

Philharmonic Court, Catharine Street, Liverpool L8 7SD

Heritage appraisal: addendum

- 1 Following a consultation response from, and subsequent discussions with, English Heritage, the proposed scheme for the redevelopment of Philharmonic Court has been amended to address concerns regarding its design and its effect on the character and appearance of the Canning Street Conservation Area. This brief note assesses those changes and how they alter the effect of the scheme on the conservation area.
- 2 This note should be read with the KMHeritage report that accompanied the application, entitled 'Philharmonic Court, Catharine Street, Liverpool L8 7SD: Heritage appraisal' (August 2012).

English Heritage concerns

- 3 English Heritage raised a number of concerns regarding the proposed scheme. These were that:
 - The proposed composition of height, massing, architectural language and materiality would impose a form of development that fails to take account of the clearly identifiable character of the conservation area;
 - The scale and assertiveness of the proposals misunderstands the spatial hierarchy of the conservation area;
 - The architectural language of contrasting brick panels and framing, the proportions of the elevations and fenestration and irregular form have little regard for the predominant scale, height and detailing of the conservation area

The character and appearance of the conservation area

- 4 English Heritage provides an analysis of the character and appearance of the Canning Street Conservation Area in its consultation response. It says that 'The Canning Street Conservation Area is characterised by a well defined street hierarchy of formal terraced frontages enclosing a distorted grid of largely linear streets with narrower lanes and yards accommodating many additions to the much less formal rear elevations of the terraces. The residential properties are uniformly three storeys in height and maintain a commonality in respect of materials, proportioning and

detailing. A series of institutional sites and buildings are distributed across the conservation area, however it is the terraced residential properties and related street pattern that largely define its distinctive character’.

- 5 We agree that this description of the Canning Street Conservation Area accurately conveys the character and appearance of most of the conservation area in a general sense, but we believe that the location of the Philharmonic Court is in a part of the conservation area that differs in character from other parts of the conservation area. Though the predominant character of the conservation area is, as English Heritage observes, grids of streets with fairly uniform terraced residential properties, the conservation area, like any conservation area, varies in quality and character across its extent.
- 6 The part of the conservation area in which Philharmonic Court is located differs by a) having been cleared and redeveloped to a considerable degree in the post-war period and b) containing a series of larger institutional buildings along Hope Street and Myrtle Street. It is not the typical situation that is found, say, around Canning Street or Huskisson Street further south. Philharmonic Court is located in a transitional part of the conservation area, between the more generic zone to the south and west and the University quarter to the north.

English Heritage comments regarding the proposed scheme

- 7 Given the English Heritage assessment of the conservation area, its position regarding the quality of the existing buildings on the Philharmonic Court site is thus somewhat curious – we find it hard to agree that ‘the existing buildings, from the 1970s respond far more positively to the context of the site than the current proposals’.
- 8 We disagree that a building whose function is different in type and use from the typical buildings in the conservation area should necessarily have to reflect 'the predominant scale, height and detailing of the conservation area' - the Philharmonic Hall doesn't, nor do some of the more recent University buildings. The examples of larger buildings in historic areas contained in, say, EH/CABE's 'Building in Context' guidance suggests a greater flexibility than English Heritage suggest here.

The amendments to the proposed scheme

- 9 However, a series of amendments have been made to the proposed scheme in order to address English Heritage’s concerns. These are:

- Removal of the 6th floor elements from the scheme and recession of the 5th floor elements away from the façade of the building in order to reduce perceived scale;
 - Extension of the development over the proposed car park on Sugnall Street to relocate the bedrooms removed from the 6th floor.
 - Straightening of the block facing the rear of Falkner Street so it follows the linear form of the existing terraces on Falkner Street;
 - Introduction of a gap in the façade facing Catherine Street to enable a clearer glimpsed view into the central landscaped area;
 - Introduction of a more subdued, simple façade design and materials;
 - Bring out cut backs at Caledonia Street and Sugnall Street.
- 10 These amendments will reduce the overall height of the proposed development, and reduce the scale of the development as it is experienced in views from the surrounding public realm. The overall height of the buildings will be approximately that of the ridge height of the surrounding terraced properties – in other words, the height of the development will correspond to the general scale of the surrounding area and will not be meaningfully greater.
- 11 The revised approach to materials uses two closely matching red/brown bricks, which will reduce the degree to which the elevations contrast with their surroundings or stand out in street views. The new treatment will be more subdued and contextual in feel.
- 12 The adjustment of the plan layout of the development reflects more closely the urban grain of the area by reflecting the grid of streets more closely, or recalls the street layout that was lost in post-war redevelopment – the new gap in the block to Catherine Street is in the position of what was Upper Hope Place where it emerged on to Catherine Street.

Conclusion

- 13 The site of Philharmonic Court is not a typical one in the Canning Street Conservation Area. This block is immediately to the south of a series of larger buildings on Myrtle Street and within a block which has been altered by post-war clearance to a greater extent than those blocks to the south that are most typical of the character and appearance of the overall conservation area.
- 14 This permits a greater freedom for change on the Philharmonic Court site. The proposed scheme, however, does not disregard its context. The scheme, as

amended is – in terms of both footprint and height – respectful of that context while taking advantage of the nature of the site to building more densely. Our main report, accompanying the planning application, explains at detail (in Section 4) why the scheme is appropriate for the site on which it is located; the revised scheme is yet more appropriate.

- 15 Finally, our main report also carried out the key policy test required by the National Planning Policy Framework in respect of heritage assets: it weighed ‘harm’ to heritage assets against the benefits that flow from the scheme. The proposed scheme places a needed new facility on a site where existing premises have reached the end of their useful life. It responds to the site and its context in a manner commensurate to the overall significance of that context. It increases the amount of accommodation provided on the site but, by its massing and design, respects the conservation area and the setting of listed buildings – and the proposed amendments reduce further the effect of the proposed development on these heritage assets.
- 16 We firmly believe that the revised scheme strikes the balance sought by the NPPF and also by Liverpool’s Local Development Framework. The scheme makes every effort to respect its sensitive context. At the same time it delivers a significant public benefit in terms of its proposed use, as well as regenerating a city centre site in line with local land use aspirations.
- 17 For these reasons the proposed development complies with national and local policy and guidance regarding the historic built environment

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The author of this report is Kevin Murphy B.Arch MUBC RIBA IHBC. He was an Inspector of Historic Buildings in the London Region of English Heritage and dealt with a range of major projects involving listed buildings and conservation areas in London. Prior to this, he had been a conservation officer with the London Borough of Southwark, and was Head of Conservation and Design at Hackney Council between 1997 and 1999. He trained and worked as an architect, and has a specialist qualification in urban and building conservation. Kevin Murphy was included for a number of years on the Heritage Lottery Fund’s Directory of Expert Advisers.