



Pre-Application Reference:	PE/00778/2019
Location:	NEOPOST HOUSE, SOUTH STREET, ROMFORD
Ward:	HYLANDS
Description:	ERECTION OF FOUR BLOCKS TO PROVIDE 100 RESIDENTIAL UNITS
Case Officer:	SIMON THELWELL

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 In June 2019, planning permission was refused for development for three blocks ranging from 5 to 8 storeys to the southern and eastern parts of the site adjacent to the retained Neopost House to provide 104 units. Reasons for refusal included a poor pedestrian environment dominated by parking; poor privacy, outlook and daylight for future occupiers due to close proximity of blocks; development prejudicing future development of adjoining land through placing elevation on the boundary; inadequate amenity space in terms of quantum and quality; single aspect poor quality dwellings. A scheme similar to that subject of refusal, was subject to pre-application developer presentation to Members of the Strategic Planning Committee in July 2018.
- 1.3 The applicant has been seeking to address the reasons for refusal and has been engaged in pre-application meetings with officers. The new proposal has also been subject to Quality Review Panel (QRP) which took place on 5th September 2019. The scheme has continued to be developed following feedback from the QRP and officer comments.

2 PROPOSAL AND LOCATION DETAILS

2.1 Proposal

As last seen by officers, the proposal was for the following (may be subject to change as a result of feedback given):

- Erection of 4 x new residential buildings adjacent to Neopost House; block A of 11 storey height on the frontage to Roneo Corner, blocks B, D and D of 5-7 storeys alongside Neopost House on its eastern side, close to the boundary with B&Q.
- The 4 new blocks would comprise 100 new dwellings, of which 35% will be affordable. Neopost House itself has been granted Prior Approval for conversion to residential use and is currently being converted.
- 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 communal gardens at ground floor, as well as private gardens/terraces and balconies. Parking is provided 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 has not yet been constructed.
- 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

J0038.18 Prior Approval for conversion of Neopost House to 109 flats
Approved 21 December 2018

P1726.18 Replacement of all existing windows with new casing and glazing
and associated alterations
Approved 11 January 2019

P0030.19 Three blocks ranging from 5 to 8 storeys above deck level,
providing 104 residential dwellings (Use Class C3) and erection of 6
residential dwellings (Use Class C3) to form an additional floor on Neopost
House
Refused 14 June 2019

P0883.19 Erection of additional storey to provide 6 flats
Under consideration

P1022.19 New Substation
Approved 21 August 2019

J0030.19 Prior Approval for conversion of Neopost House to 115 flats. Under
consideration

3 CONSULTATION

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

- Mayor of London (GLA)
- London Fire Brigade

- Environment Agency
- Historic England
- Thames Water
- Essex and Suffolk Water
- EDF Energy
- National Grid

4 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- 4.1 In accordance with planning legislation, the developer is planning to consult with the local community on these proposals as part of the pre-application process. This is due to take place following feedback from this Committee.

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
- QRP Feedback

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.
- 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. 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. The buildings proposed to the rear of the site, ranging from 5 to 7 storeys, could be considered appropriate in this context. The proposed 11 storey building to the front of the site facing Rom Valley Way represents an increase in three storeys from the previous application and would need to be justified through a thorough townscape and contextual approach and Members may wish to comment on this part of the proposal.

5.4 Quality of Design/Impacts on Living Conditions

- Previously, with regard to the refused application, there were concerns that proposed buildings would be in fairly close proximity to the existing Neopost House and the site boundaries resulting in poor 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. The revisions that have been made seek to address this by reducing the width of the rear buildings and setting them off from the boundary. The results are considered to be an improvement to existing and proposed residential amenity.
- The refused proposal included a shared podium amenity deck and single aspect units right on the boundary to the B&Q service yard. The revised plans address this concern through being dual aspect and set off the boundary. Amenity space is now at ground floor and the quantum and quality of this would need to be assessed. A number of the proposed dwellings remain as single aspect north facing which can offer poor quality living environment and this will need to be considered carefully in assessing the overall acceptability of the proposal.

- With the previous proposal, the quality of pedestrian access to the proposed buildings was a concern with conflict with vehicles and lack of legibility to proposed routes. The revised proposals seek to create a generous pedestrian entrance separated from vehicles from the pedestrianised part of South Street and this is considered to be an appropriate response to the issues raised.

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 refused application proposed 120 parking spaces. As a result of the revisions made, principally to set buildings off the boundaries and create attractive ground floor routes and spaces for pedestrians/residents, the number of parking spaces proposed has been reduced – exact numbers to be confirmed. A reduced parking provision would be in line with the submitted Local Plan (Policy 24), given the sites proximity to the town centre and public transport and the majority of proposed dwellings being 1-2 bed units. 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

- 35% 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. This is in accordance with policy requirements.

5.7 Quality Review Panel (QRP) Comments

- The submitted planning application was subject to QRP (Chair and Vice Chair Review) which formed the basis of the conclusion regarding the poor quality of the proposal.
- The QRP (Chair and Vice-Chair Review) have reviewed the revised proposals and made the following comments:

The panel feels that the proposals are significantly improved from those presented at the previous review, and in particular it welcomes the decision to step back from the eastern boundary of the site. The pedestrian entrance from the pedestrianised section of South Street has also been improved. In addition, the panel feels that relocating the play space to the south of the mansion flat blocks is successful.

There are however still unresolved issues. Given the density of the scheme, it needs to provide a very high quality of public realm, with as much greenery as possible. This public space will require a secure maintenance plan as a condition of consent, to ensure a high quality place is created. The boundary along the western edge of the development is particularly important and should be well-defined and greened to contribute to an attractive pedestrian route along South Street and to signal the entrance to the development. In addition, the panel feels that the increase in height to eleven storeys on Roneo Corner is problematic in terms of massing and the weight of development on a busy road. It is broadly supportive of the design of the mansion blocks to the east of the site, but that Block A is relatively underdeveloped and requires further work to produce a successful building.

Financial and Other Mitigation

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

- Contributions to improved pedestrian/cycle access in vicinity of site

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

- £25 per square metre Mayoral CIL towards Crossrail
- £125 per square metre Havering CIL

5.10 Other Planning Issues

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

Conclusions

5.10 Following refusal of the earlier scheme, the proposed revisions have been considered at pre-application meetings with officers and by the QRP, with the scheme being 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.