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Our ref TBP Meeting Pod

11th April 2025

Dear Sir/Madam

Full Planning Permission for the siting of an External Meeting Pod at land between Ocean house and Adamson House, Towers Business Park, Wilmslow Road, Didsbury, Manchester M20 2RY.

1. Introduction

We write on behalf of our client KW Towers Ltd, seeking full planning permission for erection of an external meeting pod, Towers Business Park, Wilmslow Road, Didsbury, Manchester, M20 2RY.

In addition to this letter, the following documents are submitted in support of this application:

- Application Form and Certificates;
- Site Location Plan (2004_EXTERNAL POD_111_OS MAP);
- Existing Site Layout (2004_POD_100_EXISTING LAYOUT);
- Proposed Site Layout (2004_POD_100_PROPOSED LAYOUT);
- Elevations (2004_POD_200_ELEVATIONS); and
- Floor Plan (2004_POD_201_POD FLOOR PLAN)

The application fee of £383.00 has been paid via the Planning Portal (ref: PP-13908330).

2. Site Context

The application site comprises land between Ocean House and Adamson House, Tower Business Park on Wilmslow Road, Manchester. Tower Business Park comprises of 9no. office buildings and associated car parking within landscaped parkland.

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The proposal site extends to 345 sq.m. The site is bound to the north by Ocean House,

to the east by Scotscroft, to the west by the business park internal access road and to the south by Adamson House.

The site is located in flood zone 1 and obtains low surface water flood risk. The proposal is less than 1ha in area and therefore a flood risk assessment is not required

Access to the wider site is gained from Wilmslow Road to the north, which also acts as its northern boundary. A Grade II listed gate house is located within the north east corner of the business park and to the south-east, outside of the site boundary, is the Grade II* Listed Building 'The Towers' (Shirley Institute), as seen on figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Site Heritage Context (Historic England, 2024)

Beyond the immediate site boundaries, the surrounding area is characterised by residential development, particularly to the south. To the west is significant open green space and to the east is East Didsbury train station. Non-residential uses including hotels, pubs and restaurants, a primary

school and a medical centre, are notable to the north although residential development is predominant.

The site is approximately 7km from Manchester City Centre. The site benefits from favourable transport links with adjacent roads acting as bus routes, East Didsbury train station and East Didsbury Metrolink stop approximately 0.2miles and 0.5miles, respectively, from the site entrance. The site is also in close proximity to the A34, a major road in the highway network, and the M60.

3. Heritage Context

Towers Business Park is within the Didsbury St James Conservation Area, which was designated in 1970. The Conservation Area has the greatest concentration of Listed Buildings in Manchester outside of the City Centre. Centred upon the historical core of Didsbury, at the junction of Wilmslow Road and Stenner Lane, the settlement was once an agricultural hamlet with the oldest building, The Church of St. James, dating to 1620.

The industrial revolution fuelled the growth of Didsbury with wealthy businessmen choosing to settle in the area over the course of the 19th Century. The Grade II* Listed Shirley Institute, which is located at the southern edge of Towers Business Park, dates to this era.

The Listed Buildings are evenly spread across the Conversation Area, although there is a cluster of Grade II Listed Buildings at The Grove, in the centre of the Conservation Area's boundary. Notable Listed Buildings include the aforementioned Shirley Institute and the Church of St James, as well as the Grade II Listed Fletcher Moss Art Gallery, the Grade II Listed Old Chapel Building at Didsbury Campus, and the Grade II Listed Didsbury Methodist Church of St Paul.

Towers Business Park is located in the south east corner of the Didsbury St James Conservation Area and is a well established modern development within the Conservation Area. The Grade II listed gate house and the Grade II* Listed Building 'The Towers' (Shirley Institute) are the only listed buildings in the vicinity of the Business Park, as seen on Figure 1 above.

The Business Park stands apart from the notable group of Garden listed Buildings at the grove, with Wilmslow Road acting as a natural boundary and is considered to provide little contribution to the conservation area or the listed buildings' setting.

4. Planning History

A planning history search has been undertaken via a desktop search of Manchester City Council's online public access page.

The most relevant permission to this application are summarised in the below table.

Reference	Description of Development	Decision and Date
128964/FO/2020	Elevational alterations to basement in association with the extension of existing amenity area	Approved, Mar 2021

5. Proposed Development

This application seeks full planning permission for the siting of a modular external meeting pod.

The meeting pod will be located on the raised podium area, between Ocean House and Adamson House. The site measures 345 sq.m and currently comprises a gravelled area with picnic benches, surrounded by soft landscaping.

The proposed meeting pod measures 24sq.m GEA and will rely upon existing access arrangements to the location. The pod will be located on the central gravelled area of the podium.

Full specifications of the modular meeting pod and maintenance schedule has been provided as part of the application submission. The key elements of the proposed pod comprise:

- A sliding louvre / privacy screen
- Full height windows
- An external rainwater drainage system
- A mini kitchen including:
    - A sink with contemporary mono mixer tap with stainless steel bowl,
    - A double door base unit with integrated fridge/freezer.
    - An under-sink water heater and internal drainage.

Full details of the materials of the proposed meeting pod are provided on drawings:

- 2004_POD_200_ELEVATIONS

- 2004_POD_201_POD FLOOR PLAN

Towers Business Park currently services approximately 2,000 employees across a number of businesses. While many businesses have their own meeting room space provided as part of their internal fit-out, the business park also offers 3no. bookable meeting room facilities that can be used whenever any business may require additional meeting space. The current facilities are all located within the existing office buildings and may be subject to change / reprovided in the business park if required.

The existing meeting room facilities are as follows:

- Scotscroft Building - Lower Ground Floor Meeting Room - Hosts up to 12 people (Fully accessible with disabled toilet on same floor and tea point adjacent)

- Adamson Building - 2nd Floor Meeting Room - Hosts up to 8 people (Fully accessible with tea point adjacent - disabled toilet on ground floor)

- Adamson Building 2nd Floor Video Conference Room - Hosts up to 4 people with video conferencing facilities (Fully accessible with tea point adjacent - disabled toilet on ground floor)

These flexible meeting spaces have proved very popular with the existing businesses on the Business Park and as a result, the applicant has explored options to provide further meeting room facilities within the Business Park. As the Park is fully let, it is not possible to provide the facilities within the existing buildings. As such, the modular pod is seen as the most suitable option to improve the facilities offered at the Business Park and fully service the existing businesses.

6. Planning Policy Considerations

When determining any planning application, the relevant planning authorities are under a statutory obligation as imposed by Section 54A of the Town and Country Planning Act, repeated in section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, to make their determination in accordance with the Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 amended section 38 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act to add that regard must be given to the National Development Management Policies (NDMPs) and that where there is a conflict between development plan policies and NDMPs, 'the conflict must be

resolved in favour of the national development management policy'. As yet, NDMPs have not been published for consultation and have not been adopted.

The principal Development Plan documents against which planning applications for development in Manchester are considered, currently comprise the following:

- Manchester Core Strategy, adopted July 2012
- Unitary Development Plan 'Extant Policies', adopted July 1995
- The Addendum to the Manchester Core Strategy, adopted March 2024
- Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan, adopted March 2024

Other material considerations will include the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) issued by central government, emerging local policies, and guidance.

The Development Plan

According to the adopted Policy Map, the site is allocated as *'Economic Development'* (DB12a - UDP Area 15 Didsbury) and also falls within the Didsbury St James Conservation Area and the South Manchester policy area.

Economic Development

As previously stated, the site is part of an Economic Development Area, Towers Business Park. Policy CB12a (of the extant UDP) sets out that Towers Business Park is a key area within Didsbury for Economic Development and:

> *'Further business development will be permitted'… 'expansion and/or redevelopment of existing major employment sites in the area, will have regard to the need to minimise detrimental impact upon environmental quality, the character of the area, residential amenity and traffic movements'.*
>
> The policy reasoning goes on to explain that the *'The council wishes to allow existing activities to develop but retain the high environmental quality which makes Didsbury an attractive place to live and work.'*

Additionally, Local Plan Policy EC 2 *'Existing Employment Space'* supports the retention and enhancement of existing employment sites and safeguards against alternative uses, subject to criteria requirements.

Local Plan Policy EC 9 'South Manchester' maintains that '*new development is expected to mainly comprise office development, although proposals for high technology industry and research will also be supported. Employment and economic development provision will be within existing employment locations, such as Business Parks, such as, Towers, Didsbury Point, Christie Fields and Parkway; Christies Hospital; Along Princess Parkway; and District Centres of Chorlton, Didsbury, Fallowfield, Levenshulme and Withington. These will be suitable for mixed use development providing local needs and services. Development proposals and planning applications should have regard to ensuring efficient use of existing employment space...'*

Heritage & Conservation

The site falls within the Didsbury St James Conservation Area. UDP Policy DC 18 states that:

> *'the* Council will seek to preserve and enhance the character of designated conservation areas by carefully considering…the relationship of new structures to neighbouring buildings and spaces; the effect of major changes to the appearance of existing buildings; the desirability of retaining existing features, such as boundary walls, gardens, trees, (including *street trees); the effect of signs and advertisements'.*

UDP Policy DC 19 Listed Buildings sets out that:

> *'in determining applications for listed building consent or planning applications for development involving or having an impact on buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest, the Council will have regard to the desirability of securing the retention, restoration, maintenance and continued use of such buildings and to protecting their general setting.'*

Local Plan Policy EN 3 also sets out that:

> *'New developments must be designed so as to support the Council in preserving or, where possible, enhancing the historic environment, the character, setting and accessibility of areas and buildings of acknowledged importance, including scheduled ancient monuments, listed buildings, registered parks and gardens, conservation areas and archaeological remains.'*

Design and Access

Policy DM1 states that all development should have regard to specific issues, including:

- *Appropriate siting, layout, scale, form, massing, materials and detail.*

- *Impact on the surrounding areas in terms of the design, scale and appearance of the proposed development. Development should have regard to the character of the surrounding area*
- *Accessibility: buildings and neighbourhoods fully accessible to disabled people, access to new development by sustainable transport modes.*
- *Community safety and crime prevention.*
- *Adequacy of internal accommodation and external amenity space.*

Policy EN1 Design Principles and Strategic Character Areas states that:

> *'All development in Manchester will be expected to follow the seven principles of urban design, and have regard to the strategic character area in which the development is located.'*

NPPF (2024)

Chapter 6, Paragraph 85 of the NPPF also sets out that:

> *'Planning policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development.'*

Chapter 16 outlines policy in respect of the historic environment. When considering potential impacts to heritage assets, Paragraph 219 explains that:

> *'Local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development within Conservation Areas and World Heritage Sites, and within the setting of heritage assets, to enhance or better reveal their significance. Proposals that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to the asset (or which better reveal its significance) should be treated favourably.'*

Paragraph's 220 and 221 elaborate on this stating that:

> *'Not all elements of a Conservation Area or World Heritage Site will necessarily contribute to its significance.'* (p220) and that '*Local planning authorities should assess whether the benefits of a proposal for enabling development, which would otherwise conflict with planning policies but which would secure the future conservation of a heritage asset, outweigh the disbenefits of departing from those policies.'* (p221).

Chapter Paragraph 131 sets out the national design principles:

'The creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities. Being clear about design expectations, and how these will be tested, is essential for achieving this. So too is effective engagement between applicants, communities, local planning authorities and other interests throughout the process.'

7. Justification

This application proposes an external meeting pod at land between Ocean House and Adamson House, Towers Business Park, Didsbury.

Principle of Development

The meeting pod is proposed within an allocated 'Economic Development' area and within the existing business park. The proposal site currently comprises hardstanding and is predominantly bound by the existing office buildings of TBP, so as to not impact on the heritage context of the surrounding area. Consequently, it is considered that the principle for ancillary office facilities such as the meeting pod, is accepted on this site.

Furthermore, the site is considered to be of adequate distance from the Grade II listed gate house (in the north east corner of the site), and the Grade II Listed Building The Shirley Institute located south of the site, and is not anticipated to impact the setting of the 2no. listed buildings.

As seen on Figure 1 above, the site and the Listed Gate House are separated by Ocean House, Honeywell House, Scotscroft, associated access roads, soft landscaping, and mature trees. Similarly, the proposal site and The Shirley Institute are separated by Adamson House, 2no. car parks, associated access roads, soft landscaping and mature trees.

The proposal is therefore considered to accord with UDP Policy DC 18, DC 19, Local Planning Policy EN3, and NPPF Paragraph 219.

Economic Development

The meeting pod will enable further business development at TBP, by meeting the need for an increased supply of high-quality facilities within the Business Park. This will allow the local businesses to invest and adapt to their changing needs, whilst having regard to the surrounding character of the

area. The proposal is therefore considered to comply with UDP Policy CB12a, Local Plan Policy EC 2, EC 9; and NPPF Paragraph 85.

Design

The proposed meeting pod is considered minor in scale, form and layout and has been designed to a high quality which mirrors the surrounding office buildings.

The proposal is not considered to be a material change to the current use of the site and has been designed to ensure the impacts of the proposed works on the heritage context of the site and Didsbury St James Conservation Area are negligible.

The meeting pod will rely upon existing access arrangements and will provide further meeting room facilities for the business park. It is acknowledged that there is no accessible access route to the meeting pod, however, the business park already obtains 3no. accessible meeting rooms, as set out in Section 5 above, that are bookable for all business within TBP. The meeting pod proposed as part of this application, is proposed as an additional facility to alleviate pressures on the existing meeting rooms and offer an alternative option to free up space in the fully accessible meeting rooms.

Therefore, the proposal is considered to be in accordance with Local Plan Policy EN1 and NPPF Paragraph 131 and largely accord with Local Plan Policy DM1 and MCC Design for Access Planning Guidance SPD, with multiple accessible alternatives available on site.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

In England, BNG is mandatory under Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as inserted by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021). Developers must deliver a BNG of 10% to create more or better-quality natural habitat than there was before development.

Exemptions to BNG include development below a de minimis threshold. Any development that does not impact a priority habitat and impacts less than 25 square metres of non-priority onsite habitat or 5m for non-priority onsite linear habitats, falls within the de minimus exemption.

The list of priority habitats is published by the government[1], none of which are located on or near the application site. Therefore, the 25 sq.m threshold applies.

For this application, the proposed meeting pod measures 24 sq.m, which falls below the 25 sq.m threshold. Furthermore, the pod is to be located on gravelled hard standing, classed as sealed

[1] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/habitats-and-species-of-principal-importance-in-england

surfaces which are assigned a zero score in the statutory biodiversity metric, meaning that these surfaces are effectively exempted from the 10% net gain requirement.

Having regard to the above, it is concluded that the proposal engages the de minimis exception set out above and therefore, a BNG assessment is not required.

8. Summary and Conclusions

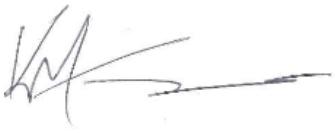
The site is located in south east Didsbury. The site is located as an ‘Economic Development’ area and also falls within the Didsbury St James Conservation Area and policy areas South Manchester and UDP Area 15 Didsbury.

The proposal comprises the erection of a meeting pod at land between Ocean House and Adamson House, Towers Business Park.

The proposal will enable the existing employment site to invest and adapt to their changing needs, whilst having regard to the surrounding heritage context. The proposal has been designed to be in keeping with the existing building and its surroundings and it is anticipated to have a negligible impact on the Didsbury St James Conservation Area and 2no. listed buildings.

It is considered that the development is therefore in line with national and local policy. It supports the economic function of Towers Business Park and seeks to protect the setting of the Didsbury St James Conservation Area and Shirley institute. We therefore respectfully request that this application is supported, and Planning Permission is granted.

Yours Faithfully,



Keith Jones

Director