

Agenda Item	A7
Application Number	22/00880/LB
Proposal	Listed building application to facilitate the conversion from 96-bed into 62 one-bed self contained student accommodation units, erection of a four storey front extension with roof terrace above linking the Mill and annexe and demolition of part of enclosure wall
Application site	Mill Hall Moor Lane Lancaster Lancashire
Applicant	Afar Properties Limited
Agent	Mr Thomas Zub
Case Officer	Mr Andrew Clement
Departure	No
Summary of Recommendation	Approval

1.0 Application Site and Setting

- 1.1 The site that forms the subject of this application is Mill Hall, a Grade II Listed Building located within the Lancaster Conservation Area, part of the Canal Corridor North Character Area. Mill Hall was built as a steam-powered worsted mill in 1819 by Thomas Higgin & Co. Thomas, subsequently operated by Greys of Styal and then Storey Brothers. The building was converted into a cotton spinning factory by 1828, and to student accommodation in 1988-89. This multistorey property has a dominating presence in the townscape, as one of several impressive mills in the area. The frontages of the older mills and factories generally have a uniformly consistent pattern, which emphasises their massing. Industrial buildings such as the application site are particularly important to the character of this area of the Lancaster Conservation Area, and contributes positively to the designated national heritage asset area. The Mill walls are finished in battered squared coursed sandstone under a slate roof, with a rectangular plan along the canal with coped gables, the cap of a ventilation shaft at the southern apex, and with a truncated chimney stack against the north gable. The existing front Doric porch is understood to be a subsequent addition added by Charles B Pearson Son & Partners (Architects), with the roof slope containing 20th century rooflights. The stone wall on the approach to the canal bridge on the north side of Moor Lane adds historic interest to this frontage, with its distinctive coping and response to the change in level.
- 1.2 The smaller Block 2 part of this proposal is also a Grade II Listed Building, which was part of the cotton mill built for Storey Brothers circa 1880, and converted to student accommodation caretakers block in 1988. This 3-storey building is finished in squared coursed sandstone under a slate roof, with a central wagon entrance at ground floor level providing access to a rear courtyard area. The rear wall has a central 1st-floor bay of timber and glass with an iron crane. These Grade II Listed Buildings make a positive contribution to the setting of further Grade II Listed Mill buildings to the south side of Moor Lane, and non-designated heritage asset buildings in the surrounding area. The site is within a parking permit area, adjacent to the Lancaster Canal designated open space, green

space, cycle network and biological heritage site. The site is near a smoke control area and the outer zone 2 for air quality management, and forms part of a regeneration priority area for the broader Canal Quarter area.

2.0 Proposal

2.1 This application seeks listed building consent for the erection of a four-storey front link extension and to reorganise the existing internal arrangements for student accommodation bedrooms to student studio flats. The proposal would reduce the number of student accommodation bedrooms from 96 predominantly 10sq.m bedrooms, to just 62 en-suite student studio apartments measuring between 19sq.m and circa 28sq.m floorspace. The proposal seeks to remove 15 existing communal WCs, 18 communal bathrooms, and 11 communal kitchen/living space, replacing these with en-suite facilities, a two communal living areas, a communal gym, meeting space, with communal WC by the entrance and within the gym the proposed front extension. The proposed four-storey front link extension with additional roof terrace is to be finished in glazing and corten steel, measuring circa 13 metres above external ground level to the top of the corten parapet, with a further approximately 1 metre tall glazing balustrade to the roof top terrace. The flat roof development measure 10.4 metres long along the frontage, projecting a maximum of 10.1 metres from the front elevation of the 5-storey Mill building.

3.0 Site History

3.1 A number of relevant applications relating to this site have previously been received by the Local Planning Authority. These include:

Application Number	Proposal	Decision
22/00879/FUL	Change of use of 96-bed into 62 one-bed self contained student accommodation units, erection of a four storey front extension with roof terrace above linking the Mill and annexe and demolition of part of enclosure wall	Concurrent
21/00489/FUL	Erection of a two storey front extension linking Mill and annexe, reconfiguration layout from 96-bed into 62-bed ensuite student accommodation with associated facilities, and demolition of an enclosure wall	Refused
21/00490/LB	Listed building application for erection of a two storey front extension linking the Mill and annexe and reconfiguration of internal layout from 96-bed into 62-bed ensuite student accommodation, and demolition of an enclosure wall	Refused
07/00668/LB	Listed Building application for alterations and reinstatement of curtilage wall (following demolition of adjacent buildings)	Refused
07/00665/LB	Listed Building Application for alterations and reinstatement of northern elevation (following demolition of part of the adjacent Heron Chemical Works)	Refused
05/01340/FUL	Installation of laser data communication equipment on gable end at high level	Approved
05/01375/LB	Listed Building Application for installation of laser data communication equipment on gable end at high level	Approved
89/3017/LB	Formation of dormer roof to accommodate internal goods lift and ground floor windows and doors	Approved
87/01084/HST	Convert Mill To Student Accommodation	Approved
87/01085/HST002	Convert Mill To Student Accommodation	Approved
87/00896/HST	Demolition Of Old Mill Buildings	Approved

4.0 Consultation Responses

4.1 The following responses have been received from statutory and internal consultees:

Consultee	Response
Conservation Section	No objection , loss of portico entrance raises no concern, sought amendments to provide deeper recesses of glazing, lower corten height with capping to this, and improve visualisation, subsequently addressed through amended plans, concluding neutral impacts to heritage assets of Listed Buildings and the Conservation Area.
Lancashire Archaeology	No objection , no formal archaeological investigation or recording required
Historic England	No advice offered, suggest seeking local specialist conservation and archaeological advisers.
Lancaster Civic Society	Objection , serious reservations regarding proposed design, materials and height, which would appear overwhelming, harsh and obtrusive, detracting from very handsome mill buildings. Suggest reducing height and more neutral cladding. Support reducing number of student units and elements within the listed buildings themselves. Amendments have resulted in modest improvements aesthetically, but not addressed the fundamental concerns within the objection.

4.2 The following responses have been received from members of the public:

- **Three objections**, raising concerns with harm to heritage assets, longevity of student accommodation use, inappropriate materials and design to setting of stone Mills and Moor Lane.

5.0 Analysis

5.1 The key considerations in the assessment of this application are:

- Design, scale and impact upon heritage assets

5.2 **Design, scale and impact upon heritage assets** (Development Management DPD DM29: Key Design Principles, DM37: Development affecting Listed Buildings, DM38: Development affecting Conservation Areas, DM39: The Setting of Designated Heritage Assets, DM41: Development Affecting Non-Heritage Assets or their settings, Strategic Policies and Land Allocations DPD SG5: Canal Quarter, Central Lancaster, SP7: Maintaining Lancaster District's Unique Heritage, Canal Quarter SPD, National Planning Policy Framework Section 12. Achieving well-designed places, Section 16. Conserving and enhancing the historic environment, Listed Building and Conservation Areas Act 1990 Section 7, 17 Paragraph 72, 73

5.2.1 In accordance with the Listed Building and Conservation Areas Act, when considering any application that affects a Listed building, a Conservation Area or their setting, the local planning authority must pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the heritage asset or its setting. This is reiterated by policies DM37 and DM38. DM38 sets out that development within Conservation Areas will only be permitted where it has been demonstrated that:

- Proposals respect the character of the surrounding built form and its wider setting in terms of design, siting, scale, massing, height and the materials used; and,
- Proposals will not result in the loss or alteration of features which contribute to the special character of the building and area; and,
- Proposed uses are sympathetic and appropriate to the character of the existing building and will not result in any detrimental impact on the visual amenity and wider setting of the Conservation Area.

5.2.2 The application site contains two national heritage asset Grade II Listed Buildings, making a strong positive contribution to the city scape and Conservation Area, particularly when viewed in the context of adjacent Grade II Listed Moor Lane Mill buildings and non-designated heritage assets. The frontage to the 5-storey Mill building already contains a modest Doric porch, which is sought to be replaced by a 4-storey flat roof extension to the front, linking to the adjacent 3-storey mill building,

also a Grade II Listed Building. The proposal seeks internal alterations to facilitate a reorganisation of existing student cluster flats to student studio flats within the existing Listed Buildings. However, given the previous original; conversion to student accommodation, the interior works primarily affect modern alterations, with no undue harm to the interiors of these Listed Buildings through the proposal. The interior is less sensitive to change than the exteriors of these heritage assets given previous works undertaken at the site.

5.2.3 The area sought for development likely contained built form in this location, as shown on historic OS maps, and a 3-storey building was present immediately south of the frontage of the 5-storey building up until the conversion to student accommodation in the late 1980's. From 1948 aerial photography, it is understood that this building previously linked the two remaining Mill buildings, within the location of the proposed development. Whilst this building (Mill 3) was demolished, part of this building had formed part of the sought original student conversion, with a link roof canopy between the three Mill buildings. However, this was demolished prior to conversion and the link canopy was not implemented. Given the previous built form in this location and proximity of opposite historic mill buildings to Moor Lane, the siting of a link extension in this location may be suitable, subject to a high-quality design and sympathetic proportions in this prominent location. High quality design is vital for new developments in the historic environment, as the vibrancy and richness of the heritage assets strongly contribute to the cultural values of the district, the quality of which could be eroded through inappropriate or low-quality proposals. In certain circumstances, and with an understanding of the significance of heritage assets and their setting, high-quality contemporary and innovative design may be acceptable within the historic environment.

5.2.4 A linking extension to the building has previously been proposed at the site, and was refused due to the design, massing and materials resulting in harm to national heritage assets. The proposed development under this current application is substantially different, addressing the horizontal emphasis through reduced footprint and increased height, bridging the height to 4-storeys tall, providing a vertical link between the 5-storey Mill Hall and 3-storey smaller mill as this steps up Moor Lane eastwards. The location of development would not restrict views of Lancaster Castle from Moor Lane, and whilst the topography of Moor Lane rises eastwards, the rooftop of the development would be circa 6 to 7 metres above street level, providing a degree of visual containment of any rooftop furniture despite the glazed balustrade to this.

5.2.5 Furthermore, whilst the Canal Quarter regeneration is considered to be at an early stage, with a masterplan unveiled in October 2022 and the council seeking a first phase delivery partner, the Canal Quarter SPD details potential for 4 storey tall development east of Bulk Street as part of phase four. The Canal Quarter SPD also includes a precedent image within the design and materiality section of Caixa Forum in Madrid, which has a large corten vertical extension above a traditional brick heritage building adjacent to a green wall. Whilst surrounding development within this phase of the Canal Quarter would likely be in the medium- to long-term, it is considered that the proposed development is in accordance with the design ethos of this area of the Canal Quarter, and future development aspirations for the wider area to the west nearer Bulk Street could progress in a similar ilk to that proposed. The existing traditional buff and elements of pink/red Cumbrian sandstone walls, vegetation adjacent to the canal and introducing a corten extension to this would achieve a similar appearance to precedent images within the Canal Quarter SPD, and whilst the predominant materials in the immediate vicinity are sandstone under grey slate, the tall red brick tower projecting above the Mills to the south and wider use of render provides some variety, ensuring that the development of contrasting industrial appearance achieves a degree of congruency.

5.2.6 The external materials proposed now include corten steel, considered to be a high-quality material when combined with glazing as proposed, tying into the Mills with an industrial appearance finish and a perforated design inspired by mill punch cards for programmed patterns, albeit this design inspiration may not be immediately obvious. Further minor amendments received following submission have modestly reduced the height of the corten elements, with a glass balustrade atop, providing greater depth/separation of glazed links joining the listed buildings, with some minor design alterations including a parapet top to the corten elements. Such changes are considered to have resulted in a development harmoniously scaled to the adjoining and immediately surrounding Mill buildings, in a clearly contemporary design and appropriate high-quality industrial material, with variation provided by glazing and perforated design.

5.2.7 Whilst full details and samples would be required to ensure the development is suitable in terms of

high-quality design, subject to planning conditions controlling such matters, the scale is considered to be proportionate to the vertical emphasis of attached and surrounding built form, in a well-considered design and architecture, finished in high-quality materials and sympathetic to the area and heritage significance. As such, and as concluded by the Principal Conservation Officer in their consultation response, subject to final details and samples agreed through planning condition, it is considered that the development would have a neutral impact upon the Listed Buildings, the setting of the detached Listed Buildings and the Lancaster Conservation Area as a whole. The site is clearly sensitive from a heritage and streetscene prominence perspective, and whilst the development would undoubtedly affect the character and appearance, it is considered that this would not be in a harmful way for the aforementioned reasons. Overall, the proposed development would certainly be striking, but due to the contemporary design of extension with positive links and inspiration from the original use of the Mill buildings using high quality design and materials, the proposal would not cause significant harm to heritage or streetscene. Whilst concerns and objections have been raised by Lancaster Civic Society and three members of the public, the proposal is considered to be high quality contemporary and innovative design, in appropriate materials, resulting in a neutral impact upon heritage assets.

5.2.8 There are some public and heritage benefits to the proposal to balance against the neutral impacts of the development upon the Listed Buildings and Conservation Area. Whilst the proposal is a reconfiguration of existing student housing provision, this will make modest contribution to meeting the districts housing needs. Furthermore, the refurbishment of the building will encourage long-term maintenance of the heritage assets, through what is now considered to be the optimum viable use of the heritage assets. As such, the heritage impacts are considered to offer modest benefits from the re-use of the building for alternative student accommodation, consistent with the assets' conservation. Additional details regarding works to improve energy efficiency measures within the Listed Buildings, surrounding landscaping, external lighting and boundary treatments can be controlled through planning condition to ensure all details are acceptable, and that the impact to the Listed Buildings and wider heritage assets remains acceptable.

6.0 Conclusion and Planning Balance

6.1 The proposal for the refurbishment and alteration of existing student accommodation to form higher standard studio student apartments is considered to be policy compliant in principle, facilitating the continuation of the optimal viable use of the site whilst bringing regeneration to this important city centre site. Importantly, through high-quality contemporary design, massing and materials sympathetic to the industrial past of the Mills and surrounding area, the proposal will make a bold impact but one that is considered to be neutral impact upon heritage assets, subject to planning conditions ensuring suitably high-quality details and samples. As such, and on balance, the continuation of the optimal viable use of the site in a form that will result in a neutral physical impact to heritage assets is considered to be acceptable, and therefore this application is recommended for approval, subject to a number of planning conditions.

Recommendation

That Listed Building Consent **BE GRANTED** subject to the following conditions:

Condition no.	Description	Type
1	Standard 3 year timescale	Control
2	Development in accordance with the amended approved plans	Control
3	Energy efficiency measures	Prior to commencement
4	Details and samples of external materials	Prior to above ground works
5	Details of guttering and flues/extraction	Prior to installation and occupation
6	Lighting details	Prior to installation and occupation
7	Security measures, including details of bollards and boundary	Prior to occupation

	treatments	
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Background Papers
None