

Development Management Officer Report Committee Application

Summary	
Committee Meeting Date: 19 May 2015	Item Number:
Application ID: Z/2012/1428/DCA	Target Date:
Proposal: Demolition of 55-63 University Street and Queen's University garage with facade retention of 63 University Street, demolition of 101-11 Botanic Avenue with facade retention of 101-111 Botanic Avenue (to enable development of 12 HMO townhouses and 3 apartments to provide purpose built student accommodation with associated operational development)	Location: 55-63 University Street 101 -111 Botanic Avenue and Queen's University Garage University Square Mews Belfast BT7
Referral Route: Referred to Committee by Director of Planning and Place – Demolition Consent is intrinsically linked to the accompanying full application Z/2013/0012 /F Previously deferred application	
Recommendation:	Refusal
Applicant Name and Address: Queen's University Belfast Estates Department Level 5 Administration Building Belfast BT7 1NN	Agent Name and Address: Fleming Mountstephen Planning The Gasworks 5 Cromac Avenue Belfast BT7 2JA
Executive Summary: The application seeks consent to demolish in total 11 buildings (retaining the facade of 6), on a prominent corner site of Botanic Avenue and University Street. The application was presented to the Town Planning Committee on 6 June 2013 with an opinion to refuse. Members are directed to the full detailed planning report on the planning portal under application reference Z/2012/1428/DCA. Following deferral the applicant submitted a range of further information for consideration in an attempt to justify demolition of the buildings however the view remains that a strong case has not been demonstrated which justifies demolition of these buildings. The main issues in this case are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The principle of the demolition / facade retention in the Conservation Area; and • The design of the replacement scheme; 	

The applicant submitted additional reports and information following deferral, however, it is considered that the existing buildings make a positive contribution to Queens Conservation Area and no overwhelming evidence has been put forward to justify demolition in this case. The replacement scheme is considered to be unacceptable as it would result in harm to Queens Conservation Area, a view shared by the Conservation Officer. Therefore the proposed is contrary to Planning Policy Statement 6, Planning, Archaeology and Built Heritage.

A Judgement in February 2014 (Athletic Stores) in respect of demolition in a Conservation Area reinforced the Authority's policy position that strong consideration should be given to the presumption in favour of retaining unlisted buildings in the Conservation area.

No representations were received.

It is recommended that demolition consent is refused.

Signature(s):

Case Officer Report

Site Location Plan



Consultations:

Consultation Type	Consultee	Response
Internal	Conservation Officer	Objecting

Representations:

Letters of Support	None Received
Letters of Objection	None Received
Number of Support Petitions and signatures	No Petitions Received
Number of Petitions of Objection and signatures	No Petitions Received

Summary of Issues

N/A

Characteristics of the Site and Area

The site consists of a large corner site at the junction of University Street and Botanic Avenue. It encompasses properties 55-63 University Street and 101- 11 Botanic Avenue as well as a flat roof garage within University Square Mews.

Planning Assessment of Policy and Other Material Considerations

Addendum Report

The application was presented to the Town Planning Committee on 6 June 2013 with an opinion to refuse. Members are directed to the full detailed planning report on the planning portal under application reference Z/2012/1428/F.

The application was recommended to council with refusal reasons relating to impact on the loss of the buildings on the Conservation Area.

A deferred meeting was held and the applicant was given the opportunity to address the issues.

Belfast City Council considers that the existing buildings, whilst in a poor state of disrepair make a positive contribution to Queens Conservation Area. The applicant has not disagreed with this

assessment but has attempted to make a case for demolition under the policy.

Following the deferred meeting a package of information was submitted to Planning on the 18 September 2013. The package included:

1. A planning statement prepared by Fleming Mountstephen planning;
2. A building condition report prepared by Poval Worthington
3. A structural condition report prepared by Doran Consulting
4. A cost Report prepared by Hood McGowan Kirk; and
5. A Valuation / Development Appraisal Report prepared by Osborne King.

Alternative use/ Structural Condition/Costs

The Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) and Land and Property Services were consulted with the technical information.

CPD who were consulted in respect to the structural report concluded that demolition was a reasonable course of action for properties 55-61 University Street, given their condition and the extent of intervention required to retain them but did not state it was necessary or essential. They also concluded that whilst numbers 63 and 101-111 have obvious structural defects their present condition does not warrant demolition.

In respect of 55-61 University Street, it is considered that the demolition may be a reasonable course of action, but it is not the only option. CPD do not state that the buildings are beyond saving. Whilst the cost to retain them may be substantial, strong consideration must be given to the presumption of retention given the clear policy direction.

A costing report to refurbish the properties was submitted by the applicant. This report demonstrated that it would cost approximately £574,777 to refurbish properties 55-61 University Street, equating to £143k per property and £891,082 for properties 101-111 Botanic Avenue and 63 University Street, equating to £127k per property. Whilst the cost of demolishing and rebuilding the properties may be the cheaper option, the cost of refurbishment is not considered prohibitive and is achievable in terms of retaining the integrity of the CA it is the more desirable option given the thrust of the policy. It is therefore considered that the cost of refurbishment cannot be used as justification for demolition.

A development appraisal report was also submitted to demonstrate potential alternative use for both the properties in University Street and Botanic Avenue. Option 1 proposed the refurbishment and conversion to single family residential use and option 2 proposes own door office accommodation.

In respect to option 1- LPS development appraisal concluded that it would be unviable, whilst option 2 resulted in an even less viable option. It is considered that the buildings in University Street are severely dilapidated and the costing to fulfil options 1 and 2 is substantial and it could be argued that the buildings are neglected and have not benefited from regular maintenance, which if carried out may have reduced the overall costings as detailed under options 1 and 2. Therefore the cost involved in repairing does not alone hold determining weight in this instance.

Criterion (b) of paragraph 6.25 states that the Authority will require to be satisfied that genuine efforts have been made without success to continue the present use or to find compatible uses for the building. This includes the offer of unrestricted freehold of the building on the open market at a realistic price. The applicant has argued that there is a need to retain their current building stock in close proximity to the main university complex to facilitate any upward fluctuation in student numbers and therefore have decided not to put the buildings on the open market. Queens University's position in this respect is acknowledged as part their wider business

strategy aimed at ensuring enough ancillary building stock is available in close proximity to the main campus buildings.

Criterion (c) deals with the merits of alternative proposals. The architectural merit of the proposed replacement scheme does not outweigh the demolition of the existing buildings on the site. It is further considered that the preservation of the public elevations alone of a building in a conservation area which makes material contribution to its character or appearance will only be acceptable in exceptional circumstances. There are no exceptional circumstances which merit this to be permitted.

Neighbour Notification Checked

N/A

Summary of Recommendation:

The proposal is recommended for refusal as the buildings make a positive contribution to Queens Conservation Area and no overwhelming evidence has been submitted to justify their demolition.

Reasons for Refusal:

1. The proposal is contrary to Policy BH14 of the Department's Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning, Archaeology and the Built Heritage in that the buildings makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Queens Conservation Area and no exceptional reason has been demonstrated which, in the judgement of the Department, justifies its demolition.

Signature(s)

Date: