



UNIT K6, NORTHFLEET
INDUSTRIAL PARK, LOWER ROAD

**SUMMARY TOWNSCAPE AND
VISUAL APPRAISAL**

Prepared for

Jackson Family Holdings Ltd

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report sets out the findings of an outline townscape and visual appraisal in respect of the proposed development at Unit K6 within the Northfleet Industrial Estate. The purpose of the appraisal is to assess the design proposals and in particular likely visual impact resulting from the proposed development on the surrounding area on respect of the refusal to grant planning permission as set out in further detail below.
- 1.2 The appraisal has been commissioned by Kate Holland of Invicta Planning, on behalf of applicants Jackson Family Holdings Ltd. and the appraisal been undertaken by Vanessa Ross FLI, a Chartered Landscape Architect, Fellow of the Landscape Institute and Director at Arc Landscape Design and Planning Ltd (Arc). It is noted that whilst not forming a full Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment, this appraisal does draw on best practice guidance as set out in the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition (GLVIA3) published by the Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment.
- 1.3 This appraisal is supported by three accurate visual representations (ARVs) which have been prepared by a specialist consultant following best practice methodology and is included in Appendix A. Other site photography is included below for reference.

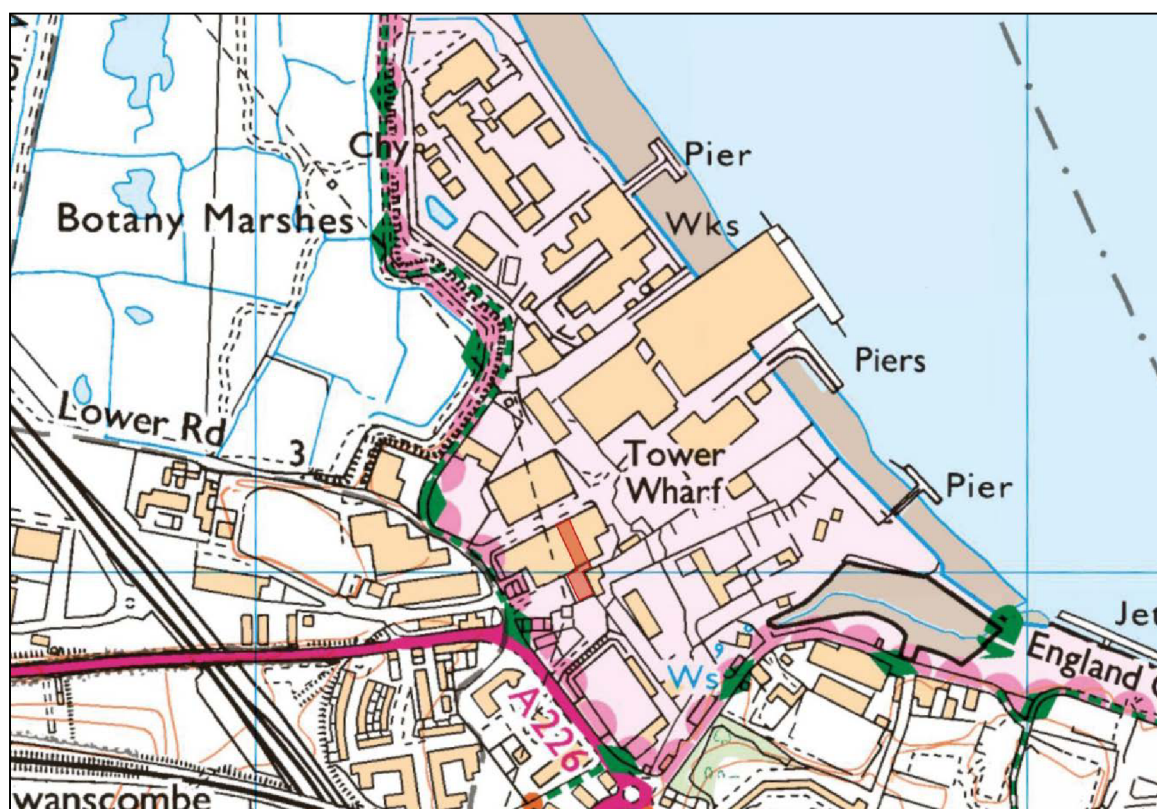


Figure 1 - Site Location (shown in red). Scale (1km grid)

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- 1.4 The site comprises an existing industrial unit within a terrace of similar industrial buildings. It is accessed off Lower Road and is located within the Industrial Estate which lies to the north of Northfleet and to the west of the River Thames.
- 1.5 The scheme proposal as illustrated in Figures 2 and 3 was submitted to Gravesham Borough Council for planning approval (ref 20220681) in June 2022 and refused permission on 27th September 2022 under delegated power for the following reason:

“The introduction of two additional floors together with a multi-storey car park, will result in an incongruous form of development out of character with this terrace of units. Due to its height and appearance, it will bear no relationship with the other units and will appear dominant in the street scene and from long ranging views. The proposal therefore conflicts with the objectives of Policy CS19 of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy 2014 and para. 130 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2021”.



Figure 2 – Illustration of scheme proposals (Ward and Associates)

- 1.6 There are no landscape, townscape or heritage designations on or adjacent to the site however it is located within approximately 175m of the Swanscombe Peninsular Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
- 1.7 The appraisal first considers the relevant planning policy background relating to the site and goes on to review the existing conditions of the site and its surroundings with commentary on both townscape character, visibility and visual amenity. Consideration is then given to the potential effects which would result from introducing development on to the site.
- 1.8 A site visit was undertaken in November 2022 to specifically review the visibility of the site and its surrounding context. The report is supported by three accurate verified views (AVRs) which show the proposed massing from selected locations within the vicinity. Details on architecture and materials are as per the Design and Access Statement and are described below in further detail.

2. Planning Policy Context

Introduction

- 2.1 This section includes a summary of relevant planning policy and guidance relating to the area.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

- 2.2 Originally published in 2012, the NPPF sets out the Government's planning policies for England. The current version of the NPPF was published in July 2021 and is supported by Planning Practice Guidance which is reviewed and updated on an on-going basis. Paragraph 7 of the NPPF states that *"The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development"*.
- 2.3 Much of the NPPF is concerned with residential developments however paragraphs 126-136 provide guidance on ensuring the delivery of well-designed buildings and places, with paragraph 126 stating *"The creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities"*. Paragraph 127 stresses the need for design policies should be *"grounded in an understanding and evaluation of each areas defining characteristics"*.
- 2.4 Paragraphs 128 and 129 introduce the need for councils to provide clarity about design expectations early on and introduce the (new) requirement for councils to prepare *"design guides or codes consistent with the principles set out in the National Design Guide and National Model Design Code, and which reflect local character and design preferences"*.
- 2.5 Paragraph 30, referred to in the reason for refusal, states that :
- "Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:*
- (a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;*
 - (b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;*
 - (c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);*
 - (d) establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;*
 - (e) optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and*
 - (f) create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-*

being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users 49 ; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.

Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (

- 2.6 At a local level current planning policy is set out in the Local Plan Core Strategy (2014). The Site falls within the 'Northfleet Embankment and Swanscombe Peninsula East Opportunity Area' which is covered by Policy CS03, sub area 1.2 which is described at para 4.4.5 as

"Swanscombe Peninsula East Riverside Industrial Area (sub-area 1.2) comprises mainly industrial and port-related uses that sit behind the existing tidal flood defences. Access to this area is from the junction with the A226 at Galley Hill Road and a narrow privately maintained road. It is anticipated that this area will remain in active employment uses over the plan period. The retention and expansion of industrial and port related employment in this area will be supported".

- 2.7 The wording of the Policy CS03 includes the following at 4.4.30:

"The Swanscombe Peninsula East Riverside Industrial Area, Kimberly Clark Site and Imperial Business Estate will be retained in employment use. The Council will support proposals which expand and support their operation".

- 2.8 Other policies of relevance to this study include CS19 Design and Development Principles, referred to in the reason for refusal which at 5.15.14 states:

"New development will be visually attractive, fit for purpose and locally distinctive. It will conserve and enhance the character of the local built, historic and natural environment, integrate well with the surrounding local area and meet anti-crime standards. The design and construction of new development will incorporate sustainable construction standards and techniques, be adaptable to reflect changing lifestyles, and be resilient to the effects of climate change".

3. Site Analysis

Introduction

- 3.1 The following section provides a description of the site and its local context.

Site Description and Local Context

- 3.2 The site is located on the southern side of Lower Road, Northfleet and sits within the Northfleet Industrial area to the west of the river Thames. The site falls within a terrace of industrial units referred to as Unit K6 and the overall site area is approx. 2162 sqm.
- 3.3 The building of Unit K6 is rectangular however the application site extends south-west creating a dog-legged shape with the rear part of the site providing carparking and rear access from the west.

Vegetation and Biodiversity

- 3.4 Vegetation on the site is very limited however there are two trees within the corner of the existing service yard, one of which is an oak tree, it is therefore anticipated that biodiversity on the site will be limited. Vegetation within the surrounding industrial area is limited however some vegetation of trees and shrubs was noted along some property boundaries. Within the surrounding area, the Swanscombe Peninsular includes marshland areas some of which was formerly excavated and now includes the Swanscombe Marshes SSSI. To the south-east, there are other pockets of undeveloped land such as along Robin's Creek and Wallis Park as well as areas along the wider transport corridors such as high speed railway line (HS1).

Topography and Drainage

- 3.5 The site is broadly flat with the majority, as noted, being covered by existing built form. Due to former excavation and extraction of chalk, in particular, in the surrounding area there are some notable changes in level some of which are a result of the former workings. The industrial area within which the site is located, is broadly level with land rising to the south-east beyond the football club and to the west along Galley Hill Road.
- 3.6 Whilst the site and immediate land around it is devoid of any watercourses, the river Thames is some 350m to the north-east.

Built form and Nearby Settlement

- 3.7 The industrial estate within which the site is located comprises a range of large through to small scale buildings housing industry and warehousing along with a number of businesses including aggregates and distribution that utilise wharves along the river. To the south, is the sports stadium Ebbsfleet United Football Club and a small number of local retail outlets serving the area.

- 3.8 A small area of residential housing is located to the southwest of the site, beyond the A226 and further residential areas are found either side of the B2175, Stonebridge Road, to the south and south-east, north of Northfleet train station. The main residential areas of Northfleet are to the east with Gravesend beyond. Swanscombe and Greenhithe are to the southwest and west respectively. Much of the area falls within the Ebbsfleet Garden City and as such has been and continues to be the subject of significant change resulting from large areas of residential development.

Public Rights of Way

- 3.9 Whilst there are no public rights of way identified in the area, the route of the Long Distance England Coast Path, runs along Lower Road to the west. To the east of the route, an area defined as the 'The England Coast Path Coastal Margin' washes over the site. Under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, this land become 'access land', however it does exclude land such as buildings and their curtilage. Both the path and the margin are shown on Figure 1, identified as a green route and as a pink semi-circles, respectively.

Townscape Character

- 3.10 The character of the area is largely determined by land-use, proximity to the river Thames and former extraction industries, however as noted the wider Ebbsfleet Garden City area is undergoing a degree of change. The site itself, falling within the industrial area however is largely detached from any of the surrounding areas.
- 3.11 A number of published assessments exist for the area, including the Gravesham Heritage and Character, Background paper 2020 which focusses on the historic areas of Gravesham however it does also refer to previous studies including the Gravesham Townscape Character Appraisal (2008) and the Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment (2009).
- 3.12 The Gravesham Townscape Character Appraisal sub-divides Gravesham into a number of areas with the site falling within the 'Industrial Hinterland' area and one of two which fall within land alongside the Thames. Under the heading of 'Sensitivity', the Appraisal sets out the following for the Industrial Hinterland character area, though not all specifically apply to the site and area around it.:

"The industrial hinterland has a much defined set of land uses and very distinctive built form. Views of these areas are very distinguished from within and outside their respective site boundaries. The massing of the buildings and the materials used in their construction are further distinguishing features that set this space apart from every other part of the borough. Distinctiveness rating: Very Distinct.

There are a minority of buildings that reflect the Victorian industrial past, but the majority of the built form is modern. Continuity rating: Recent

The expansive area and stature of the built form creates a very dominating landscape. Buildings and chimneys can be seen from all over, both in and outside of the area boundary. Landform rating: Insignificant.

Due to many of the industrial areas being located on the edge of the River Thames and the changes in topography that surround these areas, views in and out can be extensive, from key vantage points. Views in/out rating: Open.”

3.13 The Guidelines are to ‘Restore and Enhance’ with guidelines for the future stating:

- *Retain and restore buildings of historic value.*
- *Encourage redevelopment that seeks new uses for old buildings.*
- *Restore brownfield land with mixed use development.*
- *Restore green spaces where long lasting improvements can be made, particularly along the Thames & Medway Canal situated in the Canal Basin area.*

Site Visibility

3.14 Forming part of the industrial estate, the site is largely indiscernible in views from the surrounding area, however it is currently visible from the immediate area, including the access road to the front, and in views looking east along Lower Road. The site is also visible from higher land within the surrounding area including from Galley Hill Road to the south west and Stonebridge Road to the south where it is seen within the context of the industrial townscape within which it is located.

3.15 The visibility of the site is likely to increase with the introduction of the proposed development and this is discussed in further detail in section 4.

4. Summary Appraisal of Visual Effects

Introduction and summary description of scheme proposals

- 4.1 This section considers the likely effects of the scheme proposals which were previously submitted for planning approval, on views towards it from the surrounding area. The appraisal draws on the site visit undertaken in November 2022 and refers to a number of representative photos including three verified views that model the scheme from representative locations in the surrounding area. Figure 4 identifies the photographic locations with numbers P2, P4 and P5 referring to the verified views.



Figure 3 – Illustration of scheme proposals from above (Ward and Associates)

- 4.2 As illustrated in Figures 2 (Section 1), and 3, above the proposed development is to change the use of the existing industrial building and to introduce an additional two storeys to the existing building and a multi-storey carpark on land to the rear.
- 4.3 The proposed front elevation of the main building retains the existing vehicular service access but upgrades the overall façade to include a pedestrian reception entrance. The elevation at first and second floor includes a glazing set within grey metal cladding. A vertical projecting glazed element visually ties all three stories together. A shallow pitched roof is proposed which reflects the pitch of the existing and adjacent buildings, and extends to the rear, where an area is 'cut out' to create an external roof terrace. The side elevations of the upper two storeys step in along the central length of both sides, with horizontal glazing running along the length of each inset on both storeys.
- 4.4 The addition of the two stories to the main building would result in an increase in height, compared to the existing buildings, of approximately 6m.
- 4.5 The proposed car park will include four split levels providing 59 parking spaces. The overall height of the car park is approximately 9m, with the lower level will be set within the ground. The

structure will connect to the proposed second floor extension via a bridge link and will also incorporate a lift and stair core. The car park will be clad in vertical metal fins.

Appraisal of effects on visibility and views

- 4.6 The proposal will result in an increase in height across the main building and the introduction of new built form in the car park and therefore the visibility of the building, compared to the existing will increase. As demonstrated by the verified views, the upper two storeys will project above the roofline of the adjacent buildings and it is therefore possible that extent of visibility will increase over a wider area.

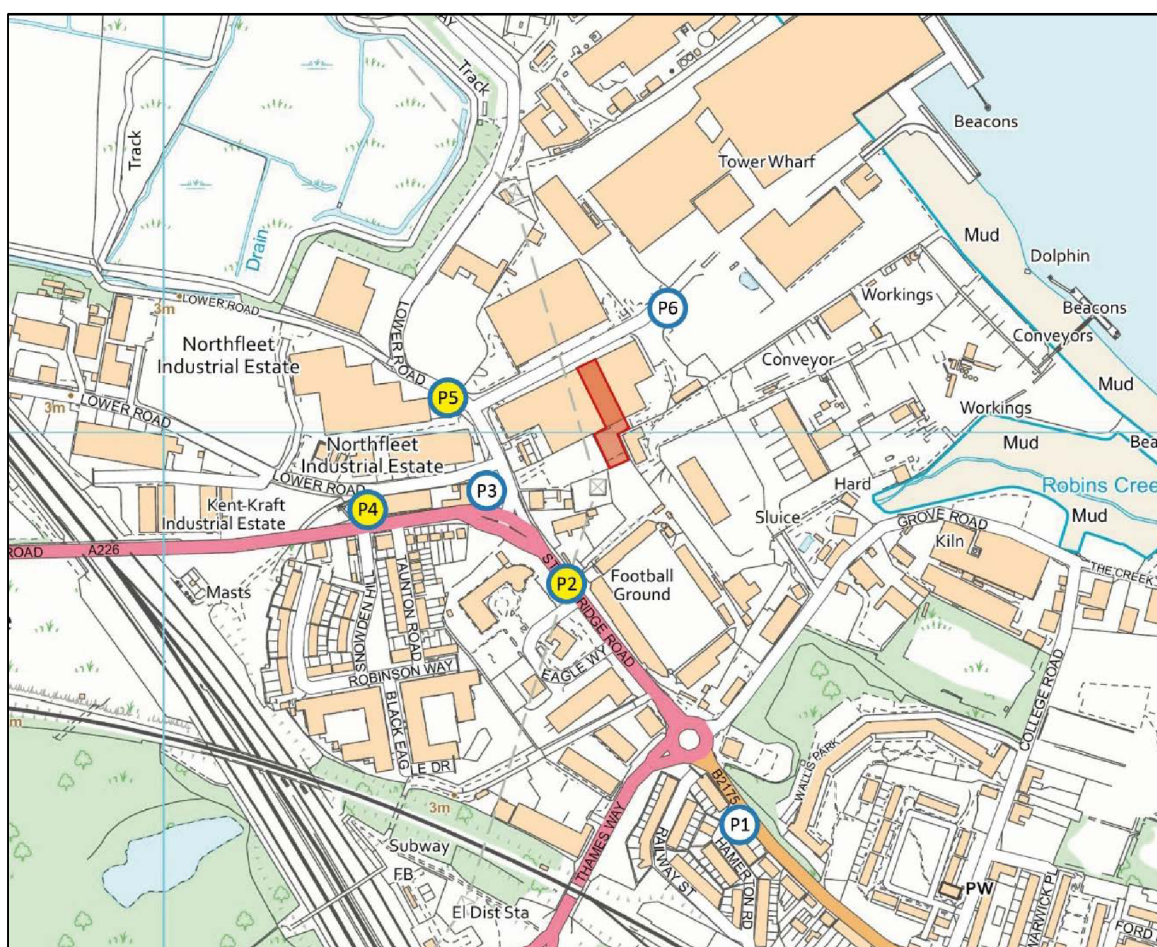


Figure 4 – Photo location plan

- 4.7 From the assessment of the proposals at the site visit it was observed all views will see the proposed building as part of the wider industrial backdrop experienced in this area.
- 4.8 From the surrounding area the increase in height and mass will be seen from a number of locations including the elevated streets to the west and south. From **viewpoint P1** the view looking north-west from Stonebridge Road takes in the existing group of buildings within which the development is proposed and therefore the proposals will be visible from this location. Whilst the increase in size of the building will be visible, the change will be seen in the context of the varying industrial

roofscape seen in the middle-far distance and will not extend above the line of the existing taller industrial buildings, prominent in the view.



Photo P1 – View looking north-west from Stonebridge Road

- 4.9 The views from **viewpoint P2** and shown in the photo below which has been stitched together to show the wider context and the massing of the scheme proposals are modelled within the verified view in Appendix A. From this location the view takes in the football stadium (to the right of the picture) in the near distance. The HV pylons are prominent within the view and a number of other vertical features such as lighting columns, chimney stacks and dockside cranes are also visible. The gable end of one of three residential properties at the junction with Lower Road is visible in the middle distance, and part of the roof tops of the existing group of buildings within which the development is proposed is glimpsed beyond the boundary fence and below the overhead power cables.
- 4.10 The verified views illustrates that the proposed development will become visible from this location, however whilst it is taller than the existing buildings it will not appear out of scale or incongruous with its setting.



Photo P2 – View looking north from Stonebridge Road (adjacent to petrol station)

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- 4.11 The view from **viewpoint P3** is taken from Lower Road looking towards the existing group industrial buildings. From this location the proposed development will be seen rising above the three units visible in the photo. Whilst the mass of the new building will be greater than existing, it is not considered that this will appear out of keeping with the surrounding area, and from this location the proposals will read as a separate building.



Photo P3 – View looking north-east Lower Road towards the site

- 4.12 Views from the immediate vicinity of the site will change as a result of the proposals and from Lower Road, the change will be experienced from the front where the new entrance, façade materials and increased height will make the building more prominent in the view. Whilst the adjacent buildings to both the north and south will retain their existing form, the proposed development will introduce a new element and have the visual effect of splitting the existing building into separate parts.
- 4.13 **Viewpoint P4** is taken from Galley Hill Road which rises up to the west. The photograph (and verified view in Appendix A) are taken from approximately 350m away from the site. Due to the elevated location, the view is taken at broadly the same level as the top of the roof of the existing building. The verified view demonstrates that the western elevation of the new upper floors of the building will be clearly visible from this location. The proposed car park will also be visible but as a lower structure, it will be less discernible in the view.

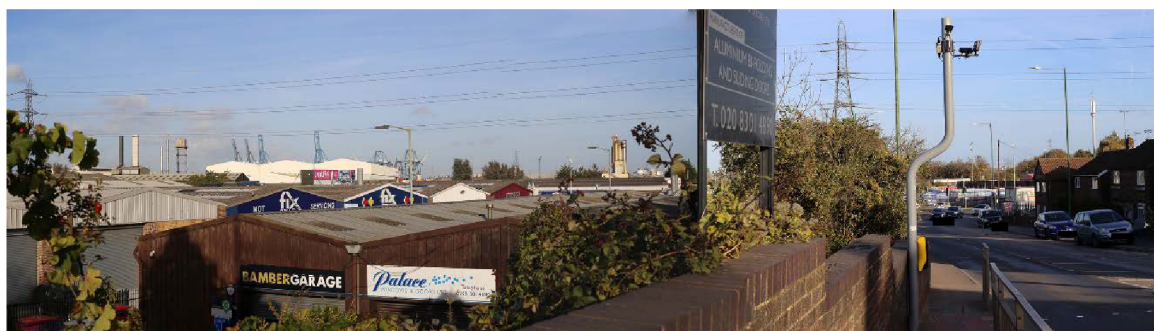


Photo P4 – View looking east from Galley Hill Road towards the site

- 4.14 It is noted that due to the land rising, there are view towards the site from the higher ground along Galley Hill Road to the west. From higher locations, further away from the site, views take in the River Thames, Tilbury Docks and the Essex landscape beyond. It is therefore the case that subject to some intervening features, the development proposals will be seen in some views from further west. As noted for other locations, the building, whilst larger than existing, will be seen in the wider scene which takes in a range of industrial buildings and features of varying scales and therefore will not be out of place within this visual context.
- 4.15 **Viewpoint P5** is taken from Lower Road at the end of the road on which the site is located. From this point the existing building reads as part of the larger industrial building. From this location, the proposed development will be clearly visible and with the front and part of the sides of the building seen part way along the façade. The introduction of the projected element to the front will identify the development as distinct from the remaining building. Whilst this and the additional height will result in an alteration to the form of the wider building, the design, including the roof form and pitch will enable the proposed development to integrate with the existing building.



Photo P5 – View looking towards the site from Lower Road

- 4.16 **Viewpoint P6** is taken from the eastern end of the access road, a location internal to the industrial estate and therefore not part of any specific public viewpoint, or route. Again, from this location the front and upper floors will be clearly visible and taller than the buildings on either side of the road, however as with the previous viewpoint the proposed development will read as a distinct and separate element but one which includes common some architectural features.



Photo P6 – View looking towards the site from Lower Road

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 As set out in the preceding sections, the scheme proposals will introduce new architectural elements to the industrial streetscene of Lower Road within the Northfleet Industrial Estate. The existing buildings comprise a terrace of industrial buildings, each with shallow pitched roofs and which sit either side of the road. The proposals include adding an additional two storeys to the existing building, increasing the height by approximately 6 meters, providing an upgraded entrance within the three storey front façade along with a multistorey car park to the rear of the building.
- 5.2 The appraisal, based on a site visit and supported by a number of verified views, sets out the likely change in views from the surrounding area. The existing views towards the site take in a mix of buildings, including some large scale industrial buildings, roads and other features such as security fencing, hoarding and vertical features such as HV pylons, dock side cranes, chimneys and flue stacks, street and security lighting. Whilst the views contain no particular architectural interest or special qualities, the overarching character is as to be expected of such an area. There are some views towards the River Thames and beyond, however these are from further away and the site forms part of a much wider panorama.
- 5.3 In considering the views towards the development it is acknowledged that the proposals will introduce a taller element to the street however whilst different from the immediately adjacent buildings, the proposal will be distinct and of a quality that will not result in any detriment to the views towards it.
- 5.4 A number of the viewpoints described in section 4 (P2, P3 and P5) represent locations along the England Coast Path, a short part of which, as described in section 3, passes through the Northfleet Industrial Estate. Due to the long distance nature of this path, those walking along it experience a vast range of landscapes both, urban, rural and industrial and whilst the proposed development will be seen and the view will change with the introduction of the proposals, this will form a very limited and part of the experience, if noticed at all. Where the route heads towards and passes the site, neither the existing buildings or proposed, form part of any specific views or vista eg towards the river or towards any notable landmark and it is not considered that any harm to visual amenity will result from the proposals.
- 5.5 In respect of the effects on the local townscape character, the introduction of the two storey extension and multistorey car park will have no notable impact or result in any harm to it. The proposals will introduce a new element to the street and terrace of existing of buildings within which it sits, however whilst distinct from the immediate buildings, it will read as part of the varied texture of the industrial riverside estate.



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