EIA Quality Mark
Case Study

Key Issues –
Following the introduction of the 2017 EIA Regulations, the scoping process for this EIA was a key action from the beginning of the project to ensure it was limited to those aspects of the environment that are likely to be significantly affected. In particular, this included:

- The expected visual impact of the proposal was a key consideration across both the TVIA and Heritage due to the prominence of the site, as well as potential cumulative developments coming forward in the area affecting the methodology.
- The Heritage technical discipline was scoped in to the EIA and through the scoping exercise, Deloitte sought to scope out a number of heritage assets prior to undertaking the full Heritage Assessment where it was unlikely the proposed development would cause a significant effect.

Additionally, the constraints of the site required careful consideration through the EIA process, notably the close proximity and density of neighbouring buildings making wind and daylight / sunlight key technical assessments key.

Purpose of the project
The proposed development was for a 36 storey Purpose Built Student Accommodation tower within Leeds City Centre on the site of a vacant office building. The developer and client was Olympian Homes and the building will be operated by an established student accommodation management company.

Description of the project
The site is located within the Arena Quarter in Leeds City Centre, which is undergoing significant regeneration. The site is particularly constrained at only 0.21ha, with tall buildings close to the developer’s ownership boundary to the north and west, limiting the developable footprint. The site attracted a high level of interest in the City, being a vacant site in this important regeneration area for Leeds, and located adjacent to the Leeds Arena. It is also at one of the highest points of the City Centre meaning any tall building development at this location would be highly visible. There are 80+ designated heritage assets within the catchment area of the site, including Grade II, II* and Grade I listed buildings and a number of conservation areas.
Lessons learnt

The constrained and prominent nature of the site required significant consideration of the interaction of the proposed development both with its immediate surroundings and further afield. These considerations were key in the design of the development, and the initial EIA assessments informed this process.

Particularly relevant was the impact in respect of Sunlight and Daylight impacts and wind microclimate, where the balance of the tightly constrained site with the impact on the existing neighbouring buildings required iterative design approaches to minimise these impacts.

Following this process, a wind tunnel test was undertaken early in the design process, seeking to ensure that any design alterations required to mitigate potential wind impacts could be designed into the scheme.

This allowed a cut back in the ground floor of the building to be designed in, and wind baffles to be designed into the landscaping scheme early in the design process and avoided the need to retrospectively include the wind mitigation that could have been less effective in reducing the potential wind impact.

Following the recent guidance updates to confirm that an EIA assessment should only be undertaken where a significant effect was likely, we front loaded the scoping process for the Heritage technical discipline.

An initial desk based study was undertaken to identify heritage assets within a 500m radius of the Site which identified over 80 listed buildings. The desk study was then extended with a site visit to determine which assets could be potentially impacted by the proposals.

Lessons learnt cont.

Due to the topography of the City Centre and the views in which the assets were appreciated, we were able to scope half of the assets out where there would not be a likely significant effect. This approach was agreed with the Local Planning Authority.

The scoping response from Historic England identified a number of highly graded assets within the City further afield than the 500m buffer that they considered could be affected by the proposal. Further assessment proved that they would not be significantly affected but for future assessments of buildings of scale we should note that the potential impact is further reaching than the usual buffer radius.

The cumulative assessment scenario was also important as a number of high density developments were proposed in the area, including some at planning stage. It was agreed with the Local Planning Authority that in this instance the developments at planning stage would be included in the cumulative assessment due to the proximity and scale. It was considered that the potential forthcoming developments should be considered given the high potential for cumulative impacts.

The cumulative assessment was particularly relevant in this case study as in a number of Heritage and Townscape views the committed developments completely screened the proposed development from view.

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