

Proposed 80 unit student accommodation at Hunter Street 15/04014/FUL

The Chester Civic Trust objects to the proposed development for the following reasons:

The danger of increasing building heights.

If approved, the proposed scheme is likely to set a most unfortunate precedent for future tall buildings surrounding the city core and in close proximity to the Walls.

The proposed building is 8 storeys from road/pedestrian level on St. Martins Way, with a further parapet wall to screen services on the roof. It is out of scale with its historic surroundings and the general scale of the attractive buildings within the conservation area. In contrast the buildings opposite are 3 storeys from road level with a basement room.

If this gradually increasing height of buildings surrounding the historic city core is allowed to continue then a new city 'wall' of buildings will obscure the older core and erode its nationally important historic character.

The design and access statement that accompanies the planning application tries to justify the proposed height of the building as 6-8 storeys as being in context with the existing height of the Crowne Plaza Hotel and the proposed height of its replacement at 8 storeys, together with the 5-6 storey height of the proposed student accommodation fronting St. Martin's Way at Linenhall. However the Chester Characterisation Study, which is quoted in the statement, clearly states that the typical building heights within the area are between 3-4 storeys. The development opposite is 3 storeys from road level with a further basement level. Therefore the building heights of the Crowne Plaza, its proposed replacement hotel and the un-built Linenhall development are already out of scale with the predominant local and historical 3- 4 storeys. Close to the site are other examples of new development that have abided by the scale of the historic city. These are the apartments on the former Royal Infirmary Site and student accommodation on Powys Court.

To justify the height of a new student accommodation building by reference to the precedent of those that are already, or (if built) out of scale with the local townscape, is totally inconsistent with good design.

Planning by precedent with reference to the steadily increasing heights of buildings on sites within and on the edge of the city core is already occurring in Chester and is eroding the historic character of the city. A good example is the precedent set by the ex Travelodge Hotel (now student accommodation) at Fountain's Roundabout. This gave the precedent to the out of scale Delemare Street health centre and apartments. The Crowne Plaza and its equally out of scale proposed replacement is now having the same effect on St. Martins Way.

Views, Vistas, Landscape/Townscape Character

It is considered that the proposed building would be an oversized brutal and ugly insertion into the city centre, the sort of large scale, bland architecture, which has recently been removed from the very same area to the undoubted benefit of the city and the city centre conservation area. St. Martin's Clinic, the building demolished on the adjacent site was a much derided and unloved monolithic building and a few metres away. Commerce House was a blot on the city skyline and coincidentally also an 8 storey building.

We believe the building will create significant visual and townscape impact upon both the immediate environs and further away. It would create visual intrusion and obstruction to views from many locations and impact upon the setting of buildings and structures, which have the highest national protection.

From the Walls and also from further away the development will change the skyline of Chester potentially obscuring the Town Hall particularly when viewed from the west. It will potentially obscure views looking south to the Welsh Hills from the new Theatre and from the new Cathedral at Heights attraction. From our initial survey there will be significant detrimental impact upon views and vistas in addition to the detrimental impact upon St. Martin's Way.

These impacts have not been assessed by the applicant and within such a sensitive and important setting a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) should be requested so that that the planning authority and all consultees can make informed judgements. We believe this detailed appraisal should be required as part of the application to assess the significance of the effects of the development upon the city, the wider views and vistas, and upon sensitive local receptors listed buildings and scheduled ancient monuments.

We note that a wide variety of reports and assessments have been prepared. These include a daylight and sunlight appraisal, an archaeological report, a sustainability report, transport, heritage, air quality, even an ecological report, but no LVIA. This is a significant omission and we can only assume no detailed work has been done as it would reveal problematic data for the applicant.

We request this information be provided which should be undertaken in line with current good practice guidance on Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment.

Design

The site for this building is an important gateway site in the core of Chester city centre and requires a high quality design that matches the site's

importance and respects the design and scale of the historic/attractive buildings that surround it. The proposed development fails to achieve these objectives.

When summarising the Central Area in which this site is located the **Chester City Centre & Approaches Characterisation Study** states some buildings from the mid 20th century have not respected the character of this highly sensitive area that the area (sub area A8) and currently has a “negative” impact upon the character of the City. It also states that the current development within this area is “Large scale uses out of scale with the townscape within the walls,” ...”The Crowne Plaza Hotel and car park, which is highly visible because of its size and bulk, ... pays no heed to the grain of the city”.

This scheme replicates the design, massing and architectural quality which has been identified as out of scale and unattractive. It is somewhat ironic that the building previously on the open space site adjacent was a large monolithic, unattractive disliked, featureless brick building. The proposed development building is more of the same.

Section 3 of the design and access statement references the design principles for new development in central Area A within which the site is located.

These principles are:

‘The market area offers potential for a more comprehensive development. This needs to be mindful of the following considerations:

- Providing a strong and attractive frontage to St. Martin’s Way.
- Respecting and enhancing views to the Town Hall, the Cathedral, the Guildhall and rear of buildings on Watergate Street, the Coach and Horses on Northgate street, the Odeon and the adjacent Georgian houses on the western side of St Martin’s way.
- Reserving and respecting the identified buildings of townscape merit on Hunter Street, Northgate Street and the rear of Watergate Street.
- Elevation design, materials, colours and heights should respond to the historic townscape and the urban form of the city.’

The proposed scheme fails to meet these principles in a number of ways.

It fails to provide an attractive frontage to St. Martin’s Way as the building is out of scale and character with the buildings that adjoin it. It also fails to create an active frontage at street level.

It fails to respect the identified buildings on Hunter Street as it is also out of scale by virtue of its excessive height.

Its proposed elevation design and height and building footprint fails to respond to the historic townscape and urban form of the city.

The design of the proposed tower of a very poor quality because, not only is it too tall in the context of surrounding historical building heights but it fails to achieve the landmark status that it is supposed to achieve by being of a bland, out of proportion and uninspiring appearance. It is likely to be perceived by the public as yet another new ugly building to join the parade of others that are now marching across the city's skyline.

Due to the scale, design, location of this scheme and the potential to set a precedent on building heights within the walls/conservation area we believe this should be considered a major application for the City and the scheme should therefore go before the planning committee or strategic planning committee.

Andrew Pannell

Chairman of the New Works Committee