



PLANNING COMMITTEE: 8 March 2011
DIRECTORATE: Planning and Regeneration
HEAD OF PLANNING: Susan Bridge

APP: N/2010/0320 (Listed Building Consent) and
N/2010/0906 (Planning Permission)
Erection of two storey visitors centre at base
of tower
Northampton Lift Testing Tower, Weedon
Road

WARD: St James

APPLICANT: Peter Sullivan
AGENT: Sansome Hall Architects

REFERRED BY: Councillor Pam Varnsverry
REASON: Parking

DEPARTURE: No

APPLICATIONS FOR DETERMINATION;

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1 REFUSE planning application N/2010/0906 for the following reasons:

- (1) By reason of its design, siting, size, massing and footprint the proposal would represent an incongruous form of development detrimental to the character, appearance and setting of the host building, a Grade II Listed Building, contrary Policy E20 of the Northampton Local Plan, Policy 2 and Policy 27 of the East Midlands Regional Plan and the aims and objectives of PPS1 and PPS5.
- (2) By reason of the scale and nature of the proposal combined with its siting within a residential area, the development would result in increased disturbance, nuisance, noise and general activity to the detriment of the living conditions and general amenity of the area contrary to advice in PPG24.

- 1.2 **REFUSE listed building consent application N/2010/0320** for the following reason:

By reason of its design, siting, size, massing and footprint the proposal would represent an incongruous form of development detrimental to the character, appearance and setting of the host building, a Grade II Listed Building, contrary Policy E20 of the Northampton Local Plan, Policy 2 and Policy 27 of the East Midlands Regional Plan and the aims and objectives of PPS1 and PPS5.

2. THE PROPOSAL

- 2.1 Full planning permission and Listed Building Consent are sought for the erection of a 2 storey visitor centre at the base of the National Express Lifts Tower, off Weedon Road, Northampton.

- 2.2 It is proposed to erect a two storey extension to the existing lift tower structure. This new structure would measure some 10m high and be predominantly sited to the north of the existing tower but wraps around roughly a third of its base. It would comprise the following principle elements:

- New reception area to act as a single point of entry for all visitors and anyone entering the tower
- Café at ground floor
- 100 seat revolving auditorium for conferences and seminars at first floor level.
- Two storey void with hoist

- 2.3 It is proposed that the existing tower and new extension would be used for the following purposes:

Conferences - It is anticipated that the lift tower would host lift industry related events organised by the University of Northampton, the Lift Academy, the Lift and Escalator Industry Association (LEIA) and the Chartered Institute of Building Services Engineers Lifts Group (CIBSE). The applicant has indicated that no more than 10 such events would be held per year and it is expected that any one of these events could fill the 100-seater auditorium.

Training courses – The applicant has stated that the tower would become a centre of excellence for training within the lift industry and would complement the University of Northampton by offering a hands-on environment for lift training. The applicant is a strategic partner of the University, which provides a range of lift engineering courses. The courses offered by the applicant would take place on a variety of lift related subjects and would occur most weeks. The number of delegates is indicated to be unlikely to exceed 20 and it is expected that most of the courses would be residential with delegates staying in local accommodation. It is proposed to shuttle delegates by bus to and from the tower to local accommodation.

Research, development and testing - The tower was built for the purposes of researching, developing and testing lift technology. There are a number of shafts available for let on short or long term leases. The applicant's hope is to achieve full occupancy of all rentable shafts and associated office / accommodation space. It is anticipated that a maximum of 15 people would be working on projects at any given time.

Café – A new café would be formed in the ground floor of the extension. It is proposed to be open from 9am to 6pm Monday to Sundays with an average occupancy of 10 customers and would provide catering for staff and members of public and cater for events and cater for conference / training events.

- 2.4 A total of 10 off street parking spaces are proposed on the eastern side of the tower at Tower Square with one space being allocated for disabled users. Access for deliveries and servicing is taken off the western side of the tower from Tower Square.

3. SITE DESCRIPTION

- 3.1 The site is located within a modern residential estate to the south of Weedon Road to the west of the town. The lift tower is a highly distinctive and prominent concrete structure measuring some 127m high and 14m in diameter at the base. It is a Grade II Listed Building (listed in 1997) and has been previously used as a lift testing facility. The tower was built during 1980 to 1982 and designed by Stimpson and Walton for Express Lifts Company. It is positioned within a circular island at the end of the main estate road (The Approach) from Weedon Road and is surrounded by residential flats and houses completed in 2005.
- 3.2 The Lift Tower was opened in 1982 as a purpose built lift testing tower as part of the wider Express Lifts factory complex. The factory was closed in 1999 following the takeover of Express Lifts by Otis. The Tower was incorporated into the surrounding residential development such that it could continue to be used for lift testing purposes by the British Standards Institute. Although it has continued to be used periodically for research and development the building became largely dormant until 2008 when it was taken over by the current owner, the applicant.

4 PLANNING HISTORY

- 4.1 Planning permission was granted in November 1979 under Local Planning Authority reference 79/1017 for the construction of a lift testing tower with associated training facilities. Since then various applications have been determined for associated development connected with the tower.

- 4.2 In 1999 planning permission was granted for 411 residential dwellings, this was for the residential development which now surrounds the tower.
- 4.3 In 2003, there was a listed building consent application submitted for the demolition of the tower which was refused and an appeal made against the refusal. The appeal was withdrawn on the first day of the resulting Public Inquiry and the Council was awarded costs.

5 PLANNING POLICY

5.1 Development Plan

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires a planning application to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material planning considerations indicate otherwise. The current Development Plan comprises the East Midlands Regional Plan, the saved policies of the Northamptonshire County Structure Plan and Northampton Local Plan 1997.

5.2 East Midlands Regional Plan

Policy 2 - Promoting Better Design

Policy 27- Regional Priorities for the Historic Environment

5.3 National Policies:

PPS1 – Delivering Sustainable Development

PPS4 – Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth

PPS5 - Planning for the Historic Environment

PPS23 - Planning and Pollution Control

PPG13 - Transport

PPG24 - Planning and Noise

5.4 Northampton Borough Local Plan

E20 – New Development

E40- Crime and Vandalism

5.5 Supplementary Planning Guidance

Northamptonshire County Parking Standards SPG 2003

Planning Out Crime in Northamptonshire SPG 2004

6 CONSULTATIONS / REPRESENTATIONS

6.1 Built Conservation (NBC) Object.

The principal concern with the application is that the scale and footprint of the building proposed is disproportionate to the size of the tower. Although the application states that the proposals will be dwarfed by the height of the tower this does not take into account the perspective of the building from the ground.

The proposed development engulfs approximately two thirds of the base of the tower with the new development and includes an oversized extension to the north of the building.

Therefore the base of the tower will not be at all visible from the principal elevation along The Approach. This is considered to have a detrimental impact on the setting of the building and leads to a loss of significance of the building.

It is considered that insufficient justification has been provided for the nature and scale of the proposals to justify the loss of significance to the structure with particular regard to the setting of the building. It is not considered that the design is of sufficient quality to provide a positive contribution to the character and local distinctiveness of the historic environment and the details including scale, height, mass, alignment and materials have been insufficiently considered in relation to the setting of the heritage asset.

6.2 **English Heritage** The application should be determined in accordance with national and local guidance and on the basis of your specialist conservation advice.

6.3 **Archaeological Advisor (NCC)** The application site lies on the south side of Weedon Road in an area where there have previously been identified remains from buildings associated with the medieval abbey of St James. These remains were identified to the north of the tower and any deposits in the site vicinity are likely to have been truncated by the towers construction but there are nonetheless the potential for remains to survive. The proposed development will have a detrimental impact on any archaeological deposits and an appropriate condition should be attached in accordance with advice in PPS5.

6.4 **Ancient Monuments Society** support the development as it gives meaningful future to a most distinctive landmark and the design seems appropriate and ambitious. We encourage your council to take a positive view of the proposal.

6.5 **East Midlands Design Review Panel** The scale, massing and prominence of the visitor centre needs careful consideration and it is our view that there may be an unsatisfactory relationship between the tower and visitor centre and its impact on public realm and streetscene.

6.6 **Highway Authority (NCC)** A total of 28no car spaces should be provided for the proposal. The 10no existing car spaces as detailed on the submitted Parking Layout would also only be sufficient for the existing situation.

Therefore there is the potential for a significant shortfall in parking, despite the measures suggested in the statement for the tower usage to overcome this. However another factor, which has not been referred to in the adoptable highway, which includes a degree of public parking around the edge of the circular road that surrounds the site.

There are a total of 27no spaces around this road that have unrestricted public use and, although it is understood they were not for a particular use, except probably for visitors where the housing density is high but with minimal road frontage, it could be considered that some

of this parking would be available for visitors to the tower. Despite the potential of the public parking, there would always be availability issues, although the surrounding housing does have on-site provision within parking courts.

The applicant has also referred to measures to reduce car use that should be included within a Travel Plan. With the suggestion of pursuing the provision of additional parking with, for example, the bingo hall and rugby club this should be pursued as an agreement with particularly the new car parking off Edgar Mobbs Way.

- 6.7 **Northamptonshire Police (NCC)** Have serious concerns over the impact on the surrounding residential area which is already buckling under the strain of parking spillage from other commercial activities. It is noted that the applicant refers to the new development being used for conferences and modes of transport used by 3rd parties will be difficult to control and roads are too narrow to accommodate the safe movement of coaches and buses when cars are parked on both side of the road. In the Design and Access Statement there is no indication about the use of café and whether it is open to the public during the day or purely for use of the people attending sessions at the tower. In essence, our concerns can be summarised in that the site is too tight for such an expansion and the movement to and fro and the impact on residents.
- 6.8 **Public Protection (NBC environmental health)** No objection in principle. There are some concerns about the impact on the amenity of residents in the locality. It is recommended that any approval be subject to the conditions below regarding noise and cooking odours. It is recommended that hours of use be restricted to 0800 to 2000.
- 6.9 **Councillor Pam Varnsvery** requests that application be referred to Planning Committee as there are concerns over parking at the locality and the ongoing impact of traffic management in the area is substantial.

Neighbours

- 6.10 **Neighbour responses were received from numbers 31, 33, 34, 35 Tower Square, 39 Far End, 17 The Approach, 52 Nearside, and 23 Park Corner**
- Increase in traffic generation to the estate with no through road
 - Would increase damage to the road currently maintained by members of the St James Neighbourhood Trust
 - Proposed use will conflict with this residential area
 - Lack of provision for smokers
 - Effect on utilities in the area
 - Concern over height of building
 - Concern over potential future use of the tower for “Freefall experience”

- Parking - the tower is located in a residential area and the use would lead to problems with parking in an area where congestion can already be a problem
- Difficulty in trying to enforce parking especially use of Edgar Mobbs Way
- Concern over proposed use and possible A1 use
- Impact on residential properties
- Overshadowing and loss of light resulting from proposed building
- The proposed design and appearance would be out of keeping with rest of development
- No provision of trade effluent
- Increase in litter and no consideration given to this
- Noise and disturbance in a residential area
- Overlooking / loss of privacy

7. APPRAISAL

Main issues

- 7.1 The principal considerations for the determination of the planning application relate to the design and appearance of the new building and its impact on the setting and character of the Grade II Listed Building, parking / highways and the acceptability of the additional uses / more intensive use of the site in terms residential amenity and the town centre.
- 7.2 Regarding the application for listed building consent the sole issue to consider is the impact on the special character, appearance and setting of the Listed Building.

Principle of development

- 7.3 Policy EC10 of PPS4 encourages Local Planning Authorities to adopt a positive approach to planning applications for economic development and in considering planning applications that secure sustainable economic growth.
- 7.4 National Planning guidance also stresses that all planning applications for economic development should be assessed against certain impact considerations including the impact on local employment, impact on physical and economic regeneration, whether the proposal secures high quality design and accessibility by a range of transport modes including walking, cycling, public transport and car.
- 7.5 In policy terms, a development of this type involving conferencing and a café uses should ideally be located within the town centre where it contributes to the mix of town centre uses to support the viability and vitality of the centre and is most accessible by a range of transport means and more sustainable in line with the aims and objectives of PPS4. The applicants have indicated that they have explored other

alternative sites for the purposes proposed in the extension and have had to discount these for various reasons. As a result, the proposal must be assessed against its current location and a decision made on the merits of this site.

- 7.6 The café is relatively small and in its own right would not have any negative impact on any recognised centres including the town centre due to its limited scale. The auditorium / conference space proposed at first floor with seating for 100 delegates is of greater concern, particularly when considered in combination with the ground floor café floorspace. Nonetheless, on balance, given that these facilities are intended to be ancillary to the main use of the tower and as such cannot be readily located remote from the tower combined with the fact that the town centre is reasonably well served for auditorium / venues and the comparatively small scale of the event space it is not considered that the use would have a significant impact on the town centre or other recognised centre.
- 7.7 Whilst officers support the principle of some form of development at the site that is directly connected to supporting the existing lawful use of the tower as a unique testing and research facility, to help secure the future of the lift tower, reservations are held over the scale and intensity of development proposed as detailed below.

Applicant's Justification

- 7.8 The applicant has submitted a brief Business Plan to support their application which sets out the activities and costing / income generated on a yearly basis for the existing lift tower (i.e. without the proposed extension). The activities identified are consistent with the planning application although there is no detail on figures for the proposed new building. The Plan indicates that the business would make an annual profit of approximately £30,000. It also identifies that there would need to be a fund of £500,000 available to allow for future repairs and renovation of the tower to be undertaken as required.

Design and Impact on Listed Building

- 7.9 PPS5 provides national guidance and policy on how proposals for development affecting heritage asset should be assessed.
- 7.10 Policy HE7 PPS5 encourages Local Authorities to take into account the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to the character and local distinctiveness of the historic environment with consideration given to scale, height, massing and materials of new development. Furthermore, Policy HE9 states that where a proposal has a harmful impact on the significance of a designated heritage asset which is less than substantial harm, in all cases local authorities should weight the public benefit of the proposal and recognise the greater

harm to the significance of the heritage asset the greater justification will be needed for any loss.

- 7.11 The principal concern with the proposal is that the scale and footprint of the building is disproportionate to the size of the tower and that although the application states that the proposal will be dwarfed by the height of the tower, this does not take into account the perspective of the building from the ground. It is acknowledged that due to the two / three storey scale of the new build and the screening effect of the surrounding residential estate it would not be readily visible from outside the estate. Nonetheless, the proposed building would be strongly visible for long distances along The Approach (the main access road leading up to the tower through the estate from Weedon Road) and the area around the tower. Consequently the new building would form a prominent feature in the context of the estate and existing tower which, due to its design and scale, would detract from the appearance of the host building.
- 7.12 The proposed development would occupy a large portion of area around the base of the tower and would be concentrated in the area to the north of the listed building. Due to its prominent siting at the approach to the site its detrimental impact on the setting of the listed building by reason of its massing, size, footprint and general design would be further compounded.
- 7.13 Notwithstanding the comments of the Ancient Monuments Society, it is considered that insufficient evidence has been given to justify the nature and scale of the proposals to outweigh the undoubted negative impact of the proposed built form on the listed building.
- 7.14 For these reasons and with reference to the comments of English Heritage and the Council's Conservation officers, the proposed development would be contrary to Policy HE7, which encourages development to make a positive contribution to the historic environment. It would also be contrary to the aims and objectives PPS1, which promotes high quality design, and E20 of the Northampton Local Plan, which also emphasises the need for good design. The proposal is also contrary to Policy 2 of the East Midlands Regional Plan which encourages design which helps maintain amenity and benefits the quality of life of local people and Policy 27 which promotes sensitive change to the historic environment and the conservation and enhancement of its own intrinsic value.

Impact on Amenity and Living Conditions of Neighbours

- 7.14 The site is located within the heart of a residential housing estate consisting of modern town houses and apartments.

- 7.15 The Council's Environmental Health service has no objection in principle subject to conditions being imposed controlling hours of operation, noise and cooking odour schemes.
- 7.16 Nonetheless, given the nature of the proposed use, which includes a 100-seater conference facility, the proposal would lead to increased activity and vehicle movements within this residential estate, which has the potential to significantly affect the amenity of local residents.
- 7.17 There are particular concerns re the conference facilities. The applicant has indicated that conferencing could be limited to events associated with the lift industry / adjacent tower and that 10 events would take place each year with potentially 100 delegates attending. Given the potential intensity of this use, it is considered that there is potential for a significant increase in customers using the site which would severely undermine the residential amenity of the area and cause harm to living conditions of nearby residents who live opposite and in close proximity the site.
- 7.18 It is acknowledged that the proposed café on it own is likely to be more of an ancillary use to the building and is of limited scale. Nonetheless, there is still concern that the combination of the uses and the potential use of the whole space for events would have a negative effect on the residential amenity of the area as the site would become a destination in its own right for conferences and related activities.
- 7.19 It is recognised that it may be possible to control and secure a number of the proposed activities by condition such as hours of operation, noise control, odours and an appropriate management regime. Indeed the applicant has stated that a shuttle bus service would be provided for conference delegates and attendees of training events, as discussed in following section. However, no mechanism for securing / managing this has been put forward and overall it is considered that given the range and number of uses concerned that it would be difficult to control all the proposed activities to the required level that would mitigate impact and justify approval of planning permission.

Parking and Highways

- 7.20 With reference to the County Wide SPG on Parking Highway Authority has advised that the development would generate approximately 28 off-road parking spaces when assessed against the. The applicant's parking layout shows that 10 spaces can be accommodated on the island surrounding the tower. The Highway Authority acknowledge that there is capacity for 27 spaces adjacent to the road encircling the existing tower which have unrestricted public use.
- 7.21 The applicant contends that the existing parking at the site is adequate to serve the day-to-day needs of a development of this size and nature. They have also submitted a brief Travel Plan with their application that

indicates how they wish to cater for larger events at the site. It is proposed that on days when they are hosting training courses or conferences that a shuttle bus service would be provided to the train and bus stations and that they would encourage visitors to use these modes of transport rather than drive. They also contend that where projects are being run by an individual company that in their view visitors would generally share vehicles rather than travel separately helping to reduce the need for parking. As the site is within easy access to bus routes on Weedon Road and within walking distance of the railway station it is considered that the site is fairly sustainable. The shuttle bus service would also be provided to the car parking at Edgar Mobbs Way to minimise parking in the residential estate surrounding the site.

- 7.22 Given the location of the site in close proximity to the Saints Rugby Club and Northampton Town Football Club it is noted that on match days the estate suffers from pressure for parking particularly on weekends when parking is at a premium. However, the hours of use of the proposed building are not likely to coincide with the match days.
- 7.23 Officers have reservations over how the proposed travel plan would be secured and managed and how this might affect highway safety, traffic flow and demand for parking in the vicinity of the site. Nonetheless, with reference to the advice of the Highway Authority, it is not considered that these concerns are sufficient to warrant refusal of the planning application.

Archaeology

- 7.24 The site is identified as being within an area that has previously been associated with identified remains in respect of the medieval abbey at St James. Therefore, should Members be minded to approve the planning application, officers would recommend a condition to control and secure adequate provision for investigation and recording remains in accordance with advice in PPS5 in line with the advice of the County Archaeologist.

Other Matters Raised by Neighbours

- 7.25 The concern raised in respect to loss of privacy raised by some objectors is unlikely to be problematic given the internal layout of the development, the proposed use and relationship to other properties. An increase in litter is also unlikely to be a concern as the café is not proposed to be take-away and waste management could be controlled by condition.

8 CONCLUSION

- 8.1 The proposed development would for the foregoing reasons have an adverse impact on the character, appearance and setting of the listed

building and residential amenity of the area. It is considered that the proposal is contrary to advice in PPS1 and PPS5 and Policy E20 of the Northampton Local Plan and advice in PPG24 and Policies 2 and 27 of the East Midlands Regional Plan.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

9.1 N/2010/0906 and N/2010/0320.

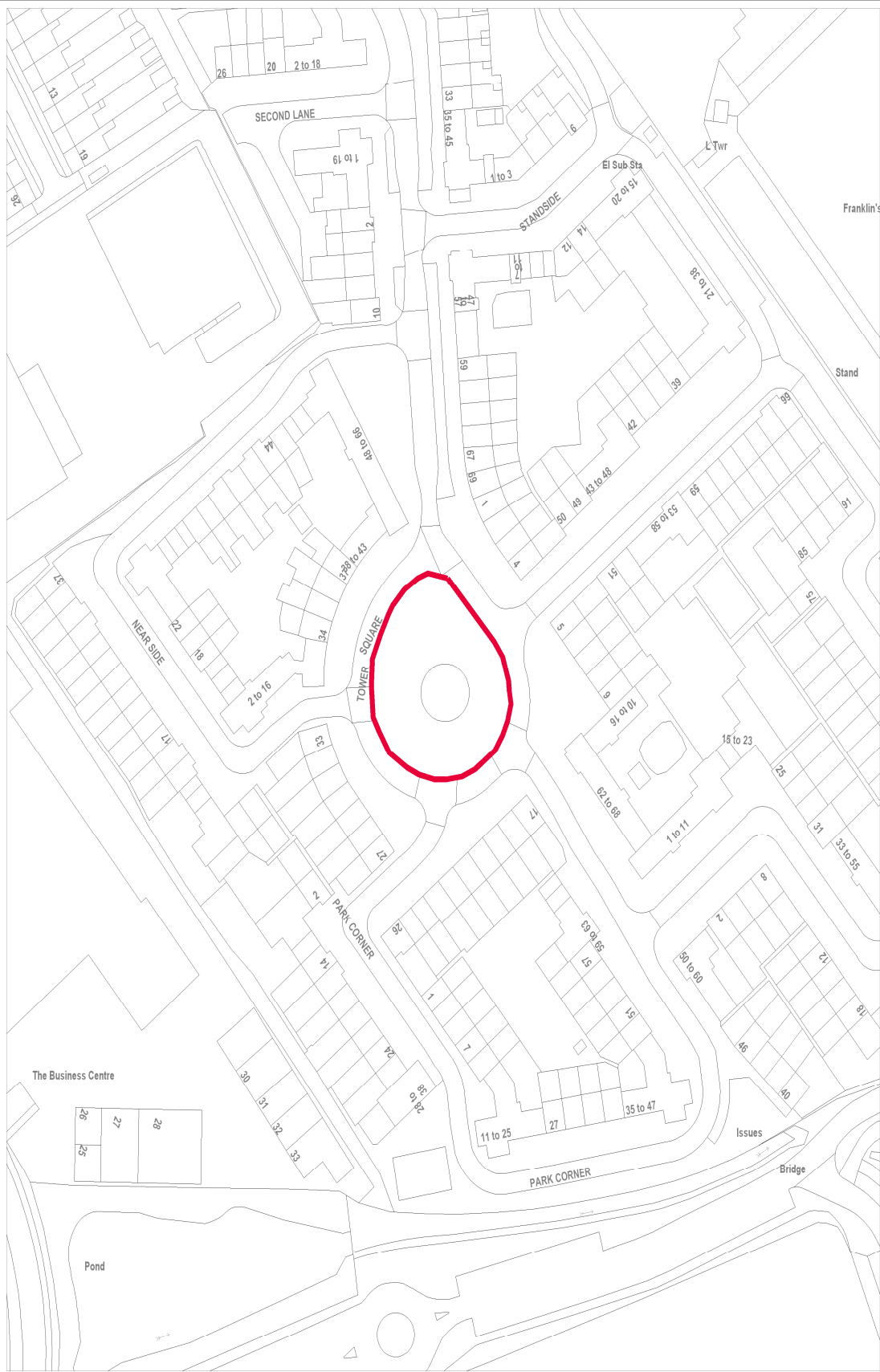
10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 None.

11. SUMMARY AND LINKS TO CORPORATE PLAN

11.1 In reaching the attached recommendations regard has been given to securing objectives, visions and priorities outlined in the Corporate Plan together with those of associated Frameworks and Strategies.

Position:	Name/Signature:	Date:
Author:	Jonathan Moore	17/02/2010
Development Control Manager Agreed:	Gareth Jones	17/02/2010



Name: SW
 Date: 17th February 2011
 Scale: 1:1250
 Dept: Planning
 Project: Site Location Plan

Title

The National Lift Tower, Tower Square

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