

# PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT AT 18-24 SEEL STREET

LIVERPOOL CITY CENTRE



## HERITAGE ASSESSMENT

GARRY MILLER  
*Historic Building Consultancy*

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## 1: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report supports proposed development at 18-24 Seel Street, on the fringe of the Ropewalks district in Liverpool City Centre. The site is located at the junction with David Lewis Street, a recently-constructed thoroughfare, and is currently occupied by the modern PSS healthcare building. This backs on to Wolstenholme Square, an area formerly occupied mostly by mid-20<sup>th</sup> century warehouses that is now undergoing a £40m mixed-use redevelopment featuring buildings of between three and ten storeys.

Planning approval is sought from Liverpool City Council for demolition of the existing PSS building and erection of a nine to eleven-storey 200-unit residential scheme with ground floor commercial units. The application site adjoins the Duke Street Conservation Area, along with Character Area 6 (Lower Duke Street) of the Liverpool Maritime Mercantile City World Heritage Site, and falls within the Buffer Zone that forms the wider setting of the WHS. The heritage issues raised by the proposal, as examined in this report, are its impact upon the setting of the WHS and the conservation area.

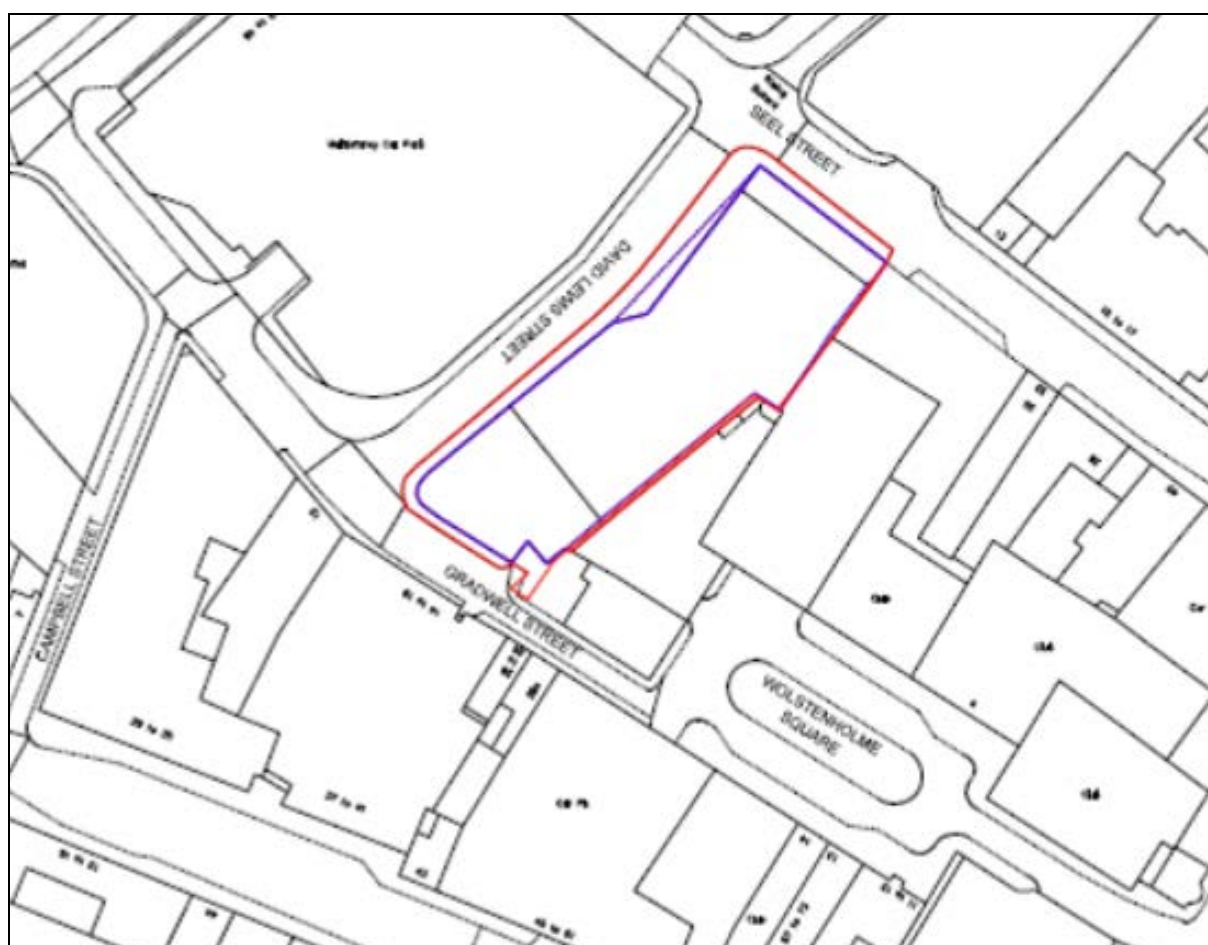
Ropewalks is located between the commercial core of the city and its former docklands and encompasses the core of an 18<sup>th</sup> century suburb established close to Liverpool's (and the world's first) purpose-built enclosed dock of 1715. It contains many fine and distinctive historic buildings within a district recently regenerated into a dynamic, mixed-use neighbourhood distinguished by a high concentration of apartments, creative and digital businesses and cultural attractions. The result has seen modern developments successfully integrated into the historic townscape and in many streets buildings symbolising its 18<sup>th</sup> century origins and early 21<sup>st</sup> century regeneration stand side-by-side. At the core of the area is the current regeneration programme at Wolstenholme Square, which has revitalized what was formerly an urban backwater. The application site originally belonged to a densely-built townscape of warehouses and industrial premises that was partly destroyed by wartime bombing and rebuilt in a piecemeal, nondescript fashion thereafter. The PSS building that presently occupies the site is a linear two-storey metal-clad structure of idiosyncratic appearance which jars with its surroundings and does not enhance the settings of the WHS or the conservation area.

The proposal will redevelop a site whose present use is now inappropriate to the regenerated Ropewalks district and is occupied by a building that is out of character with its surroundings. The proposed development is in accordance with the strategic vision for the area and will be read as an organic extension of the major Wolstenholme Square redevelopment which it directly adjoins. It will provide a building of high architectural standard that will form an important gateway to Ropewalks from the Hanover Street/Gradwell Street end of the city centre and accords with the surrounding streetscene in which contemporary and traditional structures stand in harmony. The settings of the WHS and the Duke Street Conservation Area will therefore be enhanced, and thus it is considered that planning consent should be granted.

## 2: THE SITE

### 2.1 Location

The application site is 18-24 Seel Street, located on the fringe of the Ropewalks district of Liverpool City Centre. The site is located at the western end of Seel Street adjoining its junction with David Lewis Street and immediately northwest of Wolstenholme Square, the latter presently undergoing a major £40m redevelopment. The site is currently occupied by the modern PSS healthcare building along with a car park to the south at the Gradwell Street junction. The surrounding area is characterised by a mixture of traditional and contemporary properties resulting from the regeneration of what was historically a district of warehousing, industry and surviving Georgian housing. David Lewis Street is itself a new street, constructed alongside a multi-storey car park behind numbers 42 to 46 Hanover Street and connecting Seel Street with Gradwell Street.



*Map 1. Location of the site*



*1. The Seel Street frontage of the PSS building, looking towards the David Lewis Street junction*



*2. The building, looking north along David Lewis Street from Gradwell Street*



## *2.2 Wider setting*

The Ropewalks district that forms the site's wider setting is located between the commercial core of the city and its former docklands. It partly lies within the Duke Street Conservation Area and also the Lower Duke Street Character Area of the Liverpool Maritime Mercantile City World Heritage Site. Ropewalks encompasses the core of an 18<sup>th</sup> century suburb established close to Liverpool's (and the world's first) purpose-built enclosed dock of 1715 and contains many fine and distinctive historic buildings within a district regenerated during the last decade into a dynamic, mixed-use neighbourhood distinguished by a high concentration of apartments, creative and digital businesses and cultural attractions. This has led to modern buildings being successfully integrated into a townscape characterised by the relationship of 18<sup>th</sup> century and early 21<sup>st</sup> century structures amid the historic Georgian street pattern. At the core of the area is the current regeneration programme at Wolstenholme Square, in which this former urban backwater populated by mid 20<sup>th</sup> century warehouses and sheds – along with a handful of 18<sup>th</sup> century houses – is being transformed by a mixed-use development incorporating buildings of between three and ten storeys.



*3. Wolstenholme Square as it appeared in 2015, looking west towards the site*



*4. The regeneration programme currently under way, seen from the same viewpoint*



## 3: THE PROPOSAL/SCOPE OF THIS REPORT

### *3.1 Proposed development*

An application is being submitted to Liverpool City Council for demolition of the existing PSS building and erection of a nine to eleven-storey 200-unit residential scheme with ground floor commercial units.

### *3.2 Designations*

The application site adjoins the boundary of the Duke Street Conservation Area, along with that of Character Area 6 (Lower Duke Street) of the Liverpool Maritime Mercantile City World Heritage Site. However it falls within the Buffer Zone that forms the wider setting of the WHS and within which all proposals are scrutinised for their impact upon this setting.

### *3.3 Heritage impact*

The heritage issues raised by the proposal are its impact upon the setting of the WHS and the conservation area.

### *3.4 Scope and purpose of this report*

Paragraph 128 of the National Planning Policy Framework states local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance (i.e. heritage interest and value) of the heritage assets affected, including the contribution made by their setting. The scope and purpose of this report is therefore to describe the significance of the WHS and conservation area and to evaluate the impact of the proposal upon it. It is considered the level of detail employed is proportionate to this significance and to the scale of the impact. The report is to be read in conjunction with other documentation supporting the application.

### *3.5 Report structure*

This is as follows:

1. A short account of the historical background relating to the site (Section 4)
2. A summary of the character of the World Heritage Site (Section 5)
3. A summary of the character of the Duke Street Conservation Area (Section 6)
4. An account of the contribution to their settings of the present building on the site (Section 7)
5. Evaluation of the significance of the heritage assets and the contribution of the present building (Section 8)
6. A review of the relevant planning policies against which the application will be assessed (Section 9)
7. Evaluation within this policy context of the impact of the proposal upon the setting and significance of the heritage assets (Section 10).

## 4: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The site occupies what was originally part of a densely-built townscape of warehouses and industrial buildings which by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century characterised the area around Wolstenholme Square (Map 2). The origins of the square were far different however, for when first laid out in the 1740s it was a high-status residential address within walking distance of the port's first purpose-built dock. By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century its prestige began to wane as the wealthy moved out to more distant suburbs, and by 1900 the predominant buildings were five and six-storey warehouses. The area suffered heavily during wartime bombing in the 1940 Blitz, with most of the north side of the square destroyed. Rebuilding in a piecemeal fashion took place thereafter, but ruined buildings and vacant sites still existed in the mid-1950s (Map 3). Three decades later, the character area had altered little as the mapping of 1984 demonstrates (Map 4).



*Map 2. The 1927 25-inch OS mapping records how the site (indicated approximately) lay within a densely-built townscape dominated by warehouses and industry*



*Map 3. Ruined buildings, partial rebuilding and vacant sites characterised the area in the postwar era, as the 1955 1:1250 mapping records*



*Map 4. The edition of 1984 noted little change*

## 5: THE WORLD HERITAGE SITE

### 5.1 Overview

A Cultural World Heritage Site is the highest international heritage designation: a monument, group of buildings or sites recognised as being of Outstanding Universal Value to the international community. In 2004, a defined area of Liverpool was inscribed on to the World Heritage List of the United Nations Educational and Scientific Organisation by its World Heritage Committee as “*the supreme example of a commercial port at the time of Britain’s greatest global influence.*” The Liverpool Maritime Mercantile City World Heritage Site’s Outstanding Universal Value derives from:

- Liverpool’s leading role in the development of dock construction, port management and international trading systems in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries
- The buildings and structures of the port and the city, which are an exceptional testimony to mercantile culture
- Liverpool’s major role in influencing globally-significant demographic changes in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, through its involvement in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and as the leading port of mass European emigration to the New World.

### 5.2 Extent of the WHS

The WHS covers the majority of Liverpool city centre and its central docks and is divided into six areas of distinct townscape (character areas) containing significant commercial, civic and public buildings, of which more than 260 are listed. The application site adjoins Character Area 6, which is that of Lower Duke Street. In planning terms, all development proposals within the WHS are considered for their potential direct impact upon its Outstanding Universal Value. Surrounding the WHS is a Buffer Zone (Map 5, following page) that provides a visual setting for the WHS and which includes some historically significant features and major landmarks, including the Anglican Cathedral, and where development could potentially have an adverse impact upon that setting. The application site lies within the Buffer Zone.

### 5.3 Lower Duke Street

The Lower Duke Street Character Area consists of the southwest part of the Duke Street Conservation Area (see Section 6, following) along with two warehouses on College Lane and the Bluecoat Chambers on School Lane. Its character is therefore



essentially that of the conservation area, in other words a Georgian suburb now undergoing sensitive regeneration.

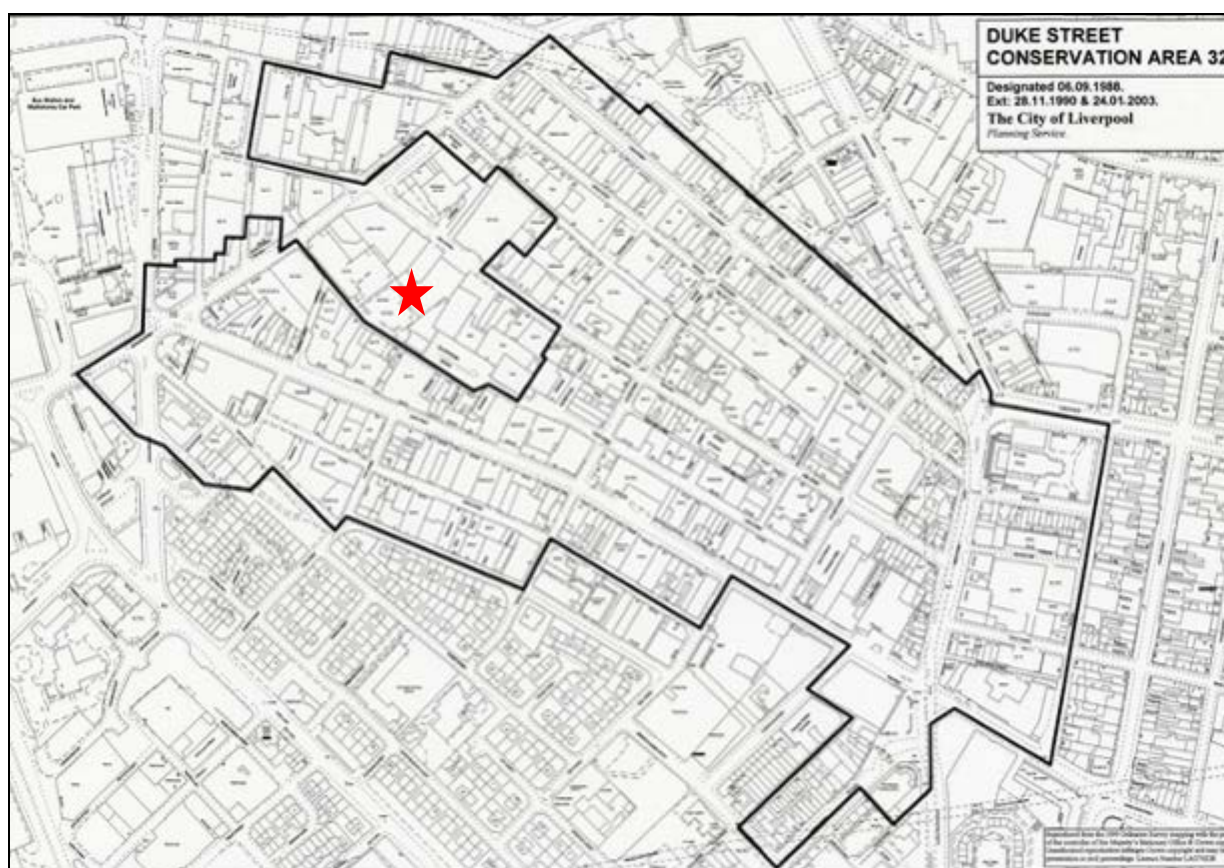


Map 5. The WHS and its Buffer Zone, with approximate location of the application site indicated. Map from the 2009 WHS SPD

## 6: THE CONSERVATION AREA

### 6.1 Boundaries

The conservation area covers a large and densely-built area that forms the core of the Ropewalks district, and is focussed upon the major thoroughfares of Bold Street, Duke Street and Hanover Street. It broadly forms a U-shape, with the north side of Wolstenholme Square and the west end of Seel Street forming an enclave that is outside its boundaries (see Map 6 below).



*Map 6. Duke Street Conservation Area, with the application site indicated*

### 6.2 Character of Duke Street Conservation Area

The historic core of the conservation area is the Georgian residential suburb established in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century close to the dock and Customs House. The first street to be built up was Hanover Street, followed by Duke Street in the 1750s and thereafter Bold



Street around 1780; between them a grid of squares and minor streets was established. Originally the merchants' residences doubled as warehouses before purpose-built warehouses, several stories high, appeared later in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Today this development is evident in the townscape, with its hierarchy of streets: the widest contain the survivors of the fine merchants' houses while the narrow streets behind contain warehousing and lesser dwellings. However as warehousing and industry expanded, the wealthy moved to outlying new suburbs and their former residences were adapted to other uses. With the closure of the historic docks to the west towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, almost all the warehouses became redundant or derelict. As the core of the Ropewalks district, the area is now at the forefront of the city's regeneration and as a result, historic buildings have been adapted and revitalised and contemporary buildings sympathetically integrated into the townscape. Meanwhile the traditional built character of the Duke Street Conservation Area remains embodied in a high number of listed buildings, comprising merchants' houses along with later warehouse and commercial premises. The closest listed building to the site is the Grade II Georgian terrace numbered 48-52 Seel Street, which stands approximately 100 metres southeast. The conservation area also includes the former St Peter's Catholic Church at Seel Street, of 1788 and the oldest surviving church in the city centre. In addition to these designated buildings are a multitude of unlisted examples which help to establish its character. The significance of all these buildings is enhanced by their wider setting within a still-legible 18<sup>th</sup> century street pattern.



*5. View along the conservation area boundary on the south side of Gradwell Street, adjoining the site, showing how contemporary buildings and traditional warehouses share the streetscene*

## 7: CONTRIBUTION OF THE PRESENT BUILDING

The PSS building that presently occupies the structure is a long, linear two-storey building of unusual appearance, with metal cladding and circular windows, built probably in the late 1990s/early 2000s. While this makes it a distinctive and idiosyncratic sight on Seel Street, the building is entirely out of character with the area, as it lacks the strong vertical emphasis, regular window rhythm and brick and stone walling that are the traditional Georgian characteristics of the Ropewalks district and which have been the inspiration for most of the modern redevelopment. The building does not therefore make a positive contribution to the setting of the conservation area or the WHS.



6. The PSS building (foreground right), looking east along Seel Street into the conservation area and showing how it fails to integrate with both traditional and contemporary buildings adjoining

## 8: ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### 8.1 Rationale

Paragraph 129 of the National Planning Policy Framework states local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of a heritage asset, including its setting, and take this into account when considering the impact of a proposal in order to avoid or minimize conflict between the asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal. Significance is defined in the NPPF Glossary as:

*'The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting.'*

The Glossary defines setting as:

*The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral.*

### 8.2 The World Heritage Site

The WHS is of the highest international significance, a designation awarded in recognition of Liverpool's role as *"the supreme example of a commercial port at the time of Britain's greatest global influence."* Its heritage value is summarised in the Statement of Significance for the WHS, produced by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and English Heritage in 2008, which reads:

*Liverpool - Maritime Mercantile City reflects the role of Liverpool as the supreme example of a commercial port at the time of Britain's greatest global influence. Liverpool grew into a major commercial port in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when it was also crucial for the organisation of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. In the 19th century, Liverpool became a world mercantile centre for general cargo and mass European emigration to the New World. It had major significance on world trade being one of the principal ports of the British Commonwealth. Its innovative techniques and types of construction of dock facilities became an important reference worldwide. Liverpool also became instrumental in the development of industrial canals in the British Isles in the 18th century, as well as of railway transport in the 19th century. All through this period, and particularly in the 19th and early 20th centuries, Liverpool gave attention to the quality and innovation of its architecture and cultural activities. To this stand as testimony its outstanding public buildings, such as St.*



*George's Hall, and its museums. Even in the 20th century, Liverpool has given a lasting contribution, which is remembered in the success of The Beatles.*

This significance and Outstanding Universal Value of the WHS is therefore embodied in its six distinct character areas and their buildings – of which more than 260 are listed – and the views and settings in which they are experienced.

### *8.3 The conservation area*

The conservation area is of city-wide importance as the core of the prestigious Georgian suburb established close to Liverpool's first dock in the early-mid 18<sup>th</sup> century. The bulk of the conservation area forms the Lower Duke Street Character Area of the Liverpool Maritime Mercantile City World Heritage Site, and thus assumes international importance for its contribution to the Outstanding Universal Value of the WHS. While its built character essentially derives from its traditional buildings and street patterns – with a wide range of heritage assets comprising both listed and unlisted merchants' houses, lesser dwellings and examples of early warehouses – contemporary redevelopment has been successfully integrated into this streetscene and therefore has a notable presence.

### *8.4 Contribution of the application building*

As discussed above in Section 7, the PSS building does not make a positive contribution to the setting of the conservation area or the WHS, as it strikes a discordant note with the character of the surrounding Ropewalks streetscene that embodies these heritage assets and their setting.

## 9: POLICY CONTEXT

### 9.1 Statutory duties

Section 72 (1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires local planning authorities to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character of a conservation area.

### 9.2 Relevant policies

Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework (*Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment*, March 2012) provides the guidance on how this statutory duty is to be put into practice. Paragraph 131 states that in determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

- The desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets, and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation
- The positive contribution that the conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality, and
- The desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness

Paragraph 132 states that ‘*great weight*’ should be given to the conservation of a designated heritage asset, and the more important the asset, the greater that weight should be; that significance can be lost through development within its setting; and that as heritage assets are irreplaceable, any harm or loss should require clear and convincing justification. Substantial harm to, or loss of, a Grade II listed building should be exceptional; substantial harm to or loss of designated heritage assets of the highest significance, including Grade II\* buildings, wholly exceptional. Paragraph 133 states that where a proposal will lead to substantial harm to, or total loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset, consent should be refused unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss, or all of the following apply:

- The nature of the heritage asset prevents all reasonable uses of the site; and
- No viable use of the heritage asset itself can be found in the medium term through appropriate marketing that will enable its conservation; and
- Conservation by grant-funding or some form of charitable or public ownership is demonstrably not possible; and
- The harm or loss is outweighed by the benefits of bringing the site back into use.

Paragraph 134 states that 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 securing its optimum viable use.

Locally, the relevant heritage policies are those saved from the 2002 Liverpool Unitary Development Plan:

- **Policy GEN3 (Heritage and Design in the Built Environment)**, which states that the UDP aims to protect and enhance the built environment of the City by encouraging a high standard of design and landscaping in developments and creating an attractive environment which is safe and secure both day and night.
- **Policy HD12 (New Development Adjacent to Conservation Areas)**, which states that development on land adjacent to a conservation area will only be permitted if it protects the setting of the conservation area and important views into and out of it.

### *9.3 Specific planning guidance for the Buffer Zone and Ropewalks*

A Supplementary Planning Document for the WHS was adopted by Liverpool City Council in 2009. Its purpose is to guide development, conservation and investment in the WHS and Buffer Zone with the aim of protecting the WHS's Outstanding Universal Value while ensuring that it continues to play a leading role in the sustained regeneration of the city and the wider sub-region. In relation to development within the Buffer Zone, the SPD states:

*4.2.8 All developments in the Buffer Zone, whether in an area of surviving historic character or not, will, in accordance with HD18, need to respond to and reflect the characteristics of the area around them. The design and scale of developments will need to respond to, and respect, their context proportionately to their potential impact on the setting of a conservation area and the WHS. Major schemes adjacent to conservation areas and the WHS will be considered more carefully for their impact on the OUV of the WHS and character of conservation areas than minor developments further away from the WHS and conservation areas.*

Of key importance also in the context of the scheme is the SPD for Ropewalks, adopted in 2005 by Liverpool City Council and which aims to regenerate the area by encouraging sensitive restoration, contemporary design and the development of a diverse local economy. Its objectives are:

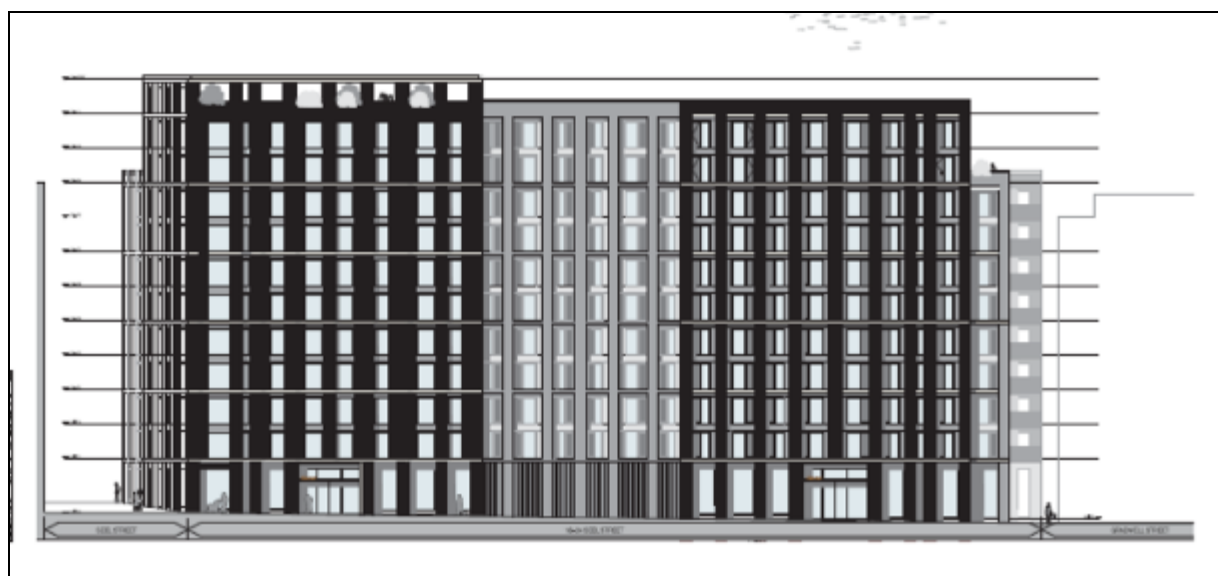
1. Conserving the area's unique heritage by bringing new, appropriate uses to buildings with heritage value, encouraging sensitive new development and refurbishing historic buildings in such a way that enhances and conserves the special character of the area
2. Setting a benchmark for urban design through exciting, innovative architecture, sympathetic conversions and the provision and maintenance of high-quality public realm

3. Creating a permeable, well-connected area, where people are able to access spaces and locations easily throughout Ropewalks
4. Stimulating new investment by encouraging a stronger and more diverse economy in the daytime and evenings. Conditions for economic growth must be improved through enhancements to the physical fabric, securing the future of key buildings and reducing the number of derelict/vacant sites and buildings
5. Improving the quality of the environment by encouraging a complementary mix of land uses, improving maintenance and management of public realm, and encouraging developments that enhance the environment

## 10: IMPACT OF THE PROPOSAL

### 10.1 *The principle of the scheme*

The existing use of the site as a healthcare facility and car park is no longer considered appropriate for this particular part of the city centre, where the Ropeworks regeneration has sought to encourage new use, especially residential and leisure, to the area. The proposal seeks to maximise this strategic location and the potential of the site by creating a new development of high architectural quality and bold street frontages that accords with the surrounding regeneration-led streetscene.



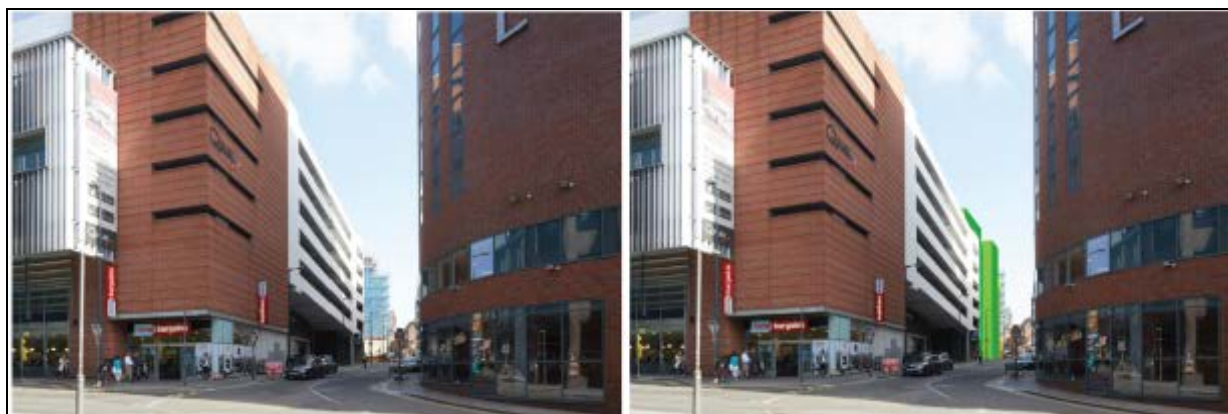
7. David Lewis Street elevation of the development (FCH Architects)

### 10.2 *The proposed development*

- a. **Design/appearance.** The proposed development comprises a block of between nine and eleven storeys, stepping up to achieve the maximum height at the Seel Street/David Lewis Street junction. The walling is primarily of facing brick, in accordance with the tradition of the locality, with perforated aluminium and stone/concrete detailing. In accordance with the built heritage of the area, there is a strong vertical emphasis and consistent horizontal window rhythm.
- b. **Integration with the surrounding streetscene.** The regeneration of Ropewalks during the last decade has produced a unique streetscene in which traditional buildings and tall contemporary stand side-by-side. The new development will therefore integrate successfully into this streetscene, and will be read as an organic extension of the major Wolstenholme Square



redevelopment which it directly adjoins, as well as providing a distinctive gateway to Ropewalks from the Hanover Street/Gradwell Street junction to the west, a role the present building fails to achieve. However, despite the maximum height of eleven storeys (one taller than the Wolstenholme development) the wider visual impact of the scheme will be limited owing to the enclosed nature of the square and the scale of the new buildings associated with its regeneration. This is fully described in the applicant's design and access statement, but the key viewpoints are noted below.



8. Visual impact of the development (in green) from the Hanover Street/Gradwell Street junction – existing (left) and proposed views (FCH Architects)



9. Existing and proposed views, looking west from Wolstenholme Square, with the new buildings of the latter in yellow (FCH Architects)



10. Present and proposed views westwards along Seel Street (FCH Architects)

### *10.3 Summary and conclusion*

The proposal will redevelop a site whose present use is inappropriate to the surrounding district and is occupied by a building entirely out of character with its regeneration-led surroundings. The proposed development is in accordance with the strategic vision for the area and will provide a development of high architectural standard that will act as a new gateway to Ropewalks from the west and conforms with the character of the surrounding streetscene in which contemporary and traditional structures are successfully integrated. The settings of the WHS and the Duke Street Conservation Area will consequently be enhanced. The proposal therefore complies with guidance contained in paragraphs 131 and 132 of the NPPF and with the saved policies of the local development plan. It is thus considered that planning consent should be granted.

## APPENDIX: GARRY MILLER HISTORIC BUILDING CONSULTANCY

Garry Miller is an architectural historian who has spent more than 35 years studying buildings of town and countryside, in particular those of North West England. His career as a consultant began in the mid-1980s with the Preston-based Nigel Morgan Historic Building Consultancy, of which he became a partner in 1992 upon its rebranding as Datestone. In 1997 he was commissioned by the Heritage Trust for the North West, a buildings preservation trust based at Barrowford, Lancashire, to produce an in-depth regional study of vernacular houses in southwest Lancashire: the result, *Historic Houses in Lancashire: The Douglas Valley, 1300-1770* was published in 2002. Among the many positive reviews, it was described as ‘*scholarship as its best*’ by *Country Life* (June 2003), and ‘*well analysed and presented*’ in *Transactions of the Ancient Monuments Society* (Vol 48, 2004); the work was extensively cited in the revised *Buildings of England* volume on Liverpool and Southwest Lancashire (2006). Research on the houses of Georgian and Regency Liverpool has also been undertaken, with a view to future publication. Following the success of his Douglas Valley book, Garry Miller has established his own consultancy, producing analytical and interpretive reports on historic buildings. His specialism are the heritage assessments required to support planning applications affecting the historic environment, and his area of operation extends throughout the North West, Midlands, North Wales and parts of Cumbria and West and North Yorkshire. Projects range from the £40m Wolstenholme Square development in central Liverpool and the Grade I Barkisland Hall, Ripponden, West Yorkshire, to cottage extensions and barn conversions. Several local authorities have cited his assessments as examples of best practice, and on average reports on more than 100 buildings or sites are produced annually.