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| Agenda Item | A7 |
| Application Number | 25/00134/LB |
| Proposal | Listed building application to facilitate the conversion from 96-bed into 62 one-bed self contained student accommodation units, erection of a three storey front extension 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 | Approve with conditions |

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 Gregs 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.
- 1.2 Industrial buildings such as the application site are particularly important to the character of this area of the Lancaster Conservation Area, and contribute 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.
- 1.3 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.

- 1.4 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. The site is at low risk of surface water flooding, with pockets of medium risk from future surface water flooding within the site, but beyond the areas sought for built development.

2.0 Proposal

- 2.1 This application seeks listed building consent for the erection of a three-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 in cluster flats, 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 studio facilities and communal areas within a proposed front link extension.

- 2.2 The proposed extension contains a communal living areas, a communal gym, meeting space, with communal WC by the entrance and within the gym. The proposed three-storey front link extension is to be finished in glazing and porcelain rainscreen, measuring circa 9.6 metres above external ground level, slightly taller than the eaves of the adjacent smaller Block 2, but subservient to the ridge height. The three storey element measures approximately 8.5 metres across the frontage and deep, joined to each of the existing Mill buildings by subservient and setback glazed links projecting circa 1.2 metres wide between the main extension and the existing building. Laundry and bike store to be provided within the existing smaller Mill, with fenced bin-store area in the existing carpark behind Block 2.

- 2.3 Within the existing Mill buildings, all modern partition walls are to be removed, with new partition walls installed for the proposed studio layout. More substantial internal walls adjacent and parallel to the north and south facing gable ends of Mill Hall will be retained and incorporated into the development, and both the existing and proposed floor plans show the locations of historic cast iron columns within Mill Hall. The replacement of windows within Mill Hall have previously been approved and already installed.

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 |
|--------------------|---|-----------------|
| 25/00133/FUL | Partially retrospective application for the change of use of 96-bed into 62 one-bed self contained student accommodation units, erection of a three storey front extension linking the Mill and annexe, erection of a cafe to rear and demolition of part of enclosure wall | Concurrent |
| 23/00879/LB | Listed building application for the installation of replacement windows | Approved |
| 23/01000/PRFORU | Pre-application advice request for remodelling of student accommodation block and extension | Advice Provided |
| 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 | Refused |
| 22/00880/LB | 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 | Refused |

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| | extension with roof terrace above linking the Mill and annexe and demolition of part of enclosure wall | |
| 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 , subject to amendments to proposed fencing, and subject to conditions to protect existing internal cast iron columns, details and samples of external materials of development, hard and soft landscaping and external lighting |
| Lancashire Archaeology | No objection , consider that any formal archaeological investigation or recording would not be justified for the present scheme |
| Historic England | No advice offered |
| National Amenity Societies | Neither object nor support. Defer to Conservation Section on design and scale. Recommend angle of corner glazing is considered to avoid impact of illumination after sunset. |
| Lancaster Civic Vision | No adverse comment, although would seek the addition of rooftop solar panels. The design and materials are an improvement upon previous application, internal layout an improvement upon existing, and welcome the addition of an outdoor café. |

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

- One **Objection**, due to front facing extension, contextually inappropriate, harm to national heritage assets. Little benefit of café given existing alternatives, and lack of demand for student accommodation
- One **Support**, due repurposing the building and extension sensitively integrating with the Mills heritage, safeguarding the long term future of the buildings. Café would provide unique location for existing neighbouring residents and future residents of the development. Development would enhance the appeal of Canal Quarter as a destination. Development will ease pressure and demand for students occupying traditional housing, and design is flexible to alternative uses.

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 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 other 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 3-storey flat roof extension to the front, linking to the adjacent 3-storey Mill building (Block 2), both of which are nationally important heritage assets as listed buildings.

5.2.3 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 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 far less sensitive to change than the exteriors of these heritage assets given previous works historically granted and undertaken at the site.

5.2.4 The area sought for development likely contained built form in this location, as shown on historic OS maps. 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 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.

5.2.5 High quality design is vital for new developments in the historic environment. The vibrancy and richness of heritage assets strongly contributes 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.

5.2.6 An application for development at this site has been before planning committee previously, for a

larger (four storey) development, finished in a contemporary, but ultimately divisive, corten and glazing external materials, with a roof terrace atop. This earlier application was refused, as members determined that the brutalist design and materials were unsympathetic to national heritage assets, a decision which was ultimately upheld at planning appeal. Since the planning appeal, the scheme design and scale has evolved through a pre-application forum process involving members. The current proposal has taken account of this process and previous decisions, and now seeks a smaller scale extension development that remains contemporary in design, but avoids starkly contrasting materials from the surrounding national heritage assets.

- 5.2.7 The reduced height at three storeys tall, and lack of a rooftop terrace, not only makes this subservient to both attached Mill buildings, but also avoids adverse impact upon views towards Lancaster Castle from Moor Lane. The avoidance of a rooftop terrace should be controlled through planning condition preventing such use. The design remains flat roofed, with a large corner and link glazing features, with walls finished in porcelain rainscreen walls. The rainscreen and glazing are designed to offer verticality to the development, to tie with the verticality of the taller Mill buildings attached, despite the subservient height. The proposed design includes a contemporary corner glazing, which cascades upwards through increasing floorspace at higher floors. This glazing reduces the appearance of massing of the building, which will avoid a 'boxy' appearance when viewed in three dimensions, despite the flat roof and dimensions of the proposed extension. The design is considered to make a lighter appearance addition, further assisting with vertical emphasis, through thoughtful design detailing.
- 5.2.8 Whilst the porcelain rainscreen will contrast with the attached sandstone walled Mill buildings, this will assist in differentiating this as a modern addition, but in a fashion that synergises with the original buildings. Porcelain is made from earth sourced materials, and can be finished in a colour and texture to compliment with Listed Buildings without matching these, but likely similar to the ashlar eaves detail of Mill Hall. The precise material, scale and orientation of panels for the rainscreen will all be critical details that should be controlled through planning conditions, to achieve verticality through narrow joints and controlling how these panels are to be hung. Similarly, the corner glazing feature, rainwater goods, and any other external features of the development will need to be controlled through planning conditions to ensure a high-quality clean and contemporary finish befitting of these Listed Buildings. Subject to agreeing such details through planning conditions, it is considered that the contemporary addition will appear subservient and appropriate to this sensitive heritage setting, offering a contrast from the existing Mills but tying to the verticality and repetition.
- 5.2.9 The site is clearly sensitive from a heritage and streetscene prominence perspective, and whilst the development would undoubtable 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 use of sympathetic high quality materials, the proposal would not cause significant harm to heritage asset or the wider streetscene. Lancaster Civic Vision concluding this is a much-improved application showing much more respect and sensitivity to the original mill building. The proposal is considered to be high quality contemporary and innovative design, in appropriate materials, resulting in a neutral impact upon heritage assets.
- 5.2.10 As concluded by the Conservation Officer, 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 Conservation Officer suggestion of boundary treatment setback location has been incorporated in amended plans, and the precise design can be controlled through planning condition. The only internal features sought for protection and to be incorporated into the works are the internal cast iron columns. Such details can be controlled through planning condition to ensure their retention and positive incorporation within the interior of the building. Additional details regarding works to improve energy efficiency measures within the Listed Buildings, surrounding landscaping, external lighting and security measures 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.
- 5.2.11 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. 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.

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. Development would facilitate 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 are considered sympathetic to the Mills and surrounding area. The proposal would 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 conditions.

Recommendation

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

| Condition no. | Description | Type |
|---------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| 1 | Development in accordance with the amended approved plans | Control |
| 2 | Energy efficiency measures | Prior to further work commencing |
| 3 | Scheme for protection and incorporation of existing internal columns | Prior to further work commencing |
| 4 | Details and samples of external materials and boundary treatments | Prior to above ground external 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 treatments | Prior to completion or occupation |

Background Papers

None