

2020/0506/01/DET	Plot 12 East Quayside, Newcastle.
<b>Proposal</b>	Erection of 292 apartments
<b>N&amp;N Comment (if applicable)</b>	<b>The Northumberland and Newcastle Society <u>objects</u> to the grant of planning permission for this development.</b>

As a key guardian of Newcastle’s heritage, the Northumberland and Newcastle Society (N&N) regularly reviews planning proposals affecting the city’s historic heart.

The N&N applies its ‘empathy architecture’ concept when considering planning applications and in that context we have carefully scrutinised the plans for Plot 12, Quayside, Newcastle. On that basis **we strongly believe this application in its current form should be refused**. We would welcome revised plans being brought forward for this site that demonstrate greater empathy with its surroundings and a reduction in the scale of the proposed development. In response to our findings we have included a summary of suggested amendments in the following comments.

**Context**

The River Tyne Gorge is rightfully acknowledged to be a visual jewel in the crown of Newcastle and Gateshead, with the Quayside being the focus of innovative renovation of many important historic buildings complemented by the construction of renowned landmark developments. The transformation of this area into an immense cultural and heritage asset demonstrates the breadth of the North East’s creative talent. The River Tyne scene is universally recognised as an iconic and profound visual representation of the spirit of endeavour in this region.

As a matter of general principle the N&N supports residential development of appropriate ‘brownfield’ sites and in that context we acknowledge the rationale for completing the infill of the East Quayside Masterplan. We believe it is reasonable for the owners of this important vacant Quayside site to create a high quality development that achieves empathy with the Quayside’s unique built and natural environment.

We note this site has been the subject of previous development proposals, most recently in 2016, and it is effectively the last vacant development plot on this section of Newcastle’s Quayside.

**Scale**

The N&N echoes others’ feelings and comments on the excessive height of the proposed building and its impact on the surrounding existing built and public space environment.

Whilst there is logic to the building’s height lines rising slightly to the East as City Road rises, the proposal is too high, creating a giant linked C shaped block of such bulk and scale to be visually overwhelming. The proposed building is simply too large and the layout provides no visual or physical permeability to the site, with no views through the site from St Ann’s Church to river and vice versa.

Although it is evident the developers have considered some elements of design and synergy in their proposals, the emphasis on scale seems to be the decisive influence, accommodating a planned 292 apartments within the building. The end result is a building two storeys too high on the City Road elevation where pursuit of scale overrides achieving synergy with neighbouring structures.

### **Empathy with its environment and Impact on heritage assets**

The building's scale is overwhelming for the site footprint and it is this scale that has such a negative effect on the setting of adjacent buildings, particularly St Ann's Church. This grade 1 listed building dating from 1768 is an important heritage asset and its setting will be devastated by the construction of the proposed building in its current form.

St. Ann's Church has been an integral historical feature of Newcastle's riverscape for more than 250 years and it is intrinsically part of the Quayside environment. The skill, ingenuity and style of those who designed and built St Ann's represent the very best of Newcastle and they were at the forefront of making this one of the greatest cities of the United Kingdom.

The proposed building design will result in irretrievable loss of an effective visual connection between St Ann's and the River Tyne at great harm generally to the Quayside and City environment.

As we have commented above, the River Tyne Gorge is rightfully acknowledged to be a visual jewel in the crown of Newcastle and Gateshead. This status has been the catalyst for substantial investment in renovating some of the area's most iconic historic buildings and the construction of new developments that have positively transformed this immense asset over many years.

### **Amenities**

It is our belief the brief to provide as many accommodation units as possible results in a reduction in the quality of communal relationship of the units and a lack of open amenity space including landscaping. The apparent focus on sheer volume of units detracts greatly from creating a building that has humanity, a sense of belonging and most importantly the feeling of being a desirable place to live.

Amenity and community sharing spaces have been provided but they are restricted to designated areas on the first and eleventh floors, rather than on each floor. We would emphasise the importance of such spaces not least in their value in mitigating the effect of narrow corridors, noting it is just as important to achieve good design for such spaces as should be applied to the entire development.

We feel the provision of commercial space is disproportionately high in comparison to that given over to amenity space for the building's residents. The building's key aspects are its relationship and juxtaposition to the River Tyne, these characteristics should be a source of enjoyment and inspiration for its residents and commercial space should be an ancillary consideration.

### **Narrow corridors**

The N&N has previously commented on planning applications elsewhere in Newcastle where we have noted an apparent developers' preference for narrow corridors in proposals for multiple storey residential buildings.

It is disappointing to note this preference has been followed in this proposal. We understand commercial pressures are powerful influences on developers and this often translates into a preoccupation with quantity rather than quality in order to generate an immediate financial return for investors. In the case of Plot 12, Newcastle Quayside it is our belief this translates into a very basic plan form which is un-inspiring, uninteresting, and unsociable.

This development proposes unrelieved long narrow internal corridors that offer no view of the world outside or any resonance with what is the most significant positive characteristic of this building i.e. its riverside location.

As noted, all main communication and access to residential units is via a narrow internal corridor. We consider this is a poor design feature likely to result in problems of accessibility, invasive noise, maintenance, fire safety and possible anti-social behaviour. We are particularly concerned on how this form of access affects the well-being of vulnerable people or those with more advanced mobility needs.

### **Treatment of elevations**

We believe the visual impact of external elevational treatment lacks interest, ingenuity, proportion or quality and reverts to an almost "pattern book" developers' standard. This lack of imagination applied to the elevations, with alternating windows on adjacent floors seem visually disturbing and muddling. The City Road elevation is particularly muddled, with four distinct vertical blocks separated by full height glazing but then blended together overall in grey brick.

We feel this elevational treatment stems from the very basic plan form which is uninteresting and seems to be the core concept of this development. We would make reference to the applicants' own "mood board" comparisons to illustrate how inferior is the proposed elevational treatment.

### **Accessibility**

As referred to above the N&N believes this site cries out for a landmark design that reflects the outstanding opportunities offered by this unique River Tyne Gorge location. The steep slope should be the design cue for a scheme which steps down the hill to the riverside, allows a pedestrian flow through it, providing occupants with river views and passers-by with views up to the church and down to the water.

## **Suggested Amendments**

The Quayside is of great importance to both Newcastle and Gateshead and we believe the proposed building should be redesigned in a way that derives from the contours and context of the site. Plot 12, Newcastle Quayside offers the prospect to deliver a stand out building that complements heritage assets and reflects the high standards of innovative design that are so evident nearby.

What is proposed seems like a desire to simply insert as large a structure as the plot can physically accommodate, it is a colossal missed opportunity and if approved we believe it would blight this environment for generations.

As we have commented previously, in principle we support development of this brownfield site for residential accommodation. It is the scale and the unimaginative design of the proposed building that we object to, with seemingly little thought given to the well-being of its future occupants or those of its neighbours.

We do believe an overall design that takes account of the following amendments would ameliorate the scale and size issues and result in a building that achieves empathy with this site:

1. Reducing the overall height of the development;
2. An overall reduction of around 40 to 50 flats;
3. Removing, or lowering the central block;
4. Reduction in the space given over to commercial activity;
5. Redesign of access corridors to make them spaces that emphasise safety, security and well-being;
6. Provision of more amenity open space would provide an environment and a way of life for residents that stimulates communal life and interface with their neighbours;
7. Providing access through a landscaped area;
8. Giving each elevation block on City Road a pronounced vertical frame using a different brick to give some articulation to the elevation and emphasise verticality.

We are also greatly concerned at what appears to be no specific provision for affordable housing in the development and we would expect to see an unambiguous strategy for the inclusion of such accommodation.

**The Northumberland and Newcastle Society objects to the grant of planning permission for this development.**