

**70449 – Longfield Shopping Centre/Car Park, Fairfax Road Car Park and adjoining land at Bury New Road, Rectory Lane and Fairfax Road, Prestwich.**

**Hybrid application: Full application for demolition of existing buildings/structures & erection of phased mixed use development including Community Hub with flexible uses of library, offices, medical/health services (Classes F1 (a-f), F2(b), E(c), E(e), E(g)) & retail uses (Classes E(a), E(b) F2(a)) & Sui Generis (hot food takeaway & bar), new Market Hall (Classes E(a), E(b) & Sui Generis (hot food takeaway and bar)), Commercial Building with flexible uses including retail, offices, gym (Classes E(a), E(b), E(c), E(d), E(g), F2(a), Travel Hub with car parking & cycle parking (Sui Generis), public square & realm, associated landscaping, car parking provision, cycle storage & associated works; and,**

**Part Outline application (all matters reserved) - mixed use development of residential (Class C3), flexible commercial, business, service, local community & learning uses (Classes E, F) & Sui Generis (hot food takeaway & bar), engineering works to Rectory Lane, new public realm, associated landscaping, car parking provision, cycle storage & associated works.**

The development site is not within a conservation area, however there are a number of Non-Designated Heritage Assets (NDHAs) adjacent to the site and the Grade I listed St Mary's Church is approximately 350 metres to the south west of the site.

The heritage assets affected by the proposed development are the Non-Designated Heritage Assets of Our Lady of Grace Roman Catholic Church (OLOG), its former Presbytery and Church Hall which constitute a group asset and the Grade I Listed St Mary's church.

Paragraph 209 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states the effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.

The OLOG church, church hall and former presbytery form a group value of NDHAs. It is accepted that the setting of this group has been compromised in recent years by the Radius development, but the group has retained a positive element to its setting with the openness of the adjacent car park preserving views from the car park itself, Fairfax Road, Rectory Lane and the junctions of Fairfax Road and Rectory Lane as well as filtered and kinetic views from the Metrolink Line when arriving and departing Prestwich tram stop. It is considered the views from and along Fairfax Road and from Rectory Lane are the most sensitive to changes brought about by the proposed travel hub.

It is not agreed that the car park is necessarily a negative feature within the groups setting or that because harm may have already been caused to its setting by the Radius development further harm would be acceptable.

The group currently retains a level of setting that is beneficial to its associative/communal and historic interest providing a tangible significance in how the building is experienced, the group of buildings have a visual experience when approached along established routes of access as in Fairfax Road, Rectory Lane and the adjacent car park.

The proposed travel hub would harm this element of the groups' setting, reducing the ability to appreciate the building and therefore how it is experienced.

The position, size, scale and resultant massing of the proposed travel hub would result in the harm caused to its significance as described and would visually dominate the group challenging the groups' architectural aesthetic.

As such the current siting, size, scale and resultant visual massing cannot be supported in heritage conservation terms.

To achieve an acceptable level of mitigation of the impact of the proposed travel hub on the significance of the group heritage asset, the proposed travel hub should be significantly reduced in height and significantly set back from Fairfax Road. Its proposed façade fronting Fairfax Road should be significantly reduced in height and by virtue of its design, materials and palette should not visually dominate the asset group as a whole.

Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires Local Planning Authorities in the exercise of their planning functions to have regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.

Paragraph 206 of the NPPF states any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification. Substantial harm to or loss of:

a) grade II listed buildings, or grade II registered parks or gardens, should be exceptional;

b) assets of the highest significance, notably scheduled monuments, protected wreck sites, registered battlefields, grade I and II\* listed buildings, grade I and II\* registered parks and gardens, and World Heritage Sites, should be wholly exceptional.

Paragraph 208 of the NPPF states 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, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.

The Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin, Prestwich is Grade I Listed and as such is a building of significant national importance.

St Mary's Church tower had been visible historically in views from Prestwich tram stop but is now, at certain times of the year, screened by self-seeded, unmanaged deciduous trees which occupy a vacant site once occupied by the National School, between Rectory Lane and Bury New Road. The trees are considered to be a transient feature in that when the site is re-developed the trees would be removed restoring historic views. The proposed residential blocks, while only proposed in outline and indicated to be up to 6 or 7 storeys in height would permanently remove that view of the church in its wider setting representing harm to its significance. Within the terms of paragraph 208 of the NPPF this harm is considered to represent less than substantial harm.

The applicant has also identified the harm that would be caused to the setting of the church, but has not quantified this harm within the terms of paragraph 208 of the NPPF as less than substantial harm requiring the harm to be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. As such the proposed residential tower blocks that would obscure the existing filtered views from the tram stop, that have been identified by the applicant in their heritage statement and which would also permanently prevent any future reinstatement of the views cannot be supported in heritage terms, unless their impact can be removed or a public benefit that can be weighed against the harm caused is identified.

Conservation Officer

15/3/24