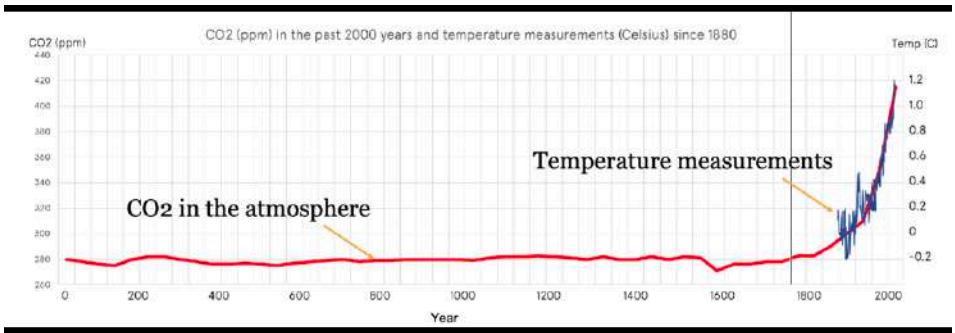
Smallbrook Ringway planning objection: Response to Turley Supplementary Statement

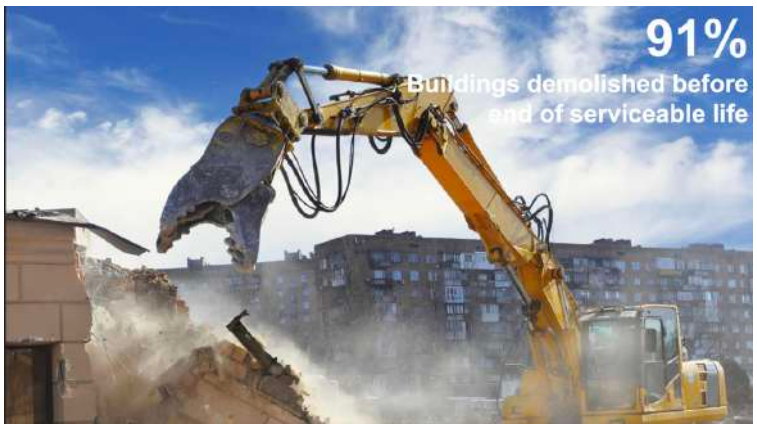
April 2023



**"[Climate change] is the defining issue of our age.
It is the central challenge of our century.
It is unacceptable, outrageous and self-defeating
to put it on the back burner."
UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres**

Extensive discussion of this application, both locally and nationally, and emerging wider understanding of the urgency of action needed on climate, make it important as a precedent for wider adaptive reuse of existing buildings.

Coverage by national newspapers, radio, tv, an open public letter signed by many leading experts in the field, local media, social media, an open public meeting hosted by Birmingham Civic society and attended by a hundred people, etc speak for themselves as an increasing weight of public opinion and interest.
The congruence with M&S Planning inquiry, *Demolition in the dock: Why the M&S Oxford St public inquiry really matters* www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/this-is-not-just-any-public-inquiry , Selkirk House, *To retrofit – or not to retrofit? It's a towering row in London's heritage neighbourhood* https://www.camdennewjournal.co.uk/article/to-retrofit-or-not-to-retrofit-its-a-towering-row-in-londons-heritage-neighbourhood , Cumbernauld *Demolition of Cumbernauld's brutalist town centre "a complete outrage"* https://www.dezeen.com/2022/03/14/cumbernauld-brutalist-town-centre-demolition-outrage/ and Architects' Journal *RetroFirst campaign* https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/introducing-retrofirst-a-new-aj-campaign-championing-reuse-in-the-built-environment is striking.



At section 8.19* Turkey state: "The applicant acknowledges and welcomes the debate about the future of Birmingham's built environment including the case for the retention of existing buildings that have heritage value or that present the opportunity for re-use and retrofitting that best delivers on net zero objectives."
This acknowledgment is welcome. The Smallbrook Ringway application uniquely combines the issues of heritage *and* carbon; as well issues of scale, townscape, affordable homes, etc.

[*unless otherwise stated, references are to Turley's Supplementary Planning Statement.]

Turley's report reiterates many of points from the original application. It is clearly not an independent assessment, but an attempt to justify the existing scheme. Points of objection are not reiterated here, but still stand, as the proposals on heritage and environmental issues (ie wholesale demolition) have not been altered in any material respect.

Turley 3.3 states "a range of considerations" have now been assessed. But no revisions to the Environmental Impact Assessment are made: it remains deeply flawed, relying on the surprising and unamended statement that **CO_2e emissions causing climate change from this major development are "not significant"** and therefore not assessed. Section 16 of the previous objection explained in detail how this is contrary to overwhelming recognised good practice.

Park Hill, Sheffield.
Energy efficient retrofit redevelopment by Urban Splash.
A Brutalist architectural icon, the same age as Ringway.

The Sunday Times recently cited the building as helping to make Sheffield the **'Capital of Cool'.**

3.5 "City's aspirations for transformational change": Respect for historic buildings, and the highest level of sustainability through retention and retrofit would arguably give better "transformational change" - as evidenced among others by by Park Hill in Sheffield (above): phase 2 now complete having just won further awards https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/aj-retrofit-awards-2023-winners-revealed

4.3-4.5 & 4.11 Supply of new homes: if this were the overriding priority, it could be achieved far more quickly through retrofit of the existing building, rather than the proposed 14 years. It is noted that although City policy TP32 seeks "35% affordable homes as a developer contribution" **still none is proposed.** Without it, social exclusion and inequality would result,

undermining many progressive Birmingham planning policies, particularly Our Future City theme "City of Growth for all": Mixed family/community/social facilities are essential.

4.6 "Brownfield sites" - Wikipedia defines "Brownfield refers to land that is abandoned or underutilised due to pollution from industrial use." These proposals would demolish a locally listed heritage asset: **it is disingenuous to suggest "substantial weight" should be given to demolishing a heritage asset.** It is totally opposite: Birmingham planning policy gives "substantial weight" to retention and preservation. There are many brownfield sites within 15 minutes of this site which would benefit from development. This is not one of them.

4.7 NPPF para 124, this site certainly cannot be described as "suitable" or "available land" for wholesale demolition.

4.8 The counter proposals can both "maintain the area's character" and also give transformational change, as at Sheffield Park Hill (above), Mailbox (below) etc.

4.13 "Significance of the heritage asset" - the national press coverage, timing, increased environmental awareness as outlined above, and the applicant's acknowledgement and welcoming of the debate over heritage and sustainability add to the evidence that it is highly "significant".

4.15 Our Future City Plan theme of 'A City of Growth for All' supports developments which "promote a greater mix of uses led by introducing residential activity at a greater density as part of well-designed places". This includes homes, workplaces, leisure, culture and social infrastructure to improve the quality of life and places for residents and visitors to the city. The proposals with 100% private rental, zero affordable housing, and 14 years construction are clearly designed to prioritise commercial return rather than "Growth for All".
This concern was a voiced by many of the public who attended the open meeting hosted by Birmingham Civic Society in February.

4.17 Our Future City Plan focus on promoting green and sustainable growth as 'City of Nature' and 'City of Connections', with a zero-carbon approach to development.

4.17 Our Future City plan advocates creation of "attractive places" to live. An increasing body of research highlights the mixed, but **predominantly negative, consequences of high rise living**, including mental and social health, fear, phobia, dissatisfaction, unsuitability for families, alienation, behaviour problems, suicide, altitude sickness, and widespread ambivalence about high rise flats following of the tragic Grenfell fire.

Sustainability
6.2 Birmingham's TP3 & TP4 policies are not the only relevant standards.

In December 2020 the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) published the 6th Carbon Budget which requires a 68% reduction in all carbon emissions compared to 1990 by 2030, 78% reduction by 2035, and 100% reduction by 2050.

HM Government has backed up its intentions with the following guidance, 'The Construction Playbook', published in December 2020 which says that its use will create the right environment to:
"Take strides towards our 2050 net zero commitment and focus on a whole life carbon approach to fight climate change and deliver greener facilities designed for the future".
And that: "contracting authorities should adopt the use of **whole life carbon assessments** to understand and minimise the GHG emissions footprint of projects and programmes throughout their lifecycle."

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2021, Chapter 14, 'Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change' Para 152, states that: "The planning system should support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate.....". Further; "It should help to: shape places in ways that contribute to **radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions,** minimise vulnerability and improve resilience; encourage the reuse of existing resources, **including the conversion of existing buildings**."

Best practice recommendations align with and reinforce these policies. Examples include the LETI Climate Emergency Design Guide's first **"primary action", to "build less"**, asking "is a new building necessary?" LETI's Embodied Carbon Primer prioritises "making use of the site and **retrofitting existing buildings rather than building anew.**"
The proposal for this site clearly does not "contribute to radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions" (retrofit would do so) nor "encourage the reuse of existing resources, **including the conversion of existing buildings**".

In June 2021, the Committee on Climate Change published their Joint Recommendations Report to Parliament which calls for: "Setting out a plan for phasing in mandatory whole-life reporting followed by minimum whole-life standards for all buildings, roads and infrastructure by 2025".

Birmingham Design Guide: Efficient and Future Ready City Manual (September 2022)
Extracts:
EF4: [buildings longevity] … "with the ability to accommodate a wide range of uses … easily refurbished as uses change … could give buildings a longer lifespan"
EF5: low carbon building materials "reusing existing building fabric"

Both these policies encourage retention of existing buildings, which has not been properly assessed or quantified, except as a brief narrative in the Supplementary document.

6.3 Turley state the building is designed to "Future Homes standard". Although a Govt intention of 80% reduction has been floated, this **Future Homes standard does not yet exist**. It is not possible to state the proposal "has been designed" to this standard. **Such statements call into question the whole document, and underline the fact it is not an independent assessment.**

6.5 merely states the building runs on electricity and the Govt plans to decarbonise the grid, as acknowledged by para 6.21. It says nothing about quantifiable energy, LETI, RIBA etc

6.6 The statement "non-residential uses are **aiming for** BREEAM Excellent" is **vague and potentially misleading**: CPW analysis elsewhere in the application documents reveals it only achieved BREEAM "very good". Note the top BREEAM standard is "Outstanding" - but BREEAM is widely regarded as an outmoded standard, with RIBA, UKGBC and LETI standards now preferred.

6.7 CEG's commitment to sustainability is a most welcome statement of intent - but the action it requires is to retrofit this building.

6.14 The narrative statement that **"from the outset of the design process"** there has been a focus on whole life carbon **is not supported** by the 100+ documents previously submitted, which contained no reference to this, and **the continuing absence of a WLC plan.**

RIBA 2030 Climate Challenge target metrics for domestic / residential

RIBA Sustainable Outcome Metrics	Business as usual (new build, compliance approach)	2025 Targets	2030 Targets	Notes
Operational Energy kWh/m²/y	120 kWh/m²/y	< 60 kWh/m²/y	< 35 kWh/m²/y	Targets based on GIA. Figures include regulated & unregulated energy consumption irrespective of source (grid/renewables). BAU based on median all electric across housing typologies in CIBSE benchmarking tool. 1. Use a 'Fabric First' approach 2. Minimise energy demand. Use efficient services and low carbon heat 3. Maximise onsite renewables
Embodied Carbon $kgCO_2e/m^2$	1200 $kgCO_2e/m^2$	< 800 $kgCO_2e/m^2$	< 625 $kgCO_2e/m^2$	Use RICS Whole Life Carbon (modules A1-A5, B1-B5, C1-C4 incl sequestration). Analysis should include minimum of 95% of cost, include substructure, superstructure, finishes, fixed FF&E, building services and associated refrigerant leakage. 1. Whole Life Carbon Analysis 2. Use circular economy strategies 3. Minimise offsetting & use as last resort. Use accredited, verifiable schemes (see checklist). BAU aligned with LETI band E; 2025 target aligned with LETI band C and 2030 target aligned with LETI band B.
Potable Water Use Litres/person/day	125 l/p/day (Building Regulations England and Wales)	< 95 l/p/day	< 75 l/p/day	CIBSE Guide G.

For reference purposes current **(2021) Good Practice** for new build projects in-use now are as follows:
Non-Domestic (new build office):
Operational Energy 90 $kWh/m^2/y$ (GIA) and/or DEC C(65) and/or NABERS Base build 5; Embodied Carbon LETI Band D 1180 $kgCO_2e/m^2$; Potable Water Use 16 l/p/day
Non-Domestic (schools):
Operational Energy 75 $kWh/m^2/y$ (GIA); Embodied Carbon LETI Band D 870 $kgCO_2e/m^2$; Potable Water Use $3m^3$/pupil/yr
Domestic/Residential:
Operational Energy 60 $kWh/m^2/y$ (GIA) no gas boilers; Embodied Carbon LETI Band D 1000 $kgCO_2e/m^2$; Potable Water Use 110 l/p/day

RIBA 2030 Climate Challenge target metrics for all buildings

Best Practice Health Metrics		References
Overheading	25-28 °C maximum for 1% of occupied hours	CIBSE TM52, CIBSE TM59
Daylighting	> 2% av. daylight factor, 0.4 uniformity	CIBSE LG10
CO_2 levels	< 900 ppm	CIBSE TM40
Total VOCs	< 0.3 mg/m^3)	Approved Document F
Formaldehyde	< 0.1 mg/m^3)	BREEAM

Extract from RIBA 2030 Climate Challenge (version 2 (2021)

The 2030 standards are the recommended good practice standards.

https://www.architecture.com/about/policy/climate-action/2030-climate-challenge

See 6.18 below etc

6.18 The statement "it is expected that the application proposals **could achieve** the 'RIBA 2030 Challenge' embodied carbon 2025 target of 800kgCO2/m2" is **cautiously welcomed** as the sign of engagement with embodied carbon and whole life carbon on recognised metrics. However, it **non-committal**, and uses the lowest figure "which should, as a *minimum"* be adopted according to RIBA (2021).
Note RIBA's good practice standard is **600kgCO2/m2** (see previous page). This should be mandated as the minimum standard (ie maximum embodied carbon) for this project, for RICS stages A1-A5, B1-B5, C1-C4 as RIBA CC2030.
Note however, even this would not represent the very best practice, **as the embodied CO2 footprint for retrofit would be significantly lower.**

6.20 states "the energy strategy for the application proposals identifies that the development **should achieve** a 56% reduction in carbon emissions beyond Part L (2021), and a greater than 80% improvement beyond Part L (2013)". Although all reductions are welcome, elsewhere in the application documents different figures are quoted. However, **none of the figures appear to relate to absolute metrics as RIBA CC 2030 above. Note the RIBA standard must be taken as a whole, including embodied carbon, operational carbon, water, etc, rather than cherry-picked. Operational energy <35kWh/m2.yr is essential.**

6.21 states "proposals have been designed to benefit from the decarbonisation of the electricity network which the Government has committed to being Net Zero from 2025."
This is factually incorrect, the date is 2035*, and again highlights **this report is from the applicant's appointed consultants, and not an independently verified consultant opinion**, which would be expected for an application of this importance.
* https://www.gov.uk/government/news/plans-unveiled-to-decarbonise-uk-power-system-by-2035

The statement "Furthermore, the all-electricity strategy will enable future residents to live in 'Net Zero' apartments through the use of certified renewable electricity" merely means residents can choose their own utility supplier. These statements disguise the fact that no commitment to **energy use intensity/operational energy is given as RIBA CC2030.**

Section 7 about heritage significance doesn't address the townscape significance of the existing buildings and the contrast with what is proposed.

7.3 The existing building is and must be assessed in planning terms as, a heritage asset. NPPG's definition of a "non-designated heritage asset" ie "identified by plan-making bodies as having a degree of heritage significance meriting consideration in planning decisions but which do not meet the criteria for designated heritage assets."
The fact the building is not nationally listed, but is locally listed means it has a considerable "degree" heritage significance, designated by the plan-making body, Birmingham City Council, in making the Local Listing. Heritage assets are widely recognised as valued components of the historic environment. They include all locally listed buildings. Birmingham planning policies therefore apply, giving **"very great significance"** to this heritage building.

7.6 **It is transparently obvious that the harm caused by complete demolition would be substantial, irreversible, and destroy the complete 1960s urban design and street, described as "the finest piece of mid-century urban design" in Birmingham. To pretend otherwise is ridiculous.** (Turley: "not be correct to identify this [harm] as 'substantial'").

7.10 The 2016 lapsed planning precedent is not now relevant, but nevertheless it retained part of the existing building.

Section 8 about barriers to regeneration could very easily be mitigated with an imaginatively designed permeable retrofit proposal.
It is agreed that "the opportunity to bring forward comprehensive transformation, new connections, enhanced public realm, landscaping, and ground floor activation should all be treated with considerable favourability when comparing this with the current conditions." (8.8)
Two further routes through the existing site/building are certainly required.
The counter-proposal includes these. The key point here is **the existing building does not need to be removed.**

As presented to the 28 February open public meeting, Birmingham Mailbox is a local example which provided a complete new destination and route/street with pedestrian permeability, to unlock a new area of the city - **without demolishing** a 1968 building, as the before and after photos above. In that case the Mailbox building suffered from high alumina cement (aka "concrete cancer") and was unlisted, so could easily have been demolished. But the design team found solutions to all the problems, attracted diverse and very high value uses, **without the embodied huge carbon penalty** of demolition and new construction.

8.13 Removal of the iconic "Rainbow Bridge" is completely unnecessary, and would be hugely destructive of the urban fabric and obliterate a landmark point of orientation within

our changing city. The bridge **does not block the route south, either visually or physically**, but provides a memorable piece of architectural urban design, a literal gateway.
It would be tragic to loss: it must be retained.

9 & 10. Feasibility of retaining and re occupying the existing buildings.

The 60 year design life of the Ringway Centre and whole life considerations for buildings should be looked at as element-based. The existing services and plant have shorter design lives requiring life cycle management, and certainly need removal. However, the robust RC concrete structure and fabric have a much longer design life, and also contain much higher levels of embodied carbon. In some RC buildings, the concrete frame and substructure represent up to 90% of the embodied carbon. No quantitative analysis has been presented. The views expressed in the report and subjective and not independent.

On the structural constraints, if the existing building were to be retained in whole or in part, there would certainly need to be levels of adaptation.
For example at Park Hill, new lightweight steel structural frames were threaded through existing concrete structure, picking up new lifts, upper stories, strengthening loading where required; all very feasible using BIM modelling. Narrative in Turley's report describes the challenges of retrofit. This does not make them insurmountable.

The arguments put forward over altering the external appearance of the building are incorrect.
In 1960s in-situ-clad concrete buildings (eg University of Birmingham's Muirhead Tower), the external appearance of the building would be altered by externally insulating, so internal insulation is required. This has been successfully carried out, although complex, in Sheffield's Park Hill flats (photo p.2 above).

In the case of the Ringway Centre, however, happily the technical challenge is much simpler. As the building is clad with precast concrete panels, not in-situ, these can much more easily be removed, new insulation and thermal breaks added behind, and the precast panels re-fixed. The precast cladding panels and up-lighters are among the strongest and most characteristic parts of the design, inspired by le Corbusier's Chandigarh and Ben Nicholson's relief works, and will be relatively easy to retain.

External insulation and cladding to exposed parts of the recessed RC frame at lower levels could be pragmatically incorporated as a good compromise between heritage and thermal efficiency, taking advantage of the building's non-listed status.

9.3 stares "The applicant has committed to undertaking a **Whole Life Carbon Assessment** (WLCA) for the detailed proposals for SBQ3." This is welcome, but **does not yet exist.**

IMEI and other recognised good practice for requires proper consideration of alternative designs and their carbon impact. The original submission states only minor variations of the three-tower proposal have been considered. The supplementary document gives a narrative on retrofit, which is unsupported by any data, and has only appeared after questions were asked. It is suggested the options below should be assessed for whole-life carbon:
(a) conversion/retrofit of the existing building;
(b) conversion plus extension/alteration as the Counter-proposal;
(c) variations for re-development which retain most or all the existing;
(d) the previously approved scheme.

Note: in the absence of any comparative embodied carbon and whole-life carbon assessment, an informed decision on the fundamental planning issue, whether to allow demolition of this complete street of Locally Listed buildings, is impossible.
The Environmental Audit Committee report on embodied carbon (May 2022) advises reuse of all buildings must be prioritised.

The Public Inquiry Nov 2022, into embodied carbon of M&S Oxford Street demolition, demonstrates the urgency of this issue.

10.4 states "Any proposals for residential use in the existing buildings would involve extensive demolition" This is untrue. The 60 year design life of the Ringway Centre whole life considerations should be element based, usually services and plant have shorter design lives requiring life cycle management whilst structure and fabric have longer design lives, and also contain the higher levels of embodied carbon.

11 Repetition that "climate change effects resulting from the proposals have been key considerations from the outset" does not make this true - and it is belied by the environmental deficiencies of the originally submitted documents.

Stating that the new development is "highly sustainable" is not credible, in terms of the proposed demolition ("The Greenest Building is the One Which Already Exists"), its proposed height - making it highly inefficient in both construction and operation, the absence of a Whole Life Carbon assessment, citing outdated metrics to make misleading comparisons, etc. There is no credible detail of how the air source pumps proposed would be incorporated, how they would impact "sensitively within the back of house service yards behind SBQ 1&3"
PV electrical solar panels shown on the roof are welcome, but small and token in comparison with the buildings' huge appetite for energy. No heat pumps are apparent on elevation drawings. These could be noisy and visually detrimental. Ground source pumps may be preferable: quiet, inobtrusive, more efficient, and boreholes require little land.

The materials proposed for the building (exposed reinforced concrete, aluminium) are far from sustainable. The facade is proposed as aluminium panels with double glazed units. The double-glazed units have a life expectancy of some 30-40 years, and when replaced, it is very probable the entire aluminium system will need also to be replaced. If it were anodized aluminium, it might have a longer life than glazing units, depending on the specification, but at a significantly higher carbon cost.