



Pre application no: 14/05898/PREAPP

Site address: St Georges Great George Street City Centre Bristol BS1 5RR

Proposal: Refurbishment of Crypt area and hall. Repairs to existing building. Construction of extension in existing gardens with link to existing facilities. Creation of accessible entrance from Charlotte Street.

The Civic Society welcomes this proposal in principle as it will contribute to providing a long term, sustainable future for this important listed building. The Society agrees with the Council's generally positive assessment of the extension's potential impact on the church and its garden setting. The Society supports the proposed footprint, height and mass of the extension. The Society also looks forward to receiving a much more detailed justification of the need for the additional floor space.

Despite our general support there are a number of issues where we have specific criticisms. We would request that these issues are resolved prior to the submission of a planning application.

The concrete frame

This is a lightweight building. We do not understand the use of form cast reinforced concrete. We understand that current practice is to use a steel frame because it is cheaper and more flexible should there be a need for future internal alteration. We assume that there is no proposal to use exposed concrete inside the extension since its use as an interior finish is largely discredited. The tower staircase will be expensive because it would require bespoke shuttering. If it is only top lit it will probably require continuous artificial light.

The east window

The frame of the east window should be stone, not concrete. English Heritage's and the Council's planning advice is that an extension to a listed buildings should use facing materials that are sympathetic to the building and to the neighbouring buildings. Concrete appears grey and lifeless; it would compare unfavourably with the Bath stone of the church.

The Hill Street side wall

The Society shares the Council's concern about this proposal. After stressing the need to use materials that complement Smirke's church, the architect proposes to use shuttered concrete. Concrete has no contextual relevance. The contextual building materials are Bath stone and rubble pennant. Viewers from the upper windows of the Park Street properties would see a contextual relevance of this concrete wall with the weather stained concrete of failing 1960s car parks.

Internal lighting

The major light source for both floors will be the glazed end wall that faces south east. For much of the day, during most of the year the church will cast its shadow over the extension. In cafés, people generally choose to sit near a window, if they have the choice but the proposed cafe will have a long blank wall facing Hill Street. Windows are required to admit maximum light and reflect the vegetation in the surrounding garden. People want to look out over the gardens, not at a blank wall. Long windowless walls are boring. The wall that faces the church will be top lit from the passage between the Church and the extension, which will compromise light entering from the church side. There will be a need for continuous artificial lighting in the day time throughout most of the interior.

Retention of trees

We support the Council's preference to retain the line of lime trees along the boundary with Hill Street, which have group significance. We suggest that they would be more compatible with the informal 'English garden landscape' of the church yard than would be a formal row of pleached trees. The mature vegetation not only creates an informal boundary to the church yard but would also provide a screen to prevent overlooking towards the rear of the Park Street properties and help to screen the light emitted from the extension.

Simon Birch

Bristol Civic Society