

**Development Control (North Sunderland)
Sub-Committee**

29 March 2012

SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT ON APPLICATIONS

REPORT BY DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report is circulated a few days before the meeting and includes additional information on the following applications. This information may allow a revised recommendation to be made.

LIST OF SUPPLEMENTARY ITEMS

Applications for the following sites are included in this report.

North Sunderland

S1

15 Whickham Street, Sunderland.

North Sunderland Sub-Committee

SUPPLEMENT

Number:	S1
Application Number:	11/03441/FUL
Proposal:	Change of use from warehouse to student accommodation to provide 44no. bedsits and associated works.
Location:	15 Whickham Street Sunderland SR6 0ED

The main issues to be considered in this case relate to land use and need, impact on the amenities of the surrounding area, access and parking, ecology, archaeology and land contamination.

LAND USE

The area of land in question is defined as an 'Economic Development' area within the Unitary Development Plan and as such regard should be given to policies NA43, EC4 and B1 of that plan.

Policy NA43 is specifically concerned with the revitalisation of the visual and functional environment of the Monkwearmouth Improvement Area. Policy EC4 further expands on the above setting out the uses which are deemed to be acceptable within this area. Such uses include:- Offices (Use Class B1), General Industry (S2) and Warehouses / Storage (B8), possible acceptable ancillary uses include:- Shops (up to 50 sq.ft), Offices (A2), Food and Drink, Hotels (C1), Community Facilities (D1), Assembly & Leisure (D2) and open space. However, both Residential Institutions (C2) and Housing (C3) are specifically listed within the policy as being unacceptable uses in this defined area.

Notwithstanding the above, in particular policy EC4, it is acknowledged that the policies contained within the Unitary Development Plan are now some 13 years old and whilst the UDP remains the development plan document on which decision are to be based, regard must also be had to present day site circumstances. In this

regard, an exception (or departure) may be made to the development plan as long as there is sufficient justification to release the site for non commercial. In this case the applicant has provided written confirmation from Lofthouse and Partners that the site has been marketed unsuccessfully for any user, since 2008. In summary therefore, whilst the principle of residential development on the site is unacceptable in policy terms the proposal may be seen as a minor departure from the UDP policies listed above, subject to other appropriate UDP policies being satisfied.

ISSUES RELATING TO NEED (SUPPLY AND DEMAND)

Issues raised by the University of Sunderland relating to supply and demand for student accommodation may be addressed as follows. It is acknowledged that several other Local Planning Authorities have introduced policies to control speculative development proposals for student accommodation in an attempt to prevent the market being saturated. Indeed the issue is being considered by the Strategy, Policy and Performance Management section at the request of the University as part of Sunderland City Council's Core Strategy. To date, however, there is no adopted policy regarding the issue of student residences that may be given any weight as part of the development control process. As such, matters related to competition in the market cannot be taken into account as a material consideration in this case.

FLATS AND BUILDINGS FOR MULTIPLE OCCUPATION

Policy H18 is relevant to the proposal. This states that proposals for the conversion of non-residential buildings (into flats and buildings for Multiple Occupation) which are vacant or under-used will normally be approved where they will not conflict with other policies and proposals of the plan. In all cases, proposals must include satisfactory provision for parking, servicing and other design aspects. It is acknowledged that there is a concentration of HMO's in some areas of the City, including Roker sea front and Roker Avenue. However, the UDP makes it clear that the whilst the University and NHS Trust supply purpose built student and nursing accommodation other students accommodation is expected to be provided by the private sector through conversion. Such conversions should provide satisfactory living accommodation without adversely affecting residential amenity or the character of an area. In this case the subject building is substantial and, although somewhat dilapidated, its conversion into bedsits would bring back into productive use an attractive and historic feature of the area. The immediate area is mixed in character and there are high rise flats to the south west, a school to the south east, residential dwellings to the north east and commercial to the north west. The proposed change of use of the building to small residential units would not unduly alter the mixed character of this part of Whickham Street, as described above. Nor is the density (or number of units) considered to be over intensive given the isolated position of the building and the intensive nature of the uses surrounding it. In this regard the proposal involves external changes to the building that involve only larger window openings. However, no overlooking or loss of privacy to surrounding occupiers would occur due to distances involved and the nature of neighbouring uses, several of which are non residential.

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

The building lies within a site of local archaeological significance (Monkwearmouth Ropery) as designated by UDP policies B13 and B14. These policies aim to regulate proposed developments which affect sites of known or potential archaeological importance. Proposals for development should evaluate the nature, extent and significance of the existing building, any remains present within the curtilage of the building and the degree to which the proposal is likely to affect them. In this case the proposal involves the conversion of the building and it is anticipated that there will be no significant implications for archaeology. However, comments are awaited from the County Archaeologist and these will be addressed in a circulation report prior to the Committee meeting.

DESIGN

Policy B2 of the UDP is concerned with new developments, redevelopment and alterations to existing buildings. The policy states that the scale, massing, layout or selling of new developments and extensions to existing buildings should respect and enhance the best qualities of nearby properties and the locality and retain acceptable levels of privacy; large scale schemes, creating their own individual character, should relate harmoniously to adjoining areas.

The appearance of a proposed development and its relationship with its surroundings is considered to be acceptable (see section on Flats and Buildings for Multiple Occupation, above).

HIGHWAY, ACCESS AND PARKING PROVISION

UDP policy T14 states that proposals for new development should be readily accessible by pedestrians, cyclists and all forms of public and private transport, not cause traffic congestion or highway safety problems, make appropriate and safe provision for access and egress, make appropriate provision for the loading and unloading of commercial vehicles and finally, indicate how parking will be accommodated. Network management have advised that some time ago they carried out a consultation / survey exercise in partnership with the University and this indicated that a more relaxed approach to the requirement for student parking may be appropriate, with more emphasis being placed upon the provision of sheltered and secure cycle storage. The result being a guideline provision of 1 space per 6 beds, with a lesser provision potentially being appropriate in some instances, dependant upon location, transport links, nearby restrictions, etc. The proposal as it stands is to create student accommodation consisting of 44 bedrooms, shared amenities and the provision of 5 car parking spaces. Given the previous use of the site and nature of Whickham Street, it is not considered that there would be any requirement for the provision of formal visitor parking. Whilst this falls short of the 1 per 6 guideline by two spaces, given the proximity of the premises to campus, former commercial use, width of Whickham

Street and relatively large frontage of the premises, along with the fact that there is no traffic accident record in the vicinity, it is felt that a recommendation to refuse could not be defended in this instance.

It has, however, been requested that a condition requiring the applicant to provide sheltered and secure cycle storage is attached should planning permission be forthcoming. This should take the form of cycle lockers or a dedicated structure, with the most appropriate location within the rear yard area. Further, should it be deemed appropriate, the applicants could be required to fund the implementation of a Parking Management Scheme, so as to mitigate the risk of overspill parking onto the adjacent highway network and residential streets.

CONTAMINATION ISSUES

The applicant has submitted a Land Contamination Risk Assessment as part of the application. No objection to the proposal has been received to the findings given that the site was used first to manufacture sails, awnings, and hatch covers but latterly has been used mainly to store furniture. The risk of land contamination is therefore minimal.

ECOLOGY

A Bat Risk Assessment has been submitted as part of the application. The findings of the report indicate that there are no records of bats or bat roosts within 1.1 km of the site. Neither was there evidence of bats inside or outside the building. There was some evidence of birds nesting within the building due to holes in the gable wall. On the balance of evidence it is considered that the proposals therefore present a low risk to bats but a high risk to nesting birds. Mitigation is therefore recommended in the form of timing of works at the end of the nesting season in August, should planning permission be forthcoming. Should any bat roosts be found all works should cease until advice from the appropriate body (Bat Conservation trust) has been sought. In light of the above it is anticipated that no objections to the proposal are likely to be forthcoming from natural England. However, comments are awaited and any received will be reported prior to the Committee meeting.

CONCLUSION

In principle, it is considered that there is sufficient justification to bring forward the site of 15 Whickham Street for residential conversion. This is because evidence that the property has been unsuccessfully marketed for commercial purposes since 2008 has been provided. The use of the premises for 44 no. bedsits is considered to be acceptable in terms of maintaining the existing mixed use character of the area and the proposed development would bring back into use an historic but derelict building, which would be beneficial to the appearance of the area. The scale, design, accessibility, archaeology, ground contamination, and ecological aspects of the proposal have been satisfactorily addressed, in principle, and for the above reasons

planning permission is recommended subject to the conditions below.

Notwithstanding the above, comments are awaited from the County Archaeologist and English Nature. In light of this a further report for circulation will be written to address these outstanding matters prior to the Committee meeting.

Recommendation: Deputy Chief Executive to Report
