

Heritage Statement

Our ref 66810/01/JW/LBI

Date 6 February 2024

1.0 Statement of Significance

The Somerford Buildings

Figure 1 Somerford Buildings, Sunderland – Image from 2019



- 1.1 The Somerford Buildings is a three-storey end of terrace property at Norfolk Street, Sunderland, that encloses the southern edge of Sunnyside Gardens and bookends the northern end of a short terrace to the south of the gardens. It is not a designated heritage asset, but it is recorded in the Tyne & Wear Historic Environment Record (Ref. 17801) and it is located within the Sunnyside Conservation Area. The building was constructed in the

early-20th-century, appearing for the first time on the 25-inch OS map of 1919 (surveyed: 1914). It is constructed from red brick and local coal measures sandstone and serves as a minor local landmark within Sunnyside due to its larger scale and greater height compared to the surrounding terraces. It is also distinguished by its architectural features, including its octagonal tower located above the main entrance and topped with a dome, its stepped gable overlooking Sunnyside Gardens, and its main entrance decorated with a swan-neck pediment and Baroque ornamental detailing. The style, appearance and design of the Somerford Building contributes positively to the wider townscape. The building is of some architectural significance and is considered to contribute positively to Sunnyside's historic character and appearance.

Sunnyside Conservation Area

- 1.2 The fundamental architectural character of the Sunnyside Conservation Area is derived from its early-19th-century development as a middle-class residential area, with its concentration of late-Georgian and early Victorian terraces and high-quality individual buildings built in both Classical and Gothic Styles.
- 1.3 There is a legacy of change within the conservation area in the form of new developments and changes of use. During the 19th-century the area had a predominantly residential character which was steadily eroded during the late-19th-century/early-20th-century as professional services and other commercial uses began to occupy properties in the area whilst its middle-class residents steadily moved to newer suburbs on the outskirts of the town centre at Ashbrooke, Thornhill and Roker. The appearance of the Somerford Buildings in the context of the surrounding developments was captured in historic aerial photography from 1936 (Figure 2):

Figure 2 Aerial Photograph of the Somerford Buildings and surrounding developments at Sunnyside (1936)



Source: Britain from Above (ref. EPW051131)

- 1.4 More recently, buildings in the area have been converted from commercial use to residential use in the form of HMO accommodation and apartments.

Contribution of the Somerford Buildings to the Sunnyside Conservation Area

- 1.5 The Somerford Buildings lies within the Sunnyside Gardens sub-area of Sunderland's Sunnyside Conservation Area which is recognised within the Sunnyside Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Strategy as a focal point of regeneration in Sunnyside. The Somerford Buildings is identified as a high-quality landmark of architectural and townscape merit within this part of the Conservation Area. The character of the building is considered to contrast positively with the uniformity of the neighbouring terraces.
- 1.6 Although the Somerford Buildings is not a listed building it is within an area covered by an Article 4 direction. This relates to restrictions on the painting of the exterior of buildings to maintain uniformity, particularly on terraced properties on West Sunnyside, Frederick Street, John Street and Foyle Street.
- 1.7 The Somerford Buildings is located to the east of the former Norfolk Hotel which was originally The British Day School. It was later used as a labour exchange before being converted to a hotel. On the opposite side of the Sunnyside Gardens to the Somerford Buildings is the former General Post Office building which was constructed in 1903 by Sir Henry Tanner. In the early 21st century the Post Office was converted to residential use with a modern extension added to the roof space of the sorting room to provide additional accommodation. The Maritime and Sunnyside Chambers and the Waterboard Building at Hawksley House in Sunnyside have also been converted.

Effect on Significance

- 1.8 The proposed development seeks to convert the Somerford Buildings from offices to 11 apartments. No external alterations are proposed and so the architectural significance of the building and the contribution that it makes to the character and appearance of Sunnyside Conservation Area will be preserved. By bringing the building back into active use it will safeguard its future and prevent the building from deteriorating as a result of long-term vacancy and obsolescence.
- 1.9 Sensitive changes of use such as the proposed conversion of the Somerford Buildings is recognised in the Sunnyside Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Document as positively contributing to the area's regeneration and the sustainable use of historic buildings. In this context, the proposed change of use is encouraged.
- 1.10 The Sunnyside Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) identifies an aim to deliver an urban renaissance in Sunnyside through the development of a revitalised 'mixed use city quarter'. The SPD envisages the area with residential use and for the use of small and medium sized businesses. In the Historic Core of Sunnyside, where the Somerford Buildings lie, there are several examples of historic buildings having been converted to residential use. The SPD recognises that good quality conversion can preserve character.

- 1.11 Given the legacy of change within the Sunnyside Conservation Area, the impact of the proposal on the character and sustainability of the conservation area is considered to be minimal. The proposal would be complementary to the vision that Sunderland City Council has for Sunnyside to be a 'mixed use' quarter.
- 1.12 Overall, in terms of heritage considerations the proposal would be positive in contributing to the preservation of the character of Sunnyside.