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16th July 2018

The Bristol Civic Society's response to the proposed redevelopment of 7-29 Wilder St. 1-3 Backfields - 18/02548/F

The proposal

Redevelopment of existing buildings (except for retained listed building at 25 Wilder Street) and two commuter car parks to provide purpose-built managed student accommodation (348 beds) and ground floor employment floorspace; refurbishment and change of use of 25 Wilder Street to provide three self-contained residential units and associated works.

1 Introduction - The Society strongly supports redevelopment of this site but regrets that it cannot support the current proposal. The planning context of the Stokes Croft and the Brunswick Square and Portland Square Conservation Areas (the conservation areas) is their diversity. The mix of commercial, leisure and residential uses has led to the area's rapid social and economic regeneration. Within 500 metres of this site there is a substantial student population with outstanding permissions for more student accommodation and more sites in an earlier planning stage. Whilst the Society supports purpose built managed student accommodation the local planning authority must balance the citywide need for student accommodation with competing local needs for more commercial space and housing. The application proposes an additional 350 bed spaces which will consolidate a student residential monoculture between Lower Maudlin Street and Dean Street. There is now a harmful concentration of student accommodation that inhibits the establishment of a stable resident population around the conservation areas and the provision of local employment opportunities.

2 Change of use - -

2.1 The loss of employment space - The proposal would substantially reduce the current quantity of employment space locally. Loss of employment floorspace within the city centre must be considered in line with Policy BCAP7 within Bristol's Central Area Plan. Watkins Jones need to demonstrate that the proposal meets the policies and that the loss of employment space would not harm the economy and employment opportunities in the local area. The employment space offered by the proposal is a

token, it would not mitigate the overall loss of employment space. The St. Paul's Planning Group have evidence that the market demand for small, flexible workspaces in the area exceeds the supply.

- 2.2 Student accommodation** - There is understandable local resistance to a substantial increase in student numbers in the area, which residents consider would undermine the principle of a balanced community of permanent residents. The Society would strongly prefer employment use at street level and private residential accommodation on the upper floors. There is a substantial unmet need for residential accommodation in the city centre.
- 2.3 Policy DM2 'Residential Sub-Division and Specialist Housing' and policy BCAP4 and the emerging policy proposal ULH 6: 'Specialist Student Housing' support the principle of specialist student accommodation in the city centre if the development does not contribute to a concentration of specialist student housing that would harm the surrounding residential amenity. The Society refers the planning officer to the Council's map that shows all student accommodation in the City's central wards. The Society is aware that there is an unbuilt permission for 285 student accommodation units at 13/17 Dean Street and permission for up to 235 units is sought for a development at 2 -18 Stokes Croft. To the north of Stokes Croft, a city block bounded by Dighton Street, Marlborough Street, Charles Street and King Square Avenue contains a massive concentration of student accommodation. IQ manage a 370- bed student tower block on the south of Marlborough Street. Unite Students propose a managed student accommodation block on the site of the Old Building of the Bristol Royal Infirmary on Lower Maudlin Street with 700+ bed spaces.
- 2.4** Recently, the area has received a large influx of permanent new residents. The local residential population will continue to rise for some years to come. The conservation areas are again popular residential neighbourhoods. The Society anticipates that the Council will require an impact assessment to analyse of the structure of the local residential and student communities.
- 2.5** If the Council consents to more student accommodation, a development of this size should contribute to the local housing needs as part of a mixed development. Emerging Council policy ULH 6: 'Specialist Student Housing' supports the inclusion of residential space within large student accommodation of 100 bed spaces or more, to form part of mixed used developments. The area needs this additional residential population.
- 3 Height and mass** - The Society welcomes the revisions that reduce the height from those originally proposed. The height should not exceed the nicely detailed St. James House to the west which was the permitted height of the unbuilt permission for Nos. 7/11 Backfields - 14/03981/P. We support the set back of the top floor. A building taller than St. James House would harm the Backfields and Wilder Street streetscapes and fail to enhance the conservation area. The narrowness of the streets and minimal pavement widths would accentuate the building's impact, create unacceptable shadow, overbear and harm the surrounding streets. The construction of a building

that exceeds the height of St. James House and the permitted scheme creates a strong concern of potential harm to the setting of the former Coroners Court and the opportunity to make Backfields a pedestrian friendly space. The Society supports the revision of the Wilder Street building line.

4 Design

4.1 The Society supports the revisions to the design of the elevations, the development of the main entrance and the proposed integration of the Grade II listed building in Wilder Street. We are pleased to note the absence of plant at roof level. The Society's principal interest is the impact of development on the public realm. The Society leaves to the Council to assess the adequacy of the amenity offered by the central courtyard. Views into the courtyard from the street are welcome.

4.2 The Society welcomes the developer's internal design to enable the development to be adaptable to other uses should there be a fall in demand for student accommodation.

5 Materials - The Design Statement proposes a mixture of grey and buff bricks to contrast with the surrounding red brickwork. The site lies between conservation areas. The Stokes Croft Character Appraisal states, *"The typical building materials in this character area are a red brick, some Bath stone detailing, painted render, or iron frames. The larger warehouse-type or church buildings, and their boundary walls, are exceptions to this rule and tend to be in local pennant stone."* St. Paul's and Brunswick Square etc have no Character Appraisals, we anticipate that they would similarly describe the dominant building materials. The Society supports the choice of brick but would prefer a colour within the terracotta colour range. We support the use of modern materials such as metal cladding, which could be a suitable light weight material for the upper floor. The Society does not support render. There are many local examples of deteriorating, weather affected render on recently constructed buildings. The Society suggests that to prevent the development becoming degraded with tagging the ground and first floor surfaces should be spray paint resistant.

6 Public realm

The Society suggests that WJG and the Council undertake a study to select improvement opportunities in the surrounding streets. Apart from upgrading the surviving setts and pavements, the open space at the junction of Backfields with Moon Street offers an opportunity to create an attractive public place. The Society does not support machining the setts to produce a smooth road surface in this area.