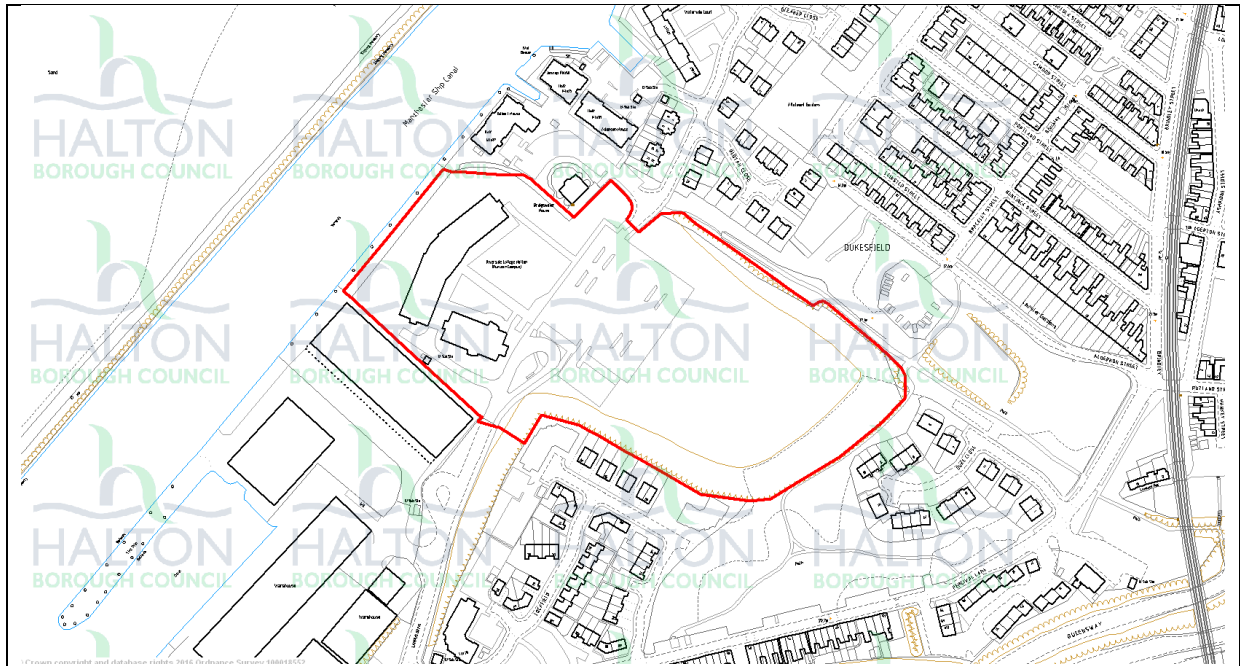


APPLICATION NO:	16/00131/OUT
LOCATION:	Former Riverside College Percival Lane Runcorn
PROPOSAL:	Outline application, with all matters reserved, for development of up to 120 dwellings, open space, infrastructure and associated works
WARD:	Mersey
PARISH:	None
AGENT(S) / APPLICANT(S):	Riverside College
DEVELOPMENT PLAN ALLOCATION: National Planning Policy Framework (2012) Halton Unitary Development Plan (2005) Halton Core Strategy Local Plan (2013)	UDP Action Area 4: Runcorn & Weston Docklands Canal Safeguarding Area Key Area of Change: West Runcorn
DEPARTURE	No
REPRESENTATIONS:	5 letters of objection 1 Representation form owners of Bridgewater House Further letters of objection from: Runcorn Locks Restoration Society Peel Land & Property and the Bridgewater Canal Co. Ltd Manchester Port Health Authority Peel Ports/ Manchester Ship Canal Co.
KEY ISSUES:	Principle of development; Regeneration; canal safeguarding; housing need; ecology impacts; drainage; residential amenity and highway impacts
RECOMMENDATION:	Approve Subject to Conditions
SITE MAP	



APPLICATION SITE

The Site

The Site is approximately 4.15 hectares and is adjacent to the Bridgewater Canal approximately 1km south west from Runcorn town Centre. The Site comprises the former Riverside College, which is now vacant. Bridgewater House, a Grade 2 listed building lies immediately to the north east. Land to the north east and south is predominantly residential in character. Land to the south west is in predominantly employment use. The nearest employment use is the adjacent Runcorn Docks site. The Manchester Ship Canal lies to the north of the site.

Planning History

None directly relevant to this application.

THE APPLICATION

The proposal

This outline application seeks permission to develop the site for a residential development of up to 120 dwellings with all matters reserved, except for means of access. It includes the demolition of all former college buildings on the site. Subject to detailed design it may be necessary to relocate an existing substation, however, this will be determined at a future reserved matters application stage.

Documentation

The applicant has submitted a planning application, drawings and the following reports:

Design and Access Statement
Transport Statement
Phase 1 and 2 Site Investigation/ Contaminated Land Report
Statement of Community Involvement
Aboriginal Impact Assessment
Phase 1 Ecological Report
Japanese Knotweed Treatment Update Report
Flood Risk Assessment
Noise Assessment
Heritage Statement
Viability Assessment

POLICY CONTEXT

National Planning Policy Framework

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in March 2012 to set out the Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied.

Paragraph 196 states that the planning system is plan led. Applications for planning permission should be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise, as per the requirements of legislation, but that the NPPF is a material consideration in planning decisions. Paragraph 197 states that in assessing and determining development proposals, local planning authorities should apply the presumption in favour of sustainable development.

Paragraph 14 states that this presumption in favour of sustainable development means that development proposals that accord with the development plan should be approved, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Where a development plan is absent, silent or relevant policies are out of date, planning permission should be granted unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in the NPPF; or specific policies within the NPPF indicate that development should be restricted.

The government has published its finalised Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) to compliment the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

Halton Unitary Development Plan (UDP) (2005)

The following Unitary Development Plan policies and policy documents are relevant to this application: -

- RG4 Action Area 4 – Runcorn and Weston Docklands
- BE1 General Requirements for Development
- BE2 Quality of Design
- BE5 Other Sites of Archaeological Importance
- BE10 Protecting the Setting of Listed Buildings
- GE9 Redevelopment and Change of Use of Redundant School Buildings
- GE21 Species Protection

GE29 Canals and Rivers
GE30 The Mersey Coastal Zone
PR1 Air Quality
PR2 Noise Nuisance
PR4 Light Pollution and Nuisance
PR5 Water Quality
PR6 Land Quality
PR7 Development Near to Established Pollution Sources
PR14 Contaminated Land
PR16 Development and Flood Risk
TP1 Public Transport Provision as Part of New Development
TP3 Disused Public Transport Facilities
TP14 Transport Assessments
TP15 Accessibility to New Development

Halton Core Strategy Local Plan (2013)

The following policies, contained within the Core Strategy are of relevance:

CS1 Halton's Spatial Strategy
CS2 Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
CS3 Housing Supply and Locational Priorities
CS10 West Runcorn
CS12 Housing Mix
CS13 Affordable Housing
CS15 Sustainable Transport
CS18 High Quality Design
CS19 Sustainable Development and Climate Change
CS20 Natural and Historic Environment
CS23 Managing Pollution and Risk

Joint Waste Local Plan 2013

WM8 Waste Prevention and Resource Management
WM9 Sustainable Waste Management Design and Layout for New Development

Supplementary Planning Documents

- New Residential Development Supplementary Planning Document
- Designing for Community Safety Supplementary Planning Document
- Draft Open Spaces Supplementary Planning Document
- Affordable Housing SPD

CONSULTATIONS

The application has been advertised as a departure via the following methods: site notices posted near to the site, press notice, and Council website. Surrounding residents and landowners have been notified by letter.

The following organisations have been consulted and any comments received have been summarised below in the assessment section of the report:

Environment Agency – Objection based on FRA issues
United Utilities – No Objection
Peel Land & Property and the Bridgewater Canal Co. Ltd – Object
Manchester Port Health Authority - Object
Peel Ports/ Manchester Ship Canal Co. - Object

Council Services:

HBC Open Spaces – No Objection
HBC Environmental Health – No Objection
HBC Contaminated Land – No objection
HBC Highways – No Objection

REPRESENTATIONS

5 letters of objection have been received raising concerns regarding the following:

- Traffic generation and highway capacity
- Dust, noise and other construction and demolition impacts
- Opening up the locks would be a better option bringing back the heritage along with a barge route bringing new business to Runcorn
- Potential to open Old Coach Road to be a through route for HGVs accessing the docks unless some physical barrier is installed
- Better suited to redevelopment as a leisure facility related to the refurbishment and reopening of Runcorn locks. As a tourist attraction it would offer more income streams to the Council and put “Halton on the map”
- Lack of need for extra properties
- Chance to develop the canal as a heritage centre will be lost
- Conversion to such as a hotel might be more sustainable as building is only 15 years old
- That road access should be restricted or engineered as a bridge to allow the canal to be reinstated at ground level.

A letter of representation has also been received from the current owners of Bridgewater House stating that the building is currently used as managed office space and opportunity should be taken to provide additional parking within the site for use by those offices. This is considered a private matter between two land owners and no policy justification exists to require additional parking to be provided for a separate private use.

A letter has been received on behalf of the Runcorn Locks Restoration Society which states that:

“Whilst we understand that this planning application would not prevent the Locks themselves being re-opened, one of the potential opportunities for investors in this scheme is the possibility of developing a Marina on the site of this proposed housing development- therefore we are opposed to the application as it stands as it will prevent further town regeneration in the form of a Marina in favour of yet another

generic new build housing estate and deter potential investors in our overall scheme.”

A letter of objection has been received Peel Land & Property and the Bridgewater Canal Co. Ltd (BCCL) stating that whilst the application is in outline only they consider that the scheme conflicts with the policy and overall vision for the Runcorn Waterfront Area and “*fails to provide evidence of link or assimilation with the reinstatement of the former Lock system*”. They confirm that the proposals will not impact on the operation of the Bridgewater Canal. They consider the scheme to be a departure from the development plan, adding that:

”The Runcorn Waterfront Area may provide a significant amount of housing in the longer term, the Riverside Campus development, as it is currently submitted, will set a precedent for development which underutilises and fails to incorporate the key assets available. This is a key site and its development should drive high quality development and growth within the area, in line with the adopted policies in the area. Not only are the proposals unassuming in terms of their content and detail, we consider the scheme to be isolated and not considered in terms of its integration into its surroundings as well as the aspirations of the adopted Local Plan Policy”.

Manchester Port Health Authority state that they are the statutory enforcing authority for most elements of environmental health on the docks at Runcorn. They state that cargo tonnages for Runcorn Docks have risen in recent years and that this is scheduled to increase significantly (50% increase in the next two years) with recent and proposed investment. They therefore raise concerns regarding the potential for increases in disturbance, congestion, noise, dust and other pollution associated with such activities. They state that:

“In the opinion of the Port Health Authority, despite the efforts of Peel Ports to improve their loading/ unloading operation, we feel the very nature of the business which concentrates on mineral handling for many of the industries in this area, will impinge on the environment of potential residents. Any development of a residential nature probably will result in pollution problems for both the Port Health Authority and Halton Borough Council. Therefore we feel it prudent to oppose the proposed development”.

Manchester Ship Canal Company as owners of Port Runcorn has also objected to the planning application on the grounds that a residential use for the site would “*be an inappropriate proposal of development alongside a long established and designated land use, as potential residential occupiers would be likely to raise complaints about our port operations*”. They state that the application “*will have detrimental impacts on the workings of an operational port facility*” and would “*undermine current and continued use at this site*”. They further state that:

- *The proposed introduction of a residential development immediately adjoining the operational port estate at Port Runcorn which specialises in handling of bulky cargoes, which are often dusty, and is currently subject of an investigation with the Manchester Port Health Authority (MPHA), therefore we do not believe it to be a compatible use due to potential complaints about our operations. We would recommend consultation with MPHA on this proposal.*

- *We do not believe that the submitted noise assessment, specifically point 5.0 Sound Attenuation scheme proposal takes our operations into account as it is based on 'external and internal noise measurements undertaken by ENS at other sites'. Our site, adjacent to the proposal represents noise issues outside normal conditions and therefore we would like to see a more comprehensive, varying time and site specific report undertaken.*
- *Vessels transit and dock within the Canal 24 hours a day, 7 days a week without restrictions. We therefore do not believe the current noise assessment takes this into account as it is suggested that our works are 'sporadic' and that, at the time of the survey in very early January 2016, there was 'no activity or noise from the warehouse' with suggestion also that there is 'minimal daytime activity in the vicinity of the docks'.*
- *Peel Ports have also invested significantly to develop the Manchester Ship Canal enhanced Port operations, in order to handle the increase in cargo expected from the new £300 million deep water facility, Liverpool2. Access to the Ship Canal means that products going further inland via ship helps to promote multi-modal usage and greener transport links thus helping to remove lorry-miles (incl. empty backhaul) from the Region's congested roads. We would therefore not be in a position to support any development which hinders this multi-modal opportunity.*

ASSESSMENT

Background

The application seeks permission to redevelop the site of the former college site at Runcorn. The purpose built college buildings were constructed in early 2000 but have remained vacant for approximately two years following relocation and consolidation of facilities to the College's Widnes Campuses. The application states that the redevelopment of the site will generate capital for the college to invest in the continued improvement and expansion of its retained campuses.

Principle of Use

The site is designated within Action Area 4: Runcorn and Weston Docklands on the Unitary Development Plan (UDP) Proposals Map as a Phase 2 Allocated Housing Site. UDP Policy RG4 specifically lists housing as an acceptable use within the area. The justification to that policy (para 16) also states that:

"On an area of land adjoining the Dukesfield housing area there is an opportunity for building a new education building for Halton College. Alternatively this area would be suitable for waterside housing."

The site is also within the Key Area for Change: West Runcorn as defined by Core Strategy Policy CS10. Whilst that policy identifies Halton Riverside College as an existing use, provision is made within that policy for residential development. The site is also sandwiched between previous residential development at Dukesfield and an area identified within the policy as Runcorn Waterfront. CS10 makes clear provision for residential development as a principle use within the redevelopment and regeneration of that area. In addition, Core Strategy Policy CS3 aims to deliver

at least 40% of new residential development on previously developed land, to which this scheme would contribute.

UDP Policy GE9 specifically relates to redevelopment of redundant school buildings and makes no reference to college buildings. Notwithstanding that we are not aware of any evidence that the site is meeting, or is likely to meet in the near future, the current needs of the local community for any use listed within Policy GE9(2) and it is not considered that any argument could be sustained that the proposals would conflict with that policy.

A number of objectors have suggested preferential alternative uses. In the absence of any adopted detailed policy in this regard it is considered that no significant weight can be given to such suggested alternative uses. On that basis it is considered that a clear policy justification can be made in principle for residential development of the site.

Design and Density

The application is in outline only with all matters reserved except for means of access. The application is supported by an indicative layout plan which shows a mix of detached, semi-detached and townhouses. Approval is sought for means of access to the site which includes potential for dual access from Campus Drive and Old Coach Road. The indicative layout plan seeks to demonstrate that 120 dwellings can be appropriately accommodated within the site. Whilst this is a sketch layout only it is considered that 120 dwellings could be satisfactorily accommodated within the in compliance with the Council's adopted New Residential Development Guidance.

The indicative layout plan shows how provision can be made for access through the site providing potential future through connection for buses and links to Runcorn Old Town. The route of that road has been defined, in part at least, by the route of an existing main sewer which crosses the site. That plan also makes provision for open space and properties fronting both the, Listed Building at Bridgewater House and the Canal Safeguarding Area. It also shows properties fronting the Manchester Ship Canal with an intervening area of open space which it is considered could be designed to provide pedestrian and cycle links to the Canal if access could be secured. The current site is also privately owned and securely fenced thereby limiting current access. It is considered that adequate opportunity would arise to address these issues including quality of the built form at reserved matters stage.

The Design and Access Statement indicates that based on the submitted indicative layout a scheme density of 29 dwellings per hectare (dph) is achieved. Whilst this falls marginally below the 30 dph required by Core Strategy Policy CS3 this is indicative only at this stage. The Design and Access Statement also indicates that account should be had for steep wooded banks around the eastern edge of the site and open space retained along the Bridgewater Canal and around the Bridgewater House. In addition land to be protected for the route of the Canal Safeguarding Area in accordance with UDP Policy TP3. In addition, the Design and Access Statement indicates that the scheme aims to "create a desirable area through the use of aspirational housing types including detached and townhouses suitable for families".

Such a strategy accords with aspirations identified within para. 13.7 of Core Strategy Policy CS10 which identifies West Runcorn as having capacity to contribute to diversifying the housing offer through the addition of higher quality residential development. That policy identifies the adjoining land at Runcorn Waterfront as providing particular opportunity to deliver such housing. It is considered logical that such an aspiration should be attributed to the application site which directly adjoins it. The application is in outline only and it is considered that appropriate relationships to the waterfront, adjoining listed building and future line of the restored canal can be secured at detailed design stage.

Highway Considerations

The application is supported by submission of a Transport Assessment. The assessment predicts that, compared with the previous use of the site, the proposed development would result in a substantial reduction in weekday and daily trips. No significant highway safety issues are raised and it is therefore considered acceptable based on NPPF and UDP Policy TP15.

Any potential for through traffic must be balanced against the benefits of futureproofing potential bus links through the site. It is considered that given the wider expressway network it is unlikely that substantial volumes of traffic would be attracted to utilise the new road linkages as a shortcut to through traffic much greater than local traffic. Traffic calming and detailed design can further be used to reduce the attractiveness of the route. With respect to concerns that the route would encourage use by HGV's to access surrounding employment areas it is considered that powers exist for the Council as Highway Authority to apply appropriate weight restrictions as required.

Bus stops are in excess of 400m from the site (reported as 540m and 740m) as required by UDP Policy TP1. The site is located approximately 1km from Runcorn Old Town and 600m from Runcorn train station. The Council's Transport Officer has confirmed that bus service operators are unlikely to be willing to divert services for such a small development. The scheme directly adjoins existing residential development and does provide the opportunity for direct access to bus travel by allowing a circular bus route through the new link road including connection to wider future development and review of public transport provision as part of any future development of Runcorn Waterfront. On this basis it is considered that the site is well located with respect to access to Runcorn town centre, train station and bus stops and that refusal of planning permission could not be justified on these grounds.

Potential construction impacts, including routeing, timing of deliveries, wheel wash and construction parking can be addressed through submission and agreement of a Construction Management Plan secured by suitably worded planning condition. This will also help to ensure that disturbance to existing local residents are kept to a minimum. Members do need to be aware that, whilst all reasonable efforts can be made to minimise disturbance and potential conflict such issues are largely a site management issue.

The Council's Highways Engineers have confirmed that they raise no objection.

Heritage Impacts

The NPPF requires that in determining planning applications, Local Planning Authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The application is accompanied by a Heritage Statement which includes a summary of relevant planning policy and guidance at national and local levels and consideration of the impact of the proposals on the setting of heritage assets.

The heritage statement identifies that there are four listed buildings which have the potential to be impacted by redevelopment of the site, however it states that three of these, the Former Tide Dock of Bridgewater Canal and Lock to North, Runcorn Railway Bridge over the River Mersey and Runcorn Widnes Road Bridge, will see no impact to their significance by the proposed development.

Bridgewater House, which dates from circa 1760, is a Grade 2 listed building and was the occasional residence of the Duke of Bridgewater, his agent, John Gilbert, and engineer, James Brindley who were responsible for the construction of the Bridgewater Canal (1759-61). According to the heritage statement it is not considered that the site currently makes any significant contribution to the significance of the building. The proposals would result in built development being brought closer to the heritage asset, further surrounding the building. The development proposed is for smaller residential units, which will be substantially smaller in scale than the heritage asset. Whilst the development will sit in relatively close proximity, the scale, massing and dominance of the listed building will still be apparent. Removal of the existing college buildings is reported to represent a positive impact.

The indicative layout provides for an area of open space adjacent to the listed building which it is considered will allow for a degree of separation between the heritage asset and the new development. The primary elevations of the building are also reported to be the north-east elevation, where the main entrance is located, and the north-west elevation. The proposed development does not spread to surround these elevations, and therefore the locations in which the building is primarily appreciated from will be largely unaffected by the proposals.

UDP Policy BE10 seeks to preserve both the character of the setting and its historic relationship to the listed building. NPPF para. 132 provides that "*Substantial harm to or loss of a grade II listed building, park or garden should be exceptional.*" It is considered that the proposed development has the potential to cause some degree of harm to the setting of the heritage asset, through bringing development closer to the building. The heritage statement confirms however that this will be:

"markedly less than substantial, located at the low end of that spectrum, at a minor level of harm"

The wider benefits of the scheme are considered to outweigh any such low level harm and it is not considered that refusal of planning permission can be justified on this basis.

Canal

The Halton UDP policy TP3 seeks to ensure that development does not prejudice the re-opening of disused public transport facilities including the Bridgewater Locks which connects the Bridgewater Canal to the Manchester Ship Canal. The UDP Proposals Map provides an indicative line for the safeguarding of the former canal, defined as the Canal Safeguarding Area which runs along the north eastern boundary of the site. The applicant has agreed to protect sufficient land within its control which considered necessary to safeguard the line of the canal. This land is shown as green space within the indicative layout plan. The applicant has also agreed to enter into a legal agreement to allow the land to be landscaped and managed as part of the proposed development but to gift the land to the Council should a viable scheme be developed for re-instating the canal in whole or in part. It is therefore considered that, for the land under the control of the applicant, not only are the proposals able to demonstrate compliance with the requirements of UDP Policy TP3 but also provide the Council with sufficient control over the land currently under private ownership to facilitate the implementation of the scheme in future.

Trees

The application is supported by an Arboricultural Impact Assessment. A Tree Preservation Order is in force with respect to trees immediately adjacent to the site at Bridgewater House. The site does not fall within a Conservation Area. The development will potentially require the removal of a number of trees from within the site but none are judged worthy of statutory protection. It is considered that sufficient opportunity exists that provision can be made for a significant replanting scheme. It is considered that this can be secured by appropriately worded planning condition and on that basis the Council's Open Spaces Officers raises no objection in this regard.

Ecology

In accordance with national and local planning policy, a Phase 1 Ecological Survey has been conducted. The survey concluded that there are no protected species present on the site and none of the buildings or trees were found to have potential for roosting bats. The Survey identified a small area of invasive non-native plant species Japanese knotweed and includes details of its treatment. That Japanese knotweed has now been confirmed to be on Council owned land and is being treated accordingly. This is not therefore considered to warrant further consideration with respect to this planning application.

The assessment has identified that the Mersey Estuary Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Ramsar site, Special Protection Area and Local Wildlife Site lies approximately 100m to the north of the site. Natural England has raised queries regarding the level of records information survey effort undertaken by the applicant's ecological consultant and the potential for noise impacts on the Mersey Estuary SPA and Ramsar sites. The Council's retained adviser on ecology matters has responded confirming that they have reviewed the referenced additional survey information and supplied the relevant data. They have also confirmed their opinion that:

there will not be a significant effect on these species due to:

- *The separation distance of 100m between of the proposed development site and the Mersey Estuary SPA and Ramsar site;*
- *The predicted noise levels at 100m separation;*
- *The ambient noise level in the area, including noise from the Runcorn docks, traffic noise, the West Coast Main Line and freight trains, and shipping use of the Manchester Ship Canal; and*
- *The barrier effect of the Manchester Ship Canal bank.*

They also advise that the likely level of noise, based on a worst case scenario may have a moderate response to the disturbance, involving head turning, scanning behaviour reduced feeding and movement to other areas close by, it would not result in birds leaving the area. That response has been sent to Natural England and their response is awaited and members will be updated accordingly.

Water voles are a protected species and Core Strategy Policy CS20 applies. Developments that may affect water vole and/or its habitat may require a Water vole Development License from Natural England. The Council's retained adviser has advised that no works should be carried out within 5 metres of the top of the bank and details of methods of protection to this zone should be submitted for approval. This can be secured by a suitably worded planning condition. A further condition is recommended relating to lighting design to minimise light spill onto surrounding habitats.

On this basis it is considered that, subject to the appropriate mitigation through a Construction Environmental Management Plan, and opportunities for enhancement, the proposed development will have no significantly adverse impacts upon any protected habitats or species, and has the potential to provide a net gain in terms of biodiversity. The applicant will be reminded of their duties to comply with relevant legislation with regards to breeding/ nesting birds by way of informative attached to any planning permission.

Noise and Other Amenity Issues

The application is accompanied by a Noise Report which assesses existing noise levels over the site. The report assesses the existing background levels and noise sources in the area and applies the internal standards contained within BS8233:2014 'Guidance on Sound Insulation and Noise Reduction for Buildings'. The Council's Environmental Health Officer has confirmed that this is considered an appropriate methodology and appears to have been applied in accordance with the standard. The report concludes that internal noise levels within the proposed dwellings will meet the standards within BS8233:2014 with standard double glazing fitted. The external background levels are all within the BS8233 levels. This demonstrates that the noise levels in the gardens will be acceptable.

Objections have been made due to the proximity of the proposed housing development to Runcorn Docks. They state that the noise report assumes the activities at the Docks are 'sporadic' and that further growth in the use of both the Docks and the Manchester Ship Canal are proposed. It is suggested within those

objections that the noise report does not adequately assess the future use of the Docks and the Ship Canal.

The Council's Environmental Health Officer has confirmed that the report adequately addresses the noise environment as existing and it would not be appropriate to expect any assessment of future activities that cannot be predicted. Contrary to the assertion of the objectors that the noise report is based on noise assessments undertaken at other sites the Council's Environmental Health Officer has confirmed that this appears to be a misunderstanding as the report clearly uses background levels on the site itself to calculate the noise conditions.

On the basis of the noise report and in consideration of the NPPF the Council's Environmental Health Officer has confirmed her opinion that refusal of planning permission could not be justified on the basis of noise.

With respect to other sources of pollution from the adjoining commercial uses such as dust and odour UDP Policy PR7 provides as follows:

“Development near to existing sources of pollution will not be permitted if it is likely that those existing sources of pollution will have an unacceptable effect on the proposed development (as defined in Policies PR1, 4, 5, 6 13 and 14) and it is considered to be in the public interest that the interests of the existing sources of pollution should prevail over those of the proposed development.”

In this regard no evidence has been provided that such forms of pollution are an inevitable result of essential activities by the adjoining commercial uses and necessary for the future of those commercial activities. No evidence has been provided that such form of pollution, if they do exist, cannot be mitigated by appropriate management of those activities. It is considered that the benefits of the scheme in terms of regeneration and provision of much needed housing are considered to outweigh any benefits from the unrestricted activities of the adjoining commercial uses and any resultant nuisance from those activities in future can be controlled through other appropriate legislation.

It is considered that construction impacts on adjoining existing residents can be minimised by restricting construction and delivery hours and requiring the developer to submit a Construction Environmental Management Plan including appropriate wheel wash provisions. These can be secured by appropriately worded planning conditions.

Flood Risk and Drainage

The application is supported by a Flood Risk Assessment and Outline Drainage Strategy. The Environment Agency identifies that the application site lies entirely within an area at the lowest risk of flooding (Flood Risk Zone 1). A small area of Flood Risk Zone 2 lies along the western boundary adjacent to the Ship Canal; this area is outside of the application site boundary. The Flood Risk Assessment considers all potential sources of flood risk and recommends mitigation measures in order to ensure that the proposed development is not at risk of flooding and does not increase flood risk at the site or elsewhere. Mitigation measures have been

suggested to include setting appropriate site and finished floor levels, monitoring groundwater levels prior to construction, appropriate drainage design including land drainage and attenuation in order to control surface water run-off.

In accordance with national and local policy, the submitted Flood Risk Assessment identifies that the proposed development is located within an area of low flood risk. Whilst the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) has raised some technical questions and a response has been provided by the applicant which is currently being reviewed and members will be updated accordingly. United Utilities and the LLFA raise no objection in principle subject to detailed drainage design which can be secured by appropriately worded planning condition. The proposals are considered to accord with NPPF, UDP Policy PR16 and Core Strategy Policy CS23.

Contaminated Land

The application is supported by a phase 1 and 2 site investigation reports. The reports have been reviewed by the Council's Contaminated Land Officer who has confirmed that they provide a good assessment of the potential pollution linkages. There is a need to delineate the extent of some localised areas of contamination within the site and further targeted investigation to allow a detailed remediation strategy to be developed. The current outline proposals for remediation are a soil cover system. The Council's Contaminated Land Officer has confirmed that the assessment provides sufficient information to determine the application subject to appropriate planning condition. The Environment Agency also raises no objection subject to a recommended condition.

Archaeology

The proposed development is reported to lie on the site of the 19th-century complex of docks, locks, basins, wharves and warehouses which once surrounded Bridgewater House. Previous archaeological investigation of part of the site in 2002 in relation to the construction of the existing college buildings to be demolished encountered evidence for surfaces and walls surviving at a depth of up to 5m below the current ground surface, whilst works on an area adjacent to Bridgewater House in 2006 recorded substantial dock structures surviving at depths of up to 3m across the site. The in-filled canal arms and locks also retain the potential to contain the remains of abandoned canal boats, as was recorded during earlier monitoring works in the 1980s.

Whilst it is anticipated that piled foundations are likely to be required grubbing out works, as well as any other deep excavations, are considered to have the potential to encounter both surviving structural remains associated with the docks, as well as the remains of abandoned canal barges. Such remains would not be considered to be a constraint upon development but rather as being of local or regional significance and therefore worthy of preservation by record. Cheshire Archaeology Planning Advisory Service therefore recommends that the developer be required to undertake a programme of archaeological work, and that such works be secured by means of appropriately worded planning condition.

Waste

The proposal involves demolition and construction activities and policy WM8 of the Joint Merseyside and Halton Waste Local Plan (WLP) applies. This policy requires the minimisation of waste production and implementation of measures to achieve efficient use of resources, including designing out waste. In accordance with policy WM8, evidence through a waste audit or a similar mechanism (e.g. site waste management plan) demonstrating how this will be achieved must be submitted and can be secured by a suitably worded planning condition.

The applicant has not provided information with respect to provision of on-site waste storage and management to demonstrate compliance with policy WM9 of the Joint Merseyside and Halton Waste Local Plan. It is considered that this can be secured by a suitably worded condition.

Prematurity

The application site is located between the Dukesfield Residential Neighbourhood and Runcorn Waterfront as identified by Core Strategy Policy CS10. The site is identified within that policy by its former use as Halton Riverside College. Residential development of the site would act as a natural progression of the existing Dukesfield Residential Neighbourhood. It is not considered that the development of the site for residential use would in any way prejudice the future development of Runcorn Waterfront for the uses identified by UDP Policy RG4 or Core Strategy Policy CS10. No masterplan or other detailed policy document exists for the area and the opening up of access through the site could be argued to contribute to the future development potential for Runcorn Waterfront. On that basis it is not considered that any argument of prematurity or prejudice to the future regeneration aspirations for the area could be sustained.

Other Material Matters

Under normal circumstances the development would be liable for the provision of affordable housing in accordance with Core Strategy Policy CS13 and provision of open space in accordance with UDP Policy and the Open Space SPD. The application is supported by a Financial Viability Appraisal which concludes that the scheme would become unviable in terms of residual land value if such contributions were required. That assessment is currently being appraised by the Valuation Office Agency. Their response is awaited and Members will be updated accordingly. It is also considered worthy of note that the applicant is Riverside College and that the stated purpose of the application is to “generate capital for the College to reinvest in the continued improvement and expansion of its retained campuses”. Such potential benefit must also therefore be balanced against the benefits of securing affordable housing and/ or open space contributions.

CONCLUSIONS

The application seeks permission for the proposed demolition of the former college buildings (which have remained vacant for approximately two years) and

redevelopment of the site to provide up to 120 residential units. The application is in outline, with all matters except for access reserved for future determination.

Core Strategy Policy CS2 and NPPF paragraphs 14-16 set out the presumption in favour of sustainable development whereby applications that are consistent with national and up-to-date local policy should be approved without delay. As set out in this appraisal, the site falls within Action Area 4: Runcorn and Weston Docklands which specifically allows for housing as a suitable use and as a potential alternative to Halton College buildings on the site. The application is also consistent with Core Strategy Policy CS10, which promotes new dwellings across West Runcorn, with emphasis on Runcorn Waterfront. The proposals have the benefits of contributing much need housing in the Borough, in a sustainable location, on a brownfield site, close to the town centre, whilst making a positive contribution to the regeneration of the area. The application also states that the redevelopment of the site will generate capital for the College to invest in the continued improvement and expansion of its retained campuses. It is considered that sufficient provision can be made for protecting the amenity of surrounding land uses and that of future occupiers, securing appropriate design to mitigate any negative impacts, protecting the setting of the listed building at Bridgewater House, opening access to the waterfront, and safeguarding the route for the reinstatement of the Bridgewater Locks through consideration at a future reserved matters application stage.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the application is approved subject to:-

(a) The entering into a Legal Agreement or other agreement for the maintenance of specified land in accordance with the landscaping requirements of the Permission and the transfer of that land to the Council upon written notice for the purposes associated with the reinstatement of the former Bridgewater Canal.

(b) Conditions relating to the following:

1. Standard Outline Planning Permission conditions relating to submission of reserved matters and timescales
2. Specifying Approved Plans (BE1)
3. Requiring submission and agreement of a detailed Construction Environmental Management Plan including wheel cleansing facilities, construction vehicle access routes, construction parking and management plan, noise and dust minimisation measures. (BE1 and GE21)
4. Materials condition, requiring the submission and approval of the materials to be used (BE2)
5. Landscaping condition, requiring submission and approval both hard and soft landscaping, including replacement tree planting. (BE2)
6. Submission and agreement of boundary treatment including retaining walls. (BE2)
7. Construction and delivery hours to be adhered to throughout the course of the development. (BE1)
8. Vehicle access, parking, servicing etc to be constructed prior to occupation of properties/ commencement of use. (BE1)

9. Condition relating to further detailed site investigation/ mitigation/ verification (PR14)
10. Condition relating to unidentified contamination (PR14)
11. Submission and agreement of details of on-site biodiversity action plan for measures to be incorporated in the scheme to encourage wildlife including dwellings to be fitted with bird/ bat boxes (GE21)
12. Conditions relating to tree protection during construction (BE1)
13. Submission and agreement of detailed surface water/ highway drainage scheme (BE1/ PR5)
14. Requiring submission and agreement of site and finished floor levels. (BE1)
15. Submission and agreement of scheme of protective fencing to watercourses to secure a minimum 5m buffer zone (GE21)
16. Submission and agreement of Site Waste Management Plan (WM8)
17. Submission and agreement of a sustainable waste management plan (WM9)
18. Submission and agreement of detailed lighting scheme including measures to minimise light spill onto surrounding habitats and sky glow (PR4/GE21).

(c) That if the S106 Agreement or alternative arrangement is not executed within a reasonable period of time, authority be delegated to the Operational Director – Policy, Planning and Transportation in consultation with the Chairman or Vice Chairman of the Committee to refuse the application.

SUSTAINABILITY STATEMENT

As required by:

- Paragraph 186 – 187 of the National Planning Policy Framework;
- The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) (Amendment No.2) Order 2012; and
- The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2012.

This statement confirms that the local planning authority has worked proactively with the applicant to secure developments that improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of Halton.