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THE VICTORIAN SOCIETY
The champion for Victorian and Edwardian architecture

Your reference: n/a
Our reference: 135029/LO/2022

emily.booth@manchester.gov.uk

21st December 2022

Dear Emily,

RE: 135029/FO/2022 | Erection of 14 storey building and the refurbishment of the existing buildings at 3 Smithy Lane and Carriage Works on Garden Lane / St Mary's Parsonage with ground floor extension to form office accommodation (Class E) with front of house and commercial floorspace at ground floor (Class E) with associated landscaping and other works following demolition of existing buildings at 27-29 King Street West and 31-33 King Street West and link bridge from Carriage Works on Garden Lane / St Mary's Parsonage to 3 St Mary's Parsonage | Land Bound By King Street West, St Marys Parsonage, Garden Lane And Smithy Lane Manchester M3 2JP

Please accept our apologies for the lateness of response. We hope that this letter can still be considered.

Thank you for notifying the Victorian Society of this application, which was considered at the last meeting of our Northern Buildings Committee. We write now to offer our comments and advice.

We **object** to the proposed demolition of Grade II listed Reedham House and the proposed erection of a 14-storey building. Both would harm the character and appearance of the Conservation Area in which it is located as well as the adjoining Grade II listed buildings to the rear.

Significance and harm

Parsonage Gardens Conservation Area is characterised by impressive orange-red brick or terracotta buildings of varying scale. Buildings are usually 4 or 5 storeys in height, with a few grandiose buildings reaching 8 storeys. The urban fabric combines opens spaces with tightly woven alleyways connecting through to buildings and yards. These are not only characterful features but a tangible reflection of Manchester's historic growth and development of retail and commercial provisions. It is imperative that as Manchester continues to develop as a city, elements which make areas such as this unique, are protected.

The proposed 14-storey building would be a wholly inappropriate height for the context. It would overshadow listed and unlisted buildings in an area largely characterised by 4 and 5 storey buildings; completely at odds with centuries of development. The omnipresence of the proposed development

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would disrupt the roof lines and have an adverse effect on a number of key viewpoints within the conservation area. Notably, the disrupted view along King Street West.

The harm which the proposed buildings would have on the Parsonage Gardens Conservation Area would be significant and set a further precedent for tall buildings which could end up obliterating the character of the area.

Reedham house is a handsome red brick building with good classical details. It was constructed in 1849 with sympathetic alterations in 1926 and later bomb damage repair. Initially used as a showroom for the carriage works, the building was later used for office and retail space; therefore, largely continuing its commercial purpose. Despite later alterations, the showrooms still demonstrate the legible development of the site from its original use as a place for manufacturing and the sale of carriages. The carriage works and showrooms are both intrinsically linked, and the demolition of the showrooms would lessen the impact of the site as a whole. Moreover, it should be noted that the listing for this site was updated in 2020, excluding later non-contributing additions and retaining Reedham house. Clearly indicating the continued significant contribution Reedham house makes towards this listing.

The proposed 14-storey building, which would replace Reedham house, does not bear any relation to the scale, materials or massing of the remaining grade II listed carriage works. The proposed 14-storey building would considerably overshadow the 4-storey carriage works, reducing the building to an annex, divorced of its historic relationship with King Street West.

Reedham house positively contributes to the line of King Street West and is in-keeping with the scale and materials of the Parsonage Gardens Conservation Area.

Policy

The conservation area appraisal notes that any new buildings should be ‘predominantly solid material such as brick, stone and terra cotta, fenestrated by small vertically proportioned openings’ and ‘Materials such as concrete and cladding should be avoided, as should large expanses of glass, in preference for solid traditional materials.’ Furthermore, under paragraph 206 of NPPF, any new developments within a conservation area should ‘enhance or better reveal their significance’. The proposed scheme not only fails to adhere to these stipulations but disregards them so completely that the negative impact on the surrounding conservation area would be significant.

The proposed demolition of Reedham house would lead to substantial harm of a designated heritage asset. Under paragraph 200 of NPPF, any harm to designated heritage assets, should require “clear and convincing justification”. The proposal indicates that the tower would ‘truly reunite the whole site’. A bizarre statement considering Reedham house, from its design and tangible links to the origins of the site, already does this. Furthermore, the developer claims that demolition of Reedham house is essential to the restoration of the remaining parts of the listed site, a weak argument and clearly not the only option. The scheme should be viewed not only inappropriate, but unacceptable.

The current proposal would lead to the loss of historical evidence of this part of Manchester’s development and cause significant harm to the Parsonage Gardens Conservation Area. Granting planning permission for this proposal would set a dangerous precedent of disregarding the significance and characteristics of conservation areas despite their status as designated heritage assets, and the protection which this should afford them. We therefore object and urge you to deny consent for this application.

Emphasis needs to be put on the importance of reusing and recycling buildings such as this as per Historic England guidance https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/news/recycle-buildings-tackleclimate-change/. In addition to the Government’s legally binding target to reach net zero, Manchester City Council’s climate emergency declaration resulted in a commitment to halve carbon emissions by 2024. The demolition and replacement of this listed building would be wasteful and generate significantly more carbon emissions compared to its reuse. The proposals are therefore also contrary to the Council’s commitment to tackle climate change and should be refused on this basis.

I would be grateful if you could inform the Victorian Society of your decision in due course.

Yours sincerely,

Guy Newton

Conservation Adviser