



<b>Pre-Application Reference:</b>	<b>PE/00680/2017</b>
<b>Location:</b>	<b>NEOPOST HOUSE, SOUTH STREET, ROMFORD</b>
<b>Ward:</b>	<b>HYLANDS</b>
<b>Description:</b>	<b>3 X NEW RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS AND EXTENSION TO EXISTING BUILDING TO PROVIDE 122 UNITS AND NEW GP SURGERY</b>
<b>Case Officer:</b>	<b>STEFAN KUKULA</b>

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## 1 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 This proposed development is being presented to enable Members of the committee to view it before a planning application is submitted and to comment upon it. The development does not constitute an application for planning permission and any comments made upon it are provisional and subject to full consideration of any subsequent application and the comments received as a result of consultation, publicity and notification.
- 1.2 The proposed detailed planning application has been the subject of two pre-application meetings with Officers, on 10 August 2017, and 3 March 2018. There was also a site meeting that Officers attended on 23 August 2017.
- 1.3 The scheme has continued to be developed following feedback from the pre-application meetings and from community engagement undertaken during May and June 2018. The developer has discussed the proposals with residents' groups, ward councillors and the Leader of the Council.

## **2 PROPOSAL AND LOCATION DETAILS**

### **2.1 Proposal**

- Erection of 3 x new residential buildings adjacent to Neopost House; block A of 8 storey height on the frontage to Roneo Corner, blocks B and C of 7 storeys and 5 storeys respectively alongside Neopost House on its eastern side, along the boundary with B&Q. Erection of an additional floor on the existing Neopost House.
- The 3 new blocks and new floor would comprise 122 new dwellings, of which 25% will be affordable. Neopost House itself has been granted Prior Approval for conversion to residential use.
- A new GP Surgery will be provided within block A.
- Vehicle access will be as at present from South Street and new pedestrian accesses from South Street and Roneo Corner are proposed.
- Amenity space for the development will be created through the provision of a communal podium garden at level 1, as well as private terraces and balconies. Parking is provided below, at ground floor level.

### **2.2 Site and Surroundings**

- The site is located close to the junction of Roneo Corner and Rom Valley Way, on the south side of Romford Town centre, in an area of mixed uses.
- The site has reasonable access to public transport and other services, it is a little over half a mile (10-15 minutes' walk) to the railway station and has a PTAL of between 2 and 4
- Neopost House is a prominent building existing on the proposed application site. Access to the site and its ground floor parking is from South Street. Immediately to the west the first phase of the Vickers House development has been completed and this consists of 9 storeys. Phase 2 also of 9 storeys to front Roneo Corner will follow shortly and has planning consent.
- East of Neopost House is the Tesco and B&Q but the surrounding area to the north, west and south is predominantly residential.

## **Planning History**

2.3 The following planning decision is relevant to the application:

J0016.16 Prior Approval for conversion of Neopost House to 120 flats.  
Approved December 2016

J0027.17 Prior Approval for conversion of Neopost House to 112 flats.  
Approved 16 January 2018.

J0010.18 Prior Approval for conversion of Neopost House to 120 flats.  
Approved 10 April 2018

J0018.18 Prior Approval for conversion of Neopost House to 109 flats.  
Approved 20 June 2018

## **3 CONSULTATION**

3.1 At this stage, it is intended that the following will be consulted regarding any subsequent planning application:

- London Fire Brigade
- Environment Agency
- Historic England
- Thames Water
- Essex and Suffolk Water
- EDF Energy
- National Grid
- CCG

## **4 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

4.1 In accordance with planning legislation, the developer has consulted the local community on these proposals as part of the pre-application process.

4.2 The public consultation ran from Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> May to 31<sup>st</sup> May, involving face-to-face through door knocking, through the online dedicated website, through press release, through the distribution of printed materials, and through the public exhibition with residents and wider stakeholders on 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> May.

4.3 As a result of the community consultation exercise, the developer has changed the plans to include a GP surgery.

## **5 MATERIAL PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

5.1 The main planning issues raised by the application that the committee must consider are:

- Principal of development
- Quantum and height of development
- Quality of Design/Impacts on living conditions
- Parking/Traffic
- Affordable Housing

### **5.2 Principal of Development**

- This is a brownfield site close to Romford Town Centre that is no longer required for its existing use. At all levels of planning policy, including the emerging Local Plan there is strong encouragement to maximise the use of such sites when they become available. Bringing forward this type of site that could be delivered in the short term will support the Council in meeting its housing requirement and identifying a 5-year supply of housing land.
- The site has no formal allocation for a specific use. The Council's Proposed Modifications following the submission of the Local Plan state that Romford has potential for significant regeneration and intensification, and national, London Plan and local policies seek to optimise the use of brownfield land for meeting the demand for new homes, and other growth. The site is not designated as an employment area. Although not implemented, it could be said that a residential use has been established through the grant of Prior Approval for the conversion of Neopost House. There are therefore no policy objections to the loss of office and providing additional residential units.

### **5.3 Quantum and Height of Development**

- The proposed density would exceed the ranges identified in the current London Plan and the adopted Local Development Framework. The emerging London Plan suggests moving away from the density matrix approach however, and in any case, density is only one indication of the appropriateness of proposed development. What would be important in assessing such a high density proposal is whether it delivers sufficient quality of design and provides a high quality living environment for future occupiers.

- The existing Neopost House (6 storeys), adjacent Vickers House (up to 9 storeys), and to some extent the YMCA building opposite (11 storeys), has established the principle of taller buildings close to the very dominant and extensive highway infrastructure at this junction. However, the height and scale of buildings surrounding the site reduces to the north of the site. Buildings of the height proposed, ranging from 5 to 8 storeys, could be considered appropriate in this context although there may be concerns over proximity of the buildings to the boundaries of adjacent sites in terms of amenity impact and/or prejudicing development of surrounding land, in accordance with Policy DC61 of the LDF and policies 7 and 10 of the submitted Local Plan. Staff have expressed concern over this impact to the developers.

#### 5.4 **Quality of Design/Impacts on Living Conditions**

- The proposed buildings would be in fairly close proximity to the existing Neopost House and the site boundaries and this may raise concerns regarding quality environment for existing and future residents in terms of light and outlook as well as concern over prejudicing the future development of adjacent sites, requirements of Policies DC61 of the LDF and 7 and 10 of the submitted Local Plan.
- The proposal includes a shared podium amenity deck, although the quality of this and ease of access for all future occupiers has not been demonstrated to date. For a number of the proposed dwellings balconies and main outlook is to the B&Q service yard or Roneo Corner and there may be concerns regarding noise impact/disturbance to future occupiers. A number of the proposed dwellings are single aspect north facing which can offer poor quality living environment.
- The quality of pedestrian access to the proposed buildings will also need to be demonstrated – as presently illustrated, pedestrians would walk alongside access roads/through parking areas to access entrances to cores under the podium or via stairs and safe and attractive design/access for pedestrian including disabled/pushchairs should be fully appreciated in any submitted proposal.

#### 5.5 **Parking/Traffic**

- It is not anticipated that the proposals will generate materially more traffic than the present office use which has 117 parking spaces. The proposal is for 120 parking spaces which would include spaces for the existing Neopost House (to be converted to flats) equating to 0.52 spaces per

dwelling. This could be considered low, but this is in line with the submitted Local Plan (Policy 24) and the majority of proposed dwellings are 1-2 bed small units and there is sufficient access to services and public transport. Car club spaces are also proposed and consideration will need to be given on whether access to on-street parking permits should be restricted.

## 5.6 **Affordable Housing**

- 25% affordable housing is proposed. It is proposed that the affordable housing provision will be compliant with Council's preferred mix; i.e. 70% social rented, 30% intermediate/shared ownership. Some of the 2 bed units have been enlarged to accommodate 4 persons as requested in our Pre-Application discussions. Some 1 bed units could be allocated to key workers. As the amount of affordable housing is below the 35% required by the Mayor's policy, a viability exercise will need to be carried out.

## **Financial and Other Mitigation**

5.7 The proposal would attract the following section 106 contributions to mitigate the impact of the development:

- Up to £732,000 towards the provision of new school places
- Contributions to improved pedestrian/cycle access in vicinity of site

5.8 The proposal would attract the following Community Infrastructure Levy contributions to mitigate the impact of the development:

- £150,000 Mayoral CIL towards Crossrail

## 5.9 **Other Planning Issues**

- Archaeology
- Consideration of microclimate
- Servicing Management Plan
- Sustainable design and construction measures
- Secured by Design

## **Conclusions**

- 5.10 The proposed development has been considered at two pre-application meetings with officers, and the scheme has been developed as a result. There are some aspects that require further work as identified in this report and Members' guidance will be most helpful to incorporate as the various elements are brought together.