

# Report

## Application for Planning Permission in Principle

16/02815/PPP

**At Car Park 137 Metres Northeast Of 98, Ocean Drive,  
Edinburgh**

**Erection of Hotel development (Class 7), associated facilities  
and ancillary works, including Boardwalk (As Amended)**

### Recommendations

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**1.1** It is recommended that this application be Granted subject to the details below.

### Background

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#### 2.1 Site description

The site relates to the existing Ocean Terminal Shopping Centre that provides a mix of retail, leisure and tourist facilities. The redline boundary of the site covers the surface car park and associated area located to the northeast of the shopping centre and also wraps round the existing building and along the edge of the waterside.

The existing centre is a large symmetrical building orientated north-east/south-west alongside Ocean Drive and forming the eastern frontage to the main harbour of the Port of Leith. The building is a large covered shopping mall with two multi-storey car parks at either end.

Areas of landscaping and trees are located to the front of the shopping building.

At the northern part of the site is the previously B listed Paint Shed. This is an early 20th century two storey structure built using shipbuilding techniques and constructed from riveted iron plates. The Council received notification from Historic Environment Scotland on 14 December 2016 that the building has been delisted.

Bus stops are located immediately outside the main pedestrian entrance on Ocean Drive.

The wider area consists of a mix of uses including retail, offices and residential. Adjacent to the site is a nine storey office block. There is some vacant land opposite the shopping centre which sometimes houses temporary uses, e.g. funfair.

The nearest bus stops to the site are located on Ocean Drive, within 150 metres of the site and directly adjacent to Ocean Terminal's main entrance. These bus stops provide access to a number of services provided by Lothian Buses, including the service numbers 11, 22, 34, 35, and 36 which collectively provide links to the airport, city centre, west Edinburgh, and south Edinburgh. A proposed tram stop is also located near to the site on Ocean Drive.

The site is in close proximity to established and future transport connections. A hotel use in this location would complement the existing leisure/retail and office uses.

The supporting text to LDP Policy Emp 10 notes that tourism is the third biggest source of employment in Edinburgh, providing jobs for over 31,000 people. The City Strategy and Economy section are supportive of the application given the positive economic impacts the development would have.

The proposed hotel development is acceptable in principle at this location.

**b) Design, Scale and Layout**

**Height and Massing:**

LDP Policy Des 11 Tall Buildings - Skyline and Key Views states that planning permission will only be granted for development which rises above the height prevailing generally in the surrounding area where it creates a landmark that enhances the skyline, the scale of the building is appropriate and there are no adverse impact on important views, features and the skyline.

Ocean Terminal is itself a large building, approximately 30 metres in height. The Ocean Point office development next to the site is approximately 42 metres in height.

The Leith Docks Development Framework (LDDF) provides general support in principle for tall buildings in appropriate locations within the docks.

Although the LDDF urban framework strategy that covers this site is largely silent in relation to the application site, the document does refer to a potential new major landmark on the northern end of Ocean Terminal. Elsewhere, the LDDF identifies that 16 storeys may be acceptable in nearby locations subject to appropriate analysis and justification.

Previous outline applications have considered tall buildings to the north of Ocean Terminal. However, in both cases it was stated that there was not enough information or design detail to assess whether the tall buildings would enhance the skyline and not have an adverse visual impact. The details were therefore to be deferred for consideration at the detailed application stage.

The applicant reduced the height of the original scheme from 100 metres to 55 metres due to concerns over the adverse impact the proposal would have on key aspects of the city's skyline from a number of important viewpoints.

The City of Edinburgh Skyline Study (2010) building height limitations map was identified as a basis upon which to carry out further detailed assessment for any proposals for a tall building in this location. This indicated that building heights between 50 - 55 metres AOD may be acceptable. These sightlines do not necessarily imply that a site is suitable for high buildings or provide a datum to comply with.

The sightlines which cross the Port of Leith were set out to protect 'the open backdrop of long views of the Castle Hill, Calton Hill, Salisbury Crags and St Mary's Cathedral spires. In addition, there is a key view of Inchkeith Island from the Castle ramparts to be safeguarded.'

The revised Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment considered the visual impact of a 55 metres high proposal from a number of viewpoints across the city.

This assessment can only examine how the mass and height of the proposal will affect the quality of the visual experience for visual receptors based upon the nature of existing views, not how these assumptions might be affected by the final form and external appearance including texture, colour, shade, reflectivity and opacity.

The proposal contains limited information on the final intended form or external finishes of the hotel, which could assist in mitigating adverse visual effects. It is therefore not possible to state with confidence whether the tests of LDP Policy Des 11 a) can be met in terms of enhancing the skyline.

The proposed building envelope indicates a bulky form, which contrasts with the city's historic tall buildings, where historically, spires, steeples, domes and monuments punctuated the skyline. Viewpoints 1 (Edinburgh Castle), 6 (Arthurs Seat), 7 (Calton Hill) and 11 (Lighthouse Park), show a relationship between the proposal and existing 1960's tower blocks, Ocean Point and industrial buildings whereby the final form and external finish could either clash with or complement these elements of the skyline resulting in uncertainty with regard to the impact of the proposal.

In terms of LDP Policy Des 11 c) the height of the proposal at 55 metres impacts on the skyline of Calton Hill when viewed by highly sensitive visual receptors from Blackford Hill (viewpoint 4). The upper stories of the proposal would impact on the Dugald Stewart Monument and remove open sky space and water between it and Old Observatory House, reducing their legibility in views and altering the hill's iconic profile. This change would be permanent and irreversible. Whilst the principle of a tall building may be acceptable on this site, it is not possible to determine a maximum height without detailed design information.

#### Design:

The proposal contains only block images to inform the visual impact assessment work. Detailed design would come forward as part of subsequent submissions.

The applicant has indicated that the hotel will contain 230 bedrooms. This will be reliant on the detailed design of the hotel and therefore the number of bedrooms will be dealt with as a reserved matter.