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The Society's statement in response to pre-application – to develop Land at Home Gardens
Blackboy Hill Redland Hill - 16/00711/PREAPP

23rd February 2014

Proposal

The Society welcomes the principle of the redevelopment of site to provide an 86-bed care home. The Society intends its response to be positive, it proposes suggestions to improve the scheme.

Demolition

The "Coach House" offices and the 1930's terrace have a neutral quality in the conservation area and their loss would lead to less than substantial harm. The Society accepts that the public benefits of the proposal, which include the more efficient land use of the would justify demolition of the buildings on the site.

Change of use

The Society supports the proposed change of use.

Mass and height of the proposal

The site fronts onto and overlooks Westbury Road. The Society is aware that there has been adverse comment about the increased mass of the insurance building at the top of Blackboy Hill, which is out of scale and dominates the surrounding the older buildings in this character area of the conservation area. The Society would regret any informal support given by the Council to the proposed height and mass. The Society suggests that without compromising the mature trees on the site, it would be possible to extend the footprint of the building to the east and provide ground level car parking under the first floor. A larger plan would maintain the scheme's total useable floor area. A lower building would cause less harm to the surrounding conservation area. It would provide a more suitable transition to the mass and height of the older architectural context. In the Society's view the architectural reference should be the whole of the surrounding architectural setting; the newly constructed 6-storey insurance office building is not the point of reference to scale the proposal; the Council should not consider the mass of the insurance building to be a material consideration in the planning decision.

Design and materials

The Society has not seen the correspondence about the earlier design; it does not consider the site to be suitable for a 'landmark' building. The Society supports the retention of the mature trees. The Society does not promote any specific architectural style. The window proportions, the stepped facade and the varied roof profile created by roof level set back are welcome. The Society supports robust red brick construction above a natural stone plinth for the principal structure and the light weight appearance of the upper floor. These aspects of the design are appropriate in the local context. The Society suggests that there are other aspects of the design that could benefit from further refinement without adding to the building costs. The rendered frames appear out of proportion to the other elevational details, particularly to the fenestration. They have no local reference in the conservation area. Would not articulation of the common brick elevation be sufficient? Another approach might be to introduce simple vertical or horizontal elements in brick or glass to accentuate the articulation of the façade. The Society regrets the introduction of another building with a flat roof in a conservation area. The Site Allocations and Development Management Development Plan Document strongly promotes consideration of the roof as fifth façade. The Society might support a building of this height if the roof added interest to the skyline. This development could provide an opportunity to incorporate PV generation elements in an imaginative manner, the solar PV built into the mansard roof General Hospital illustrates this suggestion.

The local impact of the proposal

The Society welcomes the proposed improved footpath from Westbury Road to St. Vincent's Hill. If this improved access could be signposted through the adjoining Queen Victoria House development, the improvement of the local permeability would be a substantial public realm gain. The Society agrees that the proposal will have a minimal traffic impact. The Design and Access statement minimises the impact of the proposal on the neighbouring Harper House and the 19th century houses in St. Vincent's Hill. The Society's response is concerned only with the impact of a proposal on the public realm. The Society has intentionally not commented on the impact of the proposal on occupiers of the neighbouring properties who may have significant planning objections.