DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT

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FOR PROPERTY ALLIANCE GROUP

PROPOSALS FOR EXTERNAL WORKS & LANDSCAPING TO SPECTRUM HOUSE

THE TOWERS BUSINESS PARK, DIDSBURY, MANCHESTER

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2.0 CONTEXT, CONSTRAINTS & OPPORTUNITIES

The site is located within the village of Didsbury, Manchester, is centred around The Towers building, and sits within the St. James Conservation Area. The area is comprised of mixed development, with the site bounded by residential properties to the North (along Wilmslow Road), to the West (along Kingston Road) and to the South (along Parrs Wood Road), with sporting facilities to the East (Didsbury Cricket Club). In addition, the Manchester Metropolitan University also has a substantial campus close-by to the North.





2.0 CONTEXT, CONSTRAINTS & OPPORTUNITIES

Aerial View of Site



EXISTING BUILDINGS

01 - The Pavilion

02 - Egerton House

03 - The Towers

04 - Pioneer House

05 - Crescent House

06 - Adamson House

07 - Spectrum House

08 - Ocean House

09 - Kingston House

10 - Honeywell House

11 - Scotscroft

THE TOWERS

The Towers, a Grade II* Listed Building, is the historical heart of the site and was built over the period 1868-72 at an estimated cost of £50,000, for the then proprietor of the Manchester Guardian, John Edward Taylor. In 1874, the property was bought by the engineer Daniel Adamson and it was in his drawing room that the momentous decision to construct the Manchester Ship Canal was made on 27th June 1882.

Designed by Thomas Worthington in a florid Gothic style, The Towers was described as "the grandest of all Manchester mansions" by Sir Nikolaus Pevsner, and referred to by locals as the 'Calendar House' as they believed it to have 12 towers, 52 rooms and 365 windows. However, the accuracy of this is somewhat debatable as the building was designed during the rational Victorian-era of construction. The original driveway approached the building from Wilmslow Road (as it does today), however its grounds were not as extensive and remained largely informal, with the original Scotscroft building occupying a large proportion of the site (this was completed pre-1820). Original primary access to The Towers was set an oblique angle via the lodge house along Wilmslow Road. Secondary access was added via the lodge house along Kingston Road. More recently, primary access was relocated to a more central entrance on Wilmslow Road. It is worth noting that there has been little, or no, reference to the landscaping around The Towers and Scotscroft buildings in any of the historical sources. This is further corroborated in historical maps of The Towers over the past two centuries (please see maps overleaf).

During the Great War (1914-1918) the building was used as a recreation centre for war-wounded. In 1920 the house was bought for £10,000 to accommodate the newly-formed British Cotton Industry Research Association, later called the Shirley Institute, and today known as the BTTG (the British Textile Technology Group). The Shirley Institute was a world-leading textile research centre, with laboratories for prototype spinning, weaving and dyeing. The Institute developed many textile innovations during the 2nd World War, and invented the Tog scale and Ventile. The Institute went into decline along with the rest of the British textile industry during the mid 20th century.

At the peak of its development the Shirley Institute, along with The Towers building itself, effectively formed the natural 'hub' of the entire site. This focal point of activity has since been lost with the demise of the institute and subsequent development. The Towers has reflected Manchester's social upheaval, economic prosperity and technological innovation over the past two centuries, namely in its symbolic association with the building of the canal network and its housing of a significant element of the larger textile industry. It is now positioned to continue to serve Manchester's growing technology and service-based economy in the future.



The Towers



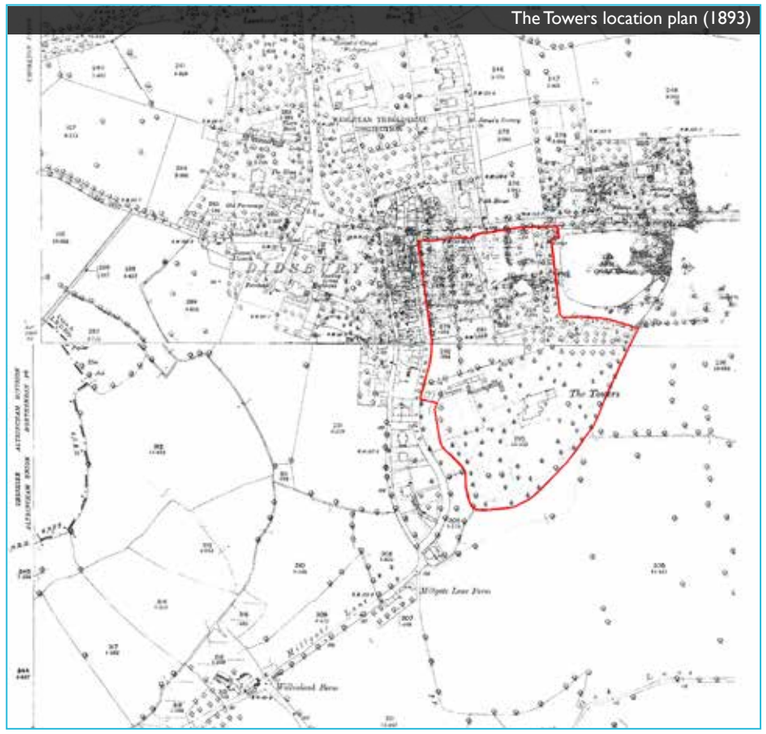
ST. JAMES CONSERVATION AREA

Prior to the Industrial Revolution, Didsbury was a small agricultural hamlet. The 19th Century brought radical change to the area as wealthy industrialists built large manors overlooking the River Mersey and on avenues such as Didsbury Park. This new house typology, with The Towers being the largest of these, brought with it aspirations of the seclusion of the country estate combined with the convenience of daily commuting to the city centre for business. With the growth of the railway network, Didsbury was absorbed into the urban growth of Manchester (officially in 1904).

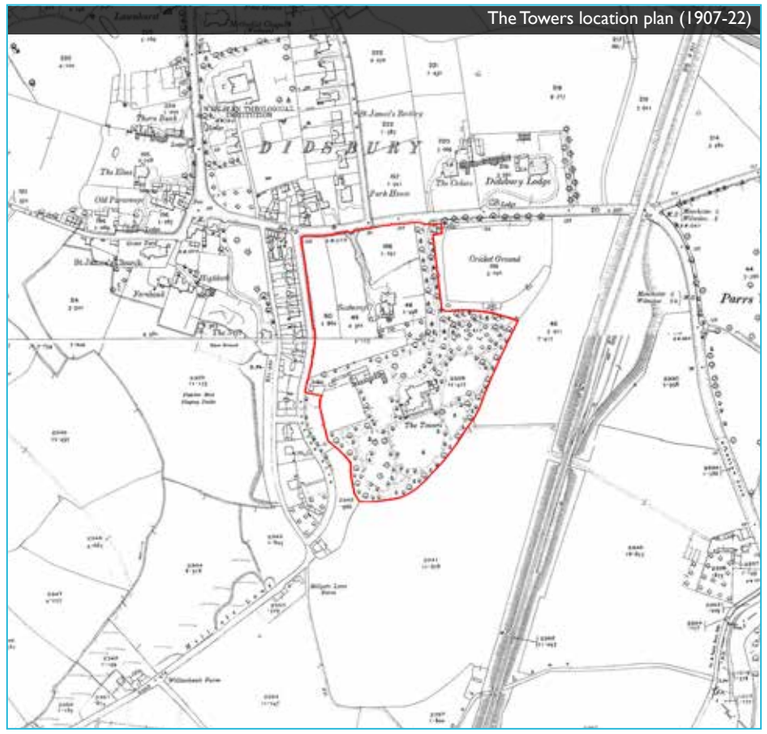
Didsbury St. James Conservation Area was designated in 1970, and it contains the largest concentration of listed buildings in Manchester (outside the city centre). Key features defining the character of the area include mature tree-lined routes, garden walls, hedges, gate posts, and porches. Architectural styles vary from Classical and Gothic of public buildings, to the French Chateau style of The Towers themselves, along with simple vernacular styles. The material palette consists mainly of red brick with blue slate roofing and stone detailing.

Over the past centuries, commercial development has not overpoweringly altered its character, with the few commercial buildings in the vicinity of the site including two public houses and a restaurant. The Shirley Institute (now the British Textile Technology Group) has long been established in the conservation area, and its use has been scientific or institutional rather than commercial. Although the glass and metal structures are not in the style of the older buildings in the conservation area they quite clearly represent the age in which they were built and to some extent replace the older 1950s buildings of far less character or interest.

The Towers location plan (1893)



The Towers location plan (1907-22)



The Towers location plan (1956-09)



PHYSICAL

The Towers Business Park is bounded by two roads, with Wilmslow Road to the North and Kingston Road to the West. To the East of the site is located the playing fields of Didsbury Cricket Club, with residential properties along Parrs Wood Road backing onto the South boundary.

Primary access to the site is provided along Wilmslow Road, with a large central entrance and a smaller entrance via the security lodge house. Existing buildings along both Wilmslow Road and Kingston Road are predominantly 2-3 storeys and are for the most part traditional red brick homes. Overall, the character of the surrounding area is defined by its mature tree-lined roads and well defined gardens.

The village in which The Towers Business Park in located is Didsbury, and it is a small suburb of Manchester comprised mostly of traditional residential areas. It contains a small commercial centre which has seen quite recent redevelopment, and this includes retail outlets, restaurants and bars, alongside newer apartment-based residential buildings.

Didsbury village centre



Residential properties on Kingston Road















Entrance approach along Wilmslow Road



The Towers Business Park comprises The Towers building itself, and several office buildings built in phases from the mid 1990s to the present, set within a large and informal mature landscape. The existing office buildings are a mixture of 'glass box' typology, alongside more traditional red brick buildings. These are less in keeping with the overall conservation area, but they do signify the age in which they were built, in turn reflecting the original pioneering architectural statement in the building of The Towers in the 19th Century.

The current owners acquired The Towers at the end of 2011. Since that time, a key objective has been to identify and implement a comprehensive and high quality masterplan of phased improvements that will address the problems arising from limited management in recent ownership. Specifically, the aim is to improve the overall environment, identity and security of the site to make it more attractive to new tenants, through the following:

- General improvements to the overall public realm and management of the external environment of the site, including maintenance of landscaped areas and improved circulation, lighting and security
- An improved and co-ordinated approach towards signage, and other amenity facilities such as cycle and refuse stores and smoking shelters
- The opening up of the main entrance onto Wilmslow Road to create an improved sense of arrival and to improve visibility of the buildings and into the site
- The creation of a focal point for people working at, and visiting, the site through a central piazza and cafe 'hub'
- An improved car parking strategy

The current application represents an important phase within the overall masterplan, relating to minor facade works and new landscaping to Spectrum House.

Entrance gateway via Wilmslow Road



Ocean House (right) & Adamson House (left)



Spectrum House



Entrance to Kingston House



Pioneer House



Scotscroft



The existing boundary treatments include a high level fence to the front perimeter and dense, wooded boundaries to the remainder of the site, with garden fences beyond. There is an opportunity to enhance the boundary treatment at the primary point of access along Wilmslow Road through the insertion of a high-impact permeable gateway.

The site does benefit from a number of existing lawns, large trees and a mixture of shrubs, however there are a number of landscape opportunities which are currently not effectively utilised.

In addition, site-wide signage provision is also an ad-hoc mixture of forms and materials, resulting in an incoherent way-finding network. The site is predominantly lit by street lighting to the perimeter and roads, with some additional low lighting to the building entrances.

The Towers



Landscape to South of Pioneer House

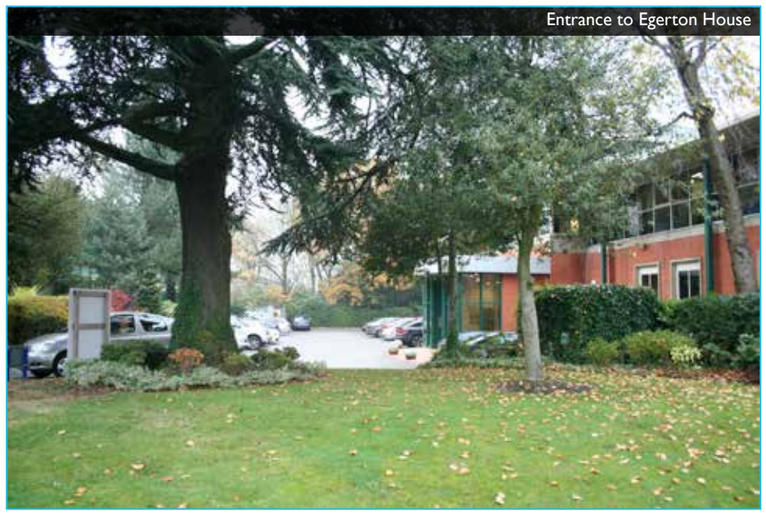


Existing signage





Entrance to Egerton House



View towards North of Scotscroft (right) & Adamson House (left)



Landscape to West of Kingston House



SOCIAL

Didsbury is a "village" within a city. Although only around three miles from the centre of Manchester, it proudly retains its village community identity. Whilst Didsbury is proud of its self-sufficiency and its old-world character, it is far from insular. Alongside its traditional shops and businesses, with the emphasis on personal service, Didsbury is also home to many of the big high-street names.

At the 1991 census it had a population of 13,387 people, with 5,798 households and the second highest number of detached houses in Greater Manchester. In recent years it has also become one of the city's liveliest wining-and-dining enclaves with a plethora of smart restaurants and café bars springing up alongside its many traditional pubs. On weekdays the bars are always fairly busy, busier if there's a sporting event on, and especially during the summer when the weather is fine. But on any day, Didsbury's continental-style pavement cafe bars are popular with locals and visitors alike..

The fact that the site sits within the St. James Conservation Area and is bounded by mature, relatively affluent residential areas will require any future development of The Towers to be designed in a sensitive and considered manner. Therefore it is important that new developments respect the existing landscaped boundaries and and have regard to views into and out of the site and the surrounding Conservation Area.

However, a unified strategic vision for the future managment and development of The Towers has the potential to raise the prestige of the area as a whole, through the provision of high quality office space fully integrated with amenities and an enhanced public realm. The improvements sought by the current owners through its masterplan aims to maintain the historical significance of The Towers, and enhance its current position as a centre for business and employment for the local community and wider region.

ECONOMIC

The Towers location and surrounding abundance of amenities are key to its tenant appeal and success to date, with the M56 less than two miles away, and both Parrs Wood leisure amenities and Didsbury village only a short walk from the site. The current and future public transport links enhance employer appeal with a nearby bus station already in existence and the new Didsbury Metrolink due for completion in 2013. The nearby East Didsbury railway station currently provides regular 12 minute journey links to Manchester City Centre and Manchester International Airport. The Towers provides a natural extension to the city as opposed to the peripheral locations of standard business parks.

The Towers is currently occupied by a number of high profile tenants including British Airways, John Lewis, Vodafone, and Cisco. The estate consists of nine office buildings, totalling 290,000 sq ft.

The Towers is a highly successful enterprise and, through the creation and sustaining of a significant number of jobs, represents an important element within the local economy of Didsbury and the wider North West region. Ultimately, The Towers has the potential to provide a boost to the local economy.

PLANNING POLICY

Policy DB12 of the previously adopted Unitary Development Plan encourages additional business development at various identified existing employment locations, including The Towers. The policy states that in considering proposals for the expansion and/or redevelopment of existing major employment sites in the area, the Council will have regard to the need to minimise detrimental impact upon environmental quality, the character of the area, residential amenity and traffic movements. The aim of this policy is to allow existing activities to develop, whilst retaining the high environmental quality that makes Didsbury an attractive place to live and work.

Policy EC9 of the more recently adopted Core Strategy notes that South Manchester is not expected to make a significant contribution to employment provision within the City. New development is expected to mainly comprise office development, although proposals for high technology industry and research will also be supported. The policy allows for employment and economic development provision to be located within existing employment locations, including the Towers and states that new development proposals should have regard to ensuring efficient use of existing employment space; and improving public transport, walking and cycling connectivity between residential neighbourhoods and employment locations.

The application proposals make provision for an improved external design for Spectrum House, including both minor alterations to the facade and landscaping to the building perimeter. The proposed improvements involve the replacement of existing external features which have limited architectural quality, and the enhancement of the landscaping within the building's periphery. The proposals will help to make the building more attractive for existing and potential tenants, and would be consistent with the underlying objectives of the Council's economic policies referred to above. At the same time, the design of the proposals ensures that the Conservation Area would be enhanced. There would be no impact on the residential amenity of surrounding residents, and the existing landscaping will be strengthened and improved.

2.0 CONTEXT, CONSTRAINTS & OPPORTUNITIES - C - DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

As the primary focus of this document, Spectrum House was studied in detail. This included the surveying and analysing of the existing building, via a combination of site visitations, drawing and 3D modelling. From this study we can conclude that, although Spectrum House remains fit for purpose internally as a high quality office building, it is in need of a minor redevelopment of its facade treatments and adjacent landscaping.

A redevelopment of the front (North and East) entrance facades, including the replacement of the existing revolving door and the insertion of new stone elements within the brick piers, would serve to strengthen the visual significance of the building, enable better integration with its surrounding landscape, and would ultimately boost its overall visibility from the road and pavement.

An opportunity to reinvigorate the architectural form and identity of Spectrum House, as well as to enhance and strengthen its landscaped setting within the overall site, is being missed, and it is the purpose of this application to address these issues, as part of a wider strategic plan for a phased development of The Towers.

Spectrum House (View A)





Existing entrance (Spectrum House)



Spectrum House location plan



Key

- Site boundary
- Key building

3.0 EVALUATION

Following the detailed analysis of the existing site, and consultations with the relevant bodies, an opportunity for the redevelopment of Spectrum House has been identified.

The guiding design intent is to enhance the architectural credentials of Spectrum House through economical interventions along the North and East facades of its entrance, which currently serve to weaken the visual quality of the building, coupled with the insertion of quality hard and soft landscaping features. These proposals form an important element within the overall strategic vision for The Towers, in terms of establishing a unifying visual identity, and the improvement of architectural quality site-wide.

The underlying logic of the proposed redevelopment is as follows:

Entrance Redevelopment

The existing metal-enclosed revolving door is to be removed and replaced with a glazed bi-parting door, with a simple glass canopy above, set back to the curtain wall. The new entrance door system will provide additional internal space, improved accessibility generally, and will also provide a more modern transition from the exterior to the interior of the building.

In addition, white granite strips are to be inserted into the central recess of the two brick piers to the front of the building and will run into the proposed hard landscaping below. This will improve the overall visual quality of the building, and help to visually link it to the proposed landscaping scheme.

Landscaping

The existing hard landscaped areas are to be redesigned using quality granite paving, visually linking to the new facade elements. Also, new high quality low-level planting and grass lawn areas will be included within the overall landscaping strategy, and will utilise the same palette of materials as is to be used across the wider redevelopment of the Towers.

The remainder of this document will put forward our detailed proposals.

4.0 DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES - A - AMOUNT OF DEVELOPMENT / B - USE / C - SCALE / D - LANDSCAPING

A - AMOUNT OF DEVELOPMENT

The scope of the proposed works to Spectrum House covers two elevations of the entrance to the building (North and East), alongside the adjacent hard and soft landscaping areas.

The proposals do not affect the overall amount of development.

B - USE

The proposed works to Spectrum House does not affect the existing commercial use of the building.

C - SCALE

The proposed facade alterations are essentially facade treatments to the existing structure. As such, the scale of the proposed works shall not alter or exceed the existing footprint of the building. This has been a key consideration from the outset, given the close proximity of local residents along Kingston Road.

D - LANDSCAPING

The proposals put forward in this document aim to create a much improved, high quality feature entrance to Spectrum House. The landscape scheme works as a stand-alone landscape scheme, but also forms visual linkages with the wider landscape proposals for the site. The use of high quality paving materials to highlight the building entrance and reflect building details is softened by the use of mixed planting, which features varied shade tolerant species, thereby complementing the planting style throughout the development.

Promote Vista Enhancement

The orientation of the paving detailing helps to enhance the link between Spectrum House and the central 'Hub' area of the site, thereby stitching the building to the overall fabric of the proposed Masterplan for The Towers (which is subject to a separate approved planning application).

Ensure Practicality and Functionality

Alongside the architectural drivers and inspiration behind the Amenity Provision design (again, subject to a separate approved planning application), the scheme's landscaping strategy has also been driven by practical constraints, in particular issues relating to maintaining secure access and servicing. The landscape screening elements will be low maintenance, and have a long life expectancy.


Clipped box hedges form strong edges to planting beds


Colour in winter (Cornus)

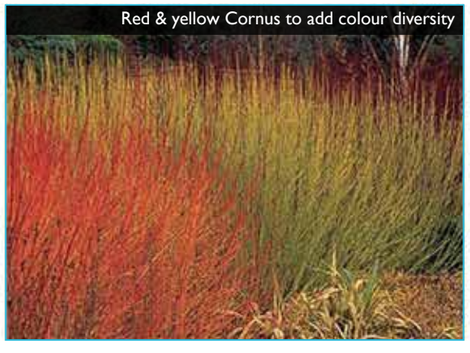

Bold blocks of planting behind a formal box hedge


Coloured foliage to lighten up shrub beds


Granite paving with contrasting edge feature


Mixture of grasses & seed heads for seasonal colour

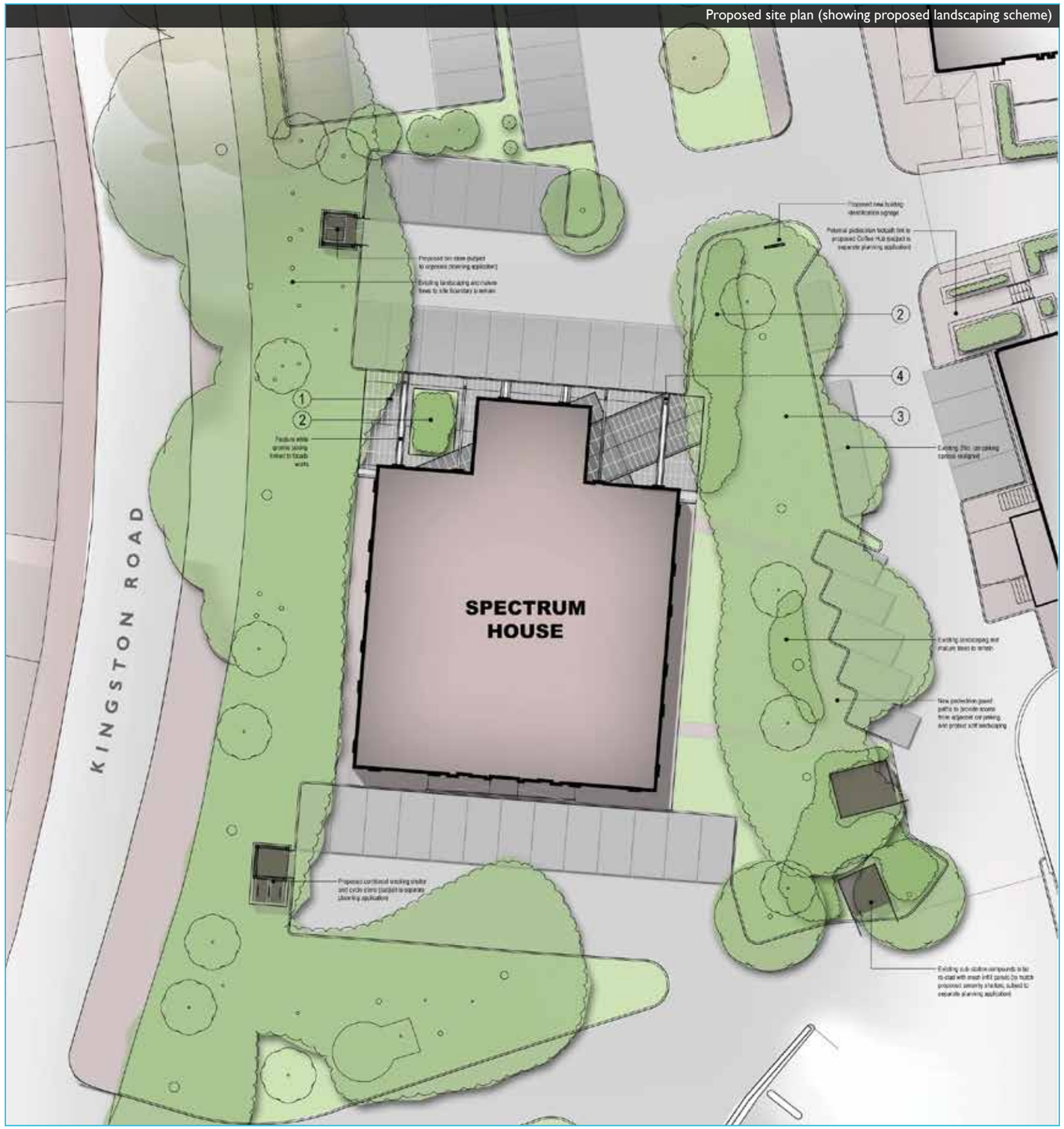

Clipped box hedge & pleached lime trees in formal setting


Red & yellow Cornus to add colour diversity


Clipped box


Granite paving with contrasting edge detail

Proposed site plan (showing proposed landscaping scheme)



4.0 DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES - E - APPEARANCE

E - APPEARANCE

The proposed works to Spectrum House will utilise high quality, durable and contextually appropriate materials. The existing metal-enclosed revolving door is to be replaced with a glass bi-parting door, with a simple glass canopy above set back to the curtain walling.

In addition, the two brick piers to the North facade are to receive a white granite strip, to match the hard landscaping, within their central recess to visually "lift" the front facade and integrate the building with landscaping scheme (please see visuals below).

It has been an important consideration from the outset that the redevelopment of Spectrum House be such that any potential impact upon the adjacent residential properties is minimised. This can be seen in the fact that the majority of alterations to the building itself are introvert in that they address the site rather than the adjacent public highway. Given the existing sensitivities surrounding the conservation area as a whole, we deemed this a prudent strategy for redevelopment.



Existing facade and entrance



Proposed improvements to facade and entrance

4.0 DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES - F - ACCESS

Inclusive Access

All of the elements that make up this proposal are responses to the existing site conditions, the need to redevelop a high-quality office building (Spectrum House), and well-informed urban design principles. A critical consideration throughout the design process is the issue of inclusive access, in terms of both pedestrian and vehicular, and designing to achieve an appropriate balance between convenience of access, circulation network logic, and the preservation of desirable vistas.

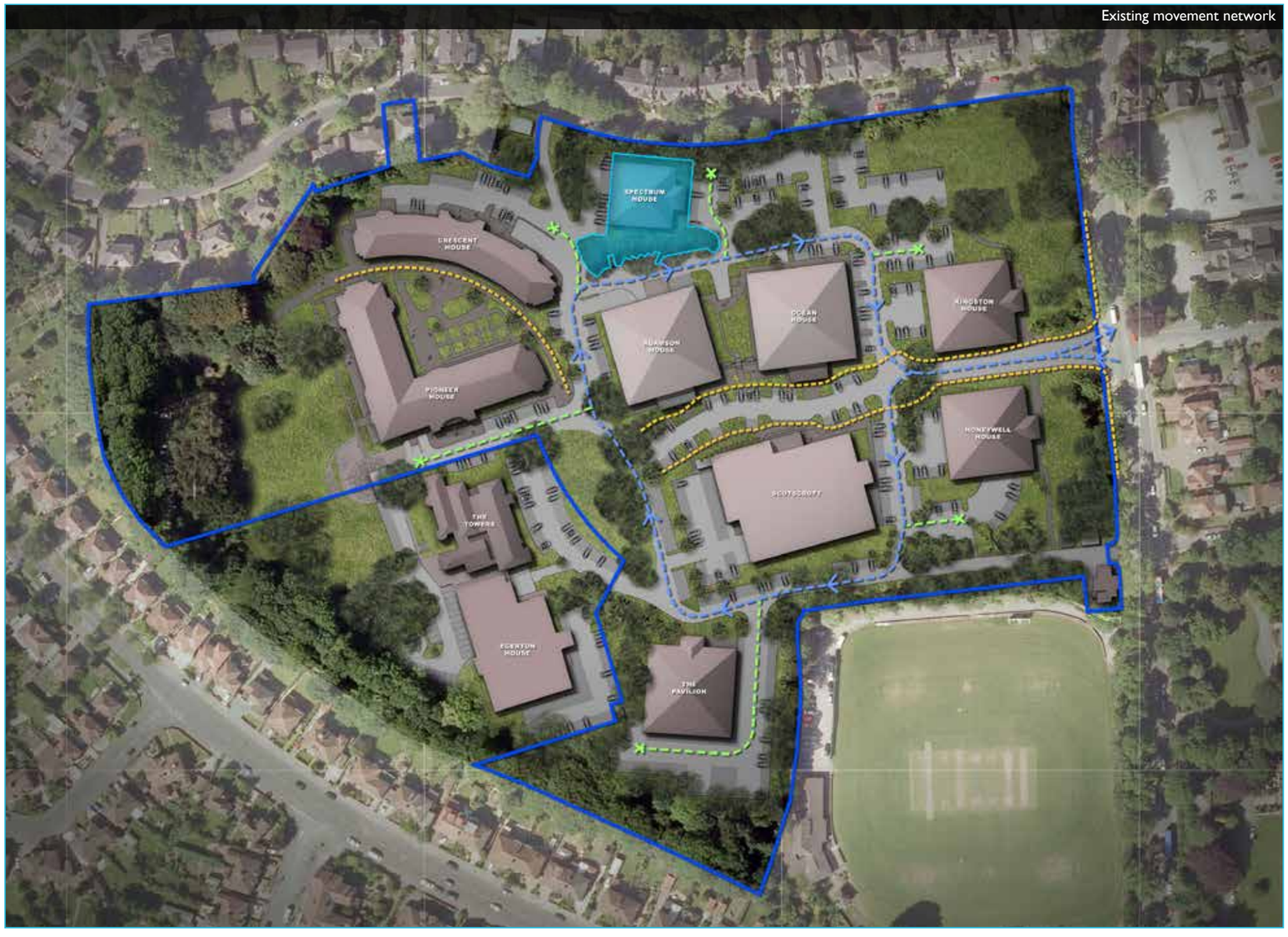
Pedestrian Network

The proposals seek to minimise any negative impact upon the existing pedestrian circulation network by leaving all existing footpaths in the vicinity of Spectrum House, that link it to the wider business park, completely intact.

Vehicular Network

Similarly, the existing vehicular network would not be affected by the current proposals. All proposed redevelopment work will maintain efficient and straightforward access by service vehicles and bicycles alike, to and from Spectrum House.

Existing movement network



Key

- Site boundary
- Key building
- Primary vehicular circulation network
- Service vehicle access point
- Primary pedestrian / cyclist route

4.0 DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES - G - DESIGNING OUT CRIME / H - SUSTAINABILITY

G - DESIGNING OUT CRIME

These proposals will not adversely affect the current site security.

H - SUSTAINABILITY

These proposals have no impact in terms of sustainability principles.

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