Heaton Norris, Heaton Mersey, Edgeley, on Lancashire Hill and throughout the town centre. At least up to 1 km from the Weir Mill site.

1.6 A fundamental feature of the landscape setting of viaducts is the nature of their span across natural topography: in this case, Stockport's steep-sided industrialized valley sides and rockcut river gorge. The awesome nature of the nineteenth century engineering is accentuated by multiple archways being seen head-on, or at oblique serried angles of study. The height of the structure is especially appreciated when seen against the depth of the river Mersey in its gorge, and by contrast with the physically puny scale of buildings scattered at its feet.

1.7 Until recent history, nearly the whole expanse of the brick structure was exposed to public view and appreciation along its full length on both east and west sides. Most buildings at the viaduct's feet remain visually subservient to the mighty structures' geometry – being generally shorter than the arch springing lines.

## 2. CONSERVATION PRINCIPLES

2.1 The applicant offers hardly any references to, or justifications against, important cultural heritage criteria cited in Historic England's *Conservation Principles* (2008 as amended) pertaining to the proposals' impacts on the Values and Significance of the heritage assets, and in particular, of the Grade II\* Viaducts.

### Evidential (Scientific and Technical) Value

2.2 Evidential values are proportional to their potential to contribute to people's understanding of the past. The town's steep river gorge topography, adjacent land forms, and industrial landscape are encompassed in the giant spans of brickwork crossing the River Mersey. Therein, lies an enormously tangible panorama of Victorian engineering and transport history: including the consequential development of the town to the north and Manchester; the fast connection of the town to Birmingham and London markets; and so on.

2.3 The significance of the Stockport Viaducts lies in equal parts to their exposed great length and height – indicating logistical, economic and craft prowess that have inspired local pride, admiration and awe. The Trust draws parallels with other designated heritage assets around the country and overseas where the full span of such railway and other structures is fully displayed, rather than intermittently seen between blocking vegetation, topography or buildings.

### Aesthetic Value

2.4 Through conscious design, fortuitous juxtapositions in the town- and land- scape, inspirational form, proportions, massing, silhouettes, views and vistas, the awesome nature of the viaducts soars across and exemplifies mid-nineteenth century popular industrialization.

2.5 Iconic town centre views of the Viaducts and Weir Mill have been documented and used for inspiration by artists since the railway structure's erection in 1840. The views include popular c1845 engravings and lithographs, including Arthur Fitzwilliam Tait's famously heroic 1848 industrial depiction (redolent of Philip James de

Loutherbourn's 1801 *Coalbrookdale by Night*); numerous artistic works by L.S. Lowry R.A. (1887-1976), including *Industrial Landscape* (1955), *Industrial Landscape Stockport Viaduct* (1958), and *The Viaduct, Stockport* (1969-72); black-and-white architectural photographs of the Viaduct and Mill (1954) by Eric de Mare (1910-2002); black-and-white photos of Lowry on Wellington Bridge steps (1962) by Crispin Eurich (1935-1976); numerous paintings inspired by the Lowry photographs on the steps by Chris Cyprus, Mervyn Levy, Phil and Rolf Harris; and viaduct inspired paintings by Clare Allan, Beryl Baguley, Albert Barlow, Gordon Bruce, Stephen Campbell, Helen Clapcott, Arthur Delaney (1927-1987), James Downie, A. E. Gill, Alan Harris, Sophie Holt, Alan Knight, Alan Lowndes, Kate O'Brian, Stafford Simeon, William Ralph Turner (1920-2013), Dolt Vincent, and Martin Whittam. Most recently, movie actor Timothy Spall played Lowry at the Viaduct in a scene in *Mrs. Lowry and Son* (2019, Vertigo Films [www.youtube.com/watch?v=TTOiVivEmwo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TTOiVivEmwo) for Amazon Prime).

2.6 In many of these artistic scenes (see Appendix B), the vastly wide and generally uninterrupted span, overpowering height and relative scale of Stockport viaducts are key elements of the artists' designs. The views, equally divided between the east (town centre) and west sides of the listed structure have entered popular imagination both within and beyond the town, and become closely associated with Stockport's sense-of-place; its industrial heritage, its witness to the sublime awesome power of the Industrial Revolution, and other impressions of Northern Grit.

### Communal Values

2.7 As of 2pm today, more than 2,800 people, the vast majority of them local residents, have signed a petition: <https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/don-t-hide-our-viaduct> objecting to the Weir Mill tower on the east side of the viaducts. A hard copy of the document with all the signatures is enclosed with this document at Appendix C.

2.8 The Grade II\* structures have deep meaning for locals and provide them with a sense of place. The structures have been assigned both symbolic and social values, as a source of identity, distinctiveness and coherence. They are cherished local views form part of collective memory.

2.9 Images of the viaducts can be found in railway and other posters and postcards; news blog web pages e.g., *The Viaduct*, and in local company and club logos: for example, those of Viaduct Care CIC; Aqua Design; Stockport College (now defunct); Stockport County Supporters' *Marion's Board* Website; Stockport & District Railway Modelers Club; Stockport Gin; Stockport Homes; and Viaduct Life Coaching.

2.10 Local Councillors, Matt Wynne and David Meller, and local MPs Navendu Mishra and Andrew Gwynne, have been campaigning for Network Rail and the Ministry of Transport to improve maintenance and repair on the Grade II\* structures.

2.11 These actions signify a popular response to the Grade II\* structures and widespread public care for their welfare and sustainability. This concern includes not only a desire for cleanliness of the brickwork's appearance at the micro-scale, but also a broader apprehension about the hiding of the viaduct from general view and appreciation in the town centre.

## 3. ENABLING DEVELOPMENT: ALTERNATIVE SITES

The Trust's early comments submitted on the developer's Scoping Report in the current submittal were largely ignored or dismissed by Avison Young's EIA Scoping Report response. Nevertheless, the Trust recites the principal objections here again.

3.1 The developer's EIA report failed to encompass any sensible review of Alternate Sites. Alternative uses or combinations of uses have been addressed. But only within the confines of the existing Weir Mill site. However, given the Council's Town Centre West strategy, and its intention to work with the Mayoral Development Commission to free up redundant brownfield sites by negotiated agreement or compulsory purchase, the Trust feels it ought to be possible for Capital and Centric to trade a reduction of a minimum of 60 of the 78 units planned over ground floor retail / food and beverage spaces for the Weir Mill east tower in return for alternative land for that amount of accommodation elsewhere in the immediate area.

3.2 The 14-storey tower is contentious and will raise planning objections as articulated in this document and from other heritage interest groups including Historic England. But a shorter building with 18 apartments over three floors with commercial spaces below would raise few objections on that same site.

3.3 To make the developer's finances work, it is recognized by the Trust that compensatory enabling development would be required, and the Trust agrees that this would be impossible within the confines of the current site. The developer has not tested or fully explained why nearby sites could not be conjoined to the development and freed up for construction by Stockport Mayoral Development Corporation (SMDC). Key aims in the Corporation's five-year business plan 2020-2025 for Stockport Town Centre West are, after all, to:

- Tackle development viability constraints (page 5)
- Provide new approaches to development on brownfield land (page 9)
- Unlock sites (page 12)
- Accelerate delivery through land acquisition to facilitate site assembly (page 12), especially at the King Street West / Chestergate intersection (page 14) adjacent to the Weir Mill site.
- Provide gap funding (page 12)

3.4 Such provisions appear to the Trust as direct and specific means to aid the developer to achieve its goals without materially and significantly affecting the special interest and setting of the Grade II\* listed Viaducts on their east side.

#### 4. SOCIO-ECONOMICS: local planning policy

4.1 With regards to the town's Strategic Regeneration Framework (SRF) – the developer has not demonstrated how the development's eastern tower will “showcase the town's heritage” when, in fact, it will directly obscure part of the Grade II\* listed viaduct, and contribute in cumulative fashion to limiting other panoramic and direct views when combined with obstructions caused by the existing Regent House and the planned Interchange tower developments.

4.2 The Trust fails to see why the Weir Mill eastern tower would act as a landmark for Town Centre West when the adjacent and taller Interchange tower will already create such a marker. The term, “Landmark” infers that the structure would form a singular visual marker for navigation. But the new Interchange will already have such a function, as its primary use is already concerned with travel and navigation.

#### 5. IMPACT OF TOWER ON THE GRADE II\* VIADUCTS

5.1 The Trust objects to the lack of definition for the Zone of Visual Influence (ZVI) suggested by the developer. SHT proposes a 1 km zone to account for all significant views and vistas of the viaducts, and the cumulative effects of Regent House, Interchange Tower and the Weir Mill tower on the engineering features' eastern side.

5.2 Stockport Heritage Trust strongly contests the developer's assumption that Townscape and Visual attributes should be deemed insignificant, or minor, and excluded from the scheme's Environmental Impact Assessment. Indeed, the developer conveniently focuses solely on the development site in the scoping report, while expanding the study area to 1 Km in other sections. In this regard, the suggested scoping is partial and biased.

5.3 Considering that the previous developer appears to have withdrawn its planning application on the basis of strong objections from Historic England, the Victorian Society and the Stockport Heritage Trust regarding the impact of a tall tower on the east (town centre) side of the Grade II\* Viaduct, it would seem to the Trust essential that the current scheme be contested on the same basis.

5.4 It remains the Trust's opinion that many panoramic views of the east side of the Grade II\* structure and its familiar skyline would be obstructed by the cumulative effects of tall buildings. The current Weir Mill development's tall tower would, if permitted, significantly add to the cumulative visual impacts already generated by the existing Regent House to the north and the proposed Interchange tower to the south. Appendix E provides a reassembly by the Trust of the developer's computer-generated imagery from which to study visual impacts. But these images are preceded by the Trust's own panorama comparisons from a view point on the west side of Wellington Bridge. They illustrate the obstructed views created by Interchange Tower, the proposed Weir Mill Tower and by the unfortunate extant Regent House.

5.5 The Trust insists that visual impacts modelled on the townscape and cherished local viewsheds seriously affects the special interest and setting of the railway viaduct. The Trust refers to Historic England's Conservation Principles cited above; Planning Advice Notes #3, The Setting of Heritage Assets; and #4, Tall Buildings; and the references in the latter documents to the National Planning Policy Framework that all emphasize the contribution of settings of historic assets to their significance, local character and distinctiveness.

5.6 Stockport Heritage Trust is aware that Stockport Council (SMBC) has no urban design expertise in its planning department. It does not appear to have carried out any urban skyline, cherished view or vista studies as part of its strategic planning functions.

#### Tests in the National Planning Policy Framework

5.7 In the Trust's view, the current proposals represent "substantial harm" to the historic viaduct and require either major mitigation benefiting the heritage assets (e.g., by eliminating the residential tower) or be rejected as overloaded development.

5.8 The Trust contests arguments that an NPPF test of "less than substantial" harm should be applied to the proposals. This is illogical. The identified heritage benefits of retention and adaptation should and must be applied to the public benefits side of the balance equation, not used to offset substantial harm.

## 6. ECONOMIC VIABILITY

6.1 The Trust notes from the viability studies that the developer claims that the Weir Mill eastern tower “results in a more viable development.” But elsewhere, its consultants admit that economic viability is marginal and heavily subsidized by Homes England, through a proposed £7 million Housing Infrastructure Grant focused upon the “viability challenges with the listed asset (i.e., Grade II listed Mill complex). Indeed, so unviable is the current scheme, that no affordable (subsidized) accommodation is now planned, and Capital and Centric appear to be waving standard profit margins in an attempt to make the project work.

6.2 Considering the economic shortfall assumed for the project, the developer appears to have based its enabling activities solely around the most expensive new element to build – a high rise tower with all its complicated structural and mechanical infrastructure.

6.3 No applications appear to have been made to Historic England, or to the National Heritage Lottery Fund (NHLF) for additional targeted public sector grants to offset the costs of repair of the Grade II listed Weir Mill complex. The NHLF’s Grants for Heritage programme provides funding to large deserving heritage projects from £250,000 to £5 million. Such grants might reduce the developer’s reliance upon building a high-rise tower, thus saving Weir Mill and not destroying the setting of the Grade II\* viaducts.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

7.1 In conclusion, and for the reasons outlined above, Stockport Heritage Trust objects to the current proposal to erect a high-rise tower on the east side of Stockport’s Grade II\* viaduct and recommends that planning permission and listed building consent be refused.

The Trust is copying this letter to both Historic England and the Victorian Society for their information.

### **Navendu Mishra MP**

Stockport Viaduct is a Grade II\* listed structure and an iconic part of the town’s built heritage. It is incorporated into the branding of many local organisations. Capital and Centric has applied for planning permission for a development on either side of the viaduct which includes a tower between the town centre and the viaduct, and which will have a damaging impact on its prominence in our community and spoil the enjoyment for all those who live, work and visit our town.

I want to set out my position on the current proposal in response to all the constituents who have contacted me about it. I’m grateful that so many have taken the time to get in touch.

A petition opposing the tower has more than three thousand signatures to date <https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/don-t-hide-our-viaduct>

Significantly, the Victorian Society has now objected to the scheme. I am grateful for the time that Stockport Heritage Trust took to explain its reasons for opposing the current proposal. Its biggest concern is that a 14-storey tower will ruin the view of the viaduct, while Historic England says the development would be a ‘considerable visual intrusion’.

I welcome plans to make the river accessible and it is important to see historic buildings brought back into use and protected. When I met with Capital and Centric I saw exciting indoor spaces and an attractive 'public realm'. I recognise that public aspects of schemes like this have to be funded from the money generated through 'enabling' residential development.

But there are seven thousand households on Stockport's housing waiting list. The crisis is not simply about the number of homes. It is also about improving the alternatives for the people who live here already. This development can – and should – make an important contribution if commercial considerations are balanced with a real commitment to improving the stock of social housing. My priority remains good quality and affordable housing for everyone who lives in Stockport.

A commercially viable development which preserves the views of the viaduct and provides an inclusive mix of housing must be our goal. Stockport Council and the Mayoral Development Corporation should consider making more adjoining land available. The Victorian Society points out that 'there is plenty of space in the areas proposed for redevelopment immediately to the south and west of the site to provide the extra units that the tower would offer.'

I am not against the whole development, but a balance must be struck. We do not need the tower to enable high quality development in Stockport town centre. We need a rethink that protects the view of the viaduct for future generations.

I look forward to seeing such a vision put forward for the people of Stockport.

### **Save Britain's Heritage**

SAVE Britain's Heritage objects to the above planning and listed building consent applications for the redevelopment of the Weir Mill site and the construction of a 14-storey tower adjacent to the Stockport Viaduct. Listed at grade II\*, this viaduct is a historic monument of the highest significance to both the city of Stockport and the nation's railway heritage. The tower proposed in its immediate setting will substantially harm not only the viaduct's historic significance but also the defining views to and from it which are integral to the unique character of the city. The applications therefore fail to comply with national and local policy for preserving Stockport's historic environment. For these reasons we call on the Local Planning Authority to refuse planning and listed building consent.

### **Significance**

Passing through the heart of the application site and spanning much of the city itself, Stockport Viaduct is arguably the defining landmark of the city. Completed in 1840 to designs by George Watson Buck for the Manchester and Birmingham Railway, the viaduct was at the time the largest viaduct in the world and is still considered to be an icon of the early railway age. Constructed from over 11 million bricks, the substantial scale and span of the viaduct over the River Mersey were deliberate expressions of civic pride in a city proud of its industrial role in the region, a characteristic reflected in the historic Weir Mill which sits beneath it. Such is the impact of the viaduct, that it also became something of a cultural icon, portrayed in several works by the noted landscape artist L.S. Lowry.

The historic Weir Mill forms the remainder of the application site, sitting to the west and partly beneath the viaduct. Listed grade II in 1996, the Weir Mill was originally a



cotton spinning mill and dates in part from the late 18th century, with extensions in the 19th and early 20th centuries. It is acknowledged to be of high heritage significance to the city, a fact recognised in the Stockport City Centre Masterplan which emphasises the council's intention to see it restored.

### Our Assessment

SAVE has long supported the principal of restoring and reusing the Weir Mill, an intention originally set out in our 1976 report *Deserted Bastions*, featuring a number of historic industrial landmarks in need of reuse.

However, having assessed the current proposals, we consider the substantial harm the tower proposed will cause to the setting of Stockport Viaduct to outweigh the benefits of restoring the Weir Mill.

At 14-storeys high, the tower would be three times the height of the Weir Mill and rise well above the listed viaduct, diminishing its landmark setting and unbroken views of the historic structure from the east of the city. Historic England state that the tower would be a '*considerable visual intrusion*', a concern also echoed in the formal objections of the Victorian Society, Manchester Civic Society and the Stockport Heritage Trust.

We consider this setting harm to be substantial and therefore unacceptable in the context of National Planning Policy Framework para 189 which states that "*Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting.*" Paragraph 193 also states that "*When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.*"

The viaduct is a grade II\* listed building of the highest value in national terms, and its setting, both immediate and in long distance vistas, is integral to its heritage significance and landmark quality as a symbol of Stockport. It is therefore essential that any proposals for new development of this site protect and enhance this setting, a duty set out under Section 16 of the Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990. A 14-storey tower at this location, just metres from the viaduct's structure, does not achieve this.

We also question the fundamental justification for a tower at this. We note that the council's adopted City Centre Masterplan identifies several locations in the western city centre in need of regeneration and suitable for housing. The applicant states that the tower is in part, an enabling factor in their restoration of the Weir Mill but fails to justify why 14-storeys specifically is needed to achieve this. In our view, these applications, if approved, risk setting a dangerous precedent that tall buildings and the harm they cause to the immediate setting of the Stockport Viaduct are acceptable.

The regeneration of this site, including the restoration of the Weir Mill, is set to benefit from £7 million of public HIF funding awarded by Homes England. We therefore urge the council to ensure this public money is invested in a scheme that respects, not harms, the historic character of Stockport without the need for a 14-storey tower. This is also a key policy aspiration of the Unitary Development Plan Policy TCG3.1 'RIVERSIDE', which states that "*In this area the extension of leisure*

*and office uses into the area will be appropriate, with new buildings being designed to respect historic features and the dramatic setting of the viaduct and river gorge.”*

The planning system should support economically, environmentally and socially sustainable places by enabling development that balances the costs and benefits of a proposal over the long term. The aim is to achieve the right development in the right place; it is not to allow development at any cost. To create high quality sustainable places, the *National Planning Policy Framework 2019* advises in paragraph 184 that heritage “*assets are an irreplaceable resource and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations*”.

## Conclusion

We do not believe that the present proposals are the only means of achieving either the restoration of the Weir Mill or the regeneration of this part of the city, and for the reasons outlined above, we call on the Local Planning Authority to refuse planning and listing building consent. I trust these comments are useful to you and I ask that you keep me informed of further decisions or consultations regarding these applications.

## **CONSULTEE RESPONSES**

### **SMBC Heritage Conservation**

#### **SITE LOCATION AND CONTEXT**

The application site comprises the GII listed Weir Mill complex. The site is bisected by the Grade II\* Railway Viaduct, which oversails the site, with four of its supporting piers located within the site boundary. The site is contained by Astley Street to the east, King Street West to the west, Chestergate to the south and the steep sided banks of the River Mersey to the north.

The site is in close proximity to a number of heritage assets of special architectural and historic interest, the collective group value of which help to define Stockport's unique identity, townscape and sense of local distinctiveness. Most notably they include Wellington Mill and chimney (Grade II), Wellington Bridge (Grade II), the former Wellington Bridge Inn (locally listed) and the St Peters Conservation Area to the east, King Street West bridge (locally listed) to the north and King Street House Hatworks (locally listed) and Kingston Mill (locally listed) to the west.

The Railway Viaduct and Weir Mill together with Wellington Mill, Mentor House and Kingston Mill retain the legibility of the Victorian Industrial composition of this part of the town. The mill buildings illustrate the historic importance of the textile and clothing industry to the town and its relationship with the river, and represent surviving examples of a once more prevalent type of industrial building. The numerous road bridges that skirt the site and the Railway Viaduct are illustrative of improving transport, as a result of increased industrialisation, highlighting the site's evolving connectivity and valley topography.

The valley setting and building pattern allow important views across the town centre from a number of vantage points across Stockport as well as providing views into the area and vistas towards key buildings and structures. These views and vistas are defining elements of the character and identity of the town centre of Stockport.

Weir Mill is identified as a key site, which contributes to the Stockport Mayoral Development Corporation's ambitions for housing provision and the regeneration of the town centre, falling within the 'Weirside Neighbourhood' of Town Centre West. The *Stockport Town Centre West Strategic Regeneration Framework* (SRF) establishes the expectations for Town Centre West in line with the principles of sustainable development and places an emphasis on celebrating heritage, promoting good design and responding sensitively to character and landscape. The vision for 'Weirside Neighbourhood' is the creation of a 'low rise mixed-use employment and leisure area under the viaduct, which creates a new gateway into the town - showcasing the river and the town's heritage'.

Historic asset descriptions for statutory and locally listed buildings and conservation areas can be accessed via the Council's interactive mapping system at the following link: <https://www.stockport.gov.uk/find-conservation-and-heritage-assets>

The heritage context of the site engages the requirement for the applications to be assessed in accordance with relevant policies and legislation as they apply to the historic environment / heritage assets, being CS8 and SIE-3 of the Core Strategy DPD, HC1.3 of the UDP, policies contained within Chapter 16 of the NPPF and S16(2) S66(1) and S72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act, 1990.

## HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE OF WEIR MILL AND STOCKPORT RAILWAY VIADUCT

Paragraph 195 of the NPPF states that local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise any conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal. Annex 2 of the NPPF defines significance as 'the value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. The interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting'.

As described below, the significance of Weir Mill and Stockport's Railway Viaduct, both individually and collectively, derives from a wide range of inter-related values. Weir Mill, the Railway Viaduct and their setting are of exceptional cultural, architectural, historic and archaeological significance, making a substantial contribution to the identity and local distinctiveness of Stockport.

### Weir Mill

Weir Mill was listed for its group value, as a multi-phase integrated cotton spinning and weaving complex displaying the greatest number of phases of development represented on any mill site in Greater Manchester, dating from C18th to C20th. It includes important examples of fire proofing technologies and floor construction, which reflect the advancing abilities of the era to construct large span, multi storey buildings that carried the huge weight of the machinery. The buildings on the site further reflect the advancement of technologies in the cotton industry itself, driven by the need to produce ever-increasing amounts of goods. There is evidence of early waterpower and then the progression to steam power, as well as the early weaving shed, which survives as a reminder that the mill capitalised on the advantages of a

combined process. The surviving fabric of Weir Mill is unique because it encapsulates the development of the cotton industry in a single site and represents the key role that Stockport played in contributing to the technological advancement of the Industrial revolution. It remains substantially intact with its ancillary buildings grouped together within a tight knit urban site abutting the River Mersey. This level of completeness and early retained fabric displays a legibility of the variety of uses which contributed to the life of the textile mill, which is key to its overall significance.

Assessment of the regional significance of Weir Mill in the context of historic textile-manufacturing buildings, undertaken by Salford Archaeology in January 2019, identified the following:

- In the context of C18 mills in the region, Weir Mill by virtue of evidence of the original elements of its 1790 construction, particularly the lower levels of the wheelhouse, is the oldest textile mill in the urban setting of Stockport.
- In the context of water-powered mills in the region, Weir Mill is a rare survival. It retains elements of the housing of its mechanics as well as legible water management features in the red sandstone bedrock such as tunnels and sluices. Weir Mill's wheelhouse uniquely extends into the River Mersey
- In the context of steam-powered mills in the region, there is a greater number of surviving steam-powered textile mills. Evidence of Weir Mill's internal engine house (within the East Mill block) is important, though the loss of the chimney and power plant is regrettable.
- In the context of its innovation of structural design, Weir Mill retains fine examples of the developing fireproof construction of the time, incorporating the 'hodgkinson-type' floor beam construction with cast iron columns and brick vault ceilings. The structural arrangement of the standing west spinning mill was unique to notable architect George Woodhouse and Potts' design and likely the last textile mill that Woodhouse designed.
- In the context of integrated cotton mills, the adoption of power-loom weaving and the erection of the weaving end of Fernley's mill made Weir Mill one of the earliest integrated cotton spinning and weaving mills. The earliest riverside weaving shed was demolished to accommodate the Railway Viaduct, however the remaining weaving shed to the east of the site provides useful evidence of this building typology. There are few remaining integrated mills in the region, and a number of those that do remain have already had their weaving sheds demolished. Other textile mills identified with surviving weaving sheds are without statutory protection, indicating a level of regional rarity.

#### Weir Mill and Stockport Viaduct

The significance of Weir Mill is reinforced by its association with the Grade II\* listed viaduct and the Mersey river, in terms of physical proximity, historic and visual interrelationship. In the 1890's the railway was widened but was hindered by the presence of Weir Mill. To overcome this, a section of the spinning block was taken down, and rebuilt projecting under an archway of the bridge, creating the distinctive relationship between the two. Views of the Mill through the arches of the viaduct form part of the cherished local appearance of the site as a whole, as illustrated in many engravings, paintings, and photographs of the area - some famously featuring LS Lowry. The contrast between the polite architectural character and overt confidence of the design of the viaduct, contrasts with the functional and vernacular architectural

character of the mill group, reinforcing the sense of progress as well as a sense of loss of local identity and control – this is something echoed in the paintings of LS Lowry, many of which depict Stockport Viaduct as a motif or symbol of the impact of the industrial revolution upon the daily lives of ordinary people.

### Stockport Railway Viaduct

Stockport's Railway Viaduct stands out as a truly awe-inspiring piece of Victorian industrial engineering. The massive scale of the vivid red structure with its exposed great length of 27 brick arches marching across the landscape, is a defining landmark of the town, emphasising the town's steep river gorge topography, adjacent land forms and industrial landscape, and contrasting with lower scaled buildings beneath it, dominating its visual surroundings. It is of considerable architecture interest, which stems not only from the exceptional quality and complexity of its construction, but also from its enormously impressive visual character. It is an iconic structure, a symbol of Stockport that invokes feelings of nostalgia, familiarity, destination and a sense of place, symbolising logistical innovation and economic and construction prowess that inspire local pride, admiration and awe.

The Viaduct makes a substantial contribution to our understanding of the evolution of railways and railway architecture. Its soaring nature is a tangible reminder of the wealth and ambition of the railway companies in the nineteenth century. The deep Mersey Valley was a major impediment to north/south rail connections, and the construction of the viaduct – which remains the largest brick structure in Western Europe – represented a monumental effort to overcome the topographical challenges in connecting Manchester/SE Lancashire to the rest of the UK and was achieved with notable architectural flair and innovation. Constructed only 10 years after the first passenger railway (Manchester to Liverpool in 1830) the viaduct embodies the spirit of the early Victorian age and the rapid technological advances brought about by the industrial revolution; the importance of the railway network in supporting the supply of raw materials; transporting people and facilitating trade; and the growing confidence in applying engineering innovation to overcome obstacles.

In April 2018 the MEN recognised the viaduct as being 'one of Greater Manchester's most recognisable landmarks'. It is visible over short, medium and long range views, both day and night (thanks to its fine floodlit form); from within and outside the site from public spaces and from private homes, making a vital contribution to the Townscape character of Stockport.

The viaduct holds significant amenity value and cultural significance for all those that live, work and visit the town and is of great importance as part of a main artery connecting the North with the South. The viaduct has been a source of artistic inspiration since its construction, as evidence by the wealth of artworks that have made the structure their subject, and it is notable that even today, with its overpowering scale and generally uninterrupted length, it remains the most utilised image in promotional materials for Stockport.

### HERITAGE IMPACT OF THE PROPOSALS

Weir Mill complex is listed grade at II, while the Railway Viaduct is listed at grade II\*. Weir Mill, the Railway Viaduct and their setting are of exceptional cultural, architectural, historic and archaeological significance, making a substantial contribution to the identity and local distinctiveness of Stockport. These two assets have a considerable interrelationship, historically, visually and physically. The impact

upon the significance of heritage assets varies in nature and scale – from demolition and physical alterations to new development within their setting – and so are considered separately.

## Weir Mill

### Retained buildings

The application proposes retention of the following buildings, which have been assessed within the Heritage Assessment as the most significant buildings at the site, in individual terms:

*East Mill* (fireproof spinning mill 1&2) - comprising building 1 dating from c1831, largely rebuilt in 1843, which includes a former engine house with evidence of beam engine, & building 2 dating from 1840, which was built as an extension to building 1.

*West Mill* (fireproof spinning mill 3) – design by George Woodhouse, dating from 1884, replacing an earlier 1790 structure and retaining a double-height engine room and boiler house. Elements of the 1790 structure potentially retained.

*Wheelhouse* (building 4) – 1790 mill building, largely rebuilt in 1884. Includes a surviving three-bay block incorporating part of the original wheelhouse

*West Shed* (building 8) – dating from c.1856. Identified historically as a ‘factory’. Single storey building with early examples of ‘Hodgkinson’ floor beams and cast iron columns supporting brick-vaulted ceilings and innovative raised roof lights

The repairs to, and restoration of, the original fabric and architectural features of the retained buildings are to be welcomed and would represent a significant benefit of the scheme. Whilst the complexities involved in the conversion of these buildings to residential and commercial use are acknowledged they would nevertheless involve interventions and alterations that would have a harmful impact on their significance. This however should be considered in the context of bringing the buildings back into positive use.

In order to facilitate repurposing of the buildings, the proposed scheme would, for example, result in:

- loss of existing fabric and original architectural features, original character, and legibility of earlier phases of construction / building uses, from the alteration to original openings, creation of new openings and the blocking up of, or visual obstruction of existing original openings (including windows, doors, hoist voids etc.)
- Loss of original fabric and architectural features, loss of legibility of original industrial plan form and loss of legibility of earlier phases of development and their relationship with other component buildings, arising from partition walls and from the insertion of new and replacement floor levels
- Loss of original fabric from stripping back of existing roofs and rebuilding with insulation and new roof coverings
- Loss of original fabric as a result of replacement staircases and new lift
- Impact on original character and existing fabric, arising from the installation of plant, services, fixtures and fittings and advertising

The quality and sensitivity of the conversion of the retained buildings on the site will have a considerable role to play in assessing the impact on the significance of Weir Mill. The Heritage Assessment conveys an aspiration to minimise the impact of



interventions and alterations to the retained buildings, with the form of buildings guiding subdivision. Nevertheless the submitted documents (DAS, Structural Surveys, Heritage Assessment and drawings) express uncertainty in respect of a number of aspects of the proposed works / methods and extent of repairs and restoration, due to incomplete surveying arising from access restrictions at the site. It is acknowledged that assessment of some of the earliest phases of development – most notably the Wheelhouse and early engine rooms, has not been possible due to the current structural condition of the buildings. As much of the proposed work requires further detailed surveys to be undertaken to enable assessment of feasibility and to inform the detailed design and form of the proposals, it would be necessary for these matters to be covered by conditions applied to any consent.

In respect of the proposed window and door replacement strategy the Heritage Assessment provides details of the original design and materials of windows at the buildings highlighting that the different size, shape, pattern and arrangement of openings assists in distinguishing between different phases of construction and uses. Buildings features a range of square headed, arch headed, and round / semi-circular headed openings representing different architectural period design as well as different functionality. The subtleties between designs makes an important contribution to architectural character and appearance, particularly given their scale and the repetition of openings across elevations. All new windows and doors are proposed to be of metal construction, rather than timber, as per the original and the existing windows, though justification for this change is currently missing from the application. Whilst some consideration has been given to the division / number of small panes to windows of different buildings, the window units that would occupy arch headed openings would not be shaped to reproduce the curved head of the openings. This would diminish their visual quality and reduce the ability to read the subtle design differences, which is important in emphasising the different periods of construction.

The form and legibility of original openings to the west elevation of building 2 of the East Mill would be significantly impacted upon by the design and scale of the proposed new central circulation core / link. The existing Woodhouse link building is of discrete form being of matching materials and design and set 8m back from the north facing elevation. This allows public views of the existing openings to the west elevation, including the large Diocletian attic window. The proposed circulation core would obscure all of the existing openings to this elevation and would involve the 'bricking up' of existing opening and the creation of new access points. Whilst the loss of the Woodhouse link is regrettable, the need for a circulation core / link between the East and West Mill is understood and the avoidance of harmful interventions involved in locating it internally is supported, however it is not evident from the submission that the impact to the external elevations has been minimised as far as is possible. As such further information is requested in this regard.

As proposed the East Mill would experience significant change to its east elevation, impacting on original fabric and legibility of existing openings, including windows to the engine room. The proposed new staircase to this elevation would avoid internal interventions, the principle of which is supported and it is acknowledged that the orientation of the staircase has been rotated to present the shortest length to the east elevation in order to reduce its impact, however justification for the proposed design, scale and appearance is not sufficiently clear at this stage and it is difficult to assess what level of transparency would be afforded by the mesh materials without detailed samples being provided. The DAS considers that the design of the staircase has been informed by the nature of the cast iron escape stairs, however its appearance would be considerably more bulky and lacks the elegance of the existing

external staircases, instead relating aesthetically to the mesh clad circulation core. The proposed retention, repair and reuse of the existing cast iron staircases to the East and west Mill buildings is to be welcomed.

Limited justification is provided for the proposed interventions to the west elevation of the West Shed involving the partial demolition of the wall reducing its height, and inserting openings into the presently blank elevation, impacting on the sense of enclosure at this part of the site and the original character of the building.

### Demolition of buildings

Whilst the importance and value of bringing underutilised and poorly maintained historic buildings back into positive use as part of the regeneration of the site is recognised and welcome, it is noted that the current proposals involve a high proportion of demolition of surviving listed buildings. Whilst it is accepted that some demolition would be required at the site, in order to facilitate its redevelopment, it is particularly regrettable that the proposal includes loss of building components that are identified as being of considerable heritage significance in the submitted Heritage Assessment, namely the West Factory building fronting Chestergate and the 1874 Weaving Shed to the east. Given the high level of significance that is attributed specifically to its completeness as a multi-phase integrated mill complex, the demolition of a considerable number of buildings raises significant concern from a heritage perspective, diminishing the significance of site and the historic, architectural and technological evidence that the site embodies, causing a high level of permanent and irreversible harm.

With respect to the relative completeness of the complex, the survival of weaving sheds on the site is of particular interest and importance. In the context of integrated cotton mills, Weir Mill is one of the earliest integrated cotton spinning and weaving mills. There are few remaining integrated mills in the region, and a number of those that do remain have already had their weaving sheds demolished. Other textile mills identified with surviving weaving sheds are without statutory protection, indicating a level of regional rarity. Only six other former textile mills in Stockport retain elements of a weaving shed and of these, just four were integrated spinning and weaving mills. Weir Mill is the only mill complex within this small group that is afforded statutory protection as a listed building

Almost all of the weaving sheds at the site are proposed to be demolished under the current application. By way of mitigation the application proposes the 'partial retention of a portion of the grid of structural elements' of the 1874 weaving shed (building 11) in order to 'create a visual clue to the former footprint and identity of the buildings'. It is noted that the submitted information indicates that the precise feasibility of this proposal has not yet been determined and would need to be a matter for conditional control. Nevertheless the proposal would involve a substantial degree of demolition and alteration and would result in the loss of its inherent architectural character, so as to be unrecognisable. North-light weaving sheds are recognisable for and derive much of their significance from their characteristic form, typically being single storey with expansive floor plates and distinctive saw-toothed north-light roofs. The proposed retention of only a 'portion of the structural elements' of the building would result in the loss of the characteristics that make it recognisable as a weaving shed – as such in my opinion only very limited heritage benefit could be attributed to it. The loss of the legible form of the north-light weaving shed would compromise the 'integrated' nature of the listed mill complex causing a high level of harm to its significance.

The submitted Heritage Assessment and DAS suggests that the building form does not lend to retention and conversion of the weaving shed 'for uses other than industrial and commercial buildings' and provides little opportunity for reuse within the proposed mixed use / residential context. In my opinion however, the numerous examples of north light weaving sheds that have been successfully refurbished and repurposed demonstrate that such buildings can be put to a wide range of imaginative and innovative uses, including retail, office space, creative industry hubs and food and drink offers. It is therefore disappointing that the submitted documents do not evidence that such opportunities have been explored. I do however acknowledge that I must base my comments on the application in front of me.

The Heritage Assessment states that the proposal seeks to retain elements of the complex that have been identified within the Heritage Assessment as being of the highest individual significance, with an aim of retaining evidence of important innovations in mill construction, as well as some of its sequential evolution. The 1897 weaving shed and west factory are however recognised within the Heritage Assessment for their high level of significance individually. Given the nature of the significance of the Weir Mill complex and its rarity of completeness as a multi-phased integrated mill, the significance of the site as a 'whole' is even greater than the sum of its parts. As such, the level of proposed demolition would still have a highly harmful impact on its significance.

### Public Realm

The proposed opening up of parts of the site and the riverfront and creation of an attractive publicly accessible space represents a positive intervention that could deliver considerable benefits. The enhanced access, providing potential for greater public appreciation and contemplation of the historic and architectural interest and environmental qualities of site, and the relationship between the listed structures, the town and the river are welcomed. This would provide valuable opportunities for the interpretation of the history and development of Stockport and in particular the key contribution played by water from the River Mersey and its tributaries to provide power for the early textile industries which is welcomed.

### New Buildings

Turning to the new build elements of the scheme, it is recognised that the conversion and repurposing of the site presents a number of clear challenges and it is acknowledged that the scheme is heavily reliant on grant funding in the form of a £7 million housing investment fund grant from Homes England.

The proposed scale, massing and orientation / layout of the new buildings, which would be of a different height, form, floorplate, siting and architectural character to the replaced buildings, presents considerable challenges when considering them in the historic context of the site.

In respect of development on the south and west of the site, the relatively low level of the existing West Factory (building 5), which articulates the corner site with its distinctive curved elevation, allows for views of the taller mill buildings, which are sited closer to the river, and also allows the viaduct to the east to be seen from viewpoints in the street to the south and west of the site. The arrangement and scale of existing buildings on this part of the site allows for views, which provide legibility of the layered composition of the site, with the single and two storey structures contrasting with the imposing scale of spinning mills, and all being dwarfed by the monolithic viaduct oversailing east portion of the site. The proposed new buildings

would be significantly taller than the factory building, and also taller than the East and West Mill Buildings, obscuring them from some views from the south and undermining their street presence from the west. This would dilute the character of the complex, and diminish the context in which the retained buildings are experienced.

The spinning mills, with their imposing scale, are the dominant structures of the Weir Mill complex and are considered landmark structures, currently being dwarfed only by the viaduct. All of the proposed new buildings at the site would be larger than the spinning blocks, which would impact significantly on the perceived scale and dominance of the spinning mills, weakening their landmark status and impacting negatively on the character of the site. Views of the East Mill projecting through the arch of the viaduct that are gained from Chestergate on the south side of the site, would be lost, harming the legibility of the interrelationship between the listed structures.

The orientation and layout of the proposed west towers have been designed with the intention of opening up the site in order to create visual and physical permeability. This is contrary to the notable lack of permeability in the planned form and the sense of enclosure, arising from the arrangement and design of the existing mill buildings, which is a key characteristic of the Weir Mill site and mill complexes in general. The associated benefits of this design intent in respect of the enhanced ability to appreciate, experience and interpret the historic environment and listed structures is however acknowledged.

### Stockport Viaduct

The very high level of historic and architectural significance of the viaduct is recognised in its designation as a grade II\* listed building, placing it in the top listed buildings in the country. It is of the highest value in national terms and its setting, in short, medium and long distance views and vistas, is integral to its heritage significance and landmark quality, as a symbol of Stockport.

The East Tower as proposed would have a substantially adverse and irreversible effect on the setting of the GII\* listed viaduct. This would have a highly damaging impact on views of and from the viaduct and would negatively affect the understanding of the historic relationship with the Weir Mill complex and its development. The proposed residential tower would be significantly taller than the viaduct, which would have a detrimental impact on the sense of scale and dominance of the Viaduct in key views from short, medium and long distances.

The proposed width of the tower, at 23m, is approximately equal to the combined width of one arch and one pier of the viaduct. The submission suggests that this limits the impact of the tower on the viaduct, however even at this width the tower would foreshorten / truncate the views from positions where some of the longest continuous length of the viaduct can be best appreciated, and in doing so would fundamentally diminish the quality of these views and the appreciation of the viaduct and a key characteristic of its special significance. Only in the instance of viewpoints directly opposite the tower would its visual impact be limited to just one arch of the viaduct. This does not acknowledge or truly reflect how the viaduct is experienced or appreciated outside of a single viewpoint. There are a number of static, progressional and panoramic viewing points that allow for excellent linear views of the viaduct, revealing the majority of the arches. When experienced in the 'oblique' the East Tower would either block out a series of arches or would completely truncate the viaduct, obscuring most of the visible length that lies beyond it. At 44m

tall the tower would project 19m above the viaduct and would be perceptible in views from all directions.

Being sited just 5m from the viaduct this would be an inescapable consequence from any angle that would be completely contrary to the horizontal quality of the viaduct and discordant with its special character and appearance. The tower would seriously undermine the ability to appreciate the scale, grandeur and visual dominance of the viaduct stretching across the river valley, and would obstruct the complete nature of iconic views of this important landmark. This significant alteration would result in sporadic views of shorter lengths of the viaduct from the best vantage points as well as introducing development of an incongruous form, scale and materials rising above the viaduct from a significant number of other important long-range views (including approaches towards Stockport traveling in a southerly direction on the M60). In close range views the viaduct's immense scale and feelings of awe that it induces would be substantially weakened by the presence of the tower rising above it.

The tower would also harm the quality of views from the top of the viaduct, when travelling by train, which allows for a unique elevated perspective of the valley below, and wide panoramas, taking in the skyline and important buildings of Stockport's historic core and closer views of nearby heritage assets including the listed Wellington Mill, Wellington Bridge, Plaza Cinema, St. Mary's Church and St. Peters Church. These views and the important sense of place they evoke, in approaching Stockport, which cannot be enjoyed in any other circumstance, would be drastically reduced, or lost, by the presence of the East Tower, rising 19m above the top of the viaduct. It is disappointing that the Heritage Assessment makes no analysis of these views or the impact of the tower upon them.

In my opinion, the submitted visual aids have failed to properly illustrate the impact of the tower, by omission of key views and by focusing on a limited number of narrow angled / single framed shots / closed views. The submitted analysis of the heritage impact in respect of views of the viaduct substantially underestimates the magnitude of harm from a number of key vantage points. In respect of views from Wellington Road North to the north east, the only view offered within the Heritage Assessment is View 7 to which they attribute low value. The Heritage Assessment does not analyse the impact on high quality views from this locality, where excellent progressional and oblique views of the continuous length of the viaduct are available, particularly at the junctions of Wellington Road North and the A5145 / Railway Street, as shown below where approximately 20 of its 27 arches can be seen.



High quality long and medium range views of the viaduct from the north-west are also generally overlooked, being limited to a single view from the M60 motorway bridge (View 10), rather than from road level approaching Stockport or from elevated pedestrian routes, as shown below:





There is a notable absence of any analysis of the value of, or impact on, night-time views of viaduct, which is dramatically and beautifully emphasised by the unbroken string of lights to its piers. The harmful impact of the east tower would be particularly striking, interrupting the continuous length of illuminated piers and arches, and the verticality of the tower, which itself would be lit, projecting above the viaduct would detract from its strong horizontal lines.



The impact of the proposed development must also be considered in the wider context of the cumulative effect of other existing and approved tall buildings (Regent House and the recently approved Interchange building). The current proposal for the tall tower on the east of the site would significantly add to the cumulative visual impacts already generated by the existing Regent House to the north and the



recently approved Interchange tower to the south. The approved 19-storey Interchange tower will block some views of the viaduct on the south side of the valley, whilst the existing Regent House blocks some views to the north. The proposed 14-storey East Tower, positioned between these blocks would obstruct both central and oblique views. The cumulative impact on the setting of the viaduct is considered to be severe.

For the reasons set out above the impact on the setting of the GII\* listed viaduct by the imposition of a tower of this scale and location would be substantially harmful to its significance. The NPPF makes it clear that significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting. The judgment of the Court of Appeal in Barnwell Manor confirmed that considerable weight must be given to the desirability of preserving the setting of all listed buildings. That general duty applies with particular force if harm would be caused to the setting of designated heritage asset of the highest significance (which includes GII\* listed buildings). Even if the harm to the setting of a GII\* listed building were considered less than substantial there remains a presumption against the granting of planning permission.

#### The Viaduct, St Peter's Conservation Area, Wellington Bridge and the former Wellington Bridge Inn

In its assessment of the impact of the development in View 8, the Heritage Statement identifies that the East Tower, by virtue of its height, siting, design and materials, would have a harmful impact on a 'key view' identified within the approved St. Peters Conservation Area Character Appraisal, and the setting of the heritage assets within the view. This important view encapsulates the impact of the Industrial Revolution on this part of the town. Significant elements include the high quality buildings that frame the views, the visual relationship between the viaduct and Wellington Bridge displaying a unique aspect of their respective arches and strong horizontal form, and the interrelationship of the Railway Viaduct and Weir Mill, all in one view. Notable to the composition is the way the structures respond to the topography of the river valley. The proposed East Tower would not convey the identified positive qualities of structures in the view and would instead diminish the quality of this important view, which at present remains substantially unaltered from its late 19<sup>th</sup> / early 20<sup>th</sup> century appearance.

## CONCLUSION

When assessing what constitutes 'harm' to a heritage asset the NPPF categorises harm into three areas: substantial harm; less than substantial harm; and no harm.

It is noted that Historic England consider that cumulatively, the harm would fall at the high end of the spectrum of less than substantial harm.

It is my view that cumulatively the proposals would cause substantial harm to heritage assets, principally arising from the demolition of elements of the Weir Mill complex, the impact of the proposed new build development and the impact on the setting of the Grade II\* listed viaduct, which is a building of the highest significance. The assessment of harm is a matter of judgment and in reaching this view it is recognised that substantial harm is a high test, involving serious impacts on key elements of an asset's special architectural or historic interest. In this respect, the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) was updated in 2019 to provide additional clarity on assessing substantial harm. The NPPG at Paragraph 018 states that 'in determining whether works to a listed building constitute substantial harm, an important consideration would be whether the adverse impact seriously affects a key

element of its special architectural or historic interest. It is the degree of harm to the asset's significance rather than the scale of the development that is to be assessed. The harm may arise from works to the asset or from development within its setting.'

Paragraph 200 of the NPPF and CS policy SIE3 require that any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification.

The application proposes development that seeks to regenerate a key gateway site and deliver much needed housing. The associated benefits that would arise, including the retention, repair and reuse of listed buildings, the creation of high quality public spaces and opportunities for engagement with the historic environment is recognised. However, the harmful impact of the development upon the setting and significance of heritage assets is not considered to be underpinned by clear and convincing justification within the Heritage Assessment to justify the scale of the proposal, measure the level of harm involved and does not adequately explain why other options have been discounted.

In respect of the proposals for the retention of historic buildings and required interventions, further work is still required in order to understand feasibility, deliverability and design, much of which cannot be achieved currently due to access constraints and safety issues. I remain concerned in respect of the proposed degree of demolition of important historic buildings and consider that thorough justification is lacking, particularly in respect of the loss of weaving sheds.

The harm that would be caused has not been clearly justified with respect to the planning or wider strategic context of the site. In respect of Stockport's Strategic Regeneration Framework (SRF), the applicant has not thoroughly demonstrated how the development would be compatible with the Masterplan's requirements that future proposals for the Weirside Neighbourhood 'should respond by sensitively integrating with listed, locally listed and non-designated assets' and that 'new infill buildings will be of an appropriate scale, working with retained and refurbished historic buildings'. The vision for the area is defined as the creation of a 'low rise mixed-use employment and leisure area under the viaduct which creates a new gateway into the town - showcasing the river and the town's heritage' where 'the setting of the viaduct will be enhanced' rather than undermined. The application rather focuses justification for the scale and design of the East Tower on the provision of a 'landmark' building, however, a review of landmark buildings of Stockport, including the existing spinning mills at Weir Mill, which sit under the viaduct, evidences that a building of landmark quality need not be a tall building.

*Historic England Advice Note 4 – Tall Buildings* sets out that in assessing a tall building proposal, local planning authorities must pay particular regard to the policies in paragraphs 8 and 9 of the NPPF that state economic, social and environmental gains are to be sought jointly and simultaneously in order to deliver positive improvements in the quality of the built, natural and historic environment. This may involve the examination of alternative designs or schemes that might be more sustainable because they can deliver public benefits alongside positive improvement in the local environment. If a tall building is harmful to the historic environment, then without a careful examination of the worth of any public benefits that the proposed tall building is said to deliver and of the alternative means of delivering them, the planning authority is unlikely to be able to find a clear and convincing justification for the harm.

The submitted 'Options Appraisal' explores a relatively limited number of possibilities, being variations on the same principle of redevelopment of the site. It is unfortunate that opportunities for other neighbouring sites to be conjoined to the development, in order that housing density may be increased whilst minimising the effect on historic assets, have not been explored, which could potentially address issues in respect of density and numbers of housing. I note that this land lies outside of the application site and is not in control of the applicant. There is also no evidence presented by the application at this stage to demonstrate that opportunities for additional targeted public sector grants to offset the costs of repair of the historic buildings or bridge the funding gap in relation to conservation deficit (such as those offered by the National Lottery Heritage Fund), have been sought. I am however advised that further clarification in respect of this, is expected.

In my view it is not evident that this degree of harm is necessary, by virtue of the scheme being the only way of delivering perceived benefits.

The overarching policy objective of Chapter 16 of the NPPF (Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment) is found at paragraph 189, which states "assets are an irreplaceable resource and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations".

When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, the paragraph 199 of the NPPF instructs that, irrespective of whether harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance "great weight should be given to its conservation" and "the more important the asset, "the greater the weight should be". The NPPF states that substantial harm to Grade II Listed assets should be exceptional. Substantial harm to Grade I or II\* assets should be wholly exceptional.

Where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to (or total loss of significance of) a designated heritage asset, paragraph 201 of the NPPF states that local planning authorities should refuse consent, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or total loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss, or all of the following apply:

- a. the nature of the heritage asset prevents all reasonable uses of the site; and
- b. no viable use of the heritage asset itself can be found in the medium term through appropriate marketing that will enable its conservation; and
- c. conservation by grant-funding or some form of not for profit, charitable or public ownership is demonstrably not possible; and
- d. the harm or loss is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the site back into use.

In closing, I must emphasise the need to consider the above and apply all the relevant tests when determining this application. I must also emphasise that the question to be addressed by a decision maker is not a simple balancing exercise but is one which is mindful of and applies the need to have 'special regard' or give 'special attention' to the heritage assets whether under section 16(2) 66(1) or 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Harm to the special interest of a listed building is not a matter to be weighed equally with other material considerations, as the priority given by parliament effectively amounts to a 'strong presumption' against approval of development that would cause such harm.

## Historic England

### Summary

Weir Mill is a well preserved example of a mill complex, the greatest significance of which derives from the completeness of its survival, and the evidence it provides of multiple phases of mill construction and technological innovation. Spanning over the site, the viaduct is an exceptional example of Victorian railway infrastructure, which is a dominant landmark in the landscape, and which demonstrates considerable constructional complexity.

The proposals would require the demolition of a number of buildings within the Weir Mill complex, something which would considerably diminish the valuable evidence of the evolution of mill architecture that it provides. This impact is compounded by the scale, massing and orientation of the new buildings.

The development also proposes to erect a new tower element on the eastern section of the site. This is identified to harm the ability to appreciate the special architectural character of the viaduct, and to diminish its townscape value.

Historic England would identify that the proposals would result in a high level of harm (albeit less than substantial) to the significance of Weir Mill. We would also identify that it would result in a medium level of harm to the significance of the viaduct, and would impact on the important contribution that it makes to the townscape of Stockport.

It is acknowledged that the site has historically faced considerable economic and viability concerns, which will affect the optimum viable use for the site. The applicant has submitted a viability statement and development options appraisal, which seek to support the quantum of development proposed. This is a central element of the applicant's justification, and it is recommended that these documents are specifically assessed by an appropriately qualified independent professional.

### Historic England Advice

#### Significance

##### *Weir Mill*

Weir Mill is a well preserved example of a mill complex, which exhibits outstanding evidence of multiple phases of evolution. The earliest of these are the surviving elements of a late eighteenth century water powered mill. The complex also includes phases of rebuilding and expansion in the early, mid and late nineteenth century, as well as more recent alterations in the twentieth century. A number of these phases are highly significant in their own right, but their greater historic interest derives from the ability to consider them as a collective sequential whole.

In particular, Weir Mill provides exceptional evidence of the evolution of mill architecture. This includes evidence of a number of different technological innovations, such as two forms of fireproof construction. It also retains evidence of multiple power sources (including water and steam), which allow an important understanding of the configuration and operation of mills throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

This historic interest also derives from the fact that a number of these elements are also relatively rare survivals. For example we have limited other examples of either surviving water powered mills, or of eighteenth century mills in urban contexts.

Weir Mill also has considerable communal value, particular when considered as part of the wider group of mills across Stockport and Greater Manchester. This is because mills and industry are elements which are integral to defining not only the character of Stockport, but also the wider industrial heartland of Greater Manchester. This placemaking value gives the complex considerable architectural and aesthetic interest, which in part also derives from the characteristically robust nature of its architecture.

### *Stockport Viaduct*

Passing through, and over, the site, the Railway Viaduct is an astonishing and audacious piece of Victorian industrial engineering. The structure spans twenty-seven colossal brick arches, and is reputedly the largest brick built structure in the Western Europe. It dominates its visual surroundings, and is an iconic landmark of Stockport. This gives it considerable architecture interest, which stems not only from the exceptional quality and complexity of its construction, but also from its imposing and striking character.

The viaduct also makes a substantial contribution to our understanding of the evolution of railways and railway architecture. It not only provides important evidence of the speed and breadth of the spread of railways, but also of the confidence and entrepreneurial spirit of early investors. In particular it is a striking testimony to the ambition of the railway companies, that the viaduct was erected just ten years after the opening of the railway between Liverpool and Manchester, and fifteen years after the Stockton to Darlington Railway. It is accordingly also of exceptional historic interest.

Weir Mill is listed grade at II, while the viaduct is listed at grade II\*. The two assets have a considerable interrelationship, visually and physically, something which is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that the construction of the viaduct required the taking down and rebuilding of a section of Weir Mill.

### Impact

#### *Background*

Historic England would continue to stress our support in principle for the regeneration of Weir Mill, provided that it allowed for the site's sensitive and viable reuse. We are also aware that previous iterations of proposed development on the site have encountered considerable viability issues, which have constrained the ability to sensitively bring it forward. We therefore acknowledge that this will have an impact on determining the optimum regeneration scheme for the site.

#### *Impact on Weir Mill*

The application proposes the demolition of a number of the buildings which form part of the Weir Mill complex, including the buildings fronting onto Chestergate. This would considerably diminish the important evidence of mill architecture and technology which the complex currently provides, something which stems in part from the completeness of its survival. Given the level of significance which is attributed specifically to this completeness, the demolition of a considerable number of buildings raises a large concern from a heritage perspective.

It is, however, acknowledged that the proposals would retain the elements of the complex which have individually been identified to be of the highest significance. The complex would also still retain evidence of a number of important innovations in mill construction, as well evidence of some of its sequential evolution. However, this demolition would still have a highly harmful impact on its significance.

The impact would also be emphasised by the configuration of the new built form, which would be of a different height, form, floorplate, siting and architectural character to the replaced buildings. This would dilute the character of the complex, and diminish the context in which the retained buildings are experienced. They would also not create the same sense of enclosure as the historic built form. This is significant, as the sense of enclosure, and a lack of permeability through the site, is characteristic of mill complexes, and served a functional purpose when it was in operation.

It is noted that the current proposals would retain more of the historic buildings than the previously submitted scheme, most notably the building indicated as building 8 in the submitted reports. Given the significance placed on the ability to read the complex as a complete multi-phased entity, the retention of additional buildings is acknowledged to be an improvement from the previous scheme.

The proposals would also retain the structural element of building 11, historically a weaving shed. This is identified to have some heritage benefit, as it will partially retain the ability to read the historic character of the building, and its place within the wider Weir Mill complex. However, as only the frame will survive, and it is not identified to be one of the more significant phases of construction on the site, the heritage benefits accrued from its retention will be comparatively lower.

The impact on the significance of Weir Mill will also be considerably determined by the quality and sensitivity of the conversion of the retained buildings on the site. In discussions it was set out that these works were designed based on a mantra of letting the buildings guide the subdivision, with the accommodation being adapted to the buildings, as opposed to vice versa. This is a positive philosophy. However, given the extent of our remit, we would defer to local authority's own specialist advisors to assess the specific details of these proposed works, as well as the weight, positive or negative, which they ascribe to them within the planning balance.

### *Impact on the Viaduct*

The proposals would span either side of the viaduct, and would result in the redevelopment of a site which has a strong visual and physical interrelationship with this heritage asset. In principle therefore, there would be some benefit to the way in which the viaduct is experienced, if the Weir Mill site was sensitively redeveloped. However, this would be highly dependent on any scheme positively maintaining and reinforcing the historic interrelationship between the two.

The proposed scheme envisions the erection of a large tower element. This would not only considerably alter the physical and visual interrelationship between the Weir Mill site and the Viaduct, but it would also be a considerable visual intrusion, especially in views from the east.

This is significant, as the viaduct's landmark architectural character stems to a large degree from the fact that it is the dominant and striking feature within the skyline, soaring over the landscape below it. A visual intrusion, which partly obscured it, and which visually competed with it, would therefore harm the ability to appreciate the special architectural interest of this section of the viaduct. In particular, the fact that

the tower will be taller than the viaduct negatively alters the relationship which the viaduct has with the surrounding townscape.

This soaring nature is also a tangible reminder of the wealth and ambition of the railway companies in the nineteenth century. The diminishment of the viaduct's prominence therefore also harms the historic and evidential value of the asset.

The development would therefore result in a considerable impact on the significance of this section of the viaduct. It is however acknowledged that the building would obscure one of the twenty-seven arches. The ability to appreciate the scale, grandeur and visual dominance of the viaduct would therefore be partially, rather than completely, impacted.

### Policy

The national policies which relate to the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment are set out within section 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework. These policies require that heritage assets be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance (paragraph 184) and that great weight should be given to the asset's conservation, when considering the impact of a proposed development, (paragraph 193).

Where there will be harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), it is required by paragraph 194 that a clear and convincing justification is provided.

Where a proposed development will cause less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, it is stated in paragraph 196 that *this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.*

These national policies are supported by local planning policy. In this instance this is elucidated in the Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council Core Strategy (adopted 2011), with Strategic Objective 5, and Policies CS8 and SIE-3 being of particular relevance to the assessment of this application.

### Position

Historic England would conclude that the proposals would result in a high level of harm to the significance of Weir Mill and a slightly lower level of harm to the significance of the viaduct. Cumulatively, this harm would fall at the higher end of the spectrum of less than substantial harm. This would trigger the need for the decision maker to consider the requirements set out within paragraphs 184, 193 and 196 of the NPPF, and would be a considerable material consideration in the planning balance.

We would, however, reiterate our support for the principle of bringing the Weir Mill complex back into an active viable use. Mill buildings as a typology make a considerable contribution to establishing local and regional distinctiveness, and are important in allowing an understanding of our shared national history and heritage. More locally, mills make an important contribution to the historic character of Stockport, relating to the evidence they provide of the town's development, and the contribution they made, and still make, to its visual character.



More broadly we would acknowledge the public benefits attached to securing the optimum viable use for Weir Mill, and that the site presents acknowledged viability issues. It is therefore positive to note that the applicant has supported the application with a robust evidence base, including a viability report and development options appraisal. These are detailed, and have been produced by professional companies with demonstrable experience in their respective fields.

However, while we cannot fault the methodology, we are not able to comment on the accuracy of the exact figures, which will be specific to the local market. We would also suggest that a number of the financial assumptions would benefit from a more detailed assessment. Given the complexities of this subject, and the centrality of it to the applicant's justification, we would recommend that the local planning authority has the viability report and development options appraisal independently assessed by a suitably qualified professional. This would better clarify the exact weight which can be placed in the planning balance on the justification provided. It would also clarify whether the scheme is viable, and whether the extent of development proposed is the minimum necessary to secure this.

### Recommendation

Historic England has identified demonstrable harm to two designated heritage assets. This is a material consideration in determining the application, which needs to be fully considered and addressed in order for the application to meet the requirements of the relevant paragraphs of the NPPF. In particular, we would highlight the requirements set out in paragraphs 194 and 196.

In determining these applications you should also bear in mind the statutory duty of sections 16(2) and 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. These require the decision maker to have special regard to the desirability of preserving listed buildings or their setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which they possess.

Your authority should take these representations into account and note the great weight which should be placed on the conservation of heritage assets, as per paragraph 193 of the NPPF. You should also seek the further information as set out in our advice. If there are any material changes to the proposals, or you would like further advice, please contact us.

### **The Victorian Society**

Thank you for consulting the Victorian Society about this application. We object to the proposals and would like to offer our comments.

There are several elements to our objection; our principal concern, however, is the proposed tower, and the impact it will have on the grade II\*-listed Stockport Viaduct. The justification for a tower in this location remains negligible, both in the context of the site and in the wider context of the Stockport SRF and the proposed future developments to the south and west. Overall, the proposals fail to meet the requirements of national policy, especially the NPPF, paragraphs 194 and 196, and we urge your authority to refuse consent.

### Proposals and Harm

The Victorian Society objected strongly to the previous proposals for this site on two grounds: first, that the degree of demolition proposed for the historic mill buildings

would cause substantial harm to their significance; second, that the proposed tower would cause harm to the significance of the grade II\*-listed Stockport viaduct by affecting its setting.

The current proposals still involve a high proportion of demolition: the factory building to the south-west corner of the site, the later attached office buildings, and almost all of the weaving sheds are to be demolished under this scheme. In comparison to the earlier scheme these losses will be mitigated to some extent by the retention and conversion of the West Shed (building 8) and by the retention of elements of Weaving Shed 1. We consider that these proposals for retention are probably enough to reduce the technical level of harm below the threshold of 'substantial'; it must be emphasised, however, that the degree of harm is still very high. As the list entry and the current heritage statement make clear, an important aspect of the mill complex's significance is the degree of survival of different phases. The list entry states unequivocally: 'Weir Mill displays the greatest number of phases of development represented on any mill site in Greater Manchester, including two different types of fire proof construction. It remains substantially intact, with its ancillary buildings.' The current proposals will cause the loss of many of these ancillary buildings, which will harm significance. The loss of the weaving sheds will be particularly harmful: as the Heritage Statement points out, the survival of integrated mills (mills for both spinning and weaving) with their weaving sheds intact is relatively rare.

The proposed retention of the West Shed is welcome, and the modest alterations to its fabric acceptable. The retention of elements of the Weaving Shed as part of new public realm is also welcome. We must point out, however, first that there is still some uncertainty about the degree of retention, and second that the significance of the weaving sheds does not simply inhere in their fabric. What is currently proposed is that a number of iron columns will be retained, forming a grid on plan, along with the timber beams that currently link them — the retention of the latter subject to survey. The fact that the precise feasibility of these proposals has not been determined before the application has been made is concerning. If this retention of historic fabric is seriously intended to limit, to some extent, the degree of demolition and hence harm to significance, it should be pursued with as much rigour and attention to detail as the other elements of the scheme. Even if as much fabric as possible is retained, the harm to significance will still be relatively high, because the characteristic form of the weaving shed will be destroyed. The significance of weaving sheds inheres strongly in this characteristic form — single storey, expansive floor plate, saw-toothed north-light roofs — and we think that serious consideration should be given to retaining something more meaningful — more recognisably part of a weaving shed — than simply a grid of columns and beams.

As well as through the demolition of surviving phases, these proposals will cause harm by radically changing the character of both the mill complex and the surrounding streetscape. Currently, Weir Mill presents to the street edges a hard and closed landscape characterised mostly by brick. This is most strikingly the case along Chestergate and King Street West, where the site boundary is defined by the long curving external face of the factory building, tight along the back edge of the pavement; the views into the centre of the site from further east also contribute. The proposals to replace the factory building with a new block and to transform the spaces at the centre of the site with extensive planting will change this character radically. The new block is designed explicitly to make the site more permeable: where there is currently a continuous wall, the proposed masterplan has large openings intended to offer views and to funnel pedestrians into the centre of the site.

Taken purely as a change to the character of the mill complex, this new permeability will be harmful — it is entirely alien to the character of the historic site and will erode its legibility. We understand that, in the predominantly residential emerging context both of Weir Mill and the surrounding area, the increased permeability and landscape treatment of the internal courtyards will bring some benefits. Nonetheless, we have concerns about the extent of the soft landscaping and opening-up proposed, especially to the edges of the site. Whereas the benefits of planting in the proposed central courtyard and the river-facing terraces are clear, those of the proposed soft landscaping at the new entrances to the site are not. The planting in these places will do the most harm to the hard character of the historic buildings and streetscape, and is not clearly purposeful. Given that the new routes into the site will anyway offer views of the planted areas within, the extra planting at the edges of the site does little to justify the harm it will cause, and should be omitted.

We also have serious concerns about the proposed new building on this part of the site. As well as the proposed permeability at ground level we accept the rationale for its plan-form generally — the way in which it reconciles the non-orthogonal alignments of existing structures is clear. We object, however, to the materiality of the proposed building. In a context of massive brick structures the use of the kind of cladding systems proposed seems a retrograde approach: whatever the conceptual justification the proposed materiality fails to reflect anything about the historic built forms, and reads as an alien imposition. We are unconvinced, too, by the qualities of the proposed materials. The powder-coated cladding, both sheet and sinusoidal, will look flimsy, in contrast to the robust existing character of the site, and we are concerned that the expanded mesh cladding especially will weather badly. As a major development in the setting of two strongly characterised designated heritage assets the proposed materiality seems particularly insensitive.

Finally and most importantly, the Victorian Society objects strongly to the proposed tower to the east of the site. Our concerns about materiality also apply here, but our fundamental objection is to such a building in principle. As we pointed out in our objection to the earlier scheme, a tower in this location will cause serious harm to the grade II\*-listed Stockport Viaduct by breaking its silhouette, disrupting its compelling horizontal form, and undermining its dominance in the landscape. Further, any tower built in such close proximity to the viaduct will have a disproportionately harmful effect because it will affect all views, from all angles. The impact on the significance of the viaduct should not be underestimated: it is an exceptionally important structure in its own right and an icon of the town, and the erection of the proposed tower will cause a great deal of harm to significance by transforming the way in which it is experienced.

This harm has still not been clearly justified, either with respect to the planning of the site, or to the wider strategic context. We understand that a balance must be struck on this site between the retention of historic structures, the provision of public space, and the construction of new elements. We also understand that the applicants have undertaken an options appraisal to assess different possible compromises. We maintain, however, that this options appraisal does not offer the clear and convincing justification required by the NPPF, para. 194, for the harm that will be caused to the significance of the viaduct and the wider townscape by the construction of the proposed tower. The options considered explore a relatively limited number of possibilities and the variation of only a few of the relevant parameters. The fundamental concept for the site — large new block to the west, higher block to the east — is the same as it was for the last scheme, and remains seriously harmful. This fundamental concept is nowhere seriously questioned. The assertion that the proposed masterplan is the most viable of the options considered does not resolve

the question as to whether something less harmful is possible with a more radical change of perspective. We note in this context that large apartment blocks and towers are not the only way to create high-density housing, and that alternative plan-forms exist which offer similar densities at much lower heights.

The justification for the tower on the site is also weak with respect the emerging context as detailed in the Stockport SRF. If this framework is to be taken seriously as a *strategic* framework then it must be made clear why specifically a tower is necessary in the proposed location to fulfil the framework's strategic aims. A convincing justification for the proposed tower from this strategic point of view would have to show that there were very good reasons why increasing the housing density nearby would be impossible. No such reasons are given in the current application, and it appears to us that there is plenty of space in the areas proposed for redevelopment immediately to the south and west of the site to provide the extra units that the tower would offer.

### Advice

The Victorian Society considers these proposals an improvement on the previous scheme. The degree of retention of historic elements is higher, and proposed treatment of these retained elements is broadly acceptable. The present scheme remains, however, harmful, for the reasons given above. In particular the erection of a tower to the east of the site will seriously harm the significance of the Stockport Viaduct. We strongly object in principle to this part of the proposals. The harm that will be caused by any tower in this location has not been clearly and convincingly justified (NPPF, para. 194), and the public benefits of the proposals are not such as to outweigh this harm (NPPF, para. 196). We urge your authority to **refuse consent** to these proposals, and to work with the applicants to develop an alternative scheme.

### **Ancient Monuments Society**

Thank you for consulting us on this application. We have reviewed the documents available on your website, and while we welcome the adaptation and reuse of the East and West Mill buildings, the Ancient Monuments Society objects to the proposed 14 storey building on the east site.

The heritage study and design and access statement both indicate the dominance of the grade II listed railway viaduct over this site, particularly following its widening in the 1980s and the creation of arches over part of the East Mill. The relationship between the listed mill buildings and the viaduct is important to the significance and development of both structures, and the new buildings proposed on the west site respect that hierarchy.

The documentation highlights the importance of the viaduct, being one of the largest brick structures in the world when it was completed, and as a landmark in the area, dominating the skyline and the valley. The proposed 14 storey building on the east site is located near the viaduct's highest point and extends approximately 7 storeys above the viaduct deck. We note there are other tall buildings in Stockport, but those sit much further away while this building is almost hard against the viaduct. The view analysis clearly shows how intrusive this building would be and the harm caused to the setting and significance of the viaduct.

## Greater Manchester Archaeological Advisory Service (GMAAS)

Thank you for consulting GMAAS on this proposal. The application is supported by an Archaeological Desk Based Assessment prepared by Salford Archaeology in December 2020 and a Heritage Statement and Impact Assessment produced by BDP in December 2020. Both are comprehensive reports which give an excellent understanding of the site's historic development, the location and nature of known and potential buried archaeological features, historic fabric and its relative significance.

GMAAS were consulted on the previous application for this site, by Maryland Securities, and our comments are essentially the same for this proposal by Capital & Centric.

Weir Mill is a fine surviving example of a multi-phase integrated cotton mill combining spinning and weaving. It displays a remarkable number of development phases from its inception in 1790 to closure in the 1960s. Regeneration of the site is welcome, given its poor condition, but it is disappointing that the development requires demolition of two major historic building components: the two storey building fronting Chestergate and the single storey weaving shed. The former has an unusual mid-19<sup>th</sup> century fire-proof cast iron framework, whilst the latter is a rare survival of a weaving shed.

Buried archaeological remains of particular interest have been identified as the footprints of former steam-powered engine houses, boiler houses and associated chimneys and a gas house. The riverside area has considerable archaeological interest in terms of features cut into the natural bedrock, such as steps and tunnels which may relate to the early water powered use of the site, and recommends that these are subject to a more detailed survey. The desk based assessment considers that the archaeological remains are at least of high local and potentially regional significance. The archaeological importance of the site also extends to the historic built fabric which should be fully recorded and interpreted prior to re-purposing or demolition works. Of particular interest here are the features identified in the assessment reports such as the evidence for phasing, early power features including the rare survival of the water wheel house projecting into the river, the early engine and boiler houses, cast iron framework including evidence for transmission systems.

GMAAS would like to see a scheme of commemoration of this highly significant industrial heritage site, especially as it is proposed to remove so much of the historic fabric. The scheme should incorporate some of the artifacts that come out of the demolition process and below-ground archaeological investigations, and should tell the story of the mill through interactive media as well as referencing this through a more comprehensive and integrated landscape scheme. There should also be published material on the results of the archaeological investigations and the history of the site, along with digital resources and on-site interpretation such as information boards. Similar schemes are well underway at the NOMA regeneration site (Shudehill Mill), Ordsall Chord new rail bridge, Murrays Mill in Manchester, and Chapel Wharf in Salford. It may be possible to exhibit in the Hat Museum or Story of Stockport Museum, especially as it is anticipated that the Museum will take the archaeological archive. This heritage interpretation scheme should be secured through a dedicated condition of consent. Initially, a 'Principles of Interpretation' document should be compiled for approval by Stockport LPA.

Archaeological investigation and recording works should be secured through an appropriately worded condition. Essentially, these works should include the list below, which is set out in the desk based assessment and with which GMAAS agree. The results will be set out in a technical report, the archive deposited with the museum and the results published commensurate with their significance. This might include an academic article and a popular publication in the Greater Manchester Past Revealed series.

The archaeological desk based assessment identifies a variety of further archaeological works which should be secured by condition to protect archaeological interests. These comprise:

- Evaluation trenching focused on the footprint of demolished mill structures including former engine and boiler houses and associated flues and chimney, the gas house

and associated structures, the former weaving shed and the river bank area including the rock-cut steps which has the potential to retain remains of early water power features that might pre-date the earliest known phase of mill building.

- Further more detailed, targeted excavation and recording will be required should significant remains be encountered.
- A targeted archaeological survey will be undertaken of the river bank area and rock-cut tunnels to enable a better understanding to inform heritage interpretation.
- An archaeological building survey and recording of standing buildings will be required prior to development work commencing. Further, targeted historical research is needed as part of and to inform the survey interpretation. Access will be required to areas that have been hard to reach and a watching brief will be undertaken during demolition, stripping out and repairs to ensure that previously hidden historic fabric is recorded. Of particular importance is the need to gain safe access to the wheelhouse to make a comprehensive record of this significant and rare historic structure to inform proposals for repair and conversion. The archaeological recording might identify fixtures and fittings that should be preserved in situ.
- The desk based assessment makes further recommendations identifying the potential for preserving significant features found by archaeological investigations within the landscaping scheme. Key features should be conserved and presented, and interpretation provided. These might include rock-cut features such as the steps.

GMAAS recommend that an archaeology condition is attached to planning consent to secure the programme of archaeological investigations and recording.

*No development shall take place until the applicant or their agents or successors in title has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological works. The works are to be undertaken in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) submitted to and approved in writing by Stockport Planning Authority. The WSI shall cover the following:*

*1. A phased programme and methodology of investigation and recording to include:*

- a historic building survey (English Heritage Level 3/4)*
- an archaeological watching brief and any further appropriate recording during any demolition, stripping out, opening up of historic fabric and ground-works*
- an archaeological survey of the river bank and tunnels*
- evaluation through targeted trial trenching*
- targeted, more detailed excavation (subject of a new WSI)*

*2. A programme for post investigation assessment to include:*

- analysis of the site investigation records and finds*
- production of a final report on the significance of the heritage interest recorded*

*3. Dissemination of the results of the site investigations commensurate with their significance, including popular and academic publication*

*4. Provision for archive deposition of the report, finds and records of the site investigation*

*5. Nomination of a competent person or persons/organisation to undertake the works set out within the approved WSI*

*Reason: In accordance with NPPF Section 16, Paragraph 199 - To record and advance understanding of the significance of any heritage assets to be lost (wholly*

*or in part) and to make this evidence (and any archive generated) publicly accessible and SIE-3 "Protecting, Safeguarding and Enhancing the Environment" of the adopted Stockport Core Strategy DPD.*

A scheme of heritage display and interpretation should be secured through the following condition:

*Details of proposals for a physical interpretation package, including phasing details and maintenance, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Stockport Planning Authority, prior to the commencement of the landscaping scheme. Details of proposals for a digital interpretation package shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the City Council as local planning authority, prior to occupation of development. The first phase of interpretation will be delivered within six months of first occupation of the development.*

*Reason: In accordance with NPPF Section 16, Paragraph 199 - To record and advance understanding of the significance of any heritage assets to be lost (wholly or in part) and to make this evidence (and any archive generated) publicly accessible and SIE-3 "Protecting, Safeguarding and Enhancing the Environment" of the adopted Stockport Core Strategy DPD.*

## **ANALYSIS**

This application seeks listed building consent for the works described above and should be considered alongside the parallel application for planning permission.

The submission has been accompanied by a comprehensive package of plans, assessments and other supporting information which has been considered in detail alongside the information submitted as part of the accompanying planning application.

## **Design and Scale of the proposed development**

### **Design and scale of the proposed development**

Policies of the adopted Core Strategy, in particular SIE-1 'Quality Places' sets an expectation that all development should be designed and landscaped to the highest contemporary standard. It stresses the need to ensure that it has regard to the built and /or natural environment in which it is sited. The policy advises that where these matters are met planning applications will be given positive consideration.

In addition, to Core Strategy Policy SIE-1, both the Design of Residential Development SPD, Town Centre SPD and the Town Centre West Strategic Regeneration Framework place a strong emphasis on the need to deliver a high quality of design.

In addition, Policy H-1 'Design of Residential Development further enforces the requirement to deliver high quality sustainable residential development which contributes to the creation of successful communities. It requires proposals to respond to the townscape and landscape character of an area and should reinforce or create local identity and distinctiveness in terms of layout, scale and appearance. The policy also cross references the need to deliver low carbon housing and to ensure that good standards of amenity, privacy, safety / security and open space should be provided for the occupants of new housing.

In respect of Policy CS8 the development plan acknowledges the unique place that the historic environment holds in Stockport's cultural heritage as well as the multiple



ways in which it supports and contributes to the economy, society and daily life. It stresses that conserving and managing this resource is a key component wider principle of sustainable development. It further advises that development will be expected to make a positive contribution to the protection and /or enhancement of the borough's heritage assets.

Turning to the NPPF, as referenced in the Policy background section of the report, the NPPF was revised earlier this year. The main thrust of changes made to the document were to seek to drive significant improvement in design. In the ministerial statement by the Secretary of State on 20<sup>th</sup> July 2020 he stated *"The Government has set out to put beauty and design, for the first time, at the heart of the local planning system."*

The Secretary of State further advises that the changes to the NPPF will ensure that the planning system helps to create buildings that "fit in with places" but at the same time maintains the strong focus on the delivery of homes and other developments that communities make.

Members are advised that the application presented has been considered by the RIBA Places Matter Design Review panel comprising an independent panel of design experts on two separate occasions during design development. The most recent comments are provided in full in the responses section of the report. The following statement is of particular note, *"The landscape and place-making are, if anything, even more compelling than they were before. The respect for heritage issues and the group of buildings to the West of the viaduct is all working well."*

The comments view the scheme extremely favourably, noting that the public realm *"is well considered and very exciting"*. They further recognise that *"the enrichment of landscape and place-making is all very positive and fully supported by the panel"*.

The panel were particularly firm in their view that this presented *"a very special addition to Stockport"*.

In terms of the proposed buildings, the panel supported the approach to Weir Mill and the expressed form of the buildings proposed and their context is respect of the Grade II\* viaduct.

The comments are highly supportive of the approach to the mill complex and public realm, however, the panel remained of the opinion that the design approach of the eastern tower was not strong enough. The panel expressed a view that the tower should be higher, more elegant and use a different design approach.

The panel wished to see further detail in respect of the impact of the development in a much wider context, in particular, in relation to the consented Interchange but also the wider town centre. Members should note that much of this information has been prepared by the applicant to support the application but was not presented to the panel for consideration.

The panel challenged the scheme designer to *"pull a rabbit out of the hat"* and create a tower that is more elegant, simpler and of a different architecture. Following receipt of these comments' officers entered into further dialogue with the applicant seeking to explore options to deliver a revised design whilst striking the correct balance to minimise impact from both a townscape and heritage perspective. The applicant in turn provided a response to the concerns expressed by Places Matter which advised that they strongly considered that the scheme was of a sufficiently strong quality of design and coupled with viability considerations did not propose to make any changes to the scheme.

They argue that the design approach to the scheme has been driven both by a wider urban analysis but also framed in response to the new context set out within the adopted SRF. They further advised that the choice of a lower tower was made having regard to the nature of the valley as well as a conscious decision to make the tower lower than the consented interchange building.

The designer responds that the *“new additions to the site are strong new contemporary pieces of architecture, they are underpinned by a Heritage led approach to the regeneration of the site. They are shaped by our detailed understanding of the setting, evolution of the mill complex and the importance it holds in Stockport’s and the North’s industrial history”*.

They further advise that the language of the buildings is intentionally simple referencing both the existing mills grid of windows, and the industrial nature of the site and rail infrastructure. The fundamental approach taken by the project is to present the scheme as *“a phased family of evolution is an important part of this sites history which was subdivided by the viaduct as a later addition”*.

The information supporting the application clearly articulates that the scheme has been driven by a heritage led regeneration based approach, and it is evident that the designer has sought to utilise the evolution of the site in creating a new family of buildings, importantly making a consistent statement with a clear building identity to further the organic evolution of the site.

In considering the design, officers strongly support the form and architectural language of the proposed new build, conversion / adaptation of Weir Mill complex, and share the views expressed by Places Matter that this element of the scheme can be considered to be exemplary. The attention to detail and the innovative approach taken in the development are to be applauded and furthermore, enables the Council to continue to advocate a high bar in respect of the expectation for development in the Town Centre and wider borough. It is acknowledged that the Conservation Officer has raised concerns in respect of matters of detail in particular in respect of the approach to replacement windows, as well lack of detail in respect of some elements of the scheme. These matters will however be the subject of conditional control and will afford further opportunities for these matters to be considered in detail to ensure that the new build and interventions are delivery in a sensitive way.

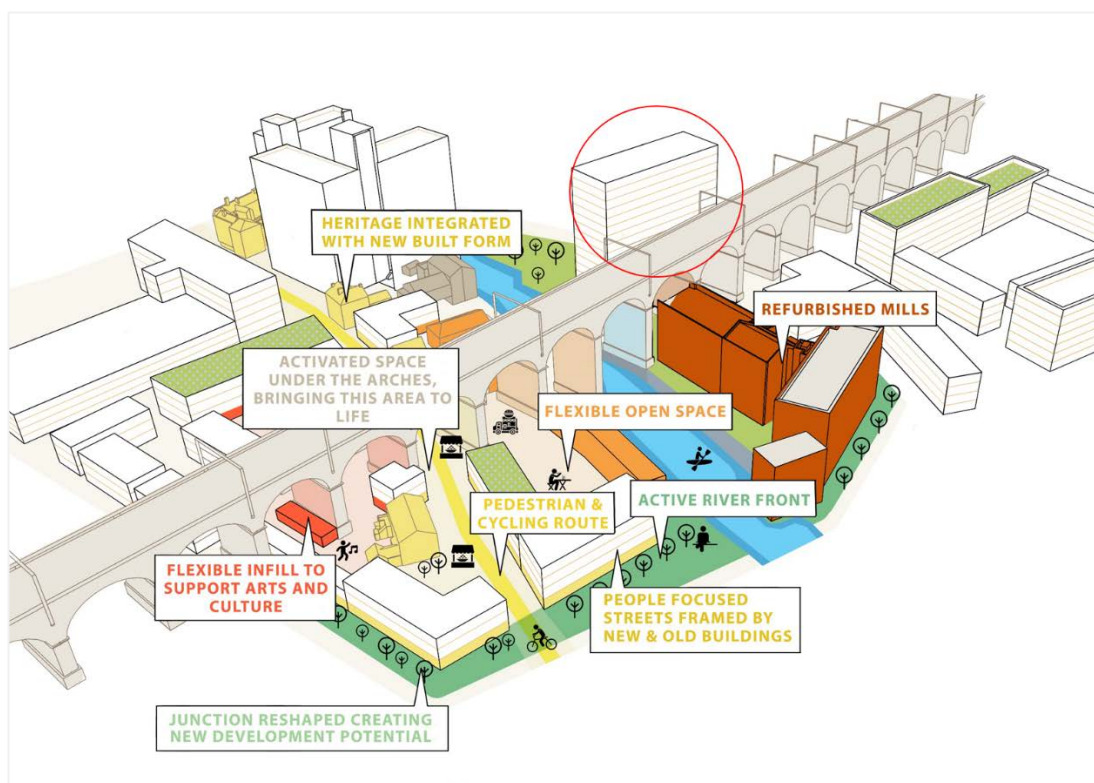
Turning to the Eastern tower, based on the strength of opposition to the scheme and the comments raised by heritage bodies this is by far the most controversial element of the scheme for the Council to consider. Notably, whilst objections are raised to the visual impact of the tower, little is said in respect of its design quality.

As described within this section, the policy framework at both a local and national level advocate the delivery of high quality of design, a view supported by the SRF. It is considered that the design approach to the mill complex can be considered to accord with the thrust of national and local policy in striving to create an extremely high quality of design. Whilst there is undoubtedly merit in the suggestion that an alternative design approach could be taken in respect of this tower and to make it is truly exceptional piece of architecture, this presents numerous challenges including advocating a much taller and therefore impactful building, as well as further considerable cost implication. The scheme designers response to Places Matter (as well as the DAS, Tall Buildings report etc) articulates a design approach which is centred around a consistent theme which seeks to enhance the design evolution of the site and take a contemporary approach to creating an industrial feel for the development and is one that is supported as striking an appropriate balance.

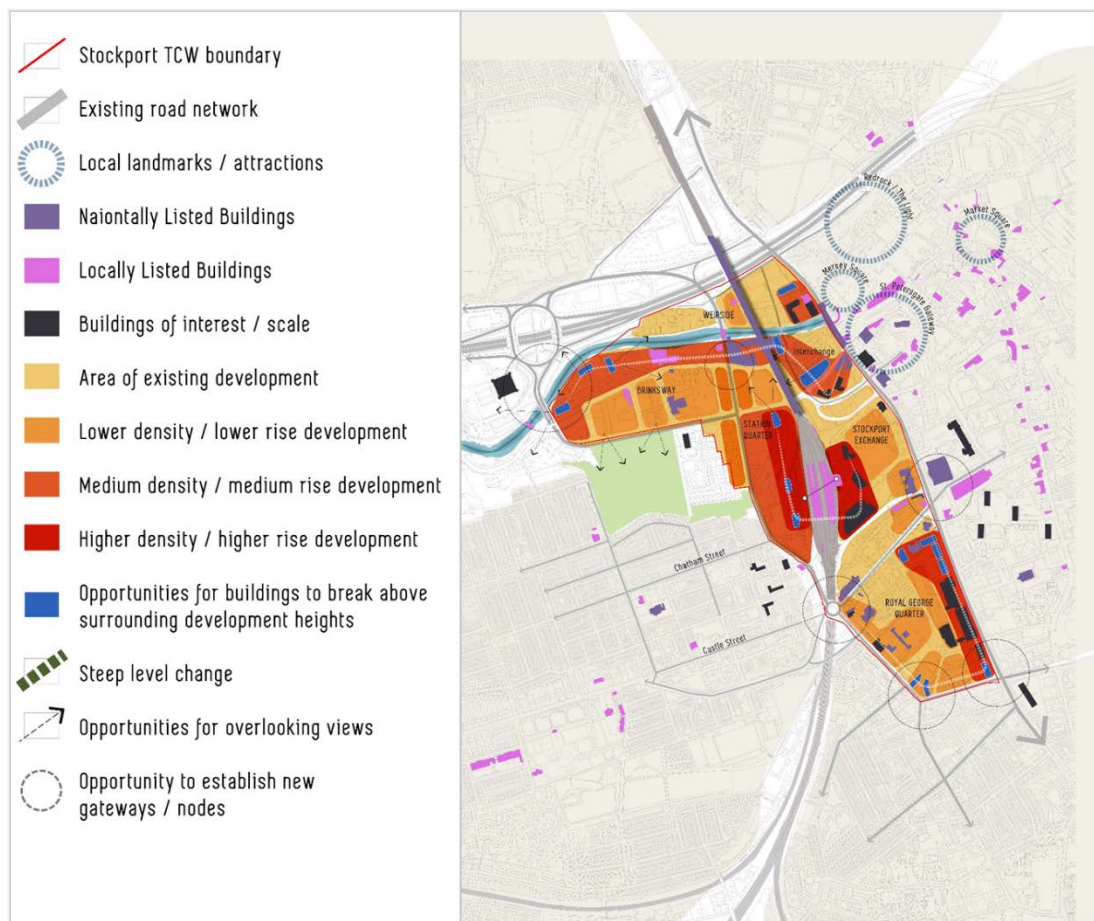
Turning to the level of amenity that would be afforded to future residents of the development, clearly a balance must be struck where schemes involve conversion of existing buildings and the need to accommodate new development within a constrained urban location. In this regard, the scheme has been designed to afford residents with an acceptable level of amenity. All units are designed to meet the national space standards and have been designed to make the best use of space and the views afforded to them. In addition, the scheme proposes private and communal amenity spaces including both an internal residents room as well as a roof garden on the New Western building as well as proposing in the region of 5,450m<sup>2</sup> of public open space for use by residents, those employed at the site as well as the wider community. The scheme strives to deliver quality place making, recognising the key gateway location of the site and the opportunities provided by the re-use of the site. A further significant benefit of the scheme is the opening up access to the river and through the creation of an attractive well-landscaped seating area. Elements supported by both the SRF and the TCG3.1.

The SRF provides a strategy and illustrative framework which seeks to guide the transformation of Town Centre West.

Members should note that the indicative masterplan imagery for the Weirside 'character area' clearly shows higher-rise development on the part of the Weir Mill site to the east of the viaduct (pp. 134-135):



While section 5.3 of the SRF, which directly addresses Scale and Massing (pp.94-94), clearly identifies the same part of the Weir Mill site as an area with the 'opportunity for buildings to break above surrounding development heights'.



The same section of the SRF goes on to say that these ‘illustrations provide a general guide to scale and massing, encouraging a more varied and refined [...] urban form to emerge as detailed site proposals come forward. [Town Centre West’s] central location demands an urban response with a noticeable step up in scale from surrounding residential suburbs.

## Crime Prevention

CS Policy SIE1 together with Paras. 92, 97 and 130 of the NPPF seek to ensure that developments create safe living conditions and incorporate safety and security measures into the design whilst not compromising overall design quality.

A Crime Impact Statement has been submitted with the application. The statement advises that the layout of the development is considered acceptable provided that a number of issues are addressed, the issues raised are provided in the bullet points below with subsequent paragraphs addressing how these comments have been taken on board.

- the design and layout of the public realm should not include any hard or soft landscaping that could impede surveillance or attract loitering
- consideration should be given to closing off the riverside area at night, but acknowledges that if this cannot be achieved adequate lighting should be provided.

In respect of the issues above, clarification has been sought in respect of how these matters are proposed to be addressed. The scheme design is focussed on inclusivity and creating public spaces that are inviting and safe to use/occupy at all times of the

day, with the overall objective of encouraging people into the development. To this end, the central courtyard is comprised of two main open spaces with visual connections throughout the site, which offer flexibility for events/performance, whilst ancillary spaces and connecting routes are designed to maximise visual surveillance. A scheme of artificial lighting is proposed to create spaces that feel safe and welcoming – JHP Plans identify the locations of proposed light fittings. There will also be a site wide CCTV strategy in place to maximise surveillance throughout the development. The riverside area is intended to be a space for public access to active ground/ lower ground floor spaces, and as such needs to remain open for commercial reasons as well as making the scheme feel like a new part of Stockport. A fully integrated external lighting scheme is proposed, which will include suitable artificial lighting provision to the riverfront area, together with associated primary access routes, to permit safe access as a minimum. Details would be subject of a planning condition if planning permission is granted.

- Concern is expressed that the external escape stairs must be secured to prevent unauthorised access

The proposed external escape stairs to the East Mill Building and West New Building will incorporate a gated/barrier system, to restrict unauthorised access from the public areas. Both will be on an alarm system, linked back to the 24hr management suite on site. In addition, external escape doors, including those leading to the stair landings at each level, will be alarmed and linked back to the management suite. The landscape design is also intended to include discrete pathways to the stairs, whilst lighting to this location will draw attention to anyone using the stair without authorised access. As noted, a scheme of CCTV will also be covering the landscape and be directed to the 24hr management suite on site, where activity can be recorded/monitored. All external doors serving the stairs, including those to the external stair landings will be PAS 24 security rated. The proposed shared core stair between the East and West Mill Buildings will only be accessible to residents via an integrated access control system. Access to the stair will be via the main lobby. It is proposed that the lower flights of the existing external stairs to the West and East Mill Buildings will be removed to eliminate unauthorised access to the stairs (landings to be utilised as balconies) from the ground floor on the East Mill and from West Shed roof on the West Mill.

- Bollards should be utilised to prevent access into the public realm on King Street, Chestergate and Astley Street

The proposed external landscape design incorporates bollards to prevent vehicular access from King Street, Chestergate and Astley Street into the site in accordance with comments made by the counter terrorism team in discussions with the applicant. Dropped bollards will also be provided to facilitate temporary access for emergency vehicles to/from the central courtyard at key locations.

- The publicly accessible ground floor void on the new West building should be as high and as wide as possible, well-lit and overlooked through adjacent glazed elevations

The West New Building undercroft has been maximised spatially to enhance the quality of space and maximise natural daylighting, which is further improved with the provision of a mirrored soffit and supplementary artificial lighting. The undercroft is also directly overlooked by elevations that incorporate glazing, including the main entrance to the West New Building and one of the commercial units making this space an active area subject to high levels of traffic and visual surveillance.

- Secure layout / treatment of the new buildings, including single leaf communal entrances, robust video access and a secure system for delivery of the post.
- Clearly defined /enclosed defensible space to protect the ground floor residential windows of the west mill.
- Prevention of unauthorised access to the roof of the West shed building
- Main entrance to the wheelhouse to be provided at street level and hidden windows protected.

Communal entrances have been located on the new buildings to best respond to the site constraints, align with primary access routes, and maximise visual surveillance. This is coupled with a full CCTV system to provide a high level of security to be provided across the site. The scheme is provided with two main lobbies at ground floor level, serving residential accommodation above; one to the West New Building and one to the West Mill Building. Each lobby will accommodate secure post boxes, which are accessible to residents only. It is proposed that larger deliveries will be received in a designated, secure space within the West New Building, run by a central management suite and in close proximity to the proposed loading bay accessed off Chestergate to the south of the site. The proposed external landscape design incorporates defined margins of planting under ground floor windows to the West Mill Building, to act as a deterrent for unauthorised access, creating a buffer between access routes and adjacent apartments. Windows will also feature lockable restrictors to provide a further level of security to the apartments. Members are advised that these areas have been discussed in detail with the secure by design officer as part of the development of the proposals for the listed building works. It is proposed to remove the existing external stair to the north of the West Shed Building, which is currently unsafe and provides a security risk for unauthorised access to the roof. Roof access will instead be gained via a new internal ladder and roof hatch, which will be accessible from an internal back of house door, accessible only to the landlord/maintenance personnel. All rainwater goods will be located internally to prevent unauthorised access onto the roof via externally mounted downpipes. Planters are proposed to be installed to the top of the low level street wall on King Street West, to provide a deterrent for unauthorised access to the roof from the pavement. The proposals included for a new accessible public entrance to the Wheelhouse building from King Street West, where levels of activity and surveillance are maximised. Windows will be tested and certified to BS EN 1627 RC2 in accordance with advice from Design for Security Consultant.

- Disabled parking spaces must be well overlooked, well lit, protected by cctv and should not be for the long term parking by residents or visitors.

Designated disabled parking is proposed to be provided under the viaduct arch adjoining Chestergate. The parking will be suitably lit as part of the external lighting scheme and protected by the site-wide CCTV coverage. Given the close proximity to the East and West New buildings and central courtyard, parking provision will be well overlooked by gable windows to the new buildings.

Based on the issues raised and the responses provided and reflected in the scheme designed it is considered that the scheme has adequately addressed matters raised and will provide safe living conditions and incorporate safety and security measures into the design whilst not compromising overall design quality as such this accords with Policy SIE-1 and paragraphs 92, 97 and 130 of the NPPF.



## Heritage considerations

The site occupies a key gateway location set towards the eastern boundary of Town Centre West. Weir Mill is located in Weirside, which is defined in the adopted SRF as *“a distinctive new town gateway, showcasing its heritage.”*

Not only does the site occupy a prominent position, it presents a series of challenges given the sites listed status, together with its location in close proximity to a number of key statutorily listed heritage assets, most notably the Grade II\* majestic, iconic and defining Stockport viaduct. This iconic structure is located within the top 8% of listed buildings in the country and is described in its statutory listing as:

*Viaduct of 27 arches by G W Buck. Opened 27 December 1840, having taken 21 months to build, at a cost of £70,000. Said to contain 11 million bricks. Viaduct in brick with stone capping and dentil cornice. Stone moulded impost bands and rusticated faces to piers.*

Members will recall that when considering the proposals for the Interchange, the report made clear that the development proposed by this scheme would present significant change to the townscape of Stockport and that the development as proposed will present a highly visible addition to the townscape.

In accordance with section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the LBCA Act), the Local Planning Authority as decision maker must pay special regard to the desirability of preserving those listed buildings potentially affected by the proposals, or their settings or any features of special architectural or historic interest which they may possess.

The approach to considering the impact on the historic environment should follow the guidance advocated in the PPG as referred to above, namely that significance derives not only from an asset's physical presence but also from its setting. In cases where potential harm to heritage assets is identified, it needs to be categorised as either less than substantial harm or substantial harm (which includes total loss) in order to identify which policies in the NPPF apply.

It stresses that within each category of harm, the extent of the harm may vary and should be clearly articulated in any assessment. It is clear that the judgement as to whether a proposal constitutes substantial harm is a matter for the decision making have regard to the particular circumstance of the case and the relevant policy test of the NPPF.

In order to assist the decision maker the PPG cites an example, *“in determining whether works to a listed building constitute substantial harm, an important consideration would be whether the adverse impact seriously affects a key element of its special architectural or historic interest. It is the degree of harm to the asset's significance rather than the scale of the development that is to be assessed. The harm may arise from works to the asset or from development within its setting.”*

The National Planning Policy Framework confirms that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). It also makes clear that any harm to or loss of the significance a designated heritage asset requires clear and convincing justification and clearly sets out that substantial harm to or loss of listed assets should be exceptional/wholly exceptional.



## Whether the proposed development would preserve the setting of the Stockport Railway Viaduct, a Grade II\* Listed Building

The application is supported by a full and detailed heritage assessment which considers the assets and their significance, and an assessment of the potential impact of the proposed development. This has included a detailed views assessment based on a series of viewpoints based on a defined Zone of Visual Influence. The view points, can be viewed in the plans pack appended to this report.

The applicants submission in respect of Weir mill concludes that the impact of the development on the Grade II\* Listed viaduct is minor-moderate adverse which they consider at worst is “less than substantial” and therefore the test under Section 202 of the NPPF should apply.

Members will note that the Council in undertaking the requirements to notify Historic England and the National Amenity Societies, has received mixed responses in respect of the impact of the proposals on the Viaduct.

Historic England, the Government’s adviser on the historic environment who hold the responsibility for the designation of historic assets in England, provide extensive comments in respect of the application. In respect of the impact on the viaduct, they recognise that the proposed eastern tower element of the scheme “*would be a considerable visual intrusion*”. They recognise that this is significant acknowledging that the viaduct’s landmark architectural character stems to a large extent from the fact it is so dominant and striking within the skyline. Whilst acknowledging that the tower would partially obscure and visually compete, it would do so only with that particular element of the viaduct - effectively obscuring one of the twenty-seven arches. It is this that allows them to conclude that the ability to appreciate the scale, grandeur and visual dominance of the viaduct would therefore be partially rather than completely, impacted. They consider the level of harm to the viaduct (and indeed Weir Mill and cumulative harm) as at the high end of the spectrum of less than substantial.

The Victorian society (VS) in responding to the application indicate that they “*most importantly....objects strongly to the proposed tower to the east of the site.*” Whilst they raise concerns in respect of the proposed materiality of the scheme they make clear that they hold a fundamental objection to the principle of any tall building in this location. They consider that the scheme would cause serious harm to the viaduct and due to its position in close proximity that this would be disproportionately harmful. In terms of the comments, it is noted that whilst the VS clearly have a strong objection to this element of the scheme, they have not concluded with a view that this would amount to substantial harm.

Similar to the VS, the Ancient Monuments Society do not articulate a view in respect of the magnitude of harm caused by the proposal, and refer to the view analysis submitted with the application as the example of the harm caused to the setting of the viaduct.

The Council’s Conservation Officer on the other hand considers that the impact of the proposed development on the setting of the viaduct would be significant, and therefore considers that the higher test under Paragraph 201 of the NPPF should apply. Whilst these comments acknowledge the view of HE, they do not agree.

Both Save Britain’s Heritage and Stockport Heritage Trust consider the proposals result in substantial harm as do a number of those commenting on the application.

The applicants' own comprehensive submissions consider that the development would result in less than substantial harm.

It is clear that the proposal will be harmful, to reach a different conclusion would be evidently wrong. However, the stature, scale, magnitude and strength of the viaduct as a defining feature, would not be fundamentally undermined by the proposed development. Yes, it would obscure some views from certain vantage points and break the opportunity to appreciate the entirety of the horizontal emphasis of the structure, but the scheme would obscure only one of the twenty-seven arches. Whilst the comments of the Council's Conservation Officer are noted, in this particular instance, it is considered that more weight should be provided to the HE position particularly given the level of harm and as such it is concluded that the scheme would cause less than substantial harm to the Grade II\* Viaduct.

#### Impact of the proposed development on Weir Mill, a Grade II Listed complex of buildings.

The application is supported by a full and detailed heritage assessment. It considers the assets and their significance and an assessment of the potential impact of the proposed development. This has included a detailed views assessment based on a series of viewpoints based on a defined Zone of Visual Influence. The view points, can be viewed in the plans pack appended to this report.

The applicants submission in respect of Weir mill concludes that the impact of the development on Weir Mill is minor-adverse which they consider at worst is *"less than substantial"*.

Historic England express clear support for the principle of regeneration of Weir Mill provided that this can be achieved via a sensitive and viable re-use. They recognise that earlier schemes proposing the redevelopment of this site (namely the withdrawn Maryland scheme DC72907, May 2020) encountered considerable viability issues which have constrained the ability to sensitively bring it forward.

In respect of Weir Mill, they note that the extent of the demolition proposed would considerably diminish the level of significance which is attributed to the completeness of the mill complex raises a large concern. Nevertheless, they accept that the proposed development would retain elements of the complex which have been identified to be of the highest significance and that this in turn would still mean that the complex would retain evidence of a number of important innovations in mill construction and sequential evolution.

Consistent with the approach taken by the Conservation Officer, HE expresses that the demolition and revised configuration of the site to facilitate the re-purposing of the site, amongst other detail design matters, would have a significant impact on the sense of enclosure and lack of permeability through the site - a characteristic of mill complexes serving a function purpose when they were operational. It is however recognised that the scheme retains more of the historic buildings than the previous scheme and that this is an improvement in respect of the position regarding the ability to read the complex.

Whilst the regeneration of the site should be afforded significant weight, there can be no denying that the development will result in harm to Weir Mill, a complete complex representing the evolution of technologies. However, this has to be weighed against the considerable benefits derived from safeguarding the future of the complex, bearing

in mind the interventions necessary to ensure that the wider benefits of the scheme can be delivered.

### St Peter's Conservation Area, Wellington Bridge and the former Wellington Bridge Inn

It is clear in its assessment of the impact of the development in View 8, the Heritage Statement identifies that the East Tower, by virtue of its height, siting, design and materials, would have a harmful impact on a 'key view' identified within the approved St. Peters Conservation Area Character Appraisal, and the setting of the heritage assets within the view. This important view encapsulates the impact of the Industrial Revolution on this part of the town. Significant elements include the high quality buildings that frame the views, the visual relationship between the viaduct and Wellington Bridge displaying a unique aspect of their respective arches and strong horizontal form, and the interrelationship of the Railway Viaduct and Weir Mill, all in one view. Notable to the composition is the way the structures respond to the topography of the river valley. The proposed East Tower would not convey the identified positive qualities of structures in the view and would instead diminish the quality of this important view, which at present remains substantially unaltered from its late 19<sup>th</sup> / early 20<sup>th</sup> century appearance.

### Cumulative Impact of the Proposals

Having regard to the case made in connection with the application, supporting evidence and following due consideration of the proposals in their entirety, including consideration of the proposed development within the context of the approved Interchange park and residential block, that the cumulative impact on designated and non-designated heritage assets should be considered to be less than significant.

### Level and extent of harm

In considering the representations of all heritage experts in connection with this application it is considered that the development as proposed would result in less than substantial harm. It is recognised that this view differs from the Council's own heritage expert, however, in respect of the viaduct, whilst views would be affected these would not diminish or undermine the fundamental quality, function, grandeur and prominence of the viaduct. Rather the scheme and the position of the building, and the very opening up of public access to the viaduct would offer new opportunities to bring the spaces under the viaduct into positive use allowing for a new appreciation of the majesty of the structure.

Under paragraph 202 of the NPPF, where a conclusion is reached that a development would result in less than substantial harm, this harm should be balanced against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing the optimum value use of the designated heritage assets.

The restoration of the key buildings within the Weir Mill complex have been demonstrated to secure the optimum viable use for the building. This application has considered a number of agreed alternatives, has clearly demonstrated that the scheme cannot be dealt with in a less harmful way and that the development is the minimum necessary to deliver a viable scheme. The value of the retention and re-use of the complex and the key contribution this will make to transformational regeneration of the part of the town must be given significant weight. The scheme will open up access to the site, enabling residents, the public and occupiers of the development to appreciate and understand the complex and its relationship to the Grade II\* viaduct.

In addition, the scheme will deliver much needed housing for the borough, in a highly sustainable urban location comprising a brownfield site. As a key gateway site in the MDC, this scheme offers the level of exemplary design and place making qualities envisaged by the SRF and supported by local and national design policies. It is considered that this development has the potential to have a catalytic effect on regeneration and investor confidence in the town. This scheme together with that consented at the Interchange will offer a truly transformational form of regeneration in the heart of the town. These matters are strong and significant public benefits. Furthermore, the catalytic effect has the potential to deliver further significant and sustained public benefits for the town.

Whilst the comments of the conservation officer are noted in respect of the absence of detail, officers have received further clarification and assurance from the developer in this regard. They stress that the Council has been aware throughout the duration of the process that some of the buildings were unsafe due to the level of decay causing structural failures and as such some condition survey work remains outstanding, most notably this applies to the Wheelhouse. The applicant acknowledges and agrees that these are of high significance and their intention remains to proceed with a presumption to preserve as much of the fabric as possible to sustain its special architectural and historic interest, matters which are considered capable of consideration by condition. They further stress that the appointed structural engineers have extensive experience in developing repairs that are appropriate to the historic importance of buildings with particular expertise in respect of the Victorian mill building typology.

### Alternatives

As referenced in the ES summary, the application includes consideration of a number of alternatives in chapter 4. This considered the potential of delivering a scheme to test whether or not the adverse effects could either be avoided or reduced. At the point of submission this initially considered 4 options, but during the assessment of the application officers requested a further alternative to be considered to reduce the scale of the proposed tower to 5 storeys (below the viaduct). All options considered were discounted on viability grounds and the 'no development option' was discounted as a missed opportunity on socio-economic terms.

Noting the comments made from SHT and the scale of the MDC and opportunities it presents, the MDC were asked to respond whether there were any further opportunities either via funding or land. Their response is provided full above. Whilst members should consider the application that is in front of them, regard should rightly be had to whether the development could be delivered in a less harmful way.

Officers have sought confirmation as to whether any other potential funding opportunities are available. It has been confirmed that the site was unsuccessful in its application for brownfield housing fund monies and further advises that MDC Investment facility does not extend to provide grant funding into schemes. In respect of other current opportunities to obtain funding, we are advised that there are no other current opportunities available through either Homes England or other public sector funding bodies.

Clarification was also sought as to whether it was possible to effectively provide additional land to enable a viable scheme to be delivered in lieu of either the eastern tower in its entirety or a less harmful way, a point raised by SHT. In this respect the following issues were identified:-

1. Scheme viability is also challenging, by splitting the site economies of scale would be affected and the position would worsen.
2. The Council (as landowner) or MDC would potentially have to swap land which would have a greater capital value. This issue must be considered in light of S123 of the Local Government Act 1972 which requires that a public body obtains best consideration for the disposal of land, therefore C&C would need to pay the difference relative to the uplift which in turn would further affect viability.

Turning specifically to the HIF, members are advised that a funding agreement with an offer of up to £7.0m capital HIF support was secured for the Weir Mill project in November 2019 which at that time proposed to deliver 303 units.

Subsequently, due to a change of ownership and new timetable, a Deed of Variation was entered into between the Council and Homes England in July 2020. Together these form the current grant agreement between the Council and Homes England (HE) for a scheme of 297 units. A further Deed of Variation is currently being finalised with Homes England. This has been assured by Homes England internally, and once executed, will extend the grant availability period from March 2022 to March 2023. It will also take account of the proposed new scheme design with reduced housing unit numbers to 253.

Officers from the Council's Regeneration and Development team are of the strong opinion, from their knowledge of how the grant works, that if the number of homes are reduced substantially from the proposed 253, then the HIF grant is at high risk of being withdrawn altogether. The HIF grant works on a viability gap basis, along with a positive Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) requirement, and a view on the scheme's strategic importance and overall quantum of units. It does not work on a grant per unit basis. Given that the number of units is already been reduced (from 297 to 253), and that the HIF grant amount is being protected based on the strategic importance of the scheme, any further changes to unit numbers, and hence also risk to the delivery timetable, is unlikely to be supported by Homes England.

The reasons for this conclusion are summarised below:

- HIF Marginal Viability is a very competitive fund and nationally oversubscribed. Projects that delay further, for example due to redesign, or substantial changes in outcomes, are at high risk of not being supported.
- Homes England has confirmed that there is no further HIF available to support any increased viability gap due to lower unit numbers, even if hypothetically, the grant assessment allowed it. HE have already increased the grant offer from the original submission and so are highly unlikely, or able, to do this again.
- HIF support is unlikely to be reduced pro-rata against unit numbers because HIF works on viability, not a per unit amount. If the scheme is not shown to be viable, and deliverable within the grant timescale, then all the HIF will be withdrawn.
- Additional public funding can be sought subject to Subsidy Control advice. The Council has already sought additional funding to support the Weir Mill scheme in 2020 through the GM Brownfield Housing Fund (£3.5m). This was not successful.

- We are not aware of any other appropriate public grant based funding sources to support the scheme.

There are also some more technical reasons why we believe HIF would be withdrawn, rather than reduced, if unit numbers were lower.

- The Council's HIF Funding Agreement with Homes England is conditional on fulfilling a number of grant conditions, these include planning permission, milestones and pre-draw down conditions. Weir Mill is already flagged up as behind schedule. So any further changes to the DoV currently being processed would further escalate the scheme in Homes England's risk category.
- Delay of the scheme, due to a further revised design, also risks breaching the HIF grant availability period in which the grant can be spent (currently March 22 but being revised to March 23).
- A case, through a DoV mechanism, is currently being finalised to agree to reduce the housing units from 297 to 253. This is on the basis of liveability, a better product and place making objectives. It is highly unlikely that Homes England would accept this case again for any further reduction.
- The scheme has a large proportion of fixed costs, e.g. mill conversion and external works, so we believe that reducing unit numbers will not result in a pro rata cost reduction. Therefore making the scheme less viable and supportable.
- The Weir Mill grant offer of £7.0m is on the basis that a positive BCR can still be achieved. Any further reduction in unit numbers, or changes that decrease viability, risks making the whole scheme unsupportable due to a negative BCR and over large funding gap.
- The above, in terms of an unviable scheme, also applies to the planning permission process, as viability is required to be demonstrated as part of this process.

Whilst members will appreciate that there is harm associated with the development, full consideration has been given against the relevant policies of the NPPF. The potential impact of the development on heritage assets has been considered and has been assessed against the public benefits the scheme will deliver.

The statutory duty to have 'special regard' to the desirability of preserving listed buildings and their setting which requires that considerable weight and importance is to be afforded to the harm to the heritage assets, given the impact of the proposals on the listed complex and the viaduct. This must be considered in the overall planning balance, and in particular, must be weighed against the benefits of the scheme however, is acknowledged should be given significant weight when assessing the proposal.

### **Archaeological considerations**

The application is supported by an Archaeological Desk Based Assessment prepared by Salford Archaeology in December 2020 and a Heritage Statement and Impact Assessment produced by BDP in December 2020. Both have been reviewed by the Greater Manchester Archaeological Advisory Service (GMAAS) who

commend both reports for providing an *“an excellent understanding of the site’s historic development, the location and nature of known and potential buried archaeological features, historic fabric and its relative significance.”*

GMAAS consider that the archaeological remains are at least of high local and potentially regional significance and that the archaeological importance of the site also extends to the historic built fabric which should be fully recorded and interpreted prior to re-purposing or demolition works.

GMAAS recommend that two conditions be imposed should the application be granted to require:

- archaeological investigation and recording works set out in an approved Written Scheme of Investigation; and
- a scheme of heritage display and interpretation.

Subject to the imposition of these conditions, the development/works would be in full accordance with Policy SIE-3 of the Core Strategy and the National Planning Policy Framework. GMAAS’s suggested conditions are recommended accordingly.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the scheme as proposed would deliver considerable regenerative benefits to a key strategic and prominent site within the town centre. The re-development of the site has been a key regeneration objective of the Council for many years and this proposal would be the next step in delivering a high quality mixed use development in the town centre and will be a continuation of the transformational regeneration underway in the town centre.

Whilst areas of concern have been identified within this planning report, particularly in respect of the impact of the development on heritage assets in the vicinity of the site, including the Mill complex itself and Stockport Viaduct, this needs to be carefully balanced against the wide ranging and significant benefits associated with the proposal. The setting of Grade II and II\* listed buildings would be affected by the development even after any proposed mitigation, arising from the location, scale, bulk and mass of the development.

Although it has been concluded that cumulatively the scheme would result in less than substantial harm, it is acknowledged that this is at the higher end of the spectrum. The scheme will affect listed buildings even after the mitigation proposed, and as required by statute, this must be given significant weight.

It is clear from the evidence accompanying the application that this scheme is heavily reliant on grant funding and remains only marginally viable, as is evidenced by the consideration of Option 8B the scheme would be totally unviable without the eastern tower. Furthermore, evidence provided in response to questions asked in respect of further funding opportunities have been exhausted. Put simply, without the HIF grant funding, the delivery of this gateway site within the MDC, the regeneration of the mill and the provision of much needed housing would not happen. It is therefore accepted that it is not possible to deliver the scheme in a less harmful way.

Whilst it has not been possible to retain all of the listed buildings and structures within Weir Mill, it is considered that the scheme and opportunities it affords will



ensure that a high quality residential led development will breathe new life into these important heritage assets. In addition, through selective demolition and appropriate mitigation, the scheme will afford the public with the opportunity to experience the viaduct by creating new and accessible public spaces to lift and celebrate the importance of these assets.

By far the most difficult element of the proposal and that which has raised most concerns is the proposed Eastern tower. This building as proposed will harm the viaduct, but this is less than substantial harm and must be read in the wider context of the transformational change this area is undergoing. The combination of the new public park, a purpose built Interchange and a contemporary residential block are changing the way in which residents, visitors and all can appreciate some of the most important heritage assets in the town. Although, the tower will shorten views of the horizontal emphasis of the viaduct, it has been designed to be positioned within the confines of one arch, with its height minimised as far as possible without rendering the scheme undeliverable.

Weir Mill is positioned in a key strategic position in the MDC area, but it is also acknowledged to be the most difficult and challenging site to unlock given the level of constraints and need to sensitively deliver a scheme which has regard to the listing and proximity to other historic assets. In this regard, it is concluded that the scheme would, on balance, deliver the optimum viable outcome for the site and play a critical role in achieving the Council's and Mayoral Development Corporation's wider strategic regeneration objectives for Town Centre West.

Given the scale of the proposal and potential impacts it is recommended that Members undertake a detailed site visit in advance of making a decision in connection with this and the accompanying application for Listed Building Consent. This visit should include, but should be limited to, an assessment of the potential impact of the development from a number key vantage points both within and outwith the town centre.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Members of Area Committee are advised that the scheme is recommended as outlined below. Noting that the determining committee is Planning and Highways Regulation Committee, comments of the area committee are sought.

It is recommended that

1. PRIOR TO THE CONSIDERATION OF THIS APPLICATION IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT A SITE VISIT SHOULD BE UNDERTAKEN BY MEMBERS OF OF PLANNING AND HIGHWAY REGULATION COMMITTEE.
2. PLANNING AND HIGHWAY REGULATION COMMITTEE ARE RECOMMENDED THAT THEY RESOLVE TO BE MINDED TO GRANT LISTED BUILDING CONSENT SUBJECT TO CONDITIONS AND TO AGREE THAT THE MATTER BE REFERRED TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HIS CONSIDERATION.